

The Lang Collection at the Seattle Art Museum



Francis Bacon (1909-1992)
Portrait of Man with Glasses I, 1963
Oil on canvas, 13 1/2 x 11 1/2 in.

Following Francis Bacon's retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 1962, portraiture remained the artist's main focus for the duration of the 1960s. In 1963, Bacon painted the series of four versions of *Portrait of Man with Glasses*, which he delivered to his London gallery, Marlborough Fine Art, in early July. Originally titled *Head 1* through *Head 4*, the paintings were not necessarily painted in this order and the titles subsequently changed.

The four portraits are dominated by distortion and deformation. *Portrait of Man with Glasses I* (1963) is the most abstract painting in the group, where the features of the face are entirely obfuscated. Bacon did not reveal the man's identity, though research suggests that the subject could be London eye surgeon Patrick Trevor-Roper, with whom the artist socialized at the time. As Bacon worked from photographs and had images of Mahatma Gandhi and James Joyce in his studio, the latter have also been proposed as possible identities for the portraits. *Portrait of Man with Glasses I* (1963), together with *Study for a Portrait* (1967), also part of the Lang Collection gift, are the first works by Bacon to enter the Seattle Art Museum's collection.

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Francis Bacon (1909-1992)
Study for a Portrait, 1967
Oil on canvas, 61 x 55 in.

Francis Bacon was honored at the *Pittsburgh International* (known today as the *Carnegie International*) exhibitions of 1950, 1958, 1961, 1964, and 1967, and was distinguished with a Carnegie Institute painting award in 1967. Completed that same year, *Study for a Portrait* (1967) was featured in the 1970 *Pittsburgh International*. The painting was also included in the 1973 exhibition organized by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, *Four Contemporary Masters: Giacometti, Bacon, de Kooning, Dubuffet*, which travelled to Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Brazil.

Beginning in 1948, Bacon's preferred working method was in thematic series. *Study for a Portrait*, however, is a rare single composition that was never repeated. The self-referential inclusion of earlier works on the wall behind the seated woman—*Three Studies for a Crucifixion* (1962) on the right and likely *Seated Figures* (1962) in the middle—is also unique. Henrietta Moraes, a frequent subject and friend of Bacon, is depicted in *Study for a Portrait*. Bacon commissioned the photographer John Deakin to take nude photographs of Moraes, and the images of her poses acted as the basis for most of the artist's female nudes made between 1961 and 1972. *Study for a Portrait* (1967), along with *Portrait of Man with Glasses I* (1963), also part of the Lang Collection gift, are the first works by Bacon to enter the Seattle Art Museum's collection.

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Willem de Kooning (1904-1997)

Town Square, 1948

Oil on paper mounted on Masonite, 17 x 23 1/2 in.

Willem de Kooning's *Town Square* (1948) was acquired directly in 1976 from the renowned collection of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller, New York. The Hellers' collection included notable Abstract Expressionist masterpieces including Clyfford Still's *PH-338 (1949-No. 2)* (1949) (also part of the gift from the Lang Collection), and Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles* (1952) (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra) and *One: Number 31* (1950) (Museum of Modern Art, New York).

1948 was a significant year for de Kooning. In April, his first solo exhibition opened at Charles Egan Gallery in New York, featuring ten mostly black and white abstractions. The exhibition received critical and institutional recognition: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, subsequently acquired *Painting* (1948) from the exhibition, and the Whitney Museum of American Art selected *Mailbox* (1948) for their 1948 *Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*. *Town Square* (1948) is part of this important body of work, characterized by a hybridity of abstract and figurative forms, reduced color palette, and fluid compositions. At the time, de Kooning used transparent tracing paper to explore the effects of individual lines and forms. Built in layers, white is the dominant color upon which a composition of black lines with ochre accents appears in a state of flux—an effect the artist described as a “slipping glimpse.” In tandem with his predominantly white abstractions such as *Town Square*, de Kooning also worked in the inverse, creating white-on-black compositions. In 1960, Harriet Janis and Rudi Blesh described the relationship between the black and white compositions in photographic terms, as ‘positives’ and ‘negatives’: “To look rapidly back and forth at these two pictures creates an effect like that of a dark landscape upon which a searchlight flashes on and off.”

