



Royal Academy of Arts
**Abstract
Expressionism**

Abstract Expressionism

Main Galleries

24 September 2016 – 2 January 2017

Lead Sponsor



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The Royal Academy of Arts presents the first major exhibition of Abstract Expressionism to be held in the UK in almost six decades. With over 150 paintings, sculptures and photographs from public and private collections across the world, this ambitious exhibition encompasses masterpieces by the most acclaimed American artists associated with the movement – among them, Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Phillip Guston, Franz Kline, Joan Mitchell, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Aaron Siskind, David Smith and Clyfford Still, as well as lesser-known but no less vital artists.

The selection aims to re-evaluate Abstract Expressionism, recognising that though the subject is often perceived to be unified, in reality it was a highly complex, fluid and many-sided phenomenon. Likewise, it revises the notion of Abstract Expressionism as based solely in New York City by addressing such figures on the West Coast as Sam Francis, Mark Tobey and Minor White.

To ensure an exhibition for the 21st century, informed by new thinking, *Abstract Expressionism* re-examines the two main strands into which these artists have often been grouped in the past. Namely, the so-called 'colour-field' painters, such as Rothko and Newman, versus the 'gesture' or 'action painters', epitomised by de Kooning and Pollock. The art of the former has been held to focus on the contemplative or sublime use of colour, whereas the latter supposedly demonstrated spontaneity and improvisation in their work through bold gestural mark-making. Yet these categories are simplistic, belying the deeper concerns that linked many of the artists.

For example, various Abstract Expressionists developed the 'all-over composition' by rejecting the formal concept of an image with a single or central focus. Instead, they thought in terms of energised fields, whether of vibrant colour or linear dynamism. Concerns such as myth-making, the sublime, monochrome and an urge to stress the human presence even in abstraction also connected the artists. Similarly, their creations challenged conventional notions of scale with dimensions that ranged from minute intimacy to epic grandeur – dramatic innovations that the exhibition highlights.

Lending from its renowned collection for the first time, the Clyfford Still Museum in Denver, which holds 95% of the artist's work, has loaned nine major paintings to the exhibition, establishing the artist at the very forefront of Abstract Expressionism. The paintings by Clyfford Still are presented in a dedicated gallery within the exhibition.

Jackson Pollock's monumental *Mural*, 1943 (University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa) and *Blue Poles*, 1952 (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra) are displayed in the same gallery for the first time, a juxtaposition unlikely to ever be repeated. Further highlights include Arshile Gorky's *Water of the Flowery Mill*, 1944 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); Willem de Kooning's *Woman II*, 1952 (The Museum of Modern Art, New York); Franz Kline's *Vawdavitch*, 1955 (Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago); Mark Rothko's *No. 15*, 1957 (Private Collection); Lee Krasner's *The Eye is the First Circle*, 1960 (Courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York); and David Smith's *Hudson River Landscape*, 1951 (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York). Works by artists such as Helen Frankenthaler, Adolph Gottlieb, Hans Hofmann, Lee Krasner and Ad Reinhardt also feature amongst others. In addition to Aaron Siskind and Minor White, the photographers include Harry Callahan, Herbert Matter and Barbara Morgan.

Dr David Anfam, co-curator of *Abstract Expressionism* said: "*Abstract Expressionism* explores this vast phenomenon in depth and across different media, revealing both its diversity and continuities as it constantly pushed towards extremes. It brings together some of the most iconic works from around the world in a display that is unlikely to be repeated in our lifetime."

Organisation

Abstract Expressionism has been organised by the Royal Academy of Arts, London with the collaboration of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. The exhibition is curated by the independent art historian, David Anfam, alongside Edith Devaney, Contemporary Curator at the Royal Academy of Arts.

Dr Anfam is the preeminent authority on Abstract Expressionism, the author of the catalogue raisonné of Mark Rothko's paintings and Senior Consulting Curator at the Clyfford Still Museum, Denver.

Exhibition Tour

Royal Academy of Arts, London

24 September 2016 – 2 January 2017

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

3 February – 4 June 2017

Catalogue

Abstract Expressionism is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue. Authors include David Anfam, author of the now-standard textbook *Abstract Expressionism* (1990); Susan Davidson, Senior Curator, Collections and Exhibitions, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Edith Devaney, Curator of Contemporary Projects, Royal Academy of Arts; Jeremy Lewison, former Director of Collections at Tate; Carter Ratcliff author of *Fate of a Gesture: Jackson Pollock and Postwar American Art* (1996) and Christian Wurst, researcher on *The Catalogue Raisonné of the Drawings of Jasper Johns* (forthcoming).

Sponsor's Statement

BNP Paribas is proud to sponsor the *Abstract Expressionism* exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, a once in a generation opportunity to explore one of the most influential movements in art history.

As the bank for a changing world, BNP Paribas values the important role that the arts play in helping to shape how we perceive and understand the changing world in which we live. Through our continued support of the Royal Academy and arts in the UK, we hope that visitors will derive both a unique perspective and enjoyment from the pioneering group of American painters that effected true innovation at a time of significant global change.

About BNP Paribas

BNP Paribas is a leading bank in Europe with an international reach. It has a presence in 75 countries, with more than 189,000 employees, including more than 146,000 in Europe, 7,500 of who are in the UK. The Group has key positions in its three main activities: Domestic Markets and International Financial Services (whose retail-banking networks and financial services are covered by Retail Banking & Services) and Corporate & Institutional Banking, which serves two client franchises: corporate clients and institutional investors. The Group helps its clients (individuals, community associations, entrepreneurs, SMEs, corporates and institutional clients) to realise their projects through solutions spanning financing, investment, savings and protection insurance. In Europe, the Group has four domestic markets (Belgium, France, Italy and Luxembourg) and BNP Paribas Personal Finance is the leader in consumer lending. BNP Paribas is rolling out its integrated retail-banking model in Mediterranean countries, in Turkey, in Eastern Europe and a large network in the western part of the United States. In its Corporate & Institutional Banking and International Financial Services activities, BNP Paribas also enjoys top positions in Europe, a strong presence in the Americas, as well as a solid and fast-growing business in Asia-Pacific.

Dates and Opening Hours

Open to public: Saturday 24 September 2016 – Monday 2 January 2017
10am – 6pm daily (last admission 5.30pm)
Late night opening: Fridays until 10pm (last admission 9.30pm)

Admission

£19 full price (£17 without Gift Aid donation); concessions available; children under 16 and Friends of the RA go free.

Tickets

Tickets for *Abstract Expressionism* are available daily at the RA or online at www.royalacademy.org.uk.
Group bookings: Groups of 10+ are asked to book in advance. Telephone 020 7300 8027 or email adultgroups@royalacademy.org.uk.

Images

Publicity images for *Abstract Expressionism* can be obtained from Picselect, the Press Association's image service for press use. Please register at www.picselect.com and once registered go to the Royal Academy folder in the Arts section of Picselect.

Social Media

Join the discussion about the exhibition online at:

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About the Royal Academy of Arts

The Royal Academy of Arts was founded by King George III in 1768. It has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects whose purpose is to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. Its public programme promotes the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate.

The RA is undergoing a transformative redevelopment which will be completed in time for its 250th anniversary in 2018. Led by the internationally-acclaimed architect Sir David Chipperfield RA and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the plans will link Burlington House on Piccadilly and Burlington Gardens for the first time, uniting and revitalising the two-acre site. The redevelopment will also reveal the elements that make the RA unique, sharing with the public the historic treasures in its Collection, the work of its Academicians and the RA Schools, alongside its world-class exhibitions programme. For more information on the RA visit www.royalacademy.org.uk/ra250#video

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