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The Museum of Modern Art

CAREER OF JASPER JOHNS EXAMINED IN MAJOR EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

First Retrospective in 20 Years Features Late Work Exhibited for the First Time

Jasper Johns: A Retrospective

October 20, 1996-January 21, 1997

The most comprehensive survey ever held of perhaps the most influential artist of the postwar era opens at The Museum of Modern Art on October 20, 1996. *Jasper Johns: A Retrospective*, the first in-depth study of the artist's work in nearly 20 years, presents four decades of achievement, from the early paintings of flags and targets that stunned the art world to the recent densely layered canvases that probe the whole of his career. Until now, nearly half of the artist's work has never been treated by a retrospective.

Drawn from public and private collections throughout the world, the exhibition comprises some 225 paintings, works on paper, and sculptures, including recent work never before shown to the public. Organized by Kirk Varnedoe, Chief Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, the exhibition has its only American showing at MoMA.

On view through January 21, 1997, this exhibition is sponsored by Philip Morris Companies Inc. Additional support is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts. An indemnity for the exhibition has been granted by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. The accompanying publications are made possible by a generous gift from Emily Fisher Landau.

"The Museum of Modern Art recognized Jasper Johns's achievement early in his career, acquiring three works from his first solo exhibition in 1958," remarked Glenn D. Lowry, Director of The Museum of Modern Art. "Now the Museum is privileged to bring together works from Johns's entire oeuvre, particularly the second half, which has not been studied in context or in depth. We are particularly grateful that the artist is cooperating completely with the project and has lent many works from his own collection."

"Jasper Johns changed the course of art in his time," remarked Mr. Varnedoe. "He is often seen as the 'father' of Pop, Minimalism, and Conceptual art. But beyond the well-recognized, immediate impact of the early paintings and sculptures as a generative source for the art of the early 1960s, Johns has provided ongoing inspiration for generations of peers and younger artists of widely differing aesthetic persuasions."

"Philip Morris is privileged to support this comprehensive retrospective examining the immensely important career of Jasper Johns," said Stephanie French, vice president, corporate contributions and cultural programs, Philip Morris Companies Inc. "Our involvement with the work of Jasper

Johns began in 1977, when we sponsored his first major retrospective, and now through this exhibition, we are once again able to honor Johns's unsurpassed legacy of innovation, creativity, and artistic achievement."

The Exhibition

Surveying works in all media from 1954 to 1995, the exhibition comprises approximately 110 paintings, 86 drawings, 17 prints, and 12 sculptures. Organized for the most part chronologically, certain galleries are devoted to exploring thematic issues that recur throughout the artist's work. The exhibition charts Johns's artistic progress through the years, which has been marked equally by recycling, reinventing, and combining signature images and by unexpected breaks and shifts in direction.

In 1954, at the age of 24, Johns destroyed virtually all of his prior work, determined to purge his art of any resemblance to the styles of other artists. He then began creating the paintings of flags, targets, and numbers that brought him early fame while sounding the death knell for Abstract Expressionism, the movement that dominated the international art world at that time. Unlike the enigmatic gestures that filled the canvases of the Abstract Expressionists, Johns's art was filled with everyday images shaped by convention and culture. Concerned with the relationship of thought and sight, Johns referred to the images in his mid-1950s works as "things the mind already knows" and also as things that were "seen and not looked at, not examined." When they filled the picture plane, these early images blurred the line between art and object. Further separating himself from the action paintings of the New York School, works such as *Flag* (1954-55), with their densely worked encaustic surfaces, were "a sum of corrections," according to Johns, that showed a concern with "accuracy." Indeed, the labor-intensive works that comprise the retrospective underscore the concern with craft that has occupied Johns throughout his career.

In 1958, even as Johns's innovations were being acclaimed throughout the art world—a magazine cover, his first solo exhibition, purchases by MoMA—his art was evolving. In 1959 the pictorial field, now often imageless, became covered with aggressive brushstrokes that had a splashy "expressionist" intensity in contrast to the reticence of his previous paintings. The act of painting and the physical properties of the picture—in works such as *Device Circle* (1959) and *Painting with Two Balls* (1960)—became the central subjects and primary sources of imagery for the art, more than any motif brought in from common experience.

In the early 1960s a new emotional tone—chill, dark, bleak—entered Johns's work. Titles of negation, melancholy, or bitterness (*No, Liar, In Memory of My Feelings—Frank O'Hara*, all of 1961) underline the altered mood. The imagery of imprinting and smearing, along with thinned-out passages of staining paint and crusts of scraped residue, give this art a more troubled material and psychological life.

In the early 1970s Johns first began working with the abstract cross-hatch patterns—the clusters of parallel strokes—that would become one of his favorite motifs. Having glimpsed such markings on a passing car, Johns later recalled that the pattern "had all the qualities that interested me—literalness, repetitiveness, an obsessive quality, order with dumbness and the possibility of complete lack of meaning." And while Johns did use the motif to convey order, he could also turn it into a comment on the disintegration of order in works such as *Corpse and Mirror* (1974). The exhibition includes the first work that used the motif—the

large, four-panel *Untitled* (1972)—as well as seldom-seen masterworks such as *Scent* (1973–74) and *Weeping Women* (1975).

