

Sign Language: Twentieth-Century Painting from the Permanent Collection,
June 23, 2000-October 29, 2000

Sign language is a system of communicating by hand gestures. It is a substitute for the spoken word that can be used by people of different cultures to share ideas and emotions. In the context of twentieth century painting, its meaning expands. It includes marks and symbols in which references to earlier art are embedded, and it is also a metaphor for two important and sometimes overlapping developments: the emergence of distinct gestural styles, and the embrace of non-objective imagery.

By mid-century, painting had become both an international language and a vehicle for self-expression. Brushstrokes, as individualized as handwriting, were free to reveal the subconscious or to deliver messages that were independent of subject matter. Artists invented and became the active verbs of this language: witness Joan Mitchell's physical movement of the arm to create aggressive painterly passages, Cy Twombly's repetitive motion of a crayon to produce automatic writing, and Jackson Pollock's abandonment of brushes in favor of poured and dripped paint. Mark Rothko's glowing, brushy icons were a new dialect in this language, quiet and contemplative in contrast to Cleve Gray's bravura statement on an otherwise serene color field.

The cornerstones of this sign language were laid early in the twentieth century by anti-traditional artisans: Cubists, Fauves, Surrealists, German Expressionists, experimental interpreters of modern reality. Their contributions formed a new lexicon of subjects and of ways of painting that continues to be referenced in the "texts" of later generations of artists. This selection of works from the Museum's permanent collection reinforces the universality, and confirms the resonance and endurance, of these highly personalized means of artistic communication.

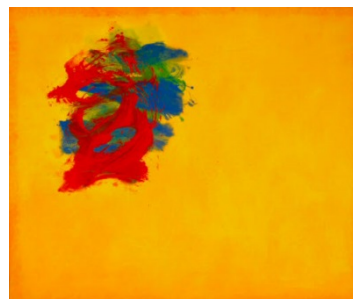
CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Grace Hartigan, American, 1922-2008
Homage to Matisse, 1955
Oil on canvas
Anonymous gift 56.120



RISD MUSEUM

Cleve Gray, American, 1918-2004
Karnak Dawn #2, 1978
Acrylic paint
Gift of Lee Hall 79.111



Louisa L. Chase, American, 1951 - 2016
Flurry, 1982
Oil on canvas
Gift of Paula and Leonard Granoff 1995.066



Ruth Dealy, American, b.1947, (RISD BFA 1971, Painting; RISD MFA 1973, Painting)
Blue Bra, 1990-93
Acrylic with metallic pigments on canvas
Gift of J. Scott Burns 1994.106



RISD MUSEUM

Dennis Congdon, American, b. 1953
Pile, 2000
Oil and acrylic on canvas
Jesse Metcalf Fund 2000.17



Joan Mitchell, American, 1926-1992
Mooring, 1971
Oil on canvas
Gift of Bayard and Harriet K. Ewing 1992.124



Wifredo Lam, Cuban, 1902-1982
Near the Virgin Islands (Près des Îles Vierges), 1959
Oil, charcoal and pastel on canvas
Nancy Sayles Day Collection of Modern Latin American Art 69.054



RISD MUSEUM

Cy Twombly, American, 1929 - 2011

Untitled, 1968

Oil and crayon on canvas

The Albert Pilavin Memorial Collection of 20th-Century American Art
69.060



Jackson Pollock, American, 1912-1956

Magic Lantern, 1947

Oil, enamel, and carpet tacks on canvas

Gift of Mrs. Peggy Guggenheim 54.005



RISD MUSEUM

Mark Rothko, American, 1903-1970

Untitled, 1954

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase in honor of Daniel Robbins: The Chace Fund, The Collectors' Acquisition Fund, Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund, Mary B. Jackson Fund, Walter H. Kimball Fund, Jesse Metcalf Fund, Museum Gift Fund, and gifts of Mrs. George Harding, Mrs. Lewis Madeira, Mrs. Malcolm Farmer, Mrs. Frank Mauran, George H. Waterman III, Mrs. Murray S. Danforth, Mrs. Russell Field, Mrs. Albert Pilavin, Mr. and Mrs. Bayard Ewing, Mr. and Mrs. Tracy Barnes, Mr. and Mrs. William Boardman, Mr. and Mrs. Roy Neuberger, Mrs. Lee Day Gillespie, Mr. and Mrs. Carl Haffenreffer, and Richard Brown Baker 71.091

