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**ART OF THE AMERICAS WING
LEVEL 3 GALLERY DESCRIPTIONS**

20th-CENTURY ART THROUGH THE MID 1980s

Saundra B. and William H. Lane Gallery / Abstraction: 1940–1970 (332)



Staccato, 1965, César Paternosto

This large central gallery presents a range of artists working in North and South America from about 1940 through the mid 1970s in a variety of styles ranging from Abstract Expressionism to Color Field painting and so-called op-art. Key works by Arshile Gorky and Franz Kline join canvases by Jackson Pollock, Adolph Gottlieb, and Joan Mitchell, as well as works by color field painters based in North and South America. Showcased are paintings by a range of artists working in hard-edged abstraction, such as Al Loving, César Paternosto, and Frank Stella, and more painterly styles by artists Philip Guston and Robert Motherwell. Sculpture and jewelry by Alexander Calder, a ceramic work by Peter Voulkos, and sculptures by David Smith, John Chamberlain, and Louise Nevelson complement the paintings in this soaring space flooded with natural light.

Wall Text

This gallery features works from the decades between 1940 and 1970, when art in the United States captured the attention of the world. Many styles flourished, but even at the time the growth of abstract art seemed the most important story. For decades, artists had explored the idea that art need not represent the physical world—that it could also be non-representational, or abstract. In the mid-1940s, a group of New York painters, including Jackson Pollock, invented a radical new approach that critics immediately labeled Abstract Expressionism. It was not a style so much as an approach, one that made the ways an artist put paint on canvas central to the work's meaning.

Abstract Expressionism liberated—even compelled—artists to develop ever more innovative, personal styles. Some explored color as an end in itself; others toyed with perception; a few reassessed the very boundaries of art. The works here are the legacy of that drive to experiment. In some, all is action and agitation, revealing the artist's struggle to shape the work; in others, not a hint of texture disrupts the painting's surface. All owe a debt to that convulsive moment in the 1940s.

Saundra B. and William H. Lane Gallery / American Modernism: The Lane Collection (334)



Deer's Skull with Pedernal,
1936, Georgia O'Keeffe

This gallery is devoted to the major 20th-century modernist artists Georgia O'Keeffe, Arthur Dove, Stuart Davis, Marsden Hartley, and Charles Sheeler. Many of the objects on view were a gift to the MFA from benefactors William and Saundra Lane. The display surveys the innovative careers of these artists, who sought to reconcile the new language of abstraction with a distinctly American vocabulary. Each main wall of the gallery features one of the artist's masterpieces (*Deer's Skull with Pedernal* 1936; *That Red One*, 1944; and *Hot Still-Scape for Six Colors—7th Avenue Style*, 1940) surrounded by other signature canvases. The installation also includes light-sensitive works in a variety of media, O'Keeffe's series of paintings entitled *Shell and Old Shingle* (1926), which demonstrates her process of working from realism towards abstraction, and an early mobile by Alexander Calder. An interactive touch-screen table in the gallery encourages visitors to explore the way in which artists' choices affect their resulting

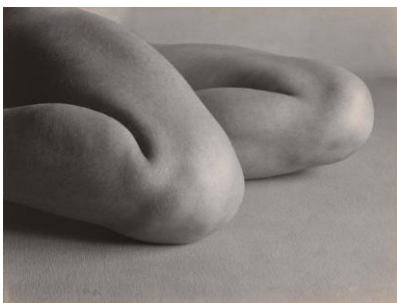
compositions; among the painters featured are O'Keeffe, Sheeler, Edward Hopper, and Ralph Colburn.

Wall Text

The artists in this gallery—Stuart Davis, Georgia O'Keeffe, Arthur Dove—were key figures in the North American response to European modern art. Europe and the Americas grew closer together than ever in the decades around 1900. Steamships meant that the trip from New York to Paris now took just days, so artists and objects moved back and forth with ease. As early as 1907, the photographer Alfred Stieglitz featured avant-garde paintings from Paris in his New York gallery; and 1913 brought the Armory Show, a huge touring exhibition with radical works by Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Marcel Duchamp. Some were scandalized, but many artists were inspired to experiment with color and form, and even explore the challenge of making art that does not represent the physical world at all.

None of the artists here copied European models explicitly. Instead, each transformed the lessons of modernism in a personal way. Davis looked to man-made forms and the rhythm of urban life; O'Keeffe turned to nature and the American landscape. Others, especially Arthur Dove, embraced the challenges presented by non-representational painting. All tried to take art in a fresh direction.

