

TO SEE AS ARTISTS SEE  
**AMERICAN ART**  
FROM THE PHILLIPS  
COLLECTION



FRIST CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS

A Teacher's Guide to the Exhibition

## Preparing for Your Visit

---

*To See as Artists See: American Art from The Phillips Collection* teaching packet was designed to help teachers prepare students for their gallery visits and classroom follow-up. This packet contains a teacher's guide and fifteen color art reproductions.

### Teacher's Guide:

This teacher's guide begins with an introduction to *To See as Artists See*. The subsequent sections include information about key artworks and artists that may be featured on docent-guided tours of the exhibition. Designed for adaptation, the discussions and activities encourage students to look closely and creatively respond to the featured artworks.

These icons throughout the guide will prompt students to look closely at a work of art and...



find inventions or innovations illustrated in the work.



examine the artist's process, materials, or techniques.



try an activity in response to the work.



learn more through online research.

### Color Art Reproductions:

Each section is accompanied by color reproductions of the following images:

Milton Avery  
*Black Sea*, 1959

Arthur G. Dove  
*Sand Barge*, 1930

Rockwell Kent  
*Burial of a Young Man*, ca. 1908–11

Edward Bruce  
*Power*, ca. 1933

Helen Frankenthaler  
*Canyon*, 1965

Jacob Lawrence  
*The Migration Series*,  
*Panel no. 3* and *Panel no. 23*,  
1940–41

Alexander Calder  
*Red Polygons*, ca. 1949–50

Adolph Gottlieb  
*The Seer*, 1950

Ernest Lawson  
*Spring Night, Harlem River*, 1913

Arthur Bowen Davies  
*Along the Erie Canal*, 1890

Winslow Homer  
*To the Rescue*, 1886

John Sloan  
*Clown Making Up*, 1910  
*Six O' Clock, Winter*, 1912

Stuart Davis  
*Egg Beater No. 4*, 1928

Edward Hopper  
*Sunday*, 1926

## To See as Artists See: American Art from The Phillips Collection

*"Our most enthusiastic purpose will be to reveal the richness of the art created in our United States..."*  
— Duncan Phillips, collector, 1921

The Phillips Collection, America's first museum of modern art, was founded in Washington, D.C. in 1921, a decade before the Museum of Modern Art (est.1929) and the Whitney Museum of American Art (est.1931) opened their doors in New York. From its inception, The Phillips Collection has championed the very best American art and artists. Its in-depth holdings of American paintings are broad in scope, yet cannot be characterized as either encyclopedic or strictly historical. Rather, The Phillips Collection is a rich assembly of independent-minded American artists, most of whom were alive and actively exhibiting when their work entered the museum's collection. Many of the seventy-seven artists included in this exhibition, in fact, became acquaintances and good friends with the museum's founder, Duncan Phillips (1866–1966), who often acquired their work in large numbers.



Edward Bruce (1879–1943). *Power*, ca. 1933. Oil on canvas. The Phillips Collection; Gift of Mrs. Edward Bruce. 1957

A well-regarded critic, in addition to being a collector and museum director, Phillips firmly believed that we benefit as viewers by learning to see as true artists see. In his extensive critical writings, Phillips made clear that “artists of creative originality and of sincere independence” were those he was looking for, not those whose work was coldly intellectual or imitative of popular trends.

*To See as Artists See: American Art from The Phillips Collection* is divided into ten thematic sections, which aim to reveal the breadth of America's modernist vision from approximately 1850 to 1960. The exhibition begins with the great heroes of American art of the late nineteenth century whose work set the course for modern art in the United States. It concludes with a grand display by the Abstract Expressionists, whose efforts to create a new visual language in the 1940s turned American art into a global force.



### Inventions and Innovations

*"To invent, you need a good imagination and a pile of junk."* — Thomas Edison

America is known as a land of invention and innovation. Many of the artists in this exhibition were influenced by and captured in their work some of the biggest changes transforming society during their lifetimes: the rise of industry and new modes of transportation, the growth and electrification of cities, and the invention of laborsaving objects. Throughout this exhibition, you can explore some of these inventions, both big and small, that helped shape our world and impact the way we live today. As you read through this guide, look for the light bulb icon to see an invention illustrated in a specific painting.



### Curriculum Connections

*To See as Artists See* docent-guided tours support the Tennessee Curriculum Standards by introducing ideas relevant to the visual arts, language arts, and social studies curricula. Specific standards are addressed at grade-appropriate levels. View connections for all grade levels (K–12) at [www.fristcenter.org](http://www.fristcenter.org).

## Romanticism and Realism

---

*"The artist should fear to become the slave of detail. He should strive to express his thought and not the surface of it."* — *Albert Pinkham Ryder, artist, 1905*

From its beginnings in the eighteenth century, the predominant aesthetic of American art was one of realism tinged with romanticism. By the second half of the nineteenth century, young American painters sought alternatives to the sentimentality of American genre painting and to the grand theatricality and microscopic realism of the Hudson River School, which treated the landscape of the new world as a divine gift to humanity. In the work of independent-minded artists such as George Inness, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, and Arthur Bowen Davies among others, American art came of age. Considered America's "modern" old masters, these artists had a vision of nature and the inner psychology of the individual that ultimately shaped the emergence of a modernist sensibility in the United States.



**Winslow Homer (1836–1910)**

*To the Rescue*, 1886

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection; acquired 1926

One of America's great realist painters of the nineteenth century, Winslow Homer began his career as an illustrator on the battlefields of the Civil War before studying painting in Paris. In 1883, after a brief sojourn to the bleak Northumberland coast of England, Homer settled on the Maine coast at Prout's Neck, where he concentrated on capturing humanity's

continual struggle against the sea. For the rest of his life, nature and the sea became his primary subjects. *To the Rescue* typifies Homer's obsession with the shipwreck theme as a progression from life to death. The sparse narrative avoids all direct description of the rescue mission that is the painting's unseen subject. The strength of the painting lies in its limited chromatic scheme, the severity of the confrontation between human beings and the elements that threaten to engulf them, and the simplified, sketchy quality of the paint handling.