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Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011)

Dawn Shapes, 1967

Acrylic on canvas, 77 x 93 3/4 in.

Dawn Shapes (1967) was painted one year after the 33rd Venice Biennale (1966), where Helen Frankenthaler—together with Ellsworth Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, and Jules Olitski—represented the United States. Painted at a highly productive time in Frankenthaler's career, the large-scale *Dawn Shapes* is a dramatic color field painting, a painterly direction she pioneered. Created on the floor with thinned acrylic paint, it is considered a "classic" example of her soak stain technique. While her paintings in the 1950s are more strongly defined by linear designs, a dramatic change occurred in the early 1960s when Frankenthaler covered large parts of the canvas in bold forms. Compositionally related to several 1964 paintings with framed bands of contrasting colors around the edge of the canvas, *Dawn Shapes* (1967) exemplifies the spatial tension between pools of contrasting color and their relationship with areas of unprimed canvas. Earlier examples include large areas of unpainted canvas, whereas in this work only small slivers remain exposed. The painting is distinguished by a powerful suggestion of gravity through the insertion of a descending formation, and is closely related to *Mauve District* (1966) (Museum of Modern Art, New York).

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Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966)
Femme de Venise II, 1956
Bronze, 48 in.

Alberto Giacometti's *Femme de Venise II* (1956) was originally part of the collection of Aimé Maeght (Galerie Maeght) in Paris. Sidney Janis, a champion of the European avant-garde, exhibited the sculpture in 1974 at his New York gallery, where Jane Lang first saw it and was captivated by the elongated figure. The Langs acquired it the following year.

Giacometti's mature style, of which *Femme de Venise II* is an example, was predicated on a new concept of the figure, which he developed during and after World War II. The hieratic stance and the artist's characteristic use of a heavy, rectangular pedestal are derived from studies of ancient Greek and Egyptian statues.

The *Women of Venice* were a group of ten upright silhouettes made for the French Pavilion of the 28th Venice Biennale in 1956. Giacometti created approximately fifteen figures, modeled in clay and cast in plaster by his brother and frequent assistant, Diego Giacometti. Of these, he selected ten plaster casts for the Biennale. Some of the *Women of Venice* were closely related to life studies from the model, while others were marked by a greater degree of abstraction. Within this group, *Femme de Venise II* is among the most abstract, with both arms melting into the body. Only nine of the *Women of Venice* were later cast in bronze. *Femme de Venise II* is the first work by Giacometti to enter the Seattle Art Museum's collection.

The Lang Collection at the Seattle Art Museum



Adolph Gottlieb (1903-1974)
Crimson Spinning #2, 1959
Oil on canvas, 90 x 72 in.

Adolph Gottlieb's *Crimson Spinning #2* (1959) debuted in Paris at Galerie Rive Droite in April 1959, and travelled almost immediately to London, where it was included in another solo exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, *Adolph Gottlieb Paintings, 1944–1959*. Six years later it would feature prominently in a group exhibition mounted by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), *New York School: The First Generation, Paintings of the 1940s and 1950s*.

Gottlieb's *Crimson Spinning #2* is a characteristic example of his 'Burst' paintings, an iconic body of work that would occupy the artist from the mid-1950s into the 1970s. An extension of his earlier 'Imaginary Landscapes', the 'Burst' paintings similarly feature compositions with ovoid shapes in opposition with staccato brushstrokes—further explorations into the possibilities of formal and conceptual dichotomies. In *Crimson Spinning #2*, stillness and movement are captured in the dynamic juxtaposition of forms: a red orb and cluster of black brushstrokes appear suspended in two separate registers. This painting is the first work by Gottlieb to enter the Seattle Art Museum's collection.

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Philip Guston (1913-1980)

To B.W.T., 1952

Oil on canvas, 48 1/2 x 51 1/2 in.

One of Guston's earliest abstract compositions, *To B.W.T.* (1952) was included in the 1956 Museum of Modern Art, New York, exhibition, *Twelve Americans*, as well as Guston's 1962 mid-career retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Richard E. and Jane Lang acquired the painting from Acquavella Galleries, New York, in 1979.

