

OBJECT GUIDE

*European and
American Art
1890-1950*



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John Marin
American, 1870 - 1953
Weehawken Sequence No. 20, c. 1916
oil on canvas-covered board
Ackland Fund, 60.4.2



- John Marin was among the first American artists to make abstract paintings. He was a member of the avant-garde circle that centered around the influential photographer and gallery owner Alfred Stieglitz.
- This work is part of a series of about 100 oil sketches Marin made between 1910 and 1916, called the Weehawken Sequence. The works focus on imagery of grain elevators and railroad tracks, the Palisades, and the Hudson River with the New York City skyline beyond.
- Marin painted this series of works outdoors. The notional strokes and scratched lines give the impression of an artist trying to get down the general impressions of buildings and boat traffic. The fragmented, expressive scene conveys the frenetic pace and congestion of life in a major industrial waterfront.

1870: Born 23 December in Rutherford, New Jersey

1899-1901: Studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

1901-03: Studied at the Art Students League, New York

1905-09: Lived abroad in Paris

1909: Began to show work at Stieglitz' 291 Gallery

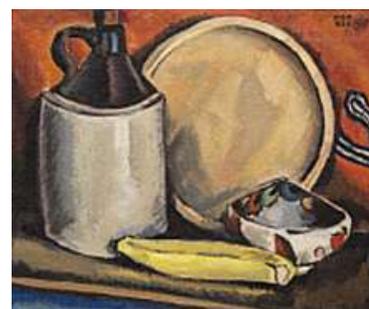
1910: Returned to the United States and settled in New York

1913: Exhibited ten paintings at the International Exhibition of Modern Art, known as the Armory Show

1936: Became one of the first American artists given a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York

1953: Died 1 October in Cape Split, Maine

Man Ray
American, 1890 - 1976
Still Life, 1913
oil on canvas
Burton Emmett Collection, 58.1.241



- Man Ray painted this still life shortly after the famous New York Armory Show (the International Exhibition of Modern Art) closed, when he moved to an artists' colony in Ridgefield, New Jersey. There he painted various arrangements of plates, jugs, fruit, and patterned cloths.
- Coffee grounds mixed into the paint give the surface of the canvas a gritty, three-dimensional texture.
- Man Ray had, in his words, "an aversion to paintings in which nothing was left to speculation." Here the table is tilted downward to give the sense that objects gathered on the table are unstable and about to spill into the viewer's space.
- For some time, this painting was not associated with Man Ray due to a misreading of the signature as Mon Roy.

1890: Born 27 August Emmanuel Radnitzky in Philadelphia

1910-12: Attended the Francisco Ferrer Social Center, or Modern School, in New York City

1912: Began to sign his paintings as Man Ray

1913-16: Lived at the artists' colony in Ridgefield, New Jersey

1921: Edited the publication *New York Dada* with Marcel Duchamp; emigrated to France

1940: Moved back to the United States at the outbreak of war

1951: Returned to Paris, where he lived the rest of his life

1976: Died 18 November in Paris

Walt Kuhn
American, 1877 - 1949
The City, c. 1919
oil on canvas
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Norman Hirschl, 75.30.1



- Walt Kuhn was one of the chief organizers of the Armory Show of 1913, which marked American audiences' first encounter with European avant-garde art and was extremely influential on the development of American modernism.
- Kuhn's interest in the stage and in the lives of entertainers lasted throughout his life. In addition to portraying actors and dancers, he also directed performances and designed costumes, which his wife created.
- This work is a study for a larger painting that Kuhn completed in 1919, now at the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago. The final version uses a darker palette, more solid planes of color, and pronounced geometric brushstrokes, and modifies the dancer's facial expression.
- The visible brushwork suggests that the painting was executed rather quickly and that some colors were mixed directly on the canvas. Passages of thickly applied paint or impasto add weight to an already overfilled space.