**Arthur Bowen Davies (1862–1928)**

*Along the Erie Canal*, 1890

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection; acquired 1920

A rebel against the National Academy of Design and the chief organizer of the 1913 Armory Show, which introduced modern European art to American audiences, Arthur Bowen Davies straddled the boundaries between the nineteenth-century romantic tradition and early twentieth-century American modernism. Born in upstate New York near the Erie Canal, a busy commercial waterway, Davies's earliest landscapes feature the Mohawk Valley of his childhood. Filtered through memory, these canvases combine atmospheric effects with detailed renderings of the land and the manmade structures—such as the canal and bridges—that define the countryside. *Along the Erie Canal* is one of Davies's earliest masterworks. In it the artist tempers his use of bright summer light and atmospheric effects with carefully rendered details to create a harmonious realm where economic prosperity co-exists in idyllic harmony with benign nature.





Arthur Bowen Davies (1862–1928). *Along the Erie Canal*, 1890.



**Did you know that at one time some considered the Erie Canal to be the Eighth Wonder of the World?**

The Erie Canal had an enormous impact on New York and America in the nineteenth century. Completed in 1825, the canal links the waters of Lake Erie in the west and the Hudson River in the east. It was such an engineering marvel that when it was built that some referred to it as the Eighth Wonder of the World. The canal was 363 miles long and included eighteen aqueducts to carry the canal over ravines and rivers, and eighty-three locks, with a rise of 568 feet.

Other than a few areas where dynamite was used to blast through rock formations, most of the canal was built by the muscle power of men and horses. The Erie Canal cost \$7 million to build, but it significantly reduced the costs associated with shipping goods. For example, before the canal existed, the cost to ship one ton of goods from Buffalo to New York City was \$100. After the canal was built, a ton of goods could be shipped the same distance for only \$10.



**Learn more...**

Maps of the Erie Canal - <http://www.eriecanal.org/maps.html>  
Official New York State Canal Corporation website - Classroom ideas and resources  
<http://www.canals.ny.gov/cculture/classroom/index.html>

In 1996, the United States Congress designated the Erie Canalway as a National Heritage Corridor to recognize the national significance of the canal system as the most successful and influential human-built waterway and one of the most important works of civil engineering and construction in North America.

By looking at a modern map, you can see the impact on the state. Nearly 80 percent of upstate New York's population lives within twenty-five miles of the Erie Canal. Arthur Davies's work *Along the Erie Canal* was painted in Utica.

The Erie Canal proved to be the key that unlocked an enormous series of social and economic changes in the young nation. The canal spurred the first great western movement of American settlers, provided access to the rich land and resources west of the Appalachians, made New York the preeminent commercial center in the United States, and helped establish an American identity. Within fifteen years of the Canal's opening, New York was the busiest port in America, moving tonnages greater than Baltimore, Boston, and New Orleans combined.

## Impressionism

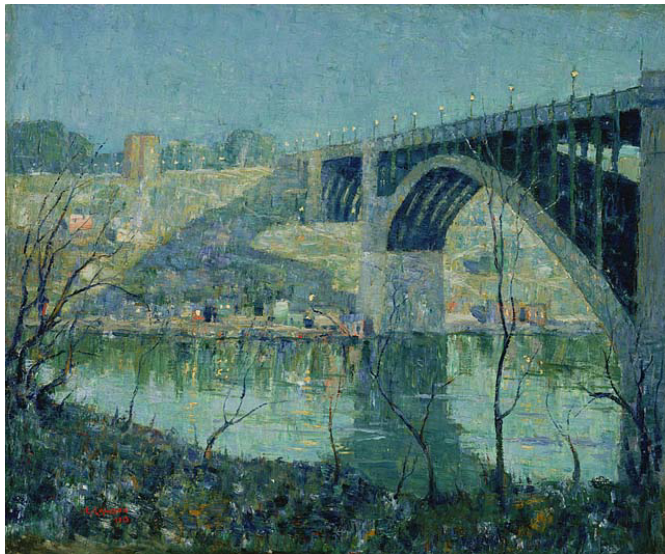
---

*"It must not be assumed that American Impressionism and French Impressionism are identical. The American painter accepted the spirit, not the letter of the new doctrine."*  
— Christian Brinton, American art critic, 1916

For some American artists, trained in the academies of Paris and Munich, exposure to French Impressionism in the 1880s was transformative. Like their French counterparts, they left the studio and began painting outdoors in a variety of weather conditions and working without preliminary sketches. They adopted a brighter palette and substituted color for shadows. They applied pure unmixed pigment on the canvas in dabs and broken brushstrokes to create a sense—an impression—of reflected light, air, and atmosphere. They borrowed ideas from photography and Asian art, including cropping, asymmetry, and multiple viewpoints. Even so, the American Impressionists never completely lost their foundation in the realist tradition, always keeping three-dimensional volume in their forms.

The pioneers of American Impressionism taught their aesthetic to their younger colleagues, using not only the classroom, but outdoor summer art sessions held in various locales throughout New England, as well as Europe. With this new generation, American Impressionism became more diverse and its influence lasted well into the second decade of the twentieth century.

The effort to infuse American painting with a French Impressionist style gave a fresh interpretation to countryside and city. Intimate landscape views, rooted primarily in the suburban New England countryside, became the norm, as did scenes of leisure activities in parks and at the beach, along with urban views that captured the genteel character of the city's upscale neighborhoods.



**Ernest Lawson (1873–1939)**  
*Spring Night, Harlem River*, 1913  
Oil on canvas mounted on panel  
The Phillips Collection; acquired 1920

The motif of the bridge has a particularly American resonance in Ernest Lawson's oeuvre before World War I, as it often symbolized movement and change. With its bold composition of verticals and diagonals, and unified color scheme, the motif evoked in *Spring Night, Harlem River* is Lawson's urban masterpiece. The painting depicts Washington Bridge at 181st Street, a modern steel arch bridge (opened 1888) connecting upper

Manhattan to the Bronx along a picturesque section of the Harlem River where New Yorkers could rent a boat, have a picnic, or take leisurely walks. Lawson, who always painted outdoors in front of the motif, chose to heighten the drama and powerful impact of the huge steel span by observing the bridge from below against the night sky. Slender trees in the foreground invite a poignant comparison of natural and man-made forms.



**Did you know that before the invention of tube paint, artists used pig bladders to store paint?**

Before the 1840s, artists had to make their own pigments. Unused paint was then stored in pig bladders. The laborious nature of making pigments bound artists to their studios. But in 1841 all that changed because of the ingenuity of American John Rand. New manufacturing techniques allowed tin to be rolled thinly and pressed, leading to his invention of the squeezable tube. The tube was refined to incorporate a screw cap, allowing paint to be stored without drying out.

