

The Museum of Modern Art

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AMERICAN ART FROM THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART AT KUNSTMUSEUM BERN

In a joint celebration of its 50th Anniversary Year and of the 100th anniversary of the founding of Switzerland's Kunstmuseum Bern, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, has assembled a major exhibition, AMERICAN ART FROM THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, that will travel to museums in Europe and Israel on a year-long itinerary. On view at the Kunstmuseum Bern from February 15 through April 15, 1979, this exhibition of American painting, sculpture, drawings, prints, architecture and design, photographs, films, and videotapes from the Museum's Collection will later travel to the Museum Ludwig, Cologne (May 18 - July 16).

AMERICAN ART FROM THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART was initially organized at the invitation of the Kunstmuseum Bern to mark the Swiss museum's own centennial as well as the 50th anniversary of The Museum of Modern Art. (The Kunstmuseum Bern was founded in 1879; The Museum of Modern Art was established fifty years later in 1929.) Plans for an exchange of exhibitions originated over four years ago in discussions with Dr. Hugo Wagner, Director of the Kunstmuseum. The present exhibition has been conceived of as an exchange for the generous loans of the Kunstmuseum Bern to European Master Paintings from Swiss Collections shown at The Museum of Modern Art in 1976; and in prospect of a future Paul Klee exhibition to be organized by The Museum of Modern Art with the assistance of the Kunstmuseum and the Paul Klee Foundation.

Waldo Rasmussen, Director of The International Program of The Museum of Modern Art, who coordinated the exhibition and its accompanying catalog, notes that "The present exhibition has been a collaboration between the Bern Kunstmuseum and The Museum of Modern Art in every sense of the word, from its inception and selection, complex shipping arrangements to final installation of the works of art and production of the catalog. Dr. Sandor Kuthy, Curator of the Kunstmuseum, has worked tirelessly on every phase of the exhibition with unfailing good humor and has our deepest gratitude and professional respect." Mr. Rasmussen also singled out Karl Ruhrberg, Director of the Museum Ludwig, for his role in supervising the production of the German-language catalog. The exhibition was organized under the auspices of The Museum of Modern Art's International Council, a group of art patrons and collectors which sponsors the Museum's long-range program for exchange of contemporary visual arts with other countries. AMERICAN ART FROM THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART represents each of the Museum's six curatorial departments and was selected by its curatorial staff in close collaboration with Dr. Kuthy.

AMERICAN ART FROM THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART is designed to serve two major functions: to present important aspects of the Museum's holdings of American art in all media; and to impart something of the essence of The Museum of Modern Art, especially its interdepartmental nature. A small orientation section of the exhibition contains photographic and other documentary material on the history and development of the Museum since it first opened its doors to the public on November 8, 1929.

The Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture is represented by a selection of nearly sixty works by many of the major figures in American art since World War II. Included among these are Josef Albers, Alexander Calder, Helen Frankenthaler, Philip Guston, Al Held, Hans Hofmann, Jasper Johns, Barnett Newman, Kenneth Noland, Claes Oldenburg, Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg, Mark Rothko, David Smith, Frank Stella, and Andy Warhol, among others.

In the catalog essay on this section of the exhibition, Carolyn Lanchner, the Museum's Research Curator of Painting and Sculpture, writes:

"The work of the artists in this exhibition is a kind of sample cross section of the major movements in America since the end of World War II. If, at first glance, this art seems discontinuous and even incoherent, an examination of the premises guiding its various manifestations indicates that common to it all is a fusion of the formal discoveries of early modernist European art with a particular Yankee brand of pragmatism and vernacular directness. ...If Paris was the 'laboratory of 20th-century art,' then New York was its testing ground. From Abstract Expressionism to the present, American artists have radically expanded the initiatives of earlier 20th century European art in extending the boundaries of what constitutes artistic reality."

An earlier generation of American modernists, perhaps less well-known in Europe than their more contemporary counterparts, is represented by a selection of drawings and watercolors by artists active between 1900 and 1945. Charles Burchfield, Stuart Davis, Charles Demuth, Lyonel Feininger, Arshile Gorky, Marsden Hartley, Edward Hopper, Man Ray, John Marin, Georgia O'Keefe, Maurice Prendergast, Ben Shahn, Charles Sheeler, and Mark Tobey, among others, are included in this group.

