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AMERICAN PAINTINGS TO BE SHOWN AT BIENNALE EXHIBITION
IN VENICE, ITALY

A 50-year retrospective collection of the work of John Marin and representative work by 6 younger American painters, selected under the joint organization of The Art Foundation, the Museum of Modern Art and the Cleveland Museum of Art (Hanna Fund), will represent this country in the 25th Biennale Exhibition at Venice to be held from June 3 to October 15. This famous exhibition, begun in 1892 and held biennially except during war years, is the oldest and most important international exhibition of contemporary art in the world. American artists to be included with a total of 82 paintings are, in addition to John Marin: Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Lee Gatch, Rico Lebrun and Hyman Bloom.

The aim of this exhibition is to present a selected sampling rather than the conventional cross-section containing one picture by each of about 80 artists. This plan of selection falls into 2 parts. One-half of the American Pavilion is devoted to the retrospective exhibition of the work of John Marin who, at 80, is generally regarded as dean of American painters and an American "old master" in the modern movement. This showing, more than any previous European one, will reveal his original qualities to a wide European audience and will symbolize the art of the older generation of American artists who since before the 1913 Armory Show have helped to develop 20th-century ideas in the United States. The other half of the American Exhibition shows several paintings by each of 6 artists who are younger and less renowned than Marin but who have taken a position of leadership during the past decade.

This year more than 20 nations, 5 of them for the first time, are participating in exhibition pavilions of their own. The American Pavilion is the only non-government-owned building of the many national buildings at the Biennale; it belongs to the Grand Central Art Galleries of New York, a private organization that has generously loaned the building unconditionally for this purpose. The insti-

tutions organizing the exhibition have been able to assemble it through contributions from private individuals who prefer to remain anonymous, and loans of paintings from the artists, from museums and from private collections. Shipping both ways has been supplied by the American Export Lines free of charge, in special strong room space for safety. At the Biennale, prizes will be awarded by the Italian government for the best contemporary work shown. During the showing of the exhibition, the International Art Critics Association will hold its third annual assembly in Venice. This Association numbers among its members about 400 of the leading art critics from 18 European and American countries. Unaided by any governmental support or subsidy, this privately sponsored American exhibition in Venice is an indication of the desire of American institutions to aid in international cultural relations.

The 55 oils and watercolors by John Marin to be shown constitute one of the few retrospective one-man shows by living Americans in a European public gallery. Of his work, Mr. Duncan Phillips, who has loaned 12 paintings from the Phillips Memorial Gallery, says:

"In his 80th year John Marin still paints with power, ecstasy and the most original brush work and design of any American artist. He is one of the most gifted and important painters since Cézanne and perhaps the best of all masters of watercolor."

Mr. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of Museum Collections at the Museum of Modern Art, selected the works by Gorky, de Kooning and Pollock that are to be shown. Mr. Barr comments on these painters as follows:

"The spirit of painting after World War II seems by contrast much bolder than the retrospective movements of post-World War I - at least in those countries where cultural freedom still survives. Everywhere in the United States as well as in Western Europe many strong young artists and a number of talented older men are engaged in renewed exploration and adventure. In the United States three of these younger leaders have been Gorky, de Kooning and Pollock.

"Gorky, who came to this country 30 years ago, was foremost among the young American painters who had rejected the cubist tradition for an abstract art of free-flowing form and evocative symbol. With his unhappy death in 1948, American painting suffered one of the severest losses in many years.

"De Kooning, although he has been in this country for more than a quarter century, has risen to fame only in the past two years. His dense, compact style controls forms which seem to struggle against strong surface tension. Though his art seems abstract or cryptic, he insists upon the importance of the latent subject.

"Pollock, considerably younger than the other two, has developed perhaps the most original art among the painters of his generation. He uses no brush, but lays his canvas on the floor and trickles the fluid paint on it from above, his hand weaving the thin stream

of color into a rhythmic, variegated labyrinth. The result provides an exciting adventure for the eyes."

Alfred M. Frankfurter, President of the Art Foundation and American Commissioner for the Biennale who will instal the exhibition, says of the other three painters, Bloom, Gatch and Lebrun:

"The new maturity of our advancing painters displays itself simultaneously in recognizing that what a painter says is not so important as how he says it and in a new respect for the *matiere* of painting. These three painters share these characteristics to a remarkable extent, although in varying degrees.

"Bloom, the youngest, developed his own style after his first view of a few Rouaults and Soutines. Most of his subjects relate to two major motifs: death and religion. But whatever his theme, he renders it in his unique language of vibrating color.

"Gatch evolved a personal manner of two-dimensional abstraction from which he developed his present highly individual style of structural form built up subtly and mysteriously through color. He lets one color determine the tonality of a picture and then develops myriad nuances of it with an occasional absolute contrast. The result is a poetry as tender as it is elusive and personal.

"Rico Lebrun came to America from Naples and soon began to develop his immense technical gift as a draftsman. Quick success in fashion and advertising illustration was followed by a totally different approach at the beginning of the last war, when first his subject matter and then his art started to reveal his real profundity. About 5 years ago he began work on sketches for a great Crucifixion, and the specific moments of the great symbol of suffering and regeneration are becoming individual pictures one by one, painted as uncompromisingly and directly as they deal with their theme."

For additional material and photographs
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