Paint could now be produced in bulk. This single event would redefine the direction of art. Tube paints liberated the Impressionists and freed them to create outside—*en plein air*. Artist Pierre-Auguste Renoir said: “Without tubes of paint, there would have been no Impressionism.”



**Examine the artist's brushstrokes.**

Look closely at Lawson's painting *Spring Night, Harlem River* and describe the brushstrokes. How did Lawson apply paint to the canvas to create a sense (or impression) of reflected light, air, and atmosphere? Are the strokes long and sweeping? Short and choppy?

*Spring Night, Harlem River* is an evening scene. Describe the colors that Lawson used to represent evening. How might the artist adjust his color palette to show different times of day?



**Experiment with mark making.**

Try it! Look closely at the sky at different times of day—in the morning when you wake, at mid-day, and in the evening as the last light fades. Notice variations in the sky's color and brightness from sunrise to sunset. For each stage of your observations, select several sheets paper and a few chalk pastels (or other drawing media) that correspond with the sky at that particular time of day. Then experiment with mark making. Try short, rapid strokes like the kind Lawson used to create atmospheric conditions. After filling an entire sheet of paper with marks, repeat the process for each additional stage of your observations. Complete a series of atmospheric drawings and compare your impressions of the sky over the course of one or more days.

How would you generally characterize the sky and its light at different times a day? What type of colors and marks did you use to capture the sky's variations—at sunrise versus sunset, for instance?



Ernest Lawson (1813–1939). *Spring Night, Harlem River* (detail), 1913.



## Forces in Nature

---

*"The true artist must perforce go from time to time to the elemental big forms—Sky, Sea, Mountain, Plain . . . to sort of re-true himself up, recharge the battery."*

— John Marin, artist

Nature and the land hold a special place in American art. The countryside continued to seduce American artists in the twentieth century, as it had in the nineteenth. The twentieth-century American painter, however, sought to re-interpret nature in a bold, expressive manner, capturing a personal response to elements seen and unseen, often in styles adapted from those of European contemporaries. Although most American painters who came of age after the turn of the century were trained as realists in the academies of New York, Philadelphia, and Europe, many of them chose to ignore the city, its inhabitants, and industrialization. Instead, they experienced the modernist impulse as a utopian longing for nature experienced in isolation.

Dissatisfied with Impressionism's emphasis on intimate, domesticated landscape views rendered in soft, atmospheric light, a younger generation of American artists combined the heroic realism of Winslow Homer and the romantic abstraction of Albert Pinkham Ryder into an unsentimental modernism. Remote northern areas of New England and New York continued to attract young American artists of independent spirit just as it had a previous generation. In the rugged landscapes and harsh climate of these regions, artists found an escape from the confines of civilization and experienced the extremes of nature's grandeur and beauty.



Rockwell Kent (1882–1971). *Burial of a Young Man*, ca. 1908–11



---

**Rockwell Kent (1882–1971)**

*Burial of a Young Man*, ca. 1908–11

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection; acquired 1918

Rockwell Kent rarely painted urban scenes like his contemporaries Edward Hopper and John Sloan. Instead he drew inspiration from nature's grandeur and humanity's relationship to its monumental forces. *Burial of a Young Man* was begun in 1908 while the artist was living on Monhegan Island in Maine. The bleakness of the landscape and the dramatic sky create a powerful image of nature overwhelming humanity. The shallow band of figures that make up the burial scene stretches across the length of the canvas. The undulating line of the mourners' arms and hands, the presence and placement of the children, and the draped clothing reveal Kent's study of Greek and Roman monuments. This picture was exhibited in New York in 1911 to rave reviews. Critics cited the unusual blending of quotations from classical art with a modern sensibility and style.

**Nature and Humanity**

Look closely at Rockwell Kent's *Burial of a Young Man*.

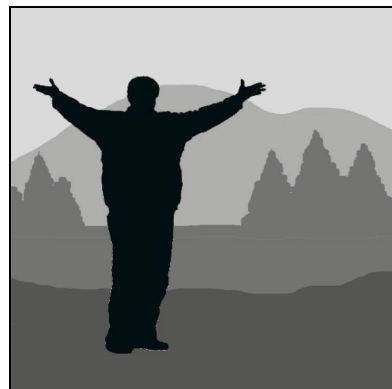
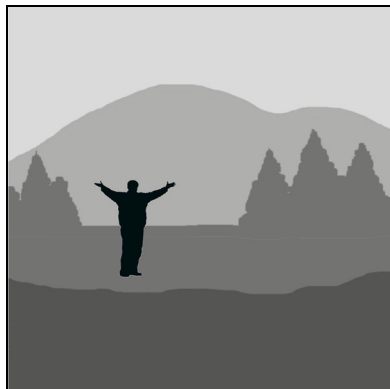
Describe the relationship between the sky, land, and people. What might this suggest about Kent's feelings concerning nature and humanity? What compositional devices were used to demonstrate this relationship? Think about scale and proportion. What if the sky was less dominating and the mourners occupied more space on the canvas?

**Nature and You**

Create sketches that include humans and nature. Experiment with scale and proportion.

Begin by selecting a natural setting. This could be an observable place (backyard, park, or school playground) or a place found in a magazine. Then create several sketches that show people within the environment you selected. In each sketch, experiment with the scale of the people, ranging from very small to very large in relationship to their surroundings.

Review your completed sketches. How does the significance of the individuals change with the scale? Which of your drawings best captures how *you* feel about humanity's importance within the environment you chose to draw?



## Nature and Abstraction

---

*"Nothing is less real than realism. Details are confusing. It is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis, that we get at the real meaning of things."*

— Georgia O'Keeffe, artist, 1922

After World War I, artists and writers struggled to define the country's modern identity. In the booming postwar economy of the 1920s, some were fascinated by the technology of the machine age, while others turned inward in search of an authentically American art rooted in nature and connected to nineteenth-century Transcendentalism. Augustus Vincent Tack, for example, described his abstract decorations as "compositions of form and colors based on essential rhythms" in nature.

The search for equivalents to different kinds of sensory experience was essential to a select group of American artists between the wars that included Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, and Georgia O'Keeffe. Their expressive symbolism grew from a shared belief that the experience of the natural world was a spiritual one in which nature's "inner truth" or essence could be made visible in abstract "equivalents," in which color, form, and line are divorced from representation.

Their subject matter, however seemingly abstract, was firmly grounded in observable, objective reality. Getting the "feel of a particular place," as O'Keeffe described it, was key to these painters who sought to convey the essence of nature and the American landscape in their art.



