



AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS

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Coming of Age: American Art, 1850s to 1950s Opening in September at the Addison Gallery of American Art

New York, NY (July 20, 2006) – In the one hundred years between the 1850s and the 1950s, American art came of age, transforming itself from the provincial to the international and moving from literal depictions of the particular to abstract interpretations of universal ideals. Organized by the American Federation of Arts and the Addison Gallery of American Art, *Coming of Age: American Art, 1850s to 1950s* will explore the complex process of maturation that took place throughout this formative century of American art.



Drawn exclusively from the acclaimed collection of the Addison Gallery, Guest Curators William C. Agee and Susan C. Faxon have selected approximately seventy iconic paintings and sculptures that reveal the complex and often contradictory impulses in American art during a century when artists were seeking to define an American style. On September 9, 2006, *Coming of Age: American Art, 1850s to 1950s* will open at the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts. The exhibition will travel to four additional venues (please see tour schedule on page 4 for details).

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Winslow Homer (1836-1910)

Eight Bells, 1886

Oil on canvas, 25 3/16 x 30 3/16 in.

Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts; gift of anonymous donor (1930.379)

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Coming of Age: American Art, 1850s to 1950s begins with a selection of masterworks of the Hudson River School and considers the influence of the American landscape on mid-nineteenth century artists as they began to establish a new idiom reflective of their uniquely American experiences and values. Works such as *Coming Storm* (1868) by Albert Bierstadt, *Mount Katahdin* (ca. 1856) by Frederic Church, and Asher B. Durand's *Study of a Wood Interior* (ca. 1850) embody an optimistic sense of nationalism.



By the 1870s, the hold of the American landscape on the imagination of artists had lessened and American artists looked overseas for inspiration and training. In works such as George Inness's *The Coming Storm* (ca. 1879) and Alexander Wyant's powerful *Landscape* (ca. 1880s), for example, Tonalists sought an emotional, soft-focused, atmospheric landscape language based on French Barbizon painting. At the same time American Pre-Raphaelites, inspired by English counterparts, narrowed their attention to depictions of nature that were minute in their specificity. Artists such as Jasper Cropsey maintained an interest in American landscape yet eschewed the large scale of his Hudson River predecessors for intimate luminous landscapes.

In the late nineteenth century, Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, and Eastman Johnson also focused on native subjects, capturing, in such masterpieces as Homer's *Eight Bells* (1886), Eakin's *Salutat* (1898), and Johnson's *The Conversation* (1879), a realism that celebrated the power of the American land, sea, and mind. Returning from Europe transformed by their training and exposure to French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, Childe Hassam and Maurice Prendergast created shimmering works—like *Early Morning on the Avenue in May 1917* (1917) and *The Swans* (ca. 1914-15), respectively, that merged European influences with the American preference for the specific over the atmospheric.

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Asher B. Durand (1796–1886)
Study of a Wood Interior, ca. 1850
Oil on canvas mounted on panel, 16 3/4 x 24 in.
Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts; gift of Mrs. Frederic F. Durand (1932.1)

By the turn of the century, an even more complex set of conflicting artistic impulses coexisted. Expatriate painters John Singer Sargent and James McNeill Whistler—adept players in the international art scene—were creating European-inspired paintings of European scenes. Artists such as Abbott Thayer and George de Forest Brush fostered the development of an American style built on Renaissance ideals that would carry on the traditions of Western European culture; while Ashcan school painters—Robert Henri, George Luks, and John Sloan—focused on the gritty streets and structures of the American city, which they portrayed using European stylistic traditions.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, exhibitions of European modernism startled the American art world at the Armory Show in 1913 and in the galleries of Alfred Stieglitz. Proponents of American modernism, including Stuart Davis, Man Ray, and Patrick Henry Bruce, defined abstraction by using bold, geometric shapes and colors to create an American vision developed from European Cubism and abstraction, whereas artists such as Georgia O’Keeffe and Arthur Dove created a modernism that was indebted to organic forms. Charles Sheeler and Edward Hopper acclaimed industry and the American city in compositions that maintained allegiance to modernism.



In the early 1930s, German-trained artists Josef Albers and Hans Hofmann emigrated to the United States where they were instrumental in introducing a generation of artists to ideas about color, form, perception, and design that would transform American art. Their teaching set the stage for the emergence of a new non-object-based abstraction in the 1940s in

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Edward Hopper (1882-1967)
Manhattan Bridge Loop, 1928
Oil on canvas, 35 x 60 in.
Addison Gallery of American Art,
Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts;
gift of Stephen C. Clark, Esq. (1932.17)

Patrick Henry Bruce (1881-1936)
Peinture/Nature morte, ca. 1924
Oil and graphite on canvas, 28 3/4 x 36 1/4 in.
Addison Gallery of American Art,
Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts;
gift of Mr. and Mrs. William H. Lane (1958.38)

the work of Abstract Expressionists such as Adolph Gottlieb, Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock, and David Smith. In works, such as Smith's *Structure of Arches* (1939) and Pollock's *Phosphorescence* (1947), a new notion of American art was forged that broke the hold of old traditions. By 1950, the center of international art moved from Paris to New York with American art now constituting the avant-garde. *Coming of Age: American Art, 1850s to 1950s* concludes with works by such twentieth-century leaders as Jasper Johns, John McLaughlin, Ad Reinhardt, and Frank Stella who translated the modernism of the New York school into a refinement of color, shape, and line that assured American art's vanguard position for decades to come.

From the early days of the new nation, Americans grappled with defining the special character of their culture and understanding its relationship to European antecedents and traditions. Through a multi-layered trajectory, delineating complexities and contractions, changes and growth, and common and continuing themes, American art forged a new artistic language over the next century built on both domestic and European artistic traditions, and by the 1950s took its place as a leader in the international arena.

Commenting on the exhibition, AFA Director Julia Brown remarked, "We are delighted to work with the Addison Gallery to present an exhibition of masterful examples from such a significant period in the history of American art. We are pleased to be able to bring works from one of the most important collections of American art in the United States to a worldwide audience."

Tour Schedule:

Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy Andover, Massachusetts	September 9, 2006—January 7, 2007
Meadows Museum of Art Dallas, Texas	November 30, 2007—February 24, 2008
Dulwich Picture Gallery London, England	March 14, 2008—June 8, 2008
Peggy Guggenheim Collection Venice, Italy	June 27, 2008—October 12, 2008
Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale Fort Lauderdale, Florida	November 6, 2008—March 8, 2009

The exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts, New York, and the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts.

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Guest Curators: William C. Agee is Evelyn Kranes Kossak Professor of Art History at Hunter College, City University of New York. Susan C. Faxon is Associate Director and Curator of Art Before 1950 at the Addison Gallery of American Art.

Publication: A fully illustrated catalogue published by the American Federation of Arts in association with Yale University Press accompanies the exhibition and includes major essays by Guest Curators Susan C. Faxon and William C. Agee.

American Federation of Arts: Founded in 1909 by an Act of Congress, the AFA is a nonprofit institution that organizes art exhibitions for presentation in museums around the world, publishes exhibition catalogues, and develops education programs. Current and upcoming AFA exhibitions include *Lorna Simpson; Contemporary Photography and the Garden—Deceits and Fantasies*; and *Temples and Tombs: Treasures of Egyptian Art from The British Museum*. For more information on the AFA, please visit www.afaweb.org.

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