

## Visions of Us: American Art at NOMA

Nancy Graves (American, 1939-1995)

*Exclude*, 1980

Oil on canvas

Gift of Drs. Joy and Howard Osofsky, 2006.62

Nancy Graves' *Exclude* is based on an aerial map of the world as seen from above, and places the United States in a broader global context. Graves based her vibrantly colored paintings of the 1970s and 1980s on aerial maps of natural phenomena like weather maps and moon maps made by NASA. Graves became interested in mapping because it seemed to her "one of the most complete abstractions," removing any singular sense of culture, place or perspective by placing things in such a broad context. Here, the barely visible "US" scrawled on the painting's upper right tests the limits between realism and abstract art, seeming to reference the "US" of the United States but also interpretable as a completely abstract set of marks.

### IMAGINING A PEOPLE

Drawn from NOMA's world-class collection of American art, this exhibition brings together paintings, sculptures, photography and decorative arts to tell a rich and inclusive story about how we imagine and represent the United States. For the last two centuries, American artists have captured many different conceptions of the country and its people, from colonial American portraits that showcase the country's early diversity, to the broad range of materials and forms to be found in 20<sup>th</sup> century art. Featuring art from all across America's vast history and geography, *Visions of US* celebrates the cultural diversity and multitude of people and perspectives that make up our vision of the United States. *Visions of US* is the first major American art exhibition in the country to place the work of acclaimed American artists from the Northeast like Jonathan Singleton Copley, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jackson Pollock and Frank Stella alongside that of their lesser-known counterparts from the South like François Fleischbein, Alfred Boisseau, Josephine Crawford and John T. Scott. The exhibition uncovers dynamic points of connection between American artists working across the country—and even world—to craft the many different *Visions of US* that compose the country today.

Thomas Sully (American/English, 1783-1872)

*Mary Magdalene*, 1830

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, 37.5

To the delight and occasional censure of conservative early American audiences, he often painted actresses portraying different historical and mythological heroines.

Here, Sully paints one of America's earliest actresses, striking a somewhat lascivious pose as *Mary Magdalene*. Despite their sometimes salacious subject matter, Sully's paintings were widely praised and admired by both men and women. As the magazine *Godey's Lady's Book* declared in 1844, "Sully, as all the world knows, paints exquisitely beautiful portraits of the ladies. His praise is in all the parlors."

Benjamin West (American, 1738-1820)

*Romeo and Juliet*, 1778

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, Women's Volunteer Committee Fund, 73.33

Benjamin West revolutionized the field of history painting, becoming one of the first artists of the period to depict present day concerns. At a time when most artists painted allegorical scenes of ancient Greece and Rome, West often painted modern battles and pictured people in contemporary clothes. West, like many artists of the time, often turned to plays to illustrate contemporary social issues, especially as public theater became increasingly popular in the United States in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. A famous 1753 staging of *Romeo and Juliet* was likely responsible for West's initial interest in this play, but the theme of star-crossed lovers also evokes the brewing tensions between Britain and the United States at the dawn of the Revolutionary War.

John Singleton Copley (American, 1738-1815)

*Portrait of Colonel George Watson*, 1768

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase and gift, by exchange, of Isaac Cline, Herman E. Cooper, F.

Julius Dreyfous, Durand-Ruel & Sons, and Lora Tortue, 77.37

Jonathan Singleton Copley was one of America's first internationally successful painters, working between Boston and London for much of his life. He was the most prominent portrait painter of the American Revolution, even though he never truly took sides in the battle. He painted both American revolutionaries like Paul Revere and loyalist English subjects like George Watson, all while keeping his true political sympathies unknown. In this portrait of George Watson, a prominent colonial merchant and trader, Watson seems all business, but this portrait was likely a much more personal affair. Watson commissioned this portrait the year after his wife's death, so he might have hung it alongside the portrait Copley had painted of her the year before.

François Fleischbein (American, born in Germany, 1804-1868)

*Portrait of a Free Woman of Color*, circa 1833-1835

Oil on canvas

Gift of William E. Groves, 66.29

Shortly after the Louisiana Purchase, German-born artist François Fleischbein immigrated to New Orleans to paint portraits that reflected the city's great cultural diversity. The *Free Woman of Color* pictured here was part of a dynamic, multi-racial culture in New Orleans in which people of color often had significant rights and freedoms, especially when compared to the rest of the American South. The portrait's simplicity and naturalism reflected new trends in European art of the time, and the portrait's sitter likely regarded the painting's straightforward artistic style as a mark of European sophistication. The portrait also reflects the influence of photography: Like many portrait painters of the time, Fleischbein was also a photographer, and opened a gallery specializing in daguerreotypes and ambrotypes in the Marigny neighborhood of New Orleans in the 1850s.

Charles Willson Peale (American, 1741-1827)

*Portrait of Robert Morris*, c. 1782

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, General Acquisitions Fund, 78.2

Charles Willson Peale was a prominent painter, scientist, inventor and politician who ardently supported the cause of the American Revolution. Peale established America's first museum in 1786, and was celebrated for his patriotic portraits of Revolutionary War heroes like George Washington. Financier Robert Morris commissioned this portrait from Peale shortly after he accepted the position of Superintendent of Finance of the United States' newly formed government. Widely credited with creating the nation's first bank using his own personal fortune, Morris' hand holds a rolled document that is likely the Bank of America's first charter. The imposing neoclassical building in the background likely served as Peale's tribute to Morris' work to shore up the country's financial architecture.

George Caleb Bingham (American, 1811- 1879)

*Portrait of Man*, c. 1835-40

Oil on canvas

Gift of William E. Groves, 56.33

George Caleb Bingham was a self-taught artist who began his career as an itinerant portrait painter along America's Western frontier. With almost no formal artistic training, Bingham travelled up and down the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers painting astonishingly accomplished portraits of hardscrabble early American settlers. Bingham was one of America's most successful early commercial artists, selling subscriptions to prints of his paintings all across the country. In 1856, he saved enough money to embark on a three-year trip to Europe to study art in Paris and Düsseldorf, but returned to Missouri to become a prominent elected official and one of America's first and only successful politician-artists.

Gilbert Stuart (American, 1755-1828)

*George Washington*, circa 1800

Oil on canvas

Gift of Frances Weis Pick in memory of her father, Mr. Samuel W. Weis, 56.15

This painting is one of the most recognizable and commonly reproduced images in American art. Serving as the basis for the portrait of George Washington still found on the dollar bill, it was one of over 100 portraits Stuart made of Washington during his lifetime. In the time before mass-reproduction, painters like Stuart often earned their living by making multiple copies of their most popular portraits. After Stuart's first portrait of Washington gained international acclaim as the most representative and relatable image of Washington then in circulation, Stuart created multiple copies that were distributed across the world to people eager to see a likeness of America's first president. Even during Stuart's own time, American artists and writers recognized the role that Stuart's portrait played in representing Washington—and by extension the United States—to the world. As early American writer John Neal wrote, "The only idea we have of Washington is Stuart's Washington."

Thomas Sully (American/English, 1783-1872)

*Portrait of Chester Sully*, 1810

Oil on panel

Gift of Jeanne Sully, 71.1

Thomas Sully was known for his vibrant, sensual portraits of early Americans, which he called "fancy pictures." The son of two prominent actors, Thomas Sully was born in England and immigrated to Charleston, South Carolina in 1792 with his eight brothers and sisters to work for a theater company managed by his uncle. To the delight and occasional censure of conservative early American audiences, he often painted actors and actresses portraying different historical and mythological heroines. He and his brother Chester often acted in plays, and here Thomas paints his brother with a dramatic lighting and flirtatious pose likely inspired by their work in the theater. Sully often painted his sitters in a particularly flattering light, and suggested to other portraitists of the time "nothing is so sure of success as flattering your portraits."

### **INVENTING A LANDSCAPE**

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, portraiture was America's most valued art form, helping early American settlers sort out who and what was "American" as people poured into the country from all across the globe. Americans paid little attention to landscape painting until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, treating landscape as little more than a background for portraits or a decorative flourish on cabinets and chairs. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, landscape painting became central to American artists' attempts to craft a sense of place and identity for the young nation. American artists began painting grand, sweeping views of American scenery that made the landscape a metaphor for the country's promise and potential. They often portrayed the American landscape as a vast and untamed wilderness—an endless source of power and strength. Such paintings were often a source of great inspiration and pride, but they also often registered the complications and contradictions of this progressive vision for the country, especially as more and more American land was overrun with railroads, farms, and, eventually, factories.

Richard Clague, Jr. (American, born in France, 1821-1873)

*Back of Algiers*, c. 1870-1873

Oil on canvas

Gift of Eugenia Uhlhorn Harrod in memory of her husband, Major Benjamin

Morgan Harrod, 13.5

The French-born painter Richard Clague is widely credited with introducing landscape painting to Louisiana. Prior to Clague's arrival in the city, portraiture and decorative arts dominated the art market, and landscape was not deemed a fit subject for painting. While living in France, Clague studied with an experimental group of painters known as the Barbizon school, who took to the forests and fields of France to create landscape paintings *en plein air*, or outdoors, creating paintings directly on the spot that celebrated the wild beauty of France's natural

landscape. These artists helped elevate landscape painting into a subject for fine art in France, and Clague brought the much the same spirit to Louisiana, encouraging artists to sketch and paint the state's unique scenery.