Arthur G. Dove (1880-1946). *Sand Barge*, 1930.

---

**Arthur G. Dove (1880–1946)**

*Sand Barge*, 1930

Oil on cardboard

The Phillips Collection; acquired 1931

© The Estate of Arthur Dove, courtesy Terry Dintenfass, Inc.

*Sand Barge* was executed while Arthur Dove was living on a boat and working as the resident caretaker at a yacht club in Huntington Harbor, Long Island. From the balcony of the club, Dove would sketch as barges entered the harbor. Although inspired by an actual scene, the components in *Sand Barge* have been altered and rearranged to create a compelling, cohesive abstract image. The horizontal motif in the upper left could be a section of a crane, or it might be interpreted as a boat railing or distant bridge. The barge is suggested by the blue, ochre, and gray central design, and the triangular ground with specks of blue in the lower right might be the sand or a representation of the harbor's shoreline. The painting's harmony of line and color and "exhilarating pattern," as Duncan Phillips described it, found critical success for Dove as a "rugged" American temperament.



### Abstraction

In the first half of the twentieth century, modern artists including Arthur Dove began depicting the world around them in new and interesting ways. They represented their environment with abstract compositions made from simplified or stylized arrangements of lines, shapes, and colors. Some of these compositions contained identifiable subject matter, such as natural elements, people, or buildings, while others were purely abstract or unrecognizable.

Look closely at the shapes and colors in Arthur Dove's *Sand Barge*. Although this is an abstract composition, it is inspired by an actual scene. Can you identify elements in the painting that are suggestive of things found in a harbor such as a barge, crane, bridge, or sand?

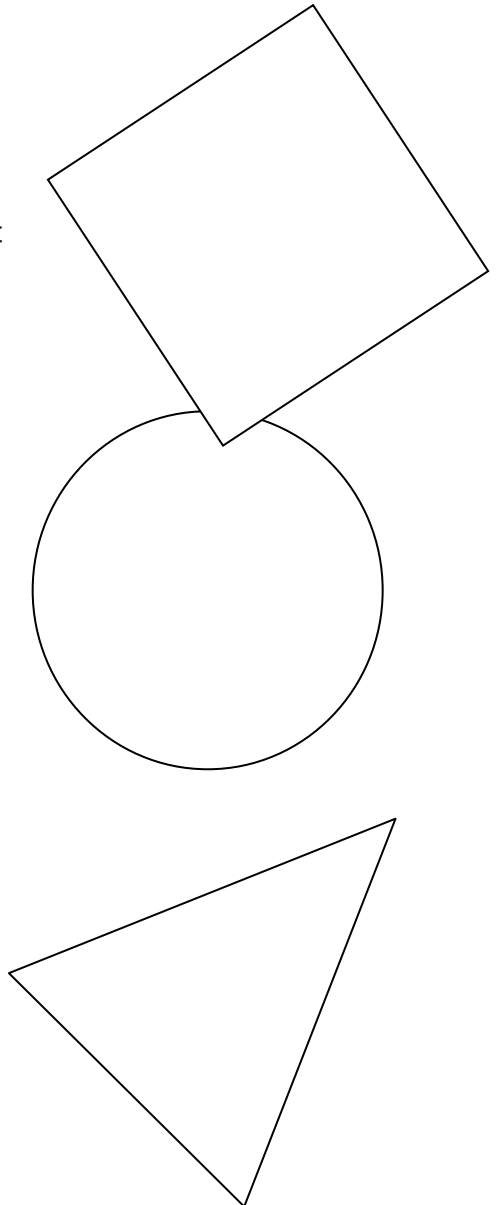


### Abstract Nature

Create an abstract composition based on an actual scene.

First choose an image of an outdoor scene from a magazine or internet. Identify the basic lines and shapes that make up the picture and trace over them. (Place transparency film over the image if you are not able to mark on it.) Now create a new abstract composition with these elements.

Draw several compositions. Each time, alter and rearrange your elements until you are satisfied with the outcome. Share your work with classmates and see if they can guess the inspiration for your abstraction.



## Modern Life

---

*"The vision and expression of one day will not do for the next. Today must not be a souvenir of yesterday. And so, the struggle is everlasting." — Robert Henri, artist*

At the end of the nineteenth century, the urbanization of America challenged the very identity of a nation that at its founding envisioned itself to be an agrarian society. While the American Impressionists chose to ignore the industrialization that surrounded them, the seamy darkness of modern city life appealed to a younger generation of painters. Led by the charismatic Robert Henri, these dissidents made it their mission to depict subjects of everyday life in the rough working-class neighborhoods of New York's Lower East Side, as opposed to the genteel world of Fifth Avenue.

Henri and his fellow urban realists, among them George Luks and John Sloan—newspaper artists who looked at the city and its inhabitants with the eyes of reporters—chose their subject matter from everyday, mainstream experience, often from the street itself: urchins, theatrical performers, working-class men and women, or friends and family. Labeled "apostles of the ugly," their subject matter eventually earned them the nickname of the "Ashcan School." Emphasizing contemporary subjects as revelatory of the modern urban experience, the Ashcan artists also used rapid brushwork to express both the subject's mood and the artist's inner emotions.

After World War I, urban realism lived on particularly in the art of Edward Hopper, whose modernism, always grounded in representation, was infused with psychological insight into the anxiety and alienation of the twentieth century.



**John Sloan (1871–1951)**

*Clown Making Up*, 1910

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection; acquired 1919

© 2012 Delaware Art Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

*Clown Making Up* displays the vigorous brushwork of John Sloan's early style and reveals his intense interest in color theory—the result of experimentation with principles to which his friend Robert Henri had introduced him in 1909. Here, Sloan limits his palette to purple, yellow-orange, and green. The flickering candlelight casts green shadows on the tired clown's face and garb, evidence not only of Sloan's interest in the color of shadows, but also of his use of chiaroscuro (dramatic contrasts between light and darkness) to heighten the sculptural quality of the figure. Sloan chose to depict the clown just as he was starting to apply his makeup, thus concentrating on the human

being behind the facade. This painting, acquired for The Phillips Collection in 1919, is the first work by Sloan to enter a museum collection.