Robert and Jane Burke Gallery / Rotating Gallery for Prints, Drawings and Photographs (335)—Modernist Photography: 1910–1950



Nude, 1927, Edward Weston

The opening exhibition in this rotating gallery will feature approximately 35-50 American modernist photographs representing highlights from the Museum's own collection as well as The Lane Collection. This installation focuses on the concept of the camera as a modernist tool in the hands of American photographers during the 1910s through the 1950s. The exhibition includes four sections and will reflect significant innovations in 20th-century American photography and major strengths of the Museum's holdings. The first rotation, on view through July 3, 2011, examines subjects such as American vernacular architectures, portraits and nudes, still life and close up, and abstraction in the everyday.

Wall Text

The years around 1910 saw the beginnings of a sea change in American photography. During the previous two decades, many photographers had favored romantic, soft-focus images intended to mimic the look of impressionistic drawings or prints. The effect was almost to deny that a camera was involved at all. In the 1910s a new generation emerged, a group of modernists who championed a “straight” approach to picture making—one that was graphically sharp and unabashedly the product of the camera.

New York photographer and art dealer Alfred Stieglitz was the preeminent spokesman for the cause of modernism and for the recognition of photography as a fine art. Stieglitz and his protégés Edward Steichen, Paul Strand, and Charles Sheeler, as well as their West Coast counterparts Edward Weston and Ansel Adams, set out to make sharp-focus, black-and-white photographs. They used large-format cameras that allowed them to record a wide range of detail and texture and to render delicate gradations of tone. Under the influence of Cubism, these modernist photographers and their contemporaries reveled in the camera’s ability to flatten the three-dimensional world into two dimensions and to make familiar subjects into seemingly abstract forms. These photographs, paintings, and drawings, are drawn from the Museum’s collection and The Lane Collection, which is on long-term loan at the MFA.

The 1940s and 1950s (336)



Necklace, about 1958,
Art Smith

Art produced in the Americas during the 1940s and 1950s displays a range of abstract forms that pervaded all media, from unique works of art to manufactured designs. This gallery explores both geometric and biomorphic abstraction using a variety of display techniques from the period. Among the highlights are innovative furniture designs by Charles and Ray Eames, chairs by Eero Saarinen and Vladimir Kagan, ceramics by Russel Wright, and jewelry and sculpture from various artists, among them Art Smith and Sam Kramer. Smaller works in oil and on paper will be rotated and include psychoanalytic drawings by Jackson Pollock and a rare ceramic bowl painted by Pollock while he was undergoing Jungian analysis. Complementing these installations are paintings by Josef Albers, Ralph Coburn, artists from the American Abstract Artists group (such as Ilya Bolotowsky, Esphyr Slobodkina, and Charmion von Wiegand), and those exploring Surrealism (Wifredo Lam and Joseph Cornell). Also featured are works by several Central and South American artists, including Joaquin Torres-Garcia and Alfredo Hilo, who, simultaneously, painted in the style of Piet Mondrian’s geometric abstractions. Paintings and sculpture on loan from the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros serve to augment the MFA’s holdings in this area.

Wall Text

The end of World War II brought the United States renewed optimism and prosperity. Wartime industry had finally pulled the country out of the Depression, and after 1945 the war effort’s resources and spirit of innovation were turned to creating domestic goods. Modernist furnishings and modern appliances transformed interiors and lifestyles. At the same time, thousands of immigrants from ravaged Europe settled in the Americas. They would dramatically influence art and design throughout the hemisphere. Many of the artists in this gallery began their careers in Europe.

These decades saw the flowering of many styles. Here, we focus on abstraction—“organic” and “geometric.” Both sorts found direct expression in painting and sculpture, but they also influenced the look of industrial goods and household furnishings. Organic abstraction, or “biomorphism,” had its roots in European surrealism, and was characterized by curvilinear and free-flowing forms. It shared surrealism’s focus on the unconscious and the

(seemingly) unplanned, even when applied to practical things like furniture. Geometric abstraction, by contrast, emphasized the rational and orderly, taking inspiration from the paintings of Piet Mondrian, the buildings of architects like Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and the practical approach to design taught at Germany's Bauhaus school.