Bernice Rose, Curator of Drawings, characterizes the American artist's attitude towards the drawing media during this forty-year period:

"In analyzing why drawing in America developed as it did the question of temperament must be examined. Looking to European modes of modernism, the American was eager to catch as quickly as possible what was exciting, what was radical in those styles, and to bend it to his own uses. The American bias was to catch the fact, to hold it up close, to grab it quickly in one breadth, one stroke, one glance. The work of art had to be an immediate fact--something immediately caught and held. Not for Americans the series of analytic drawings leading to finished work of the exploratory drawings in between in which one surveyed the territory or analyzed the form. The picture and its execution had to be simultaneous facts, 'the exact condition of a high moment.'* For Americans, watercolor, not black-and-white drawing, supplied the means for achieving the goal."

* (Statement by Marsden Hartley)

Forty-five works from the collection of the Museum's Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, most of them large-scale prints, are also on view. Included are works by Mel Bochner, Chuck Close, Jim Dine, Nancy Graves, Jasper Johns, Alex Katz, Willem deKooning, Sol LeWitt, Roy Lichtenstein, Brice Marden, Philip Pearlstein, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, Ed Ruscha, Robert Ryman, Joel Shapiro, Pat Steir, and Andy Warhol, among others. Prints are a popular medium in contemporary American art, and many of those in this selection are members of the new generation of important American artists.

In the catalog Howardena Pindell, Associate Curator of Prints and Illustrated Books, writes:

"In the past decade, artists, especially painters, have shown renewed interest in standard printmaking techniques... Revitalizing these techniques is the artists' heightened interest in color, enlarged scale, and, in some instances, the quality of the surface of the print and the craft of papermaking. The wedding of advanced technology to printmaking has provided opportunities for experimentation, as has the sanctioning of hitherto taboo commercial processes such as photo-offset."

The exhibition also includes photography, film, video, and architecture and design, in all of which fields The Museum of Modern Art has pioneered

in establishing curatorial departments and archives. American photography of the 1930s is the subject of the section of the exhibition that has been prepared by the Museum's Department of Photography, which was the first curatorial department devoted exclusively to photography in any museum. John Szarkowski, the Museum's Director of Photography, describes the principal tendencies of the period in the catalog:

"The main thrust of ambitious American photography during the twenties was directed toward fundamentally formal goals. Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham, Charles Sheeler, and Man Ray made pictures that sought to define the essential nature of photographic aesthetics, and that only incidentally dealt with the specifics of contemporary, temporal life. ...The twenties had also seen the flowering of a new branch of professional photography--that of the photographic illustration....In addition to the continuing development of these familiar options, the thirties saw the introduction of two basically new ideas into American photography. The first was what might be called the documentary aesthetic; the second was a new concept of picture journalism."

On view are works by such masters of modern photography as Berenice Abbott, Ansel Adams, Margaret Bourke-White, Imogen Cunningham, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Man Ray, Paul Outerbridge, Edward Steichen, Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, and Edward Weston, among others.

The Museum's Department of Architecture and Design has assembled a three-part contribution to AMERICAN ART FROM THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART. On view will be 13 chairs and other design objects by the famed American designer Charles Eames who died last year. Arthur Drexler, the Museum's Director of Architecture and Design, writes of Eames:

"Charles Eames...was one of the most influential American designers of the twentieth-century. The breadth of his interests was exceptional--movies, architecture, toys, fabrics, machinery, and exhibition planning, among others -- but he will probably be best remembered for the series of chairs that bear his name. Eames contributed at least three of the major chair designs of the twentieth century....The first, executed in collaboration with the architect Eero Saarinen (1910-1961), emerged from a 1940 Museum of Modern Art competition. Since then furniture by Eames has been mass-produced in quantities that must now be counted in the millions, and more than fifty examples of his work have entered the Museum's Design Collection."

Also on view will be a group of architectural drawings (and one model) by the late Louis I. Kahn, of whom Drexler writes:

"Louis Kahn was an astonishing figure in American architecture. A popular and highly respected teacher who had produced a handful of good but not particularly important buildings, he suddenly emerged at the age of 53 as one of the most interesting architects in the United States. His first building to earn such respect was the Art Gallery of Yale University, built in 1954, and followed in 1957 by the more dramatic Alfred Newton Richards Medical Research Building in Philadelphia. It was this latter work that captured the imagination of so many architects, leading to numerous variations on the theme of clustered, blank-walled towers."