---

**Edward Hopper (1882–1967)**

*Sunday*, 1926

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection;  
acquired 1926

Edward Hopper's experiences as a student of Robert Henri and Kenneth Hayes Miller at the New York School of Art were critical to his development as a realist painter. Executed on the eve of the Depression, images such as *Sunday* provided visual form to prevailing states of mind—often of unfulfilled longing or nostalgia—in the United States in the 1920s. Hopper's work revealed the essential isolation of people in the twentieth



century. *Sunday* depicts a spare Hoboken, New Jersey street where a solitary, middle-aged man sits on a sunlit curb, oblivious to the viewer's gaze. Devoid of energy and drama, the painting is ambiguous in its story but potent in its impression of inertia and desolation. Duncan Phillips was the first critic to identify contrasting content in the work, pointing out the manner in which Hopper defies our preconceptions of the picturesque by also including the challenges of modern American life.



### Artist as Observer

Urban realist painters were keen observers of the world around them. Surveying the city and its inhabitants with the “eyes of a reporter,” these artists sought to understand and portray the modern urban experience in their work.

Look closely at the paintings by John Sloan and Edward Hopper. What techniques did they use to communicate their observations and experiences through art? How did they draw you into their subjects and express mood and emotion? Notice the limited color palettes and dramatic contrasts between light and darkness.



### Learning to Look... Looking to Learn...

Try it! Look at your surroundings with the “eyes of a reporter.” As you walk down your city street (or even just the hallway at school), carefully observe people and the spaces they occupy.

Remember that you are looking to *learn and understand* the world around you. Take notes or make quick sketches to help document your findings. Create a list of words to describe your observations of people, their interactions with others, and their environment.

How might you communicate these experiences in a work of art?

## The City

---

*"The whole city is alive; buildings, people, all are alive; and the more they move me the more I feel them to be alive. . . . And so I try to express graphically what a great city is doing."*  
— John Marin, artist, 1913

As a renewed sense of nationalism settled over the United States at the end of World War I, the city became one of America's most potent symbols. Brash, young, and electrified, urban America was dominated by modern construction, its bridges and skyscrapers emblematic of the nation's advanced technology and engineering. As the city replaced wilderness and countryside as the locus for myth-making, artists began to explore the modern industrialized landscape in cities small and large, with Manhattan's streets and skyline a primary focus.



**John Sloan (1871–1951)**

*Six O'Clock, Winter*, 1912

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection;  
acquired 1922

© 2012 Delaware Art Museum  
/ Artists Rights Society (ARS),  
New York

While a student at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia in 1892, John Sloan met Robert Henri, who became his closest friend. Originally a Philadelphia newspaper artist-reporter, in 1900 Sloan began to exhibit his paintings, which the critics recognized for their narrative

power. In 1904 Sloan moved to New York, where he was fascinated by the vigor of the city in all its shabby drabness, as opposed to its elegance. Sloan's ability to capture drama in an everyday scene is very much in evidence in *Six O'Clock, Winter*, which depicts the Third Avenue "El" (short for "elevated train") at the peak of the evening rush hour. The massive and powerful train is poised for only a moment, its dark diagonal stretching across the canvas, silhouetted against an ice-blue, early evening winter sky.



**Did you know that electric lights were first used for public streets in America in 1879?**

In 1879, Thomas Edison invented an incandescent light bulb that would remain lit for about forty hours. Edison advanced the technology by performing numerous experiments to develop a carbon filament, which could burn for longer periods of time. This made the invention much more applicable, commercially viable, and usable. He said: "Anything that won't sell, I don't want to invent. Its sale is proof of utility, and utility is success." By 1880, his bulbs could be used for 1,200 hours. After Edison pioneered the use of electricity indoors, light bulbs were developed for streetlights as well. In 1879, electric lights were first used for public streets in America, as depicted in the painting *Six O'Clock, Winter* by John Sloan.



**Edward Bruce (1879–1943)**

*Power*, ca. 1933

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection; Gift of Mrs. Edward Bruce, 1957

Although he painted throughout his life, Edward Bruce, who began his career as a lawyer, did not become a professional artist until his mid-forties, after a rigorous six-year apprenticeship in Italy. Returning to the United States in 1925, Bruce soon found national recognition for his paintings;

in 1933, he was appointed administrator of the Public Works of Art Project, the first federally supported arts program. *Power* is an evocative image of New York painted during the early years of the Depression. Using simplified forms, a refined sense of line, and atmospheric perspective, Bruce presents the Brooklyn Bridge against a luminous view of Manhattan's distinctive skyline. The son of a minister, Bruce brought spiritual fervor to his landscapes and cityscapes. In *Power*, for example, shafts of golden light break through dark clouds to create a radiant aura shining down on New York, America's greatest and most powerful city.



**Did you know that the term “skyscraper” was first used during the 1880s?**

The term “skyscraper” was first used to describe a tall building during the 1880s, shortly after the first ten-to-twenty-story buildings were constructed in the United States. These modern marvels combined several innovations: a steel structure, elevators, central heating, electricity, plumbing pipes, and telephones. They came to dominate and define the American landscape in the twentieth century. When the 793-foot, fifty-seven-story Woolworth Building opened in 1913, it was the tallest building in the world.

New York City's skyline changed dramatically in the first decades of the twentieth century. The Woolworth Building was soon eclipsed by taller architectural marvels like the Chrysler Building in 1930 and the Empire State Building in 1931.

The Empire State Building stood as the tallest building in the world for forty years after its completion, and since the fall of the World Trade Center towers in 2001, is today the tallest building in New York City. More than 3,400 workers were involved in the project to construct the 102-story landmark.

In the early twentieth century, new money poured into New York City as 70 percent of the nation's corporations set up business in its unsurpassed skyscrapers. The completion of the Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queensborough, and Williamsburg bridges connected the rapidly growing city, and the opening of the subway in 1904 made travel throughout the boroughs a breeze. Now look at the painting *Power* by Edward Bruce, which celebrates and captures the beauty, the technological marvels, and above all, the power of New York City.



**Learn more...**

Discovery Education – Urban Growth in America Lesson Plans

<http://www.discoveryeducation.com/teachers/free-lesson-plans/urban-growth-in-america.cfm>

## Memory and Identity

---

*"The age old controversy, environment versus inheritance, is not within my province . . . but what is it that makes for vitalization and progress if not new sources of inspiration from other civilizations." — Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Japanese-American artist*

Millions of immigrants began arriving in the United States in the late nineteenth century, remaking the racial and ethnic character of the country. Between 1910 and 1940, America's demography was further reshaped from within during the Great Migration, when African Americans moved from the rural South to cities of the North in search of jobs, better housing, and freedom from oppression. This population shift gave birth to a generation of artists emboldened to give voice to their community experience. Duncan Phillips, an early proponent of "a fusion of various sensitivities, a unification of differences," celebrated the assimilation of various aesthetic ideas into one national heritage known as "American."

