



Quaintance, George (1902-1957)

by John D. Waybright

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Although now obscure, George Quaintance was one of the most influential figures in a unique American style of art and one of the most flamboyant and interesting gay characters for four decades of the twentieth century.

Though few people outside the gay world know it, Quaintance was a pioneer of male physique painting. This genre heralded a new American gay consciousness in the early 1950s.

Born June 3, 1902, in the tiny rural community of Page County, Virginia, Quaintance left home to study art in New York City in 1920. At age 18, he began studies at the prestigious Art Students League, which counted Georgia O'Keeffe among its graduates. His teachers included Ashcan School founder Robert Henri and the Polish-born American expressionist Max Weber.

Quaintance's drawing and painting soon took second place among his multiple artistic interests, however. He became enamored of the ballet and other dance forms. He studied with some of the great Russian émigré ballet dancers then in New York.

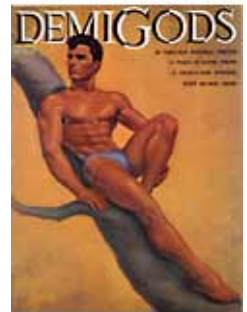
By 1928, Quaintance led classical and jazz dance instruction with friend and teacher, Sonia Serova. He also danced with a touring vaudeville group, the Collegiates. Quaintance's dance obsession led to a startling twist in his life. When his dance partner, Frances Craig, became ill, he met Miriam Chester, a classically trained ballerina. They formed a "professional partnership" and in August 1929, they married.

Both the marriage and partnership were short-lived. By July 4, 1930, Quaintance was pictured in the Washington *Evening Star* with a new partner, listed only by her first name, Karen.

From his teen years, Quaintance was obviously and actively homosexual. However, he was quite discreet and totally closeted among family, friends, and adoring fans in his native Virginia, repeating a pattern then quite common of gay men who left home in order to lead a homosexual life. During the 1930s and early 1940s, Quaintance often returned to Page County to direct musical revues and stage presentations using local talent.

In 1938, he spent an extended time in his hometown with his new lover, a handsome young native Puerto Rican named Victor Garcia. Garcia became the artist's model, life partner, and business associate until Quaintance's untimely death, despite the coming and going of several other handsome young Hispanic lovers.

Quaintance's sexual orientation aside, women always played significant roles in his



Top to bottom:
1) A portrait of Quaintance by Edwin Townsend.
2) *Shore Leave* (1952), one of some sixty male nude paintings by Quaintance.
3) Quaintance's painting *Cover Art* (1957) as it appeared on the cover of *DemiGods* in December, 1962.
4) Detail from a near-life size mural Quaintance painted for his mother's church in Stanley, Virginia in 1933. Townsend's portrait of George Quaintance courtesy of John D. Waybright and the Salvino-Finter Archive. *Shore Leave*, *Cover Art*, and the image of the church mural courtesy of John D. Waybright.