

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE LILLIE P. BLISS INTERNATIONAL STUDY CENTER

DEPARTMENT OF PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

The Museum of Modern Art acquired its first painting, Edward Hopper's House by the Railroad, shortly after it opened in 1929. Since that time, due in large part to the bequest of Lillie P. Bliss and to the generous purchase funds of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim and of hundreds of other donors, the Museum's collection now numbers approximately 2,000 paintings and 600 sculptures, which include outstanding examples of the major trends of 20th-century art.

Only a small percentage of these works can be exhibited in the Museum's galleries at one time; however, there is a continual rotation of works from the galleries to storage and vice versa because of the Museum's extensive programs of loans to other institutions and to its own traveling shows. With the establishment in The Lillie P. Bliss International Study Center of new open-storage areas for paintings and sculpture, which also function as special flexible exhibition galleries, more than half the paintings and more than 40 per cent of the sculpture, formerly in storage where they were relatively inaccessible and scattered, can now be seen and studied by students, scholars, artists, and the interested public under gallery conditions. Furthermore, since the new facilities incorporate motorized equipment for moving works of art, a minimum number of custodians is needed to make these works readily accessible.

Almost 1,000 paintings have been installed on specially constructed 11' x 13' sliding aluminum screens that are easily removed from their ceiling-mounted guide rails and can be brought into the adjacent viewing rooms where they can be studied under optimum conditions of space and light. When the Museum has an extensive number of paintings by a particular artist, the entire body of work can be displayed on a single screen, thus eliminating the need to handle the works individually.

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In the center of the painting and sculpture section, a 10 x 55' area contains low pallets that hold large sculptures, which have been designed to fit over a hydraulic lift. These pallets have been arranged so that no more than one piece has to be moved in order to reach another.

Small sculpture (up to 4' high) is installed in vitrines and arranged by artist as in an exhibition, presenting what amounts to a series of small one-man shows. Ceiling hooks for mobiles and other hanging objects make it possible to display pieces such as Claes Oldenburg's Black Giant Fan or Alexander Calder's mobiles intact, which formerly had to be stored in separate pieces. For very large, heavy, or deep objects, such as John Chamberlain's Essex, a wall partition provides space to hang works that also previously had to be disassembled for storage. Electrical outlets in the floor make it possible for kinetic pieces to perform without being moved.

Archival material relating to painting and sculpture is contained in the library and in the Registrar's files. Among the unique data are the questionnaires filled out by each artist when his work is acquired, and, in many cases, films and photographs of artists in their studios, correspondence relating to their work in the Museum and in other collections.

Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director,
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