Julius Robert Hoening (American/German, 1835-1904)

*Crossroad in the Forest*, c. 1860-1880

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Estate of Ruth Fisher Price, 67.6.16

Julius Robert Hoening studied art in Düsseldorf, Germany before immigrating to New Orleans, where he quickly rose to prominence as both a portrait and landscape painter. In New Orleans, Hoening shared a studio with B&G Moses Photography, and quickly began advertising his services to enlarge, and paint copies of daguerreotypes and ambrotypes in oil, watercolor and ink. Hoening worked at the intersection of photography and painting at a time when the relationship between the two mediums was hotly debated. In this painting, the subject matter of "crossroads" thematizes this idea of transition and transformation between painting and photography. Juxtaposing lush natural scenery with clear signs of human civilization, *Crossroad in the Forest* also reflects changes to the American landscape itself as more and land was developed and settled.

Alexander Drysdale (American, 1870-1934)

*Landscape*, 1909

Oil on board

Gift of Bob Cahlman, 86.428

Drysdale created his signature paintings of Louisiana's bayous and swamps using oil paint diluted with kerosene, applying his paint with cotton balls and rags to create thin veils of color. Initially developed as a matter of economy—brushes and paints were expensive—Drysdale appreciated the hazy, atmospheric quality produced by this inventive, if highly flammable, technique. Originally born in Georgia, Drysdale studied with Asher Brown Durand in New York before relocating to Louisiana to produce over 10,000 paintings of Louisiana landscape scenes. In 1903, Drysdale opened a studio on Magazine Street, where rumors about his unorthodox working methods and dissolute lifestyle provoked considerable controversy. His paintings, which often border on complete abstraction, anticipate many later developments in abstract art.

Alfred Boisseau (American/French, 1823-1901)

*Louisiana Indians Walking Along a Bayou*, 1847

Oil on canvas

Gift of William E. Groves, 56.34

Alfred Boisseau studied art at the École de Beaux Arts in Paris before immigrating to the United States at the age of 22. He spent two years living in the city before moving to Cleveland, and later to Montreal. While in Louisiana, Boisseau took particular interest in the state's Native American population. The 1830s and 1840s witnessed the passage of the Indian Removal Act and devastating atrocities against Native Americans, and Native Americans' rapidly disappearing culture was the subject of considerable international concern. Boisseau likely saw the much-publicized 1845 exhibition of George Catlin's *Indian Gallery* shortly before he left Paris, and may have been inspired by the success of Catlin's portraits of Northern Plains peoples. Like Catlin's *Indian Gallery*, Boisseau's *Louisiana Indians Walking Along a Bayou* travelled the world to be exhibited in New York, New Orleans and at the 1847 Paris Salon.

Pima Peoples

*Basket Bowl with Vortex Design*, c. 1900

Willow, devil's claw

Collection of the Estate of Harriette von Breton, EL.1993.12

Rowena Bradley (Native American, 1923–2003)  
*Cherokee Double Weave Storage Basket*, c. 1950  
Split cane (arundinaria) and natural dyes  
Promised Gift of Mercedes Whitecloud, TMW (3) 129

Chitimacha Peoples  
*Lidded Trunk Shaped Storage Basket with “Alligator Entrails” Design*, c. 1920  
Split cane (arundinaria) and natural dyes  
Gift of Mercedes Whitecloud in memory of Dr. Thomas St. Germain Whitecloud, III, 97.104

Papago Peoples  
*Oval Friendship Basket*, c. 1900  
Cattail, yucca, devil’s claw  
Gift of Roger Houston Ogden, 94.59

Hupa Peoples  
*Basket Bowl with Chevron Design*, c. 1940  
Plant fibers and natural dyes  
Gift of Sue Peters in memory of Kenneth Harry Shaffer, 2010.118

Roger Emile Stouff (Native American, b. 1964)  
*Chitimacha Sample Basket*, c. 1950  
Split cane (arundinaria) and natural dyes  
Collection of Mercedes Whitecloud, TMW (3) 200

Apache Peoples  
*Basket Tray*, c. 1940  
Willow, Martyna  
Gift of Emerson Woelffer in memory of his wife Dina, 91.391

The many different patterns and designs on these baskets represent Native American artistic traditions from all across what eventually became the United States, from the chevron design of the Hupa peoples of California, to the alligator pattern of the Chitimacha from Louisiana, to the friendship basket of the Papago peoples from the American Southwest. Although contemporary Native American artists like Rowena Bradley and Roger Emile Stouff have sought to preserve and protect traditional indigenous art forms like basket weaving, many of these forms have been lost in the wake of American policies that often forcibly removed entire tribes from their homelands. Native American artists’ work in ceramics, weaving, basketry, and beading remains one of America’s richest artistic legacies, and one with much to teach us about what we have lost as a result of American expansionist policies.

George Inness (American, 1825-1894)  
*Pastoral Scene*, 1857  
Oil on canvas  
Museum purchase, Deaccessioned Art Fund, 2007.45

In the 1850s, the Lackawanna Railroad Company commissioned George Inness to create landscape paintings that celebrated the railroad’s increasingly wide reach. Inness spent much of his early career creating landscape paintings that praised the country’s rapid development and progress.. During the 1850s, Inness began to move away from the more realistic style of his teacher Asher Brown Durand and towards looser brushwork and darker, more atmospheric compositions. Inspired by the writings of American philosopher William James, who famously coined the term “stream of thought,” Inness began shunning all signs of industrial presence in favor of paintings that made the landscape a metaphor for human consciousness. *Pastoral Scene* is a transitional work for Inness, and the painting’s juxtaposition of a verdant tree with a branch stripped bare hints at Inness’ increasing ambivalence about industrialization.

Asher Brown Durand (American, 1796–1886)

*Forenoon*, 1847

Oil on canvas

Gift of Fine Arts Club of New Orleans, 16.4

Asher Brown Durand's paintings inspired a generation of American artists to revere landscape painting as the most elevated form of American art. Durand was an important teacher whose students went on to paint all across the country, from the Hudson River Valley and Louisiana's swamplands to the American West. Durand implored American artists to "go first to nature," to learn all of the most important principles of fine art, arguing that the humblest rock could teach painters more than the finest art school. Durand was one of the first American landscape painters to paint nature *en plein air*, directly on the spot, and often carried his large, heavy canvases and oil paints into deeply secluded parts of the forest to capture the atmospheric effects of light. *Forenoon* is one of a pair of landscapes commissioned by the wealthy New Orleanian art collector James Robb, one of which Durand painted at daybreak, and the other at dusk.

Joseph Rusling Meeker (American, 1827–1889)

*Bayou Plaquemines*, 1885

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, gift of Bernard Bruen, by exchange, 2003.22

Joseph Rusling Meeker first visited Louisiana as a Union Navy paymaster during the Civil War, and was immediately captivated by its dense and tangled swamplands. Louisiana's landscape struck Meeker as utterly unlike the Northeastern forests and mountains he had studied with his teacher Asher Brown Durand, and he made an exhaustive study of them while traveling through the region. Although he spent little time in Louisiana, Meeker would return to the preparatory drawings and sketches he made in the state throughout his career. As he wrote in his journal, "The sketches and studies I made during the four years I spent in the South are sufficient to last me for forty years...and I shall see to it that their freshness and beauty does not fade away." Meeker produced a large body of Louisiana landscape paintings whose hazy, indistinct views challenged many of the conventions of American landscape painting of the time.

Charles Rosen (American, 1878–1950)

*Frozen River - Winter Morning*, 1912

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, Admission Funds, 13.3

Charles Rosen's winter landscapes combine the vigorous brushwork of French impressionism with influences drawn from Japanese art. Inspired by the impressionists' bold and brightly colored canvases, Rosen began experimenting with a looser, more spontaneous painting style, trying to capture the look and feel of living, breathing nature. Rosen also drew inspiration from the tranquil and carefully composed forms of Japanese decorative art, creating landscape paintings that capture nature's vitality and exuberance as well as its underlying rhythms and patterns. As one reviewer remarked in 1916, "His canvases palpitate with life—the wind blows through them and water ripples and splashes in the sunlight...Mr. Rosen is par excellence a painter of atmosphere [with an] instinctive and quite remarkable feeling for decorative form."

