

Highlights from the **Permanent Collection**



THE KREEGER MUSEUM

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Painting

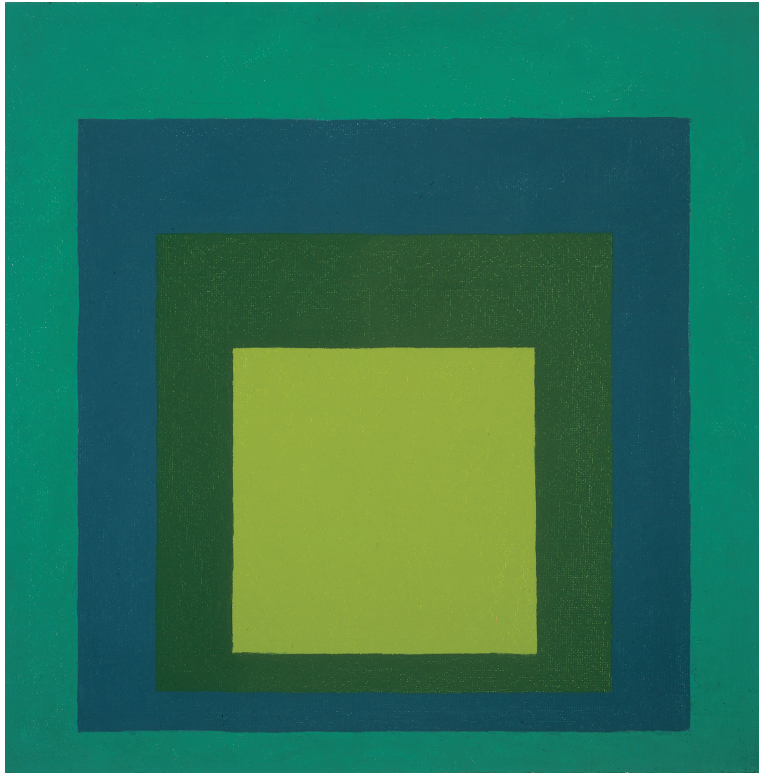
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Joseph Albers

Homage to the Square: Wet and Dry

1960

oil on masonite

Josef Albers began his *Homage to the Square* series in 1949, and continued to create these works until the end of his life in 1976. Each painting in this series follows a strict compositional format consisting of a group of concentric squares, exploring the interactions between colors. Albers created the works by using paint directly from the tube, spreading it with a palette knife onto the primed board.

Currently on view on the lower level.



Max Beckmann

Children Playing

1934

oil on canvas

German artist Max Beckmann painted *Children Playing* the year after he was forced by the Nazis to leave a teaching position in Frankfurt, as he was later deemed a “degenerate artist” by the Third Reich. Nesbitt was drawn to this work because of its balance of joy and trauma. In a lecture the German artist gave in London in 1938, he stated “It is my fortune, or misfortune, that I can see neither all in black nor all in white. One vision alone would be much simpler and clearer, but then it would not exist. It is the dream of many to see only the white and truly beautiful, or the black, ugly destructive. But I cannot help realizing both...”

Currently on view on the lower level.



Max Beckmann

Green Sea with Yellow Boat

1937

oil on canvas

In 1915, Max Beckmann wrote in a letter to his first wife, Minna: “If I were the Emperor of the World, I would claim as my foremost right the ability to spend one month every year alone on a beach.” Drawn to the sea throughout his life, Beckmann painted this beach scene in 1937, showing couples sunning in the sand, a sailboat on the waves, and a group frolicking in the surf. The figures are rough and fragmented, defined by heavy, black outlines indicative of Beckmann’s painting style. However, the sunny disposition of this work does not reflect the moment in which it was made. Beckmann painted this picture in 1937, the year he was deemed a “degenerate” artist by the Nazis, resulting in his inclusion in the infamous “Degenerate Art” exhibition and the removal of more than 500 of his works from public collections. By July of that year, Beckmann had fled Germany with his wife and landed in Amsterdam, where they remained throughout World War II. The intense pressure Beckmann faced during this time is not reflected in this painting, yet the work offers a glimmer of optimism, and perhaps an attempt to recall a more peaceful time through the artist’s view of the sea.

Currently on view on the main level.



Elmer Bischoff

Bay

1960

oil on canvas

Born and raised in Berkeley, CA, Elmer Bischoff was a member of the group known as the Bay Area Figurative artists. Starting in the 1950s, these artists, including David Park and Richard Diebenkorn, pushed back against the influence of Abstract Expressionism in their works. Instead of using purely abstract imagery, they began incorporating figures and representational subject matter into their paintings. Bischoff once likened this shift to “the end of a love affair.” Bischoff continued using certain methods of the Abstract Expressionists in his paintings, seen in his heavy paint application, flattening of space, and gestural brushwork, but the subjects are entirely different. Often working from memory, Bischoff’s figures and landscapes are both specific and still abstract, such as *Bay* from 1960. Measuring more than five and a half feet square, this large picture is inspired by the Bay Area but is also a glorious exploration of paint, filled with bold, almost surreal colors.

Currently on view on the lower level.



Georges Braque

Vase, Palette and Skull

1930

oil and sand on canvas

In this painting from 1938, Georges Braque depicts his studio as a collection of overlapping surfaces, textures, and colors. Throughout his career, the French artist was interested in capturing the materiality of objects around him. He painted using a Cubist approach, which he first pioneered with Pablo Picasso in the early 20th century—Braque described their collaboration as akin to “mountain-climbers roped together.” While Picasso later pursued other artistic directions, Braque continued to develop his Cubist methods. By the late 1930s, he was primarily painting his atelier in dark tones: deep purples and blues, mustard yellows, and rich browns. In these works, he condenses the space in his studio, where objects—an easel, a vase, an artist’s palette, and various pieces of furniture and frames—are flattened and fractured in impossible ways. Yet Braque brings depth to the painting by mixing sand into his oil paint, creating great texture. He also carefully captures wood grains of various objects, referencing his early background as a decorative house painter.

