

# The geometric stillness in a Precisionist painter's view near Avenue A

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Niles Spencer was a Rhode Island-born painter who moved to New York City in 1916. "The lively intellectual milieu of Greenwich Village was in its heyday, and Spencer was exposed to many of the radical theoreticians and personalities of the time, who encouraged him to begin working in new directions," [stated New York City's Forum Gallery](#).



"Deeply influenced by Cézanne's faceted explorations of landscape and still life, Spencer's paintings began to focus on the geometry of architectural shapes and how they related to their landscape."

The painting above, "Near Avenue A," was completed in 1933. The scene reduces what looks like a view from [the old Gas House District](#) (where Stuyvesant Town is today) to a "spare dynamic, architectonic composition" per the Forum Gallery.

Spencer is often grouped as a Precisionist painter, a style that flourished in the early to mid-20th century. (George Copeland Ault is another Precisionist [whose work can be seen here](#).) "Searching for a singular modern American subject, they venerated the machine and industry as an exaltation of the dynamism of the future," wrote the Forum Gallery.

["Near Avenue A" is at the Museum of Modern Art](#). It captures a scene that's hard to recognize in the Manhattan of today—but the round gas storage tank in the background places it on the East Side of the 1930s.

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