

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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FOR WEDNESDAY RELEASE

Symposium on American Abstract Art to be held at the Museum on Monday, February 5, at 8:30 p.m. Andrew C. Ritchie, Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, moderator. Participants: Alexander Calder, Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning, Fritz Glarner, Robert Motherwell, George L.K. Morris. Tickets: \$1.80 for members; \$2.40 for non-members.

COMPREHENSIVE EXHIBITION OF AMERICAN ABSTRACT PAINTING AND SCULPTURE
TO BE MUSEUM'S NEXT LARGE SHOWING

ABSTRACT PAINTING AND SCULPTURE IN AMERICA, the most comprehensive exhibition of this controversial subject to date, will be presented in a large historical survey at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from January 24 through March 25 on the third floor. Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, Director of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture, has selected more than 100 paintings and sculptures by about 85 artists for the exhibition, which covers the period from just before the famous Armory Show of 1913 to the present.

In the foreword to his book* which accompanies the exhibition, Mr. Ritchie points out that the selection of art works is based on personal choice and that, furthermore, for reasons of space, not every artist who has worked in an abstract direction could be included.

Like other Museum exhibitions concerned with a particular movement, ABSTRACT PAINTING AND SCULPTURE IN AMERICA is being presented as a review in both a historical and a contemporary sense. The paintings and sculptures are divided into two main groups because, Mr. Ritchie says, since 1913 abstract art in America has proceeded in two more or less distinct waves. The first wave, given its greatest impulse by the Armory Show, built up steadily through the World War I period and

*"Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America" by Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, 160 pages; 123 illustrations, 8 in color. Catalog and bibliography, \$4.00 tentative price. Mr. Ritchie places the "what" and "why" of modern abstract art against the social, political and economic background of Europe and America and discusses important European influences on American art.

gradually lost its momentum about the mid-'twenties. The second wave began to rise in the early 'thirties. After a long, rather slow beginning it began to pick up speed in the mid-'forties and appears now to be at its crest. The work of the past two decades Mr. Ritchie classifies in five groups ranging from "pure geometric" to "expressionist biomorphic."

The First Wave of Abstraction in America, 1912-ca.1925

The exhibition opens with a group of paintings by the Armory Show generation whose work reflects the dominant trends of that period - cubism and futurism. Max Weber's New York (1912) and Rush Hour, New York (1916) are shown as examples of paintings which fused cubism's static analysis of forms with a dynamic, futurist element. Joseph Stella, who exhibited with the futurists in his native Italy, is represented by Battle of Light, Coney Island; Spring, and Brooklyn Bridge.

Other painters in the exhibition whose work reflects the futurist influence despite the reigning cubist trend of the time include Feininger, whose Bridge V has a dynamic, futurist quality despite his overall debt to cubism. Marsden Hartley, who like Feininger broke with the cubist logic of static form in a controlled picture-bound space is represented by "E" and Abstraction. Man Ray's The Tightrope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows with its mechanistic, abstract cut-out images is another example of a rejection of the rational basis of cubism. Schamberg's absolute geometrical purity and precision is shown in Abstraction (1916) and Machine (1916).

Among the American painters of this period who carried abstraction to completely non-representational extremes are the synchromists, Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell, both of whom exhibited in the Armory Show and whose paintings are included in this exhibition, John Covert, who is represented by two paintings of 1916 and 1919, was one of the founders of the New York Society of Independent Artists and an artist who early developed a highly individual abstract style, only to abandon painting entirely between 1923 and 1949. Patrick Henry Bruce, another exhibitor at the famous Armory Show, is represented by Composition II.

The Second Wave of Abstraction, 1930-1950

Because abstract tendencies tapered off after the end of World War I and during the 'twenties, few paintings from this period are shown in the exhibition. In the 'thirties, however, despite the ascendancy of the American scene and social realism as subjects, a second wave of abstract art began. Once again, according to Mr. Ritchie, the abstract movement took its lead from Europe where abstraction had resolved itself into two extreme points: the surrealist explorations of the subconscious on the one hand; and the geometrical abstract movement, rational and architectural, on the other.

Mr. Ritchie has categorized the work of the past two decades in five groups ranging between these two poles.

1. Pure Geometric

The characteristics of this group, Mr. Ritchie says, are pure rectangular or curvilinear forms which bear no recognizable relation to natural forms and the treatment of space on a two-dimensional basis. In this grouping he includes paintings by Joseph Albers, Giorgio Cavallon, Carl Holty, George L.K, Morris and sculpture by José de Rivera and Theodore Roszak.

2. Architectural and Mechanical Geometric

Mr. Ritchie defines this group as characterized by rectangular or curvilinear forms derived from recognizable architectural or mechanical prototypes and with space usually treated two-dimensionally. Ralston Crawford's From the Bridge. Balcomb Greene's Blue Space and Eve Model's Uptown are included in this classification.

3. Naturalist Geometric

While the first two categories had their origins in cubism, constructivism, de Stijl and Bauhaus, Mr. Ritchie says this group is based on cubism, expressionism and constructivism. Here the forms are recognizable shapes whose geometrical structure has been emphasized. Space is treated three-dimensionally, often with atmospheric implications. Among the paintings put in this category are Arthur Dove's Sand Barge, Low Tide by William Kienbusch and The Fog Lifts by John Marin.

4. Expressionist Geometric

This category Mr. Ritchie characterizes as concerned with rectangular and curvilinear forms arranged usually in dynamic, organic relationships but with an overall geometrical control to the composition. Space is usually treated three-dimensionally and often in a vibrant manner. The origins of this category are in cubism, expressionism, dada and surrealism. Among the examples he has selected here are works of a young abstractionist, Robert Conover; veteran Stuart Davis; sculpture by Herbert Ferber who has only recently been working in the abstract style; Karl Knaths; Robert Motherwell; Alfred Russell, and Charles Shaw.

5. Expressionist Biomorphie

This category, at the other extreme, is characterized by irregular forms and calligraphic interlacing composed usually in dynamic, symbolic or emotively suggestive relationships, with space treated three-dimensionally. For this group Mr. Ritchie has selected works by Gorky, James Brooke, Hans Hoffmann, Charles Howard, Ibram Lassaw, de Kooning, David Smith, Pollock and others.

SWISS POSTERS

An exhibition of SWISS POSTERS will open at the Museum of Modern Art on January 31 (press preview, January 30, 2-5 p.m.), instead of the originally scheduled exhibition of prize-winning designs and lamps from the Lamp Competition, which will be held from March 28-May 27.

The exhibition will include more than 50 posters, selected from the traveling exhibition of "Pro Helvetia" (the Swiss national institution) and from the Museum Collection. It will illustrate the development of the modern poster in Switzerland.