

# The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Circle 5-8900 Cable: Modernart

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE NATIONAL CIRCULATING EXHIBITIONS PROGRAM

As early as 1931, two years after its founding, The Museum of Modern Art distributed its first traveling exhibition. Two years later, in 1933, the Museum had organized the Department of Circulating Exhibitions, concerned solely with the preparation and distribution of exhibitions to travel throughout the country.

The motivating force behind the Circulating Exhibitions program has been the Museum's desire to serve centers outside the New York area. As a major institution working exclusively in the field of modern art, the Museum has a special educational responsibility. The Circulating Exhibitions Department has, therefore, tried to provide material of high quality in all the media with which the Museum itself is concerned: architecture and design, drawings and prints, and photography as well as painting and sculpture.

A number of these exhibitions have been milestones in the history of American art: Six Modern Sculpture (1936-1938), the first modern sculpture show to be circulated in this country; Machine Art (1936-1938), which established the concept, then revolutionary, that the design of everyday objects was "museum-worthy"; and Photography 1839-1937, the Museum's first large photographic exhibition, which served to impress on the American public photography's right to rank among the arts.

In those early days of the Museum's history, when the entire field of modern art was pioneer territory in the United States, large museums in urban centers welcomed the opportunity to participate in major exhibitions. Thus, in 1936, following its New York showing, the first large exhibition of the work of van Gogh was circulated to nine museums in the United States and Canada and was seen by almost a million people.

Today, with greater public demand for such comprehensive exhibitions and with rising costs of transportation, insurance, materials and manpower, it has become a

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necessity to prepare and circulate the largest shows on a participating basis. In such cases, all costs are shared by those museums which participate in the organization, production and circulation of the exhibition. The Rodin exhibit, shown at The Museum of Modern Art in the Fall of 1963 was, thus, prepared in conjunction with the San Francisco Palace of the Legion of Honor, and the large exhibition Claude Monet: Seasons and Moments of 1960 was organized in conjunction with the Los Angeles County Museum.

At the same time, the needs of smaller institutions, particularly schools and colleges, has also grown over the years. To meet these needs the Circulating Exhibitions program has increasingly emphasized the preparation of exhibitions for smaller museums, colleges and universities and the communities they serve, making the shows available on a below-cost basis. In such cases, rental fees cover part, but not all, of the costs of assembling, preparing, packing and insuring the exhibitions. The Museum of Modern Art assigns a subsidy to bridge the gap between the costs of the exhibitions and the income from rental fees. The program, which had been entirely subsidized by the Museum since its inception in 1931, was drastically cut from 1954 to 1960 due to rising costs and limited funds. In 1959, the program was once again continued and expanded with the aid of a grant from a private donor and a five-year grant from the CBS Foundation, Inc., the organization through which the Columbia Broadcasting System makes contributions to educational and cultural institutions. The grant expired with the current fiscal year. The Museum is now seeking other means of financing the program.

Since it is not only difficult for smaller institutions to afford to organize independent exhibitions but also to obtain the loan of works of art of high quality, the shows sent by the Museum frequently provide an introduction to modern art and contemporary design to smaller communities and also provide an introduction to The Museum of Modern Art itself.

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The response to this program has been gratifying. A number of school and college museums have been regular subscribers for a number of years: Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire, has taken a number of exhibitions each year since 1939; Middlebury College in Vermont has taken over 140 exhibitions since the '30's; the University of Illinois -- with campuses in Chicago and Urbana -- has shown almost 70 of the Museum's exhibitions in the last 15 years.

Time and again, university museums have reported that the Museum's exhibits have consistently drawn capacity crowds and an enthusiastic reception. When The American Scene Between the Wars was shown at the State University in Oswego, New York, the exhibitor wrote, "...many people commented that it was the best we had exhibited all year." And, U.S. Government Art Projects, shown at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, was described as "unquestionably the most important art exhibition to be shown in Macon..."

During the 1964-65 season the program will have about forty-eight exhibitions in circulation. Currently in preparation is Art Israel: <sup>1964</sup> 25 Painters and Sculptors, under the auspices of the International Council of the Museum and the America-Israel Cultural Foundation. This is the first comprehensive selection of contemporary Israeli art ever to be seen in the United States. Other new exhibitions are Landscapes by Eight Americans, presenting recent works by artists in this genre which show both extraordinary ability and fresh insight; American Collages, designed to demonstrate the distinctive contributions made by American artists in this field and the wide range of expressive possibilities inherent in the medium; and Carol Summers, devoted to one of the leading printmakers of the post-war generation in America. Other painting and sculpture shows include Americans 1963, Moholy-Nagy, The Eight, Hans Hofmann and his Students, Rodin, Tobey: The Seattle Market Place Gouaches, and Fifteen Canadian Artists. Among the drawing and print shows are Recent Japanese Prints, The "Phenomena" of Jean Dubuffet, Religious Prints, and David Smith: Drawings. Architecture and design exhibitions include Stairs, Roads,

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What is Modern Architecture?, The Twentieth-Century House, and Lettering by Hand. Nine photography exhibitions complete the group; among them, The Photographer and the American Landscape, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and Paul Strand's Mexico.

Rental fees for these exhibitions average \$230 for a 3-week period, although a few large shows cost as much as \$2,800 for four weeks. Works of art are borrowed from other museums, private collectors, galleries and artists, although The Museum of Modern Art's own collection is still the greatest single source for loans.

On another level, the Museum has also provided the New York City public school system with special exhibitions over the years. This program was initiated in 1931 when the Museum circulated A Brief Survey of Modern Painting to the New York City public high schools. It proved so popular that it was duplicated and continued to travel to schools, colleges and community organizations all over the country until 1940.

The city school program soon grew to such an extent that it had to be taken over by the Museum's Department of Education and the special educational exhibitions prepared by that department are sent to elementary schools as well as high schools in all five boroughs.

In addition to these programs, the Museum's Film Library has circulated films from its collection since 1936.

During the past 32 years, the Museum has developed special techniques for packing and shipping, installation and presentation of traveling exhibitions. A full-time staff of 18, headed by Waldo Rasmussen, Executive Director of the Department of Circulating Exhibitions, works only on national and international circulating shows.

The procedures which the Department has initiated have come to be accepted as models. Packing boxes designed for each show combine maximum protection with ease of packing and unpacking.

The physical preparation of circulating exhibitions includes providing detailed scaled panel layouts, overlays for photographic and photostatic copy, drawings for

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special racks and display cases, and special installation diagrams where necessary.

Due to lack of space and facilities in the Museum building on West 53rd Street, the Museum maintains a floor at the Seven Santini Brothers Warehouse at 449 West 49th Street where the exhibitions are assembled, mounted, matted, framed, and boxed.

The special labels accompanying each show must be prepared with the needs of different types of audiences constantly in mind. The text must sometimes be comprehensive enough to include information similar to that which would be presented in a gallery talk or found in a catalog. For every exhibition there is an elaborate checklist documenting every object shown.

The painstaking attention to detail also reaps a multiple reward: lenders entrust their works of art with the confidence in the measures taken to safeguard them and exhibitors voice their gratitude for "the beautiful way in which the shows are packed and handled."

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