1877: Born William Kuhn on 27 October in Brooklyn, New York
1899: Moved to San Francisco, began to sign his name as "Walt"
1901-03: Studied in Paris and Munich
1913: Organized the Armory Show
1918: Headed the Red Cross Art department
1926-28: Taught at the Art Students League, New York City
1936-39: Designed passenger cars for the Union Pacific Railroad
1949: Died 13 July in New York City

Niles Spencer

American, 1893 – 1952

Farm Buildings, 1922-26

oil on canvas

Burton Emmett Collection, 58.1.244

Conservation treatment for this painting, completed in 1997, was made possible by a grant from the Pforzheimer Foundation.



- Spencer grew up in New England and had a personal connection to the rural areas of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Maine that he often painted.
- During a trip to Paris, Spencer became interested in Cubism, but after a while he returned to painting New England landscapes. *Farm Buildings* shows his new style, in which he portrayed recognizable subjects, but composed them out of flattened, geometric shapes.
- To create a rough texture in the grass at the bottom of the picture and in the tops of the trees, Spencer glued sand on the canvas. He wanted to reveal the beauty of rural and urban structures – grime, noise, harshness and all – without nostalgia or sentimentality.

1893: Born 16 May in Pawtucket, Rhode Island

1913-15: Studied at the Rhode Island School of Design

1915-17: Studied at the Ferrer School in New York City

1921: Traveled abroad, visiting Paris, the northern coast of France, and England

1923-30: Painted at the artists' colony in Provincetown, Massachusetts

1937: Won a National Mural Competition for the Post Office in Aliquippa,
Pennsylvania

1952: Died 15 May in Dingmans Ferry, Pennsylvania

Arthur G. Dove
American, 1880 – 1946
Tree Forms, 1932
oil on canvas
Ackland Fund, 65.25.1



- Dove was part of Alfred Stieglitz's circle of modern American artists. Between 1912 and 1946, he had annual one-man exhibitions at Stieglitz's galleries. *Tree Forms* does not appear in any records for those shows, but an inscription on the back of the painting in Stieglitz's hand reads: "Tree Forms - 1932/ Arthur G. Dove."
- In 1910, Dove painted a set of six abstract oil paintings, making him the first American artist to paint in a non-representational style prior to the landmark Armory Show in 1913.
- Dove wrote:

There was a long period of searching for a something in color which I then called "a condition of light." It applied to all objects in nature, flowers, trees, people, apples, cows. These all have their certain condition of light, which establishes them to the eye, to each other, and to the understanding.
- This painting is still in the original frame that the artist selected for it.

1880: Born 2 August in Canandaigua, New York

1903: Moved to New York City to work as a freelance illustrator

1907-09: Lived in France

1910: Moved to a farm in Westport, Connecticut

1912: First one-man exhibition at Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery

1920-27: Lived on a boat in the Long Island Sound

1924: Married painter Helen Torr

1933: Moved back to his childhood farm in Geneva, New York

1938: Returned to Long Island, settling in an abandoned post office

1946: Died 23 November in Long Island, NY

Rose Piper
American, 1917 - 2005
Slow Down Freight Train, 1946-47
oil on canvas
Ackland Fund, 91.8



- This work was directly inspired by blues singer Trixie Smith's recording of the song "Freight Train Blues." The lyrics express the feelings of many African Americans affected by widespread migration of black men from the south to the industrial north in the early twentieth century.
- In a 1990 letter to former Ackland director Charles Millard, Piper said that her painting is: "a woman's plea for the train to slow down so that she might go along with her man."
- Piper described her art as semi-abstract expressionism. She wanted her work to have accessible meaning and recognizable subject matter "to help to erase segregation, ridicule, humiliation and violence" and to "[fight] injustice the best way I know how – by putting it on the canvas."
- A rising star in the New York art scene, Piper was friendly with prominent painters Charles Alston, Romare Bearden, and Jacob Lawrence. Unfortunately, a run of personal tragedies in 1948 halted her artistic career. She spent the next few decades working the garment industry, where her knitwear designs won several awards.