William Rimmer (American, 1816–1879)

*Dying Centaur*, 1869; cast 1905

Bronze

Gift of Mr. Lawrence A. Fleishman of the Kennedy Galleries, Inc. in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Prescott N. Dunbar, 75.286

William Rimmer began his career as a painter, but after studying anatomy in Boston he opened his own medical practice and began experimenting with sculpture, eventually writing one of the most important anatomical texts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His sculptures display his keen knowledge of human anatomy as well as his ability to capture the raw emotional impact of human suffering and violence. *Dying Centaur* depicts a classic mythological subject,

but without the formality and restraint often found in more traditional renderings of such subject matter. For a nation still recovering from the shock of the Civil War, the truncated arms and anguished pose of Rimmer's centaur likely called forth the violence of war and continued struggle towards recovery and reconstruction.

Anna Hyatt Huntington (American, 1876–1973)

*Crane and Young*, c. 1915

Bronze

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Archer Milton Huntington, 37.17

Anna Hyatt Huntington was among New York City's most prominent sculptors at a time when very few women worked in the field. An ardent naturalist and environmentalist, Huntington was acclaimed both nationally and internationally for her sculptures of birds and animals. The daughter of a prominent professor of zoology at Harvard, Huntington was expelled from art school after having the temerity to point out the anatomical inaccuracies in her male professor's sculptures of horses. She went on to become the first woman to create a large-scale public sculpture in New York City, and her sensitive depictions of animal life are regarded as early precursors to today's environmental movement. Her sculptures now grace museums and parks throughout the United States, including a number of animal sanctuaries she herself founded.

### **AMERICA AT HOME AND ABROAD**

American artists brought together an international array of artistic influences in their search for a distinctively American style. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, American artists were part of a vast transatlantic network of artists that exchanged artworks and ideas on both sides of the Atlantic. During this period, more and more American artists traveled abroad to study historical European art and architecture, and experience the vanguard new art being produced across Europe. Paris held particular sway for American artists interested in the then-controversial new style of French Impressionism, but others were more inclined to study Spanish Baroque at the Prado or examine ancient architecture in Italy. This wide-ranging set of influences proved invaluable as American artists sought to create an "American" art that matched the diversity of the country itself. As American artists grappled with rising immigration and urbanization, their art incorporated an increasingly global range of references—from France, Spain and Italy to places even further afield like Asia and the Middle East. Some artists, like Robert Henri, even began offering a more egalitarian view of the country, painting portraits that included the voices of the poor and working class.

Edgar Degas (French, 1834-1917)

*Portrait of Estelle Musson Degas*, 1872

Oil on canvas

Museum Purchase through Public Subscription, 65.1

Edgar Degas was only important French painter of the Impressionist generation to travel to the United States and make paintings of American subject matter. Degas himself grew up in France, but his mother was Creole and born in New Orleans, and he often called himself a "fils de Louisiane," or a "son of Louisiana." Degas lived in New Orleans for five months during the fall of 1872, visiting a large network of close relatives and friends. When Degas arrived in New Orleans, he encountered a city in throes of Reconstruction, and made a series of paintings that captured the turmoil of the time. Degas likely created this portrait of his blind sister-in-law Estelle Musson Degas in part to reconcile himself to his own failing eyesight, but the portrait also captures the rapidly fading way of life of the city's French-speaking Creole inhabitants, who were increasingly being pushed aside by a wave of new English-speaking "American" settlers.

John Singer Sargent (American, 1856-1925)

*Portrait of Mrs. Asher B. Wertheimer*, 1898

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase in memory of William H. Henderson, 78.3

John Singer Sargent's virtuosic portraits of American and European aristocracy made him one of the most in-demand portraitists of his time. Born in the United States, Sargent spent much of his life living in Paris and

London, but also traveled the world to paint in Venice, Egypt, Morocco and throughout the United States. Called “a brilliant ambassador between his patrons and posterity,” Sargent’s sensitive and emotional portrayals of his sitters won him portrait commissions from a transatlantic network of some of the wealthiest and most famous people of the day. In 1898, the wealthy London art dealer Asher B. Wertheimer commissioned portraits of himself and his wife Flora to celebrate their silver wedding anniversary. Wertheimer went on to commission Sargent to create twelve additional portraits of his entire family, a commission that took Sargent over ten years to complete and caused him to complain to his journal that he was suffering from “chronic Wertheimerism.”

Mary Cassatt (American, 1844-1926)

*Mother and Child in the Conservatory*, 1906

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase with funds contributed by Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Forgotston, 82.124

Mary Cassatt was one of the most prominent female artists of her time. Born in Philadelphia, she spent most of her adult life living in France, where she befriended Edgar Degas and became one of the few Americans—and few women—to become closely allied with the French impressionists. Degas invited her to show her work at some of the first impressionist exhibitions in Paris in the 1870s, and introduced her to new materials and techniques that helped her arrive at the highly experimental style that eventually won her praise on both sides of the Atlantic. The seemingly conventional subject matter of *Mother and Child in the Conservatory* belies Cassatt’s experimentation with modern techniques and styles, as well as her fierce independence. Never marrying, Cassatt was an ardent supporter of the women’s suffrage movement, often enraging her more conservative family members by showing and selling her art in support of the cause.

Robert Henri (American, 1865-1929)

*The Blue Kimono*, 1909

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, Ella West Freeman Foundation Matching Fund, 71.16

Robert Henri was part of a vanguard group of New York City artists known as the Ashcan School, which spurned American art academies and museums and rejected the more conservative painting style of artists like John Singer Sargent. Instead, artists like Henri sought to capture the grit and grime of modern American cities, painting the destitute and homeless, the working class and prostitutes. Artists like Henri often appropriated art from different cultures—here a blue kimono from Japan—in order to capture the vibrant mix of cultures and people in modern American cities. Calling Henri “a dauntless young fighter [who] vigorously protested against the institutionalism of the time,” one reviewer praised *The Blue Kimono* as “passionate, impulsive, scarlet-lipped,” writing that Henri was “in love with life, but life with a strain of Orientalism.” Others praised Henri’s portraits of women as having “far more oomph than hundreds of virginal, genteel muses, painted by American academics,” writing that Henri had given his women “urgency [using] slashing brush marks and strong tonal contrasts.”

Leopold Gould Seyffert (American, 1887-1956)

*The Spanish Shawl*, 1916

Oil on canvas

Gift of Hunt Henderson, 19.1

Leopold Gould Seyffert worked variously as a semi-professional baseball player and office boy when his talent for painting came to the attention of an executive at the Standard Oil Company, who sponsored his artistic study in Philadelphia as well as several trips to Spain to study the work of Velasquez and Goya at the Prado. Seyffert remained influenced by Spanish art and culture throughout his life, and here paints his longtime model and muse Grace Vernon draped in a Spanish shawl. Both Henri and Seyffert often incorporated art and decoration from other cultures in their paintings, both to represent America’s increasingly international population, and also to experiment with new painting styles. While Seyffert paints Vernon’s figure with a luminous realism, her shawl



almost dematerializes into dashes of vibrantly colored paint that border on abstraction, recalling the “slashing brush marks” of Henri’s *The Blue Kimono*.

Robert Henri (American, 1865-1929)  
*Spanish Gypsy Child*, circa 1909  
Oil on canvas  
Gift of the Art Association of New Orleans, 60.25

Robert Henri, like Seyffert, also traveled to Spain, visiting the country seven times between 1900 and 1926. While in Spain, Henri painted a broad cross-section of Spanish society, from famous dancers and bullfighters to gypsies and peasants. He was particularly drawn to the country’s gypsy population, which lived on the outskirts of Madrid and was largely shunned and often homeless and destitute. Like the disenfranchised populations Henri painted in the United States, he painted his Spanish gypsies with great warmth and dignity, seeking to bring awareness to their struggle and use his art to call attention to the stark social inequality of the day. “I always feel,” Henri wrote, “when in the presence of a gypsy...I am in the presence of an aristocrat.” Henri was often celebrated for his art’s clear social agenda, with one reviewer noting approvingly, “Henri wanted art to be akin to journalism. He wanted paint to be as real as mud.”

Charles W. Hawthorne (American, 1872-1930)  
*The Granddaughter*, circa 1914  
Oil on panel  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Prescott N. Dunbar, 79.328

Charles W. Hawthorne’s *The Granddaughter* captures an America in the throws of transformation. In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more and more young men and women left small towns for rapidly growing cities that offered increasing freedoms for young people, especially women. Here, a grandmother seems to be almost giving her granddaughter to the future, as both stare straight ahead with their backs turned to the rural landscape the young woman seems soon to leave behind. In 1912, one reviewer praised Hawthorne’s paintings for “translating—with an intensely personal vision—a particular phase of American life.” Hawthorne himself viewed portraiture as an important way of communicating deeper meanings, writing “the painter must show people more—more than they already see, and must show it to them with so much human sympathy and understanding that they will recognize it as if they themselves had seen it.”