Painted just before the Nazi occupation of France, this picture carries ominous tones, from the somber palette to the appearance of a skull. While the artist later insisted his use of skulls was apolitical, the looming danger of World War II would have been inescapable. Braque, himself a veteran severely wounded in World War I, initially fled Paris in 1940 with his wife Marcelle, returning soon after to spend the war years in occupied France.

Currently on view on the main level.



Paul Cézanne

Houses and Fir Trees

c. 1881

oil on canvas

Paul Cézanne started his career painting figures and still lifes in the studio. However, by the 1870s, the French artist began working en plein air in the French countryside, inspired by friend and Impressionist artist Camille Pissarro, whom he often worked beside. In *Houses and Fir Trees*, painted in 1881, Cézanne captures a quiet, village scene with his distinctive style of painting, constructing his composition with a complex arrangement of dense, parallel strokes of color. These building blocks of color flatten and abstract the surface while the view from the road draws us deeper into the work. Cézanne was deeply interested in experimenting with the space within the picture, so it comes as no surprise that he was a source of inspiration for many modernist artists that followed him. Picasso, for one, referred to Cézanne as 'the father of us all.'

Currently on view on the main level.



Gene Davis

Untitled

1969

acrylic on canvas

Gene Davis is best known for his iconic stripe paintings. Born in Washington, the Color Field artist did not use any preparatory drawings in making his works. Instead, he relied on an intuitive process of bringing colors together to create the rhythmic patterns seen in this 1969 painting. On the process of experiencing his work, he wrote: “Look at the painting in terms of individual colors. In other words, instead of simply glancing at the work, select a specific color. . .and take the time to see how it operates across the painting. Approached this way, something happens, I can’t explain it. But one must enter the painting through the door of a single color. And then, you can understand what my painting is all about.”

Currently on view on the lower level.



Edgar Degas

Woman Brushing Her Hair

c. 1881

oil on canvas

Edgar Degas painted *Woman Brushing Her Hair* in 1881, depicting a nude, curvaceous figure in the midst of an intimate, everyday task. The French artist captured the woman sitting on an upholstered pillow with her back to the viewer, her legs stretched out and slightly bent, and her gaze beyond the picture plane. Degas paints the figure's body with frenzied, sketch-like brushstrokes of fleshy colors mixed with greens and blues, as exaggerated tones of interior light. Degas often created such scenes of daily life, including many pictures of women bathing or brushing their hair, where the artist is represented as the voyeur. Though he was affiliated with the Impressionists, Degas considered himself a 'realist' artist for his interest in showing the modern life of 19th-century Paris. He also found inspiration from his collection of Japanese ukiyo-e prints, which became a source for many artists after Japan reopened trade with the West in 1853. Degas incorporated the asymmetrical compositions and steep perspectives of ukiyo-e prints into his works, seen in *Woman Brushing Her Hair*. In the painting, the artist squeezes the figure into the top left corner, heightening the moment's intimacy and placing equal value on the colorful textiles beneath the woman.

Not currently on view.



Jean Dubuffet

Milady

1961

oil on canvas

An innovator and an outlier in the history of modern art, Jean Dubuffet challenged traditional methods of artmaking throughout his career. The French artist championed an aggressive artistic style called Art Brut, which rejected formal notions of beauty and relied on the subconscious, finding inspiration in the art of outsiders, children, and the mentally ill. Dubuffet painted *Milady* in 1961 as part of his “Paris Circus” series, which focuses on Paris, the city’s inhabitants, and urban scenes. The fleshy figure in *Milady* is flattened but frenzied, surrounded by undulating outlines that vibrate the skin, depicted in blotches of vivid color. The woman shown is smiling grotesquely with stunted arms reaching outward, floating on an undefined, abstract background. In this painting, Dubuffet might have been offering his own version of the nude, upsetting classical notions of female beauty from art history. The title *Milady* could also be referencing *The Three Musketeers*, the popular French novel by Alexandre Dumas, in which one of the main characters—Milady—is cast as the stereotypical femme fatale. A French version of the adapted film came out in 1961, the same year Dubuffet created this work.

Currently on view on the lower level.



Clark V. Fox

The Three Crosses

1968

acrylic on canvas

Gift from the Trustees of the Corcoran Gallery of Art

The Corcoran Gallery of Art was one of the first private museums in the United States, established in 1869 by William Wilson Corcoran and expanded in 1880 to include the Corcoran College of Art and Design with the mission 'dedicated to art and used solely for the purpose of encouraging the American genius.' In 2014, the Corcoran transferred the college to the George Washington University and distributed the works from its Collection to museums and institutions in Washington, D.C.

Not currently on view.



Helen Frankenthaler

Hurricane Flag

1969

acrylic on canvas

Gift from the Trustees of the Corcoran Gallery of Art

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Helen Frankenthaler's *Hurricane Flag* is a recent addition to the Permanent Collection, arriving in 2018 along with several other works from the Corcoran Legacy Collection that was distributed to institutions across Washington. Measuring more than 10 feet high, the painting is a monumental example of Frankenthaler's "stain-soak" technique. Frankenthaler made her paintings by first laying unprimed canvas on the floor—a method inspired by seeing Jackson Pollock's work in the early 1950s in New York—and then creating large fields of color by pouring and applying paint often thinned with turpentine. Her abstract shapes, soaked into the raw surface, were frequently surrounded by areas of untouched canvas. Frankenthaler's technique had a great impact on the artists of the Washington Color School, particularly Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland who visited her studio in 1953 at the behest of critic Clement Greenberg.

While her paintings were abstract, Frankenthaler often incorporated the colors and imagery of her surroundings into her work. *Hurricane Flag* was painted in the summer of 1969 while Frankenthaler was living in Provincetown, MA with her husband, artist Robert Motherwell, and his two daughters. *Hurricane Flag* might reference the flags that were hung in Provincetown when a storm was coming, as recently recalled by Motherwell's daughter Lise.