1917: Born in the Bronx, New York

1940: BA from Hunter College with an art major and geometry minor

1943-46: Studied at the Art Students League, New York

1946-47: Won two consecutive fellowships from the Rosenwald Foundation

1947: First one-woman show, in New York at the Roko Gallery

1948: Won first prize in Atlanta University's Annual Exhibition for Contemporary Negro Artists

1989: Solo show in New York, at the Phelps Stokes Fund

2005: Died in Connecticut

Milton Avery
American, 1885 - 1965
Devilish Nude, 1962
oil on canvas board
Bequest of Charles and Isabel Eaton, 2009.31.4



- Avery painted a series of nudes in the 1960s. Set against sparse backgrounds, most of the figures were either blue or white. *Devilish Nude* likely gets its name from its uncharacteristically fiery color.
- Avery's wife, Sally Michel was his favorite model and he often had her in mind when painting, even though few of his abstract figures bear a strong resemblance to her. She remarked: "[Milton] painted me again and again, but I don't think of them as pictures of me – they're just paintings. He could have made me the ugliest woman – I didn't care – as long as it was a good painting."
- Though he never achieved great commercial or critical success in his own life, Avery's work was admired by a younger generation of prominent artists – including Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, and Mark Rothko.

1885: Born 7 March in Altmar, New York

1905: Began attending the Connecticut League of Art Students in Hartford, Connecticut

1915: First public exhibition

1925: Moved to New York City

1944: Solo exhibition at the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington, DC

1960: Retrospective at the Whitney Museum of Art, New York

1965: Died 3 January in New York City

Ad Reinhardt

American, 1913 – 1967

Yellow Painting (Abstraction), 1946

oil on canvas

Gift of Litsa Dermatas Tsitsera in honor of
Charles Millard, 2000.20



- Reinhardt strived toward purely abstract painting that did not originate with anything in nature. Calling artists to free themselves from the idea that art imitates or abstracts from nature, he declared that “art begins with the getting-rid of nature.”
- Reinhardt sought to emphasize elements he described as verticality and horizontality, parallelism, and repetition. He often relied on a grid-based structure and geometric abstraction to explore variations on a single color, in this case, yellow.
- In addition to working as a painter, Reinhardt wrote many art-theoretical texts, including *Art as Art* and *Twelve Rules for a New Academy*.
- Although Reinhardt sought to remove all references to the external world from his pictures, he was convinced that his art had the potential to effect social change. He saw himself as a political artist and firmly opposed attempts to put abstraction in the service of commercial design and advertising.

1913: Born 24 December in Buffalo, New York

1931-5: Studied art history at Columbia University

1936-7: Studied at the American Artists' School in New York

1936-41: Employed in the Easel Division of the Works Progress Administration's
Federal Art Project

1944-45: Served in the Navy during World War II

1946: Joined the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York

1947: Began teaching art history at Brooklyn College

1952-53: Taught with Josef Albers at the Yale University Art Department

1960: Retrospective of his work held at the Jewish Museum, in New York

1967: Died 30 August in New York City

Louis Stone
 American, 1902 - 1984
Untitled, 1950
 oil on canvas
 Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Lane Stokes,
 91.33



- In the 1930s Stone was a leading member of a modernist artists' collective called the Independents based in Lambertville, New Jersey, which had an active artistic and intellectual community. Like other American artists during this period, they struggled to gain recognition in a culture that was not particularly receptive to abstract art.
- Also in the 1930s, inspired by improvisational jazz musicians, Stone and artists Charles Evans and Charles F. Ramsey held visual jam sessions where the three artists would work together on a single painting, signing their finished artwork with the combined name Ramstonev.
- In 1950, the same year that he painted this work, Stone and his wife took an extended trip to Guanajuato, Mexico with their friend, the artist Bill Ney. Following their return, Stone's paintings began to use vibrant colors in controlled, spatially organized patterns.

