

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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FOR WEDNESDAY RELEASE

MUSEUM OPENS LARGE EXHIBITION OF ITS OWN AMERICAN PAINTINGS

The first full scale exhibition of the Museum's collection of American painting will open to the public on December 22 at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street. More than 150 oils and watercolors by approximately 115 artists will show American painting done over a period of 50 years, with particular emphasis on work of the past quarter century.

Because of space limitations, only a little over half the Museum's 300 American paintings can be included in the present showing. The selection will indicate the scope and quality of this constantly growing collection, and at the same time may suggest the variety, the richness and the technical mastery of modern art in America today. Many paintings of equal quality and interest might have been included if space had permitted. These are listed in the new catalog "Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art." They may be seen upon request by anyone wishing to study them in relation to the exhibition.

A group of 10 new acquisitions will be included in the exhibition: Ivan Le Lorraine Albright, Woman, 1928; Whitney C. Bender, Humid Day, 1946; William de Kooning, Painting, 1948; Morris Graves, The Individual State of the World, 1947; William Kienbusch, New England Collage No. II, 1947; Henry Koerner, Rose Arbor, 1947; Landè Lewitin, Innocence in a Labyrinth, 1940; Bernard Perlin, The Lovers, 1946; Herman Rose, Garden in Brooklyn, 1940; Andrew Wyeth, Christina's World, 1948. Except for these new acquisitions, all the paintings in the exhibition have been shown before, either in special exhibitions or in the galleries permanently devoted to the Museum Collection as a whole. Thirteen paintings now in circulating exhibitions throughout the country will be represented by photographs.

The Museum's policy in regard to collecting American paintings is summarized in the statement of general policy made by John Hay Whitney, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, in his preface to the recently published "Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art":

"We detest the policy of the totalitarian state that rigidly controls all thought and creative expression in order to make them serve its own ends. We would be seriously remiss in our duty to the artist and the public were we not willing to stand against the intimidation of

progressive artists through pressure of invective and ridicule. The effect of such pressure upon the arts can be almost as serious as regimentation by the state. 337

"In this collection there are many kinds of art - for, paradoxically, there is no such thing as 'modern art' in any strictly categorical or descriptive sense. Yet the word 'modern' is valuable because it suggests the progressive and challenging....

"In the course of trying to make wise, fair and discriminating choices from the vast panorama of contemporary art there will inevitably be many errors. The Trustees are fully aware of this danger. Yet they believe that it is only by taking such risks that this living, changing collection can best serve the living present and, with the helpful editing of time, the present yet to come."

Dorothy C. Miller, Curator of the Museum Collection and director of the exhibition, comments as follows:

"This exhibition provides the first representative selection of the Museum's acquisitions in the field of American painting. It should be seen not as a complete and isolated unit, but as a cross section of a larger American collection which itself is only one of many collections international in scope and dealing with a number of other visual arts besides painting. Further, the Museum's American painting collection may well be considered in relation to other public collections in New York City, where, in the contemporary field, the Metropolitan Museum is primarily, and the Whitney Museum exclusively interested in American art.

Arrangement of the Exhibition

"Without attempting to fit an extremely varied collection into precise categories of school or chronology, the exhibition has been arranged in the following order. The show begins with works in the cubist tradition by Weber, Stella, Feininger, Demuth, Knaths, Spencer and Davis, done in the 'teens and early '20s. Then follow two galleries devoted to such masters as Eilshemius, Prendergast, Davies, Sterne, Weber, Karfiol, Kuniyoshi, Watkins, Hartley, Kuhn, Speicher, Pascin, Brook, Rattner, Carles, Levi and others; followed by Sheeler, O'Keeffe, Dickinson; watercolors by such older artists as Marin, Demuth, Bellows, Prendergast, Hart, Grosz and Walkowitz; and painters celebrated for their exploration of the American scene, among them, Hopper, Burchfield, Coleman, Benton, Du Bois, Dehn and Carter. Next comes sharp-focus, exact realism, as practiced by Albright and, more recently, by such younger men as Guglielmi, Atherton, Koerner, Lux Feininger, Perlin and Wyeth, followed by a gallery in which Blume, Levine, Pickens, Gropper, Evergood, Quirt, Hirsch, Lawrence, Sharrer, Cadmus and others, using various styles, comment upon the state of the world.

"Painters of mystery and sentiment, more explicitly romantic than the painters of the 'American Scene,' are shown in the next gallery - MacIver, Berman, Burchfield, Austin, Kopman - followed by the work of Graves, Bloom, Pollock, Tobey, Friedman, Baziotis, de Kooning, Gorky, Burlin, Motherwell, Dove and other artists who use great freedom of form and symbol in their poetic, semi-abstract compositions. In contrast to their spontaneous variety of design and metaphor, the next gallery presents the disciplined technique and geometric precision of Ferren, Pereira, Bertola and Greene. The exhibition concludes with 20th-century 'primitives' of whom the most renowned are Kane and Pickett.

"Artists who have recently become American citizens are represented in the exhibition with pictures painted since they came to the United States. The Museum Collection includes other works by these artists done in Europe.

History of the Collection

"The American collection was started in 1930, before the Museum was a year old; in fact the first painting the Museum acquired was American - Hopper's 'House by the Railroad.' In the next few years a number of distinguished paintings by Davies, Kuhn, Karfiol, Sheeler, Grosz and others entered the collection through the generosity of the late Lillie P. Bliss, Stephen C. Clark and other friends of the Museum. In 1935 Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. presented her large collection, chiefly American, including groups of paintings by Prendergast, Demuth, Weber, Burchfield, Hart and Blume, as well as her pioneering collection of American folk art. Later, Mrs. Rockefeller provided the Museum's first large funds through which

American art was purchased for the collection. To these funds Nelson A. Rockefeller also made generous contributions.

"The Museum's first president, A. Conger Goodyear, has been a constant champion of American art, contributing works of art and a purchase fund. Mrs. Simon Guggenheim has, since 1938, provided the Museum's largest purchase funds, making possible the acquisition of such major works as Blume's 'Eternal City' and Tchelitchev's 'Hide-and-Seek.' Among the many other generous donors to the American painting collection were Mrs. W. Murray Crane, Mr. and Mrs. Sam A. Lewisohn, Philip L. Goodwin, Mr. and Mrs. James Thrall Soby, Katharine Cornell, John Hay Whitney, Lincoln Kirstein, Mrs. David M. Levy, Marshall Field, Edward W. Root, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. and the late Richard D. Bixey. Adelaide de Groot lent several paintings with the understanding that they will be bequeathed to the Museum; and in 1938 the Museum received from the WFA Art Program an extended loan of paintings which included the work of a number of young American artists who have since won major honors.

"It has been a long-standing Museum policy to acquire the work of untried but promising younger artists, as well as of men of established reputation. The Museum's loan exhibitions, particularly those which explored the work of young and little known Americans, have proved a fruitful field from which additions to the collection have been made."