

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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Press Preview -  
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NEW IMAGES OF MAN, an exhibition of 104 paintings and sculptures by 23 American and European artists will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art from September 30 through November 29. All these "effigies of the disquiet man" date from the end of World War II and have been selected by Peter Selz, Curator of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions. All the artists were born after 1900.

"The revelations and complexities of mid-twentieth century life have called forth profound feelings of solitude and anxiety. The imagery of man which has emerged from this feeling sometimes shows a new dignity, sometimes despair, but always the uniqueness of man as he confronts his fate. These image-makers take the human situation, indeed the human predicament, rather than formal structure, as their starting point. The existence of man rather than the essence of form is of the greatest concern to them," Dr. Selz says.

"This combination of contemporary form with a new kind of iconography is the chief element these artists hold in common. They do not in any way constitute a school or a movement."

Rene d'Harnoncourt, Director of the Museum, installed the exhibition which will later be shown at the Baltimore Museum of Art. The artists, who are from the United States, England, France, Holland, Austria and Switzerland are the painters: Appel, Bacon, Diebenkorn, Dubuffet, Golub, de Kooning, Lebrun, McGarrell, Muller, Oliveira and Pollock; and the sculptors: Armitage, Baskin, Butler, Campoli, César, Paolozzi, Richier, Roszak, Westermann and Wotruba.

Karl Appel (b. 1921), one of the Dutch artists who formed the Experimental Group in Amsterdam in 1948 and the COBRA (Copenhagen, Brussels-Amsterdam) in 1949, is represented by five paintings including a portrait of the jazz musician Count Basie, painted during his stay here in 1957. "His portraits combine his peculiar expressionism with the new concern for the act of painting itself," Selz says. "Portrait of Sandberg, for instance, is impetuously built up of zig zag strokes and heavy impasto. It is a likeness which retains the dynamic events of the creative process."

Kenneth Armitage (b. 1916), one of the younger British sculptors who have gained prominence since 1950, is represented by five sculptures of simplified human figures, largely helpless, and collective groups, caught in a continuous screen. "...the nervously moving and still slightly contrived webs of the early fifties have made way for a compact slab, a frieze, indeed a wall, animated only by the pointed breasts and spider-like legs sprouting out from the surface and by the skyline of squared-off head-shapes."

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Francis Bacon (b. 1910), is represented by five "haunted and haunting" paintings, including two recent studies for portraits of van Gogh in one of which he uses brighter colors and richer application of pigment than in the sparsely painted works of the early fifties. "Bacon is interested in motion studies, in the film and in the flash-light news photographs of crime and accidents. By transferring the motion of the film onto canvas he sometimes achieves the sequential quality of time, motion and action. But in addition to physical motion, he is also interested in psychological motivations. His image of man is blurred, as man's memory is blurred."

Leonard Baskin (b. 1922), is an American printmaker and sculptor, who, like Bacon is preoccupied with the state of death and the act of dying. He is represented by six sculptures including two life size carved figures, "The Great Dead Man" and "Man Walking." "Here man assumes a quiet, dignified nobility. Symmetrical and frontal, silent and static...they have an almost iconic intensity and self-containment."

Reg Butler (b. 1913) whose prize winning maquette for "The Unknown Political Prisoner" monument was smashed in the Tate Gallery in London by an angry artist in 1953, is represented by three sculptures and a replica of the maquette. His more recent work presents life in its most sensual and erotic aspects as symbolized by woman. "The girl has the intense vitality of erotic recognition. This heroic bronze figure, erect, taut, stretching upward from the thin grid on which she stands, reaches yearningly toward the object of her desire."

Cosmo Campoli (b. 1922), Chicago artist, is represented by four closed, massive and block-like sculptures, modeled in clay, which deal with the two certainties of man's existence--birth and death. "Like ancient sculpture made to propitiate hostile spirits, Campoli's work also has the quality--found among many of the artists presented here--of conjuring up supernatural aid. That is to say, for the artist, the work partakes somewhat of the character of a fetish or shaman; it is, among other things, a magical image to control the irrational world."

César (Baldacchini) (b. 1921), who has a small workshop in a factory in the suburbs of Paris, is represented by four metal sculptures made of old scraps of iron and pieces of machinery, welded into sculptures of supernatural fantasy. Commenting on "Torso", Selz says, "Starting with 'ready-made' materials of industry and using the methods of modern technology, César has come forth conversely with a sinister nude whose decay resembles that of time--a savage assertion of the corruption and frailty of the once undefiled flesh."

