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***The Shape of Freedom: International Abstraction after 1945***

June 4 – September 25, 2022

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WiFi in the Museum Barberini: Barberini\_Gast, no password

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Potsdam, June 2, 2022

***The Shape of Freedom: International Abstraction after 1945***

June 4 – September 25, 2022

On June 4, 2022, the exhibition ***The Shape of Freedom: International Abstraction after 1945*** opens at the Museum Barberini. It focuses on the two most important currents of abstraction following World War II: Abstract Expressionism in the United States and Art Informel in western Europe. ***The Shape of Freedom*** is the first exhibition to explore this transatlantic dialogue in art from the mid-1940s to the end of the Cold War.

The show comprises around a hundred works by over fifty artists including Sam Francis, Helen Frankenthaler, K. O. Götz, Georges Mathieu, Lee Krasner, Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Judit Reigl, and Clyfford Still. Works on loan come from over thirty international museums and private collections including the Kunstpalast Düsseldorf, the Tate in London, the Museo nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

After its opening run in Potsdam, the exhibition will travel to the Albertina modern in Vienna and the Munchmuseet in Oslo.

The point of departure for the exhibition in the Museum Barberini is the Hasso Plattner Collection, which includes important works by Norman Bluhm, Sam Francis, and Joan Mitchell.

World War II was a turning point in the development of modern painting. The presence of exiled European avant-garde artists in America transformed New York into a center of modernism that rivaled Paris and set new artistic standards.

In the mid-1940s, a young generation of artists in both the United States and Europe turned their back on the dominant stylistic directions of the interwar years. Instead of figurative painting or geometric abstraction they embraced a gestural, expressive handling of form, color, and material – a radically experimental approach that transcended traditional conceptions of painting. Artists like **Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Hans Hofmann, and Joan Mitchell** discovered an intersubjective form of expression in action painting, while the color field painting of **Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Adolph Gottlieb, Robert Motherwell, and Clyfford Still** presented viewers with an overwhelming visual experience.

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Concurrently with Abstract Expressionism in the United States, artists in Paris and other European metropolises explored new materials, textures, and modes of composition. This new painterly approach was designated “Informel” due to its “formless,” unbridled aesthetic. Works by **Georges Mathieu, Antoni Tàpies, Pierre Soulages, Wols, Jean Fautrier, and Jean Dubuffet** marked a break with art historical tradition. With artists such as **K. O. Götz, Gerhard Hoehme, Bernard Schultze, Winfred Gaul, Ernst Wilhelm Nay, and Fritz Winter**, West Germany likewise emerged as a center of European postwar abstraction from the mid-1950s on. As such, it cultivated close contacts with France and the United States. The exhibition *documenta II* in 1959 celebrated Art Informel and Abstract Expressionism as the manifestation of a new, universal visual language that would strengthen the political alliance of liberal western nations. In West Germany, radical abstraction was hailed as the new standard for avant-garde painting, in contrast to the Socialist Realism of East Germany or the aesthetic principles of the Nazi regime.

Abstract Expressionism in America and Art Informel in Europe have often been viewed as separate, independent developments – a geographical and cultural distinction that obscures the close connection between the two movements. *The Shape of Freedom* now highlights the intensity and enduring nature of this transatlantic exchange. The exhibition also features works by lesser-known artists such as **Jean Degottex, Simon Hantaï, Manolo Millares, Theodoros Stamos, and Jack Tworkov** and foregrounds the long-ignored influence of women artists including **Mary Abbott, Janice Biala, Natalia Dumitresco, Perle Fine, Helen Frankenthaler, Lee Krasner, Joan Mitchell, Judit Reigl, Deborah Remington, Janet Sobel, Hedda Sterne, and Maria Helena Vieira da Silva.**

**Ortrud Westheider, Director of the Museum Barberini, Potsdam:**

“The paintings in the exhibition bear witness to the tremendous longing for artistic freedom that emerged on both sides of the Atlantic after 1945. The Hasso Plattner Collection, with important works by Norman Bluhm, Joan Mitchell, and Sam Francis, served as our point of departure. The concept developed by our curator Daniel Zamani was so convincing that the Albertina modern in Vienna and the Munchmuseet in Oslo agreed to host the exhibition as well. I am delighted to see this European cooperation.”

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**Angela Stief, Director of the Albertina modern, Vienna:**

“Due to its location, Vienna was one of the central arenas of the Cold War. The exploration of artistic freedom and the possibilities for individual expression that arose on both sides of the Atlantic are more relevant than ever for us today. In Vienna, artists including Maria Lassnig, Arnulf Rainer, and the recently deceased Hermann Nitsch appear alongside figures such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler to show how these international developments were received in Austria. At the Albertina modern, particular emphasis is also placed on the women artists associated with postwar abstraction.”

**Stein Olav Henriksen, Director of the Munchmuseet, Oslo:**

“Our museum’s new building, which opened last year in October, offers us wonderful opportunities to showcase the often large, visually overwhelming formats of abstract artists. We are already full of anticipation to be able to present these outstanding artistic positions to the people of Oslo and our numerous international guests in spring 2023. We are especially pleased to further expand our close collaboration with Museum Barberini on the Munch exhibition planned for 2023 with this additional exhibition project.”

***The Shape of Freedom: International Abstraction after 1945***

An exhibition of the Museum Barberini, Potsdam, the Albertina modern, Vienna, and the Munchmuseet, Oslo, curated by Daniel Zamani. The exhibition is accompanied by a 256-page catalogue with essays by Jeremy Lewison, Gražina Subelytė, and Daniel Zamani (Prestel, 2022, English/German).

With the generous support of the Fondation Gandur pour l’Art, Genève.

In Potsdam, the exhibition stands under the patronage of Her Excellency Amy Gutmann, Ambassador of the United States of America to Germany.

**For further information and press photos, visit**

[www.museum-barberini.de/en/presse](http://www.museum-barberini.de/en/presse)

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### **A New Avant-Garde: Abstract Expressionism**

In the 1940s, New York took its place alongside Paris as a leading international center of modern art. Due to World War II, many members of the European avant-garde had emigrated to the United States, and young American painters encountered the work of these exiles in galleries like Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century. This dialogue played a decisive role in the development of Abstract Expressionism.

Although they did not adopt a single, uniform style, the artists were united in their conviction that painting was more than the mere rendering of external reality. Instead, they viewed the canvas as a stage on which creative energies should be allowed to unfold freely and spontaneously. Intuition, expressive gestures, and the exploration of the unconscious and irrational were their most important concerns. Despite the abstract pictorial language, their works often include figurative elements or allusions to traditional genres such as landscape, still life, or interiors. In many cases, they also bear witness to the influence of the European avant-garde, echoing the flat spatial structures of Cubism or the organic forms of Surrealist painting.

### **Gestures of Freedom: American Action Painting**

Even before World War II, the Surrealists in Paris had already developed numerous techniques for integrating chance elements into the design of their pictures. They used semiautomatic processes to develop a direct, dynamic approach to painting, working rapidly and without preliminary planning in order to release the creative powers of the unconscious.

In their so-called "action painting," the Abstract Expressionists drew inspiration from their older European counterparts. For the most part, their expressive, brilliantly colored works were also executed without preparatory planning. They interpreted the physical act of painting as a performative gesture, covering the canvas with a free play of color and form marked by powerful strokes and energetic brushwork.

Many of the artists were fascinated by the depth psychology of C. G. Jung and his theory of the collective unconscious. Like the Surrealists, they sought to create a material reflection of their own inner life, one that would address the viewer intuitively and emotionally. Furthermore, they conceived of this spontaneous, gestural approach as a rejection of traditional academic rules and thus as the expression of artistic freedom and self-assertion.

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### **Unbounded Pictorial Space: All-Over Effects**

The Abstract Expressionists sought to redefine the relationship between figure and ground. They avoided spatial illusionism and emphasized the presence of the canvas as a two-dimensional surface. Often every part of the painting is equally developed, leaving the composition without an identifiable center. Concepts such as “above” or “below,” “foreground” or “background” have little meaning in context of these nonhierarchical, “all-over” compositions. The painting often appears as an arbitrary section of a visual field that can be imagined as continuing beyond the borders of the canvas. For his so-called drip paintings, Jackson Pollock spread the canvas on the floor of his studio and covered it with densely tangled threads of color, dripping, spattering, and pouring the paint onto the surface in rhythmic, dance-like movements. Beginning in the early 1950s, this revolutionary new technique also influenced the development of European abstraction. Though lacking in geometric structure, such compositions are often characterized by a decorative quality.