To B.W.T. is dedicated to the painter Bradley Walker Tomlin (1899-1953), with whom Guston became friends in 1947. Following a year at the American Academy in Rome—where Guston was awarded the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1948—he relocated from Woodstock to New York City, and briefly shared a studio with Tomlin. As Guston's work transitioned from the figurative imagery of the 1940s towards abstraction, *To B.W.T.* represents a classic early composition—an accumulation of vertical and horizontal brushstrokes weave together rich accents of orange, red, ochre, and green. Guston would cite Piet Mondrian's artistic developments, moving from figuration to abstraction in the 1910s, as an analogy for his own artistic leap.

Together with *The Painter* (1976), the gift of these two Guston paintings from the Lang Collection provide additional depth to the works by the artist already in the Seattle Art Museum's collection, and expand the understanding of Guston's figurative, abstract, and graphic works.

The Lang Collection at the Seattle Art Museum



Philip Guston (1913-1980)

The Painter, 1976

Oil on canvas, 74 x 116 in.

The Painter (1976) was exhibited at David McKee Gallery, New York, in the fall of 1981. Richard E. and Jane Lang purchased the painting in 1982, with their first letter of interest dated December 21, 1981.

In 1970, Guston shocked the art world with an exhibition of new work at the Marlborough Gallery, which had been influenced by his feelings as result of the political and social unrest in the United States during the late 1960s. For Guston, using a “hooded figure” inspired by de Chirico and the robes worn by members of the Ku Klux Klan, the image of the hooded figure became a metaphor for the banality of evil and personal accountability. The exhibition was not well received, as noted by *New York Times* art critic Hilton Kramer in October of that year, who derided Guston as “A Mandarin Pretending To Be A Stumblebum.” However, Guston remained committed to his figurative work, which was recognized in a 1980-81 national touring retrospective organized by Henry Hopkins at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, that included *The Painter* (1976).

1976 was a pivotal and prolific year for Guston, as he painted over forty iconic and highly allegorical works. The self-reflexive view of the painter was a recurring theme in his later work, beginning with the charged painting *The Studio* (1969) (Private Collection) and continuing with more introspective works such as *Painting, Smoking, Eating* (1975) (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam). *The Painter* (1976) continues this theme, casting the artist as an observer from a place of hiding. The nocturnal scene, suggested through a palette of blacks and browns, underscores the painting’s ominous mood. A closely related work in subject and style is *Discipline* (1976) (The Estate of Philip Guston).

Together with *To B.W.T.* (1952), the gift of these two Guston paintings from the Lang Collection provide additional depth to the works by the artist already in the Seattle Art Museum's collection, and expand the understanding of Guston's figurative, abstract, and graphic works.

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Franz Kline (1910-1962)

Painting No. 11, 1951

Oil on canvas, 61 1/2 x 82 1/4 in.

Franz Kline's *Painting No. 11* (1951) was in the estate of the artist when he died in 1962. Exhibited in the 1968 *Franz Kline* exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, *Painting No. 11* was purchased by Richard E. and Jane Lang in 1970 from Marlborough-Gerson Gallery in New York. The painting was their first acquisition of contemporary art.

1951 was a pivotal year for Kline, who co-organized the artist-initiated *9th Street Show* (May 21–June 10, 1951). *Painting No. 11* is a quintessential example of Kline's celebrated gestural style in stark black and white. It was made shortly after Kline's first solo exhibition at Charles Egan Gallery, New York, in October 1950, which premiered his large-scale abstractions. Developed from his drawings and works on paper, Kline enlarged some of his drawings using a Bell-Opticon projector at Willem de Kooning's studio, introducing new possibilities of scale. In the catalogue for the 1964 Kline retrospective, held at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, in association with the Museum of Modern Art, New York, poet Frank O'Hara called the artist the Action Painter par excellence: "He did not want to be 'in' his painting, as Pollock did, but to create the event of his passage..."

The Lang Collection at the Seattle Art Museum



Lee Krasner (1908-1984)

Night Watch, 1960

Oil on canvas, 70 x 99 in.