1902: Born in Findlay, Ohio

1919-20: Attended the Art Academy of Cincinnati

1926-27: Studied at the Art Students League in New York City

1927-33: Lived in Europe, mostly Southern France

1935: Moved to Lambertville, New Jersey

1935-38: Worked for the federal program, the Works Progress Administration's
 Easel Division

1939: Exhibited in the United States Pavilion at the New York World's Fair

1984: Died in Lambertville, New Jersey

Henri Rousseau

French, 1844 - 1910

View of the Île de la Cité, Paris, 1890s?

oil on canvas

Ackland Fund, purchased in honor of Joseph C. Sloane, alumni distinguished professor and first director of the Ackland Art Museum, 77.38.1

Conservation treatment for this painting, completed in 2008, was made possible by the generous support of the Tyche Foundation.



- This painting represents central Paris on the night of a major fire. On February 1, 1868, shortly before Rousseau moved to the city, there had been a large fire at the omnibus depot on the Rue d'Ulm. He did not witness the fire firsthand but he may have recreated the event based on newspaper engravings.
- Here, Rousseau records the landmarks of the Île de la Cité. He depicts, from left to right, the flagged dome of the Tribunal de Commerce, the spire of the Sainte-Chapelle, and the towers and spire of Notre Dame.
- In 1884, Rousseau began showing at an annual exhibition for artists whose work was not accepted in the official, government sanctioned *Salon* of academic artists. He submitted twenty-six views of Paris and its surrounding areas to the *Salon* between 1890 and 1900.
- Rousseau spent much of his adult life working for the Parisian toll collecting agency. Because of his occupation, Rousseau was nicknamed The Customs Officer. He retired from the civil service in 1893 in order to devote himself to painting full time.

1844: Born 21 May in Laval, France, in the Loire Valley

1863-68: Served in the French infantry

1871: Employed by the Paris toll service, which operated gates in the city wall

1893: Retired to devote his time to art

1910: Died 2 September in Paris, France

Robert Polhill Bevan
British, 1865-1925
Village Houses at Szeliwy, c. 1903
oil on canvas, mounted on Masonite
Joseph F. McCrindle Collection, 2010.4.4



- At the beginning of the twentieth century, Bevan worked in the style known as pointillism – painting in tiny dots of color – made famous by the French painter Georges Seurat. The composition of the roof in this painting recalls the pointillist style.
- This painting depicts a scene in Szeliwy, a town in Poland that appears in several of Bevan’s works. His wife, the artist Stanisława de Karłowska, was Polish and they spent many summers with her family in Poland.

1865: Born 5 August in Hove, England

1890-91: Visited Brittany and worked with artists in the Pont-Aven group

1894: Met Paul Gauguin

1911: Founding member of the group of English artists called the Camden Town Group in London

1921: Co-organized an exhibition in Paris called *Modern British Paintings*

1925: Died 8 July in London

Jack B. Yeats
British (Irish), 1871 - 1957
Canal Bridge, 1932
oil on panel
Bequest of Charles and Isabel Eaton,
2009.31.123



- One of the most important Irish artists of the twentieth century, Jack Butler Yeats came from a family of prominent artists and writers. His older brother was the poet William Butler Yeats and his father was the portrait painter John Butler Yeats, after whom Jack was named.
- Yeats began his artistic career as an illustrator for magazines and books. He began painting in watercolors and then transitioned to oil painting several years later. In the 1920s, Yeats began to develop a style characterized by thick, loose brushwork and expressive handling of paint.
- Yeats believed that a painter should be connected to the land he paints. His paintings, like *Canal Bridge*, depicted the places, people, and events that he encountered in Dublin, while his writing tended to focus on the more rural areas of his childhood, like Sligo.