### **Immersive Images: Color Field Painting**

Along with action painting, another approach also developed within Abstract Expressionism: color field painting. Here the artists created rhythmic arrangements of pictorial zones using only a few colors. The works were large, at times even monumental in scale and negated any sense of spatial depth. Many are intended to be viewed at close range, inviting viewers to contemplatively immerse themselves in the visual field. Artists like Mark Rothko or Barnett Newman associated the meditative quality of their paintings with a kind of spiritual vision. Their respective approaches to visual form, however, diverged sharply: while Rothko’s works are characterized by gently pulsating, soft-edged fields of color, Newman used clear vertical bands and edges to partition the monochromatic ground of his pictures. This formal reduction reinforced the tendency toward flatness already manifested in the large-scale water lily paintings of Claude Monet.

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### **Flowing Color: The Staining Process**

Helen Frankenthaler developed a process in which she combined elements of both action painting and color field painting. In the early 1950s, she began pouring heavily thinned paint onto the canvas, allowing it to soak into the fibers. In its luminosity, her work recalls the transparent quality of watercolor. Like Jackson Pollock, Frankenthaler worked on unstretched canvases spread out on the floor, allowing the paint to flow freely across the surface as she lifted and moved the support. She often gave representational, associative titles to her nonobjective works.

Frankenthaler's fellow artist Morris Louis likewise used the so-called staining process for his color field paintings. He poured paint onto the canvas in a carefully orchestrated sequence of colors, creating a rhythmic pattern of glowing veils.

### **In the Footsteps of Monet: Abstract Impressionism**

With the emancipation of color from form, the American postwar avant-garde embraced a tendency that had already characterized French landscape painting in the late nineteenth century.

Sam Francis had encountered Abstract Expressionism in the late 1940s through the color field paintings of Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still. From 1950 on, he spent a number of years in Paris, where he studied the nature scenes of Claude Monet, including the water lily paintings. Francis's large-scale abstractions show a luminous, decorative play of pulsating color fields, spatters, and splotches; their calligraphic character bears witness to East Asian influences.

The American painter Joan Mitchell was also active in France for many years. In 1968 she moved to the Seine village of Vétheuil, where she lived near the former home of Claude Monet. Many of her expressive, brilliantly colored action paintings are reminiscent of sun-drenched landscapes.

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### **Dynamic Processes: The Painting of Art Informel**

For European painters, as well, the 1940s were a period of profound change. Many of them had been directly involved in the war or had suffered under Fascist dictatorships. Just as in American art, figurative styles receded into the background.

The painting of Art Informel developed in Paris and other western European metropolises parallel to Abstract Expressionism in the United States. Its open, “formless” pictorial structure was based on an improvisational approach to brushwork, surface texture, and material. In many works, scratches, holes, or gouges evoke the feeling of bodily wounds. In a postwar world traumatized by violence and Fascist terror, gestural painting served as an expression of the solitary individual's existential search for meaning. Abstract Expressionist works were shown in Paris as early as 1947; shortly thereafter, the painting of Art Informel made its way to America.

### **Painting as Performance: European Action Painting**

The late 1940s saw the development of a specifically European version of action painting. Through the work of the Surrealists, artists were already familiar with automatic processes of visual creation and continued to develop them in the painting of Art Informel. Other sources of inspiration were the decorative structure of East Asian calligraphy as well as the reduced color schemes of works in ink on white paper.

Like Jackson Pollock, Georges Mathieu dripped fluid paint onto the canvas, creating action paintings marked by a calligraphic character. Many of these works were painted live in front of a large audience, completed in only a few hours in a burst of creative energy. In the early 1950s, Judit Reigl emigrated from Hungary to Paris, where she was initially associated with the Surrealists. Later, under the influence of the New York School, she experimented with gestural painting. In many works, she slung industrial paint mixed with linseed oil onto the canvas, using her bare hands or metal tools to spread it over the picture plane. The playful integration of her own body into the creative process situates her work at the threshold of new forms of expression such as Happenings and Performance Art.



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### **Joining the Avant-Garde: Postwar Abstraction in West Germany**

Under the Nazis, exposure to new developments abroad had been almost impossible for German artists. As soon as the war was over, young painters began cultivating close international contacts and traveled to Paris.

West Germany emerged as a center of Art Informel in the early 1950s. Here, too, spontaneous, dynamic processes were embraced as the expression of a new sense of artistic freedom – a development favored by Germany’s unique role during the Cold War and the Federal Republic’s close ties with Western powers. As the antithesis of the Socialist Realism of East Germany, abstraction was politicized as the only valid form of expression for the democratic West. Thus many art historians celebrated abstraction as the “universal” visual language of free modernity – a construct of the postwar period that persists in art historical writing even today.

### **Color or Form? Modes of Abstraction**

In the 1950s, Art Informel established itself as the dominant stylistic current of the West German avant-garde. Its affinity to American postwar abstraction manifested itself at *documenta II* in 1959. The exhibition in Kassel, subtitled *Art After 1945*, not only showed works by painters such as K. O. Götz, Ernst Wilhelm Nay, and Fritz Winter, but also included a room devoted to the oeuvre of Jackson Pollock.

Many works created in response to Art Informel also show echoes of Abstract Expressionism. While the smoke and fire pictures of Otto Piene recall the cosmic iconography of Adolph Gottlieb, Rupprecht Geiger’s pulsating color fields allude to the painting of Mark Rothko. Yet their works were never mere imitations of established pictorial formulas: between the poles of action painting and color field painting, each artist engaged in an individual exploration of the tension between color and form, between the subjective gesture and the rational articulation of the picture plane.

# Jeremy Lewison: The Shape of Freedom? International Abstraction after 1945

MUSEUM BARBERINI  
POTSDAM

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In the aftermath of World War II, English poet Stephen Spender traveled to Germany on a special assignment as an officer for the Allied Control Commission in the British occupation zone. His mission was “to inquire into the lives and ideas of German intellectuals, with a particular view to discovering any surviving talent in German literature,” to which later he added an investigation into the state of libraries. Visiting the “corpse-town” of Cologne, with a certain amount of irony and maybe some admiration Spender described the ruined city as “a climax of deliberate effort, an achievement of our civilization, the most striking result of co-operation between nations in the twentieth century.” The technical achievements of civilization, Spender implied, had led to its destruction. Later, as he walked through the streets of Bonn, it seemed to him that “the ruin of Germany” had the potential to “become the ruins of the whole of Europe . . . it was the sense as I walked through the streets of Bonn with a wind blowing putrescent dust of ruins as stinging as pepper into my nostrils, that the whole of our civilization was protected by such eggshell walls which could be blown down in a day.”

Complaints of civilization in crisis were already commonplace in the 1930s after the industrial-scale killing of World War I, the coming to power of fascist governments in Germany, Italy, and Spain, and the increasingly negative impact of technology on human life. It was not unusual for books to question the very nature of man in the machine age at a time when the Nazi regime was attempting to remake him. The capitulation of France in 1940 seemed to spell the end of the old European order and the ascendancy of this new, “purified” model of humanity. When the United States came out of isolation in 1941, it was not simply to save Europe from totalitarianism but to protect and preserve civilization. In a wartime letter President Franklin D. Roosevelt described the war as a “crusade” to save “civilization from a cult of brutal tyranny, which would destroy it and all of dignity in human life.” Over the fifteen years that followed the cessation of hostilities, the battle became not simply for civilization’s survival but between three competing concepts: that of old Europe, the Soviet model, and the culture that some felt was increasingly imposed through occupation and financial muscle by the United States. The Soviets, former allies, were now seen as the major threat. Winston Churchill, invoking for the first time the specter of the Iron Curtain in a speech on March 5, 1946, in Fulton, Missouri, remarked alarmingly that “the Communist parties or fifth columns constitute a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilisation.” This was the context for the promotion and reception of abstract art in the postwar era that this essay will explore. The visual arts became contested ground, not so much for artists who saw themselves as part of a generalized movement that broke the boundaries of nationhood—as Jackson Pollock said, “the basic problems of contemporary painting are independent of any one country”—but for critics, political commentators, and government agencies.

Opinion was divided as to what constituted civilization. Older Europeans often viewed America as a barbaric culture, violent, materialistic, and overbearing, while younger members of Western European society saw it as the future, exciting, the country of jazz and rock ’n’ roll, Hollywood, and chewing gum, sophisticated in its technical advances, and appearing to provide material comfort at a time of European deprivation. British philosopher Bertrand

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Russell, returning from the US in 1945, wrote of the “intolerable boredom” arising from the uniformity that he found among Americans, who lacked “respect for knowledge.” Spender, on the other hand, writing four years later in a review of contemporary American literature, could see many of America’s virtues. “American literature is a living body of protest against the vulgarity, commercialization, advertising, exploiting, which many people think of as the most characteristic American qualities. In fact contemporary literature suggests what the last American election suggested: that there is an America realer and more alive than the America which pollsters, advertisers, Hollywood and news editors know about.” Comparing America to Europe he continued later in the article: “For America is vital, young, optimistic and in this way opposed to tired and disillusioned Europe. But there is another America, which is after all very old, very attached to Europe. A conflict is implicit in American civilization which is not really a young nation growing up in virgin country, but a collection of people with roots in very old countries living the life of a young country.” Spender here gives expression to the notion that American culture was derived from Europe, a theme that would be taken up especially by French cultural commentators in their rearguard fight against Americanization.

