

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

In the early autumn of 1929 the new-born Museum of Modern Art announced its intention "first of all ... to establish a collection of the immediate ancestors of the modern movement ... and living masters." Painting, sculpture, drawings and prints were foremost in the Trustees' minds but other arts unusual or non-existent in museums were proposed from the first and then gradually included in the Museum's program: Architecture in 1932; Photography, 1932; machine-manufactured and hand-produced objects, 1933; Films in 1935. Today, in every department, the Museum's collections of 20th century art are unsurpassed in scope and in the number of key works of quality and historical importance. Yet the collections are far from complete -- and masterpieces are still in the minority!

The Museum Collections receive no public subsidy nor are they endowed. The 20,000 works in the Collections have been acquired through the loyal generosity of almost 900 donors, among them some 200 corporations.

During most of their history, the Museum's collections, excepting painting, sculpture and films, have not been exhibited for want of space. Now, in the new galleries, opened in May 1964, selections from all the collections are on view. The exhibition space is still inadequate. Equally serious, is the lack of easily accessible, not to say inviting, study storage space, except for prints and photographs. The next stage in the Museum's growth should solve these problems.

A general account of the Museum Collections in all departments is given in Masters of Modern Art, published by the Museum, 240 pages with 356 illustrations (77 in color) of about 600 objects.

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PAINTING AND SCULPTURE COLLECTIONS

FLOOR II

The painting and sculpture collections of the Museum number over 1800 works of which about 550 or 35 percent are on view. A few of the larger paintings are shown in the spacious Main Hall of Floor I and many of the best sculptures in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden but the principal exhibition begins on Floor II and ends on Floor III.

The exhibition, arranged roughly in chronological order, starts with three galleries of the founding fathers of modern painting. Gallery 1 -- two masterpieces by Rousseau. 2 -- the Impressionists who transformed Impressionism: Cézanne, Renoir, Degas, Monet. 3 -- the anti-Impressionists, Gauguin and van Gogh; the Neo-Impressionist, Seurat; the realist, Toulouse-Lautrec; the visionaries, Redon and Ensor.

Gallery 4 -- The turn of the century: Bonnard, Vuillard, Prendergast, Sickert, Klimt, Corinth -- leads past a wall of color-drunk Fauves (wild beasts) of 1905 to Gallery 6 -- Matisse, and then three galleries of artists working in traditional or expressionist styles: 7 -- French and Italian artists, Rouault, Derain, Soutine, Modigliani, Morandi; 8 -- the German expressionists, Nolde, Kirchner, Beckmann; the Austrian Kokoschka; 9 -- Americans: Weber, Hartley, Dove, Hopper and others.

Three galleries present the Cubist revolution: 9 -- Picasso (the Demoiselles d'Avignon, 1907) and Braque, through 1913; 10 and 11 -- later Cubism: Picasso, Braque, Gris and the Americans, Feininger, Weber, Stuart Davis.

12 -- a gallery of watercolors, Marin, Klee, Graves, etcetera, leads to 13 -- the two murals by Monet, The Waterlilies, in the gallery named for Mrs. Simon Guggenheim, the chief patron of the Museum's painting and sculpture collection. From 13 -- a view of the Sculpture Garden.

Returning through the Cubist galleries to 14 -- Léger, then 15 -- the Italian Futurists of 1912. Three galleries of early abstract art follow: 16 -- expressionist abstraction of Kandinsky, Delaunay, Kupka; 17 -- geometric abstraction by

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Mondrian, van Doesburg and others; and 18 -- the Russians, Malevich, Gabo and Pevsner.

The vigorous reaction beginning around 1920 against abstract and cubist art is seen in 20 -- the new traditionalism of Picasso and Derain and various kinds of realism: social comment by Grosz, Orozco, Siqueiros, Shahn; the objective realism of Bérard, Berman. The surrealist reaction against the esthetic purity of abstract art begins on Floor III, Gallery 1.

