



Large  
Print

# **Abstract Expressionism**

Annenberg Courtyard:  
David Smith

1. Introduction and  
Early Work

**Do not remove from gallery**

# Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Jackson Pollock, 'Male and Female'

# **Abstract Expressionism**

Main Galleries:

24 September 2016 – 2 January 2017

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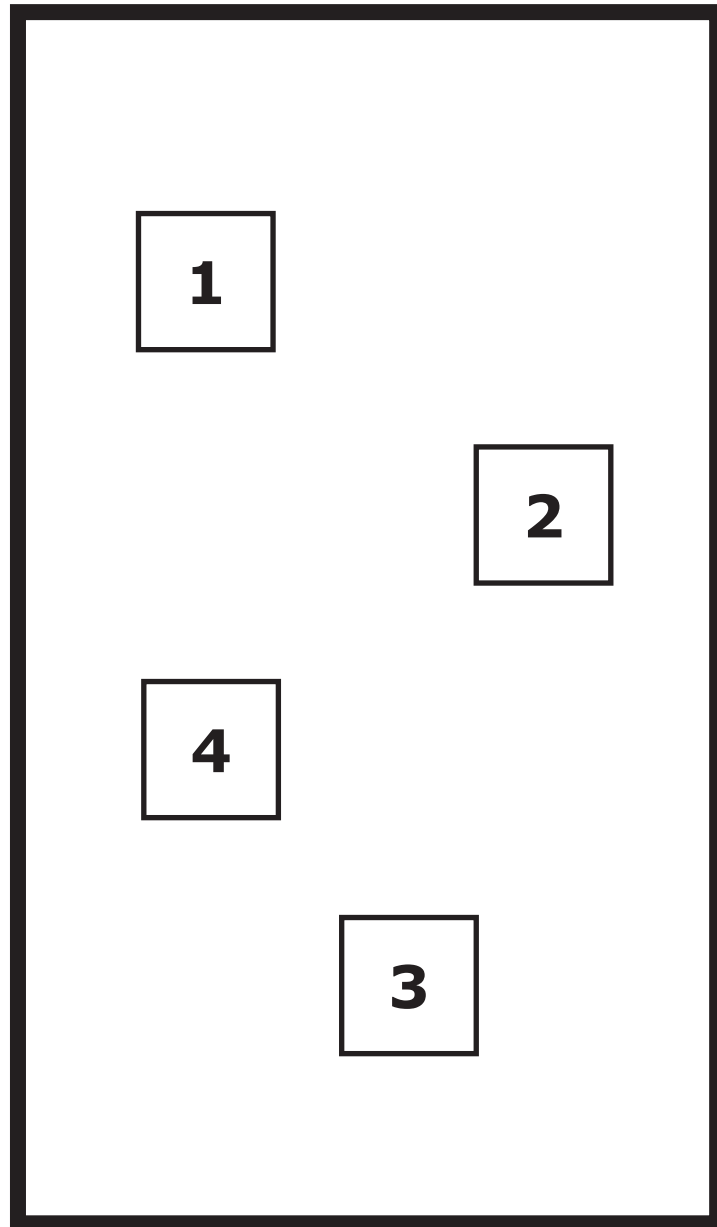
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# Burlington House



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Annenberg  
Courtyard

# Annenberg Courtyard

## **Abstract Expressionism**

### **David Smith**

b. 1906, Decatur, IN – d. 1965, South Shaftsbury, VT

As the key first-generation Abstract Expressionist sculptor, David Smith created an output that spanned a great range of themes and effects.

The works here represent four of the climactic series that Smith produced from 1956 until his untimely death in 1965.

They encompass rising forms that evoke the human presence (albeit in abstract terms) and others in which a more stern character, by turns mechanistic or architectonic, prevails.

The Courtyard display seeks to recreate the spirit of Smith's installations in his fields at Bolton Landing in upstate New York. There, not only did each sculpture enter into a silent dialogue with others, but they also responded to the space and sky around them.

Thus, for example, the dazzling stainless-steel surfaces of the 'Cubi' answer to the brooding, inward darkness of 'Zig III'.

Often, Smith's imagery and ideas parallel concerns seen throughout Abstract Expressionism in general.

As such, further pieces by Smith stand at crucial junctures in the Academy's galleries in order to amplify this sustained interaction between sculptor and painters, two and three dimensions.

## List of works

**1**

### **David Smith**

Zig III

1961

Painted steel

Private collection, courtesy The Estate of David Smith  
and Hauser & Wirth

**2**

### **David Smith**

Sentinel V

1959

Stainless steel

The Estate of David Smith, courtesy Hauser & Wirth

**3**

**David Smith**

Cubi XXVII

1965

Stainless steel

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

By exchange, 1967

**4**

**David Smith**

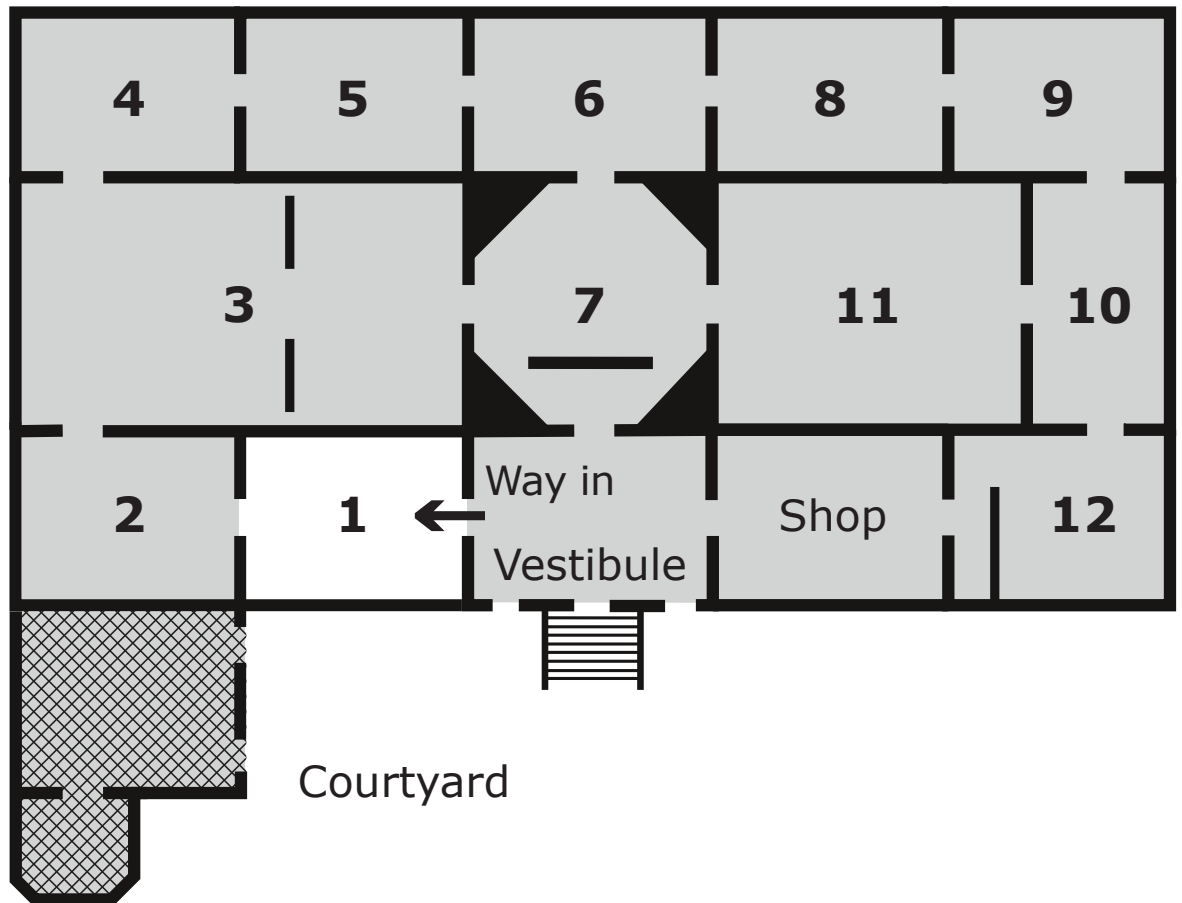
Voltri Bolton X

1962

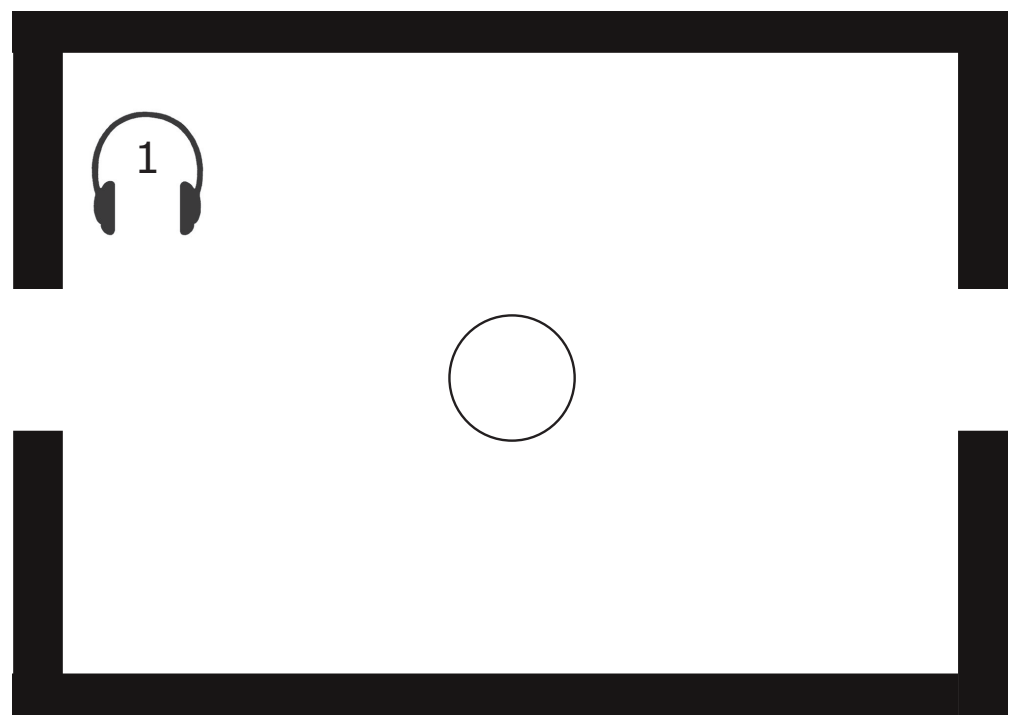
Steel

Jerome L. and Ellen Stern





You are in 1



○ Free-standing sculpture

# 1.

## Introduction and early work

Abstract Expressionism was a phenomenon as diverse and manifold as its makers. The collective label that critic Robert Coates coined in 1946 suggests two polarities: the emotional intensity of German Expressionism and the formal aesthetic of European abstraction.

The artists themselves ranged from native New Yorkers to European émigrés; others hailed from the American heartland and the West. However, despite their ethnic and biographical differences, the fledgling Abstract Expressionists shared a common experience.

Namely, they lived during the modern age of extremes and catastrophe that encompassed – among other terrible historical events – two World Wars, the Great Depression, the Spanish Civil War, atomic devastation and the ensuing Cold War.

By contrast, the United States' growing status as a global power helped foster a concomitant self-confidence in its burgeoning art world.

The early years of Abstract Expressionism reflect the dark times in which it arose.

Whether the shadowy skeletons of Jackson Pollock's 'Untitled Panels A-D', Mark Rothko's enclosing façade in 'Interior' or the Holocaust-influenced protagonists in Philip Guston's 'The Porch', the human presence appears menaced, metamorphic and morbid.

By the 1940s, these tragic concerns modulated to a supposedly more universal language that involved myth-making (witness the religious or ritual tincture of Rothko's 'Gethsemane' and Hans Hofmann's 'Idolatress I'), archetypes (the twin totemic personages of Pollock's 'Male and Female') and primitivist forms (the savage biomorphs in Richard Pousette-Dart's 'Undulation').

In Barnett Newman's 'Galaxy', austere verticals suggest an embryonic cosmos, whereas Willem de Kooning's biomorphism lends a strange sentience to erstwhile abstract motifs.

Another nascent tendency was to allow paint to flow almost with its own volition, as in the collaborative canvas by William Baziotes, Jerome Kamrowski and Pollock.

Lastly, the search for a symbolism heavy with portent and drama gave rise to the illegible scripts and enigmatic cyphers or glyphs seen in Bradley Walker Tomlin's 'Cadence', David Smith's 'The Letter' and Adolph Gottlieb's foreboding pictograph, 'Masquerade'.

**List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

## **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Untitled (Self-portrait)

c.1930–1933

Oil and gesso on canvas, mounted on composition board

Courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York, and The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Inc.

## **Arshile Gorky (1904–1948)**

Portrait of Willem de Kooning

1937

Ink on paper

Donna and Carroll Janis

# **Franz Kline (1910–1962)**

Self-portrait

1945–1947

Oil on board

Allan Stone Collection

Courtesy of Allan Stone Projects, New York

# **Lee Krasner (1908–1984)**

Self-portrait

1931–1933

Oil on canvas

The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Inc.

Courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York

**Gerome Kamrowski  
(1914–2004)**

**Jackson Pollock  
(1912–1956)**

**William Baziotas  
(1912–1963)**

Untitled

1940-1941

Oil and enamel on canvas

Collection Rowland Weinstein

Courtesy Weinstein Gallery, San Francisco

**Willem de Kooning  
(1904–1997)**

Untitled

c. 1939

Oil on paper mounted on canvas

Private collection

# **Bradley Walker Tomlin (1899–1953)**

Cadence in Stillness  
1949

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# **Richard Pousette-Dart (1916–1992)**

Undulation  
1941-1942

Oil on linen

Courtesy of J&J Collection and Pace Gallery, New York  
and London



# **Adolph Gottlieb (1903–1974)**

Masquerade  
1945

Oil and tempera on canvas

High Museum of Art, Atlanta. Purchase with High Museum of Art Enhancement Fund and Twentieth-century Art Acquisition Fund, 2000.201

# **Barnett Newman (1905–1970)**

Galaxy  
1949

Oil on canvas

Collection of Lynn and Allen Turner

# Mark Rothko (1903–1970)

Gethsemane

1944

Oil and charcoal on canvas

Surrealism filtered into Rothko's paintings of the mid-1940s; influenced by artists such as Max Ernst, he created images charged with symbolism and psychological undertones.

Taking inspiration from religion and supposedly "universal" myths, the Jewish Rothko here references the Christian betrayal and agony of Jesus. The scrims of translucent paint establish a technique that Rothko continued, with numerous refinements, throughout his career.

Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel



# **Jackson Pollock**

## **(1912–1956)**

Male and Female

1942-1943

Oil on canvas

Here Pollock reveals the mythic polarities or archetypes that people his early work.

Of the two sentinel-like presences, the curvaceous torso and long eyelashes seem to identify the leftward one as embodying the feminine force – as opposed to the stiffly upright columnar creature with numerals at the right.

The energetic paint splashes seen in the top-left corner anticipate the artist's later signature "drip" technique.

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Gift of Mr and Mrs H. Gates Lloyd, 1974

# **Philip Guston (1913–1980)**

The Porch

1946–1947

Oil on canvas

Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois on behalf of the Krannert Art Museum, Champaign University of Illinois purchase, 1948-10-1

# **Hans Hofmann (1880–1966)**

Idolatress I

1944

Oil and aqueous media on Upson board

University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of Hans Hofmann

# **Clyfford Still (1904–1980)**

PH-726

1936

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# **Mark Rothko (1903–1970)**

Interior

1936

Oil on hardboard

National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986.43.26

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Untitled Panels A–D

1934–1938

Oil on Masonite

Courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York, and The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Inc.

# **Mark Rothko (1903–1970)**

Self-portrait

1936

Oil on canvas

Collection of Christopher Rothko

# **Arshile Gorky (1904–1948)**

Self-portrait  
1937

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Free-standing sculpture

# **David Smith (1906–1965)**

The Letter  
1950

Welded steel

Among the most pictorial of Smith's sculptures, this abacus-like "missive" is essentially meant to be seen from the front, although it plays with the notion of three dimensions.

The geometric format, with abstract pictograms arranged in a grid-like composition, echoes other works in this room, in particular Gottlieb's 'Masquerade'.

Smith's allusion to painting is emphasised by the welded signature in the lower right-hand corner.

Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Museum of Art,  
Utica



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Molly Bretton, Access Manager



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# **Abstract Expressionism**

## *2. Arshile Gorky*

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# Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Arshile Gorky, 'Water of the Flowery Mill'

# Abstract Expressionism

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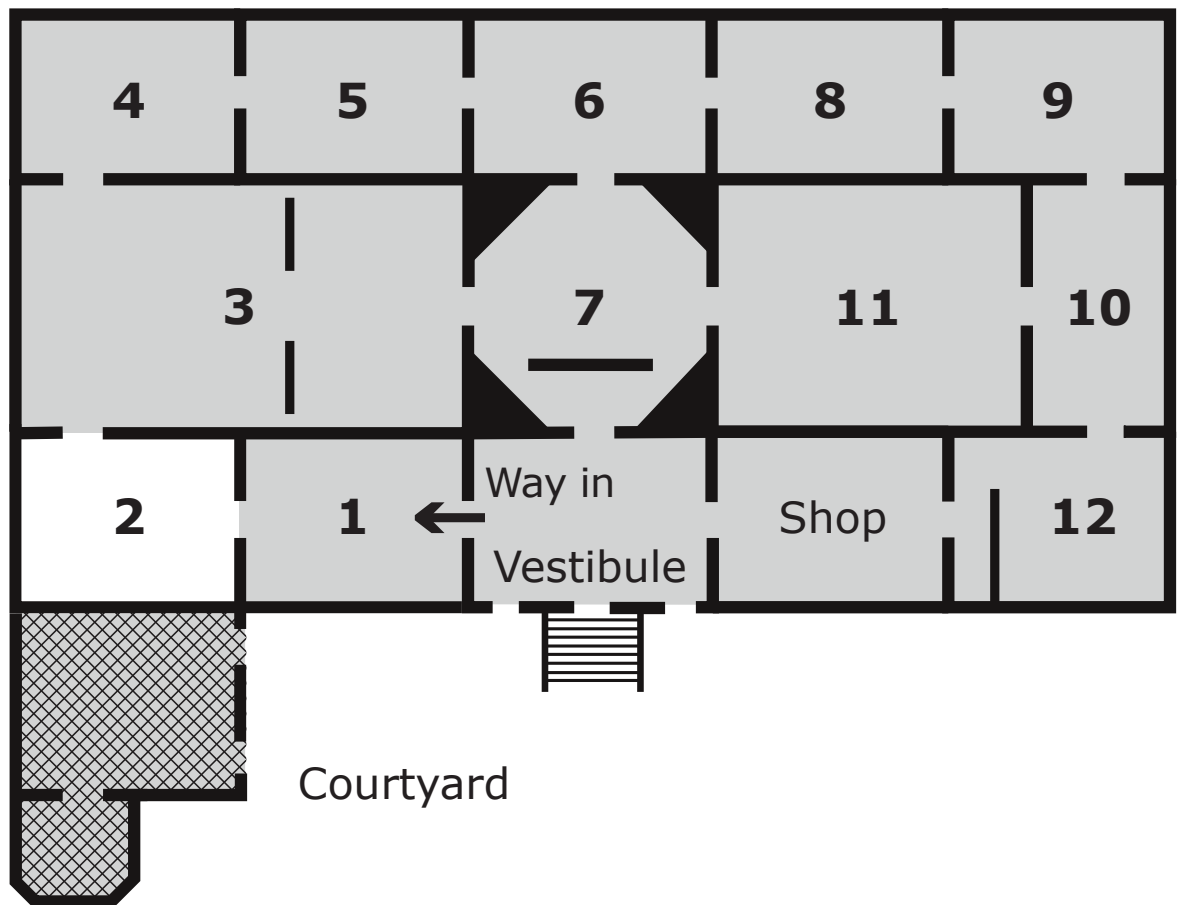
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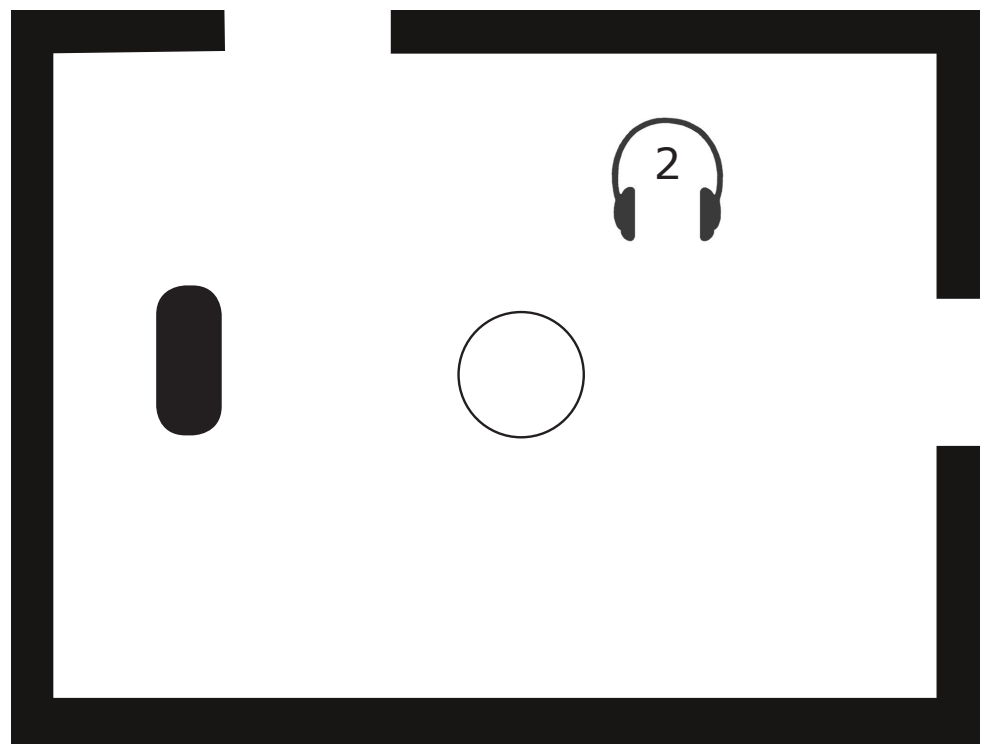
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○ Free-standing sculpture      ● Seating

## 2.

### **Arshile Gorky**

b. 1904, Khorgom, Armenia; d. 1948,  
Sherman, CT

Arshile Gorky's importance for Abstract Expressionism rested on a deep knowledge of art history, which he transmitted to his canny protégé de Kooning – whom he depicted suavely in Gallery 1 – and an ability to fuse such trends as Cubism and Surrealism into a fresh syntax.

This hybrid idiom occurs precociously in 'Untitled' ('Nighttime', 'Enigma' and 'Nostalgia') (the title invokes the proto-Surrealist Giorgio de Chirico) and his 'Still-life on a Table', which echoes Pablo Picasso's post-Cubist style between the wars.

Early on, Gorky also had a remarkable knack for camouflaging forms so that they hover between objectivity and the organic or convulsive.

Subsequently, Gorky's renewed encounter with nature in the summers of 1942-1945 – when he studied in detail the flora and fauna of the Virginia and Connecticut landscapes – sparked memories of his fecund native Armenia.

The resulting works on paper display Gorky's full-fledged genius as a colourist and as a master of line.

By 1944–1945 Gorky reached a zenith with such iconic canvases as 'Water of the Flowery Mill' and 'The Unattainable'.

A fantastical array of motifs – melding vegetal, zoomorphic and figurative overtones – combines with explosive hues recalling Wassily Kandinsky's apocalyptic compositions from just before the First World War. Their metamorphic spaces seem in a state of constant, febrile flux.

But a slew of tragic events – beginning with a fire in his studio in 1946, followed by a near-fatal car crash in early 1948 – led Gorky's art to assume a chill, elegiac tenor, already suggested in the near-grisaille cat's cradle of 'Diary of a Seducer' and the mysterious inner world of 'The Limit'.

'The Orators' is a disguised scene of mourners around the funeral bier of Gorky's father.

Having reached a psychic breaking-point, Gorky hanged himself in 1948. But de Kooning continued Gorky's powerful legacy.

The whirling maelstrom of his 'Collage' – alit with a violent luminosity – is a searing dissection of human anatomy crucified, as it were, by a cruel swathe of steel tacks.



**List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

## **Arshile Gorky (1904–1948)**

Untitled (Nighttime, Enigma and Nostalgia)

c. 1931–1932

Ink on paper

The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum

## **Arshile Gorky (1904–1948)**

Untitled

c. 1943

Graphite and wax crayon on paper

Private collection

Courtesy of Guggenheim Asher Associates

# **Arshile Gorky (1904–1948)**

Untitled (Virginia Landscape)  
1943

Graphite and wax crayon on paper

Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon

# **Arshile Gorky (1904–1948)**

The Unattainable  
1945

Oil on canvas

The Baltimore Museum of Art. Purchase with exchange funds from Blanche Adler Bequest, Frederic W. Cone, William A. Dickey Jr, Nelson and Juanita Greif Gutman Collection, Wilmer Hoffman, Mr and Mrs Albert Lion, Saidie A. May Bequest, Philip B. Perlman Bequest, Leo M. Rogers, Mrs James N. Rosenberg and Paul Vallotton

# **Arshile Gorky (1904–1948)**

The Limit

1947

Oil on paper, mounted on canvas

Private collection

# **Arshile Gorky (1904–1948)**

Diary of a Seducer

1945

Oil on canvas

In contrast to the colour-saturated 'Water of the Flowery Mill' (located on the adjacent wall), the near-grisaille tones and strong line of 'Diary of a Seducer' echo Gorky's graphic work (also seen in this gallery).

The title refers to the angst-laden thought of the Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard.

Although embedded in the Surrealist tradition – the title was suggested by Max Ernst – the painting's compositional balance and the shallow and intricate space reflect Gorky's knowledge and understanding of Cubism.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Gift of Mr and Mrs William A. M. Burden, 1985

## **Arshile Gorky (1904–1948)**

The Orators

1947

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# **Willem de Kooning**

## **(1904–1997)**

Collage

1950

Oil, enamel and steel tacks on paper

Solinger Collection



# **Arshile Gorky**

## **(1904–1948)**

Water of the Flowery Mill

1944

Oil on canvas

A celebrated example of the landscape-inspired works Gorky produced in the last six years of his life, this painting references a mill and bridge on the Housatonic River in Connecticut.

Sinuuous markings rendered with a sign writer's "liner's brush" – to which Gorky's friend de Kooning had introduced him – merge with highly fluid paint handling, anticipating the future gesturalism of other Abstract Expressionists.

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
George A. Hearn Fund, 1956 (56.205.1)

## **Arshile Gorky (1904–1948)**

Still-life on Table  
1936–1937

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Free-standing sculpture

# **David Smith (1906–1965)**

Blackburn, Song of an Irish

Blacksmith

1949–1950

Steel and bronze on marble base

Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg

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Molly Bretton, Access Manager



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# **Abstract Expressionism**

## **3. Jackson Pollock**

**Do not remove from gallery**

# Audio tour



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55 Jackson Pollock, Mural and  
Blue Poles



56 David Smith, Hudson River  
Landscape

# **Abstract Expressionism**

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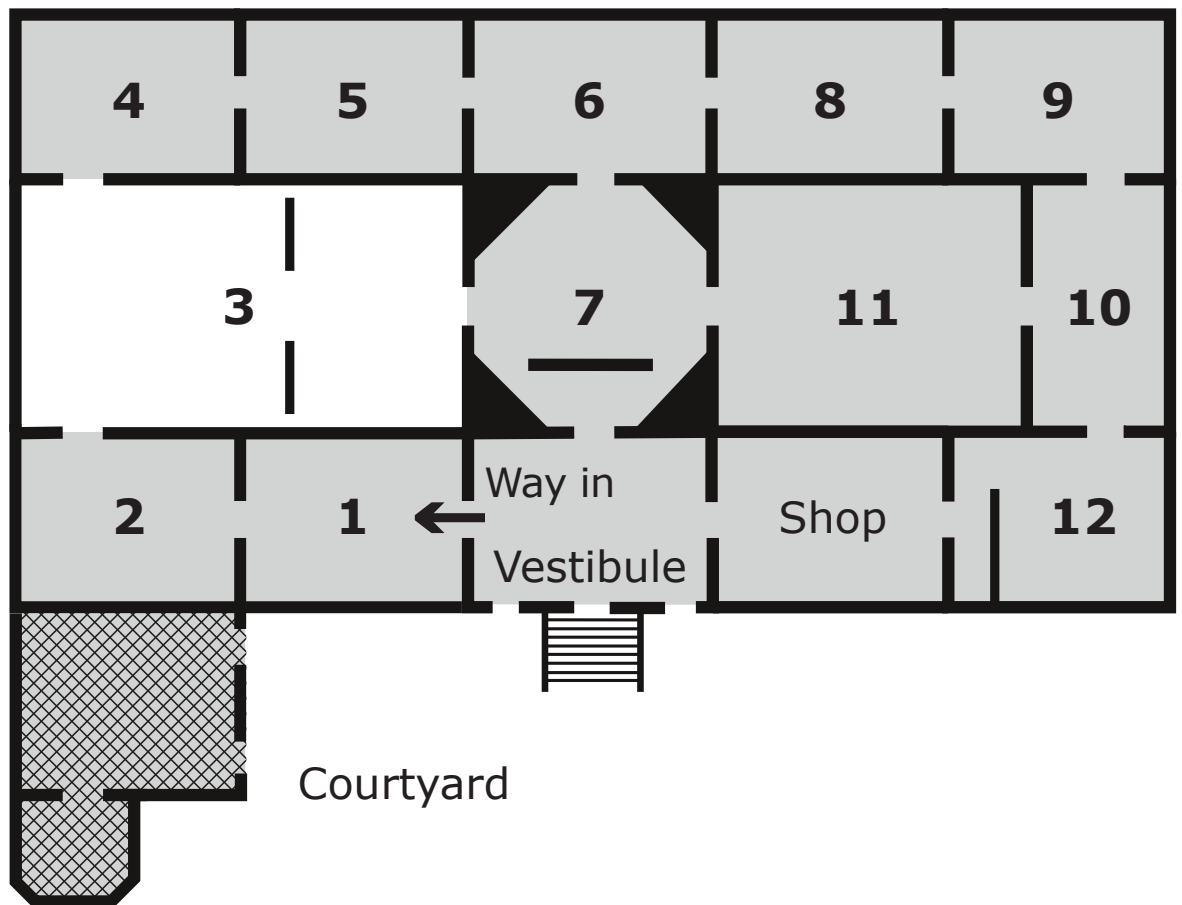
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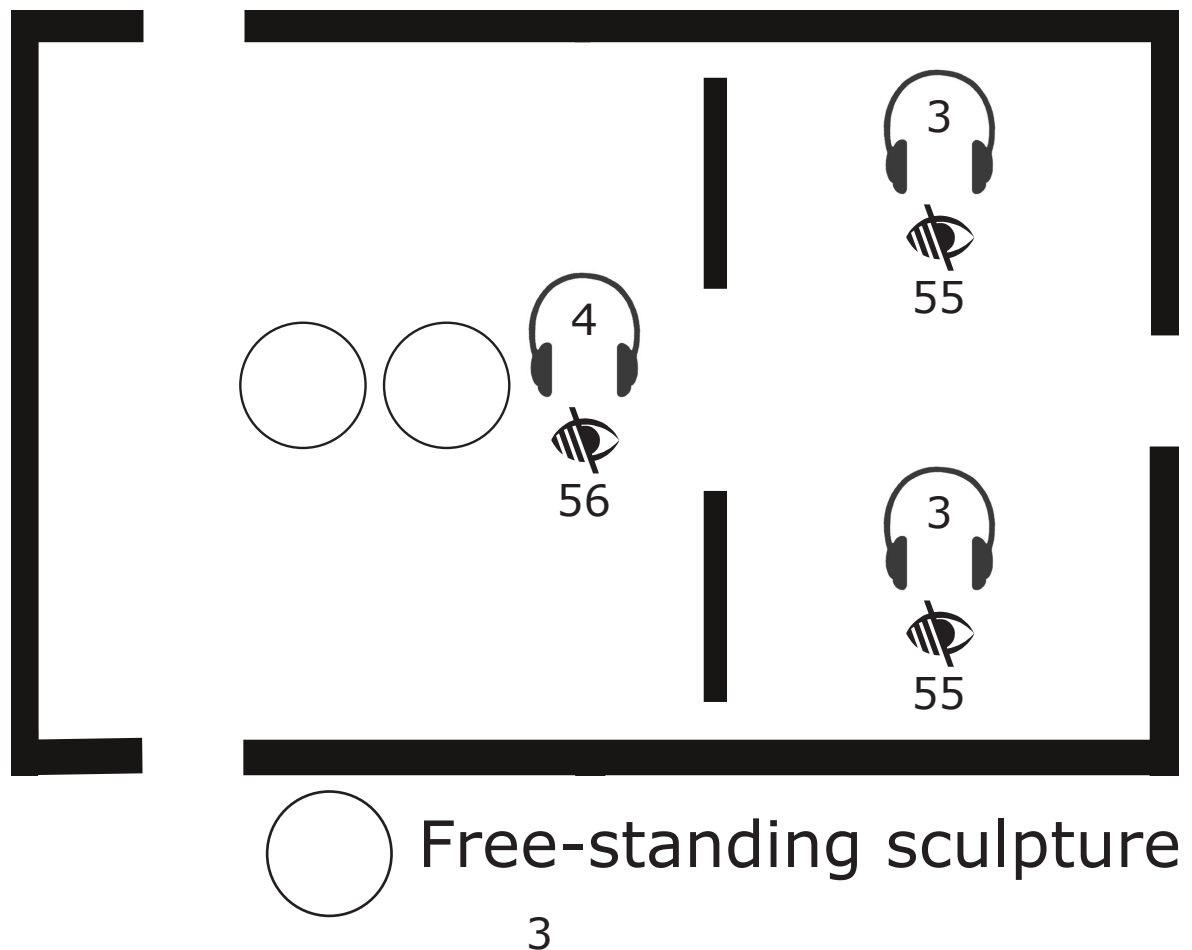
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# 3.