The idea that American civilization was barbaric was disproportionate, given recent memories of Nazi atrocities or the bombing of Dresden, but it was nevertheless a frequently expressed opinion. These reactions were to a great extent colored by old allegiances and responses to American aid in the form of the Marshall Plan (officially the European Recovery Program), instituted in 1948. It became apparent early on that America would have to make efforts to improve its image. The steps that American agencies undertook to promote the image of America through cultural activity in Europe as a way of cultivating positive opinion and to counter the impact of Soviet propaganda and resurgent communism in France and Italy is the principal subject of this essay, which looks at the growing influence of Abstract Expressionism alongside an already burgeoning European abstract movement. It will examine the concept of abstraction as an international language and a manifestation of freedom that inhered in Existentialist philosophy and discussion, and the manner in which European philosophical ideas underscored American art and writing in this period. If 1945 was the year of cessation of military hostilities, it marked the beginning both of culture wars and collaboration.

### *Art as a Weapon*

The war had been responsible for the cessation of international artistic exchange. Deprived of information and with little interpersonal contact it was only after the war that artists began to sense a feeling of common purpose as they gradually became aware of what had been developing elsewhere. Information was hard to come by at first and exhibitions were scarce, particularly in Germany. Alan Bowness, a young Englishman later to become an art historian and director of the Tate Gallery, worked in Hamburg and Cologne for the Swedish Red Cross: “There was nothing in Germany. I was there from October 1947. Hamburg was ruinous. There

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was music, both Hamburg and Cologne had excellent radio orchestras . . . and then there was a theatre scene. The art scene hardly existed.” The French and British government agencies understood fairly swiftly that the provision of culture was a primary means to reeducate the nations deformed by fascism. Some artists traveled once again to Paris, but others had to rely on the exhibitions of such cultural agencies as the British Council, on the circulation of magazines, and, in Germany, on the *Amerika Häuser*, set up for the reeducation and democratization of the German people. The *Amerika Häuser* had good libraries with a wide range of American books and periodicals, including art magazines. For the first seven years after the war the Americans only provided Europe with exhibitions about the American way of life and the modern home, which tended to encourage the apprehension of the US as a materialistic society. The Smith-Mundt Act (1948) permitted the State Department to promote American interests and its way of life beyond its borders, and to counteract Soviet propaganda, but Republicans intervened in the Senate to prevent it from promoting the visual arts as some artists were considered leftist and therefore politically undesirable.

The Venice Biennale was an exception but the US Pavilion was not state owned. It belonged to Grand Central Art Galleries, part of the Painters and Sculptors Gallery Association, an artists’ cooperative. In 1948 it was one of the first places in Europe where recent American art could be encountered. There visitors could see one early Surrealist-style work each by several artists who would later be known as Abstract Expressionists—Mark Rothko’s *Baptismal Scene* and *Ancestral Worship* by Theodoros Stamos are examples. On the other side of the canal they could view the paintings of Jackson Pollock belonging to Peggy Guggenheim, who had taken over the unoccupied Greek Pavilion. Rodolfo Pallucchini, the Secretary General of the Biennale, declaimed that the show expressed “the new spirit of freedom,” for it displayed the kinds of art of which Italy had been deprived during the fascist years. Guggenheim’s collection fit in perfectly. The paintings in the US Pavilion did not particularly stand out, and if Guggenheim’s private collection created interest it was not on account of the works by Pollock, which received little comment from the press, other than in Italy. It seemed that Pollock’s paintings, for example *Moon Woman* or *Circumcision*, could be accommodated by anyone familiar with Surrealism and European Art Informel. Scottish painter Alan Davie, who visited the Biennale that year, remembered Pollock’s paintings as “coming out of the European tradition and not something uniquely American.”

In 1948 few would have regarded American and European art as distinctively different, and American commentators themselves were keen to establish the credibility of American art by referring to its European foundations. Clement Greenberg, for example, who was to become one of Pollock’s greatest apologists, wrote in the British literary magazine *Horizon* in 1947 that Pollock was a “morbid and extreme disciple of Picasso’s Cubism and Miró’s post-Cubism, tintured also with Kandinsky and Surrealist inspiration.” European emigration to New York before or during the war meant that American painters were able to meet some of the major European artists in their own backyard. Indeed, the impact of Eu-

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ropean Surrealism should not be underestimated. The idea that European painting was the progenitor of American abstract painting would be a major weapon in the armory of French critics when responding to the three substantial exhibitions of American art that circulated around Europe in the latter half of the 1950s.

One of the points of contention, however, was the credibility of the US as a cultural force. In 1950 Lewis Galantière, an American translator of French who had lived in Paris before the war, wrote a lengthy article in the American journal *Foreign Affairs* about the current state of America and its relationship with the world, and particularly Europe. Notwithstanding the impact of American power and money in Europe, he lamented the fact that America had failed to win “over to our side that great majority of Europeans who are both anti-Communists and anti-capitalist.” The way to do that, he explained, was through the dissemination of culture, writing that “when a nation attains to world leadership, it preserves that rank only so long as its culture—which is to say not merely its achievements in the humanities but also its manners, beliefs and civil institutions—commands respect and some degree of emulation.” With resurgent communist parties in both France and Italy, America was concerned to attract people to a political position more aligned with American liberalism. At the height of the Marshall Plan, itself a form of recivilization, Galantière noticed hostility toward the US for apparently flooding the market with goods and films, despite quotas for the latter. The Europeans, he noted, “know what Soviet Russia is and they fear her domination intensely. But they do not know what America is and they are in doubt about our motives, our moral capacities and our material stability.” Above all, he added, “they are humiliated by the thought that they must seek help at our hands, and they console themselves in their humiliation by the comforting thought that their culture is superior to ours.” This European snobbery, particularly prevalent among French and British writers, was a *leitmotif* of discussion of American art, culture, and society in the late 1940s and 1950s.

Taking up where Galantière left off, Eloise Spaeth, an American art collector and writer, argued in 1951 that Congress must be “made to realize the need for an importance of the arts as propaganda” and held up the British Council as a model. She urged the government to use “art as a weapon” to combat the rising tide of communism, a weapon “that spoke the language the Italian people could understand better than any other people in the world perhaps—the language of painting.” If America was derided for its materialism, she argued, the US should “demonstrate to the world that we, the youngest of world powers, have reached a maturity in the arts that entitles us to a place among the old world civilizations. It is about time we stopped selling our culture short.” The debates in the journals and internal advice from government appointees formed the background to Nelson Rockefeller establishing the International Program (IP) at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, which he conceived as a Marshall Plan for culture, at the moment the implementation of the Marshall Plan itself came to an end. Within a year the IP was overseen by the newly formed International Council (IC). At the same time the United States Information Agency (USIA) was founded to monitor and promote the cultural image of the US abroad. If the cultural initiatives of the IC

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and the USIA were not organized in tandem, at least initially, their objectives were allied. Rockefeller was close to government and fully implicated in the way America faced out toward Europe.

The IC soon set to work sending exhibitions to South America and Western Europe to promote the values of American democracy, ironically at a time of the domestic political repression of communists and a burgeoning civil rights protest against racial inequality and segregation. Much has been made of the CIA's undoubted connection with its activities and its promotion of democracy and liberalism in the propaganda war with the Soviet Union. But the involvement of government agencies, even if at arm's length, was commonplace in the cultural field. The British Council, funded directly by the Foreign Office, actively promoted British art in Europe, while the Institut Français did the same for France. General Charles de Gaulle himself acknowledged the importance of culture in the propaganda war when he commented in 1943 in a speech delivered in Algiers on the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the Alliance Française, that the twin pillars on which France's standing would rest were French arms and French thought. Culture then, as now, was an element of soft power.

In Germany American efforts to propagate its new-found status as the guardian of civilization and as a reeducator were expended not simply in organizing exhibitions but by controlling or subsidizing media outlets in its occupation zone, including ensuring that communist sympathizers were ejected from editorial boards. They also subsidized such cultural magazines as *Die Amerikanische Rundschau* and its counterpart *Quelle* in France. The anti-communist *Preuves* (founded in 1951), a magazine read by most French intellectuals, and *Encounter* (founded in 1953 by Spender and Irving Kristol) were covertly partially funded by the CIA as were *Der Monat* (founded in 1948), *Tempo Presente* (established in 1956), Radio Free Europe (established in 1949), and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which was launched in 1950 as a response to the Soviet Union's Peace Movement. All these efforts were intended to correct the influence of Soviet foreign policy and cultural imperialism, as well as to reeducate those who had fallen under the influence of fascism. With hindsight it is hard not to regard the initiatives of the Americans, the British, and the French as alternative imperialistic endeavors at a time when the decolonization movement threatened their empires. To paraphrase the words of American art historian Max Kozloff, if all the US-backed cultural and media manifestations were not a mouthpiece for any agency, they were certainly a showcase for American values.

