

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

SIXTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215 extension 224

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NATIONAL GALLERY SHOWS MORRIS LOUIS PAINTINGS

WASHINGTON, D.C. August 23, 1976. Sixteen paintings by Morris Louis (1912-1962), a founder of the Washington Color School, will go on view September 12 at the National Gallery of Art.

This exhibition is the second in a planned series being organized by the Gallery focusing on aspects of twentieth-century art. The next exhibition, scheduled for summer 1977, will be a small retrospective of Joseph Cornell box constructions and collages.

Most of the paintings in the Morris Louis exhibition are being lent from public and private collections in the United States. They include three which have never been seen or published before: Dalet Tet, a black Veil painting; Janus, an exploration of varying values of green; and Alphard, which is composed asymmetrically around an intense purple stripe, a compositional format previously not seen in Louis' work.

Also in the exhibition is Louis' Beta Kappa, a recent gift to the Gallery of Mrs. Marcella Brenner, the artist's widow.

The paintings selected for the exhibition date from the artist's last eight years (1954-1962). They demonstrate Louis' most important contribution to the history of modern painting--the staining of unprimed canvas with thinned paint in such a way that color becomes the dominant element.

The exhibition will include four examples from the Veil series (Salient, Tet, Terranean, Dalet Tet), single examples from his Floral (Aleph Series V)

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and Column (Janus) series, and five each of his Unfurled (Alpha Beta, Delta Gamma, Beta Iota, Alpha Epsilon, Beta Kappa) and Stripe (Burning Stain, 2.67, Alphard, Horizontal VIII, Equator) paintings.

On view through January 9, 1977, the exhibition has been organized by the Gallery's curator of twentieth-century art, E.A. Carmean, Jr. The catalogue accompanying the exhibition will reproduce each work in color and will contain entries on each painting, as well as an introduction, by Mr. Carmean.

The staining technique--like the invention of the pasted collage for Braque and Picasso, Matisse's use of *découpage*, and David Smith's welding stainless steel--became for Louis a new way of thinking about his own art. As evident in much modern art, a new direction in expression is often founded on the use of a new technique or material.

Louis was a native of Washington, and his interest in color was nurtured by the public and private collections on view in the 1950s and 1960s in the nation's capital. A selection of French impressionist and post impressionist paintings in the Chester Dale Collection went on view in 1941 at the National Gallery. The Phillips Collection, which was assembled by the late Duncan Phillips partially on the basis of color, had been part of the Washington art scene since the 1920s. Louis was deeply impressed by color aspects of the paintings he studied--including Monet's series of paintings of Rouen Cathedral and waterlilies and Matisse's still lifes and figural compositions of bright areas of flat color.

In 1953, Louis, with fellow Washington artist and cofounder of the Washington Color School, Kenneth Noland, saw Helen Frankenthaler's painting, Mountains and Sea (1952), which revolutionized his way of thinking about painting by introducing him to the staining technique. Mountains and Sea,

on loan to the Gallery by the artist, will be hung adjacent to the Louis exhibition galleries.

Louis had first experimented with pouring paint in a linear style, a technique he learned from studying Jackson Pollock's monumental canvases. Frankenthaler had expanded upon this technique to include spreading areas and zones of color.

For the purpose of exploiting color to its fullest extent, Louis also absorbed differing aspects of the stylistic expressions of Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman and Robert Motherwell.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director, or Pamela Jenkinson, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565, area code 202, 737-4215, ext. 224.