## **Jackson Pollock**

b. 1912, Cody, WY; d. 1956, Springs, NY

Pollock's status as a towering mover of Abstract Expressionism has rarely been in doubt.

Even in 1949, 'Life' magazine's half-ironic headline asked: "Is he the greatest living artist?".

When the collector and patron extraordinaire Peggy Guggenheim commissioned Pollock in the summer of 1943 to do a mural for her Manhattan townhouse, the outcome – the largest canvas of his entire career – proved a titanic milestone in the annals of early Abstract Expressionism.

Almost singlehandedly, 'Mural' (positioned at the far end of this wall) combined an audacious manner of paint handling – wherein the dynamic of the artist's whole body became central – with epic dimensions fit to accommodate such energies.

Building upon the confidence of 'Mural', Pollock rapidly explored the process of painting – visible in the teeming surfaces of 'Portrait of HM' and 'Night Mist' – to reach his signature style of 1947–1950.

With the raw canvas laid on the floor, Pollock poured and dribbled his pigments with surprising control (as he memorably retorted to a critic, "No chaos damn it") to attain labyrinths that incarnate the artist's bodily rhythms.

As such, Pollock's skeins suggest both a kind of mind-writing and a muscular outpouring.

Pollock described these extraordinary tracteries as “energy and motion made visible, memories arrested in space”. Perhaps most remarkable is how Pollock’s highly idiosyncratic style, far from being a strait-jacket, liberated such different effects.

These ran from the open-weave tumble of ‘Summertime’ to the barnstorming crescendo of the immensely dense ‘Blue Poles’ (far end of the opposite wall). The latter is itself a final backward glance to the processional patterns of ‘Mural’.

Similarly, Pollock had an acute command of scale, stretching from the almost microscopic webs of certain filigrees to the impetuous scroll of ‘Horizontal Composition’.

Traumatized by Pollock’s death in the summer of 1946 in a quasi-suicidal car crash near his home and studio in Springs, Long Island, it took his wife Lee Krasner until 1960 to wrestle with his formidable ghost.

The outcome was the bounding rhythms and arcing vectors of 'The Eye Is the First Circle'. As such, this monumental canvas ranks as perhaps the most memorable single tribute to Pollock's seismic achievement.



## List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

First room

### **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Portrait of HM  
1945

Oil on canvas

The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City  
Gift of Peggy Guggenheim

### **Lee Krasner (1908–1984)**

The Eye Is the First Circle  
1960

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Night Mist

1945

Oil on canvas

Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach

Purchase, R. H. Norton Trust, 71.14

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Summertime: Number 9A

1948

Oil, enamel and commercial paint on canvas

Tate. Purchased 1988

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Number 12A: Yellow, Gray, Black  
1948

Enamel and gesso on paper

Thomas L. Kempner, Jr. and Katheryn C. Patterson, New  
York

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Untitled  
1946

Gouache on paper

Thyssen-Bornemisza Collections

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Number 20  
1950

Oil on Masonite

University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson

Gift of Edward Joseph Gallagher Jr

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Number 4  
1949

Oil, enamel and aluminium paint with pebbles on cut canvas, mounted on composition board

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven

Katharine Ordway Collection

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Composition (White, Black, Blue and Red on White)

1948

Casein on paper, mounted on Masonite

New Orleans Museum of Art

Bequest of Victor K. Kiam, 77.300

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Phosphorescence

1947

Oil, enamel and aluminium paint on canvas

Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy,  
Andover

Gift of Peggy Guggenheim, 1950.3

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

## **Horizontal Composition**

c. 1949

Oil and enamel on canvas mounted on composition board

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Gift of Sylvia and Joseph Slifka, New York, to American Friends of the Israel Museum

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

## **Number 7, 1950**

1950

Oil, enamel and aluminium paint on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Gift of Sylvia Slifka in honour of William Rubin, 1993

Free-standing sculpture

## **David Smith (1906–1965)**

Star Cage

1950

Painted and brushed steel

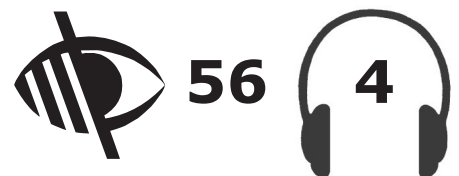
Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. The John Rood Sculpture Collection

## **David Smith (1906–1965)**

Hudson River Landscape

1951

Welded painted steel and stainless steel



This animated composition exemplifies what Smith called his “drawings in space”. Created by welding together disused agricultural tools, Smith’s calligraphic line invokes the energy of the abstract paintings of his contemporaries.

Suggestions of rail tracks, clouds and undulating terrain create an almost hieroglyphic memory of Smith’s train journey through time and space, along the Hudson River.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Purchase

## Second room

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**



55



3

## **Blue Poles**

1952

Oil, enamel and aluminium paint with glass on canvas



The most iconic of Pollock's late-period paintings, 'Blue Poles' represents one of the pinnacles of his achievement. Its position here, opposite 'Mural', effectively "bookends" the climactic decade of Pollock's meteoric career.

Its seeming spontaneity actually belies the careful process of its creation, while tiny shards of glass embedded across the surface amplify its spectacular, crackling forcefulness.

The structure makes reference to the composition diagrams used by Pollock's teacher, Thomas Hart Benton, as well as to the "processional" figuration that Pollock first definitively established in 'Mural'.

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased 1973

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Enchanted Forest

1947

Oil on canvas

Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice

(Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York)

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Number 4

1952

Duco on canvas

Ann and Gilbert Kinney



55



# Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)

Mural

1943

Oil and casein on canvas

Commissioned by Peggy Guggenheim for the hallway of her Manhattan townhouse, this is Pollock's largest work.

The vastness of 'Mural' heralded a new energy and scale in Abstract Expressionism; by no coincidence, both Rothko and Gorky produced their largest canvases the following year.

The painting's abstract style permits the suggestion of many forms – these vestiges of figuration reflect Pollock's creative struggle with Picasso.

(continued over)

Smith's sculpture 'Tanktotem' (located nearby) evokes a prancing bestial presence spun out of 'Mural' into three dimensions.

The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City  
Gift of Peggy Guggenheim

## **David Smith (1906–1965)**

Tanktotem III  
1953

Steel

Audrey and David Mirvish, Toronto

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# **Abstract Expressionism**

## 4. Gesture as Colour

**Do not remove from gallery**

# Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Joan Mitchell, 'Mandres'

# Abstract Expressionism

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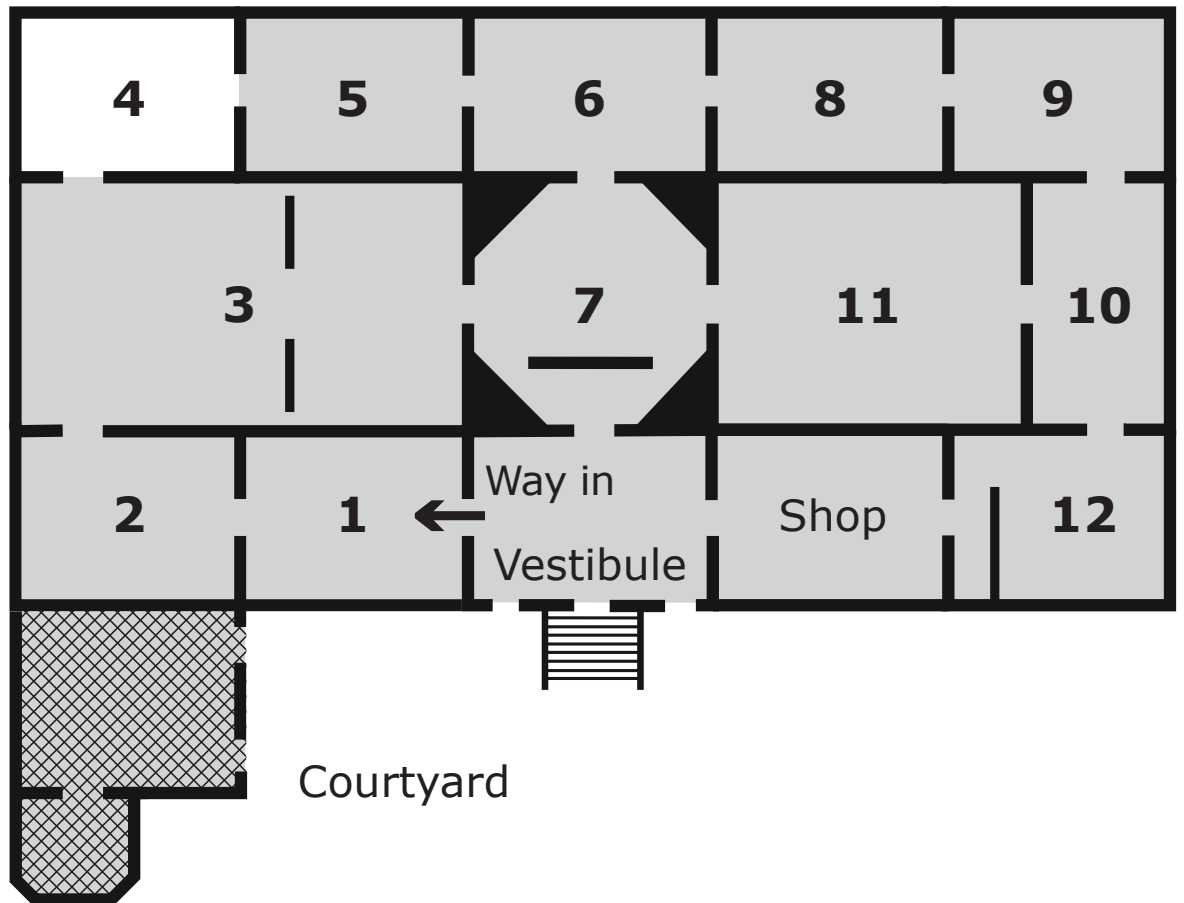
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# 4.

## **Gesture as Colour**

Although Abstract Expressionism is popularly considered as rooted in New York City, its protean reach extended to the West Coast.

Clyfford Still – one of its foremost exponents – spent his early life in Washington State and Alberta, Canada, until he moved to San Francisco in 1946. That year, Still invited Rothko to teach alongside him at the California School of Fine Arts.

From then onwards, Still exerted a crucial impact on Rothko that led the latter to finally pulverise the figurative residues in his art, eventually paving his way to a radical abstraction at the decade's end.

Still's genius as a colourist and his development of a highly idiosyncratic space – by turns visceral and cosmic – had a ripple effect on the art of Sam Francis, a West Coast native.

During the 1950s, Francis's work shifted from almost monochromatic compositions dense with corpuscular motifs to others glowing with rich hues and, finally, an uplifted openness evoking rarefied, empyrean voids.

A spiritualised space occurs in the works of Mark Tobey, who spent most of his creative life in Seattle. Minute and intense, Tobey's so-called "white writing" reflects the artist's vibrant pantheistic view of the universe – script as sentience.

A similar sense of inward immensity marks the almost micrographic fields that Krasner and the Ukrainian-American artist Janet Sobel crafted in the late 1940s. In turn, Sobel's art had a distinct, if still underestimated, influence on the density of Pollock's all-over touch.

Outpacing neat categories that sometimes pigeonhole the Abstract Expressionists into “colour-field” artists versus “gesturalists”, Guston, Joan Mitchell and the young Helen Frankenthaler evolved their own respective visual palimpsests by the second half of the 1950s.

Whether in Guston’s lush yet fragile impasto, Mitchell’s fleet, tactile brushwork or Frankenthaler’s lyrical oil washes that sketch myths and memories as they permeate the canvas, each artist created their own unique fusion of colour and gesture.

**List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

## **Philip Guston (1913–1980)**

Prague

1956

Oil on canvas

Cheryl and Blair Effron



## **Joan Mitchell (1912–1999)**

Mandres

1961–1962

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Courtesy McClain Gallery

# **Helen Frankenthaler**

## **(1928–2011)**

Europa

1957

Oil on canvas

With its refined gestural dynamism, luminosity and lyrical use of colour, this work exemplifies the artist's unique style.

Frankenthaler pioneered the "stain" technique, in which she poured thinned paint directly onto raw, unprimed canvas laid on the studio floor. Working from all sides, she created floating fields of translucent colour.

Frankenthaler herself mentioned "a kind of bull shape" in the composition of this work, perhaps the faintest nod towards the Greek myth of Europa's abduction.

Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, New York

# **Sam Francis (1923–1994)**

Untitled (Black Clouds)  
1952

Oil on canvas

Dallas Museum of Art

Gift of Mr and Mrs Algur H. Meadows and the Meadows  
Foundation

# **Sam Francis (1923–1994)**

Untitled  
1956

Oil on canvas

Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek Donation,  
The New Carlsberg Foundation

# **Sam Francis (1923–1994)**

Summer No. 2  
1957

Oil on canvas

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections

Gift of the Richard and Jeanne Levitt Family in memory  
of Ellis and Nelle Levitt, 1984.25

# **Mark Rothko (1903–1970)**

Untitled (Violet, Black, Orange,  
Yellow on White and Red)  
1949

Oil on canvas

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Gift of Elaine and Werner Dannheisser and the  
Dannheisser Foundation, 1978



# **Clyfford Still (1904–1980)**

PH-69

1946

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# **Mark Tobey (1890–1976)**

Written over the Plains

1950

Mixed media on paper, mounted on Masonite

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Gift of Mr and Mrs Ferdinand C. Smith

# **Mark Tobey (1890–1976)**

Parnassus

1963

Oil on canvas

Tobey's all-over composition is often associated with the dense markings found on ancient tablets – a connection that is reflected in the title, which references the mountain that was home to the Muses in Greek mythology.

In the work, dynamic black lines show the influence of Zen calligraphy on Tobey, whose “white-writing” came to be known as his characteristic style (see ‘Written Over the Plains’, located nearby).

Seattle Art Museum

Gift of the Virginia Wright Fund

## **Janet Sobel (1894–1968)**

**Illusion of Solidity**

c. 1945

Oil on canvas

In 1937, at the age of 43, Sobel started to paint using her children's art materials.

By the early 1940s she was propelled into the art world by Peggy Guggenheim, showing at her gallery, Art of This Century, where Pollock and the art critic Clement Greenberg first saw her work.

Sobel's fusion of the micro- and macrocosmic most likely impressed Pollock and influenced his subsequent adoption of the "all-over" painting style.