1871: Born 29 August in London, England

1879-86: Lived with his grandparents at Sligo, Ireland

1887: Returned to London and attended art classes

1897: First solo exhibition, in London at Clifford Gallery

1910: Moved back to Ireland

1913: Participated in the International Exhibition of Modern Art (the Armory Show)
in New York

1917: Moved to Dublin

1922: Participated in the *Exposition d'Art Irlandais* in Paris

1930: Published his most famous novel, *Sligo*

1939: Appointed a governor of the National Gallery of Ireland

1957: Died 28 March in Dublin

Jean Metzinger
 French, 1883 - 1956
Landscape, 1904
 oil on canvas
 Ackland Fund, 60.26.1



- In the fall of 1904, Metzinger saw thirty works by the artist Paul Cézanne in Paris at the annual exhibition called the *Salon d'Automne*, where he was also a participant. This landscape is inspired by Cézanne, particularly in the composition, the application of paint using short, parallel brushstrokes, and the use of dark contours.
- Metzinger insisted that his use of color was not intended to imitate nature, but rather, to express emotion. "Instead of copying Nature," he stated in an interview of about 1908, "we create a milieu of our own, wherein our sentiment can work itself out through a juxtaposition of colors."
- In addition to being a painter, Metzinger wrote about modern art. In 1912 he co-wrote a book about Cubism with the painter Albert Gleizes.
- Metzinger came from a military family, but avoided military service and was an ardent pacifist. In March of 1915, however, he was called to serve as a stretcher-bearer for the military ambulance corps for 18 months.

1883: Born 24 June in Nantes, France

1900: Studied at the *Académie des Beaux-Arts* in Nantes

1903: Sent three pictures to be exhibited at the *Salon des Indépendants* in Paris;
 moved to Paris

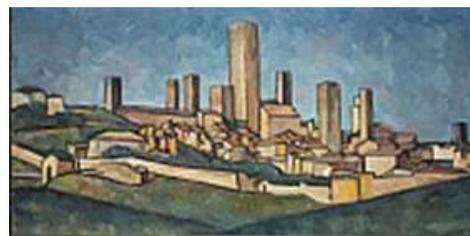
1906: Elected to a post on the hanging committee of the *Salon des Indépendants*

1915-16: Served as a stretcher-bearer in World War I

1937: Executed a large mural for the World's Fair in Paris

1956: Died 3 November in Paris, France

Alexander Kanoldt
German, 1881 - 1939
San Gimignano, 1913
oil on canvas
Burton Emmett Collection, 58.1.248



- Kanoldt was one of the founding members of the New Munich Secession along with artists Alexei von Jawlensky, Adolf Erbslöh, Paul Klee, and Charles Caspar. Founded in 1913 – the same year that Kanoldt painted San Gimignano – the group sought to support modern art by organizing exhibitions.
- Kanoldt painted the Italian town of San Gimignano several times, before and after World War I. He described wanting to visually tear down the walled medieval city “stone by stone and brick by brick,” getting past surface details to paint the real “soul of the city.”
- In 1932, Kanoldt joined the Nazi party. Soon after, he was appointed as a professor at the Berlin Art Academy and as a senator at the Prussian Academy of Arts. Despite this institutional backing, his modernist works were labeled as degenerate by the Nazi regime and were confiscated in 1937.

1881: Born 29 September in Karlsruhe

1901: Took drawing lessons

1908: Moved to Munich, where, together with Wassily Kandinsky and others, he founded the Munich New Artists' Association

1913: Member of the artists' group the New Munich Secession

1914-18: Drafted as an officer in World War I

1925-31: Taught at the art academy in Breslau

1933-36: Professor of art in Berlin

1939: Died in Berlin of heart disease

Amédée Ozenfant
 French, 1886 - 1966
Sisteron, c. 1918-28
 oil on canvas
 The William A. Whitaker Foundation Art
 Fund, 72.29.1



- In 1914, Ozenfant first visited Sisteron, a pre-Roman town in France constructed in a narrow gap between two mountain ranges, where the rivers Durance, Buech, and Sasse join. Between 1918 and 1928, the artist made a number paintings of the town, all based on a single view taken from a postcard.
- Flat geometric planes, painted using tints and shades of burnt sienna and set against a muted blue sky, emphasize the mass of the architectural forms. Ozenfant stripped away details, transforming Sisteron into the essence of a town in the south of France rather than portraying the specific place.
- Ozenfant and Le Corbusier (the prominent modernist artist and architect) championed the movement known as Purism. Purism emphasized simplicity, proportion, and harmony of objects rather than their deconstruction and analysis – it was initially a reaction against Cubism and other avant-garde ideas. They wrote: “Purism expresses not the changeable, but the unchanging.”

