

## American Collection Overview

With its inaugural exhibition, *Painting Today and Yesterday in the United States*, the Museum's first director, Donald Bear, clearly emphasized the importance of collecting and exhibiting American Art. Works by George Bellows, Edward Bruce, Charles Sheeler, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Gilbert Stuart, and Andrew Dasburg all entered the permanent collection in the first year of the Museum's history. These were followed by regular gifts reflecting the work of Charles Demuth, Milton Avery, and Arthur B. Caries, along with good examples by regional artists such as Colin Campbell Cooper.

By 1942, the first nineteenth-century American painting in the collection, a landscape by Thomas Moran, joined more "contemporary" works and, in 1945, the Museum acquired the celebrated primitive painting *The Buffalo Hunter*. This strong emphasis on collecting American art was unusual among the country's museums in the 1940's.

During the fifties, when abstract art movements were in ascendance, the Museum's American acquisitions reflected instead the already-established modernist idiom, with paintings by Marsden Hartley, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Walt Kuhn. Some years later, gifts to the Donald Bear Memorial Collection enlarged these holdings with works by artists of both regional and national importance such as John Marin, Niles Spencer, Ben Shahn, Howard Warshaw, and June Wayne.

The Museum was especially fortunate with the growing involvement of trustees Sterling Morton and his wife, Preston. Their early gifts of paintings by Prendergast, Maurer, and Beal led to the remarkable decision by Mrs. Morton in the late 1950s to form a major collection of American art. In collaboration with third director, James W. Foster, Jr. she selected pieces that would focus and expand holdings of twentieth-century art while also creating a comprehensible survey of American painting from 1750 through the first decades of the twentieth century. The Preston Morton Collection of American art with over forty works given by Mrs. Morton and further gifts from other donors, contains a number of masterpieces of outstanding quality, such as *Morning, Catskill Valley* and *Mirror Lake, Yosemite Valley*. Representative works by major nineteenth century Americans such as William Harnett, Winslow Homer, Severin Roesen, John Peto, Thomas Cole, Jaspar Francis Cropsey, John George Inness, and Albert Bierstadt and were complemented later by the twentieth-century works of Charles Burchfield, Edward Hopper, John Sloan, and Robert Henri.

Individual donors have continued to build this superb foundation, creating a notable constellation of work: modernist drawings by Stella, Demuth, and Nadelman as well as nineteenth-century works by Thomas Moran and Frederick Church from the estate of Mrs. Lockwood de Forest. These have been supplemented with regular purchases in recent years, expanding further holdings of nineteenth and twentieth-century prints and drawings as well as important examples of American impressionism.

- SBMA Catalog Selected Works, 1991, excerpts from p. 36