Gorham Manufacturing Company (American, Providence, RI, founded 1831)  
*Pair of Martelé Ewers with Triton and Mermaid*, March 1912  
Silver (.9584/1000), 75.70 oz and 73.10 oz  
Ewers marked YIU and YKY were designed by William C. Codman, made by F.O. Erichsen, and chased by David Wilmot.  
Museum purchase, Jolie and Robert Shelton Fund, 2015.35.1,.2

Figures of a long-haired mermaid and Triton, Greek mythology’s “messenger of the sea,” form the dramatic handles of this pair of Gorham Martelé ewers. Martelé was the Gorham Manufacturing Company’s celebrated contribution to the modern arts and crafts movement. To appeal to turn-of-the-century changing artistic tastes, Gorham introduced a new line of “art silver” at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle. They evocatively named the hand-made silver “Martelé” after the French verb “marteler,” meaning “to hammer.” The surfaces of these ewers has a soft misty finish from the repeated motion of the silversmith’s hammer. Martelé spoke to the ideals of the arts and crafts movement, which emphasized skilled handcraft, and responded to America’s increasing reticence towards mass-production, which seemed to many to be robbing fine art of its uniqueness and individuality.

## ENVISIONING THE LOCAL

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the new art coming out the United States fused ideas about modern art from Europe with influences culled from America's unique culture and scenery. During this period, many American artists began turning inward to explore the many different climates, cultures and peoples contained within the United States, seeking to cultivate a specifically American vision for modern art. For early American modernists like Reginald Marsh and Georgia O'Keeffe, America's energetic cities and widely varied terrain offered intriguing new ground for artistic experimentation. Some, like Marsh, captured the rush and clamor of modern American cities while others, like O'Keeffe, turned to the still and quiet of the deserts of the American Southwest. Others, like Stuart Davis, painted both, seeking, as Davis wrote, to impart "value" and "coherence" to the many different experiences and impressions that made up the mad rush of American life, from "fruit and flowers; kitchen utensils; Fall skies; horizons; taxi-cabs; radio; art exhibitions and reproductions; fast travel; Americana; movies; electric signs; [and the] dynamics of city lights and sounds."

Stuart Davis (American, 1892–1964)

*Rocks, Gloucester*, 1915

Oil on canvas

Gift of Muriel Bultman Francis, 68.23

During the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Stuart Davis led the shift from realism to abstraction in American art. A student of Robert Henri's, Davis began his career painting in a more realistic, almost documentary style, and ended it painting almost entirely abstract works that are now celebrated for their striking visual modernism. *Rocks, Gloucester* is a pivotal transitional work for Davis, painted just as he started working in a more experimental style. The painting's bold colors and fragmented shapes and forms play with our sense of scale and perspective. At first glance, the painting appears to show a relatively conventional—if brightly colored—mountainous landscape scene, but, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that the painting is in fact a closely cropped study of regularly sized rocks and pebbles.

Allen Tucker (American, 1866–1936)

*Winter Landscape in City, Madison Square*, 1904

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Allen Tucker Memorial

Allen Tucker helped played a crucial role in introducing modern art to the United States. In 1911, Tucker was part of the group that conceived, curated and selected the artists for the 1913 Armory Show in New York. The Armory Show gathered together paintings, sculptures and photographs by European and American modern artists, and is widely credited with introducing abstract art to the United States. An early American adopter of impressionism, Tucker exhibited five paintings in the Armory show exhibition, and also authored its catalogue. He was one of the first American painters to fully embrace the subject matter of the modern city, and often showed his work alongside other similarly socially engaged artists like Robert Henri.

Marsden Hartley (American, 1877–1943)

*The Ice Hole, Maine*, 1908

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase through the Ella West Freeman Foundation Matching Fund, 73.2

Marsden Hartley was one of many of early 20<sup>th</sup> century American artists to search for new subject matter in remote, rural parts of the country. In 1908, he moved to an abandoned farm near Lovell, Maine, and produced a large series of experimental winter landscape scenes like *The Ice Hole, Maine*. In these paintings, Hartley sought to capture not so much the precise topography of the Maine coast, but rather the raw feeling of its wild and desolate terrain. Hartley received his first solo show in New York from prominent photographer and gallerist Alfred Stieglitz based on the strength of this work, but the exhibition received mixed reviews. Although praised for a "hardiness and vigor of representation [that] showed knowledge of form and sincerity of sentiment," Hartley's vibrant color palette was the subject of considerable censure, with one reviewer complaining that the work "irritated the retina and exhausted it. After leaving the gallery, Fifth Avenue looked more grey than usual."

Henry Ossawa Tanner (American, 1859–1937)

*The Good Shepherd*, circa 1914

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, 30.3

As artists like Hartley looked toward rural Maine, others like Henry Ossawa Tanner traveled even further afield, forsaking Philadelphia and Atlanta for Paris and the Middle East. Tanner painted *The Good Shepherd* during one of several trips to the Holy Land. Tanner, the son of the minister of the first independent African-American Episcopal church in the United States, was particularly drawn to religious imagery, and created a large body of religious paintings. Although painted far from the United States, many interpreted Tanner's Middle Eastern works as closely allied with more domestic issues and concerns. Tanner was the first African-American student to study at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and fled the United States for more egalitarian Paris partly due to his unequal treatment in American art schools. Through paintings like *The Good Shepherd*, Tanner sought to convey a compassion and spirit of equality that, as he famously said, might "make the whole world kin."

Frederick C. Frieseke (American, 1874–1939)

*In the Garden, Giverny*, c.1900-05

Oil on canvas

Succession of Jane D. Culver and Museum purchase with funds from the Deaccessioned Art Fund, James F. Brace Fund & the George S. Frierson, Jr. Fund

For Frederick Frieseke, the French impressionist painting he encountered during an 1898 trip to Paris was a revelation. Shortly thereafter, he settled permanently in France, and only rarely returned to the United States. Starting in 1905, Frieseke and his wife began spending every summer at Claude Monet's artist colony in Giverny, France. Frieseke quickly became known across America and Europe for his lush garden landscapes, which he, like most impressionists, painted mostly outdoors. Frieseke, however, concentrated less on direct and immediate impressions of nature, and more on the decorative patterns and forms produced by the effects of dappled sunlight. Frieseke developed a unique indoor-outdoor painting style that often merged lush furnishings, dress fabrics and wallpaper designs with abstract shapes produced by the variegated effects of sunlight and shadow.

Arthur Osver (American, 1912–2006)

*Smokestack and Tank*, 1948

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, 49.12

Arthur Osver's towering paintings of America's skyscrapers, smokestacks and chimneys garnered him considerable international fame during his lifetime, including a prominent spot at the 1954 Venice Biennale. Osver was one of a number of American artists inspired by the modern shapes and forms of urban America, and often painted on long, narrow canvases that mimicked the vertical orientation of skyscrapers themselves. Like impressionist painters such as Frieseke, Osver believed in the power of direct observation, and often painted works like *Smokestack and Tank* directly on-the-spot. The crisp lines and bold geometric shapes of Osver's paintings conveyed America's faith in technology and progress, and were a source of inspiration for many artists as they sought to adapt painting to the conditions of modern life.

Reginald Marsh (American, 1898–1954)

*Taxi Dancers*, 1948

Casein on board

Museum purchase through the Ella West Freeman Foundation Matching Fund, 69.17.a,b

Reginald Marsh's paintings captured the clamor and chaos of urban life in New York in the 1930s and 1940s. First as a journalist and later as fine artist, Marsh depicted New York's overflowing subways and raucous dance halls, filling hundreds of sketchbooks with drawings of burlesque queens and down-and-out factory workers—people one critic condescendingly called "nobody's—anybody's." Marsh sought to convey what he called the "honest vulgarity" of American cities like New York, painting everyday people with an honest realism that neither turned

them into heroes nor cast them aside as bums. Here, Marsh paints a group of taxi dancers or “nickel hoppers,” young women paid a nickel per song to dance with men in the city’s teeming dance halls and nightclubs.

Josephine Marien Crawford (American, 1878–1952)

*Her First Communion*, 1935

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard B. Kaufmann in honor of E. John Bullard, 93.167

Josephine Crawford was one of the most experimental painters in the American South during the 1930s and 1940s. In the late 1920s, she traveled to Paris to study with the modern French painter André Lohte. Crawford’s paintings of New Orleans marry the stark, geometric forms of modern art with sensitive emotional depictions of the city’s diverse people and culture. While artists like Georgia O’Keeffe are widely recognized for their unique contributions to modern art, regional Southern artists like Crawford are only just being acknowledged for their important contributions to the development of American modernism. In New Orleans, Crawford’s work was widely praised for capturing the city’s local culture as well as bringing a more international perspective to the city’s art, with *The Times Picayune* praising Crawford as “a painter not [just] for New Orleans, but the world.”

Olive Leonhardt

*Woman with Lilies*, c. 1935-9

Oil on Board

Museum Purchase, P. Roussel Norman Fund and Partial Gift of Gay Leonhardt

Olive Leonhardt created *Woman with Lilies* while studying in Mexico in the 1930s. Originally from New Orleans, Leonhardt was one of many American artists of the time influenced by Mexican modernism, and went to Mexico to study the work of Mexican modern artists like Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. While in Mexico, Leonhardt developed a striking compositional style that she later incorporated into her paintings of New Orleans subject matter. Leonhardt’s time in Mexico inspired her to become more socially and politically engaged, and imagine art as closely allied with politics. As she said, “Our entire religious, social and economic upheaval—this sounds pedantic but its true—is going to leave us better painters. We are coming to times of more sincerity.”