Currently on view on the main level.



Sam Gilliam

Cape

1969

acrylic on canvas

Sam Gilliam created *Cape* in 1969 as part of his “Slice” painting series, comprised of large-scale, stained canvases mounted on beveled stretchers. Gilliam has lived and worked in Washington since 1962, when he arrived fresh from his MFA at the University of Louisville. He was initially affiliated with the Washington Color School, and early on painted hard edge abstractions in the style of the group. In 1967, Gilliam started moving in a new direction with the “Slice” paintings, marking the beginning of great innovation for the artist.

Measuring more than nine feet square, *Cape* is an abstract field of bright and florescent colors staining the canvas in layered, nebulous shapes. Gilliam created *Cape* by lying the unprimed canvas on the floor, pouring and applying paint onto the surface, folding the wet canvas back and forth, and then leaving it to dry. Once unfurled, the canvas showed the pillars of color made from the creases and a painted surface with the look and spontaneity of watercolor. Gilliam then mounted the finished canvas to a beveled stretcher, allowing the work to float away from the wall. In 1969, he also started to work on his important Drape paintings, where he suspended the stained canvases on their own, removing the stretcher all together.

Currently on view on the lower level.



Vincent Van Gogh

Bowl with Zinnias

1886

oil on canvas

Vincent van Gogh arrived in Paris in 1886 to move in with his brother, Theo. The Dutch artist spent the summer almost exclusively creating paintings of floral arrangements, including *Bowl with Zinnias*. The following spring, van Gogh wrote in a letter to his sister Wilhelmina that he used these pictures as a way to study color, moving away from the earthy tones of earlier works. He wrote: “A year ago I painted nothing but flowers to accustom myself to other colors...I painted in pink, soft and glaring green, light blue, violet, yellow, orange, and a beautiful red.” The artist’s early explorations with color anticipated his later works, where he increasingly experimented with vivid hues. In *Bowl with Zinnias*, van Gogh was also paying homage to the French artist Adolphe Monticelli, who had died that summer in 1886, and whose work the younger painter had seen at an exhibition in Paris. Van Gogh admired Monticelli’s still lifes, which were filled with heavy brushstrokes and rich colors, especially strong red tones. In response, van Gogh painted *Bowl with Zinnias* with thick dabs of paint and bold reds that flood the blossoms up top as well as the table beneath, emphasized by the dark, heavy background. While some flowers are distinct, others appear more like puddles of paint, showing how van Gogh used these still lifes to learn the language of color.

Currently on view on the main level.



Arshile Gorky

Image in Khorkom

c. 1938-39

oil on canvas

Arshile Gorky was born in Armenia (as Vostanik Manoug Adoian), fleeing the country in 1915 to arrive in the United States in 1920. By the 1930s, Gorky was creating abstractions filled with fluid, amorphous shapes influenced by Surrealism, such as *Image at Khorkom*. Underlying the work is also a reference to Gorky's Armenian background and memories, as the title refers to the village where Gorky was born: Khorkom.

Currently on view on the main level.



Charles Hinman

Sails

1965

acrylic on shaped canvas

Charles Hinman made *Sails* in 1965 at a pivotal moment in his artistic career, as he was beginning to develop his shaped, abstract canvases. For more than 50 years, the American artist has been constructing these painted works by stretching canvas over hand-built, wooden armatures. Hinman once described his shaped canvases as akin to “skin over bones.” Built on a three-dimensional armature, *Sails* emerges from the wall in a sharp point, where the blue, red, white, and green painted surfaces meet.

Hinman was born in Syracuse in 1932 and received his BFA at Syracuse University in 1955. After graduating, he moved to New York to study at the Arts Students League, and was quickly immersed in the artistic communities of downtown New York, where he would live and work for much of his career. Hinman arrived in the city at a moment of great energy and productivity for the arts. He belonged to a generation of artists, including Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly, who expanded the traditions of painting by reshaping their canvases, privileging real space over illusionary, painted space.

Sails was the centerpiece of our 2019 exhibition, Charles Hinman: Structures, 1965–2014, which was the first museum exhibition of works by the artist in the Washington area and his first survey in more than 30 years.

Currently on view on the main level.



Hans Hofmann

Elongation

1956

oil on wood panel

German artist Hans Hofmann is often discussed in the context of his teaching career and his influence on the development of Abstract Expressionism in New York, where he arrived in 1933. Yet Hofmann was prolific throughout his career, and is best known for his ‘slab paintings’ filled with thickly painted, rectangular blocks of color. He painted *Elongation* at a pivotal moment, around the time he decided to stop teaching to focus entirely on his work and just before he developed the ‘slab paintings.’ The aptly-titled *Elongation* is oddly vertical, measuring around six feet high by a foot and a half wide. The long format of the painting might relate to Hofmann’s brief work on mural commissions around his time. *Elongation* captures a frenzied but purposeful field of marks—squiggles, dabs, and smears—that are slathered on the board with heavy strokes of paint. Here Hofmann’s gestures are wildly energetic, but his colors are still separate and distinct, anticipating the slabs of color in subsequent works. Hofmann also leaves some of the wooden board bare on the right side, giving a rare look at what lies beneath the paint.

Currently on view on the lower level.