In the 1920s and 1930s representational paintings of the American Scene, which were understood to be about the experience of the people, became increasingly popular, and American art began to reflect the country's ethnic multiplicity. Artists from all over Europe, as well as from Latin America and Asia, invigorated the country's aesthetic diversity. Artists of color who captured aspects of contemporary American life in pictures were overlooked by mainstream critics. Phillips was among the few who valued and collected their versions of the American Scene as an essential part of American life.

### **Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000)**

*The Migration Series, Panel no. 3 and Panel no. 23, 1940–41*

Casein tempera on hardboard

The Phillips Collection; acquired 1942

© 2012 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

In a century when painting shifted away from narrative, master storyteller Jacob Lawrence, America's most celebrated chronicler of African-American experience and history, drew on his own emotional responses while bringing important historical events to life. Composed of sixty numbered panels, *The Migration Series* is a seminal work in twentieth-century art, and a manifestation of Lawrence's ethnic pride and desire to reveal events he thought should be known. Broad in scope and dramatic in exposition, this serial depiction of African-Americans moving North between the World Wars to find jobs, better housing, and freedom from oppression was a subject the artist associated with his parents, who migrated from South Carolina to Virginia, and finally, to New York. Enthralled by fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, especially the storytelling predella panels, Lawrence used their medium—tempera—with a craftsman's mastery. Flattened, angular forms, strong diagonals, and contrasts of light and shadow contribute to the dynamism of the images. Searing in their immediacy, the works show only essential imagery. As the narrative unfolds, the vantage point, compositions, and details change. In some panels, figures dominate; in others, the setting propels the story. Lawrence, who carefully composed and designed his series, never lost sight of the universal human drama captured in the collective narrative.

Public acceptance of *The Migration Series* has been strong since it was first shown in December 1941. The Phillips Collection owns thirty panels from the series—the odd-numbered ones—while the Museum of Modern Art owns the even-numbered panels.





## Create Your Own Written and Visual Narrative

Jacob Lawrence's *Migration Series* depicts African-Americans moving North between the World Wars to find jobs, better housing, and freedom from oppression. This subject was personally important to Lawrence because of the association with his parents, who migrated from South Carolina to Virginia, and finally, to New York.

Think about a story in history or in your life that is personally significant to you and your family. Create a written narrative in which you describe the time and place of the event, the people who were involved, and the feelings that were experienced. Then create a series of sketches (at least 10) that chronicles your story from beginning to end.

Reflect on the written and visual narratives that you created.

- What story did you depict?

- What did you want to emphasize about the story?

- How did you emphasize that message?

- Which form of narrative did you feel was most successful—written or visual? Why?



Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000). *The Migration Series*, Panel no. 3, 1940–41



Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000). *The Migration Series*, Panel no. 23, 1940–41



## Learn more...

The Phillips Collection interactive website about Jacob Lawrence's *Migration Series*  
[http://www.phillipscollection.org/migration\\_series/index.cfm](http://www.phillipscollection.org/migration_series/index.cfm)

## Legacy of Cubism

---

*"Cubism . . . enabled the artists to liberate themselves from the confinements of representation and to launch forth into the deep and perilous waters of the abstract."*

— *Duncan Phillips, collector, 1926*

Cubism, which developed in France around 1907, burst onto the American scene in 1913 at the Armory Show, an exhibition in New York and Chicago of nearly 1,300 contemporary American and European paintings organized and selected by a group of progressive American artists. The French Cubist paintings and other European works, particularly those by Henri Matisse and Marcel Duchamp, proved to be the most controversial part of the exhibition. Conservative American critics and a public accustomed to representational pictures found the analytic Cubism of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso anarchic and disturbing. Headlines in the New York press proclaimed "Cubist Art Is Here, As Clear As Mud."

While critics ridiculed the newest European art, a small band of America's first generation of abstract artists, many of whom had spent time in Europe, embraced it, absorbing the lessons of Cubism into their painting. By the 1920s, elements of Cubist style appeared in the work of increasing numbers of American modernists. There was an effort among some artists to Americanize Cubism into an original abstract style. John Marin and Karl Knaths, for example, developed personal Cubist-related styles to interpret their environment, while Stuart Davis's Cubism derived from American utilitarian objects, rather than nature. For others, Cubism led to an Americanized abstract art based on pure geometric abstraction.



**Stuart Davis (1892–1964)**

*Egg Beater No. 4, 1928*

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection; acquired 1939

© Estate of Stuart Davis /  
Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

One of America's strongest advocates of abstract art during the first half of the twentieth century, Stuart Davis began experimenting with Cubist abstraction after admiring the work of Paul Cézanne, Fernand Léger, and Pablo Picasso at the 1913

Armory Show. *Egg Beater No. 4* is the final work in Davis's breakthrough series of 1927 and 1928, in which he achieved an original abstract style that he used throughout his career. For his still life experiment, Davis purposely chose unrelated objects—eggbeater, electric fan, and rubber glove—so that he could concentrate on relationships of color, shape, and space. He spoke of visualizing these elements in relation to each other, within a larger system that unified them in the space and on the picture plane. In the Phillips painting the space is ambiguous and the shapes appear to be interlocked and integrated onto a flat surface.

---

Stuart Davis used a rubber glove, electric fan, and eggbeater—recently manufactured and marketed consumer products—to inspire his *Egg Beater* series, which consisted of four different paintings.



**Did you know that since 1856, more than one hundred patents have been granted for the egg beater?**

Yes, since 1856, more than one hundred patents have been granted to this seemingly simple device. Willis Johnson of Cincinnati, Ohio, patented an improved mechanical egg beater in 1884. With it, the rotary beater transfers the action of whisking into gears, which saves the user time and effort. In the 1920s and 1930s, electric mixers were all the rage in kitchens across America. Egg beater design was considered a science, and it was promoted as such in the marketing strategies of those selling them.

Between 1882 and 1886, New Orleans resident Schuyler Wheeler invented the first electric fan. In the 1920s, industrial advances enabled steel to be mass produced in different shapes, bringing fan prices down and allowing more home owners to afford them. As sales of electric fans steadily increased during the twenties, some manufacturers like Emerson and General Electric added carrying handles to their heavier fans to let users move them from one place to another. Mini-sized fans such as the “Polar Cub,” by the A. C. Gilbert Company, were small enough to be carried in a suitcase; they were especially popular with traveling salesmen whose nights were spent in stuffy hotels and boarding houses.