Richard Diebenkorn (b. 1922), of California, is represented by four recent oils painted since he departed from his own version of action painting and turned to a figurative style which combines the idiom of abstract expressionism with the surrealist, the expressionist and the fauve heritage. "The faces, generally, are barely indicated, but his large personages, awkward and isolated in an ambiguous but always empty space of muted interiors or brilliant landscapes, testify to their insular presence."

Jean Dubuffet (b. 1901), considered perhaps the most significant French painter to emerge since the war, is represented by six paintings and a sculpture. All show his interest in graffiti-rude scratchings found on walls from ancient times to the present--masks, the 'art of the insane' and untutored and cult images. Related to surrealism not in style but in basic attitude, "Dubuffet has collected the debris of civilization. "The Knight of Darkness" is an aggregation of slag and clinkers. This phantom, ominously confronting us, could be both an oracle of our nuclear future and a furnace gnome, product of an artist's eye which seeks its release for fantasy in any casual cast-off object. This equivocal aspect--the 'mixture of familiarity and terror'--is the major motif of Dubuffet's work."

Alberto Giacometti (b. 1901), Swiss artist living in Paris, is one of the oldest and most famous artists in the exhibition. He is represented by three tall emaciated figures, two small groups, two oils and a bronze head of his brother. "His emaciated figures, although they first appeared at the end of the second World War, are not starved survivors of the concentration camps: they are simply human beings--alone, inaccessible, and therefore inviolate. Like the character's in Satre's "No Exit" who could never close their eyes and sleep, Giacometti's "Tall Figures"--erect, distant and immutable--can stand or pace but never rest."

Leon Golub (b. 1922), American painter who lives in Paris, is represented by five canvases, including the recent "Colossal Head," almost seven feet high and "Reclining Youth," 13 feet wide, in which he has turned to classical art for his prototype. "Golub paints strong, virile figures of authority with the introspective stare, the 'inward look' which is found in the Constantine giants of fourth-century Rome... Golub's colossal figures face the destiny of their isolation with implacability."

Balcomb Greene (b. 1904), who is a professor at Carnegie Institute, is represented by three oils. "Often it is difficult to recognize the subject in his paintings because light remains the primary element in his work. The distinction between figure and ground is left ambiguous; instead the whole canvas participates in a dynamic movement which is communitated to the viewer. It is the total experience of seeing the interaction of light, color, woman, space."

Willem de Kooning (b. 1904), has for many years been a leading painter in America. He is represented by six large paintings of women, including one titled "Marilyn Monroe." "He painted these shamelessly erotic women close-up, in immediate encounter, giving us the feeling of uncanny familiarity and presence and simultaneously destroying classic proportions....Yet his paintings remained abstract. It is as if the abstract forms were invested with more specific symbols of anger, pain, humor. But the pictorial needs of the painting itself continued to determine the forms and colors."

Rico Lebrun (b. 1900), who has worked in California since 1937, is represented by three large paintings including two of death and destruction from the concentration camp series and "Doble Disparate," a large superhuman figure silhouetted against a background which barely suggests a landscape. Selz says his work is characterized by moral outrage and passion and more than any other artists in the show should be seen in the light of Western tradition. He makes use of cinematic frame devices to link the thrusting and pushing baroque elements to a mid-twentieth century conception of time.

James McGarrell (b. 1930), the youngest artist in the exhibition and who now teaches at the University of Indiana, is represented by three dream-like paintings. Of "Bathers," Selz says, "The group seems to be participating in a weird, esoteric ritual...its disquieting enigma haunts the spectator. "Equinox" is "a surrealist jungle of flame-like forms" and of "Rest in Air," "McGarrell's dream world, in which logic has no place and our associations betray us, has its own mystery and takes us back to de Chirico's silent 'Uncertainties of the Poet.'"

Jan Muller (1923-1958), who spent a good part of his short life fleeing from the Nazis, came to New York in 1941. Four paintings reflecting a peculiarly Northern and medieval imagery are included in the exhibition. "Temptation of Saint Anthony" was completed only a few months before his death. "It is a Last Judgment as well as a Temptation and which, like a medieval mystery play, is enacted by masked folk. As we look at the two naked women riding the dragon on the lower left, and notice that its eyes and toe nails are painted red, we fully enter into the artist's spirit of grim humor."