Courtesy Gary Snyder Fine Art, New York

## **Lee Krasner (1908–1984)**

Untitled

1948

Oil on canvas

Collection of halley k harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld,  
New York

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# **Abstract Expressionism**

## **5. The Violent Mark**

**Do not remove from gallery**

# Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Franz Kline, 'Untitled 1952'

# **Abstract Expressionism**

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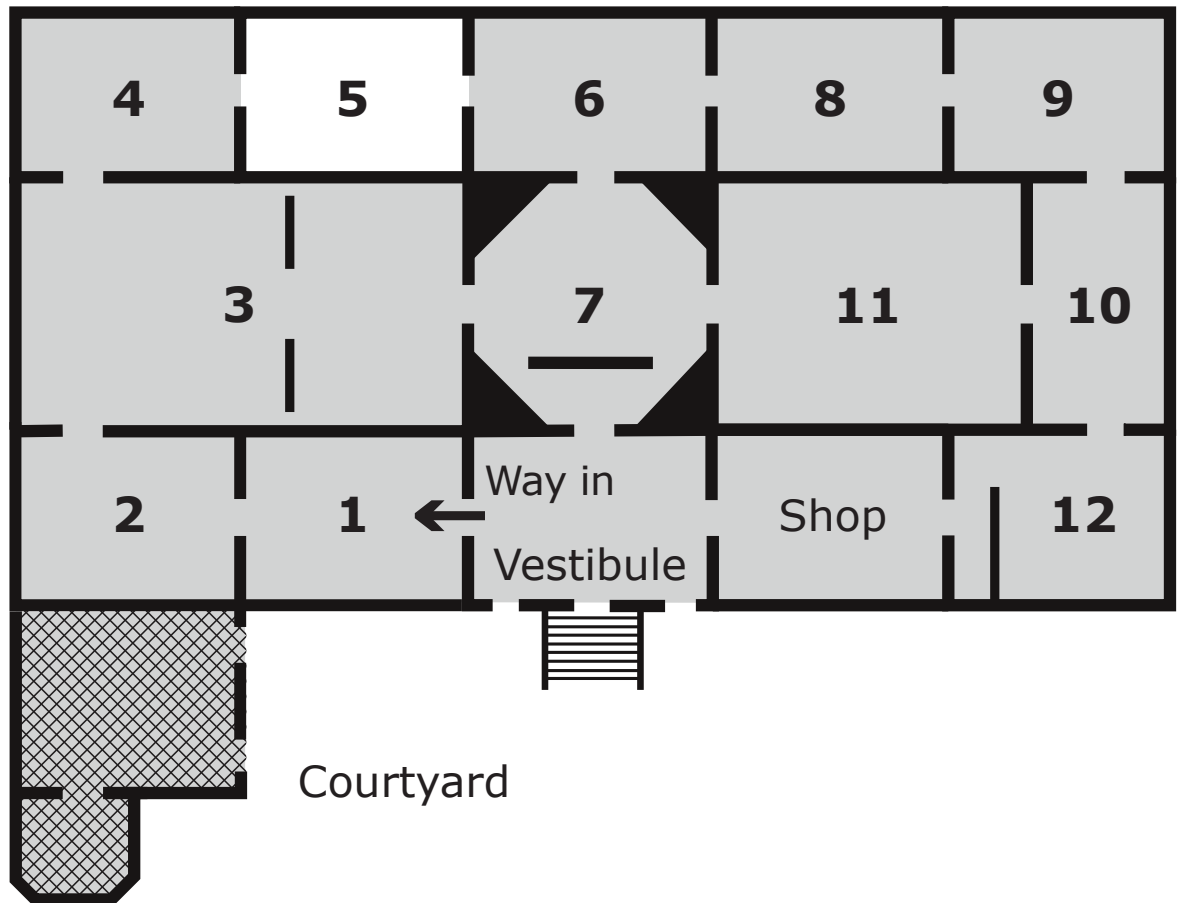
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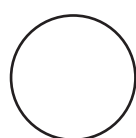
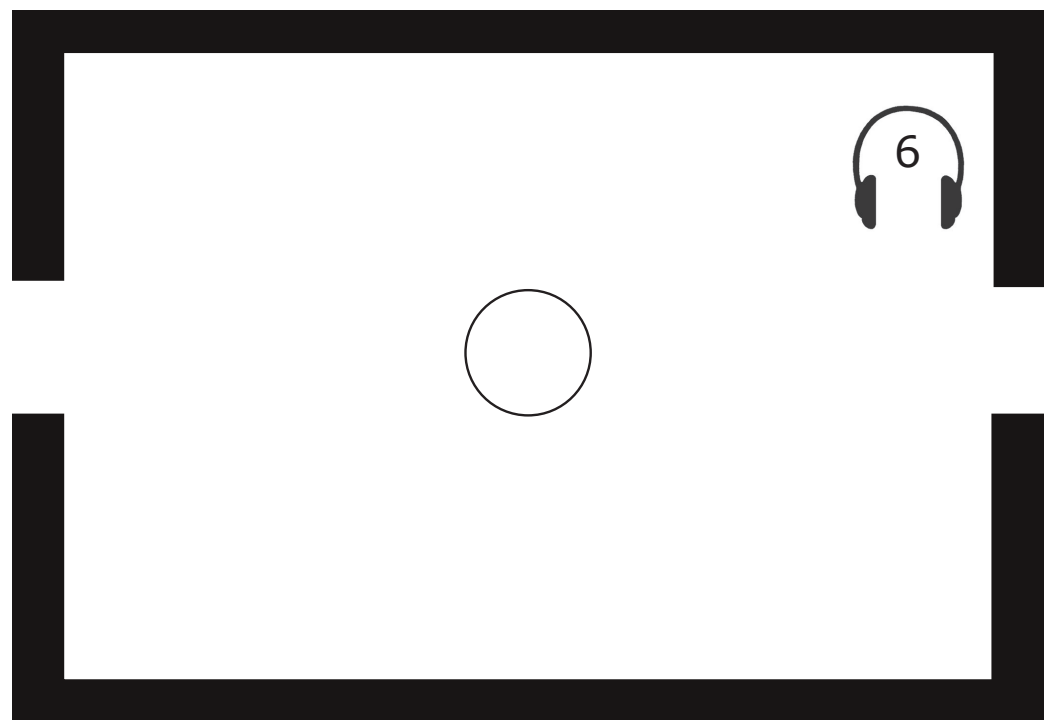
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Free-standing sculpture



# 5.

## The Violent Mark

The gritty, speeding forces of New York City inspired several Abstract Expressionists.

Starting in 1950, Franz Kline's mature technique explored black and white, colliding configurations and violent imbalance to create images at once architectonic and darkly poetic.

As Kline described it, his paintings have ragged "night forms" that express his conviction that "to think of ways of disorganising can be a form of organisation".

Kline's titles point to a macho world of people ('Vawdavitch' was a football star), grimness ('Requiem') and places, especially the industrial coal country of Pennsylvania where he was born, as well as romantic-sounding sites in Europe.

Towards the end of his life, Kline reintroduced almost neon-bright colour that heightened his great wrenching dramas, as in 'Andrus' (Dr Andrus treated the artist's fatal heart condition). In turn, the stark planes and silhouettes of Smith's sculptures frequently slice through their ambience with a comparable surge.

Aptly, too, Abstract Expressionism coincided with the heyday of the Hollywood film noir, a genre replete with tension, conflict and trauma.

The air of violence that permeates Kline's imposing painterly structures recurs in the knife-like tangles and portentous nature of Jack Tworckov's paintings.

As the Polish-born artist remarked, their central blurs are "an action brought near by a telescope but out of earshot ... In a thicket the actors might be lovers, or a murderer and his victim."

Likewise, Robert Motherwell's sombre palette and oppressive motifs reflect the artist's lifelong preoccupation with the tragedy of the Spanish Civil War.

In the hands of Conrad Marca-Relli – who alternated between the United States and Italy – the violent mark-making evident in Kline and Tworlov's work assumes a savage physical life of its own.

Cutting segments of canvas with a razor blade, Marca-Relli pinned the pieces to the support and then elaborated and blackened their surfaces.

Seeking what he called "the architecture of the figure", Marca-Relli's scorched battlegrounds raise collage (an erstwhile intimate medium) to a heroic pitch.

**List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

## **Franz Kline (1910–1962)**

Spagna

1961

Oil on canvas

Private collection

## **Franz Kline (1910–1962)**

Vawdavitch

1955

Oil on canvas

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

Claire B. Zeisler, 1976.39

# **Franz Kline (1910–1962)**

Andrus

1961

Oil on canvas

The Collection of Jon Shirley

# **Franz Kline (1910–1962)**

Requiem

1958

Oil on canvas

Collection of Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo

Gift of Seymour H. Knox Jr, 1959

# **Franz Kline (1910–1962)**

Untitled

1952

Enamel on canvas



Although Franz Kline's bold monochromatic brush strokes of the 1950s appear spontaneous, his technique was in fact among the most considered of all the Abstract Expressionists.

Often painting from drawings, Kline worked at night under artificial lighting, using thinned commercial paints and a house-painter's brush.

Immediately after it was created, 'Untitled' was exhibited at the Whitney Museum Annual of 1952–1953, and it has remained one of his most celebrated works.

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
The Muriel Kallis Steinberg Newman Collection, gift of  
Muriel Kallis Newman, 2006, 2006.32.29

# **Franz Kline (1910–1962)**

Zinc Door

1961

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Courtesy Hauser & Wirth

# **Robert Motherwell (1915–1991)**

Wall Painting No. III

1953

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Courtesy Hauser & Wirth

# **Conrad Marca-Relli**

## **(1913–2000)**

**East Wall (LL-10-59)**

**1959**

Collage and mixed media on canvas

Conrad Marca-Relli developed a technique of abstract collage in the early 1950s in which he attached biomorphically shaped painted and dyed canvas pieces to the surfaces of his pictures.

He cut these shapes out quickly in an attempt to capture his intuitive creative impulses and pinned them to a supporting canvas where they became elements of the painting, alongside colours applied by brushwork and splattering.

Private collection, Parma

Courtesy Archivio Marca-Relli



# **Conrad Marca-Relli (1913–2000)**

Ornations L-R-4-57  
1957

Oil and canvas collage on canvas

Mnuchin Gallery, New York

# **Jack Tworlov (1900– 1982)**

Transverse  
1957–1958

Oil on canvas

Collection Ambassador and Mrs Donald Blinken, New York

Free-standing sculpture

# **David Smith (1906–1965)**

Volton XVIII

1963

Painted steel

The Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza  
Art Collection, New York

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# **Abstract Expressionism**

6. Willem de Kooning

**Do not remove from gallery**

# Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



57 Willem de Kooning, 'Pink Angels'

# Abstract Expressionism

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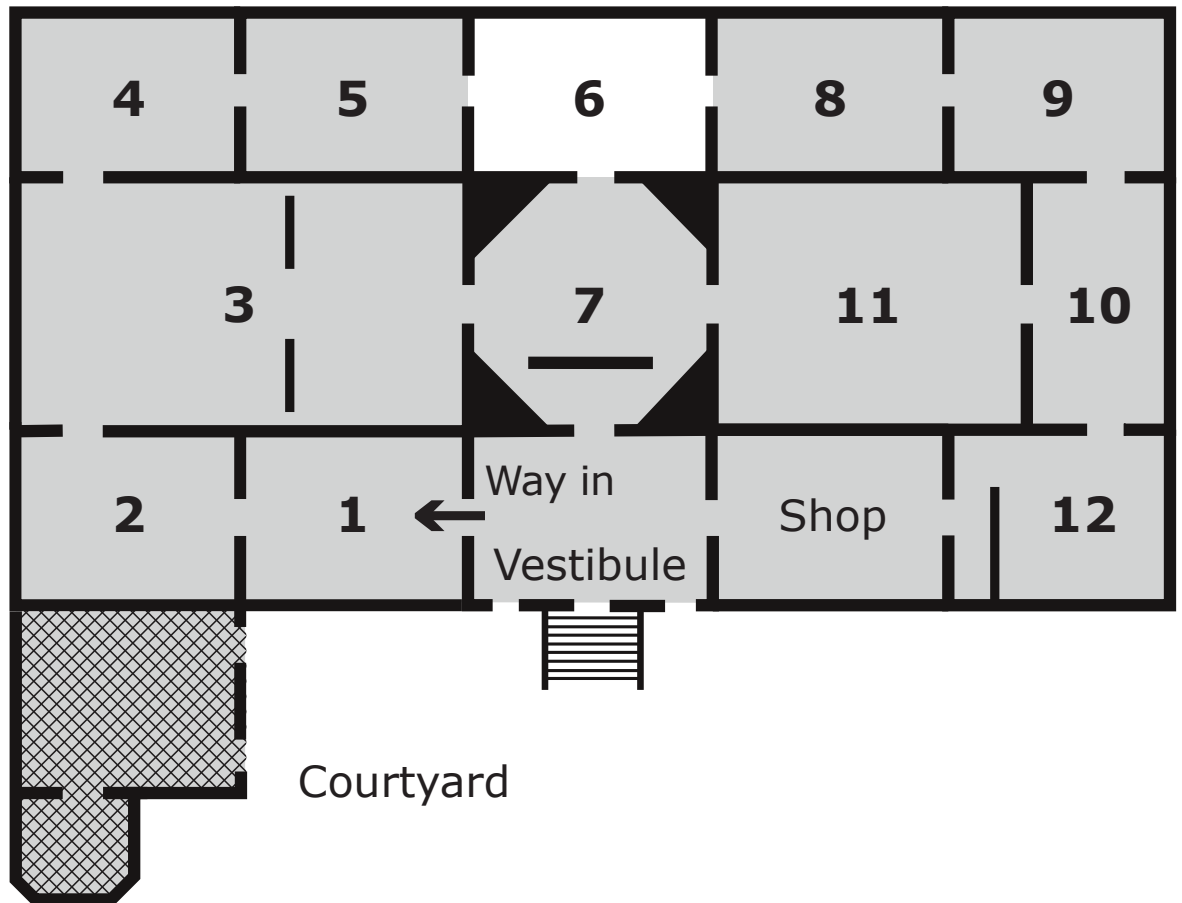
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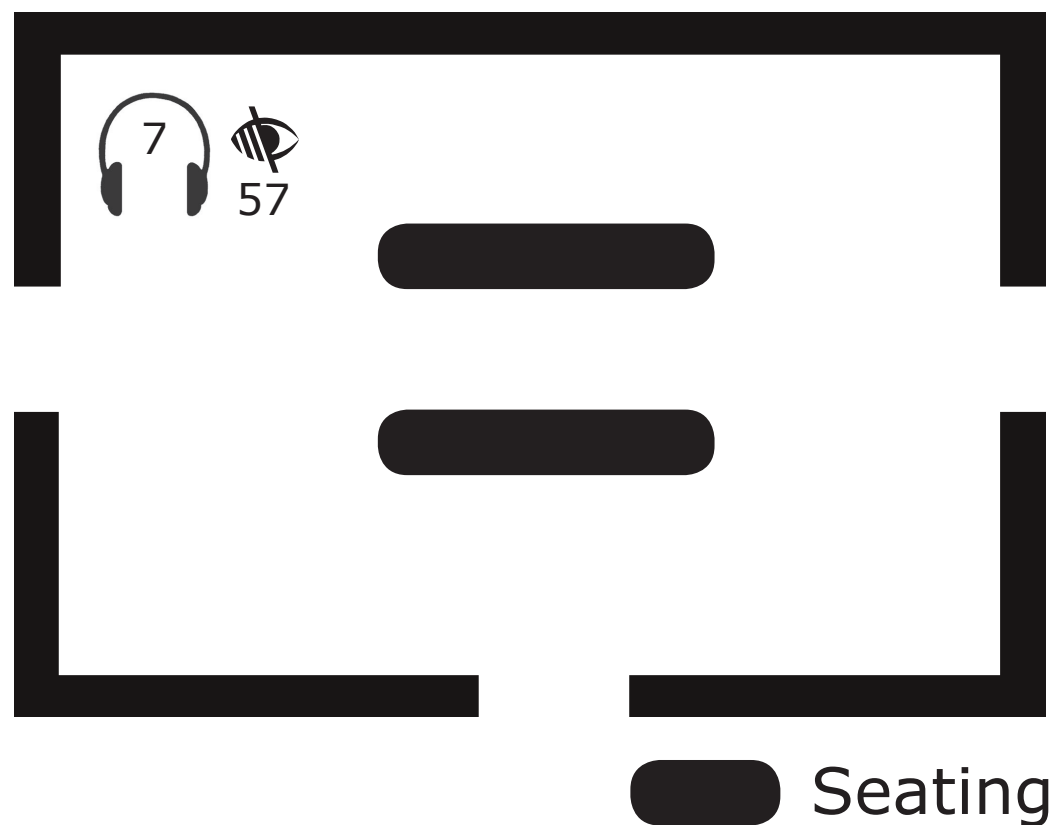
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# 6.

## **Willem de Kooning**

b. 1904, Rotterdam, Netherlands; d. 1997, East Hampton, NY

De Kooning's formidable technical repertoire included the command of the gesture as a trace of violent emotion, as evident in the previous gallery. But it encompassed much more.

De Kooning alternated between abstraction and the figure to an extent matched only by Guston. Trained at the Rotterdam Academy of Fine Arts, de Kooning could unleash some of the Abstract Expressionists' most unruly pictorial fireworks.

The early landmark, 'Pink Angels', announced an obsession with female eroticism. Rapidly, de Kooning also probed another dimension – in short, the lacerating shards that comprise the haunted nocturne 'Dark Pond'.



In the same years, 'Abstraction' reveals the religious symbolism – running from undercurrents of lust and damnation to salvation – encoded in much of de Kooning's half-recognisable iconography.

Here, he knowingly updated meditations on the human condition as venerable as those of such Netherlandish Old Masters and fellow countrymen as Hieronymus Bosch and Peter Bruegel the Elder.

In 1951 de Kooning returned decisively to the theme of woman.

The artist said that the Women "had to do with the female painted through the ages, all those idols" and "I see the horror in them now, but I didn't mean it. I wanted them to be funny ... so I made them satiric and monstrous, like sibyls."

By the time of 'Woman as Landscape', the former threatening "bitch goddesses" begin to dissolve into nature's flux.

In the 1960s de Kooning's women became both more grotesque and approachable, suggesting the artist was finally coming to terms with his demons.

To the feverish realms of female sexuality, de Kooning opposed the chaotic medley of the modern urban metropolis – witness the garish, tumultuous 'Composition'.

Subsequently this hurly-burly segued to what de Kooning called feelings "of going to the city or coming from it". In 'Villa Borghese' and 'Untitled' swathes of creamy pink, green and sky-blue tints exude a mood of release as the bliss of the great outdoors lulled this most existential-minded of the Abstract Expressionists.

## List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

# Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)

Zot

1949

Oil on paper, mounted on wood

The modest size of 'Zot' (meaning "fool" in Dutch) belies its furiously compressed drama, in which traces of the figure and other details hurtle into one another. This abstraction clearly opposes 'Dark Pond' (hung nearby) with a deathly pallor.