FLOOR III

The second part of the exhibition of the Painting and Sculpture Collection occupies much of Floor III. The first part, on Floor II, began with the later 19th century and concluded with the revival of subject matter and realistic techniques around 1920.

The painting and sculpture exhibition on this floor, III, begins with the powerful movement toward the fantastic, marvelous and anti-rational. Like realism, this, too, was partially a reaction against abstract art.

Active before World War I, the pioneers, Duchamp and Picabia in Gallery 1, Klee, Chagall, de Chirico in 2, were isolated from each other as well as from their precursors, Redon and Ensor (Floor II, Gallery 3).

During or just after the War, Duchamp and Man Ray in New York, Arp in Zürich, Ernst, Schwitters, Grosz in Germany contributed to the calculated shock and nonsense of Dadaism, Gallery 3A. Surrealism, 3 -- held sway from 1925 to 1945: Arp, Miró and Masson were "abstract" Surrealists (3); Tanguy, Magritte, Delvaux, Dali (3A) were "dream photographers" with realist techniques. Max Ernst used both styles.

Picasso, consorting with Surrealist poets, was a great (though unofficial) Surrealist painter, 4. In his great mural Guernica, 1937, he furiously attacks war.

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As in the Picassos, human figures predominate in 5. Painted during the past 25 years, the techniques range from the meticulous realism of Tchelitchew and Wyeth to violent expressionism in de Kooning and Bacon. Satire and poetic metaphor are frequent.

Expressionist abstraction, however, dominates the mid-century. Wols, de Staël, Hartung, Soulages, Baumeister, Tapiés are among the Europeans in 6. The American Abstract Expressionists, the world's strongest school of painters since the war, are seen in 6 and 7: Hofmann, Gorky, Still, Rothko, Pollock, de Kooning, Kline, Motherwell and others, including the isolated Tobey and the Chilean Matta.

Gallery 8 offers a contrast between works, poles apart, by Lippold and Segal.

Post- and sometimes anti-abstract expressionism appear in the art of the past decade in Galleries 9, 10, 11. Collage and assemblage - Burri, Rauschenberg, Stankiewicz; commonplace signs and symbols - Johns, Indiana; provocative images of everyday things and people - Oldenburg; Warhol (and Segal in 8); geometrical and hard-edge abstraction, sometimes with optical devices and mysterious or strident dissonances in color and form - Vasarely, Reinhardt, Kelly, Anuszkiewicz. (Some kinetic constructions are shown in the Auditorium Gallery near the entrance to Thomas Wilfred's Lumia composition.)

The Sculpture Galleries, 12 to 16. The Museum's most important sculptures by Rodin, Maillol, Matisse, Lachaise, Lipchitz, Moore, Calder are to be seen in the Sculpture Garden. All or most sculptures by Matisse, Picasso, Boccioni, Arp, Pevsner, Gabo are shown in the painting galleries.

In the sculpture galleries: 12 -- to your left as you enter, nine works by Brancusi. Then, roughly chronological by style, 13 -- Rodin, Bourdelle, Rosso; Maillol, Lehmbruck. 14 -- Nadelman, Epstein, Lachaise, Marini, post-surrealist Giacometti; a vitrine of small figures in many styles. 15 -- cubist and near-abstract sculpture: Duchamp-Villon, Lipchitz, Epstein, Moore, Hepworth, Noguchi. 16 -- Post-War II sculptors: Smith, Lipton, Roszak, Armitage, Butler, César, Baskin and others. In the stairway to the left are large assemblages by Chamberlain, César, Bontecou.

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Books and catalogues: Painting and Sculpture in The Museum of Modern Art, 3rd edition (checklist); 4th edition, with over 1300 illustrations, in preparation. Masters of Modern Art, with 74 color plates of painting and sculpture in the Museum. What is Modern Painting? illustrated mostly from the Museum Collection. Paintings from The Museum of Modern Art, National Gallery, Washington, D.C., 153 plates, 13 in color. The Museum of Modern Art, New York: Painting and Sculpture Collection, a pocket book.