Nathan Oliveira (b. 1928), lives in San Francisco. He is represented by four paintings of standing and sitting figures, placed solidly against a vacant and neutral background, with their features indiscernible as if in deep shadow. "Oliveira's faceless figures seem as empty as the blank space against which they are silhouetted. These personages travel through space which itself lacks both definition and limitation, and they appear as though they might vanish again in a moment. They are not so much the ghosts of humans as they are merely shapes, rapid, volatile emergences brought by the whim of the artist's brush, and bearing a deeper affinity to the soft void of his background than to the world of the viewer whose stance or shape they may casually assume."

Eduardo Paolozzi (b. 1924), was born in Edinburgh of Italian parents. Four bronze sculptures done in his current very personal technique, which he developed around 1956, are included in the exhibition. Taking random objects, he presses them into slabs of clay, forming a negative impression into which he then pours liquid wax. When the wax solidifies with all the impressions on it, he has a storehouse of designs from which he can draw at will, assembling them into wax figures. These he sends off to the bronze foundry for unique castings. "Clockworks, wheels, locks, forks, parts of radios, phonographs, automobiles, bomb sights -- all are used to create his rich surfaces, reminiscent of Chinese bronzes; at the same time they have the psychological effect of reminding the spectator of the nature of his civilization."

Jackson Pollock (1912-1956). Five black and white painting of 1951 are included in the exhibition. Writing about them in the catalog, Frank O'Hara, poet and art critic, says: "Their compulsive figurative elements call forth associations which are totally false: we mistake the artist's subconscious for our own. Each work is a unique statement, simultaneously in terms of imagery and of esthetic stance....As images they are counter to the theory of the collective unconscious; they are private and mysterious....Pollock did not 'take up' the figure as a means of clearer communication. He employed it as one of the elements in an elaborate defense of his psyche..."

Germaine Richier (1904-1959), was for awhile in Paris assistant to Bourdelle who has been chief assistant to Rodin for many years. Five of her effegies, using traditional techniques, are in the show. These "creatures with the odd grace of their hesitant stance and their romanticized ugliness initiate us into a mysterious world. A world where to be ugly is somehow to appeal, and to be human is to partake at the same time of the qualities of animals, insects, plants, even objects--a kind of pantheism in which man is the spirit inhabiting all things."

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Theodore Roszak (b. 1907), is represented by four works which reflect the change in his work which took place about 1945 when his sculpture took on a new form and feeling. "They are pitted and gnarled where they used to be smooth and clean-cut. The interiors of his complex forms have become of uppermost importance. Agonized and convulsive forms organically determine a scorched exterior. This exterior is still sharp but no longer straight-edged. Yet its hooks and thorns and prongs, in spite of their prickly appearance, are also beautifully textured from the rich brazing of copper, nickel and silver onto the steel."

H. C. Westermann (b. 1922). Three objects are shown by this young Chicago artist who is part of the current Dada revival. His figures are frequently in the form of buildings which open or have windows so you can explore the inside. Selz calls the large "Memorial to the Idea of Man If He Was an Idea" his most powerful creation. "It is again a carefully worked box of laminated wood, this time with wildly painted arms, vulgarly akimbo. Its castellated, monocular head is topped by a toy globe, balanced on a pointed finger....The man's torso is a box with a door which opens to set us aghast. Here is a garish ocean of bottle caps...a succinct view of a world which has become a madhouse."

Fritz Wotruba (b. 1907), an Austrian sculptor, is represented by three ponderous and massive forms. Commenting on "The Seated Figure," Selz says, "With its slab like body and cubed head, it recalls a pile of rocks found in a quarry or perhaps at Stonehenge. Without resembling any particular primitive form, the figure has those universal qualities of inwardness and impersonal solidity found in faceless primeval idols."

\*All the quotations are from the catalog for the exhibition, New Images Of Man by Peter Selz with an Introductory Note by Paul Tillich and statements by the artists. 160 pages, 99 black and white illustrations, 11 color plates. Published by the Museum of Modern Art, distributed by Doubleday and Co. Inc. \$5.00

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Additional material and photographs available on request from Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. CI.5-8900

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