Georgia O’Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

*My Backyard*, 1937

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, City of New Orleans Capital Funds, 73.8

Georgia O’Keeffe’s paintings of the red hills around her home in Abiquiú, New Mexico are painted with a softness and sensuality that causes them to slip between landscape and dreamlike abstraction. O’Keeffe’s intimate, emotionally charged landscape scenes combine influences from the modern art she saw in New York with the unique culture and scenery of the southwest. O’Keeffe often described the desert landscape of the southwest as a sentient being, writing of one painting from this series that it represented “two hills reaching out to the sky and holding it.” Titling this painting *My Backyard*, O’Keeffe called forth an intimate connection between self, landscape and nation. As O’Keeffe wrote, “One cannot be an American by going about saying that one is an American. It is necessary to feel America, like America, love America and then work.”

Henry Koerner (American, born in Austria, 1915–1991)

*Child’s Bed*, 1949

Oil on panel

Gift of William E. Campbell, 51.34

Henry Koerner was an American painter and graphic designer who moved to the United States from Austria at the outbreak of World War II. During the war, Koerner created over fifty portrait covers for *Time* magazine, and won awards for his work as a poster designer for the United States War Department. As a painter, he was best known for his participation in a style of American painting called magical realism, which elevated everyday objects and

experiences to the realm of myth and fantasy. Koerner was one of the most famous painters of this style, once praised as a “plein-air painter of uncanny views.” Koerner painted this scene shortly after returning to the United States from visiting his childhood home in Austria, which had been bombed during the war. He described the scene thusly: “A puff of wind blew through the broken building. I looked up to the room in which I was born. I loved and belonged to the empty space behind the torn curtain.”

Ralston Crawford (American, 1906–1978)  
*Wharf Objects, Santa Barbara, 1947*  
Oil on canvas  
Gift of Mr. Paul J. Leaman, Jr., 91.447

Ralston Crawford is best known for his representations of urban life and industry, from smokestacks and factories to bridges and city streets. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Crawford traveled the country, creating artworks inspired by everything from New Orleans jazz to the beaches and wharfs of California’s coast. In the 1930s, he began creating a series of work focused on the industrial life of the sea—lifeboats, buoys, anchors and sails. Crawford’s father was a sailor, and his maritime paintings are among his most subtle and introspective works. Crawford was also a photographer, and his paintings often explore the relationship between two-dimensional images and three-dimensional objects, using color to manipulate depth and perspective and test the relationship between painting and photography.

Juan Hamilton (American, b. 1945)  
*Abstract Form No. 43, 1973*  
Black patinated bronze  
Gift of Mrs. P. Roussel Norman, 91.449

Sculptor and ceramicist Juan Hamilton was Georgia O’Keeffe’s longtime studio assistant, living with her at her New Mexico home for over thirteen years. Hamilton’s sculptures often suggest rocks or pebbles worn smooth. They often possess an organic quality that, like O’Keeffe’s landscape paintings, reflect the influence of modern art. Hamilton’s *Abstract Form No. 43* draws from the work of modern sculptors like Constantin Brancusi and Jean Arp while at the same time referencing the black-on-black Pueblo pottery Hamilton encountered in the southwest. His intensely tactile sculptures became increasingly meaningful for O’Keeffe as she slowly lost her eyesight at the end of her life, and even experimented with making her own sculptures.

Jacques Lipchitz (American, born in Lithuania, 1891–1973)  
*Bather III, 1916-1917, cast 1941*  
Bronze with gold patina  
Gift of an anonymous donor through the American Federation of Arts, 60.38

Jacques Lipchitz was one of many artists of the time, Stuart Davis and Ralston Crawford among them, whom cubism inspired to create increasingly abstract compositions of dynamic, interlocking shapes and colors. In 1913, Lipchitz met the cubist painter Pablo Picasso through their mutual friend Diego Rivera, and began a lifelong friendship with both artists. In sculptures like *Bather III*, Lipchitz applied the principles of cubist painting to sculpture, incorporating cubism’s fragmented planes and forms without losing sight of the human figure. Lipchitz viewed his sculptures, as he wrote, as a way of “building up and composing the idea of a human figure from abstract sculptural elements of line, plane and volume.”

David Smith (American, 1906–1965)

*Amusement Park*, 1938

Steel

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Davis, Jr. in honor of the Museum's 75th Anniversary, 85.105

David Smith was known for expressive welded steel and metal sculptures that more closely resembled abstract paintings than conventional sculptures. Traditionally, metal sculpture meant bronze casts, which artists created by pouring molten metal into pre-fabricated molds. Smith, however, made most of his sculptures by welding together individual pieces of metal in much the same way painters apply paint to canvas. As a result, his sculptures are almost always singular, unique works of art, and possess a feeling of spontaneity and sense of movement rarely seen in traditional bronze casting. "I belong with the painters," Smith once stated, arguing that his work had freed sculpture to be more organic and improvisational. Smith called his sculptures "drawings in space," and here suggests the rides and roller coasters of an amusement park with just a few twists and turns of metal.

Aaron Siskind (American, 1903–1991)

*Gloucester 54*, 1954

Gelatin Silver Print

Museum Purchase, Women's Volunteer Committee Fund, 73.189

Aaron Siskind worked both as a documentary and fine art photographer, serving as contributing photographer for major documentary projects like the *Harlem Document* and also closely allying himself with abstract painters like Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning. Siskind challenged the conventions of photography by creating pictures that were simultaneously true-to-life and abstract, such as this photograph of rocks that captures the nuances of their texture but also reads as an abstract collection of shapes and forms. As Siskind wrote, "As the language of photography has been extended, the emphasis of meaning has shifted, shifted from what the world looks like to what we feel about the world and what we want it to mean."

Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864–1946)

*The Steerage*, 1907

Photogravure

Museum purchase, Woman's Volunteer Committee Fund, 74.37

Margaret Bourke-White (American, 1904–1971)

*Aluminum Company of America, Patterns*, 1939

Gelatin silver print

Museum purchase, General Acquisitions Fund, 79.35

Edward Weston (American, 1886 – 1958)

*Golden Canyon, Death Valley*, 1938

Gelatin silver print

Museum purchase, Women's Volunteer Committee Fund and Dr. Ralph Fabacher, 73.142

In the first decades of the 20th century, Alfred Stieglitz championed photography as a form of fine art, arguing that it possessed a visual modernism that matched, and even sometimes exceeded painting. Stieglitz saw *The Steerage* as his first "modernist" photograph, both for its forthright depiction of conditions of modern life, and the graphic quality of the planks and steel beams that bisect the picture. As American artists experimented with new approaches to abstract art, many of the techniques first used by photographers—close cropping, manipulation of surface and depth, and shift of focus—helped inspire innovations in painting and sculpture as well. Photography also captured the tension between documenting social and political issues, and experimenting with the new forms and techniques of abstract art.

## APPROACHING ABSTRACTION

In the wake of World War II, American artists achieved international acclaim for a daring new style of abstract painting called Abstract Expressionism. To many, the boldly expressive, large-scale abstract paintings of young American artists like Jackson Pollock, Sam Francis and Fritz Bultman seemed the apotheosis of American post-war vitality and strength, and of a character entirely different than anything being made in Europe at the time. Artists like Pollock often worked in a frenzied, forceful manner then known as “action painting,” in which artists poured and flung paint onto their canvases, using form, color and gesture rather than representational imagery to convey meaning in their art. Like landscape painting a century earlier, Americans embraced this bold new form of abstraction as a mark of the country’s power and promise during what was triumphantly dubbed the “American Century.” At the same time, however, many saw in this art a lingering response to the trauma of war, and felt that it registered a deep-seated ambivalence about America and its place in the world.

Jackson Pollock (American, 1912-1956)  
*Composition (White, Black, Blue and Red on White)*, 1948  
Casein paper, mounted on Masonite  
Bequest of Victor K. Kiam, 77.300

To create his famous “action paintings” of the 1940s like *Composition (White, Black, Blue and Red on White)*, Pollock flung and poured industrial house paint straight from the can onto canvases laid directly on the floor. Pollock viewed abstract art as a portal to the unconscious, and felt that the act of painting could unearth images and emotions buried deep within the unconscious mind. As he said, “I’m very representational some of the time, and a little all of the time. But when you are painting out of your unconscious, figures are bound to emerge.” His art was eagerly embraced on both nationally and internationally, but to some it occasionally seemed a bit too forceful and presumptuous in its efforts to speak for universal human experience. When Lee Krasner introduced Pollock to her teacher Hans Hofmann, he suggested that Pollock needed to work more from nature, to which Pollock famously replied, “I don’t paint nature, I am nature.”

