The dominant trend in America today, beneath all the apparent chaos and confusion, is towards order and organization which find their outward sign and symbol in the rigid geometry of the American city: in the verticals of its smoke stacks, in the parallels of its car tracks, the squares of its streets, the cubes of its factories, the arc of its bridges, the cylinders of its gas tanks....

The whole of mankind is vitally affected by industrial development and if the artist can make his work clear in its intention, convincing in its reality, inevitable in its logic, his potential audience will be practically universal.

Louis Lozowick, "The Americanization of Art", from the catalogue of the "Machine Age Exposition", May 1927

One of the most characteristic aspects of twentieth-century American printmaking is the persistant image of the city. Particularly during the late 1920s and early 1930s, the era dubbed the machine age, American artists looked to the modern city as the symbol of progress, strength, and rationality.

Louis Lozowick, born in Russia and emigrating to the United States in 1906, was the most eloquent spokesperson for "urban optimism" in American art. In his lithographs of 1928 to 1931, he celebrated the
clean, crisp beauty of New York's buildings, bridges, and industry. In various credos and essays written during the same period, Lozowick elevated the graphic images of the modern city to new moral and aesthetic dimensions.

For Lozowick, the modern city was most appropriately described with a Modernist vocabulary. Aspects of European-based Cubist, Futurist, and Constructivist vocabularies were used to present the city in its most dynamic light. American precisionist artists such as Charles Sheeler and Charles Demuth were particularly influential. While never reaching total abstraction, Lozowick's urban images have simplified volumes, strong compositional balance, crisp and clearly defined edges, and a minimum of textures. The mark of the artist, some sign of his actual involvement in making the work, is rarely visible. Also rare are the inclusion of human beings and indications of weather and climate. Simply put, Lozowick responded to forms in the environment rather than to the environment itself.

MR

The shapes arise!
Shapes of factories, arsenals, foundries, markets,
Shapes of the two-threaded tracks of railroads,
Shapes of the sleepers of bridges, frameworks, girders, arches,
Shapes of the fleets of barges, tows, lake and canal craft...

Walt Whitman
QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

1. Have students research the machine age in America. What technological advances were made and what practices and processes became obsolete? It was a time of great optimism; from the students' viewpoint in the 1990s, what was gained and what was lost or put at risk with the advent of the modern city?

2. Louis Lozowick was recognized in his own lifetime as one of the great lithographers of the first half of the 20th century. Have students study the process of lithography (see “Printmaking Processes” in the “Sample Lessons” section) and discuss the challenges of creating a work such as Tank #2.

3. Louis Lozowick focused on forms of the modern city, eliminating details and subtle nuances. Have students create a work of art that celebrates the forms of their neighborhood or city. Encourage students to experiment with the delineation and overlapping of forms to design a strong composition.

4. See “Realism and Idealism” in the “Sample Lessons” section.