

MODERN ART COLLECTION

Preston Dickinson

Grain Elevators

1924

Crayon, chalk, and colored pencil on paper

13 1/8 x 9 1/2 in. (33.3 x 24.1 cm)

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Preston Dickinson attended the Art Students League in New York from 1906 to 1910 before sailing for Europe in 1911. Brief studies at the École des Beaux-Arts and the Académie Julian in Paris were supplemented by extensive travel in Belgium, England, and Germany. Dickinson returned to New York in 1914 following the outbreak of World War I and began painting realist scenes of the Harlem River and its environs in upper Manhattan. By the 1920s Dickinson's work had begun to show the clarity, hard lines, and geometric reduction associated with the precisionist movement, combined with elements of analytic cubism such as tilted perspective and flattened, overlapping planes.

Dickinson sketched *Grain Elevators* during a visit to the Peters Mills industrial complex, where he was inspired by the grain elevators and other buildings that towered over the flat, desolate plains of southern Omaha. Dickinson produced at least ten variants of *Grain Elevators*, each considered to be a masterpiece of his precisionist style. In these drawings, Dickinson simplified the pictorial elements to their basic cubist, geometric forms, enlivening them with bright, flat planes of color. The foreshortened vantage point, the emphasis on verticality, and the flatness of form and color all lend to the beautiful complexity of these works.

Dickinson seldom inscribed or dated his works, yet the lower left corner of *Grain Elevators* includes a dedication in pencil, "To Oronzo from Preston." The inscription refers to Oronzo Vito Gasparo (1903–1969), a fellow artist who was best known for his surreal modernist townscapes. In the summer of 1930, Gasparo accompanied Dickinson to France and Spain, where they hoped to live and support themselves through their art. However, on November 25, 1930, Dickinson died of pneumonia in northwest Spain.