Wassily Kandinsky

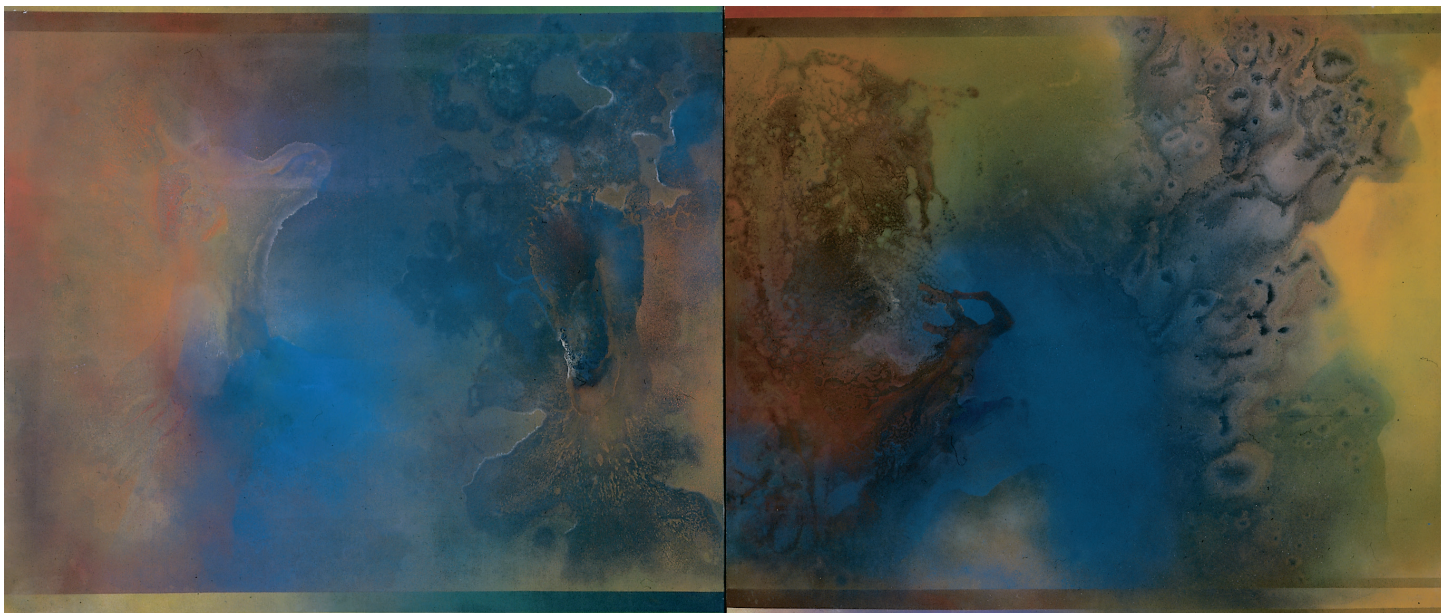
Relations

1934

oil and sand on canvas

Wassily Kandinsky made *Relations* in 1934, the year after the artist fled wartime Germany to land in Neuilly-sur-Seine, near Paris. During this period, Kandinsky moved from painting sharp, geometric forms, representative of his time teaching at the Bauhaus, to the softer, more organic shapes seen here, which emerged in the midst of his exile. These fantastical organisms scatter and squirm around the canvas, as if frozen in motion. In this picture, Kandinsky also mixed his pigments with sand giving his forms depth and relief. He only produced a handful of works using sand, using this method from 1934 to 1936.

Currently on view on the main level.



Simmie Knox

A Place: Suspended

1970

acrylic and enamel on canvas (diptych)

In 2000, Simmie Knox became the first African American artist to paint the official portraits of a U.S. President and First Lady, when he was chosen to capture the likenesses of both Bill and Hillary Clinton. The commission rocketed the Washington area-artist to the national stage, though Knox had long been known for his work as a prominent portraitist, painting for renowned sitters such as U.S. Supreme Court justices Thurgood Marshall and Ruth Bader Ginsburg as well as Oprah Winfrey and famed baseball player Hank Aaron. This abstract diptych by Knox from 1970, entitled *A Place: Suspended*, represents a different, earlier moment in the artist's career before his focus on portraiture. The large-scale work is composed of two panels covered with surging waves of color, from rich, earthy reds and yellows to deep, vibrant blues and greens. *A Place: Suspended* was included in the 32nd Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1971, where David and Carmen Kreeger first saw the work before acquiring it. Fresh from earning his B.F.A. and M.F.A. at the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, Knox moved to the Washington area the following year, in 1972, and soon turned away from abstraction to focus exclusively on portraiture. While Knox has remarked that the change was driven by his penchant for capturing the human figure, he attributes his time working in abstract painting as important to his understanding of space and color.

Not currently on view.



Joan Mitchell

Untitled

1965

oil and charcoal on canvas

Gift from the Trustees of the Corcoran Gallery of Art

This *Untitled* painting by Joan Mitchell is small—measuring around a foot and a half tall—but it is packed with color. The center of the picture is filled with deep blues, gem-like purples, and rich reds, surrounded by neutral colors at the outer edges. This explosion of color is applied with thick yet energetic brushstrokes that emerge from the canvas in supple drips and smears. Born in Chicago, Mitchell was associated with the Abstract Expressionist artists in New York by the early 1950s, as one of the few women to be part of this group. However, she moved to France in 1959, eventually finding her home in Vétheuil in 1968, near Claude Monet's Giverny estate. Throughout her career, Mitchell absorbed her surroundings into her paintings, creating abstract pictures that evoked her visual memories of the natural world. She said: "I'm trying to remember what I felt about a certain cypress tree and I feel if I remember it, it will last me quite a long time." Mitchell made this 1965 picture as part of a series of 14 small canvases with vibrant colors that seem to be drawn from the French countryside. The colors she used call to mind the paintings of Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh—two artists whom Mitchell admired.

Currently on view on the lower level.



Claude Monet

The Rock Needle and the Porte d'Aval Seen from the West

1886

oil on canvas

The Rock Needle and the Porte d'Aval Seen from the West belongs to a series by Claude Monet featuring a rock formation on the coast of Normandy, showing it in a variety of lighting and atmospheric conditions and from different vantage points.

Currently on view on the main level.



Claude Monet

Springtime at Giverny

1886

oil on canvas

Claude Monet painted *en plein air*, or “outdoors,” taking his canvas outside to paint from direct observation, capturing natural light and atmospheric conditions on the landscape. With this method, Monet shows his experience of a specific moment and place, allowing us to escape into the verdant gardens surrounding the artists home in the north of France.