### *Art Informel in Europe*

At the time the IC began to operate and send exhibitions to Europe, there was a thriving international community of painters associated with Art Informel. As the decade progressed and the Cold War came into being, abstraction came to stand for freedom from tyranny, freedom



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of expression, and freedom of the individual, as distinct from the demands placed on artists in the Soviet-controlled sector that required adherence to a doctrine of Realism in the service of the state. For western German artists, it also represented freedom from the burdens of the past, notably an expunging of the Nazi past, its history, and ideology, an endeavor encapsulated in the phrase *Stunde Null* (zero hour). If the weight of tradition could be dismissed, then freedom was possible. This was a classic Existentialist position and one that would underpin later commentary on Abstract Expressionism. As the character Antoine Roquentin puts it in Jean-Paul Sartre's novel *La Nausée* (1938): "The true nature of the present revealed itself: it was that which exists, and all that was not present did not exist. The past did not exist. Not at all. Neither in things nor even in my thoughts." The present was in effect a point of origin. This was a sentiment commonly held. Michel Tapié, for example, wrote in the introduction to the exhibition catalog that accompanied his show *Véhémences confrontées* in 1951: "One must begin by considering as being worth less than nothing all of aesthetic history, and reject once and for all everything that is not essentially visual." The idea of returning to a point of origin—or, as the American painter Barnett Newman called it, "the original impulse"—was an attempt "to arrive at [original man's] creative state." To get back to that state the artist must erase from his memory the sophistication inherent in civilization in a search for authenticity. An act of unlearning was required. Some Europeans tended to think that Americans were not as burdened by the past as they themselves were. Marco Valsecchi, for example, wrote in *Il Giorno* in 1958: "It is possible for [Americans] to be more free in their creativity precisely because they are less tied down by traditions of deep-rooted cultures, as befalls instead our artists . . . and are able to reach more relaxed heights."

In the 1960s a generation of German artists would see the refusal to engage with the recent past as a disingenuous evasion of responsibility, but in the late 1940s and early 1950s the trauma of the wartime and immediate postwar experience was perhaps too raw to process or willfully ignored. [John] Bernard Myers, an American communist sympathizer, noticed this when he wrote in the *College Art Journal*: "Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of the postwar artistic situation in Germany is its complete lack of direct response to the conditions of the time. We may assume that the preponderant interest in various forms of abstraction, chiefly abstract surrealism and abstract expressionism, represents an escape from the unpleasant realities of a bombed out world." In the next issue the critic Hugo Münsterberg presented an opposing view when he described the work of Fritz Winter, on display in the first Deutscher Künstlerbund exhibition in Berlin in August 1951, as portraying "the tragedy of our world in moving and dynamic terms. His heavy black lines and his somber reds and greys seem to reflect the experience of the burning cities and the barbed wire fences of the concentration camps . . ." The truth, however, was that the German government and society as a whole were inclined not simply to gloss over the recent past but to reintegrate former Nazis into the new democratic institutions. What emerged in the political arena, under the leadership of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, was a desire to move beyond

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national boundaries to participate in an international dialogue and to abandon Germanness. Abstract painting followed a similar path. It would abjure a national identity and be liberated from politics, a position promoted by German critic Will Grohmann. To join in an international or supranational movement was to be aligned with the political current of the time that gave birth to such institutions as the United Nations, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe that transacted across regional boundaries.

French abstraction began to be shown in Germany in 1948, beginning with *Französische abstrakte Malerei*, organized by private collector Ottomar Domnick, that circulated to seven cities and included paintings by Hans Hartung and Pierre Soulages alongside geometric abstraction. For German artists, travel in the second half of the 1940s was very difficult but by 1950 things began to open up. Fritz Winter, for example, met Soulages and Hartung in Paris in 1950, and German artists began to hold exhibitions there from around 1955. In the early postwar years Paris was still the point of reference for both artists and critics.

Like Germany, Italy had been deprived of exhibitions of avantgarde art during the fascist period, when a Classical Realism became the favored idiom of a regime that sought to encourage associations with the glories of the Roman Empire. Rather than declaring the aftermath of war as a zero hour, Italians sought to catch up with the past not only by organizing exhibitions of the interwar years, such as the 1948 Biennale referred to above, which it would take Germany another seven years to do in the form of documenta I held in 1955, but by adopting styles of painting that subsumed lessons learned from prewar Paris-based artists. The fascist period was regarded as an interregnum in an otherwise uninterrupted sequence of centuries of Italian civilization rather than a period to be obliterated from history. Italian art would build not only on European developments of the recent past but on its own historic movements, particularly Futurism, in spite of its fascist associations. In Italy abstraction only came to symbolize freedom after the leader of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), Palmiro Togliatti, publicly denounced it in an article of 1948. At that point Realism became aligned with communism and abstraction with freedom from restriction.

Contact with American art reached Italy before Germany or France. The Biennales in 1948 and 1950 and the Pollock exhibition of the same year at the Museo Correr were important sightings. However, Art Informel had an earlier starting point in France than anywhere else in Europe. Three kinds of abstraction were developed: one based on grids, derived from Cubism but hotter in color; one sometimes called Lyrical Abstraction; and a third where the materiality of paint was emphasized. The more lyrical painters, among them Pierre Soulages, Georges Mathieu, and the German émigré Hans Hartung, were considered to operate in the realms of art without political or social commitment. Wols's gestural paintings based on nature were yoked to Existentialism by Jean-Paul Sartre. However, there was no denial in France of the metaphorical content certain examples of abstraction might bear. Jean Fautrier's thickly encrusted *Otage* series was openly acknowledged to be a response to a Nazi atrocity at Oradour-sur-Glane, while Jean Bazaine's and Alfred Manessier's grid



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paintings were associated with not only the stained-glass windows of Chartres but with the noble sacrifice for church and country of World War II. If some European artists appeared to be working through trauma, so were their American counterparts Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Philip Guston, but whereas the Europeans had lived through the events themselves, and sometimes witnessed them, Rothko, Newman, and Guston, who were either second-generation Jewish immigrants or had arrived in the US as young children, only experienced them vicariously. They felt the impact of genocide through cultural identification and as a deep loss, sometimes deferred for many years.

*The Crisis of Man*

The dearth of exhibitions of American art in Europe was remarked upon by William Constable, a young curator from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, who was seconded to the Education and Cultural Relations Division of the Office of Military Government for Germany in the United States in 1951. This was reiterated in the pages of *XXe Siècle* by Jerome Mellquist, who complained that “Even the Venice Biennale in 1950 did not elucidate the direction taken by painting of the last two generations in the US.” The lack of emphasis on the most contemporary persisted in the first few exhibitions promoted by the IC that followed the model announced by an exhibition held in Berlin in 1951, *Amerikanische Malerei*. There, Abstract Expressionist works were displayed as part of the general diversity of American art of the twentieth century. In fact, advice given by Americans stationed in Germany was that the German audience was not ready to receive abstract art. While Abstract Expressionism has since come to be regarded as the dominant movement of the 1950s in America, at the time it was considered just one among many.

The IC’s first European exhibition, *Twelve Modern American Painters and Sculptors*, opened in Paris in April 1953 and toured Europe until March 1954. The exhibition showed a range of painting and sculpture from Edward Hopper to Pollock and Alexander Calder to David Smith. The subtext was a demonstration of freedom of expression and variety of approaches. As Andrew Ritchie wrote in the catalog, “diversity flourishes in the absence of an ‘official art’: The emphasis lies mostly on the artist as an individual,” the inference being that official art belonged to the Soviet model. By this time Pollock had had a solo exhibition of his black “pourings” at the Studio Facchetti in Paris (1952), with a catalog introduction by Michel Tapié, and the journal *Art d’aujourd’hui* had already devoted an entire issue to American abstraction in June 1951. A sighting of Abstract Expressionism in Paris was, therefore, not novel. American art magazines were now in circulation in Europe bearing articles about the Abstract Expressionists, although the apprehension of their work was limited to black-and-white illustrations. The major event was the publication of Harold Rosenberg’s “The American Action Painters” in *Art News* in December 1952, an article disseminated widely in Europe that largely determined the interpretation of Abstract Expressionism in the mid-1950s. Its fundamental

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premise was based on his understanding of Existentialism.