Johns's turn to realist figuration after 1980, and his concern in recent years with the work of other artists and with autobiography, is also shown in depth, often through individual paintings, pairs, or triads of works not previously exhibited. Of special note, the exhibition will reunite the four *Seasons* paintings of 1985 and 1986. Filled with references to images that dominated earlier works, including flags, half-circles, and cross-hatches, the *Seasons* offer an allegory of Johns's life up to the mid-1980s.

The monumental canvas that closes the exhibition, *Untitled* (1992–95), offers a densely layered reflection on Johns's previous four decades of work. According to Mr. Varnedoe, the work "provides a broadly inclusive 'retrospective' of [Johns's] subjects, marks, and manners, and seems to constitute not only a 'manifest,' in the sense of a shipboard inventory, but also a 'manifesto,' in another—a chart of voyages made and a key to present location, shaped by the apparent desire for a cumulative self-summation that has also seemed to spur the other large, synthetic assemblage-paintings such as *According to What* of 1964 that Johns has produced to mark previous points in his development."

Publications

The Museum of Modern Art is publishing two books in connection with the exhibition. The first, the catalogue to the show, *Jasper Johns: A Retrospective*, by Kirk Varnedoe with an essay by Roberta Bernstein, is the most complete and authoritative book on the artist to date. In addition to an overview of the artist's career, separate essays examine what artists of the past have meant to Johns and what Johns has meant to artists of the present. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. 408 pages. 483 illustrations, including 261 in color and four foldouts. Clothbound, \$65.00, distributed in the United States and Canada by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, and paperbound, \$32.50.

The second book, *Jasper Johns: Writings, Sketchbook Notes, and Interviews*, edited by Kirk Varnedoe and compiled by Christel Hollevoet, is the first book to present this private figure in his own words. In material dating from the late 1950s to the present, Johns discusses his work, describes his relationships with other artists, and analyzes the problematic aspects of artistic representation and interpretation. Included are transcripts of filmed and taped interviews that have never been published, as well as writings and interviews that have appeared in a wide variety of books, magazines, and catalogues. Among the illustrations are pages from the artist's previously unpublished sketchbooks. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. 288 pages. 30 illustrations. Paperbound, \$24.95, distributed in the United States and Canada by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York. Both books are available in the MoMA Book Store.

In addition, the complete *Jasper Johns: Bibliography and Exhibition History* will be on The Museum of Modern Art's Web site at www.moma.org/johns.biblio.html. The documents will be available on disk at The MoMA Book Store for \$5.95.

Travel

Following the MoMA showing, *Jasper Johns: A Retrospective* will travel to the Museum Ludwig, Cologne (March 7–June 1, 1997) and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (June 28–August 17, 1997). The presentation of this exhibition at the Museum Ludwig is supported by Ford Motor Company.

Related Exhibition: *Jasper Johns: Process and Printmaking*

This exhibition of approximately 125 proofs and editioned prints provides a unique opportunity to understand Jasper Johns's creative process in printmaking as he recycled and refocused his imagery. Spanning Johns's entire career as a printmaker, some 30 finished works are presented, each with a series of proofs leading up to it. The works are drawn almost entirely from the artist's personal collection. On view from October 17, 1996, to January 21, 1997, at The Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition is organized by Wendy Weitman, Associate Curator, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books. [Separate release available.]

Lectures and Special Programs

Artists and art historians will participate in a series of lectures and panel discussions about Jasper Johns. See separate release for details.

About the Sponsor

Since 1958, Philip Morris Companies Inc. has supported a broad spectrum of cultural programs that reflect the corporation's commitment to innovation, creativity, and cultural diversity. Philip Morris's support of the arts focuses on contemporary visual and performing arts, and is among the most comprehensive corporate cultural programs in the world. During the past 20 years, Philip Morris has supported numerous exhibitions and visual arts programs at The Museum of Modern Art, including the acclaimed exhibition *Henri Matisse: A Retrospective* (1992) and the last three landmark exhibitions organized by William Rubin, Director Emeritus, Department of Painting and Sculpture: *Picasso and Portraiture: Representation and Transformation* (1996), *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism* (1988), and *Primitivism in 20th-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984). In addition, *Jasper Johns: A Retrospective* marks the third major exhibition of the artist's work sponsored by the company. Previous sponsorships include *Jasper Johns: A Retrospective Exhibition* (1977) and *The Drawings of Jasper Johns* (1991). Philip Morris Companies Inc. has five principal operating companies: Kraft Foods, Inc.; Miller Brewing Company; Philip Morris Incorporated (Philip Morris U.S.A.); Philip Morris International Inc.; and Philip Morris Capital Corporation.

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