The third section, a sampling of 26 American posters done since 1945, represents such well known graphic designers as Saul Bass, Paul Davis, Milton Glaser, Leo Lionni, Paul Rand, Ben Shahn and Saul Steinberg, in addition to posters by painters and sculptors such as Jim Dine, Richard Lindner, Larry Rivers and Frank Stella. J. Stewart Johnson, the Museum's Curator of Design, describes the genesis of American posters since the mid 1940s:

"Until the end of World War II, American posters tended to follow closely the styles and techniques that prevailed in Europe; and, for the most part, the American copies were pale reflections of the originality that had inspired them....It was not..until the mid 1940s that American graphic artists seemed to gain a measure of confidence and, perhaps not simply coincidentally, to find clients anxious to encourage them.... This renaissance was not self-generating. For one thing, the Europeans who had come to America during the 1930s (when many leaders of the avant-garde fled rising Fascism), while they had a limited influence on the bulk of advertising art, made an immediate and deep impact on the generation of graphic designers who were coming of age in the late 1930s and 40s. And in addition, the brilliant work of Swiss designers, illustrated and eagerly sought out by Americans in the pages of the Swiss magazine Graphis..., acted as a powerful catalyst."

The Museum's Department of Film was established in 1935 as the first international film archive. It is presenting a retrospective of the films of the great D. W. Griffith, one of the fathers of world cinema. Included will be such Griffith classics as The Birth of a Nation, Intolerance,

Broken Blossoms, Way Down East, and Orphans of the Storm, as well as a group of Griffith's earlier Biograph films.

In a very contemporary vein, artists' videotapes from the 1970s are being shown. They represent the Museum's recently established video program. Featured is the work of such leading young contemporaries as Vito Acconci, Peter Campus, Ed Emshwiller, Joan Jonas, Bruce Nauman, Nam June Paik, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, Steina and Woody Vasulka, and William Wegman.

"As The Museum of Modern Art marks its 50th Anniversary, we are deeply conscious of the legacy of internationalism inherited from the Museum's founders and its brilliant first two Directors, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and Rene d'Harnoncourt, who guided it over the course of nearly four decades," notes the current Director, Richard E. Oldenburg. "While we can take pride in showing the work of American artists to museum audiences abroad, we also hope that the present exhibition reflects the Museum's continuing commitment to furthering understanding and appreciation of the arts of all nations."

On the occasion of the exhibition AMERICAN ART FROM THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, a catalog in German is being jointly produced by the Kunstmuseum Bern and the Museum Ludwig. It includes a brief history of The Museum of Modern Art as well as introductions to each of the six curatorial departments, the video program, and Library.

For the opening of the exhibition in Bern, The Museum of Modern Art will be represented by its Director, Richard E. Oldenburg; the President, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd; and Waldo Rasmussen, Director, The International

Program. Monroe Wheeler, the Museum's former Director of Exhibitions and Publications and now a Counselor to the Trustees, will also attend. Representing the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art is its Chairman, Prinz Franz von Bayern. (See separate background releases).

Other members of the International Council planning to attend the inauguration of the exhibition are: Mrs. Lily Auchincloss, New York (Secretary of the International Council); Mr. and Mrs. Jean-Paul Barbier, Presinge, Switzerland; Countess Boel, Brussels; Princess Laetitia Boncompagni, Rome; Mrs. Woodward de Croisset, Paris; Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Emil, New York; Baroness Alain de Gunzburg, Paris; Prince Ayn Aga Khan, Geneva; Mr. and Mrs. H. Irgens Larsen, London; Steingrim Laursen, Copenhagen; Mr. and Mrs. Irving Mathews, San Antonio; Mr. and Mrs. José Mindlin, Sao Paulo; Count and Countess Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, Milan; Mrs. Herbert P. Patterson, New York; Mrs. Richard L. Selle, New York; Dr. Gerrit and Miss Marina van der Wal, Amstelveen; and Richard S. Zeisler, New York.