In New York, in the immediate aftermath of war, the “crisis of man” discourse was promulgated by means of discussion of French Existentialism. *Partisan Review*, a quarterly magazine, carried numerous articles on Existentialism, stressing the heritage of Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard. Sartre visited New York in 1945, and his book *Existentialism* was translated into English and published by the Philosophical Library in New York two years later. His theory of man emphasized individual action, instinct, personal responsibility, and freedom, and had an enormous impact on left-leaning intellectuals as well as the artists who became known as Abstract Expressionists. Statements these artists put out in the late 1940s and 1950s indicate a strong awareness of Existentialism and debates around the “crisis of man.” Newman, Rothko, and Motherwell had all studied or read Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. Other small-circulation cultural magazines, among them *Tiger’s Eye* and *Possibilities*, published artists’ statements alongside articles about the French movement. And, as an appetizer for the interest in Existentialism, in 1946, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s essay “Cézanne’s Doubt” appeared in *Partisan Review*, in which he propounded the idea that the creative act preceded cognition and the formation of language, ideas adopted by Newman in “The First Man Was an Artist,” published in *Tiger’s Eye* the following year.

Existentialism was seen as a corrective to the industrialized, streamlined society that the US had become and a way to react against the depersonalization of Fordism and massification that had had its most heinous consequences in the concentration camps. It entered the political sphere at the moment support for communism was on the wane in the US and as American intellectuals sought to develop a more liberal, unaligned outlook. However, when Sartre declared his allegiance to the French Communist Party (PCF), his influence was supplanted by that of the more liberal, universalist Albert Camus, his “Art and Revolt,” first published in *Partisan Review*, being included in the *New Partisan Reader, 1945–1953* at the expense of the numerous articles the magazine had published by Sartre in the 1940s.

Rosenberg’s 1952 article emphasized the work of art as an “act,” something unconsidered and spontaneous, in which the canvas became the record of an “event.” He elaborated on this further in “Revolution and the Idea of Beauty,” published in *Encounter* the following year, arguing that the artist’s revolutionary position is “inseparable from the direct apprehension of himself.” Artists should preserve their freedom and individuality by making works of art that were based on self-disclosure without political engagement. This was an idea derived from Camus. The intersubjective nature of Abstract Expressionism was consistent with Camus’s views on universalism. In a lecture in New York in 1947, Camus suggested that the dignity of man, who was universally culpable for the war, could only be restored by universalism through which “all men of good will may find themselves in touch with one another.” If individualism was to be the fundamental subject of their work, contact between individuals was paramount to avoid the pitfalls of nationalism, an idea that was encapsulated in the notion of abstraction as a supranational language. Ritchie’s reference to the emphasis

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on the individual in his above-mentioned catalog introduction thus appears to be a direct reference to Rosenberg's article and an indication that both Rosenberg's ideas and Existentialism in general had drifted into institutional artistic discourse.

*The Coming of America*

The next large exhibition that the IC sent to Europe was *50 ans d'art aux États-Unis* in 1955 as part of the "Salute to France" festival arranged at the request of the French government under the auspices of the American Embassy. Drawn from MoMA's collection, it was initially planned to include only paintings but ended as a panoramic view of American fine and applied art with a large architecture section, as well as sections devoted to photography, modern prints, industrial design, typography, and film. As *Modern Art in the United States* only the paintings, sculpture, and print sections toured to Zurich, Barcelona, Frankfurt am Main, London, The Hague, Vienna, Linz, and Belgrade. The French press expressed their admiration for American architecture and, in some cases, the photography, industrial design, and print sections. In all these they could see what they felt were national characteristics. However, they were critical of the painting section, which was another eclectic mix of artists. It culminated with a room of Abstract Expressionist paintings, which, for the general public—and indeed for many artists, was the first in-depth, collective sighting of such large-scale works. Most of the French critics expressed irritation and nonchalance derived from a feeling that American painting was built on the shoulders of European art, and that many of the so-called American artists were of European extraction. It followed that for them there was no distinctively American style.

Unlike in London a year later, the French press did not engage in appreciative discussion. A theme that preoccupied the French and the British was that the paintings lacked control, were unresolved, and merely displayed "the vestiges of formidable battles," as one critic put it. Violent, tortured, funereal, ugly, convulsive, explosive, trivial, excitable were adjectives applied to this art. Some writers noted the Existentialist aspects of the work and its essential sadness, but in Britain this was remarked upon less than in France. In Germany, unlike in France, two reviewers saw the paintings as optimistic, presumably conditioned by the post-war gloom of that country and the *Weltschmerz* some thought underlay their own abstract art. The French far-left and far-right newspapers were predictably anti-American. One of the sole positive French reviewers was Georges Menant, in *La Dernière Heure Lyonnaise*, a newspaper published in Grenoble neither politically aligned nor in the pockets of the French art dealers. He took his fellow critics to task for pointing out that American art reflected a European heritage, concluding that "it would be difficult to assert that it still reflects European inspiration. In actuality, American art . . . turns its back upon European abstraction." This sentiment was shared by a number of British and German critics. Robert Melville, Patrick Heron, Lawrence Alloway, and David Thompson made important contributions to the discourse around Abstract Expressionism, seeing the scale of the paintings and their handling of space

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as being new to abstract painting.

The IC's intention had been to present American art as building on the European tradition to cement links between the two cultures, promoting a sense of universalism and common endeavor. That the French, in the main, chose to interpret this as a sign of weakness, might indicate the success of the choice of works but perhaps not its effectiveness in presenting the US as the inheritor of the mantle of cultural equal, if not leader. Given that many of the reviewers in France were allied to the leading commercial galleries and those galleries were battling for the survival of Paris as the center of modern art, their rather dismissive response was perhaps predictable.

Another important point of discussion regarded the nature of civilization itself. Pierre Descargues, for example, decried the "extensive section given over to saucepans, lemon-squeezers, can-openers and plastic plates—testimonies of American civilization that might have better found a public at the Salon of Household Arts rather than at the Musée d'art moderne." Maurice Armand, a critic of the extreme right, echoed the commonly held view that European civilization was in peril, not simply from the events of the previous decade but from America itself: "The fragility of our dying civilization is reaffirmed in the face of the monstrous visage of America, protagonist of a barbarous revolution." The view of a number of critics was that Abstract Expressionism was an unbridled, uninhibited primary expression of self with no regard for the conventions of painting, an unconscious, barbaric "action," but this represented a misapprehension of the process of painting, for the Abstract Expressionist artists applied a "civilizing" process to their art. While some of them plotted their work in advance (Franz Kline, for example), others reviewed their paintings, adjusting, reworking, or destroying where necessary. As Pollock said: "I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image." Thus the instinctive would be controlled by the rational. It may have been convenient, especially for some of the French and British press, to differentiate European art from American art and to regard the latter as "other," for perhaps there was something reassuring about nominating the invaders as barbaric, but ultimately the notion of barbarism was a myth.

Undoubtedly for some, American art had the potential to be revitalizing, as Bernard Champigneulle suggested: "To what extent is this country of recent traditions the inheritor of Western civilization? Might it bring new sap to the old country of Europe?" In England Denys Sutton was undecided. "It is conceivable," he wrote, "that American art is on the verge of a rich flowering although the possession of power does not necessarily stimulate a valid artistic expression. Whether in the long run America will stand in relation to Europe as Rome did to Greece is, as our American cousins say, the sixty-four dollar question." In other words, echoing the earlier words of Galantière, power in itself is insufficient for influence to take root. Cultural sophistication was equally important. Sutton suggests that the world was on the brink of one civilization supplanting another. For the artist and critic Patrick Heron, Paris and New York appeared to be on an equal footing: "We shall now watch New York as eagerly as Paris for new developments," he affirmed. When the IC reviewed the success of the exhibition, it could see

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that the final room containing Abstract Expressionist paintings created simultaneously the greatest controversy and the greatest excitement. Leaving aside the far-left and the far-right reviews, it was apparent that those who were substantially uncommitted appreciated the dialogue with European painting as well as the advances American art had made.

*A New Universal Language?*

The exhibition finished its tour in the tumultuous year of 1956, when the American civil rights movement entered a more militant decade, the Suez crisis erupted, the Soviet invasion of Hungary took place, and when Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, denounced Joseph Stalin. Although the Hungarian invasion impacted upon the popularity of communism throughout Europe, up until then communist parties had been enjoying electoral growth, which the American government perceived as a threat to its influence. But now their popularity was decreasing, and the USIA saw there was a need to bring the unaligned left into the fold of liberal politics. Together the IC and USIA mounted two exhibitions in Europe that ran simultaneously: *Jackson Pollock* and *The New American Painting*. An art that could be presented with familiar European Existential credentials, that seemed to link with the European avant-garde's interest in Art Informel while at the same time representing freedom of thought and expression, was meant to present a convincing counter to Soviet Realism.