Saundra B. and William H. Lane Gallery / 20th -Century Art: People (328)



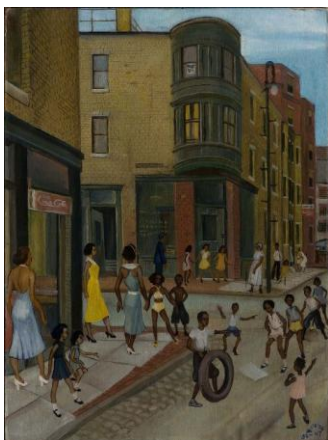
Vanitas, 1981, Claudio Bravo

Abstraction was only part of the American art experience during the 20th century, and two galleries on Level 3 highlight works by painters, sculptors, and decorative artists who remained committed to realism in a variety of forms. This gallery is anchored by Walker Hancock's moving memorial to the lost soldiers of World War II (*Scale-model for Pennsylvania Railroad War Memorial*, 1949-52). Paintings by George Luks, George Bellows, Hyman Bloom, Alice Neel, Scott Pryor, Andrew Wyeth, Larry Rivers, Claudio Bravo, and Norman Rockwell demonstrate the continued viability of the figurative tradition during the course of the 20th century.

Wall Text

What defines 20th -century art? Its story has often been told as the triumph of abstraction—of how artists abandoned the representation of the visible world. But while abstract painting and radical new styles flourished throughout the century, the physical world always retained its pull. Painters and sculptors did not abandon figurative art; they reinvented it. Though varied in look and style, the works in this gallery are linked by the human figure. There are portraits meant to capture personalities and convey the effects of emotion and time; scenes of everyday life; works intended to honor the dead or spur the conscience. Some artists strove to record the world almost exactly as it appears to the eye; others sought to explore psychological or social realities. All were devoted to a truthful depiction of human experience.

Melvin Blake and Frank Purnell Gallery / 20th -Century Art: Places (327)



Tire Jumping in Front of My Window, 1936-47,
Allan Rohan Crite

From the agricultural heartland to the vibrant diversity of the city, the Melvin Blake and Frank Purnell Gallery explores the importance of place and the persistent interest in landscape, real or imagined, throughout the 20th century. Paintings by John Stuart Curry and Grant Wood, along with agrarian themed sculpture by Albert Wein and a Wharton Esherick carved wooden folding screen, exemplify the mid-century regionalist movement. An idealized pastoral landscape decorates an elaborately painted chest by Charles Prendergast, shown with changing displays of textiles and works on paper with similar Arcadian motifs. Landscapes by Horace Pippin, Charles Sheeler, Rockwell Kent, and Maxfield Parrish represent modern approaches to the American scene, while paintings by John Sloan, Edward Hopper, Allan Rohan Crite, and Walter Simon document urban life.

John Axelrod Gallery / The 1920s and 1930s (326)



Punch Bowl from the “Jazz Bowl” series,
1931, Viktor Schreckengost

American art and design of the 1920s and 1930s combined French-inspired luxury and elegance and German machine-age functionalism with American optimism, playfulness, and innovation, as seen in jazz music, skyscraper architecture, and speedy transportation. This gallery presents the high style world of custom-made interiors and one-of-a-kind designs along with mass-produced, everyday objects available to the public. Featured works include Donald Deskey’s aluminum-leaf screen (about 1930), Paul Frankl’s iconic *Skyscraper* desk and bookcase (about 1928), Viktor Schreckengost’s ceramic *Jazz Bowl* (1931), *Chandelier* probably designed by William L. Stevens, and a selection of lap guitars. The gallery highlights the strengths of The John Axelrod Collection, including elegant silver cocktail and coffee sets and

streamlined clocks and radios, and is complemented by an impressive group of paintings, such as Joseph Stella’s spectacular *Old Brooklyn Bridge* (about 1941), Charles Sheeler’s *View of New York* (1931), Edward Hopper’s *Drug Store* (1927), and Arthur Dove’s *George Gershwin—I’ll Build a Stairway to Paradise* (1927). Also integrated into the gallery are textiles of the period, including fashionable evening attire and a textile by Ruth Reeves.

Wall Text

After World War I, the United States—or at least its cities—experienced dizzying change. It was a time of growth and speed and novelty, of what one enthusiastic book celebrated as “the new American tempo.” The “roaring twenties” came to a screeching halt with the stock market crash of 1929 and the economic depression that followed. Yet in both the carefree 1920s and the more somber ’30s, many artists, designers, and manufacturers sought to capture a spirit of boundless energy and up-to-date urban sophistication. Innovation was a constant theme, and artists embraced the era’s symbols of progress and the new: skyscrapers, jazz, the movies, and the dazzling lights and energy of city life.

The art and design of this period is often called “Art Deco,” but that term wasn’t even invented until the 1960s. In reality, the American modern look had no single style. Streamlined and simplified forms were common, but so were designs with sharp angles and energetic zigzags. Artists borrowed widely, taking cues from European cubism, sleek French styles, and functionalist German designs. This gallery brings together one-of-a-kind luxury items and mass-produced products, a reminder of the almost seamless combination of art and commerce that characterized the age.