Works in this series vary in scale but all were created by arranging pieces of cut paper and then rendering the resulting shapes in paint. A tiny orange-red trace, like a bloody smear, at upper right of centre adds to the visceral mood.

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,  
from the Collection of Thomas B. Hess. Purchase,  
Rogers, Louis V. Bell and Harris Brisbane Dick Funds and  
Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, and gift of the heirs of Thomas  
B. Hess, 1984, 1984.611

# **Willem de Kooning**

## **(1904–1997)**

Abstraction

1949–1950

Oil and oil resin on cardboard

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid



# **Willem de Kooning**

## **(1904–1997)**

Pink Angels

c. 1945

Oil and charcoal on canvas

De Kooning once said, "Flesh was the reason oil paint was invented." Here, whirling charcoal lines score the seated female figure's fleshy contours, encapsulating the artist's lifelong oscillation between figuration and abstraction.

The semi-recognisable pink wraith may well allude to the profile of the cruel goddess Diana in Titian's 'Diana and Actaeon' (1556–1559).

Above the figure's knee a sketched form directly quotes the head of a tormented woman from Picasso's 'Guernica', which de Kooning saw at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1943.

Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Los Angeles

# **Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)**

**Woman**

**1949–1950**

Oil on canvas

Weatherspoon Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Lena Kernodle McDuffie Memorial, 1954

# **Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)**

**Woman II**

**1952**

Oil on canvas

Between 1950 and 1953 de Kooning completed the series of six 'Woman' paintings – ferocious portrayals of femininity that led him to be accused of misogyny when they were first exhibited at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York in 1953.

As with other works in the series, 'Woman II' was the result of an arduous process involving many stages.

Pinholes in the canvas are evidence that working drawings were fixed to the support, while charcoal markings reveal de Kooning's many alterations to the composition.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Gift of Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller, 1955

## **Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)**

**Woman as Landscape  
1955**

Oil on canvas

Collection of Barney A. Ebsworth

# **Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)**

Woman as Landscape  
1965–1966

Oil on paper, mounted on canvas

Private collection

# **Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)**

Untitled (Woman in Forest)  
c. 1963–1964

Oil on paper, mounted on Masonite

Private collection



# **Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)**

Composition

1955

Oil, enamel and charcoal on canvas

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

# **Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)**

Dark Pond

1948

Enamel on composition board

Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Los Angeles

# **Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)**

Villa Borghese

1960

Oil on canvas

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

# **Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)**

Untitled

1961

Oil on canvas

Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham

Gift of Joachim Jean and Julian J. Aberbach, New York

# **Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)**

Untitled

1948

Oil on Masonite

Private collection

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# **Abstract Expressionism**

7. (Wohl Central Hall)  
Mark Rothko

**Do not remove from gallery**

# Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



58 Mark Rothko, 'Yellow Band'

# **Abstract Expressionism**

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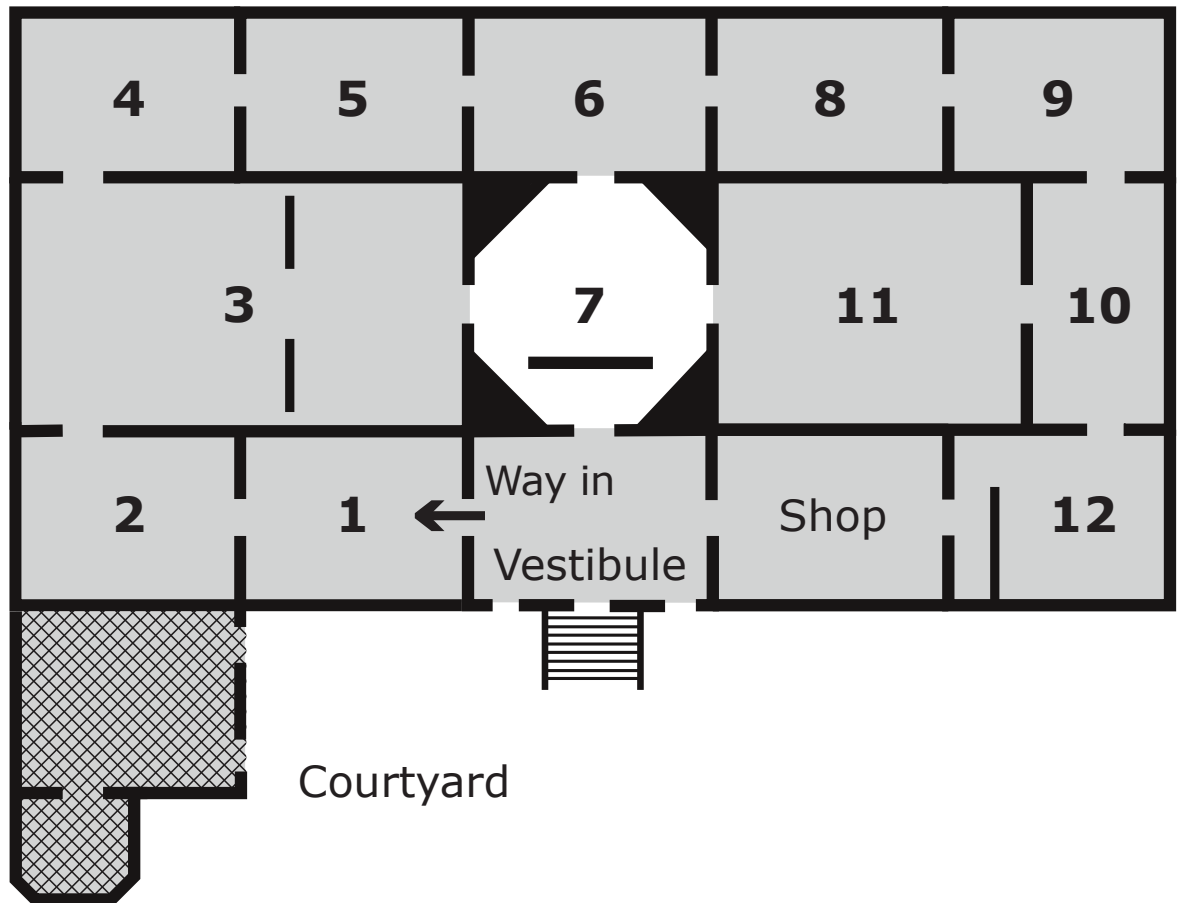
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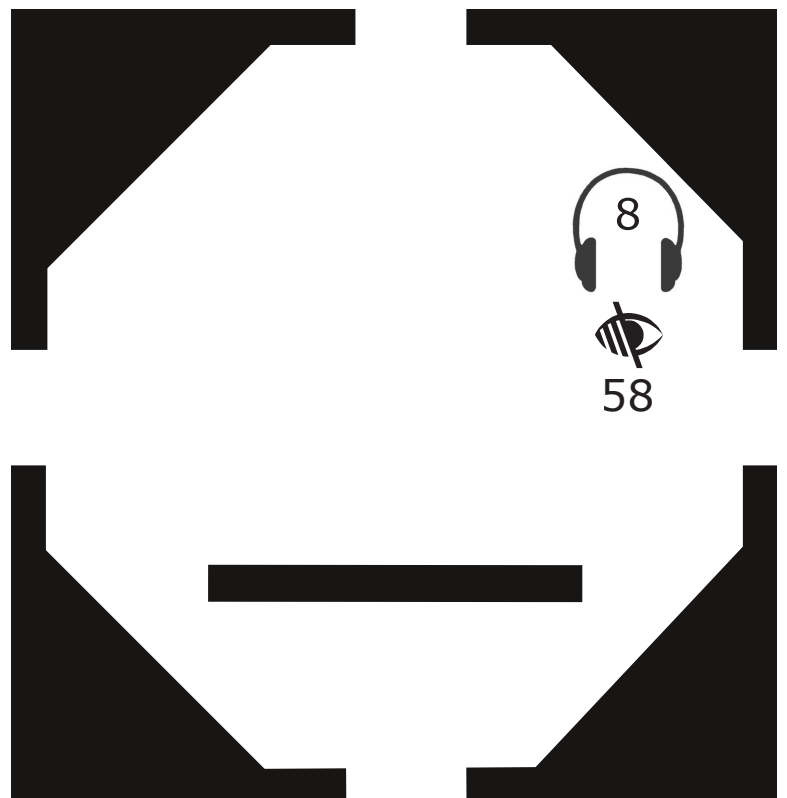
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# 7.

## Mark Rothko

b. 1903, Dvinsk, Russia; d. 1970, New York City, NY

Sited at the heart of these twelve galleries, Rothko's iconic paintings of the 1950s and '60s epitomise his perennial quest to formulate abstract embodiments of powerful human feelings: as he once memorably put it, "tragedy, ecstasy, doom".

Instantly recognisable, the tiers of hovering rectangles that Rothko established from 1950 onwards and never abandoned until just before his death two decades later have elicited myriad interpretations.

Among them the notion that they offer surrogates for the upright human presence; that they evoke sublime abstract equivalents to landscape; and that they are fundamentally mood pieces.

The compositions at once invite and elude such readings. Appropriately, therefore, Rothko called his paintings “façades”.

The word “façade” not only confirms the frontal address that the works make to the spectator, it also captures their enigmatic hypnotism, since façades by definition at once reveal and conceal.

Adding to this impression of immediacy and reticence, the halos that sometimes enclose the rectangular chromatic fields lend them a numinous aura.

Yet these edgings also intimate things unseen beneath the rectangles’ ethereal surfaces.

The result is an uncanny mix of quiescence and drama.

The relatively close hang of the seven paintings in this gallery upholds Rothko’s wish that his art should, in a sense, “defeat” the walls with its plenitude. Similarly, it also enhances the almost claustrophobic intimacy that the artist wished to cast upon the viewer.

Of equal importance is Rothko's ability to employ what he termed "measures" – subtle gradations of proportion, balance, translucency and opacity – in order to differentiate and enrich his ostensibly simple format.

Although Rothko created bright and more penumbral canvases at different stages throughout his maturity – note, for example, the startling blackness in 'No. 4 (Untitled)' – from 1957 onwards darkness tended to predominate.

Accordingly the paintings here pass silently from an earlier concern with light to a subsequent involvement with shadow. Always they aspire to what Rothko felt was the poignancy of music.

**List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

## **Mark Rothko (1903–1970)**

Untitled

1954

Oil on canvas

Collection of Christopher Rothko



## **Mark Rothko (1903–1970)**

Yellow Band

1956

Oil on canvas

Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska –  
Lincoln

Sheldon Art Association, Thomas C. Woods Memorial,  
N-130.1961

# **Mark Rothko (1903–1970)**

No. 64 (Untitled)

1960

Oil on canvas

Rothko dedicated the last two decades of his life to creating “colour field” paintings such as this one, saying “If a thing is worth doing once, it is worth doing over and over again – exploring it, probing it, demanding by this repetition that the public look at it.”

Rothko’s technique was central to the effects he created; by thinning his paints with turpentine, he was able to stain the canvas rather than pasting paint onto the surface.

His layering of different pigments in varying thicknesses adds a complexity to his apparently straightforward compositions, and by removing any narrative he enables a more direct emotional reaction to the image.

Private collection

## **Mark Rothko (1903–1970)**

No. 15 (Dark Greens on Blue with Green Band)

1957

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# **Mark Rothko (1903–1970)**

Untitled

1960

Mixed media on canvas

Lent by the Toledo Museum of Art. Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1970.55

# **Mark Rothko (1903–1970)**

No. 1 (White and Red)

1962

Oil on canvas

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Gift from the Women's Committee Fund, 1962

# **Mark Rothko (1903–1970)**

**No. 4 (Untitled)**  
**1953**

Oil on canvas

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 85.43.2



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# **Abstract Expressionism**

8. Barnett Newman &  
Ad Reinhardt:  
Paths To The Absolute

**Do not remove from gallery**

# Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Ad Reinhardt, 'Abstract Painting,  
No. 23', 1963

# Abstract Expressionism

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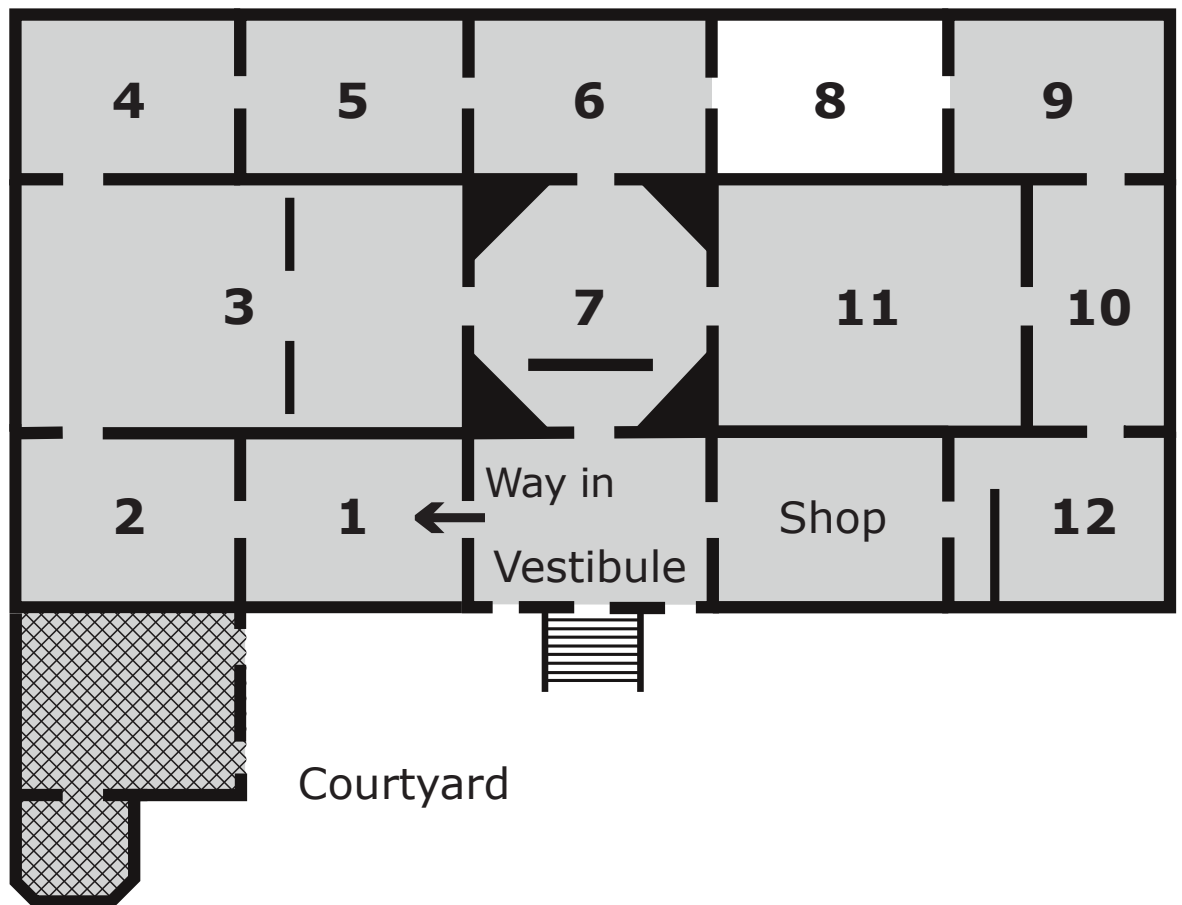
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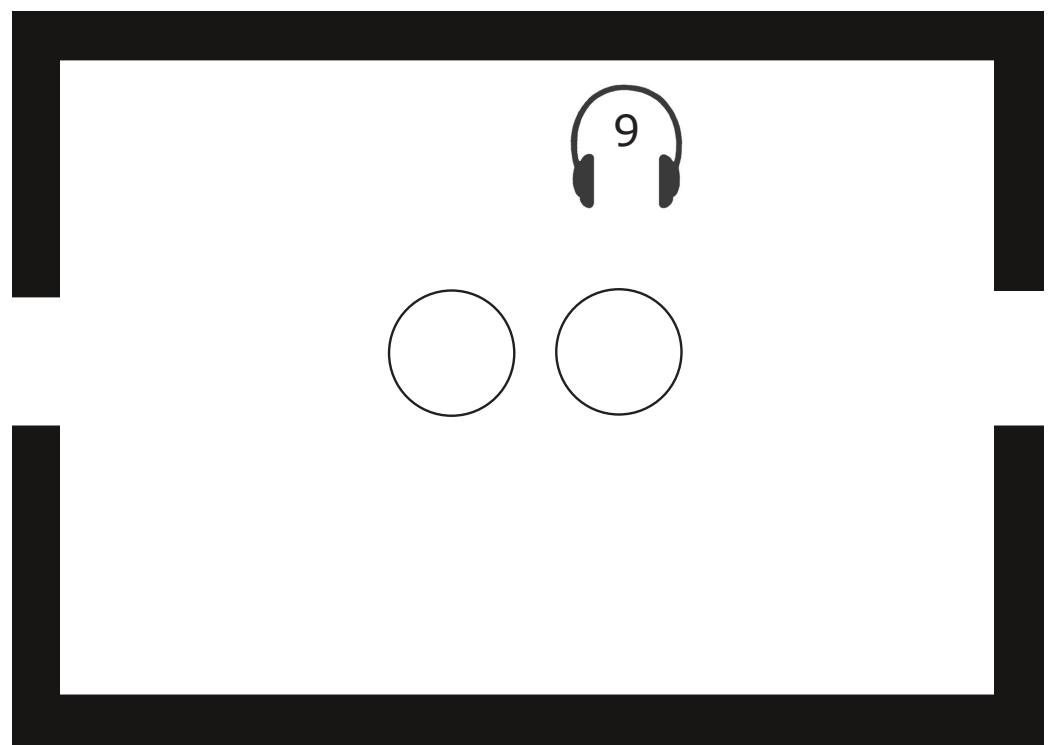
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○ Free-standing sculpture  
3

# 8.

## **Barnett Newman & Ad Reinhardt: Paths To The Absolute**

b. 1905, New York City, NY; d. 1970,  
New York City, NY

b. 1913, Buffalo, NY; d. 1967,  
New York City, NY

Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt were profoundly different temperaments.