It was also clear to the IC that many people in Europe had come to regard abstraction as a "language" that transcended national barriers, that could be universally understood. It might also deal, covertly perhaps, with issues. Robert Motherwell, Alberto Burri, Antoni Tàpies, Manolo Millares, and Antonio Saura frequently evoked a sense of trauma in their works, endowing them with a political dimension. Grohmann had for some time been arguing for an internationalist outlook for German art in an effort to reintegrate it in European modernism. His colleague Werner Haftmann took a similarly internationalist view when, in his 1954 publication *Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert* (Painting in the Twentieth Century), he talked about the worldwide adoption of modernist European strategies in art and architecture. Four years later the compendium titled *Art since 1945*, which Grohmann edited and to which he was a contributor, confirmed the widespread adoption of this internationalist position. French critic Marcel Brion criticized the use of the name "School of Paris," noting that "the term is almost meaningless, for another reason: because the pictorial vocabulary of our epoch is more universal, more international than ever before. This is especially true of abstract art, which has been the general language of two generations of painters, all of them vigorously individualistic, yet all painting in a style that ranges from Milan to San Francisco, from London to Buenos Aires, and from Berlin to Tokyo." Although Brion argued that there were local dialects within the language of abstraction, others saw this internationalism as a homogenization with little to distinguish one form of abstraction from another. By the end of the decade some commentators felt that

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gestural art had become so commonplace as to be academic.

But there were others who saw the move away from representation as a last act of rebellion in the face of the increasing mechanization of life. As American art historian Meyer Schapiro wrote in 1957: "Paintings and sculptures. . . are the last handmade, personal objects within our culture. . . . The painting symbolizes an individual who realizes freedom and a deep engagement of the self within his work." Freedom and abstraction were in harness. Schapiro, however, took issue with the idea that abstraction was a language that could be universally understood, arguing that: "what makes painting and sculpture so interesting in our times is their high degree of non-communication. You cannot extract a message from a painting by ordinary means; the usual rules of communication do not hold here, there is no clear code or fixed vocabulary. . . . Painting, by becoming abstract and giving up its representational function, has achieved a state in which communication seems to be deliberately prevented." In many respects Schapiro was correct. Abstract painting has no grammar or syntax; it has no specific language that is translatable. Meaning is not obvious from a gesture or smear, a collection of marks, or a choice of color or format. Abstract painting is interpretable, but that interpretation relies always, to some degree, on subjectivity. A language implies communicability between people, a basic level of understanding that can be exchanged in a comprehensible way. At best individual artists have their own *écriture*—the French word seems to describe it best—but *écriture* is no more than form and style. Language inhabits *écriture* but it requires consistency and accepted meaning, which abstract painting simply does not have.

### *The Triumph of American Painting?*

Many of the ideas outlined above fed into the way in which the IC presented their two large European touring exhibitions of 1957 and 1958. In the exhibition catalogs *Jackson Pollock* and *The New American Painting*, authors Sam Hunter and Alfred H. Barr Jr. made extensive reference to Existentialism, liberation, individuality, and freedom, ideas that would resonate with European intellectuals. The extent to which these philosophical points were absorbed is clear from the generally positive reviews of the exhibitions in Italy and England. In France, aside from the generous praise in the specialist art press, the national press acknowledged the Existentialist spirit of the work but continued to resent the growing status of American art. American painting continued to be seen as a descendent of European painting. If there were references to the similarity of Wols to Pollock and to the universal nature of abstraction, they were offered negatively. On the positive side, critics of all countries replaced the narrative around chaos with an equally powerful myth of control, neither of which were entirely accurate. This change was encouraged in large part by a viewing of Hans Namuth's film of Pollock in action, *Jackson Pollock 51*.

The essential diplomatic nature of the cultural offensive to unite the people of Europe and America was most keenly felt in Berlin, where, in the publicity leaflet for the Berlin



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Festival, Willy Brandt, the governing mayor of Berlin, wrote that the festival was intended “to give our fellow citizens in East Berlin and our fellow countrymen in the East Zone a practical example of the free development of art in the free world.” Offering an analysis of the ability of art to remove barriers, heal wounds, and revive spirituality, in his speech at the opening of *The New American Painting*, Senator Dr. Valentin Kielinger emphasized the power of intersubjectivity to overcome cultural and political barriers: “In a time of crisis-like phenomena, in a time of unresolved tensions and antagonisms, in a time when man feels widely threatened inwardly by the development of a technology that is increasing almost to excess, there are still encouraging, comforting signs of inner connectedness in many areas of spiritual life. There are still powerful efforts to establish and maintain spiritual relations between peoples in spite of inner disharmonies, inner threats, to strengthen them, and to help superior forces of culture and spirit to break through. To cultivate relations of this kind between peoples, especially in the present time, is the great mutual task of all those who bear responsibilities in these fields.” Art, and especially abstract art was a means to break political and cultural barriers.

The success of *The New American Painting* in Europe led MoMA to present the exhibition in New York, where it was titled *The New American Painting as Shown in Eight European Countries, 1958–59*. European approbation was a mark of validation, as though the old civilization had declared America a worthy member of the club. From this moment on, New York became the commercial center for art. This mattered little for the practice of European artists who simply saw their American counterparts as fellow travelers. The alleged “triumph of American painting” was more related to commercial interests. Perhaps more importantly, as MoMA showed its public the art that they had sponsored for export, documenta II asserted that abstract painting was the dominant genre. Organized by Arnold Bode with advice from Haftmann, it consisted of works made since 1945 chosen to represent the slogan “art has become abstract.” As much as this was a statement of Cold War politics in a frontier town, it was also a concrete realization of Haftmann’s notion of the universality of abstract art, although only six women artists were included, which might suggest it was not universal at all. Abstraction was rather a loose term since it embraced artists whose work was clearly figurative but not realist, and artists who embraced the practice of either Art Informel or whose art derived from geometric abstraction.

The American section was the largest and its organization was exceptionally delegated to MoMA, which had been asked to cover the shipping costs of the American works. There were also individual rooms given over to Pollock and Wols, and a smaller one to Fautrier. In an unsigned article in the London *Times* David Thompson noted “the extraordinary wholesale and international acceptance of the postwar abstract idiom” but considered it “less depressingly uniform than might have been feared.” A distinctive “French, and American, possibly a Spanish and definitely an English manner . . . seen *en masse* like this . . . creates an exciting sense of variety, freedom, energy and sensuous enjoyment.” There was a consensus that regional boundaries were eliminated, although Alloway felt that the Europeans’ common front

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was derived from a “strong sense of the past, of the time-bound thickness of the present.” In other words European art still reflected the impact of its heritage. For Haftmann the rise of Art Informel during and after the war was attributable to young painters sharing the same constrained conditions and the same fears about science and existence. It was perhaps a view conditioned by his experience as a German, although it should be noted that recently it has been established that Haftmann had been a member of the Nazi party and the *Sturmabteilung*, something he had always denied. While certain elements of postwar abstraction were responses to the experience of war, others were unrelated, deriving from sources as various as nature, landscape, Cubism, or a revolt against geometric abstraction.

If abstraction had become the dominant mode of painting, it was not the only one. There were many artists who kept alive the traditions of referential and narrative painting, Pablo Picasso and Francis Bacon among others. However, some adopted the mannerisms of abstraction, for example, the emphasis on materials, particularly from the mid-1950s onwards. For them abstraction was played out or inadequate, its lack of reference too limiting, and its macho posture unacceptable or unattractive. Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Larry Rivers, Frank Auerbach, Leon Kossoff, Peter Lanyon, Jean Dubuffet, and the young Georg Baselitz were among those who sought alternative ways out of what seemed like a cul-de-sac, while the COBRA artists had rejected pure abstraction as early as 1948, considering it sterile and an inadequate vehicle for their politically charged art.

And what of civilization? Had it been saved? Civilization is often seen as the antithesis of the primitive or the barbaric. Traditionally it is imposed upon a culture by invaders or colonizers as a means of subjugation and taming. With the exception perhaps of Germany and Austria, Western Europe was not subjugated. If it became a site for a propaganda war, it retained its independence and its strong sense of continuity with the past. While it undoubtedly changed in the postwar era, not least under the influence of the flood of products like Coca-Cola, television programs, film, pop music, art, and other cultural manifestations emanating from the US, as well as large-scale immigration from the colonies and former colonies, it was more than capable of asserting its independence, politically, economically, and culturally, and establishing its own federation in the form of the Common Market, later the European Union. The German *Wirtschaftswunder* and the Italian *boom economico* fed the growing appetite for consumerist habits learned from the Americans. The “civilisation of bathtubs and Frigidaires,” as the communist, French poet Louis Aragon haughtily dismissed it in 1951, was what most Europeans now wanted. European civilization has always been mutable and adaptable, ingesting influences from all manner of peoples and cultures. The 1950s were no different.