Not currently on view.



David Park

The Prophet

1959

oil on canvas

In 1949, at the age of 39, artist David Park famously piled his paintings into his car and drove them to the city dump in Berkeley, California. Park had been working in an Abstract Expressionist style—the dominant mode of painting at that time—and disposed of his canvases to mark a dramatic shift away from abstraction and towards capturing the human form. Throughout the 1950s, Park painted figures he saw in his everyday life, from children playing and musicians performing to close-cropped portraits, such as *The Prophet*. He once said: “I think of painting—in fact all the arts—as a sort of extension of human life. The very same things that we value most, the ideals of humanity, are the properties of the arts.” *The Prophet* depicts a figure from the neck up, with their arm raised and mouth open, as if caught in the act of speaking. The subject is subsumed in deep fields of red and blue on a surface slathered with thick, luscious paint, which accumulates in the edges and corners of the work.

Currently on view on the lower level.



Pablo Picasso

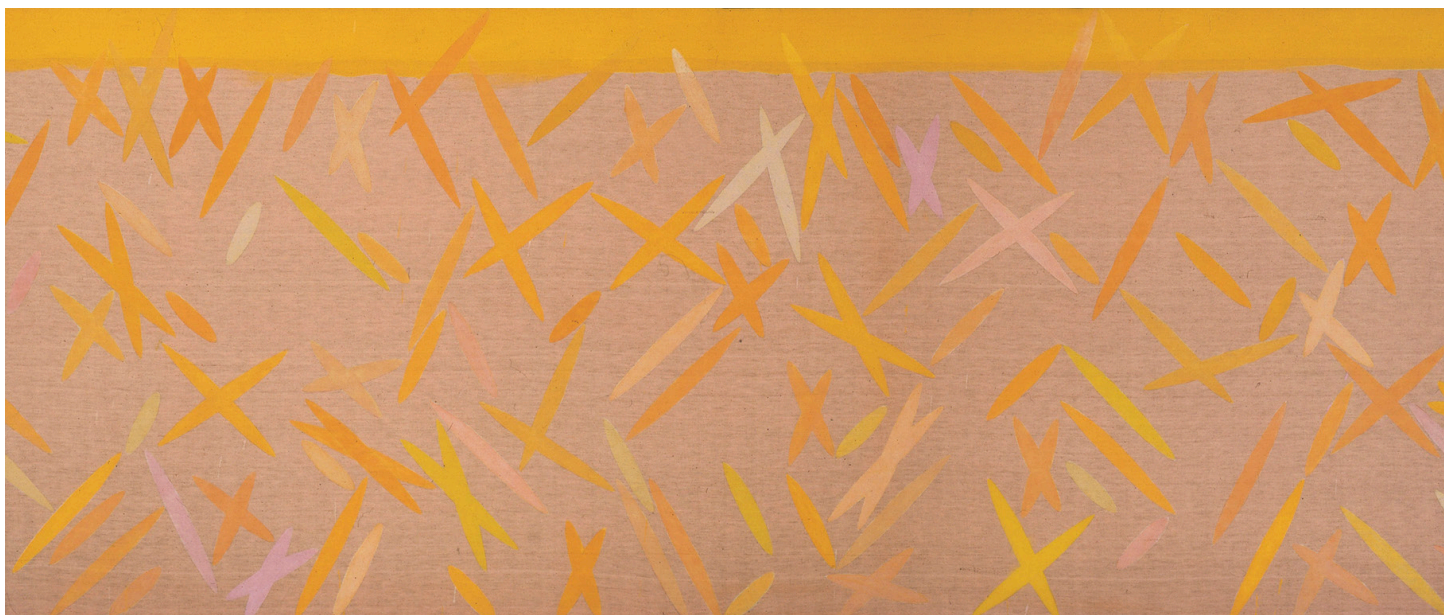
At the Café

1901

oil on canvas

Pablo Picasso painted this scene of a Parisian café in Montmartre at the age of 20, in the second year of his time in Paris. The work is one of the earliest examples of the Spanish artist's "Blue Period" from 1901 to 1904, identifiable by the melancholy scenes and figures' blue skin tones. Yet the color vibrancy and subject matter pays homage to the scenes of Parisian cafés by French artists such as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. The painting is oddly horizontal, almost cinematic, as it captures a fleeting moment in this nighttime scene. Picasso squeezes the figures into the frame, with two women on one side—one whispering into the other's ear, both wearing ornate hats of the period—and the waiter on the other side. Picasso crops the waiter so only his uniformed torso and service items are shown. With no central focus, the figures become part of the interior, painted with the same broad, hurried brushstrokes. The café represented was later identified as L'Hippodrome near Picasso's studio, the site where the artist's friend, writer and artist Carlos Casagemas, committed suicide, a grievous event that most likely influenced the somber tone of the "Blue Period" paintings.

Currently on view on the main level.



Larry Poons

Untitled

1967

acrylic on canvas

Art (c) Larry Poons/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Measuring more than 14 feet long and 4 and half feet tall, this work is monumental and an explosion of bright yellows, pinks, and lavenders, among other colors. The American artist painted a series of long ellipses in these colors that dance and float on the canvas, often colliding and coming together to form 'X's. The composition is rhythmic, even musical. Poons has long been influenced by music, as he studied composition as a young man at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston from 1955 to 1957. The following year, he moved to New York and picked up painting, which he attributes to the impact of seeing a show of Barnett Newman's works. From the beginning, Poons was very interested in exploring the optical qualities of paint and color in his all-over compositions filled with dots and ellipses. While his earlier works are more rigid and mathematical, Poons began painting looser compositions around the time he made *Untitled*, creating freer arrangements of the long shapes seen here.

The Kreegers purchased *Untitled* the same year it was painted, in 1967, showing their great enthusiasm for the contemporary art of their time. In 1967, the building was also finished, which allowed the Kreegers to acquire and show more large-scale paintings, such as this work by Poons.

Currently on view on the main level.