First exhibited at New York's Howard Wise Gallery, Lee Krasner's *Night Watch* (1960) is part of a body of work often referred to as her 'Night Journeys', as Krasner, then suffering from insomnia, painted almost exclusively at night. Though previously known for her dramatic use of color, *Night Watch*, along with other works made in the early 1960s, uses a reduced palette of black, ochre, and creamy white, with gray accents. From roughly 1959 to 1963, Krasner was exploring new artistic terrain as well as the depths of her own psyche, processing recent experiences of loss and grief. The title *Night Watch* (1960) alludes to one of Rembrandt's celebrated paintings of a militia company made in 1642. It is a singular composition utilizing piercing eyes as a recurring motif, an allusion to the militia's duty of keeping watch as well as a self-referential proclamation. Related works made the same year are *The Guardian* (1960) (Whitney Museum of American Art) and *The Eye is the First Circle* (1960) (Private Collection). In the words of the artist, "Painting is not separate from life. It is one." *Night Watch* is the first work by Krasner to enter the Seattle Art Museum's collection.

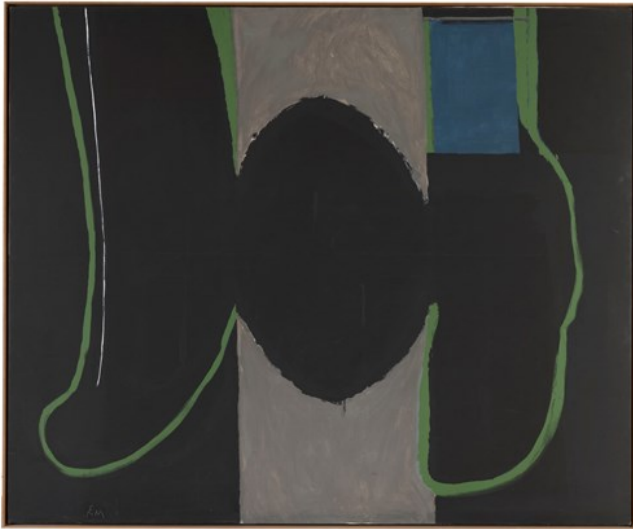
The Lang Collection at the Seattle Art Museum



Joan Mitchell (1925-1992)
The Sink, 1956
Oil on canvas, 55 x 113 in.

Joan Mitchell's *The Sink* (1956) was first exhibited by Stable Gallery in New York in 1957—her third solo exhibition with the gallery. *The Sink* is a large-scale painting—nearly ten feet in length—produced during a pivotal and transitional moment for Mitchell in the late 1950s. Painted in the years leading to her inclusion in the 29th Venice Biennale (1958), documenta II (1959), and the São Paulo Biennial (1959), it was also before Mitchell permanently relocated to Paris in 1959. Mitchell's process mined memories and experiences, and the artist often looked to her immediate environment for inspiration. In her paintings, Mitchell was “trying for something more specific than movies of my everyday life: To define a feeling.” *The Sink*, with its shimmering painterly surface, is believed to be a reference to a natural depression of land in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Chicago—Mitchell's hometown—and is an exemplar of her process and style.

The Lang Collection at the Seattle Art Museum



Robert Motherwell (1915-1991)

Irish Elegy, 1965

Acrylic on canvas, 69 x 84 in.

Unique among Robert Motherwell's works in color and theme, *Irish Elegy* (1965) is compositionally related to the artist's celebrated series of over 100 paintings completed during the years 1948 and 1967: *Elegies to the Spanish Republic*. The works, which feature a recurring motif of abutting black ovals, followed the Spanish Civil War and were meant as a "lamentation or funeral song"—a reminder of the continued dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. In 1965, as political tensions in Ireland were on the rise, Motherwell drew attention to yet another escalating conflict. His connection to Ireland was also a personal one: the country was home to his maternal grandmother. As noted by scholars, *Irish Elegy* is a rare Elegy painting in that the thrust of the rough oval forms move from right to left rather than from left to right. The painting was completed before Motherwell's 1965 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and was included therein.

The Lang Collection at the Seattle Art Museum



Robert Motherwell (1915-1991)

Before the Day, 1972

Charcoal and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 96 in.