Exhibition schedule:

Museum Barberini, Potsdam: June 4 – September 25, 2022  
Albertina modern, Vienna: October 16, 2022 – January 22, 2023 (Title in Vienna: *Jackson Pollock. Mark Rothko. Joan Mitchell.*)  
Munchmuseet, Oslo: February 22 – June 4, 2023

Number of exhibited works:

97 exhibited works by 52 artists

Curator:

Dr. Daniel Zamani, Curator, Museum Barberini

Artists (with number of exhibited works):

Mary Abbott (1)	Janice Biala (1)
Norman Bluhm (2)	Alberto Burri (1)
Jean Degottex (1)	Jean Dubuffet (2)
Natalia Dumitresco (2)	Jean Fautrier (3)
Perle Fine (1)	Sam Francis (2)
Helen Frankenthaler (4)	Winfred Gaul (2)
Rupprecht Geiger (2)	Arshile Gorky (1)
Karl Otto Götz (4)	Adolph Gottlieb (4)
Hans Hartung (1)	Gerhard Hoehme (2)
Simon Hantai (2)	Hans Hofmann (1)
Franz Kline (2)	Willem de Kooning (1)
Lee Krasner (4)	Morris Louis (3)
Georges Mathieu (2)	Manolo Millares (1)
Joan Mitchell (3)	Robert Motherwell (1)
Ernst Wilhelm Nay (3)	Barnett Newman (2)
Otto Piene (3)	Jackson Pollock (3)
Richard Pousette-Dart (1)	Judit Reigl (2)
Ad Reinhardt (1)	Deborah Remington (1)
Jean-Paul Riopelle (1)	Mark Rothko (3)
Antonio Saura (1)	Bernard Schultze (2)
Iaroslav Serpan (1)	Janet Sobel (1)
Theodoros Stamos (1)	Hedda Sterne (1)
Clyfford Still (2)	Antoni Tàpies (1)
Fred Thieler (1)	Jack Tworikov (1)
Emilio Vedova (1)	Maria Helena Vieira da Silva (1)
Fritz Winter (3)	Wols (3)

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**Lenders:**

Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden  
Galerie Georg Nothelfer, Berlin  
Collection of Richard und Karen Duffy, Chicago  
Collection of Thomas McCormick and Janis Kanter, Chicago  
Kunstpallast, Düsseldorf  
MKM Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst,  
Duisburg, Sammlung Ströher  
Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Genève  
Tate, London  
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid  
Kunsthalle Mannheim  
Michael Antonello and Chris Haqq, Magis Collection,  
Minneapolis  
Archiv Geiger, Munich  
The Estate of Jack Tworck and Van Doren Waxter,  
New York  
Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, New York  
Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College,  
State University of New York  
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne/  
Centre de création industrielle, Paris  
Sammlung Siegfried und Jutta Weishaupt, Ulm  
Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC  
Albertina, Vienna  
ASOM Collection  
Galerie Haas AG, Zurich  
Private collection, courtesy Hauser & Wirth, Zurich  
The Levett Collection  
Hasso Plattner Collection  
The Richard Pousette-Dart Estate  
Triton Collection Foundation  
and other collections that prefer not to be named

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<b>Exhibition area:</b>	1,243.92 square meters
<b>Exhibition design:</b>	Gunther Maria Kolck, Hamburg, and BrücknerAping, Büro für Gestaltung, Bremen
<b>Address:</b>	Museum Barberini, Alter Markt, Humboldtstraße 5–6, 14467 Potsdam
<b>Opening hours:</b>	10 a.m.–7 p.m. daily, closed Tuesdays Kindergartens and schools by appointment Monday–Friday 9–10 a.m. (except Tuesdays)
<b>Visitor information:</b>	Masks are no longer required for visitors to the Museum Barberini. However, we still recommend wearing an FFP2 mask and maintaining a distance of 1.5 meters from other persons. We also recommend booking a timed ticket. All other visitor information is available on our website.
<b>Admission and ticketing:</b>	Monday, Wednesday–Friday € 16 / € 10 Saturday, Sunday, and holidays € 18 / € 10 Schoolchildren and under 18 free
<b>Social media:</b>	#AbstraktionBarberini in the #MuseumBarberini on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo
<b>Barberini digital:</b>	The <b>Barberini App</b> serves as a personal guide before, during, and after the museum visit. It offers audio tours for adults and children, exhibition texts in simplified language, service information, tips on programs and events, e-tickets, and video interviews with experts. The app is free and available in the App Store and Google Play. The <b>Barberini Prolog</b> sets the tone for the exhibition: as a compact, multimedia website, the Prolog provides an overview of themes and works and can be used to prepare for the museum visit or to recommend the show to others: <a href="http://prolog.museum-barberini.de/">prolog.museum-barberini.de/</a>

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<b>Audio guides:</b>	Audio guides for adults and children, as well as a tour for parents accompanying their children, are available in German and English on the Barberini App free of charge. Exhibition texts in simplified language are also available on the app. In addition to our “classic” audio tours, the app also features a tour of the exhibition by eleventh-grade students from the Hermann-von-Helmholtz-Gymnasium in Potsdam. The audio tour “High on Art – Schülerinnen und Schüler entdecken Abstraktion” (High on Art – Students Discover Abstraction) was developed as a class project in an introductory art course to enhance the students’ experience of art. (German only)
<b>Conversations with experts:</b>	In a video on the exhibition, international experts including Daniel Zamani, Curator of the Exhibition, Museum Barberini, Ortrud Westheider, Director, Museum Barberini, Gražina Subelytė, Curator, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, Kay Heymer, Director for Modern Art, Museum Kunstpalast Düsseldorf, and Jeremy Lewison, art historian, London, discuss the transatlantic dialogue in art from the mid-1940s to the end of the Cold War. The interview collage is available in the Media Library on the museum website as well as on the Barberini App and is shown every day on the media wall in the museum auditorium.
<b>360° tour:</b>	The 360° tour offers a digital experience of the exhibition <i>The Shape of Freedom: International Abstraction after 1945</i> at the Museum Barberini. Users can navigate virtually from one exhibition room to the next and view each painting in detail using the zoom function.

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**Events and museum  
education:**

The exhibition is accompanied by a wide-ranging program of events and educational opportunities for all ages and interests. For the complete program as well as updates and news, visit our website at [museum-barberini.de/en/kalender/formate](http://museum-barberini.de/en/kalender/formate).

**Selected programs  
and events:**

**Introductory lectures:** The Museum Barberini offers two introductory lectures each day at 12:00 and 3:00 p.m. in the auditorium, open to the public. Art for Children events are scheduled every Saturday from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. An introduction for families and children is offered Saturdays and Sundays at 2:00 p.m. in the auditorium.

**Art Special:** Groups of works are presented such as color field painting, Art Informel, or Abstract Biotope. Other thematic lectures focus on specific artists such as the painter couple Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner, the abstract artist Helen Frankenthaler, and the women Surrealists Leonora Carrington, Leonor Fini, Dorothea Tanning, and Remedios Varo. Presentations on Gustave Caillebotte, Berthe Morisot, Camille Pissarro, and themes such as *The Power of Color* and *Pictures and Frames* explore facets of French Impressionism in the Hasso Plattner Collection. All events are offered live in the Museum Barberini, Thursdays at 5:00 p.m., as well as online, Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m.

**Tours and workshops for schools and kindergartens** can be booked at any time of day and in selected other languages if desired. The museum is open exclusively to school and children's groups at 9:00 a.m. Pre- and post-visit instructional materials are available on the museum website (*KunstGeschichten* and *Schreibwerkstatt*; German only).

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**Barberini Live Tour:** Visitors who are unable to come to Potsdam but don't want to miss the exhibitions at the Museum Barberini can enjoy a personal tour in the comfort of their own home. Using 360° photography, experienced guides lead interactive tours through the current show *The Shape of Freedom: International Abstraction after 1945* as well as the Hasso Plattner Collection with its Impressionist paintings. The virtual tour enables viewers to experience not only individual paintings, but also the atmosphere of the exhibition spaces and the arrangement of works into specific themes. Live tours can be booked daily on the museum website or through visitor services: **live\_tour@museum-barberini.de, +49 331 236014-499**. For international viewers and guests from all over the world who are unable to travel to Potsdam, online tours in English will be offered at 6:30 p.m. on June 9, June 30, September 1, and September 22.

**Live online lecture:** *Breaking Free: The Pleasures and Terrors of Abstract Expressionism*  
Zoom lecture by Adam D. Weinberg, Director,  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (in English),  
June 15, 2022, 7:00 p.m.

**15th Symposium**

**Clouds and Light: Impressionism in Holland**

In preparation for the exhibition of the same name planned for July 8–October 22, 2023, the symposium will take place on June 22, 10:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.

**LIT:Potsdam im Museum Barberini**

*Mächtige Gefühle. Über die Sprache der Gefühle in Politik, Alltag und Kunst*

Reading with Ute Frevert, historian and Director at the Max Planck-Institut, and conversation with Daniel Zamani, Curator at the Museum Barberini, moderated by Volker Wieprecht, June 30, 7:00 p.m.

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**Yoga and Meditation: The Art of Stillness.**

**Quiet Morning at the Museum Barberini**

Yoga session with Anna Rischke and Sandra Lange  
in the inner courtyard or the auditorium, August 28,  
9:30–11:00 a.m.

**Live online lecture:** *Peggy Guggenheim as a Patron of  
Abstract Expressionism and Jackson Pollock*

Zoom lecture by Dr. Gražina Subelytė, Curator at the  
Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice (in English),  
September 5, 6:30 p.m.