Hans Hofmann (American/German, 1880-1966)  
*Abstraction of Chair and Miró*, 1943  
Oil on canvas  
Gift of the Muriel Bultman Francis Collection, 86.200.a

Hans Hofmann is widely recognized as one of the most influential art teachers of his time, known for an innovative approach towards color and form that turned many young American artists towards abstraction. Hofmann believed color and gesture, rather than representational content, was the key to a work of art, stating, “the whole world, as we experience it visually, comes to us through the mystic realm of color.” In *Abstraction of Chair and Miró*, Hofmann references Spanish artist Joan Miró, enlivening Miró’s flat, linear schemes with bright and intense color and vivid three-dimensional brushwork. Hofmann inspired many of his students, including Lee Krasner, Fritz Bultman, Joan Mitchell, Richard Diebenkorn and Larry Rivers, to use abstract forms rather than representational imagery to convey meaning in their art. As Bultman remarked of his teacher, “Hofmann’s presence did so much to set American painting in motion.”

Lee Krasner (American, 1908-1984)  
*Breath*, 1959  
Oil on canvas  
Gift of Mrs. P. Roussel Norman, 87.270

Lee Krasner’s paintings explore the role of the body in abstract art, using painting as a form of self-exploration. Painted in pink and flesh-toned hues, the delicate, rhythmic marks of Krasner’s *Breath* call forth the rise and fall of breathing, as well as the more meditative act of taking a deep breath. Married to Jackson Pollock, Krasner’s paintings were often more subtle and introspective—gestures of contemplation rather than the more frenzied “action painting” of her husband’s art. Krasner was one of the only recognized female members of the core group of Abstract Expressionist painters of the 1950s, but her status as a “woman painter” may have contributed to her lack of critical success compared with her husband. In 1949, for instance, she and Pollock jointly participated in

an exhibition entitled “Artists: Man and Wife,” and one reviewer condescendingly claimed “There is a tendency among some of these wives to ‘tidy up’ their husband’s styles.”

Sam Francis (American, 1923-1994)

*White Line I*, 1959

Oil on canvas

Bequest of Victor K. Kiam, 77.290

Sam Francis served as a pilot in World War II, and discovered painting during a long recovery from a severe spinal injury he received during the war. After studying painting in Paris and Japan in the 1950s, Francis developed his signature “open” or “empty center” painting style. Influenced by the Zen Buddhism’s concept of infinite space, Francis began painting only around the edges of his canvases, leaving broad expanses of pure white color running down their center. This imparts paintings like *White Line I* with an astonishing level of depth and dimensionality that makes them seem almost sculptural, as if they might open out into real space. Francis was one of the first post-war American artists to develop a truly international reputation, exhibiting his work in both Europe and throughout Asia as early as early as the 1960s.

Fritz Bultman (American, 1919-1985)

*Sun Figure*, 1955

Oil on canvas

The Muriel Bultman Francis Collection, 86.157

Fritz Bultman’s art combines influences from his time working with Hans Hofmann in California and Jackson Pollock in New York with a childhood spent in New Orleans. In 1950, Bultman was among a group of painters, including Pollock, who signed a letter protesting the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s indifference to abstract art, who were dubbed “The Irascibles” for their impatience with New York’s conservative art establishment. Bultman was among the most experimental artists of this group, working in painting and collage as well as sculpture. Although almost entirely abstract, the titles of Bultman’s brightly colored canvases often reference New Orleans’ unique culture and scenery. His work was often interpreted as having a deep spiritual connection with the city, which one 1950 writer characterized as a “blood on the moon fierceness that strikes at the heart.”

Joan Mitchell (American, 1925-1992)

*Untitled*, 1969

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Joan Mitchell Foundation, MITC-0607

Joan Mitchell is known for the elegant compositional rhythms and dense masses of color in her large and often multi-paneled canvases. Mitchell moved to New York in 1950 and remained closely allied with the city and its artists even after she moved permanently to France in 1955. Unlike many of the Abstract Expressionist painters of the time, she often maintained a strong sense of figure and ground relationships in her paintings, composing them in ways that evoke figures, landscapes, or, in this case, still life. Mitchell once said that she wanted her paintings “to convey the feeling of the dying sunflower,” and many of her paintings seem alternately mournful and violent, with dense pockets of dark hued paint and vibrant slashes of brighter colors. Mitchell always underscored that she intended her paintings to express human emotion, once calling her paintings themselves “very human.”

Richard Diebenkorn, (American, 1922-1993)

*Woman on Porch*, 1958

Oil on Canvas

Museum purchase through the National Endowment for the Arts Matching Grant, 77.64

Richard Diebenkorn’s work moved between more figurative and more abstract painting throughout his life. He made this painting while living and working in Berkeley, California in the late 1950s, when he first shifted to a more figurative, realistic style. Diebenkorn explained at the time that he had grown weary of the “super-



emotional” approach to painting championed by the abstract expressionists, and sought a more contemplative method of working. During this period, he made a series of works like *Woman on Porch* that show human figures engaged in quiet contemplation in the midst of almost entirely abstract planes of pure color. After moving to Southern California in 1966, where he shared a studio with Sam Francis, Diebenkorn began creating celebrated aerial and panoramic impressions of the Southern California landscape similar to this transitional work.

John Graham (American/Ukrainian, 1886-1961)

*Self Portrait as Harlequin, 1944*

Oil on canvas

Gift of Muriel Bultman Francis, 82.125

John Graham, along with Hans Hofmann, is considered one of the most important teachers and mentors of Abstract Expressionist artists like Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner. Graham immigrated to the United States when he was 34, and was initially a staunch supporter of abstract art. Graham often appropriated and reinterpreted the work of others, from Renaissance painters like Raphael to the work of his protégé Pollock. In the 1940s, he shocked many of his friends and supporters by abandoning abstraction in favor of a series of portraits like *Self Portrait as Harlequin*, which sought to reinterpret Raphael’s portraiture for the modern age. Painting himself as a harlequin, Graham seemed to acknowledge both his frequent adoption of different artistic styles, as well as his famously outsize personality and ribald wit.

Will Henry Stevens (American, 1891-1949)

*Abstraction, c. 1940*

Oil and tempera on Masonite

Museum purchase, Harrod Fund, 46.1

Will Henry Stevens was one of the pioneers of abstract art in the American South. A professor at New Orleans’ Newcomb College from the 1920s through 1940s, Stevens’ art followed two different paths, one abstract and one representational, with a different art dealer for each. His work often explored spiritual themes, and even his more abstract works often referenced the human form, as in the hand that reaches out of this *Abstraction*. For Stevens, this mixture of figurative and abstract forms was a way of connecting himself to a more universal form of experience. As Stevens wrote, “The best thing a human can do in life is to get rid of his separateness or selfness and hand himself over to the nature of things—to this mysterious thing called the Universal Order.”

Larry Rivers (American, 1923-2002)

*Portrait of Sunny Norman: Parts of the Face, 1963*

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs. P. Roussel Norman, 91.235

Larry Rivers was an artist, musician, filmmaker and occasional actor widely regarded as one of the most important progenitors of the pop art movement, as well as a provocateur who even appeared on the TV game show *The \$64,000 Question*. In the 1960s, Rivers made a series of portraits that broke individuals down to parts of the face and parts of the body, challenging his viewers to interpret his sitters as more than an easily reproduced and rearranged collection of parts. At the time, his art was often interpreted as an affront to the gestural, emotionally fraught nature of abstract expressionism, and was later seen to anticipate many developments in pop art. As pop artist Andy Warhol said, “Larry’s painting style was unique—it wasn’t abstract expressionism and it wasn’t pop, it fell into the period in between. But his personality was very pop.”

Robert Goodnough (American, 1917-2010)  
*Vietnam 8*, 1967  
Oil on canvas  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. J.M. Brenner, 75.403

Robert Goodnough was one of the more overtly political artists associated with the core group of Abstract Expressionist painters in New York in the 1950s. Goodnough made both completely abstract paintings as well as others like *Vietnam 8* that pointedly engaged contemporary political issues. In *Vietnam 8*, Goodnough, a WWII veteran, tackles the paramount atrocity of the late 60's – the Vietnam War. Here, Goodnough conveys the catastrophic and chaotic violence of war through patches of bright color overlaid with frenetic slashes of paint. In 1951, Goodnough visited Pollock in his studio and published a famous essay about Pollock's art that might also be a description of his own work: "Penetrating nature to the core yet never striving to show its surface, that [is what] has been projected into paintings which captivate many and agitate others by their strange, often violent, ways of expression."

Anne Truitt (American 1921-2005)  
*Spanish Main*, 1964  
Acrylic on wood  
Gift of Luis Lastra in honor of Edith Rosenwald Stern, 75.204

To create her deceptively simple sculptures, Anne Truitt often painstakingly covered her works with forty or more coats of paint. Alternating between horizontal and vertical brushstrokes, Truitt sanded each coat in between layers to disguise any trace of her brushwork. These thick layers of paint impart Truitt's sculptures with tangible sense of depth that belie their seeming simple geometry. "I've struggled all my life," Truitt said in 1987, "to get the maximum meaning in the simplest form possible." Truitt, like Francis, spent several years studying in Japan, and was influenced by the art that she saw there to move towards greater simplicity. Although she is more often associated with the more minimal art of artists like Sol LeWitt, she attributed the inspiration for her art to a 1961 exhibition of Abstract Expressionist paintings she saw in New York: "I looked at them, and from that point on I was home free. I had never realized you could do that in art. Have enough space. Enough color."

