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Rare Early Work by Morris Louis and Bound Photographic Album by Ringl + Pit Enter the Collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington



Morris Louis, *Sub-Marine*, 1948, oil on canvas
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Howard and Roberta Ahmanson Fund

Washington, DC—At its October 2017 Board of Trustees meeting, the National Gallery of Art acquired works including a rare early painting by Morris Louis (1912–1962), two complete bound volumes by Giovanni Francesco Costa (1711–1773), a 1928 drawing by Stuart Davis (1892–1964), and a handcrafted album by ringl + pit (active 1930–1933).

"We are delighted with the acquisition of these important works by Morris Louis, Giovanni Francesco Costa, Stuart Davis, and ringl + pit, among others," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are grateful as well to our many donors whose generosity continues to strengthen the Gallery's collection."

Paintings

Morris Louis's *Sub-Marine* (1948) is one of his few existing early paintings. After developing his signature technique of staining in 1953, Louis destroyed much of his previous work, which makes *Sub-Marine* an important document in the career of an artist who went on to become one of the most lyrical artists of the so-called Washington Color School. The whiplash lines and washed colors show the influence of Arshile Gorky, while the biomorphic shapes recall Joan Miró and Alexander Calder. The yellow forms flowing in rhyming fashion foreshadow the parallel bands and rivulets of his mature work. The painting joins six others by Louis in the Gallery's collection, including an even earlier work, *Country House* (1938), from the Corcoran Collection. *Sub-Marine* was purchased with funds from the Howard and Roberta Ahmanson Fund.

The Gallery has also acquired important paintings by Juan Gris (1887–1927) and Pierre Soulages (born 1919). Given to the Gallery by Dian Woodner for the Woodner Collection, Gris's *Glass and Checkerboard* (1917) is a daring still life in which only a checkerboard and glass can be discerned. Other objects are incorporated into an intense play of abstract pattern, repetition, and texture. Gris's characteristic manipulation of light, shadow, and silhouette adds mystery to this painting, the modest size of which belies its power and complexity. Soulages, a master of French postwar abstraction, has limited himself in recent decades to black paint applied with rakes and other tools. A gift from Pierre and Colette Soulages, *Peinture 326 x 181 cm, 14 mars 2009* (2009) consists of four panels reaching over ten feet high. Through the careful manipulation of these four surfaces, each treated differently, Soulages demonstrates that the true medium of his so-called "outré-noir" (beyond black) paintings is light.

Prints and Drawings

Giovanni Francesco Costa's *Le Delizie del fiume Brenta nei palazzi e casini situati sopra le sponde dalla sua sboccatura nella laguna di Venezia infino alla città di Padova* (*The Delights of the Brenta River, in the Palaces and Villas Along the Banks, from Its Mouth in the Lagoon of Venice to the City of Padua*) (1750/1756) is one of the most ambitious and rare print projects from 18th-century Venice. In 1747 Costa etched a series of views along the Brenta canal between Padua and the lagoon, a favorite location for the rural residences of Venice's principal families. Inspired by the etchings of Canaletto created a few years earlier, the plates are extraordinary in the variety of their composition, the sensitivity of their drawing, and the evocation of a luminous atmosphere. The views proceed from east to west, each featuring an aristocratic structure, and together form a continuous trip up the canal. The series culminates not just 18th-century Venetian projects of the kind, extending their range to terra firma and vastly expanding their number, but the tradition of vicarious travel around actual places through printed series that goes back to 17th-century Holland. These volumes join the Gallery's holdings of 18th-century Venetian prints, drawings, and illustrated books, among which is the most complete collection in existence of Costa's rare architectural fantasies and a unique series of anamorphic etchings, all acquired over the previous six years. These volumes were purchased with funds from the New Century Fund, O'Neal Fund, and Garbaty Fund.

Torso and Head of Two Figures (1928) by Stuart Davis, one of the most original of the American modernists, resembles a stripped-down design for a machine. Done in black ink and graphite, the drawing exemplifies the tension between abstraction and realism that invigorates much of Davis's art. It also represents a study in contrasts between black and white, solid and void, organic and inorganic, and surface and depth. The drawing's mechanical underpinnings and its emphasis on geometric forms evokes not only the works of Russian constructivist El Lissitzky but also those of Louis Lozowick, an American artist born in Ukraine, whose *Machine Ornament* drawings (1923–1930) bear a striking resemblance to *Torso and Head*. The Davis drawing was purchased through the Pepita Milmore Memorial Fund and Clark Fund and is presently on view in *Machine Art Modernism*, an installation of drawings, photographs, and prints on the ground floor of the East Building through mid-May 2018.

Sculpture

The Adoration of the Shepherds (1530s), a bronze plaquette, is among the most successful religious narrative compositions by Valerio Belli (1468–1546), a gifted sculptor of rock crystals and medals as well as plaquettes. In a characteristically monumental composition on a miniature scale, in *Adoration* he has infused his figures with classical grace—slender angels hovering with olive branches and a crown, shepherds assembling with gifts, and the Virgin kneeling in rapture before her newborn son, who reaches out toward her. In front of a majestic structure with a Roman arcade, the figures reflect both Belli's studies of ancient reliefs and his immersion in the culture of Renaissance Rome, especially the school of Raphael. The composition shows the influence of an engraving of the same subject from the circle of Giulio Bonasone after Raphael, and it builds on another *Adoration of the Shepherds* by Belli, carved for the crystal casket (1530–1532) he made for the Medici pope Clement VII. While the Gallery owns a version of the latter plaquette as well, the workmanship of this new acquisition particularly demonstrates Belli's genius for expressive modeling in miniature. This plaquette was given to the Gallery by Michael Riddick as a gift of the Riddick Family in memory of Eleonora Luciano.