Man Ray

The Red Knight

1938

oil on canvas

American artist Man Ray is best known for his experiments in photography and film, his affiliations with the Surrealists in Paris, and his longtime friendship with Marcel Duchamp. Man Ray worked across mediums throughout his career but often returned to painting, stating: “I paint what I cannot photograph. My dreams, for instance. And I photograph what I cannot paint.” Along with his Dada and Surrealist contemporaries, Man Ray was also deeply interested in the game of chess, as an intellectual activity and a metaphor for the creative process. In *The Red Knight*, Man Ray paints exaggerated chess pieces floating above a board placed askew, as if an outlandish game come to life.

Not currently on view.



Auguste Renoir

Venice-Fog

1881

oil on canvas

Auguste Renoir painted this scene of Venice in 1881, during his first trip to the Italian city. He depicts gondoliers crossing the Venetian Lagoon, with the Basilica di San Marco in the background, barely visible through the fog. Renoir was especially smitten with Italian sunlight, capturing the waterscape in a golden glow. The artist created this work in an Impressionist style, painting the view and its atmospheric effects with short brushstrokes of unblended colors. San Marco and the sky are engulfed in bright yellows and peachy hues while the water is indicated by a stream of blue, green, and turquoise marks intermingled with golden reflections. The figures navigating the water are quickly sketched, dwarfed by their surroundings. Renoir painted this work at a time when he was seeking new sources of inspiration and retreating from the pressures of Paris, writing in a letter to dealer Ambroise Vollard in 1883 that he had “wrung Impressionism dry.” While in Italy, he was influenced by the Old Masters, such as Raphael, and traveled for the next two years, to Spain and Algeria as well.

Not currently on view.



James Rosenquist

Bowling Ball Galaxie

1964

oil on canvas (half of diptych)

(c) James Rosenquist/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

James Rosenquist was one of the leading artists associated with Pop art, a term coined to identify artworks in the 1950s and 1960s that engaged popular culture, consumerism, and often politics. Born in Grand Forks, North Dakota, Rosenquist moved to New York in 1955 and early on painted billboards across the city, an experience that would impact his style of painting. In his works, Rosenquist layered commercial and advertising imagery—often culled from old Life magazine clippings—stitching together these fragments for his painted compositions. His method married fine art with commercial techniques and materials, where his canvases were deftly painted but without visible brushstrokes.

The two paintings by Rosenquist in our collection are companion works, and playfully interact with one another. *Bowling Ball Galaxie* is painted on a shaped, circular canvas, taking the physical form of its inspiration: the Galaxie brand bowling ball, complete with three finger holes. Rosenquist creates an abstract, almost cosmic composition of bright, Day-Glo colors, mimicking the marbled lines of the Galaxie ball. *Bowling Ball Eclipse* echoes the shape of the ball as a painted image on top of classic movie stars (think: Ingrid Bergman and Cary Grant) locked in a lover's embrace. Here Rosenquist is playful in layering imagery, encapsulating this intimate moment in the unlikely frame of a bowling ball.

Currently on view on the lower level.



James Rosenquist

Bowling Ball Eclipse

1964

oil on canvas (half of diptych)

(c) James Rosenquist/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

James Rosenquist was one of the leading artists associated with Pop art, a term coined to identify artworks in the 1950s and 1960s that engaged popular culture, consumerism, and often politics. Born in Grand Forks, North Dakota, Rosenquist moved to New York in 1955 and early on painted billboards across the city, an experience that would impact his style of painting. In his works, Rosenquist layered commercial and advertising imagery—often culled from old Life magazine clippings—stitching together these fragments for his painted compositions. His method married fine art with commercial techniques and materials, where his canvases were deftly painted but without visible brushstrokes.

The two paintings by Rosenquist in our collection are companion works, and playfully interact with one another. *Bowling Ball Galaxie* is painted on a shaped, circular canvas, taking the physical form of its inspiration: the Galaxie brand bowling ball, complete with three finger holes. Rosenquist creates an abstract, almost cosmic composition of bright, Day-Glo colors, mimicking the marbleized lines of the Galaxie ball. *Bowling Ball Eclipse* echoes the shape of the ball as a painted image on top of classic movie stars (think: Ingrid Bergman and Cary Grant) locked in a lover's embrace. Here Rosenquist is playful in layering imagery, encapsulating this intimate moment in the unlikely frame of a bowling ball.

Currently on view on the lower level.



Nicolas De Staël

Flowers in a Red Vase

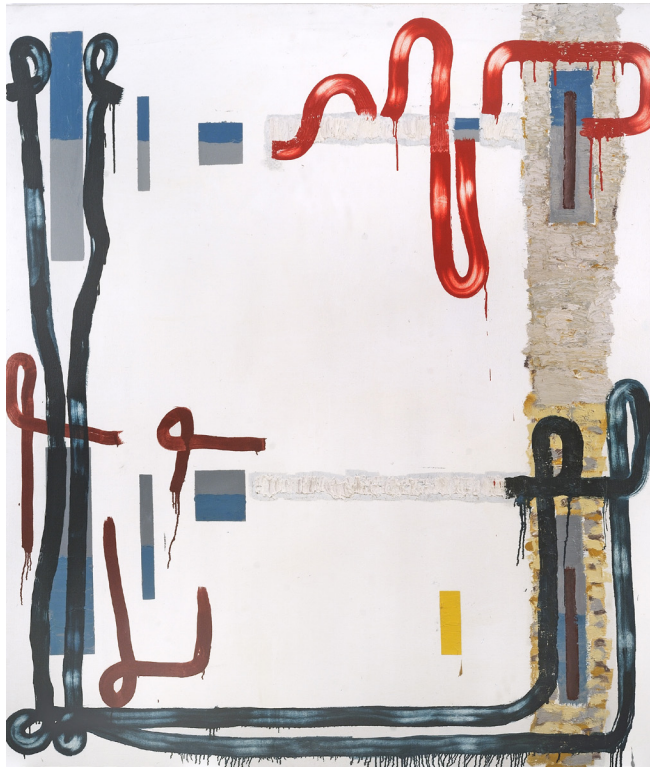
1954

oil on canvas

The subject of this painting by Nicolas de Staël is referenced in the title—*Flowers in a Red Vase*—yet the picture is far from representational. The artist created a collection of slabs by layering black, grey, and white paint with dabs of red and peach. These blocks are stacked, squeezed, and balanced on top of a red form sitting on a dark shape, as if a bouquet on the edge of a table. What is remarkable about this work is the sheer amount of paint de Staël piled on the surface. Applied with a palette knife, the shapes are thickly layered and even sculptural as they emerge from the canvas.

