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First Exhibition to Explore Charles Sheeler's Work in All Media at National Gallery of Art, Washington May 7—August 27, 2006

Washington, DC—The complex relationships between photography, film, painting, and drawing that were so central to the art of American modernist Charles Sheeler (1883-1965) are highlighted in **Charles Sheeler: Across Media**. On view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from May 7 through August 27, 2006, the show will travel to the Art Institute of Chicago October 7, 2006, through January 7, 2007, and to the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, de Young, February 10 through May 6, 2007.

The exhibition features many of the artist's greatest achievements, including striking examples from his famous 1917 series of photographs made in Doylestown, Pennsylvania; the film "Manhatta," made in collaboration with Paul Strand in 1920; and two of Sheeler's best-known paintings, the iconic images of the Ford Motor Company's River Rouge Plant *Classic Landscape* (1931) and *American Landscape* (1930).

"A celebration of the formal clarity and beauty of the artist's works, this exhibition draws upon a core of masterpieces recently added to the Gallery's collection. We are proud to present these new holdings as well as loans from public and private collections to the American public," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "The National Gallery of Art is delighted to premiere this survey of art by an important American original and is grateful to Altria Group, Inc., for their sponsorship."

Exhibition Support

The exhibition is made possible by the generous support of Altria Group, Inc.

“For nearly 50 years, the Altria family of companies has supported hundreds of arts organizations that celebrate the vision and voices of established and emerging artists. We believe the arts are an essential part of a vibrant community and are so pleased to sponsor the important exhibition, **Charles Sheeler: Across Media**. Charles Sheeler was an innovator who brilliantly linked art, commerce, design and technology in ways that move and inspire. We hope this exhibition will give audiences the opportunity to discover his views of America and to learn more about their own,” said Jennifer Goodale, Vice President of Contributions at Altria Group.

The Exhibition

Charles Sheeler: Across Media showcases 52 works: 14 paintings, 17 photographs, 18 drawings, one print, one photomural, and one film. Organized chronologically and covering the major themes of Sheeler’s career, the exhibition will enable viewers to compare works of the same subject rendered in a variety of media.

The exhibition opens with a small selection of Sheeler’s seminal c. 1917 photographs of the interior of an 18th-century Quaker fieldstone house in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. In these highly experimental night scenes, such as *The Stove* and *Stairway with Chair*, Sheeler took a familiar antiquarian subject and translated it into a modernist abstraction. Sheeler’s first major achievement as a photographer, these works were immediately championed by Alfred Stieglitz and later inspired the drawing, *The Open Door* (1932), and the painting, *The Upstairs* (1938).

In 1920 Sheeler collaborated with Paul Strand on “Manhatta,” widely regarded as the first avant-garde film made in the United States. A DVD transfer from a vintage print of this fascinating ten-minute montage of New York City’s urban landscape, with titles and captions from poems by Walt Whitman, will be projected continuously in close proximity to a number of related photographs and paintings from the early 1920s, including *Church Street El* (1920) and *Skyscrapers* (1922).

Moving from the rural to the urban to the industrial, the second room of the exhibition highlights Sheeler’s finest works from the series of iconic paintings and drawings

inspired by the commercial photographs of the River Rouge Plant that the Ford Motor Company commissioned him to do in 1927. Including watercolor studies for both *Classic Landscape* (1928) and *American Landscape* (1930) and a magnificent group of Conté crayon drawings, they make clear how Sheeler's name became virtually synonymous with depictions of the American industrial landscape. Also featured here will be a seven-by-twelve foot photomontage mural based on Sheeler's study *Industry* (1932). Murals were a popular medium in the 1930s and Sheeler, along with Georgia O'Keeffe, Ben Shahn, Berenice Abbott, and others, was invited to submit his design as part of the exhibition **Murals by American Painters and Photographers**, organized in 1932 by the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Summarizing Sheeler's ongoing practice of revisiting subjects in different media will be the enigmatic masterpiece *The Artist Looks at Nature* (1943) in which Sheeler paints himself in the process of sketching the 1932 drawing *Interior with Stove* that was in turn based on the 1917 Doylestown photograph *The Stove*. The show brings together the painting and its related works together for the first time.

Across Media concludes with a select group of images of New England mills inspired by Sheeler's experiments with photomontage in the 1940s and 1950s, such as the Conté crayon work *Counterpoint* (1949) and the oil *New England Irrelevancies* (1953), which are among the most complex and intriguing achievements of his entire career.

Charles Sheeler (1883-1965)

Born in Philadelphia, Sheeler was trained there in industrial drawing, decorative painting, and applied art at the School of Industrial Art from 1900 to 1902. He then attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts from 1903 to 1906, where he studied under William Merritt Chase and learned an impressionistic style of painting. In early 1909, on a trip to Paris, he encountered the revolutionary works of Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and other European modernists. Recognizing the break with the past that these artists represented, he returned to the United States determined to pursue a new direction in his work.

Around 1910 Sheeler took up photography as a way to support his painting and in 1913

participated in the first display of European and American modernism in the United States, the Armory Show in New York, where he greatly admired works by the iconoclastic French artist Marcel Duchamp. By 1917 Sheeler was being recognized not only for his cubist-inspired paintings, but also for his innovative photographs. During the 1920s Sheeler found further success and recognition as a commercial photographer working for Edward Steichen at Condé Nast. In the early 1930s he also designed fabrics, tableware, and glassware.

After receiving the Ford River Rouge commission in 1927, Sheeler continued to pursue industrial themes. His career was effectively ended by a debilitating stroke in 1959. Sheeler's many depictions of American industry secured his reputation during and after his lifetime.

Curator, Catalogue, and Related Activities

The curator of *Charles Sheeler: Across Media* is Charles Brock, assistant curator of American and British paintings at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. He is also the author of *Charles Sheeler: Across Media*, produced by the National Gallery of Art and published in association with University of California Press. The 238-page, hardcover catalogue includes 50 color illustrations and 80 black-and-white reproductions and is available for \$45 from the Shops at the National Gallery of Art, by visiting www.nga.gov (<http://www.nga.gov/index.htm>), or by calling (202) 842-6002 or (800) 697-9350.

On May 7 at 2:00 p.m., Brock will present the lecture "Charles Sheeler: An Introduction to the Exhibition." On Sunday, June 11, from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., noted scholars Michele H. Bogart, Jan-Christopher Horak, Patricia Johnston, and Laura R. Katzman will present illustrated lectures on Sheeler followed by a panel discussion. At 4:30 p.m., composer and pianist Donald Sosin will perform his original score for Sheeler's film "Manhatta" (1920). All programs will be held in the East Building Auditorium. For the duration of the exhibition, Gallery talks will be given by staff lecturers Sally Shelburne in the East Building, dates and times to be announced.

Additional Support

“Manhatta” is provided by the film preservation project “Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film 1893-1941” sponsored by Anthology Film Archives, New York, and Deutsches Filmmuseum, Frankfurt am Main, and underwritten by Cineric, Inc.

pictured above:

Charles Sheeler

Interior with Stove, 1932

conté crayon on wove paper

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift (Partial and Promised) of Aaron I. Fleischman, 2000.181.1

Charles Sheeler

Self-Portrait at Easel, 1931

gelatin silver print on paper

The Art Institute of Chicago, Ada Turnbull Hertle Endowment

Charles Sheeler

The Artist Looks at Nature, 1943

oil on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Society for Contemporary American Art

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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