## THE DARK SIDE OF POP

In the 1950s, many American artists began to move away from abstract painting to create art inspired by American popular culture, especially advertising. The work of early Pop artists like Andy Warhol walked a fine line between celebration and critique of American consumer culture, often embracing its glitz and glamour while at the same time exposing the darker side of conspicuous consumption. Inspired by the work of Surrealist artists like Max Ernst, Pop artists believed that it was through careful study of our culture's most banal objects and images that we could learn the most about our deepest desires and darkest fears. Although the work of Pop artists like Warhol often look quite different from those of Surrealists like Ernst, their goals were often similar: to bring to light the way common objects and forms carry hidden meanings and messages about our culture. As Warhol famously said, "Once you 'got' Pop, you could never see a sign the same way again. And once you thought Pop, you could never see America the same way again."

## FORM AS MEANING

In the 1960s and 1970s, many American artists started stripping their art down to its most basic materials and forms. Using simplified patterns and bold primary colors, these artists made color and form—rather than gesture or overt representational and emotional content—the exclusive subject of their paintings. They rejected the fraught emotions of Abstract Expressionism and the banal imagery of Pop art in favor of an in-depth exploration of the physical forms and materials of art making. Exploring the sensory and bodily impact of large, vivid expanses of color, many of these artists felt more connected to performance, dance and music—and especially jazz—than traditional painting. Ray Parker, for instance, was himself a jazz musician, and Frank Stella's *Scramble* takes its title from his 1967 collaboration with modern dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham. Much like

performance and dance, their art sought to involve the body and all the senses in a much more experiential, immediate mode of art-viewership. As one prominent critic of the time wrote, “You like it, that’s all...You like it. It hits you. You don’t have to read it.”

Ellery Kurtz

*Manhattan Celebration—Snafu*, 1981-82

Oil on linen

Bequest of Michael P. Meyers, 98.219

In the 1970s and 1980s, Ellery Kurtz created a series of works called *Manhattan Celebration* that drew inspiration from New York’s city streets. Kurtz was particularly inspired by the posters pasted on walls and fences throughout Manhattan, which were often ripped and fragmented to reveal different posters underneath. In this painting, a poster filled with words and letters curls back to reveal an almost entirely abstract geometric form that closely resembles much of the abstract art being made at the time. Juxtaposing two different ways of “reading” a painting—literally, through words, and abstractly, through an array of different forms and colors—Kurtz captured the tensions and contradictions of abstract art of the time.

Frank Stella (American, born 1936)

*Scramble: Ascending Yellow Values, Descending Spectrum*, 1978

Acrylic on canvas

Promised gift of Donna Perret Rosen and Benjamin M. Rosen, EL.2011.234

This painting takes its title from Stella’s 1967 collaboration with modern dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham, for whom he designed sets. The painting’s rhythmic ascending and descending planes of color reflect the influence of music and dance, animating Stella’s otherwise minimal squares of color with motion and dynamism. Although he began his career as a minimalist, creating flat, monochromatic paintings using industrial house paint, by the 1970s he had begun creating vibrantly colored abstractions that possess a vivid three-dimensionality. Although Stella rejected the loaded, emotionally fraught nature of abstract expressionism, his works were not without meaning, incorporating the body and all of the senses into a new form of art encounter.

Alma W. Thomas (American, 1891–1978)

*Dogwood Display II*, 1972

Acrylic on canvas

Gift of Elisabeth R. French, 2000.23

Alma Thomas was an art teacher at a public school in New Jersey for 35 years before debuting her paintings at an exhibition at Howard University at the age of 75. The first graduate of Howard University’s fine art department in 1921, Thomas, at the age of 84, also became the first African-American woman to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. While working as a school teacher, Thomas kept herself apprised of major developments in abstract art, and created a style entirely her own by combining the bold geometry of the minimalists with the more expressive brushwork of the abstract expressionists. Thomas’s faith in abstract painting was limitless, and she saw it as a bold response to the changing times. As she said, “A new art representing a new era has been born in America. There is a demand that our times be expressed in new forms.”

William T. Williams (American, b. 1942)

*Sister of the Eastern Star*, 1970

Acrylic on canvas

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Stern in memory of Thomas Baer Hess, 79.51

William T. Williams believed that abstract art could have a direct and immediate impact on the political struggles of his time. He turned to jazz music and the dynamic quilt patterns of his North Carolina childhood for inspiration for paintings that transform historically African-American art forms into a new language for modern art. *Sister of the Eastern Star* combines bright, highly saturated colors with explosive, overlapping patterns that recall the rhythms of jazz, and when Williams exhibited this painting during his lifetime, it was often accompanied by a jazz soundtrack. “I’m trying to evoke human response,” Williams wrote. “My demographic is the human arena. I hope my work is about celebration, about an affirmation of life in the face of adversity, to reaffirm that we’re human, we’re alive, and we can celebrate existence.”

George Dunbar (American, born 1927)  
*Untitled*, circa 1965-1970  
Metal leaf on panel  
Gift of Aruth Aitkens, 97.26

George Dunbar played a pivotal role in introducing abstract art to the South. Originally from New Orleans, Dunbar studied in Philadelphia and Paris in the 1950s before returning to Louisiana to create paintings, sculptures and assemblages that marry the stark geometry of modern art with organic materials that call forth Louisiana's marshlands and bayous. Dunbar's richly textured works often incorporate a staggering range of materials, from clay mixed with rabbit skin glue to egg tempera and gold leaf. His "hard edge" works of the 1960s like this one often temper strict geometry with subtle gradations of gold, palladium and metal leaf that connect the hard edges of minimalism to more organic forms and elemental processes.

John McCracken (American, 1934–2011)  
*There's No Reason Not To...*, 1967-8  
Lacquer, fiberglass, plywood  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Goldberg, 75.168

In 1965, while still a student, John McCracken exhibited simplistic painted and slotted wooden sculptures that would later develop into the signature sculptural form of works like *There's No Reason Not To...* To many, McCracken's tall, smooth, leaning planks recalled highly polished surfboards, and represented a playful, distinctly West Coast version of the simplified and often humorless minimal art being made in New York at the time. McCracken often culled his titles from phrases gleaned from fashion magazines, and designed them to be a "slap of sheer color" that spoke more to pop art than minimalism. McCracken's art involved the entire body, forcing one to walk around his sculptures to fully apprehend their form.

John T. Scott (American, 1940–2007)  
*Alanda's Dream Tree*, 1985  
Painted steel, brass, stainless steel cable  
The Muriel Bultman Francis Collection, 86.292

John T. Scott brought together influences from African, Caribbean and African-American music and culture to create vibrantly colored kinetic sculptures like *Alanda's Dream Tree*. The colors and rhythms of his sculptures come out of his New Orleans childhood, with moving parts and clashing patterns and colors that particularly reflect the influence of jazz music. Discussing the influence of jazz in his work, Scott once said "one the most powerful things in [jazz music] is the silence between the notes. In my kinetic work, there's an awful lot of space, and I play with the shifting movement of that space." For Scott, his kinetic sculptures helped him see the relationships between all things, with moving parts that constantly put different elements and forms into dialogue.

Ray Parker (American, 1922–1990)  
*No. 171*, 1966  
Oil on canvas  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. S. Walter Stern, Jr. as a donation to the Ella West Freeman Foundation Matching Fund, 68.10

In the 1950s and 1960s, Ray Parker created a series of paintings like *No. 171* that he called *Simple Paintings*. In these works, bright, opaque blocks of color are set against cloudy backgrounds, creating an impression of forms suspended in space. Parker's wide-open backgrounds call forth the open fields of his South Dakota childhood, but his compositions also reflect the influence of minimalism. Parker also worked as a jazz trumpeter, and his irregularly shaped blocks of color reference jazz's improvisational style. Parker believed in applying color in a random manner similar to the way jazz musicians often play, and was celebrated for what one critic called his "twisting and curving" shapes, which seemed to liberate form and color from the stark geometry of much minimalist art.

## THE COLLAGE AESTHETIC

The artists collected here were themselves great collectors and collagists, working in non-traditional materials often cut out of magazines, scavenged in junkyards, or found on city streets. Assembling junk and detritus into meaningful works of art, they sought to make sense of the widespread material excess of American consumer culture. If Pop Art concerned itself with the shiny and new, these artists focused on castoffs and rejects, showing how much the things we ignore or leave behind can tell us about our culture. Many of these artists drew from the traditions of American folk and outsider art, resisting the conspicuous consumption of the Cold War era and working outside the established art market of the time. Although artists like Robert Rauschenberg and Louise Nevelson were enthusiastically embraced by the art establishment, their connection to under-recognized artists like Clementine Hunter is only just beginning to be acknowledged and understood. Taken together, these artists offer a vision of America as a place of diverse perspectives and unexpected juxtapositions, but also rich connections.