De Staël's dramatic biography is often attached to discussions of his work. Born in St. Petersburg, Russia to a wealthy family, de Staël was orphaned at an early age after fleeing the Russian Revolution with his parents. He was raised in Brussels by family friends and was exposed to art as a young boy. He spent the majority of his adult life in France, where he worked in Fernand Léger's studio and brushed shoulders with the modernists of his generation, befriending Jean Arp, Sonia Delaunay, and, especially, Georges Braque. *Flowers in a Red Vase* was made near the end of de Staël's brief, but prolific career, as he took his own life the following year at the age of 41.

Currently on view on the lower level.



David Urban

Band of Hope

1996

oil on canvas

Gift from the Trustees of the Corcoran Gallery of Art

The Corcoran Gallery of Art was one of the first private museums in the United States, established in 1869 by William Wilson Corcoran and expanded in 1880 to include the Corcoran College of Art and Design with the mission 'dedicated to art and used solely for the purpose of encouraging the American genius.' In 2014, the Corcoran transferred the college to the George Washington University and distributed the works from its Collection to museums and institutions in Washington, D.C.

Currently on view on the main level.



Constantin Brancusi

Head of a Sleeping Child

1906-7, cast 1908

bronze

This small sculpture by Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi, entitled *Head of a Sleeping Child* and measuring five inches long, captures the tender likeness of the artist's godchild, Alice Poiana. Cast in bronze in 1908 from a plaster model, the artwork depicts the child asleep, leaning on one cheek. Brancusi created this sculpture at a pivotal moment, as he was shifting away from an academic style and moving towards abstraction, in search of what he called "the essence of things." He would continue to engage with the theme of the child and the sleeping head throughout his career. The beginning of that study, *Head of a Sleeping Child* still shows some of the sitter's features, as opposed to later, more abstract work. Yet he shies away from portraiture, roughly rendering the child's head and separating it from the body, as if a piece of found antiquity. In this bronze cast of the plaster form, Brancusi captures the marks and imperfections of his carving process, from the deep chisel marks on the side of the head to the broken curl at the top, contrasted with the smoothed cheeks and forehead. His approach reminds the viewer of the sculpture's material nature, in this depiction of a sleeping child.

Not currently on view.



Alexander Calder

Brunette and Blonde

1943

painted wood and painted metal wire

Alexander Calder is perhaps best known for his invention of the *mobile*, or his hanging sculptures composed of multiple parts that move with the air. Calder recalled that it was fellow artist Marcel Duchamp who coined the term *mobile*, in 1931: “I asked [Duchamp] what sort of name I could give these things and he at once produced *mobile*. In addition to something that moves, in French it also means *motive*.” Though Calder preferred making his mobiles with metal, the components of *Brunette and Blonde* are carved painted wood. Made in 1943, the hanging sculpture reflects Calder’s material limitations in the midst of World War II, as the artist often turned to using wood at a time when metal was scarce.

Currently on view on the main level.



William Christenberry

Dream Building II

1981

metal, paper, wood, paint, printed paper, tape, and Alabama wood clay soil

Gift of Esther and Ralph Bortman

Throughout his career, William Christenberry found his muse in the American South. Raised in Alabama but based in Washington for most of his life, Christenberry is best known for his color-saturated images of vernacular buildings in Alabama. He also created sculptures, including his “Dream Building” series. The artist recalled the inspiration for these works: “I dreamed I was on a winding, back country Alabama road and I around a curve and there before me there was a building with no windows and doors. The building had an unbelievably pitched roof. The walls were covered with these outdoor advertising signs that I love. I got up the next morning and the dream was as clear as a bell.”

As part of this series, *Dream Building II* is a miniature structure, measuring more than two feet high. It is carefully constructed by hand and covered with signs painted to appear worn, as if the structure has been standing for some time. At the base, Christenberry placed deep red soil from his familial county in Alabama, further grounding the sculpture in both real and imagined memories. But the work is ominous. Its steep roof calls to mind church architecture but also the hoods of the Klu Klux Klan, referencing the light and dark sides of Southern history.

Not currently on view.



Auguste Rodin

The Athlete

1901-4, cast 1959

bronze

In 1901, the American athlete Samuel Stockton White III visited Paris and decided to sit as a model for the French sculptor Auguste Rodin, on the advice of a mutual friend. White was then a gymnast and award-winning bodybuilder who studied at Princeton University and Cambridge University. Over the course of three years and multiple sittings, Rodin made various studies of White in clay and plaster, eventually casting three different versions in bronze. This version, measuring about one and a half feet tall, shows the muscular White nude and seated in a relaxed pose, leaning forward with his head turned to the side. White recalled his experience in Rodin's studio: "It was a long time before he was satisfied with the pose. He had me walk around his studio and studied me from all angles. Finally, he asked me to assume a natural pose. I remember sitting on a bench, with my arm resting on my leg as Rodin worked and worked with his infinite sense of detail." White later became a prominent modern art collector, bequeathing his collection to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Not currently on view.



David Smith

Helmholtzian Landscape

1946

painted steel

American artist David Smith was a pioneer of metal sculpture at a time when materials such as steel and iron were mostly used for industrial purposes. Smith declared the significance of metal in his talk “The New Sculpture” at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1952: “What associations [metal] possesses are those of this century: power, structure, movement, progress, suspension, destruction, brutality.”