Robert Motherwell's painting *Before the Day* (1972) was purchased directly from the artist by Richard E. and Jane Lang in 1972. While visiting Motherwell's studio, Jane wondered if the painting, then in-progress, could be completed by August 31, the birthdate of her son, Don Hussong. Completed the summer of that year—the date "30 August" is inscribed in the upper left corner—the title may thus be understood as a reference to Don Hussong's birthday. *Before the Day* aligns with Motherwell's series of 'Open' paintings first began in 1967. A departure from his preceding *Elegies to the Spanish Republic*, Motherwell's 'Open' works explore permutations of line and color, each characterized by sparse visual elements and rectangular planes. Inspired by a chance encounter in the studio—Motherwell observed a recent painting leaning against a larger canvas in an agreeable way—the compositions create the suggestion of a window, or opening. A hybrid of painting and drawing (paintings including *Before the Day* feature charcoal), the 'Open' series remained a focus for Motherwell until the early 1980s.

The Lang Collection at the Seattle Art Museum



Jackson Pollock (1912-1956)

Untitled, 1951

Black and colored ink on mulberry paper, 24 3/4 x 38 3/4 in.

1951 was a highly productive year for Jackson Pollock, during which time his technical and aesthetic objectives begin to merge in both his paintings and drawings. On the cusp of reintroducing figurative elements into his paintings, *Untitled* (1951) is part of a small and significant suite of drawings that demonstrate Pollock's continued investigations of the painted mark in relation to its support. Using two sheets of paper, Pollock worked on two drawings in tandem. The ink that bled through the top page stained the surface of the underlying sheet, which Pollock turned into a second composition (the latter of which is in the collection of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh). *Untitled* (1951) is the first in a small series of these dual compositions, and was a birthday gift from the artist to art critic Clement Greenberg. After the drawing was acquired by Richard E. and Jane Lang, it was included in the 1980 Museum of Modern Art, New York, exhibition *Jackson Pollock: Drawing into Painting*.

The Lang Collection at the Seattle Art Museum



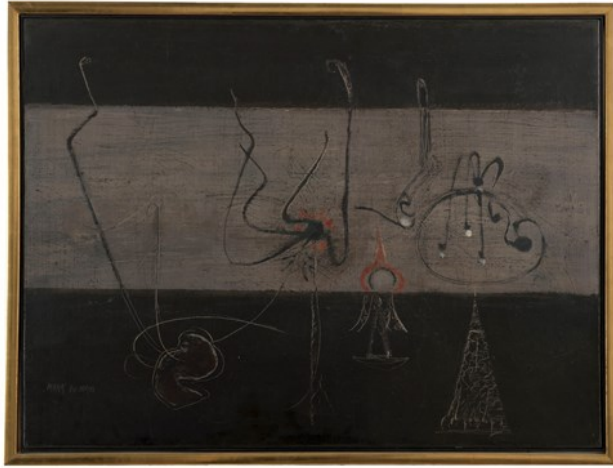
Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967)

Painting, 1950

Oil on canvas, 60 x 36 in.

Ad Reinhardt's *Painting* (1950) belonged to the estate of the artist before it was sold to Richard E. and Jane Lang in 1974 by the Marlborough Gallery, where it had been included in a solo exhibition of Reinhardt's work that same year. Beginning in the 1940s, Reinhardt took classes in Asian art history, igniting an interest in Eastern art and philosophy that would introduce him to values and artistic traditions—such as calligraphy—that were distinctly different from those of the West. The vertical composition of *Painting* is structured by a grid-like pattern of horizontal and vertical brushstrokes, set against a luminous field of variegated reds and browns. This painting in particular marks an important transition in Reinhardt's work, as its subtle tonal values, grid structure, and evocation of light prefigure his most minimal works—the black paintings—that would remain his focus from the mid-1950s until his death in 1967. *Painting* is the first work by Reinhardt to enter the Seattle Art Museum's collection.

The Lang Collection at the Seattle Art Museum



Mark Rothko (1903-1970)
Untitled, 1945
Oil on canvas, 22 x 30 in.

Painted during the last year of World War II, Mark Rothko's *Untitled* (1945) is an example of a pivotal moment in the artist's career. Bearing stylistic connections to his surrealist contemporaries, many of whom emigrated to New York from war-torn Europe, *Untitled* is divided into three horizontal bands—a compositional device that evokes geological, subterranean strata—and overlaid with glyph-like biomorphic forms. It was perhaps Rothko's interest in Greek art and mythology that informed the visual structure of this early painting (most notably the frieze-like division of the visual plane). This compositional stacking, together with the painting's soft and luminous paint application, positions *Untitled* as a predecessor to the celebrated ethereal abstractions of stacked fields of color Rothko would begin in the late 1940s.

