

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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FIRST MODERN SHOW ORGANIZED BY GALLERY

OPENS WITH AUSTRALIA'S RECENTLY ACQUIRED POLLOCK

WASHINGTON, D.C. October 12, 1973. The first exhibition of modern painting and sculpture organized by the National Gallery of Art will open to the public on Sunday, October 28.

A selection of twenty-six large-scale works by twenty-three artists, whose post-World War II style established the United States for the first time in history as the center of the art world, will be on view in the Gallery's special exhibition galleries on the ground floor through January 9, 1974.

The exhibition, entitled American Art at Mid-Century I, is the first of two exhibitions that will focus public attention on the Gallery's commitment to twentieth-century art. The selection, which is not intended as a survey, was made by members of the Gallery's staff and William C. Seitz, the Gallery's 1971-72 Kress Professor and a prominent authority on modern art. Included are works by Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Hans Hofmann, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, Louise Nevelson, Barnett Newman, Isamu Noguchi, Jackson Pollock,

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Mark Rothko, and David Smith.

The list of works to be included was made up completely of objects in private collections, as these are not normally accessible to the public. Ownership of one painting in the show has recently passed to a national museum not yet open -- (1953), Jackson Pollock's Blue Poles / acquired three weeks ago by the Australian Government for the Australian National Gallery in Canberra.

A color portfolio of every painting and sculpture on view will accompany the exhibition. In an introductory statement, Dr. Seitz writes of the artists and their works: "This group was among the last true avant-gardists: modernists who asserted new forms and concepts in the face of almost universal rejection and little possibility of worldly success. It was works such as these that placed American art, for the first time, in a position of world leadership."

Rebelling against the former preoccupation with form that dominated the geometric painters of the 1930's, the post-World War II artists felt a primary concern for content. All of them poured their own emotions into their work as each tried to "infuse less form with more meaning than any artists who preceded them" (Seitz).

For instance, the thin line that Robert Motherwell trod

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between strong feeling for love, life and death, and form -- what he called "felt reality" -- is exemplified in Jour la Maison, Nuit la Rue (1957).

Because meaning and content were more important than form to these mid-twentieth century artists, the painter's brush evolved as the vehicle for the projection of feeling and ideas. Hans Hofmann's "exuberant celebration of life and nature" is evident from his brushwork in Lava (1960); the dynamic concern for the impact of urban life is portrayed in the broad brushstrokes of Franz Kline in his four panels New York Wall: Night (1960); and Jackson Pollock, who totally broke the contact of brush and hand by pouring the paint onto his canvases.

Also included in the exhibition is a painted backdrop by de Kooning measuring approximately 17 feet by 16 feet entitled Labyrinth. Done in 1946 for Marie Marchowsky's performance of a dance epic of the same title, the painting was enlarged by de Kooning from a small oil and then executed by Milton Resnick, whose style at the time was very close to that of de Kooning's. Milton Resnick's Mound of 1961 shows his break with de Kooning, whose influence dominated Resnick's style in the 1940s and 50s.

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The most radical break with past artistic styles, such as Cubism and Expressionism, is evident in the paintings by Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still and Barnett Newman. These breakthroughs, in the use of color, concern for surface and scale, and structure, greatly influenced younger painters.

Works of sculpture in the exhibition include David Smith's The Banquet (1951), the artist's masterwork. The piece is characteristic of the domination of postwar period painting and retains a sense of two-dimensionality with its ideograms within a grid. Louise Nevelson introduced an environmental form of sculpture in 1957 with her Sky Cathedral-Moon Garden+One, and an early work by Isamu Noguchi, now a master of gardens and fountains, entitled Strange Bird (1946) will be exhibited.

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