The former was a Jew, born to Russian-Polish immigrants in Manhattan, whose secular faith deeply imbued his vision of abstraction. The latter hailed from Germanic ancestry and ceaselessly insisted that art be purged of everything extraneous to it.

Newman was an eloquent essayist, writing on topics as diverse as anarchism, New York City and “primitive” art. Reinhardt’s political sympathies lay on the left and he penned numerous cartoons satirising the art world and expounding his purist aesthetic.

Notwithstanding these radical differences, both artists pushed colour to its limits so that any decorative and sensuous associations segued to absolutes.

As seen in ‘Galaxy’ in Gallery 1, Newman had proposed in the late 1940s his two main pictorial motifs. Firstly, the verticals – sometimes dubbed “zips” – that act to establish focal zones; secondly, the continuums of intense hue that they structure.

In ‘Adam and Eve’ these stalwart uprights, combined with the earthy browns and red and the suggestive titles, convey an organic and primal aura, as though the pair herald some act of creation.

By contrast, in 'Ulysses', 'Profile of Light' and 'Midnight Blue' Newman wielded the other end of his spectrum – that is, a blueness that in the earliest painting summons feelings of unbounded oceanic immensity.

The later 'Profile of Light' projects a transcendental sublimity – as though radiance were an entity in itself – whereas 'Midnight Blue' may refer to the awesome Queen of the Night in Mozart's opera 'The Magic Flute'.

Taking the rectangle instead as his basic pictorial building block, Reinhardt made it a vehicle to condense chroma to its utmost.

From the reds and blues that he orchestrated during the 1950s, Reinhardt subsequently gravitated to a blackness that intimated a provocative nothingness and finality.

Cast into three-dimensional terms, Newman's august sculpture and Smith's minimalist 'Forging VI' add further layers to the inexhaustible possibilities of the vertical allied to Spartan austerity.



**List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

## **Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967)**

Untitled (White)

1945

Oil on canvas

Ann and Gilbert Kinney

## **Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967)**

Abstract Painting

1950

Oil on canvas

Estate of Ad Reinhardt. Courtesy David Zwirner,  
New York/London

# **Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967)**

Abstract Painting  
1956

Oil on canvas

Private collection



# **Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967)**

Abstract Painting, No. 23  
1963

Oil on canvas

From 1953 until his death in 1967, Ad Reinhardt painted only “black” paintings, and in his last five years focused solely on 60 × 60 inch square canvases.

He called these “ultimate paintings”, and felt that in them he had succeeded in purifying art.

Despite their monochromatic appearance, these works are composed of grids painted in deep shades of red, blue and green; the viewer's gaze gradually adjusts to the canvas, encouraging a prolonged, hypnotic engagement that tests the limits of vision.

By extracting much of the oil from the paint Reinhardt crafted velvet-like surfaces, which he brushed on with infinite care.

Private collection, US

Courtesy Meredith Palmer Gallery, Ltd, New York

## **Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967)**

Red Painting  
1952

Oil on canvas

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond

Gift of Sydney and Frances Lewis, 85.434

# **Barnett Newman (1905–1970)**

Eve

1950

Oil on canvas

Tate. Purchased 1980

# **Barnett Newman (1905–1970)**

Adam

1951–1952

Oil on canvas

Tate. Purchased 1968

# **Barnett Newman (1905–1970)**

Midnight Blue  
1970

Oil and acrylic on canvas

Museum Ludwig, Cologne

# **Barnett Newman (1905–1970)**

Ulysses  
1952

Oil on canvas

The Menil Collection, Houston

Formerly in the collection of Christophe de Menil, 1991–43

# Barnett Newman (1905–1970)

## Profile of Light 1967

Acrylic on canvas

For Newman, the subject of a painting could never be merely aesthetic: “Life is physical but it is also metaphysical – only those who understand the meta can understand the physical.”

Although ‘Profile of Light’ is strictly symmetrical in its composition, its minor irregularity of blue paint bleeding into the central white strip on the right side, magnified by the scale of the painting, prompts the viewer to question this perfect entity.

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid

# **Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967)**

**Black and White**  
1950

Oil on canvas

Estate of Ad Reinhardt. Courtesy David Zwirner,  
New York/London

Free-standing sculpture

# **107**

## **David Smith (1906–1965)**

**Forging VI**  
1955

Varnished steel

Private collection

Courtesy The Estate of David Smith and Hauser & Wirth

# **Barnett Newman (1905–1970)**

Here I (To Marcia)

1950

Bronze

Primarily a painter, Newman also produced drawings, prints and sculptures.

'Here I' was his first sculpture; originally made in plaster in 1950, it was cast in bronze in 1962, and is a three-dimensional manifestation of the vertical stripes or "zips" in Newman's paintings.

The juxtaposition of the flat, jagged-edged upright with its smooth, narrow counterpart creates a dynamic interchange both between the forms and with the space around them.

Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Donation from Annalee Newman, 1988



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# **Abstract Expressionism**

## 9. Darkness Visible

**Do not remove from gallery**

# Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Robert Motherwell, 'Elegy to the Spanish Republic'



Louise Nevelson, 'Sky Cathedral - Moon Garden + One', 1957-1960

# Abstract Expressionism

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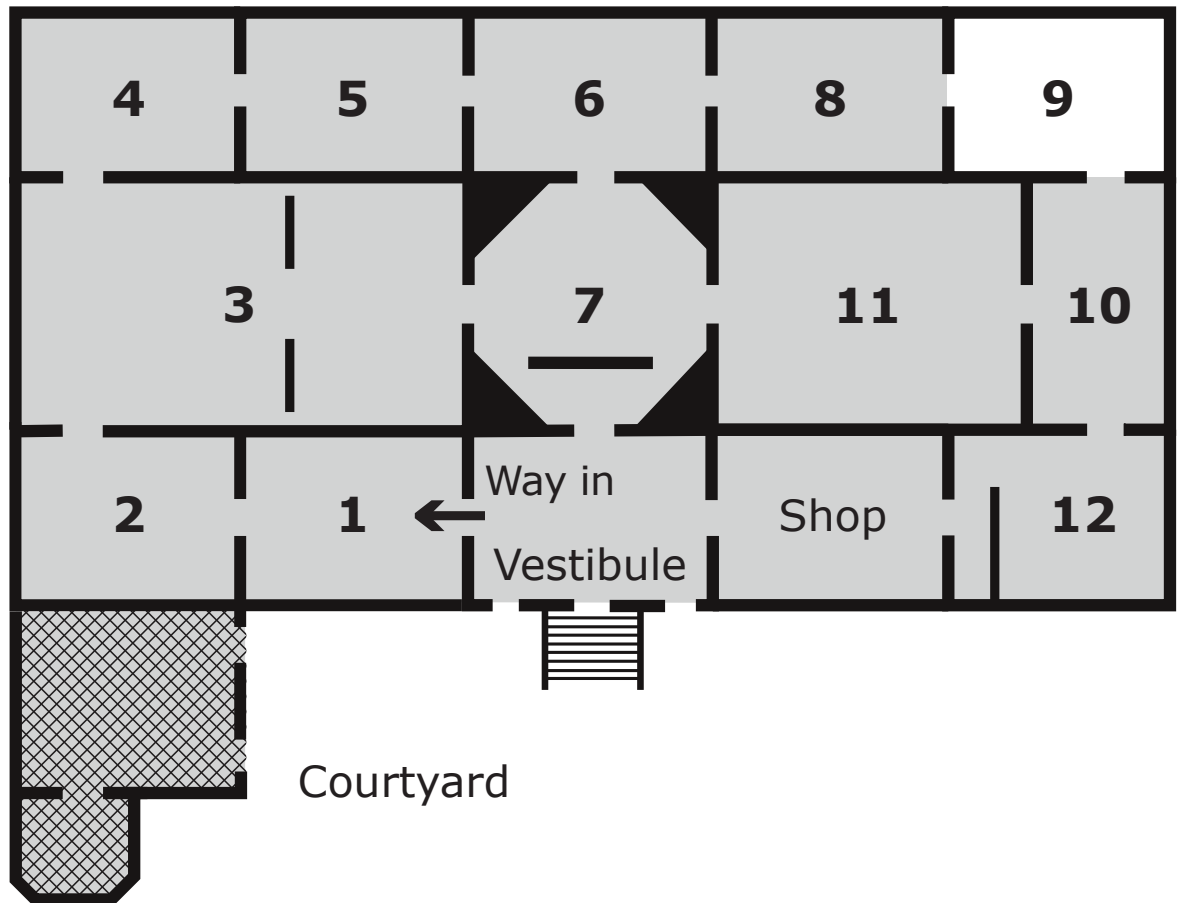
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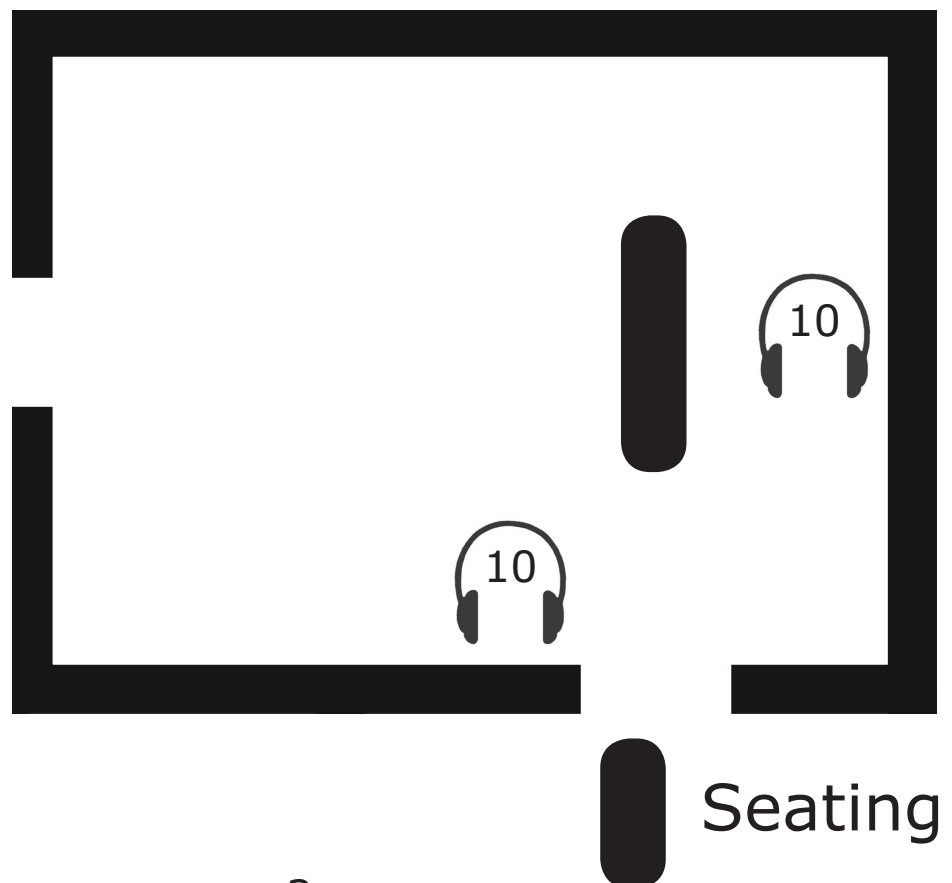
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# 9.

## Darkness Visible

Because darkness is inherently provocative, reductive and mysterious, it exerted a logical and multifarious appeal to the Abstract Expressionists.

During the later 1940s Krasner's 'Little Image' paintings cloaked their minuscule scripts in a subdued matrix.

From another perspective, the African-American Abstract Expressionist Norman Lewis associated blackness with racial issues. The obscure *mêlée* of 'Metropolitan Crowd' recalls the contemporary writings of Ralph Ellison, for whom ethnic blackness was inseparable from invisibility to the eyes of white people.

By comparison, for Motherwell blackness related to an Iberian bleak sense of existence, encapsulated in the catastrophe of the Spanish Civil War, an event he deemed "a tragedy which should not be forgot".

Motherwell's more than 200 'Elegies to the Spanish Republic' are contemplative; the version in this gallery in particular was inspired by Pollock's 'Mural', doubling as a memorial to that artist.

By contrast, 'In Plato's Cave No. 1' takes the rectangular window motif from his mainly sunny 'Open' compositions and plunges it into a realm of metaphysical imponderability.

Alternatively, Milton Resnick seems to capture an air of almost enchanted, shimmering night-time.

The eclipsed solar disc of Gottlieb's tellingly titled 'Penumbra' and the commotion below it proves that black could be exhilarating and electric.

Louise Nevelson also lauded darkness. In Nevelson's assemblages everyday bric-a-brac amasses into enigmatic reliefs, rich and embedded with mythical/elemental overtones.

Uniting Guston's work of the 1960s and Rothko's final canvases is an overwhelming mood of melancholia.

Guston's murky idiom appears to overlay recognisable memories with a grey cloudiness, as though their deeper content had to be screened from the gaze.

In the veritable lunar landscapes of Rothko's 'Black on Gray' compositions the acrylic medium lends a crisp formality to the "darkness made visible" standing above the chill grey vistas below.

Tworckov's gravely meditative 'Idling II' makes a tacit yet eloquent complement to his friend Rothko's stern visual endgame, the latter works sealed by their distancing white borders.



## **List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

### **Norman Lewis (1909–1979)**

Metropolitan Crowd  
1946

Oil on canvas

Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington. Louisa du Pont  
Copeland Memorial Fund and partial gift of Ouida B.  
Lewis in memory of Harvey W. Singleton, 1994

### **Lee Krasner (1908–1984)**

Untitled  
1948

Oil on panel

Caryn and Craig Effron

# **Robert Motherwell**

## **(1915–1991)**

In Plato's Cave No. 1  
1972

Acrylic on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

The Nancy Lee and Perry Bass Fund, 1999.1.1

# **Milton Resnick (1917–**

## **2004)**

Octave  
1961

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York

# **Jack Tworkov (1900–1982)**

Idling II  
1970

Oil on canvas

Courtesy Estate of Jack Tworkov, and Alexander Gray Associates, New York

# **Mark Rothko (1903–1970)**

Untitled (Black on Gray)  
1969/1970

Acrylic on canvas

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York  
Gift, The Mark Rothko Foundation Inc., 1986

# **Robert Motherwell**

## **(1915–1991)**

Elegy to the Spanish Republic

No. 126

1965–1975

Acrylic on canvas

The atrocities of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) inspired Motherwell's series dedicated to the Spanish Republic, painted over 40 years.

Rather than focusing on particular events, the black and white oval and vertical forms represent meditations on life and death.

This particular work was commissioned by Iowa Museum of Art as a "response" to Pollock's 'Mural' of 1943 (Gallery 3) and was conceived to hang opposite it – a position that determined the painting's ambitious scale.

The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City.  
Purchased with the aid of funds from the National  
Endowment for the Arts with matching funds and partial  
gift of Robert Motherwell, 1973.289

## **Philip Guston (1913– 1980)**

Duo

1961

Oil on canvas

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

## **Louise Nevelson (1899–1988)**



Sky Cathedral – Moon Garden +  
One

1957–1960

Painted wood

Constructed mainly from salvaged pieces of turned and shaped wood, Nevelson's rectangular sculpture is designed to be viewed from the front, like a painting.

Prior to construction Nevelson painted each element in the same matt black, erasing any sense of the objects' previous use, and unifying the component parts.

The composition, which owes much to Surrealism, creates different rhythms of flatness and recession through its grid of shallow enclosures.

