

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PUBLISHES *THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART AT MID-CENTURY: AT HOME AND ABROAD*

### FOURTH ISSUE OF *STUDIES IN MODERN ART*

This month the Museum of Modern Art publishes *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: At Home and Abroad*, the fourth issue of its annual scholarly journal, *Studies in Modern Art*. Devoted to the Museum's rich and complex history in the years following World War II, the issue includes essays by John Szarkowski, Michael Kimmelman, Lynn Zelevansky, Helen M. Franc, Terence Riley and Edward Eigen, which address the Museum's programs and policies as manifested at home and abroad. The journal is the publishing vehicle of the Museum's Research and Scholarly Publications Program, which was initiated in 1991 with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

"The period around mid-century...was an especially crucial one for the Museum," writes John Elderfield, Chief Curator at Large and Editor-in-Chief of *Studies in Modern Art* in the preface to the volume. The postwar period saw a reassessment of the modern tradition in the visual arts and a reexamination by the newly enlarged Museum of its own policies and priorities, its collections, and its exhibitions programs. Additionally, both expanded audiences at home and, with the beginning of the Cold War, new debate about American values and their perceptions abroad necessarily affected the Museum's public role.

The contribution by John Szarkowski, Director Emeritus of the Museum's Department of Photography, is a study of "The Family of Man," the landmark exhibition that traveled to eighty-eight venues in thirty-seven countries after its 1955 showing at the Museum. Organized by Edward Steichen, Mr. Szarkowski's predecessor as Director of the Department of Photography, "The

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Family of Man" ranks among the most visited exhibitions of all time. Mr. Szarkowski notes that "The Family of Man" was less a photography exhibition in the conventional sense of comprising a selection of works installed to emphasize their individual interest than it was a 'photographic' exhibition, designed to convey a specific message, and itself a work of art. Mr. Szarkowski considers the exhibition's polemical and idealistic message--the commonality of humankind--in the context of both the postwar period and Steichen's own photographic and curatorial career.

Michael Kimmelman, chief art critic of *The New York Times*, writes on the revisionist view of the Museum's role in promoting American art, especially Abstract Expressionism, abroad. In "Revisiting the Revisionists: The Modern, Its Critics, and the Cold War," Mr. Kimmelman places the revisionist literature in the context of its own origins in the politically activist decades of the 1960s and 1970s. He then shows, through an examination of primary sources, that the Museum's mid-century activities were both much more complex in their scope and content than the revisionist literature may suggest and also at times quite different in intent from that which some revisionists have claimed.

In "Dorothy Miller's 'Americans', 1942-63," Lynn Zelevansky, Curatorial Assistant in the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture, gives a detailed account of what was at the time the Museum's best-known series of exhibitions of contemporary art. Ms. Zelevansky examines the contents of each of the famous exhibitions; reveals the diverse pressures and demands with which Miller had to contend; and considers Miller's curatorial decisions and prerogatives in relationship to shifts in institutional beliefs and priorities within the Museum in this period.

"The Early Years of the International Program and Council" by Helen

Franc, former Editor-in-Chief in the Department of Publications, gives a detailed description of the International Program's objectives and activities throughout the 1950s. The essay studies the International Program's relationship to governmental art policies of the period; provides a chronological survey of the exhibitions which the Program circulated internationally and received from abroad; and includes representative press reactions to International Program exhibitions in their foreign venues.

The final essay in *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century*, "Between the Museum and the Marketplace: Selling Good Design," examines the "Good Design" exhibitions of 1950-54. Terence Riley, Chief Curator, Department of Architecture and Design, and Edward Eigen, a doctoral candidate in the department of architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, offer a careful review of these influential and extremely popular exhibitions, which were the result of a collaboration between Edgar J. Kaufmann, Jr., Director of the Museum's Department of Industrial Design from 1946 to 1948, and The Merchandise Mart of Chicago, then the nation's largest wholesale marketer.

The Appendix to the volume comprises selected chapters from the *Chronicle of the Collection of Painting and Sculpture*, by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the Museum's Founding Director, and a listing of the Museum's loan exhibitions of paintings and sculptures during the years 1940-63, compiled by Museum Archivist Rona Roob.

Under the editorial direction of Mr. Elderfield and Beatrice Kernan, Associate Curator at the Museum and the journal's Executive Editor, *Studies in Modern Art* is designed to foster and sustain study of the Museum's collections, programs, and archival materials. It also serves a wider purpose, with each issue addressing a different topic of general interest to students of modern art. Including contributions by both Museum of Modern Art

staff members and outside scholars, this publication is the only current academic journal specifically devoted to discussions of the art of this century. It is made possible by an endowment fund established by the Andrew Mellon Foundation, the Edward John Noble Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Perry R. Bass, and the National Endowment for the Humanities' Challenge Grant Program.

Previous issues of *Studies in Modern Art* are *American Art of the 1960s* (1991), *Essays on Assemblage* (1992) and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1994). *Studies in Modern Art* 5, due to be published in autumn of 1995, will be a companion to volume 4, addressing additional aspects of the Museum's programs during the postwar period.

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#### PUBLICATION

***The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: At Home and Abroad.*** 208 pages. 95 black-and-white illustrations. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. Paperbound, \$19.95. Available in The Museum of Modern Art Book Store and through the Museum's mail-order department: 212/708-9888. (Mail orders must be prepaid including shipping charges; no institutional discount will be offered on orders to the Museum.) Distributed in the United States and Canada by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Distributed elsewhere by Thames and Hudson, London. Available from bookstores and institutional suppliers.

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