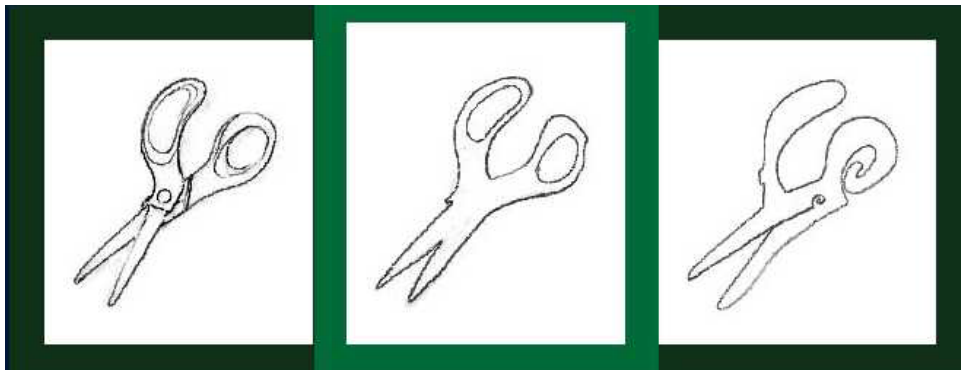
### **Abstract an Object**

Exaggerate, distort, and stretch

Try it! Create a series of abstract drawings based on a utilitarian object of your choice. Create at least three separate sketches of this object. With each one, increase the degree (or level) of abstraction until your original subject becomes unrecognizable. You may exaggerate, distort, and stretch the object into unusual proportions.

Reflect. Out of all of your sketches, which one best expresses how you relate to and/or perceive the object? For example, an exaggerated egg beater might suggest a sense of movement that the realistic drawing could not. Which of your drawings became more about formal elements such as line, shape, and space?

Share your favorite drawing with your classmates. See if they can guess the source of inspiration for your abstractions.



Degrees of Abstraction  
Example: Scissors

## Transition to Abstract Expressionism

---

*"I think I am a realist. . . . I make what I see. It's only the problem of seeing it. . . . The universe is real but you can't see it. You have to imagine it. Once you imagine it, you can be realistic about reproducing it."*

— *Alexander Calder, artist, 1962*

By the end of the 1930s, American artists, like their European counterparts, put increasing emphasis on abstraction as a universal visual language of pure form and color. Moreover, many American abstract painters also looked to philosophy, mathematics, science, psychology, religion, and music to stimulate their experiments with visual reality and propel their art into new arenas.

Milton Avery's pared-down style, for example, fuses abstraction and color with shape and spatial relationships. His large-scale late canvases are at once non-objective and representational. Similarly, the sculpture of Alexander Calder incorporates pure relationships of line, space, color, shape, time, and motion. It appears to be non-objective, but is actually derived from nature.



**Milton Avery**  
**(1885–1965)**  
*Black Sea*, 1959  
Oil on canvas  
The Phillips  
Collection;  
acquired 1965  
© 2012 Milton  
Avery Trust /  
Artists Rights  
Society (ARS),  
New York

Milton Avery, perhaps under the influence of his close friends Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb, started experimenting with large-scale canvases in 1957. The increase in scale gave his simplified color masses an overwhelming impact and marked a new flowering in his artistic oeuvre. *Black Sea*, a depiction of an ebbing wave at the Provincetown, Massachusetts, beach on Cape Cod, is one of Avery's most abstract paintings. Over the years Avery had painted numerous beaches; however, in the late 1950s he began to reduce detail and emphasize formal aspects of his works. Through this process of simplification, elements became ambiguous, creating a tension between abstraction and representation. In *Black Sea*, one of Avery's most striking and monumental paintings, the bold contrast of the black wave with the huge expanse of flesh-colored sand creates an iconic representation of the surf.

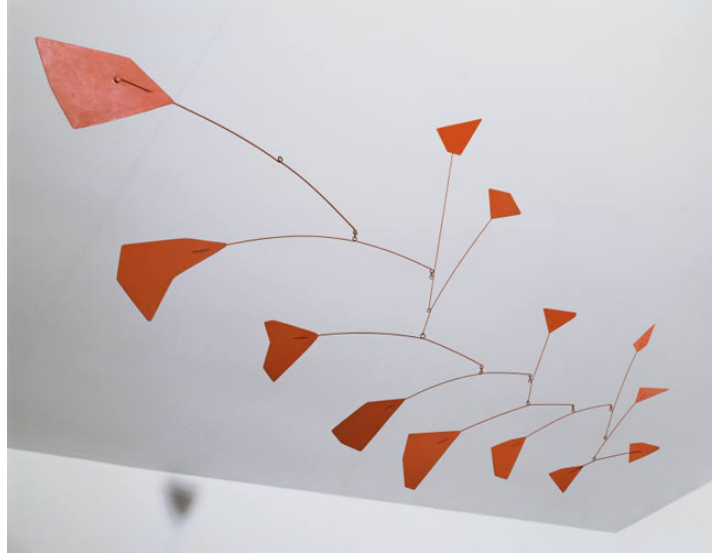


---

**Alexander Calder (1898–1976)**

*Red Polygons*, ca. 1950

Painted sheet metal and wire mobile  
The Phillips Collection; acquired 1951  
© 2012 Calder Foundation, New York /  
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Trained as an engineer, Alexander Calder considered his visit to Piet Mondrian's Paris studio in 1930 to be the catalyst for abstraction: Calder had wanted to make the painter's colored boards on the studio wall "oscillate in different directions and at different amplitudes." By 1932, Calder had invented the mobile, a revolutionary new type of sculpture made of wire which relied solely on carefully adjusted weight and balance so that air currents might compose movement in real time and space. Calder's mobiles transcend sculpture's traditional concern with volume and mass by incorporating, instead, pure relationships of line, space, and limited color. In subject and inspiration, the early mobiles had cosmological reference and significance. Later, nature became an equally rich source for Calder's imagination. *Red Polygons*, for example, originally known as *Red Flock*, suggests Calder's fascination with bird imagery. Sophisticated in its engineering and elegant in design, it is also entirely red.



