

# Highlights from the Permanent Collection



THE KREEGER MUSEUM



**Claude Monet**, *Arm of the Seine near Giverny in the Fog*, 1897, oil on canvas

Claude Monet painted this picture as part of a series called “Mornings on the Seine,” a study of the changing atmospheric effects at dawn of this view of the river Seine, near his home in Giverny. While working on these paintings between 1896 and 1897, the French Impressionist artist woke up at 3:30 in the morning and boarded his small boat—his floating studio—to arrive at a particular spot to paint before sunrise. In this picture, the artist captures the misty, ethereal haze of dawn drenched in soft purples and blue hues. There is almost no separation between the tall trees and sky and their reflections, creating a weightlessness in the composition.



**Joan Miró**, *Two Personages*, 1935, oil, enamel, nails, ball bearings, cheesecloth, string, and sand on cardboard

At first glance, Joan Miró's *Two Personages* appears to be painted solely using oil paint. A closer look at the textured surface reveals that the Spanish artist incorporated found objects into the painting: nails, ball bearings, cheesecloth, string, and sand. Created during an experimental period in Miró's career, *Two Personages* is also political in nature. The artist 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 these two opposed figures.



**Isamu Noguchi, *Soliloquy*, 1962, bronze**

Isamu Noguchi created *Soliloquy* as part of a series of works with melancholic names “that convey emotions” such as *Solitude*, *Mortality*, and *The Cry*. These sculptures reference the delicate balance of life, of sculpture, and of calligraphy, which inspired the vertical strokes and arrangements. In entitling the work *Soliloquy*, Noguchi alluded to the literary device used for sharing a character’s inward thoughts, which further emphasizes the sculpture’s solitary, emotive form. The American artist first created these works as lightweight balsa wood forms, later casting them in bronze. Noguchi wrote on the balance between these two materials: “The life of this sculpture comes from an ephemeral lightness, a delicacy, as with balsawood. Bronze adds a sense of weight, which is also to be valued.”



**Max Beckmann, *Sunny Beach with Bathers or Green Sea with Yellow Skiff*, 1937, oil on canvas**

In 1915, Max Beckmann wrote in a letter to his 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, the German artist painted this scene with rough and fragmented figures, defined by the heavy outlines indicative of his style. The sunny disposition of this work does not reflect the moment when it was made. Beckmann painted this picture the year he was deemed a “degenerate” artist by the Nazis, resulting in the removal of more than 500 of his works from public collections. By July, Beckmann had fled Germany with his wife and landed in Amsterdam, where they remained during the war. The pressure Beckmann faced is not reflected in this painting, which instead recalls a more peaceful time through the artist’s view of the sea.



**Bamana artist, Mali, *Chi Wara* Headdress Mask, wood**

Made by an artist of the Bamana people from Mali, this *Chi Wara* headdress depicts the deity that introduced the Bamana to agriculture. *Chi Wara* is honored with dances and contests during planting and harvesting times and is thought to be part human and part animal. The headdresses are carved with abstracted features referencing animals such as the antelope, while the zigzagging, geometric design may signify the radiance of the sun. Worn by men during performances, the headdresses are attached to long raffia fibers that sway as the dancers move, imitating the antelope. There are male and female versions of these headdresses, as the two sides of agricultural fertility, with the male represented here. European artists of the 20th century were particularly enamored with these objects, finding inspiration in their design and abstract compositions.



**Joan Mitchell, *Untitled*, 1965, oil and charcoal on canvas**

Born in Chicago, Joan 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. Throughout her career, Mitchell painted pictures that captured her visual and experiential recollections, creating abstract imagery driven by her sensory memories. In 1959, she moved to France and was living in Paris when she painted this work. Mitchell's paintings during this time looked to the vibrant colors of the French countryside, yet *Untitled* connects to the artist's life in Paris. The picture was part of a suite of works entitled "14 Stations on Paris Subway." Mitchell considered urban experiences to be as powerful as encounters with the natural world. She stated in a 1958 interview that she did not distinguish nature from "man-made' nature." She remarked: "a city is a strange as a tree."



**Alexander Calder, *Brunette and Blonde*, 1943,**  
painted wood and metal wire

American artist 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.





**Helen Frankenthaler**, *Hurricane Flag*, 1969, acrylic on canvas, Gift from the Trustees of the Corcoran Gallery of Art

*Hurricane Flag* is a monumental example showing Helen Frankenthaler's "stain-soak" style of painting. The American artist made her paintings by first laying unprimed canvas on the floor and then creating large fields of color by pouring paint often thinned with turpentine. Her abstract shapes, soaked into the raw surface, were frequently surrounded by areas of untouched canvas. While Frankenthaler's paintings were abstract, the artist often incorporated colors and imagery from 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.



**Larry Poons, *Untitled*, 1967, acrylic on canvas**

Larry Poons created this monumental work at a moment when the American artist was exploring the optical qualities of paint, filling his canvases with shapes suspended on fields of bright colors. In *Untitled*, Poons painted long ellipses that dance and float on the canvas, often colliding and coming together to form 'X's. The composition is rhythmic, even musical. Poons was 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. 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.



**Wassily Kandinsky, *Relations*, 1934, mixed media on canvas**

Wassily Kandinsky made *Relations* in 1934, the year after the Russian 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 from 1934 to 1936.