In October the Gallery also acquired works of modern sculpture by Alex Katz (born 1927), Alexander Calder (1898–1976), and Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975). Katz, renowned painter of pop-inflected portraits, has been treading the line between painting and sculpture with painted cutouts or silhouettes for decades. In *Ada (Weathervane)* (2016) Katz once again depicts Ada, his wife and muse, setting her painted head into motion as the image spins on a tall pole, alternately revealing front and back. This sculpture is a gift of Robert Lococo and the Artist.

Two brass wire sculptures by Alexander Calder, *French Poodle* (c. 1952) and *Vogelgesang [Birdsong]* (c. 1930), as well as a bronze sculpture by Barbara Hepworth were given to the Gallery by Elaine Kaufman as a gift of Richard and Elaine Kaufman. In *Vogelgesang [Birdsong]* Calder conjures what may be a quacking duck from a single piece of wire; in the later sculpture, *French Poodle*, multiple pieces of wire create a poodle with the ambition to be a lion. Calder was a master of manipulating wire, one of the first materials he used, as demonstrated by these works as well as two wire sculptures already in the Gallery's collection. *Sculpture with Strings* (date unknown) by Barbara Hepworth, one of the great British sculptors of the modern era, is the first work by the artist to enter the Gallery's collection. This bronze sculpture was cast in 1961 from a plaster model made in 1939, a time when she was incorporating voids into her work and spanning them with strings. The result is a lyrical fusion of constructivist geometry and surrealist biomorphism.

Photographs

Grete Stern and Ellen Auerbach were two pioneering women artists whose studio—ringl + pit, named after their childhood nicknames (*ringl* for Stern, *pit* for Auerbach)—focused on advertising, fashion, and portrait photography. With a playful yet powerful surrealist sensibility, ringl + pit often used mannequins and wigs to question the artifice involved in the construction of female identity. Their close relationship is vividly expressed in the remarkable bound album *The Ringlpitis* (1931), which Auerbach gaveto Stern as a birthday gift in 1931. A unique, handmade album, it is composed of photographs that the two artists made of each other along with drawings, pieces of fabric, and handwritten and typed texts that are often collaged to create playful and poetic narratives. It also includes an exceptional fold-out section that depicts a circus performance with images of Stern and Auerbach in masquerade. Precedents for such albums are 18th-century friendship albums and 19th-century collage photo albums, including the magnificent *Cator Family Album* (1866–1877) in the Gallery's collection. A one-of-a-kind work, *The Ringlpitis* is an important addition to the Gallery's collection of modern photography and an object that sheds light on the complexity of artists' relationships

with one another and the role of women in the history of photography. This album was purchased with funds from the Alfred H. Moses and Fern M. Schad Fund.

For 50 years, Robert Adams (born 1937) has made compelling, provocative, and highly influential photographs that explore some of the most profound questions of our time—our responsibility to the land we inherited and the moral dilemmas we face as we live with the contradictions of progress. Working in Colorado, California, and Oregon from the 1960s to the present, he has photographed a wide variety of subjects including suburban sprawl, strip malls, and highways; homes and stores; as well as the land itself—rivers and skies, the prairie and ocean—and the ravages we have inflicted on it. *North edge of Denver, Colorado* (1973–1974) addresses the construction of a new kind of American environment, one in which industry has transformed the landscape, producing great isolation and little sense of community. Given to the Gallery by Robert and Kerstin Adams, it will be included in the exhibition *American Silence: The Photographs of Robert Adams, 1965–2015* in the fall of 2019.

Shooting from a helicopter, Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky (born 1955) captured a striking aerial view of an open quarry near Barre, Vermont. Such a dramatic perspective reveals the astounding scale of the project, where stonecutters work precariously atop massive blocks of granite. Part of a larger series that examines both the geological and social history of the area, Burtynsky's *Rock of Ages #7, Active Granite Section, Wells-Lamson Quarry, Barre, Vermont* (1991) calls attention to the delicate balance between human ambition and the environment. An early example of what became Burtynsky's signature approach, this unexpectedly beautiful photograph subverts our understanding of the sublime in nature by asking us to contemplate how humans have reshaped the natural landscape.

The Joy of Giving Something, Inc. recently gave the Gallery 87 photographs by the American photographer Thomas Roma (born 1950) from his series *Come Sunday* (1991–1994). In the early 1990s while he was photographing the exterior of houses of worship in Brooklyn, Roma was invited inside to record the service itself, sparking a three-year project in which he photographed more than 150 services. His photographs, as Henry Louis Gates has noted, "capture the sublimity of the beliefs of the people who are most 'caught up in the whirling storms of life.'"

Two photographs from c. 1950 by Saul Steinberg (1914–1999), acquired from the Saul Steinberg Foundation, are part of a series the artist dubbed "photoworks" begun in the late 1940s. In this series Steinberg playfully transformed everyday objects by drawing on or around them. He then had these site installations photographed in spare compositions by different photographers, intending them to represent ideas rather than function as sculptures. He published inset booklets of these photographs in the March and September 1950 issues of *Flair* magazine. These photographs are on view in the Saul Steinberg installation on the East Building Mezzanine through May 18, 2018.

Press Contact:

Laurie Tylec, (202) 842-6355 or l-tylec@nga.gov

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 at 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. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt, Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc, and Instagram at <http://instagram.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.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Department of Communications
National Gallery of Art
2000B South Club Drive
Landover, MD 20785
phone: (202) 842-6353
e-mail: pressinfo@nga.gov

Anabeth Guthrie
Chief of Communications
(202) 842-6804
a-guthrie@nga.gov

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Laurie Tylec
(202) 842-6355
l-tylec@nga.gov

Questions from members of the media may be directed to the Department of Communications at (202) 842-6353 or pressinfo@nga.gov

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