Smith made *Helmholtzian Landscape* in 1946, six years after leaving New York City to move to rural Bolton Landing, NY and the year after finishing a stint working as an industrial welder at the American Locomotive Company during World War II to support the war effort. Inspired by his surroundings and possessing some new welding skills, Smith created a series of “landscape” sculptures including *Helmholtzian Landscape*, composed of cut steel pieces welded to form a surreal, linear landscape of hovering shapes. Smith often sketched the mountainous views around him while riding the train between Manhattan and his home, which might have inspired the rough frame of *Helmholtzian Landscape*, as if mimicking a train window.

Measuring around a foot and a half high, *Helmholtzian Landscape* is rather enchanting in its compact size and painted surface, particularly in contrast to Smith’s later, large-scale works. The colors Smith used might also give some clue to the title, as it seems to reference Hermann von Helmholtz, a 19th-century physician and scientist known for his research on color theory and influence on the Impressionist artists.

Currently on view on the lower level.



Betsy Stewart

Aquatilis No. 6

2006

acrylic and sumi ink on wood

Gift of an anonymous donor

Aquatilis No. 6 is part of a series by Washington-based artist Betsy Stewart that finds inspiration in the microscopic organisms living in water. She covered this sculpture with painted, biomorphic forms, as if the freestanding totem is an imaginary cross section of what might lurk in ponds and other bodies of water. The wooden structure is painted with thin, layered washes of color that summon both the bright and the murky greens and blues of water life, with fine details drawn in sumi-e ink. With her imagery, Stewart draws our attention to humanity's place in relation to the natural world. To create her paintings and sculptures, Stewart studies scientific textbooks, looking to microscopic life forms as well as cosmic phenomena as starting points for her shapes. Her artworks are full of motion as these forms bounce and cluster, ebb and flow across her painted surfaces. Fittingly, Stewart has long been engaged with movement, as she studied early on as a dancer under Merce Cunningham, and views her process of painting as reminiscent of choreographing a dance performance.

Not currently on view.



Anne Truitt

Essex

1962

acrylic on wood

Gift from the Trustees of the Corcoran Gallery of Art

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Not currently on view.



Paul Jenkins

Phenomena Lunar Reckoning

2008

watercolor on paper

Given by Robin Rowan Clarke in loving memory of Thomas Crawford Clarke.

Phenomenal Lunar Reckoning by Paul Jenkins is an example of his masterful use of watercolor, smoothly blending colors together and gently feathering out at the edges to create rivulets of color.

Watercolor is a medium that consists of colored pigment suspended in a water-soluble binder that is then applied to a support surface, typically paper. The paint dries very quickly and has often been used to make preparatory sketches in addition to fully realized works of art. As a medium, watercolor is prized for its ability to make luminous images as the color of the paper shines through the translucent watercolor layer.

Not currently on view.



Wassily Kandinsky

Contrasts

1937

gouache on gray paper

Kandinsky was inspired by the abstract “language” of music. “Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposefully, to cause vibrations in the soul.” - Wassily Kandinsky

Currently on view on the main level.



Wassily Kandinsky

Untitled

1941

gouache on gray-green paper

Kandinsky was inspired by the abstract “language” of music. “Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposefully, to cause vibrations in the soul.” - Wassily Kandinsky

Currently on view on the main level.



Wifredo Lam

Your Own Life

1942

gouache on paper

Cuban-born artist Wifredo Lam created *Your Own Life* in 1942, the year after returning to Cuba from Paris, fleeing German occupation. Back in Cuba, Lam developed a new style bringing together Surrealism and Cubism with his knowledge of African art, Afro-Cuban culture, and Caribbean foliage. Lam often painted hybrid beings as shown here, with human, animal, and botanical features. *Your Own Life* is a frontal, fragmented portrait showing an animal figure in the center of a bisected face with plenteous eyes, a crown clustered with leaves, and the wispy profile of the artist's German wife, Helena Holzer, in the background. Lam's hybrid figures are often attributed to his experience navigating European art circles as an artist of Chinese, Spanish, and African descent.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Lam lived first in Madrid and then Paris, befriending Picasso and becoming affiliated with the Surrealists. Lam wrote: "I went to Europe to escape my homeland. I thought this journey would resolve everything. But in Europe I encountered other problems as oppressive as those I left behind. My return to Cuba meant, above all, a great stimulation of my imagination, as well as exteriorization of my world. I responded always to the presence of factors which emanated from our history and our geography, tropical flowers and black culture."

Currently on view on the lower level.



Joan Miró

Two Personages

1935

oil, enamel, nails, ball bearings, cheesecloth, string, and sand on cardboard

At first glance Joan Miró's *Two Personages* appear to be painted solely using oil paint. A closer look at the textured surface reveals that Miró incorporated found objects into the painting: nails, ball bearings, cheesecloth, string, and sand. Created during an experimental period in Miró's career, *Two Personages* seems to be political in nature. Miró painted the work only a few months before he fled Barcelona for Paris, to escape growing hostilities leading to the Spanish Civil War. He depicts two figures bearing the flag colors of both Spain and his home region of Catalonia. In this context, the nails and ball bearings embedded in the painted surface introduce a menacing presence, as if the tools of conflict present between the two opposed figures.

Currently on view on the main level.



Piet Mondrian

Dying Sunflower, Watercolor

1908

watercolor on paper

It may surprise you to learn that this expressive watercolor of a drooped sunflower was painted by Piet Mondrian, the Dutch painter best known for his geometric abstractions. However, throughout his career, Mondrian made these pictures of flowers, often depicting a single bloom captured in a wilted state, as if final portraits of magnificent creatures. Here, flowers are not simply decorative but representative of the stages of life. This subject matter most likely reflects Mondrian's affiliation with Theosophy, a religion founded in the late 19th century that viewed death as productive to the emergence of new life.

Not currently on view.