1886: Born 15 April in Saint-Quentin, Aisne, in northern France

1905: Travelled to Paris and studied at the *Académie de la Palette*

1910-13: Lived in Russia, where he married artist Zina de Klingberg

1913: Returned to Paris; worked at the propaganda department during World War I

1920-25: With Le Corbusier, became director and owner of a journal, *L'Esprit nouveau*

1921: Published an article on Purism with Le Corbusier

1939: Moved to New York and became the head of the Ozenfant School of Fine Arts

1944: Became an American citizen

1953: Renaturalized as a French citizen

1966: Died 4 May in Cannes, France

Albert Gleizes

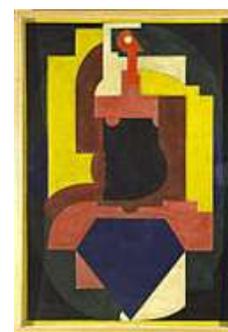
French, 1881 - 1953

Composition, 1921

oil on panel

Ackland Fund, 69.27.1

Conservation treatment for this painting, completed in 1991, was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.



- In 1911, Gleizes participated in the first organized exhibition of Cubist art in Paris. The next year, with artist Jean Metzinger, Gleizes wrote *Du Cubisme*, one of the first texts to explain early Cubist methods and philosophy.
- In *Composition*, Gleizes portrays a seated figure by layering a series of geometric, interlocking shapes to suggest a face, hair, and arms. This layering, together with the arrangement of verticals, horizontals and diagonals, conveys an impression of the figure moving in space.
- Gleizes came from an artistic family. His father Sylvan Gleizes was a successful fabric designer and amateur painter. His maternal uncle, Léon Commerre, was painter who had won the official academy's Rome Prize in 1875. Another uncle, Robert Gleizes, was an art collector and dealer.

1881: Born 8 December in Paris, France

1900: Worked in his father's fabric design studio

1902: First exhibited at the *Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts*, Paris

1903: First exhibited at the *Salon d'Automne* in Paris

1911: Exhibited at the *Salon des Indépendants* in Paris

1912: Co-wrote *Du Cubisme* with Jean Metzinger

1939: Moved to St. Remy-de-Provence

1953: Died 23 June in Avignon, France

Pablo Picasso
Spanish, 1881 – 1973
Centaur, 1956
earthenware
Gift in honor of Carolyn P. Young, 2010.64



- After 1948, Picasso collaborated with potters to create ceramic vases and plates. He painted some of them, often with animals or stylized human faces; on others, he incised lines or built up the clay to create forms in relief.
- The forms on this plate are rendered with spare, elegant lines reminiscent of ancient Greek vase painting. The contour of the centaur is drawn in such a way that it shows the body in two different positions, as if it were in motion, rearing while twisting its torso.
- Often, Picasso scholars have seen mythological creatures like minotaurs and centaurs as alter egos for the artist. In his larger body of work, they are sometimes shown charging into battle but at other times appear wounded and vulnerable.

1881: Born 25 October in Málaga, Spain

1888: Received lessons from his father, the painter José Ruiz Blasco

1897-98: Attended the *Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando* in Madrid

1900-04: Moved between Spain and Paris, finally settling in Paris

1910-12: Exhibited internationally from Moscow to New York

1916-24: Designed five complete ballet productions

1920s: Began exploring Classical imagery in his art

1940-44: Lived in Spain during World War II before moving to Southern France

1961: Moved to Mas Notre-Dames-de-Vie in Mougins

1973: Died 8 April in Mougins, France

Archibald J. Motley Jr.