Louise Nevelson (American/Ukrainian, 1899–1988)

*Cascades-Perpendiculars XVIII*, 1980–1982

Wood, black paint

Gift of the American Art Foundation through Pace Wildenstein, 97.24

Louise Nevelson is one of the most important figures in 20<sup>th</sup> century sculpture, known for monumental wooden and outdoor sculptures that she almost always painted black or white. Her work is often puzzle-like, fitting together a variety of found scraps of wood, plastic and metal. Early in her career, Nevelson famously displayed a shoeshine box owned by a local street peddler at the Museum of Modern Art, and called herself the “original recycler.” Her wooden wall-mounted sculptures are like three-dimensional collages, containing multiple compartments that hold found objects. For Nevelson, painting all these objects black was a way of bringing them together into a more unified whole: “They used to say black and white were no colors, but I’m twisting that to tell you that for me it is the total color. It means totality. It means: contains all.”

Robert Rauschenberg (American, 1925–2008)

*Melic Meeting (Spread)*, 1979

Solvent transfer, acrylic, fabric and collage on wood panels with mirror

Gift of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, partial gift in honor of Dora Rauschenberg, and Museum purchase with funds provided by the Helis Foundation, 2013.20

*Melic Meeting* was part of a series of large-scale works Robert Rauschenberg made between 1975 and 1983, which he entitled *Spread*. The term is used to describe a wide expanse of land as well as a fabric covering for a bed, and refers both to the large scale and the particular set of influences guiding this work. Rauschenberg grew up in Texas and Louisiana, and in *Melic Meeting*, Rauschenberg’s fabric collage technique explicitly references Southern quilting traditions. Rauschenberg added a myriad of other found images and objects to this work, from photographs and plastic combs to mirrored Plexiglas. Incorporating this vast range of everyday objects and images, Rauschenberg sought to create a bridge art and life so that he, as he once said, could “act in the gap between the two.”

Lynda Benglis (American, b. 1941)

*Untitled from the Pinto Series*, 1971

Colored beeswax on wood

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Glade, 81.98

Lynda Benglis created all of the works from her *Pinto Series*, which she referred to as “wax paintings,” by dripping and layering colored wax on wooden boards in delicate layers. Benglis often worked with non-traditional materials, using organic materials like wax as well as more industrial materials like latex and polyurethane. In the 1970s, Benglis often worked with organic forms and materials like wax in order to evoke the human body and challenge the often austere, rigid forms of minimalism. Benglis sized all of the sculptures from her *Pinto Series* to roughly match up with the length of a human arm, and meant their organic quality to evoke the human form. Benglis invested these works with clear personal meaning by frequently titling them after the names of family and friends.

Clementine Hunter (American, 1886/87–1988)

*Chevron Quilt*, circa 1951

Cotton and wood

Gift in honor of William Fagaly's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at NOMA from Mrs. P. Roussel Norman, Mrs. Françoise B. Richardson and Mrs. John N. Weinstock, 96.27

Clementine Hunter was a self-taught artist who lived most of her life on plantations in rural Louisiana. Hunter did not begin painting until her 50s, but painted thousands of works during her lifetime. Her paintings are prized for their strong graphic quality, exuberant color palette, and moving portrayal of African-American life in the South. Hunter, like many artists of the time, worked on any surface or object she could find—walls, canvas, bottles, and jugs. She was also an accomplished quilter, creating quilts that depicted recognizable scenes, and also quilts like this one that are composed of abstract arrangements of fabrics, patterns and forms. Her work is often prized for a strikingly modern sensibility that reflected concurrent trends in modern art.

Louise Bourgeois (American, born in France, 1911–2010)

*Female Portrait*, 1962-1982

Marble

Museum purchase, General Acquisitions Fund, 82.165

Louise Bourgeois' celebrated sculptures, paintings and installations explore questions of gender and selfhood. In *Female Portrait*, Bourgeois delves into the conflicting emotions surrounding womanhood. She presents a female figure at once ensnared and empowered by the dense, snake-like tangle of forms that surround her. Working here in marble, Bourgeois' sculpture calls forth the ancient Greek myth of Medusa and her venomous snakes for hair. Referencing this ancient myth, Bourgeois calls out the way the female body itself is often appropriated by others as both image and form. Bourgeois drew direct connections between her sculpture and her own body, writing "for me, sculpture is the body. My body is my sculpture."

George Dureau (American, 1930–2014)

*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band and Two Nuba Wrestlers*, 1970-1971

Oil on canvas

Bequest of Frank Walker Wright, 2002.25

George Dureau's paintings and photographs of New Orleans people sit somewhere between the classical and Carnival. His art embraced people from all walks of life, and his work was celebrated for capturing the inclusive come-as-you-are attitude of the city of New Orleans. He often painted and photographed socially marginalized people and imbued their figures with the same dignity and beauty as heroic Greek sculptures. Here, Dureau collages together two images likely torn from newspapers, painting an image of the victors of a traditional Nuba Sudanese wrestling match alongside the members of the rock band The Beatles. Dureau imparts even this uncanny combination with the sense of grace and purpose that characterized his best work.

Joseph Cornell (American, 1903–1972)

*Untitled (Compass Case)*, n.d.

Paper, box construction

Gift of the Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation, 2002.306

Joseph Cornell's fantastical assemblages of found objects influenced a generation of American artists to experiment with assembling diverse objects and forms. Cornell worked on an intimate scale, creating small shadow boxes or lidded containers that contain unexpected juxtapositions of photographs, bric-a-brac and small swatches of drawings and text. Each of Cornell's boxes was its own imagined world, and his art often incorporated maps, compasses and navigational charts that functioned as keys to exploring his worlds. Here, Cornell mounts 18 compasses onto a board that cleverly conceals the 18 individually painted compartments beneath; the brightly painted interior of the box was only recently discovered by NOMA's curators after they lifted the board.

Judy Chicago (American, born 1939)

*Heaven Is for White Men Only*, 1973

Acrylic on canvas

Gift of the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, 93.12

Known as an early pioneer of feminist art, Judy Chicago seeks to expose cultural biases and shine a bright light on racial and sexual discrimination through her paintings, installations and performances. In *Heaven Is for White Men Only*, bright pink bands of color bar the viewer from entering the heavenly blue and yellow sky behind, which, as the title explains, represents a space reserved for white men only. As part of a performance project she conceived during the same year as this painting, Chicago wrote the following poem: “And then all that has divided us will merge/And then compassion will be wedded to power/And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind.”

James Rosenquist (American, born 1933)

*Hibiscus and Woman*, 1987

Oil on canvas

Bequest of Elise Newman Solomon, 88.322

James Rosenquist began his career as a commercial billboard painter, and was one of the first American artists to bring the visual language of advertising into the realm of fine art. Rosenquist culls many of his images from advertising, but radically alters their size, scale and context to create a mad rush of colors, shapes and textures reminiscent of modern forms of media like television, movies and the Internet. The artist's signature style fragments and distorts images by overlapping and combining them to create jarring and destabilizing juxtapositions. So doing, Rosenquist makes us consider everyday images and objects in provocative new ways.

Nancy Graves (American, 1939–1995)

*Bends of Self-Interest*, 1992

Bronze, aluminum, patina, enamel, magnesium, glass and brass clock works

Collection of Sydney and Walda Besthoff

Nancy Graves' playfully disjunctive assemblages of found objects combine salvaged materials with cast elements she created herself. *Bends of Self-Interest* explores the interplay between organic forms found in nature and abstract forms found in art, placing bent and curved patterns from aluminum grates alongside Graves' own sculptures of hands, birds and horse heads. *Bends of Self-Interest* is also a working clock that chimes on the hour, and is part of Graves' investigation into how found objects can come together to form new meanings. Graves often projected light through her sculptures and used their shadows as the basis for her paintings, testing the way ideas and information travel across space, time, and different media.

Dennis Oppenheim (American, 1938–2011)

*Guarded Land Area*, 1970

Photographic documentation of performance (2 hour-long guard's individual walk)

Partial Gift of the Dennis Oppenheim Estate and Museum purchase, Benjamin Harrod Fund, 2015.62.a-e

These photographs document Dennis Oppenheim's 1970 performance at the New Orleans Museum of Art, entitled *Guarded Land Area*. In the 1960s and 1970s, Oppenheim was part of group of earthworks artists using the land itself as a medium for art-making, staging landscape interventions that in Oppenheim's case also incorporated performance art. To create *Guarded Land Area*, Oppenheim collaborated with a NOMA museum guard to craft a two-hour performance in which the guard patrolled a meadow outside the museum in much the same manner as the museum's galleries. This performance will be re-enacted this fall according to the schedule available to the right of this work.