Untitled (1945) brings to the Seattle Art Museum collection a rare example of Rothko's pivotal early work and, together with *Untitled* (1963), also from the Lang Collection, adds further depth and understanding of the artist's work.

The Lang Collection at the Seattle Art Museum



Mark Rothko (1903-1970)
Untitled, 1963
Oil on canvas, 69 x 90 in.

Mark Rothko's *Untitled* (1963) belonged to the estate of the artist before it was sold to Richard E. and Jane Lang in 1972 by the Marlborough Gallery. The painting, an example of the artist's mature style, would find inclusion in major Rothko exhibitions at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1978) and National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (1998). This painting evidences the artist's mastery of his signature style, characterized by large, atmospheric bands of color that vibrate with quiet intensity. Measuring 69 x 90 inches, the painting's scale creates an immersive environment for viewers as well. In an undated essay, the artist indicated that the inner light of these paintings stemmed from his continued interest in mythology: "For light makes it possible to substitute for the directness of the mythologist's sensuality a new factor that we can call *emotionality*." While exuberant color was the hallmark of Rothko's earlier color field abstractions (as evidenced in his 1953 painting, *#10*, in the Seattle Art Museum's collection), the darker and more muted tones of *Untitled* (1963) are quintessential of his later work.

Untitled (1963) brings to the Seattle Art Museum collection a highly significant late painting and, together with *Untitled* (1945), also from the Lang Collection, adds further depth and understanding of Rothko's work.

The Lang Collection at the Seattle Art Museum



David Smith (1906-1965)

Cubi XXV, 1965

Stainless steel, 119 1/4 x 120 3/4 x 31 3/4 in.

David Smith's *Cubi XXV* (1965) was acquired by Richard E. and Jane Lang in 1978. Previously, it belonged to the estate of the artist before entering the collection of Meshulam Riklis, during which time it was on loan to the Wadsworth Atheneum and on view for many years.

Situated within a career defined by sculptural innovation, Smith's *Cubi XXV* is one of a series of twenty-eight sculptures considered to be the artist's culminating body of work, and one of the last completed before the artist's untimely death in 1965. Executed between the years 1961 and 1965, Smith's *Cubi* are known for their explorations of volume, shape, scale, and surface. In the case of *Cubi XXV*, stainless steel cylindrical forms balance on extended beams. Often linked to Minimalism due to their industrial medium and form, the sculptures' shimmering wire-brushed surfaces also find connection to Abstract Expressionism, due to their gestural and emotive qualities.

The Lang Collection at the Seattle Art Museum



Clyfford Still (1904-1980)
PH-338 (1949-No. 2), 1949
Oil on canvas, 91 3/4 x 68 7/8 in.

Prior to entering the collection of Richard E. and Jane Lang, Clyfford Still's painting *PH-338 (1949-No. 2)* (1949) was originally in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller, sold to the New York couple by Betty Parsons. The Hellers' collection included notable Abstract Expressionist masterpieces including Willem de Kooning's *Town Square* (1948) (also part of the gift from the Lang Collection), and Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles* (1952) (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra) and *One: Number 31* (1950) (Museum of Modern Art, New York). This painting was included in the artist's penultimate show at Betty Parsons Gallery, from April 17–May 6, 1950, before travelling to San Francisco for another solo exhibition at Metart Galleries, from June 17–July 14, 1950. Eight years later, it was one of four paintings by Still included in the landmark exhibition organized by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, *The New American Painting*, which travelled to eight European countries.

With its expanses of color and textured surface, *PH-338* evidences Still's mature style. Still lived in Eastern Washington and California until 1950, and there is a rugged quality to the works from this period, hinting at such environments; however, the lack of horizon line, persistent brushwork, and pure color maintain its grounding as an abstraction. Painted while Still was living and teaching in San Francisco, the all-over quality of the composition makes *PH-338* a towering artistic proposal in the late 1940s—a time when many of his contemporaries were still exploring the full potential of abstraction in relation to scale. A closely related composition in color, composition, and scale is the 1949 painting *PH-385 (1949-No. 1)* (Clyfford Still Museum, Denver). The painting is of further significance as it is the first work by Still to enter the Seattle Art Museum's collection.

LANG COLLECTION

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