Private collection

Courtesy Pace Gallery

# **Adolph Gottlieb (1903–1974)**

Penumbra

1959

Oil on linen

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Bequest of Caroline Wiess Law, 2004.19

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# **Abstract Expressionism**

10. Works on Paper  
and Photography

**Do not remove from gallery**

# Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Introduction to 10

# **Abstract Expressionism**

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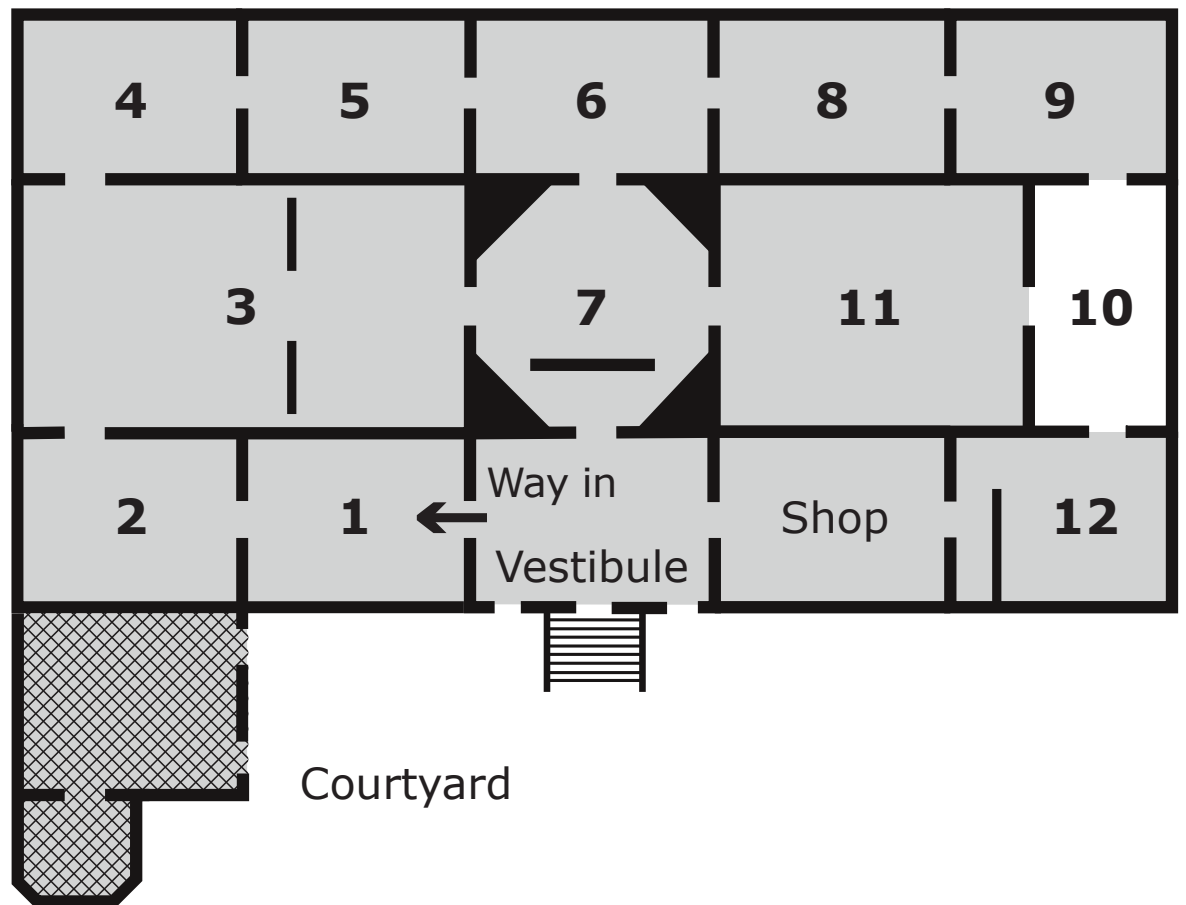
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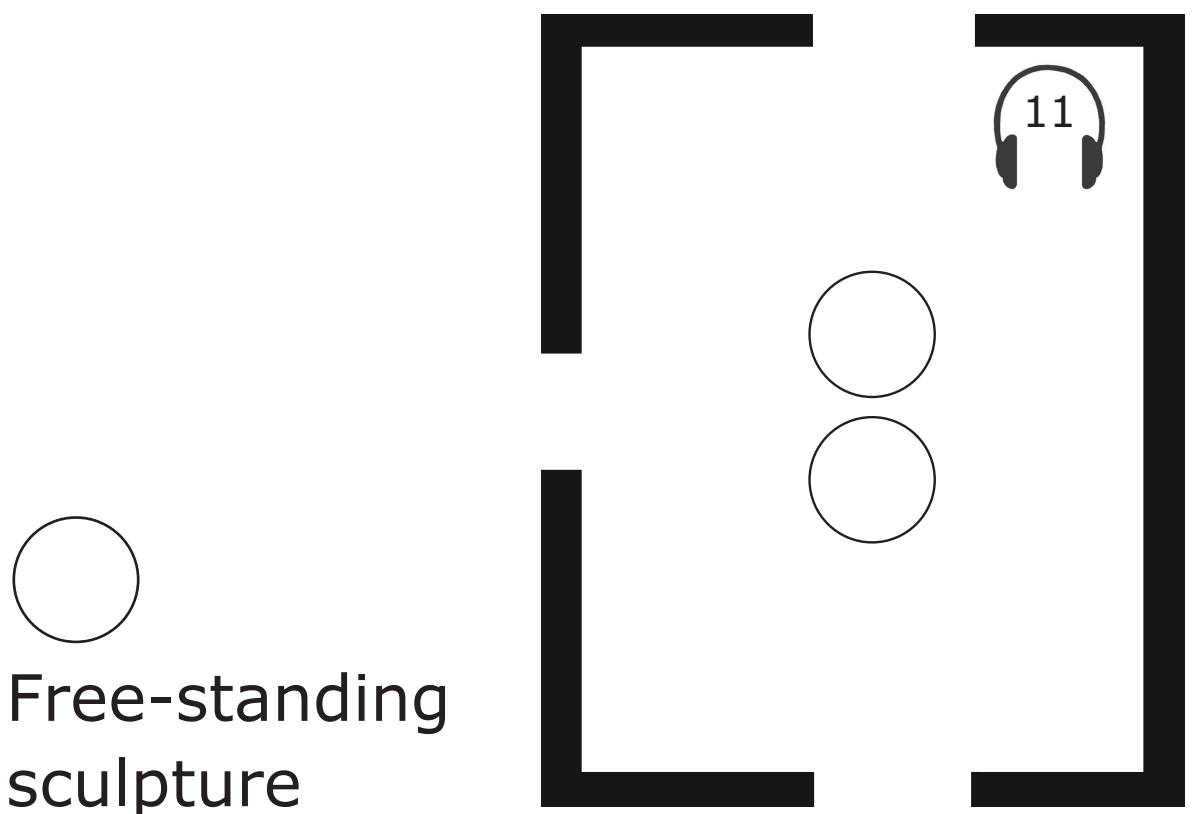
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# 10.

## Works on Paper and Photography



Although Abstract Expressionism is commonly thought to pivot around grand canvases, its searching scope encompassed relatively small works on paper as well as photography.

The Abstract Expressionists often regarded their drawings and watercolours as fully formed pieces in their own right rather than preparatory studies, and imbued them with a spontaneity and sophistication comparable to their paintings.

For example, Francis's diminutive composition still evinces the same intensity as his big canvases, as does Newman's portrayal of light.

In 1951–1952 Pollock rang an unusual change on the process of drawing by thinning his enamel paint so that it soaked, blot-like, into the canvas weave: thus 'Number 7' evokes a phantasmagorical visage limned in an ambiguous space.

While Motherwell's collage has an exuberance that almost outpaces his paintings, for de Kooning and Kline the monochrome and austere linearity associated with draughtsmanship led them to strip their signature idioms to striking essentials.

In the case of Guston, Reinhardt and Rothko, working on paper matched the vigour, calligraphy and bold colourism found in their paintings.

The hierarchy of media that long dogged the definition of Abstract Expressionism expunged photography from its fold. Yet Aaron Siskind was closely linked to the Abstract Expressionist painters.

Likewise, Minor White and Still both taught at the California School of Fine Arts from 1946 onwards.

The harsh markings, graffiti and other textures that Siskind and Frederick Sommer captured share the same expressive concern with violence, darkness and immediacy found in the paintings of Kline, Pollock, Still and others.

Harry Callahan, Herbert Matter (a close friend of Pollock), the prolific Albanian-born 'Life' photographer Gjon Mili and Barbara Morgan alike conjured abstract ideograms and swift motion that match the painters' goals.

Perhaps most influentially, it was the German émigré Hans Namuth's numerous shots of Pollock – caught in action creating his pourings on the floor – that amplified the critic Harold Rosenberg's characterisation of Abstract Expressionism in 1952 as "action painting".

## **List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

### **Robert Motherwell (1915–1991)**

**At Five in the Afternoon**  
1948–1949

Casein and graphite on paperboard

Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, New York

### **Franz Kline (1910–1962)**

**Untitled**  
c. 1951

Oil on paper

Courtesy Jacobson Space, London



# **Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)**

Untitled

1950

Enamel on paper mounted on paperboard

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC

Museum purchase from the Vincent Melzac Collection

through The Smithsonian Institution Collections

Acquisition Program

# **Philip Guston (1913– 1980)**

Untitled

c. 1953

Ink on paper

Courtesy Acquavella Galleries

# **Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)**

Number 7  
1952

Enamel and oil on canvas

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Purchase, Emilio Azcarraga Gift, in honour of William S. Lieberman, 1987, 1987.92

# **Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967)**

Untitled  
1950

Opaque watercolour on paper

Montclair Art Museum. Museum purchase, prior gift of Mrs Frank L. Babbott, 1988.107

# **Robert Motherwell**

## **(1915–1991)**

New York City Collage  
1959

Oil paint and collage on board

Denver Art Museum

# **Mark Rothko (1903–**

## **1970)**

Untitled  
c. 1944

Gouache and watercolour on paper

Collection of Alice and Nahum Lainer

# **Mark Rothko (1903–1970)**

Untitled

1968

Acrylic on paper

National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation Inc., 1986

# **Barnett Newman (1905–1970)**

Untitled

1959

Brush and black ink on paper

Recalling Newman's monumental "zip" canvases in Gallery 8, this smaller work evokes a similar sense of continuing beyond its borders.

The traces of movement present in Newman's drawing can also be found in Barbara Morgan's 'Light Waves' (hung nearby), where a long exposure and a moving light source combine to create the effect of drawing in light.

Private collection

## **Barbara Morgan (1900–1992)**

Light Waves  
1945

Gelatin silver print (photogram)

Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York

# **Harry Callahan (1912–1999)**

Detroit

1945

Gelatin silver print

Courtesy The Estate of Harry Callahan and Pace/MacGill  
Gallery, New York

# **Aaron Siskind (1903– 1991)**

Martha's Vineyard (Seaweed 2)

1943

Gelatin silver print

University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City

Mark Ranney Memorial Fund, 116.2014

# **Aaron Siskind (1903–1991)**

Chicago 8  
1948

Gelatin silver print

University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City

Mark Ranney Memorial Fund, 2014.156

# **Harry Callahan (1912–1999)**

Sunlight on Water  
1943

Vintage gelatin silver print

Courtesy The Estate of Harry Callahan and Pace/MacGill

Gallery, New York

# **Minor White (1908–1976)**

Resurrection (Peeled Paint  
on Windows, Jackson Street,  
Produce Area, San Francisco)  
1951

Vintage gelatin silver print

Courtesy Gitterman Gallery, New York

# **Minor White (1908–1976)**

72 N. Union Street, Rochester  
1958

Silver gelatin print

Collection Roy Ooms137



# **Hans Namuth (1915–1990)**

Jackson Pollock, Summer 1950,  
painting 'Autumn Rhythm:  
Number 30' (1950) in his studio,  
Amagansett, Long Island, NY; behind  
him is 'One: Number 31' (1950)  
1950

Gelatin silver print

In the summer of 1950 Hans Namuth  
photographed and filmed Jackson Pollock at  
work in his studio in Springs, Long Island.

Here, Pollock is shown painting 'Autumn  
Rhythm (Number 30)', now in the  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Namuth emphasises Pollock's famed "action  
painting" technique in this dynamic image in  
which the artist appears to dissolve in light.

Peter Namuth

# **Barbara Morgan (1900–1992)**

Pure Energy and Neurotic Man  
1940

Gelatin silver print

University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City

Mark Ranney Memorial Fund, 2014.154

# **Gjon Mili (1904–1984)**

Figure Skater Carol Lynne  
1945

Photograph

The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City

Mark Ranney Memorial Fund, 92.2015

# **Herbert Matter (1907–1984)**

Untitled

c. 1939–1943

Vintage gelatin silver print

Courtesy Gitterman Gallery, New York

# **Herbert Matter (1907–1984)**

Untitled

c. 1940s

Vintage gelatin silver print

Courtesy Gitterman Gallery, New York

# **Frederick Sommer (1905–1999)**

Sumaré

1951

Gelatin silver print, mounted on board

Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York

The Frederick and Frances Sommer Foundation

# **Aaron Siskind (1903– 1991)**

Chicago

1947

Gelatin silver print

Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York

The Aaron Siskind Foundation

# **Sam Francis (1923–1994)**

## **Black in Red, Paris 1955**

Gouache on paper

One of the smallest works in the exhibition, this gouache has a compressed energy that lends it power.

Francis's layering of black on red gives the work depth, while the red strip, separated from the dark tones beneath, resonates with Still's canvases in Gallery 11. Parallels can also be seen in Aaron Siskind's print 'Chicago', located nearby.

Collection Manny and Jackie Silverman, Los Angeles

Free-standing sculpture

## **David Smith (1906–1965)**

Tower Eight  
1957

Silver

Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas

## **David Smith (1906–1965)**

The Hero  
1951–1952

Forged and welded steel, red lead paint

Brooklyn Museum, New York

Dick S. Ramsay Fund, 57.185

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# **Abstract Expressionism**

11. Clyfford Still

**Do not remove from gallery**



# Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



59 Clyfford Still, 'PH-1123'

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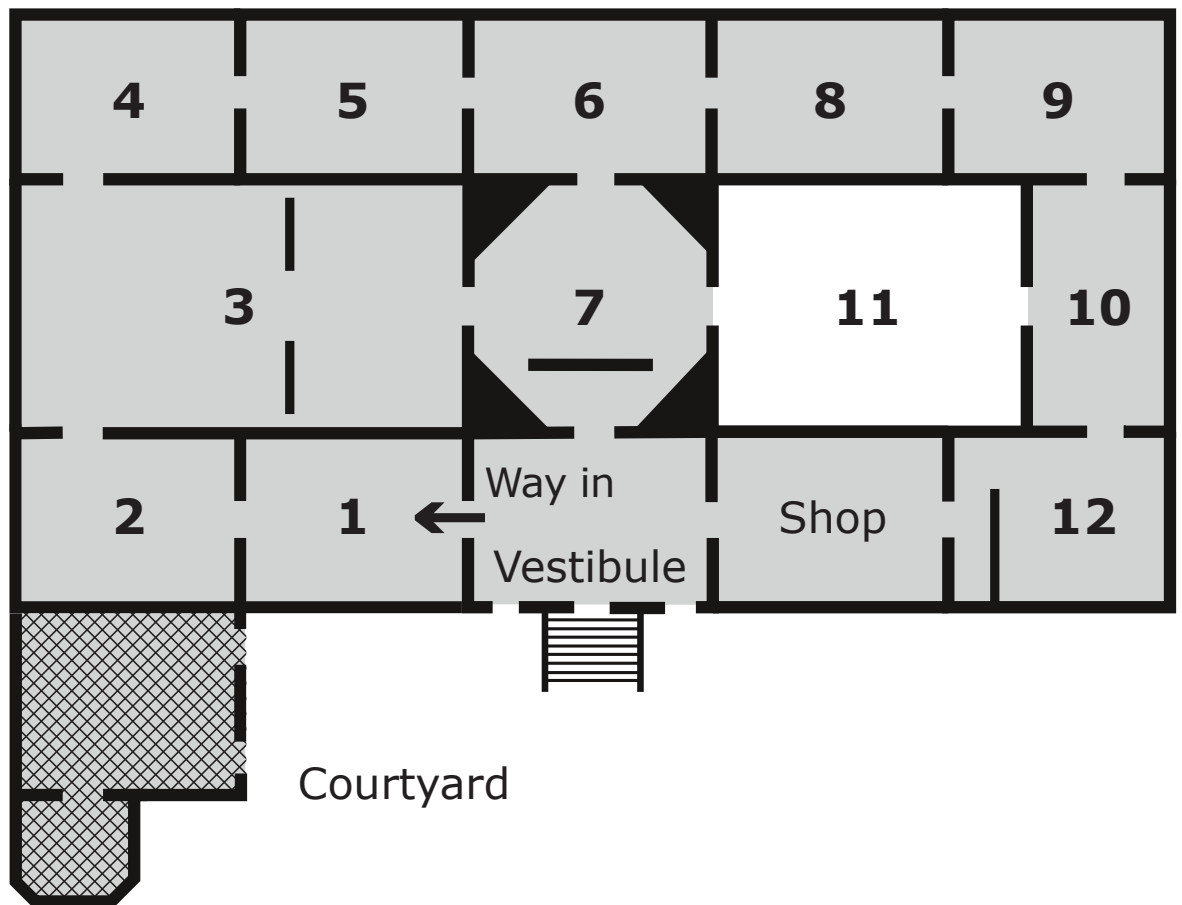
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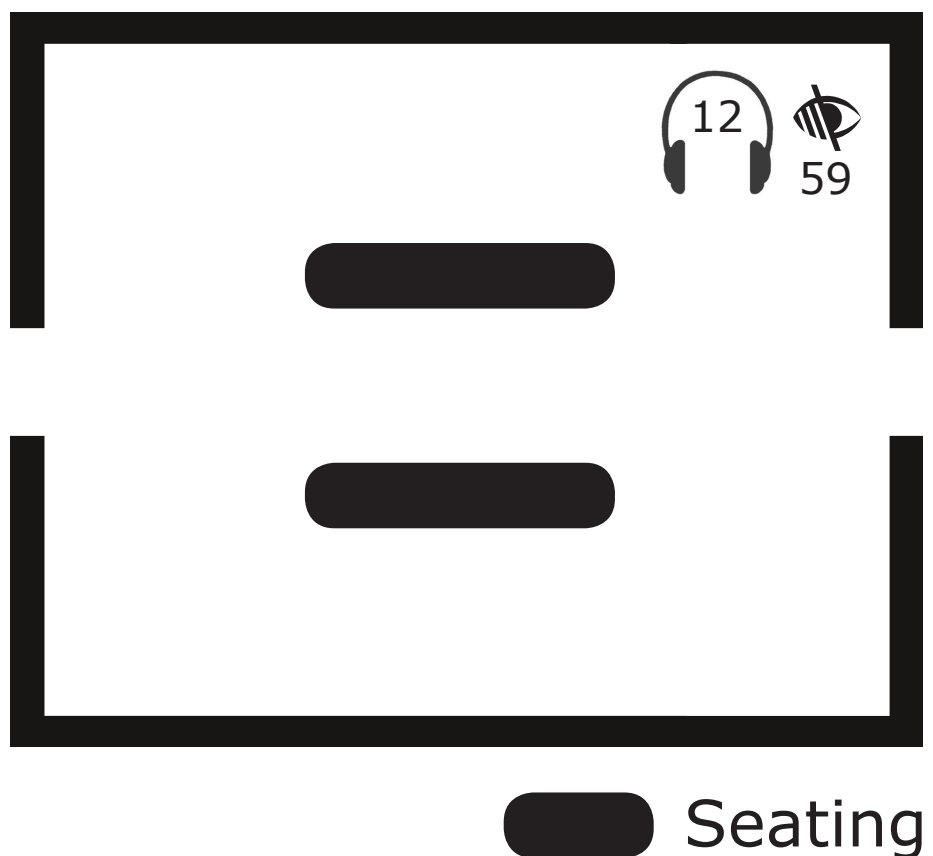
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 Seating