**Guest lecture online:** *Das Museum Reinhard Ernst –  
Ein neues Museum für abstrakte Kunst in Wiesbaden und  
die weltweit größte Privatsammlung von Werken Helen  
Frankenthalers*

Zoom lecture by Dr. Oliver Kornhoff,  
Founding Director of the Museum Reinhard Ernst,  
September 19, 6:30 p.m.

**Musical reading:** *Blixa Bargeld and Sven Regener  
“Holy Flowers Floating in the Air“ in the Nikolaisaal Potsdam*  
American literature and music from the era of  
Abstract Expressionism: Blixa Bargeld and Sven Regener  
present works of the Beat Generation and classics  
of cool jazz, Nikolaisaal, September 23, 8:00 p.m.



***The Shape of Freedom:  
International Abstraction after 1945***

Edited by Ortrud Westheider, Michael Philipp,  
and Daniel Zamani

With essays by Jeremy Lewison, Gražina Subelytė,  
and Daniel Zamani

Prestel Verlag, Munich, 2022

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Thank you!



Mark Rothko  
*Untitled (Blue, Yellow, Green on Red)*, 1954  
Oil on canvas  
197.5 × 166.4 cm  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
© Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022  
Digital image: Whitney Museum of American Art/  
Licensed by Scala



Jackson Pollock  
*Composition No. 16*, 1948  
Oil on canvas  
56,5 × 39,5 cm  
Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden  
© Pollock-Krasner Foundation/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022



Judit Reigl  
*Center of Dominance*, 1958  
Oil on Canvas  
191 x 181 cm  
Centre Pompidou, Paris. Musée national d'art moderne/  
Centre de création industrielle. Donation of the artist,  
2011 © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022  
Image: © bpk / CNAC-MNAM / Georges Meguerditchian



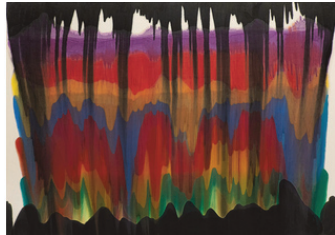
Jackson Pollock  
*Enchanted Forest*, 1947  
Oil and alkyd enamel paint on canvas  
221,3 x 114,6 cm  
Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice  
(Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York)  
© Pollock-Krasner-Foundation/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022  
Image: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York  
(Photo: David Heald)



Ernst Wilhelm Nay  
*Jota*, 1959  
Oil on canvas  
162,8 x 130,2 cm  
Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Genève  
© Ernst Wilhelm Nay Stiftung, Köln/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022  
Image: Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Genève.  
Photographer: Sandra Pointet



Mary Abbott  
*Imrie*, 1952  
Oil and crayon on canvas  
180,3 x 188 cm  
Sammlung Thomas McCormick und Janis Kanter, Chicago  
© Photograph courtesy McCormick Gallery, Chicago



Morris Louis  
*Saf Heh*, 1959  
Magna on canvas  
248 x 352 cm  
ASOM Collection  
© All Rights Reserved. Maryland Institute College of Art/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022



Lee Krasner  
*Bald Eagle*, 1955  
Oil, paper and canvas collage on linen  
195,6 x 130,8 cm  
ASOM Collection  
© Pollock-Krasner Foundation/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022



Janice Biala  
*Untitled (Still Life with Three Glasses)*, 1962  
Oil and collage on canvas  
162,6 x 145,4 cm  
Collection Richard and Karen Duffy, Chicago  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022  
Image: McCormick Gallery, Chicago



Sam Francis  
*My Shell Angel*, 1986  
Acrylic on Canvas  
308,61 x 428,62 cm  
Hasso Plattner Collection  
© Sam Francis Foundation, California/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022  
Image: Lutz Bertram



Simon Hantaï  
*Peinture*, 1957  
Oil and pigment powder on canvas  
88,3 x 80,3 cm  
Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Genève  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022  
Photo: Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Genève.  
Image: Sandra Pointet



Karl Otto Götz  
*Giverny III/2*, 1987  
Mixed materials on canvas  
210 x 175 cm  
Kunstpallast, Düsseldorf – Stiftung Sammlung Kemp  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022  
Photo: Kunstpallast – LVR-ZMB – Stefan Arendt –  
ARTOTHEK





Wols (Alfred Otto Wolfgang Schulze)  
*Composition Champigny*, ca. 1951  
Mixed materials on canvas  
72 x 59 cm  
MKM Museum Küppersmühle für moderne Kunst,  
Duisburg, Sammlung Ströher



Mark Rothko  
*Untitled*, 1958  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
142,6 x 157,8 cm  
National Gallery of Art, Washington,  
Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc.  
© Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022  
Image courtesy of the National Gallery of Art,  
Washington, DC



Helen Frankenthaler  
*Blue Bellows*, 1976  
Acrylic on Canvas  
292,7 x 238,8 cm  
Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, New York  
© 2022 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc./  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022  
Photography credit: Rob McKeever, courtesy Gagosian

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***Surrealism and Magic: Enchanted Modernity***

October 22, 2022 – January 29, 2023

With his *Manifesto of Surrealism* published in October 1924, the French writer André Breton founded a literary and artistic movement that would soon become the leading international avant-garde. At the center of Surrealism lay an interest in the world of dreams, the unconscious, and the irrational. Surrealist artists immersed themselves in the imaginative realm of magic, drawing on occult symbolism in their works and posing as magicians, seers, and alchemists. *Surrealism and Magic: Enchanted Modernity* is the first large-scale exhibition to focus on the Surrealists' interest in magic and myth. It spans an arc from the "metaphysical painting" of Giorgio de Chirico around 1915, to Max Ernst's *Attirement of the Bride* (1940), to the occult imagery of Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo.

The exhibition features around ninety works by more than twenty artists including Victor Brauner, Paul Delvaux, Leonor Fini, Wifredo Lam, René Magritte, André Masson, Roberto Matta, Kurt Seligmann, Yves Tanguy, and Dorothea Tanning. The over forty lenders include the Art Institute of Chicago, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Galleria Nazionale in Rome, the Museo nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, the Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

An exhibition of the Museum Barberini, Potsdam, and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

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***The Sun: Source of Light in Art***

February 25 – June 11, 2023

Claude Monet's 1872 painting *Impression, Sunrise*, which gave Impressionism its name and now marks its 150th year, shows the red disk of the rising sun as the focus of the composition. The painting is the point of departure for the exhibition *The Sun: Source of Light in Art*, which explores the iconography of the sun from antiquity to the present. As a sign or personification of divine power, a protagonist in mythological narratives, an atmospheric element in landscape imagery, and an intensification of color in modern painting, the sun plays a key role in European art.

The exhibition brings together around eighty works – sculptures, paintings, manuscripts, prints, and books – from antiquity to the present, including paintings by Peter Paul Rubens, J. M. W. Turner, Caspar David Friedrich, and Sonja Delaunay.

The over thirty lenders include the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden, the Museo nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen in Munich, the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and the Albertina in Vienna.

An exhibition of the Museum Barberini, Potsdam, and the Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris.



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***Clouds and Light: Impressionism in Holland***

July 8 – October 22, 2023

Landscape painting originated in Holland, and the realism of the seventeenth-century Old Masters long set the standard. With the development of *plein air* painting in France, nineteenth-century Dutch artists found new inspiration. Painters of the Hague School captured nature's changing moods of light in vast, cloudy skies using a wide range of grays. Beginning in the 1880s, Impressionist influences from France sparked an interest in cityscapes and images of modern life, followed by the unleashing of color in the painting of Pointillism. The exhibition *Clouds and Light: Impressionism in Holland* brings together around a hundred works by some forty artists including Johan Barthold Jongkind, Vincent van Gogh, Jacoba van Heemskerck, and Piet Mondrian.

Lenders include the Rijksmuseum and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Kunstmuseum Den Haag, the Dordrechts Museum, the Kröller Müller-Museum in Otterlo, and the Singer Museum in Laren.

An exhibition of the Museum Barberini, Potsdam, in cooperation with the Kunstmuseum Den Haag.

Under the patronage of the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Germany, His Excellency Ronald van Roeden.

***Edvard Munch: Transforming Landscape***

November 18, 2023 – April 1, 2024

This first exhibition of landscapes by Edvard Munch focuses on his approach to nature. On the one hand, he viewed nature as a cyclically self-renewing power; on the other, he saw it as a reflection of his own inner turmoil. Munch developed a pantheistic understanding of nature, which he projected onto the forests and coasts of Norway. The dramatic weather depicted in his paintings is especially striking in light of the current climate crisis. The exhibition brings together around ninety loans from institutions including the Munchmuseet, Oslo, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, the Museum Folkwang, Essen, and the Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal.

An exhibition of the Museum Barberini, Potsdam, the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA, and the Munchmuseet, Oslo.