

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

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PRESS PREVIEW: TUESDAY  
June 22, 1954, 2-5 p.m.

## FIRST LARGE RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION OF THE PAINTINGS OF NILES SPENCER AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The first large retrospective exhibition covering 30 years of the work of the American painter NILES SPENCER will open in the 3rd floor galleries of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, on June 23 and will continue through August 15. The exhibition was organized by Dorothy C. Miller, Curator of the Museum Collections, for the Museum's Department of Circulating Exhibitions. The New York showing comes midway in the scheduled tour of the exhibition, which has so far been seen at the Akron Art Institute, the Cincinnati Art Museum and the Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, N.H., and which will continue on tour during the coming winter.

A dozen museums and an equal number of private collectors have lent paintings to the exhibition, which includes some 35 canvases ranging in date from 1921 to 1951. The drawings in the show were selected from a large group never before exhibited.

Niles Spencer was one of a distinguished group of American artists whose work came to maturity in the early 1920s. Born of Yankee stock in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, he found in the old seacoast towns of Maine and Cape Cod one of the favorite subjects of his early work. Spencer's most characteristic subject, however, was to be the urban scene, the factories, skyscrapers, bridges, warehouses, and dwellings of the city, which his quietly searching, intense vision distilled in precisely simplified forms. He loved New York, and it was the abstract pattern of the city rather than the life of its inhabitants that moved him. His unpeopled canvases have the strength of understatement, a feeling for design that is both sensitive and profound, and a muted poetry of color.

Spencer was born in 1893 and studied from 1913 to 1915 at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. During a brief stay in New York in 1915 he studied with Bellows and Henri at the Ferrer School, and the following year he left Rhode Island and went to New York to live. Summers, and a few winters as well, were spent on the coast of Maine at Ogunwuit, where he and Kuniyoshi, Katherine Schmidt, Robert Laurent and a number of other artists lived in the colony started by Hamilton Easter Field, painter, critic and editor of The Arts magazine. From 1923 until about 1940, he divided his time between Provincetown, Mass. and New York, where he lived in the

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old Washington Square section which provided subject matter for so many of his paintings.

In 1921-22 and again in 1928-29 Spencer lived in France and Italy, painting and making a great many drawings. In 1923 he joined the Whitney Studio Club and showed in its exhibitions until 1930. Two one-man shows at the Daniel Gallery in 1925 and 1928 won him recognition and he was represented in major shows throughout the country from that time on, although he did not hold another one-man show until 1947, at the Downtown Gallery. A commission from the Section of Fine Arts of the Treasury Department for a mural for the Post Office at Alquippa, Pa. was completed about 1937-38.

Spencer's untimely death in 1952 came at a time when he was doing some of his best painting. The powerful series of late canvases, devoted to the theme of industrial America but increasingly abstract in feeling, was shown at a small memorial exhibition at the Downtown Gallery in 1952 and provides the climax of the Museum's present exhibition.

A check list and photographs of the works in the exhibition will be available at the press preview June 22 from 2 to 5 p.m.

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## NILES SPENCER

### A RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION

Circulated by the Museum of Modern Art and shown at the Museum

June 23 - August 15, 1954

City Walls. 1921. Oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, given anonymously (by exchange)

New York. 1922. Oil on canvasboard. Lent by Mrs. Edith G. Halpert

The Cove, Ogunquit. 1922. Oil on canvas. Lent by the Newark Museum

Perkins Cove, Ogunquit. 1922. Gouache. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Milton Bauman  
Study for The Cove, Ogunquit, oil, the Newark Museum

Gray Buildings. 1925. Oil on canvas. Lent by the Phillips Collection, Washington

Studio Table. 1925. Oil on canvas. Lent by Dr. Harry A. Blutman

Interior, Still Life. 1925. Oil on canvas. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Edward S. Greenbaum.

Jug and Gravy Boat. c. 1925. Gouache. Lent by The Downtown Gallery.  
Study for Interior, Still Life, oil, collection Mr. and Mrs. Edward S. Greenbaum

Buildings. c. 1926. Oil on canvas. Lent by the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, Columbus, Ohio

The Dormer Window. 1927. Oil on canvas. Lent by the Phillips Collection, Washington

Bedside Table. 1928. Oil on canvasboard. Lent by Mrs. Edith G. Halpert

Ordnance Island, Bermuda. 1928. Oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, gift of Sam A. Lewisohn

White Factory, Paris. 1929. Oil on canvas. Lent by Norton R. Goldsmith

Near Washington Square. c. 1930? Oil on canvas. Lent by Bumpel Ucul

The Green Table. 1930. Oil on canvas. Lent by the Whitney Museum of American Art

Behind the Square. 1932. Oil on canvasboard. Lent by Holger Cahill

Near Avenue A. 1933. Oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller

Across the Tracks. 1934. Oil on canvas. Lent by The Downtown Gallery

Blast Furnace. 1935. Oil on canvas. Lent by The Downtown Gallery

Steel Country. 1937. Oil on canvas. Lent by the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence

The Bay. 1937. Oil on canvas. Lent by Nelson A. Rockefeller

From the Race Road. 1939. Oil on canvas. Lent by the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass.

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- Waterfront Mill. 1940. Oil on canvas. Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art
- City Shapes. 1946. Oil on canvas. Lent by Arizona State College, Tempe
- From the Lafayette. 1947. Oil on canvas. Lent by The Downtown Gallery.
- The New Ice Plant. 1947. Oil on canvas. Lent by George H. Fitch
- In the Cabin. 1947. Oil on canvas. Lent by The Downtown Gallery.
- The Two Bridges. 1947. Oil on canvas. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Roy R. Neuberger
- Ventilators. 1948. Oil on canvas. Lent by Mrs. Niles Spencer
- Erie Underpass. 1949. Oil on canvas. Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art
- The Silver Tanks. 1949. Oil on canvas. Lent by the Northern Trust Company, Chicago
- The Watch Factory. 1950. Oil on canvas. Lent by the Butler Art Institute, Youngstown, Ohio
- Above the Excavation. 1950. Oil on canvas. Lent by the William H. Lane Foundation
- The Wake of the Hurricane. 1942-51. Oil on canvas. Lent by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis
- In Fairmont. 1951. Oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art
- West Eighth. 1951. Casein. Lent by Frank E. Hurd
- Riverhead. 1951. Lent by Mrs. Edith G. Halpert

GRAPHIC WORK

- Perkins Cove, Ogunquit. 1923. Ink. Study for the oil, 1924, collection Mrs. Frances Robbins
- Down the Hill, Provincetown. 1924. Pencil. Study for the oil, 1924, collection William H. Lane Foundation
- Entrance to the Fort, Bermuda. 1928. Pencil. Study for the oil, 1929, Downtown Gallery
- Cleret. 1928. Crayon
- Provincetown in Winter. c. 1936. Crayon
- White Factory, Paris. 1928-29. Crayon. Compare with the oil and the lithograph of the same subject

The above drawings lent by The Downtown Gallery

- White Factory, Paris. 1928-29. Lithograph. The Museum of Modern Art, gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.