# 11.

## Clyfford Still

b. 1904, Grandin, ND; d. 1980, Baltimore, MD

From first to last, Still remained a resolute outsider. For example, he spent only twelve of his seventy-five years in New York City.

Instead, during the 1920s and '30s Still lived in Washington State, while also farming the prairies of Alberta, Canada. In sum, Still was a westerner – even more so than Pollock – who had a deep relationship with the land's “awful bigness”.

Still's originality largely reflects a simple geographical fact: his sheer remoteness, especially early on, from the wider art world.

A natural draughtsman, Still also had a voracious knowledge of art history, revering certain Old Masters, such as Rembrandt and J. M. W. Turner, and, closer to our time, Vincent van Gogh.

Paradoxically, this traditionalism spurred Still's radicalism – heralded by 'PH-235', one of Abstract Expressionism's earliest landmarks.

Starting with sparse landscapes, verticality became Still's enduring leitmotif.

Whether distilled to the slenderest "lifelines" or towering monoliths, Still associated verticality with the upright living being and spiritual transcendence. Its nemeses are the yawning abysses, by turns molten and glacial, which interlock with these upthrusts.

No wonder that in 1950 Still – who had an almost Manichean outlook – wrote of his art in terms of "life and death merging in fearful union".

Consequently, a struggle between luminosity and darkness heightens this elemental dramaturgy, intensified by Still's scabrous surfaces rendered with the palette knife. The massive pictorial expanses also hold tiny contrasting accents that foster a flickering vitality.

Although Still broke with virtually all his Abstract Expressionist colleagues, he never altogether abandoned Pollock. Indeed, Still had planned to take Pollock on a road trip west in 1956.

Tragically, the latter's fatal car crash intervened. For his part, Pollock went so far as to declare: "Still makes the rest of us look academic."

Drawn (with one exception) from the unparalleled holdings of the Clyfford Still Museum in Denver, the paintings here deliberately counterpoise the achievements of Pollock shown in Gallery 3.

## **List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

### **Clyfford Still (1904–1980)**

PH-950

1950

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Clyfford Still Museum, Denver

Gift of the Clyfford E. Still Estate to the City and County of Denver

### **Clyfford Still (1904–1980)**

PH-235

1944

Oil on canvas

Still painted two other versions of this work, which he referred to as “replicas”; this suggests that he regarded the composition as exceptionally important.

Here, lightning-like bolts of white, acid yellow and green erupt into a vast, inky black chasm, defined by a snaking blood-red contour. In short, deathly gloom and sudden vitality contend.

Lent by the Clyfford Still Museum, Denver

Gift of the Clyfford E. Still Estate to the City and County of Denver

## **Clyfford Still (1904–1980)**

PH-247

1951

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Clyfford Still Museum

Gift of the Clyfford E. Still Estate to the City and County of Denver



# **Clyfford Still (1904–1980)**

PH-385

1949

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Clyfford Still Museum, Denver

Gift of the Clyfford E. Still Estate to the City and County of Denver

# **Clyfford Still (1904–1980)**

PH-847

1953

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Courtesy Hauser & Wirth

# **Clyfford Still (1904–1980)**

PH-4

1952

Oil on canvas

The almost liquid texture of the paint illustrates that Still's facture was highly various, ranging from a mordant dryness to ethereal scrim.

Note also how the dark silhouette along the lower right edge of the composition introduces an abyssal space that accentuates the soaring vermilion above.

Lent by the Clyfford Still Museum, Denver

Gift of the Clyfford E. Still Estate to the City and County of Denver

## **Clyfford Still (1904–1980)**

PH-1140

1957

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Clyfford Still Museum, Denver

Gift of the Clyfford E. Still Estate to the City and County of Denver

# **Clyfford Still (1904–1980)**

PH-150

1958

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Clyfford Still Museum, Denver

Gift of the Clyfford E. Still Estate to the City and County of Denver

## **Clyfford Still (1904–1980)**

PH-1123

1954

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Clyfford Still Museum, Denver

Gift of the Clyfford E. Still Estate to the City and County of Denver



# **Clyfford Still (1904–1980)**

PH-605

1950

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Clyfford Still Museum, Denver

Gift of the Clyfford E. Still Estate to the City and County  
of Denver

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# **Abstract Expressionism**

12. Late Work

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# Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Philip Guston, 'Low Tide'

# Abstract Expressionism

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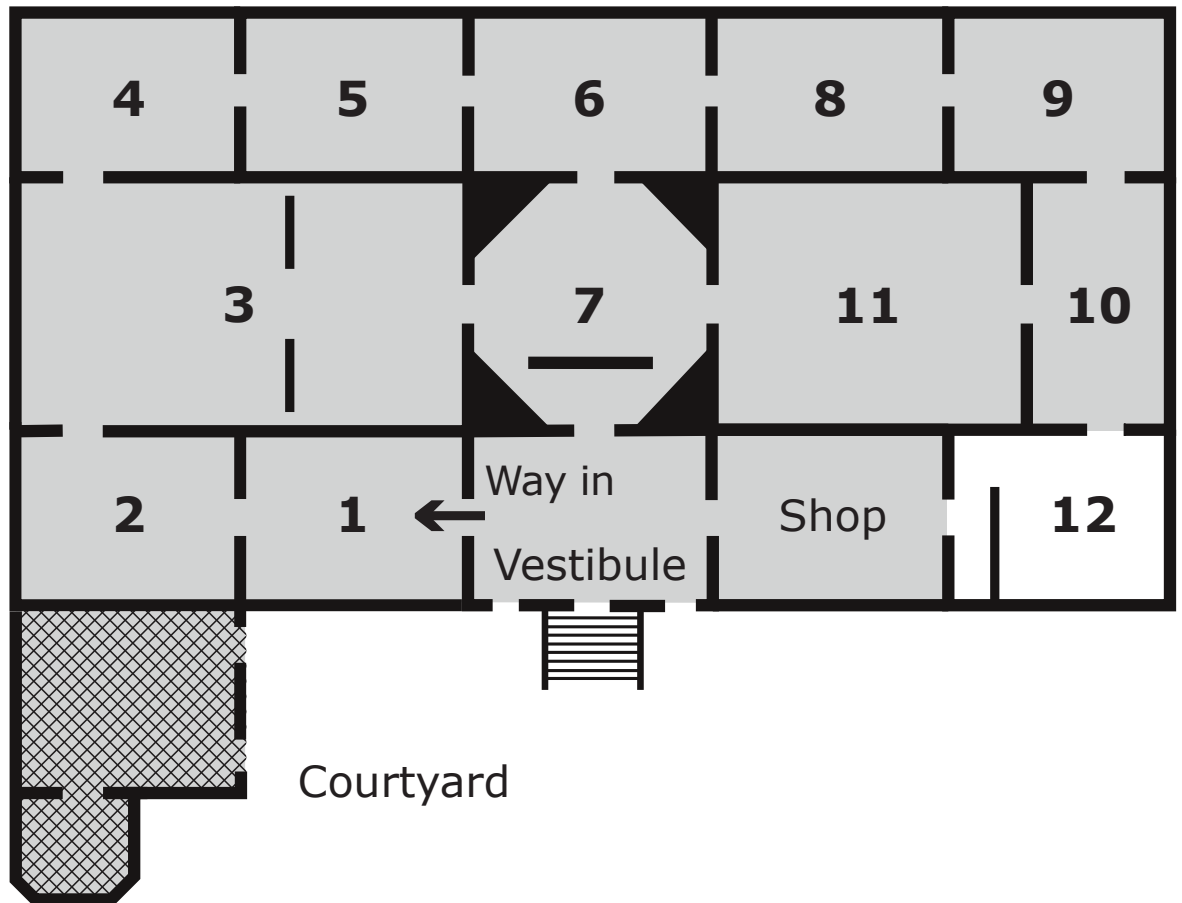
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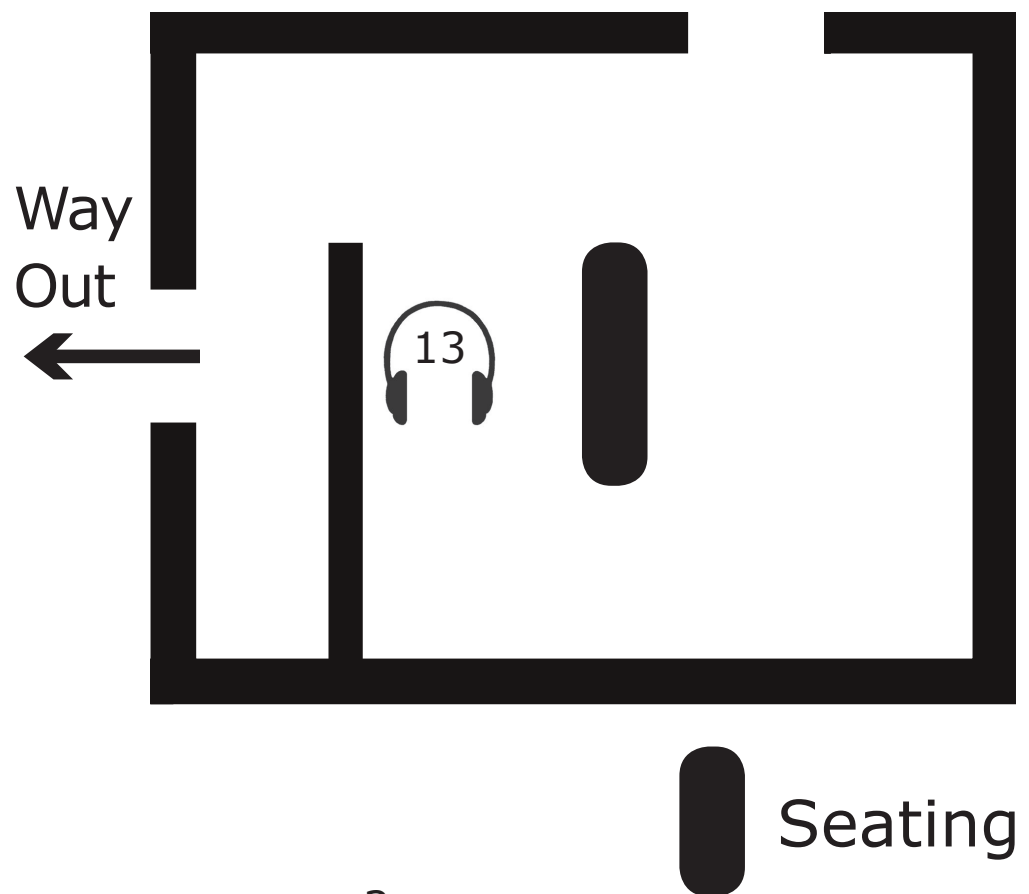
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# 12.

## Late Work

In their final phases, the Abstract Expressionists, true to their individualism, gravitated in disparate directions.

Some addressed darkness, evident in Gallery 9, as if exploring the mystery of last things. Others sought brighter realms.

The short-lived William Baziotes pictured a primeval aquatic world where tentacular phantoms drift through pale, phosphorescent deeps.

Their mythic cast – redolent with deep time and primitivism – recalls Abstract Expressionism's early interests, now writ large, while the opalescent textures intimate a universe glimpsed distantly in the mind's eye.

Choosing full-blooded impasto, the septuagenarian de Kooning seized upon immediate sensations – the gusty reflections of eastern Long Island whence he moved in 1963.

Everything is flux in these pastorals. Note the reference to the Heraclitean epitaph on John Keats's tombstone: "Here lies one whose name was writ in water."

Sensuous yet elegiac in their nod to transience, in these works de Kooning culminates what he had announced twenty years before in 'Woman as Landscape' (Gallery 6).

Mitchell's 'Salut Tom' is an apotheosis wherein sunlight and shade contend. The quadriptych format probably recalls Monet's enveloping 'Nymphéas', as it aggrandises the artist's faith in the "landscape I carry around inside me".

Again, though, the sentiment is valedictory: the title commemorates the critic Thomas B. Hess, who championed Abstract Expressionism.

Moreover, such canvases bespeak the impact of the German-born artist Hans Hofmann's late abstractions. There, lush tactility, depth versus flatness and spectacular colours close Hofmann's sixty-year celebration of the act of painting.

Guston, too, went out with a bang. In 1970 he shocked the art world with a brute return to figuration. Thereby, Guston brought Abstract Expressionism's wheel full circle, reasserting its foundational engagement with the human presence.

In 'Low Tide' the waters of abstraction ebb to reveal unsettling fragments. Simultaneously hobnail heels and parodies of the letter "omega" – the last in the Greek alphabet – Guston's quiet apocalypse also doubles as timely pictorial metaphor.

Ominous orbs rise / set on the ruddy Abstract Expressionist horizon.

## **List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

### **Hans Hofmann (1880–1966)**

In Sober Ecstasy

1965

Oil on canvas

Audrey and David Mirvish, Toronto

### **Joan Mitchell (1912–1999)**

Salut Tom

1979

Oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Corcoran Collection, gift of the Women's Committee of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and museum purchase with the aid of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, 2014.136.135

# **Willem de Kooning (1904–1997)**

**...Whose Name Was Writ in Water  
1975**

Oil on canvas

By the 1970s the women who had dominated the first few decades of de Kooning's work gave way to a return to landscape. The artist's style also changed, becoming more fluid and contemplative, as suggested by the title of this work.

Here de Kooning uses paint loosened with additional oil, enabling long, gestural strokes. A close examination of the drips suggests the constant turning of the canvas.

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

# **Willem de Kooning**

## **(1904–1997)**

Untitled V

1976

Oil on canvas

Private collection



# **Philip Guston**

## **(1913–1980)**

Low Tide

1976

Oil on canvas

In the late 1960s Guston returned to painting representational images, which he showed for the first time at the Marlborough Gallery in New York in 1970. The scathing reviews led to his retreat from the art world.

Guston's figuration, which is present in his early work (see 'The Porch', Gallery 1), is revisited here in 'Low Tide', with its hobnail heels lined up like monuments, at once grotesque and poignantly ruined, against the backdrop of the sea.

Private collection

Courtesy Hauser & Wirth

## **William Baziotès (1912–1963)**

Mariner

1960–1961

Oil on canvas

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin

Gift of Mari and James A. Michener, 1991



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Molly Bretton, Access Manager



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