
Potsdam, June 15, 2017

From Hopper to Rothko: America's Road to Modern Art

How American art became abstract: The Museum Barberini brings American modern art to Potsdam

Following its opening exhibition, the Museum Barberini will present its first international cooperation project with the exhibition *From Hopper to Rothko: America's Road to Modern Art* from June 17 to October 3, 2017. For this, The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., is sending 68 works of early American modern art to Germany for the first time.

American art from the first half of the twentieth century is still relatively unknown in Europe. The three central themes of the exhibition—landscapes, portraits, and cityscapes—present a cross-section of American painting. The show will trace the beginnings of abstract painting, which also developed during this time. After 1945, this culminated in Abstract Expressionism, and New York City became the new center of the art world. Works from The Phillips Collection highlight all of these developments.

The exhibition *From Hopper to Rothko: America's Road to Modern Art* will provide a panorama of subjects and styles ranging from Impressionism to Abstract Expressionism—taking visitors on a journey through landscape art, portrait painting, and cityscapes to Color Field Painting, with works along the way by George Inness (1825–1894), Marsden Hartley (1877–1943), Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), Richard Diebenkorn (1922–1993), and more.

With this joint project, Dr. Ortrud Westheider, Director of the Museum Barberini, continues the Museum Barberini's programmatic approach to showing world-famous works of art in thematic exhibitions. Following her 2009 Hamburg exhibition *Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time*, she now presents the diversity of American modern art in eight thematic galleries. "America's road to modern art is exemplified by works from The Phillips Collection. This partnership is a great honor for the Museum Barberini."

Dr. Dorothy M. Kosinski, Director of The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.: "We are pleased to send major works from our collection to Potsdam in order to present American modern art to Europe. The newly opened Museum Barberini is an excellent place to showcase these objects."

How American art became abstract

The first American landscape painters were motivated by the settlement of the American frontier, surveys of the country, and the preservation of natural wonders in national parks. Influenced by European Impressionism, the heroic and religious content of these early

landscape paintings was succeeded by personal observations of light and atmospheric phenomena in nature. The epic transformation of the United States from an agrarian to an urban society increased the influence of cities. In art, this process was characterized by a move toward figure painting. However, the countryside retained its importance and for many artists it became the point of departure for creating abstract compositions. The manufacturing power and architectural transformation of the cities inspired painters like Charles Sheeler (1883–1965) and Ralston Crawford (1906–1978) to create paintings in the style that came to be known as Precisionism, which reflected the optimistic economic outlook of the times. After the Second World War, abstraction provided artists with the basis for an ethical and philosophical new beginning.

In Abstract Expressionism, colors were given a life of their own, an approach that differed from European Expressionism. Artists created color spaces in which viewers could immerse themselves. Artists saw their paintings as fields that continued beyond the edges. In these fields, each dot was of equal value and each spot served as an entry point into the painting. Painters attempted to create images that were not straightforward and could not be understood or taken in at a single glance. The purpose was to develop each individual viewer's ability to encounter art and make his or her own decisions regarding it.

Duncan Phillips, collector

Through his activity as a collector, Duncan Phillips (1886–1966), an art critic and patron of the arts, and founder of The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., championed and supported America's modern artists, especially between the world wars, and thus helped shape the canon of 20th century American art. The early deaths of his father and brother prompted him to transform the family's small collection of American art into the seedbed for a museum in their honor in the nation's capital dedicated to modern art and its sources. Opening in 1921, The Phillips Collection, thus, predated the founding of the Museum of Modern Art (1929) and the Whitney Museum of American Art (1931). Phillips's view of art as a universal language that transcends national schools and eras endures to this day as an inspiration to others. This commitment to individual artistic positions remains of great importance.

Phillips believed that "the spirit shared by artists from different parts of the world and different periods demonstrates that art is a universal language." He collected 19th-century French paintings, such as those of Honoré Daumier (1808–1879), Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), and the 20th century French master Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), and he also championed American artists who were indebted to their European role models. In the interwar years, conservative circles in the United States were suspicious of work that was abstract, independent, and infused with European avantgarde styles. The bridge between these two was the birth of modern art in

America—which has been an integral part of The Phillips Collection's mission ever since the collection was established.

Like Duncan Phillips, the Museum Barberini's founder, Hasso Plattner, collected French Impressionists along with contemporary American paintings. Our cooperation project between this major historical private collection and the Museum Barberini thus also brings together two like-minded partners.

The exhibition catalog is being published by Prestel Verlag. Its 248 pages with 200 illustrations can be purchased for € 29.90 at the museum shop and for € 39.95 at regular booksellers. The essays are based on an international conference held on November 21, 2016, at the Museum Barberini. Two essays single out two major works from The Phillips Collection, while others examine the many and diverse links between American art and Europe.

The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., in cooperation with the Museum Barberini, Potsdam.

From Hopper to Rothko: America's Road to Modern Art

June 17 to October 3, 2017

Press contact:

Achim Klapp, Marte Kräher
Museum Barberini
Humboldtstr. 5–6, 14467 Potsdam, Germany
T +49 331 236014 305/308
presse@museum-barberini.com
www.museum-barberini.com