**Did you know that the term "mobile" was coined by artist Marcel Duchamp?**

A mobile is a type of kinetic sculpture constructed to take advantage of the principle of equilibrium. Alexander Calder is an artist best known for inventing mobiles—sculptures composed of abstract shapes moving through space. He studied mechanical engineering in college and was interested in the constant motion of everything in the universe as well as the changing physical relationships between all objects. By precisely adjusting the weight and balance of each shape, he created works that floated through space, propelled only by air currents. He is sometimes called "the man who made sculpture move." Calder's fellow artist, Marcel Duchamp, coined the term "mobile" in 1931, after seeing one of Calder's sculptures.



**Balancing Act**

Floating or Flat

Mobiles look graceful and weightless as they float and glide through the air. But getting them to balance is a lot of hard work! See if you can do it. Make a mobile online with NGA's interactive "Mobile Maker." Try it out at <http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/interactive/mobile.htm>.

Now look closely at Milton Avery's *Black Sea*. How did he achieve balance in a flat composition?



**Learn more...**

National Gallery of Art Classroom: Calder's Balancing Acts Lesson Plans  
[http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/counting\\_on\\_art/lessons\\_calder.shtm](http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/counting_on_art/lessons_calder.shtm).

## Abstract Expressionism

---

*"We favor the simple expression of complex thought. We are for the large shape because it has the impact of the unequivocal. We wish to reassert the picture plane. We are for flat forms because they destroy illusion and reveal truth."*

— Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko, artists, 1943

New York City became the heart of avant-garde artistic activity and the art capital of the world with the influx of European émigrés before World War II. From this international confluence of artists, Abstract Expressionism emerged during the 1940s and 1950s; the first truly international style manifested in the United States, it turned American art into a global force.

Reacting against 1930s regionalist art, America's avant-garde painters of the 1940s sought a new visual language that was abstract and inherently American. Affected by the political turmoil of World War II, these young painters believed the contemporary artist faced "a crisis of subject matter." Their search for subject matter became a search for meaning.

Well versed in the classical past, these ambitious young artists absorbed contemporary international styles like European Surrealism and abstraction, while also looking to non-Western sources for inspiration. They immersed themselves in Freudian psychoanalysis and Jungian psychology's emphasis on the universal experience of the collective unconscious, as well as in anthropological studies that treated myths as windows into the individual's relationship with the universe. Firmly believing in the creative subconscious, the Abstract Expressionists looked into their own psyches for inspiration. Thinking in paint was not about making abstractions or representations, but about giving concrete expression to thoughts and feelings.



### Adolph Gottlieb (1903–1974)

*The Seer*, 1950

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection; acquired 1952

© Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation /  
Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

*The Seer* is one of Adolph Gottlieb's "pictographs," which he envisioned as "archaic wall art whose meaning is lost to modern man." Pictographs are Gottlieb's means of instilling painting with meaning not limited to particular cultures, times, or places. African, Native American, and prehistoric art were all important sources for Gottlieb, as were the organic imagery and graphic symbols found in Paul Klee's

work. Gottlieb's early pictographs were monochromatic with symbolic forms compartmentalized in black-lined grids derived from Piet Mondrian. By 1950 Gottlieb had loosened his compositions to emphasize color and a painterly handling of the surface as evident here where the colors are derived from cave painting and Native American art. The eye, derived from surreal and primitive art, was a frequent theme in Gottlieb's pictographs and refers to his inner vision. Here, *The Seer* at left looks out with a single all-seeing eye and appears again at top center as a visionary interpreting the universal symbols arrayed below.

---

**Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011)**

*Canyon*, 1965

Acrylic on canvas

The Phillips Collection; The Dreier Fund for Acquisitions and funds given by Gifford Phillips, 2001

© 2012 Helen Frankenthaler / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Helen Frankenthaler is credited with introducing in 1952 the technique of painting directly onto unprepared canvas with turpentine-thinned oil in a manner reminiscent of watercolor. This new style of art, which replaced thickly painted, gestural brushstrokes with a soak-staining technique, was known as Color Field painting. In 1963 she began using acrylic paint as opposed to turpentine-thinned oil, resulting in the expansion of form and the production of bolder, more saturated colors. *Canyon* takes advantage of the fluid nature of acrylic paint, which floods laterally across the surface of a canvas to create a hard, defined edge rather than the soft, blotted edges found in the thinned oil paint of her earlier stained works. Although *Canyon* seems at first glance to be nonrepresentational, Frankenthaler's work conveys her immediate response to nature; her ideas expressed in large color shapes and in the ways the color hues act on each other.



### **Did you know that acrylic paint was not invented until the 1940s?**

Leonard Bocour and Sam Golden invented the first acrylic paint between 1946 and 1949 under the brand Magna Paint. The main difference between most acrylic and oil paints is the drying time. Oils dry much more slowly than acrylics and allow more time to blend colors and apply even glazes; however, the medium impedes the artist from working quickly. By the 1950s, painters began using quick-drying acrylic to avoid the considerable drying time of oils. Acrylics also offer artists a range of possibilities: they can be applied to raw canvas, they can produce both the soft effects of watercolors (as seen Helen Frankenthaler's *Canyon*) and the sharp effects of layered oils, and they can be used in mixed-media works such as collage.



### **Experiment with paint!**

Get to know the materials

Understanding materials and techniques is an important part of the artist's creative process. This knowledge enables painters, for example, to select paints that will produce the effects they desire in their artwork—whether that is sharp, controlled brushstrokes or a soft, diffused look.

Try it! If you have access to acrylic or oil paints, experiment with the medium and various applications of it. Begin with paint directly from the tube and then gradually thin with water (if acrylic) or turpentine (if oil). Depending on the paint's thickness, brush or pour it onto paper or canvas. Watch how the paint moves and how it is absorbed.

Now look closely at the paintings by Gottlieb and Frankenthaler. Compare and discuss each artist's work. Describe the lines, shapes, and colors. Are the edges of the shapes hard or soft? Does the paint appear thick or diluted? How do you think each artist applied their paint to the canvas? What type of paint do you think each artist used to achieve the effects you observed?

# To See as Artists See: American Art from The Phillips Collection

February 3-May 6, 2012

This exhibition has been organized by The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

## EXHIBITION SPONSORS

Platinum Sponsor:



Silver Sponsor:

**Anne and Joe Russell**

The Frist Center for the Visual Arts is supported in part by:



Belmont University and Ocean Way Recording Studios donated recording time and professional expertise in the production of this audio tour.

## 2012 TEACHER AND SCHOOL PROGRAM SPONSORS

Presenting Sponsor:



Supporting Sponsor:



919 Broadway  
Nashville, TN 37203  
[www.fristcenter.org](http://www.fristcenter.org)