American, 1891-1981

Mending Socks, 1924

oil on canvas

Burton Emmett Collection, 58.1.2801

Conservation treatment for this painting, completed in 1997, was made possible by a grant from the Pforzheimer Foundation.



- Motley owned this painting – a portrait of his grandmother seated in her home – for only a few years. After it was exhibited at the Newark Museum of Art in 1927 (where it was well received by the viewing public), a private collector bought it. A few years later, New York advertising executive Burton Emmett bought it; UNC-Chapel Hill acquired it from Emmett’s estate.
- In an oral history interview recorded in 1978 and now in the Archives of American Art, Motley identified the oval painting at the upper left edge as a portrait of the woman who was his grandmother’s mistress when she was enslaved. According to Motley’s account, his grandmother treasured the portrait and kept it carefully wrapped up in a closet.
- A watercolor study for *Mending Socks* that belongs to Motley’s family members shows his grandmother seated closer to the center of the composition. In another painting of her, *Portrait of My Grandmother*, in the collection of other Motley family members, she faces directly forward.

1891: Born 7 October in New Orleans

1914-18: Studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

1928: First solo exhibition, at the New Gallery in New York City

1929: With a Guggenheim Fellowship, studied in Paris

1935-40: Worked for the Federal Art Project, a division of the Works Progress Administration

1982: Died 16 January in Chicago

Hale Aspacio Woodruff
American, 1900-1980
Landscape (Mississippi, Soil Erosion), c.
1944
oil on canvas
Ackland Fund, 2013.6



- In July 1943 Woodruff received a fellowship of \$2,400 from the Julius Rosenwald Foundation “to pursue individual creativity in art.” He traveled through Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi documenting social and environmental issues in the rural South.
- Two other works of art by Woodruff depict similar landscapes: one of those is a pastel in the collection of the North Carolina Central Museum University Art Museum, and the other is a painting in the Mississippi Museum of Art.
- It is likely that Woodruff based the pastel at the NCCU Art Museum, called *Erosion in Mississippi*, on an actual location. He may have made it on the spot. The Ackland’s painting was probably created later, in his studio.

1900: Born 26 August in Cairo, Illinois

1931: In Paris, worked with Henry Ossawa Tanner

1931-45: Taught at Atlanta University

1936: In Mexico City, studied with Diego Rivera

1945-68: Taught at the Harlem Community Art Center and New York University

1980: Died 6 September in New York City

Robert Motherwell,
American, 1915-1991
Open No. 89, 1969
Acrylic and charcoal on canvas
Lent by The McConnell Trust, L2015.17.17



- This painting is one of the very extensive and varied *Open* series Motherwell began in the late 1960s.
- In the 1980s, Motherwell said:
In Mexico in the old days, they built the four walls of a house solid, without windows and doors, and later cut some windows and doors beautifully proportioned, out of the adobe wall. There is something in me that responds to the stark beauty of dividing a flat solid plane.
- According to the artist, the series originated when he noticed the beautifully proportioned rectangular shape formed by the back of a smaller canvas that happened to be leaning against the monochrome field of a larger one in his studio. In charcoal, he traced the outline of the smaller canvas on the larger.
- The artist noted the following about the series title:
In the *Random House Dictionary* there are 82 entries under the word “open.” For me these entries are one of the most beautiful poems in modern English, filled with all kinds of associations, all kinds of examples. (1973)
- Movement seems to be implied by this painting’s two incomplete rectangles with the shadowy presence of at least one other, on an atmospheric surface revealing layers of underpainting (also visible on the painting’s edges).

1915: Born 24 January, Aberdeen, Washington

1932-37: Studied at Stanford (B.A.) and Harvard (PhD work in philosophy)

1944: First solo exhibition, at Peggy Guggenheim’s gallery in New York

1949: Began *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* series

1965: First major retrospective exhibition, at Museum of Modern Art, New York

1991: Died 16 July, Cape Cod, Massachusetts.