

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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**COLLECTORS COMMITTEE SELECTS RARE PAINTING BY EDWARD STEICHEN,
MAJOR PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID SMITH, AND WORKS ON PAPER
FOR GALLERY'S 20TH-CENTURY COLLECTION**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The acquisition of Le Tournesol (The Sunflower) (c. 1920), one of the last and few remaining works in oil by Edward Steichen (American, 1879-1973), has been made possible by the Gallery's Collectors Committee. The committee also made possible the acquisition of a major photograph by David Smith, and works on paper by Sybil Andrews, Alfred Jensen, and Brice Marden for the twentieth-century collection.

"We are delighted with the selection of Le Tournesol (The Sunflower) because of the rarity of Steichen's paintings and how it greatly enriches the Gallery's collection of American modernist painting," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

This will be the third work and first painting by Edward Steichen to enter the Gallery's collection, joining two photographs, John Marin (1911) and Dunoyer de Segonzac (1935).

With its astonishingly brilliant palette, streamlined forms, and bold intensity, Le Tournesol (The Sunflower) is a radical departure from the style and mood of Steichen's early extant paintings, which are mostly small, romantic, and atmospheric landscapes. Le Tournesol (The Sunflower), with its pristine, hard-edge forms, has much in common with the movement known as precisionism in American art of the teens and 1920s.

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Steichen gave up painting in 1921 and destroyed the canvases still in his possession. Since so few of Steichen's paintings remain, he is known primarily as one of the premier American photographers of the twentieth century. From an early age, however, he made paintings alongside his photographs, valuing both disciplines equally as artistic endeavors.

Born in Luxembourg, Steichen came at the age of two to this country, where his family ultimately settled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There he had little formal education, but by age fifteen was apprenticed to a lithography firm. He also organized and became president of the Milwaukee Art Student's League after making his first photographs, which were exhibited initially in 1899. Soon he left for Paris, determined to be a photographer and a painter. Steichen's long career encompassed many professional activities: pictorialist photographer in the early years of the century in both France and the United States; prize-winning gardener and horticulturalist; historic collaborator with Alfred Stieglitz and his pioneering 291 Gallery in New York; commercial photographer making fashion, advertising, and portrait photography; and director of the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, for fifteen years (1947-1962).

PHOTOGRAPHY

The Collectors Committee also made possible the acquisition of a rare gelatin silver print, Untitled (c. 1932-1935) by David Smith (American, 1906-1965), sculptor and photographer. In the early 1930s, as he moved from cubist painting to collage and on to free-standing sculpture, Smith also made many photographs. Just as he would create a new kind of sculpture by welding, he explored in his photographs a new vision by merging multiple negatives, multiple exposures, and masks. Composed of layer upon layer sandwiched together so that they seem almost to have a three-dimensional quality, photographs such as Untitled provided Smith with another medium in which to explore new ways of combining forms, defining space, and using light to reveal structure. Perhaps made in his studio at the Terminal Iron Works in Brooklyn, New York, Untitled with its pressed-tin ceiling, metal radiator, and other

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mechanical forms speaks of the urban industrial environment that nurtured Smith during the early years of his career.

WORKS ON PAPER

Other works on paper, which are Gifts of the Collectors Committee, include Racing (1934), one of the most admired color linoleum cuts by Sybil Andrews (British, 1898-1992); Alfred Jensen's (American, 1903-1981) systemic drawing 7 x 360 = 2520 (1965) in gouache, watercolor, ball-point pen, brush and ink, and graphite; and Etchings to Rexroth (published 1986), an elegant portfolio of 25 prints by Brice Marden (American, born 1938), Gift of the Collectors Committee and the New Century Fund-The William Stamps Farish Fund.

Sybil Andrews' bold four-color linocut printed on Japanese mulberry paper is the first by the artist to enter the Gallery's collection. She was one of the most forceful figures associated with the English Grosvenor School of Modern Art, known for its color linoleum cuts. Racing, an outstanding example of their vorticist style, was inspired by the extraordinary suggestions of energy and motion in the work of the Italian futurists. The work is characterized by overlapping geometric forms with jagged edges and corners.

Alfred Jensen's 7 x 360 = 2520 is the first drawing by the artist to be added to the Gallery's collection. The drawing, which is from a group of studies for paintings and prints, is an excellent example of Jensen's distinctive imagery, reflecting the elaborate symbol systems, theories, and codes, which he absorbed into his art by the mid-sixties.

Brice Marden made Etchings to Rexroth during an important transitional period in his career. He was moving away from his minimalist geometry and working toward the more layered organic form with which he has since become associated. This portfolio resulted from his experiments with a variety of etching techniques -- sugar-lift aquatint, aquatint, hard-ground etching, open bite, and scraping -- that enabled Marden to achieve a varied quality of line and surface similar to that found in his expressive drawings.

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HISTORY OF THE COLLECTORS COMMITTEE

Since 1975 the Collectors Committee has made possible the acquisition of one hundred eighty-nine works of art. Approximately half of the committee's acquisitions have been works by living artists. The committee was formed in 1975 under the leadership of Ruth Carter Stevenson, chairman of the Gallery's Board of Trustees from 1993-1997. It is currently chaired by Barney A. Ebsworth and Doris Fisher, both major collectors of twentieth-century art. Ebsworth, from St. Louis, is the owner of INTRAV, a travel company, and Clipper Cruise Lines. Fisher, who lives in San Francisco, is co-founder with her husband, Donald, of The Gap.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The National Gallery of Art, located on the National Mall at Fourth Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W., is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. For general information, call (202) 737-4215, or TDD at (202) 842-6176, or visit the National Gallery of Art's Web site at www.nga.gov. To receive the Gallery's free bimonthly Calendar of Events, call (202) 842-6662.

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