

Robert Rauschenberg

**STATEMENT FOR SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

It is with extremely complicated emotions that I part with such a large selection of what I consider priceless icons of my history; works that celebrate the wonder and joy that I feel must be an important ingredient in the creativity and life of any artist. It is with pride and trust that the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art has chosen to represent and protect the objects and ideals that have inspired my work. I feel like the Museum has just taken on another partner.

**BOB RAUSCHENBERG**

Robert Rauschenberg

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**MODERN ICONS COME TO SFMOMA**

**Museum Acquires Major Works by Rauschenberg, Mondrian  
and Duchamp, among others**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, June 5, 1998—An exceptional group of 23 major works by leading 20th-century artists—including Louise Bourgeois, Marcel Duchamp, Alberto Giacometti, Anselm Kiefer, Brice Marden, Piet Mondrian, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Robert Rauschenberg and Wayne Thiebaud—has been added to the permanent collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), Director David A. Ross announced today. Most significant is the acquisition of 14 key works by Robert Rauschenberg, primarily from the artist's collection of his own works, including *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953, one of the touchstones of 20th-century art. The purchase of the entire group of strategically selected works was made possible almost entirely through private donations; no monies from the Museum's general acquisition funds were used in the purchases. Together they form one of the most significant bodies of work ever purchased at one time by a museum, with a value of approximately \$40 million. The extraordinary acquisition greatly enhances SFMOMA's collection of modern and contemporary masterworks, shifting into high gear a collection effort that began prior to the January 1995 opening of the Museum's highly acclaimed current building.

The landmark acquisition marks the commencement of the tenure of Museum Director Ross, who officially began his position on June 1. Ross commented: "This is an incredible, historic moment, not only for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, but for the public stewardship of major masterworks of 20th-century art in this country. Most importantly, bringing these works into SFMOMA's holdings is the culmination of years of planning and work by the Museum's trustees and staff to acquire key works that broaden and deepen its presentation of modern and contemporary art. These purchases help fulfill an institutional goal that began with the construction of a new museum, that has been reinforced by a number of major acquisitions over the past few years, and that is solidified by the breathtaking commitment on the part of several leading SFMOMA trustees to make this collection one of greater international distinction."

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The major support for the purchase of the works comes from lifetime SFMOMA Trustee Phyllis Wattis, who has long been a leader in Bay Area cultural philanthropy and recently contributed some \$70 million to local arts organizations. Her dedication to enhancing and elevating SFMOMA's collection has led several other trustees, artists and collectors to contribute to making this acquisition possible, just as she served as a catalyst in encouraging the Museum's construction of a new facility. Wattis commented: "It is deeply gratifying to me to be able to support these acquisitions, which will have such an important impact on the Museum's collection. I believe the collection is the heart of any museum, and today and we have taken our collection to a new level. I am also delighted that many other individuals have joined this effort through their generosity and commitment."

Gary Garrels, SFMOMA Elise S. Haas chief curator and curator of painting and sculpture, added: "Each of these works is of exceptional quality and historical importance, making SFMOMA's collection one of increasing complexity and stature on an international level. In particular, the group of works by Robert Rauschenberg was much sought after by museums in both the United States and Europe. The works by Mondrian and Duchamp strengthen SFMOMA's foundation of early 20th-century Modernism, consolidating the scope of the collection. The expansion of the collection of painting and sculpture with these recent acquisitions is unparalleled in the Museum's history, crystallizing the collection effort begun before the opening of the current building in 1995."

#### **Rauschenbergs Purchased from Artist's Personal Holdings**

The largest component of the acquisition is the collection of 14 works by Robert Rauschenberg, primarily purchased from the artist's personal holdings. The Rauschenberg acquisition marks one of the most extensive commitments any museum has made to a living artist through the purchase of artwork. Rauschenberg, who is 72 years old, is noted for the exceptional quality of his work in a wide range of media. These recently acquired works—nearly all of which are currently on tour in the Rauschenberg retrospective exhibition—reflect that diversity; among them are paintings, drawings, photographs, sculpture, and "combines," the form of mixed media work the artist invented in the early 1950s. Included are extremely rare and exceptional early works, such as *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953, which is an icon in the history of postwar American art. Adding these works to the Museum's holdings makes SFMOMA one of the most significant centers in the world for the study of Rauschenberg's work. The works join two other major Rauschenberg paintings already in the SFMOMA collection: *Collection*, (1953–54), an important combine painting acquired in 1972, a gift of Harry and Mary Margaret Anderson; and *Catastrophe*, 1996, a late fresco painting from the Vicki and Kent Logan Collection donated in December 1997.

### **Mondrian in New York**

Elevating the Museum's collection of early modernist works is a key geometric painting by Piet Mondrian from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s. A major work by Piet Mondrian has long been identified by the Museum as a priority in its acquisition of early 20th-century art. The founder of geometric abstraction, Mondrian is one of the most significant artists of this century, and his work profoundly influenced subsequent generations of artists, many of whom are well represented in SFMOMA's collection, including Ellsworth Kelly and Robert Ryman. Originally painted in Europe in the mid-1930s, the work was repainted in the 1940s after the artist moved from Europe to New York. The painting thus embodies the key transition in Mondrian's work between the more stark and spare work of the 1930s and the New York style of his later work, exemplified by the "boogie-woogie" pictures. It has been included in every major retrospective of the artist's work.

### **Duchamp's Iconic *Fountain***

Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, 1917/1964—one of the 20th century's most iconic and controversial works of art—has also been added to the Museum's collection of early modern art. An edition produced in 1964 by the artist and the Milanese scholar/collector Arturo Schwartz from the destroyed original of 1917, *Fountain* is the first of Duchamp's "ready-made" objects to enter the collection, joining the witty and predictive *Boîte en Valise*, 1938–42. Duchamp, a leading figure in the surrealist and Dada movements, greatly influenced the entire course of 20th-century art. *Fountain* in particular shattered all previous presumptions about art as specially endowed creative expression. The simultaneous purchase of works by both Duchamp and Rauschenberg is particularly appropriate, as Rauschenberg's work is often discussed in relationship to Dada and Duchamp, especially Rauschenberg's use of humor and his enormously inventive work with found objects.

### **Newman's Last Sculpture**

Another essential figure of the New York School is Barnett Newman, whose *Zim Zum I*, 1969, is among the recent purchases. Newman's oeuvre is distinct from that of his peers through his use of large, even fields of color sliced by thin lines of contrasting color and dramatic geometric sculpture. *Zim Zum I* is the first version of a work originally proposed in 1969 for a sculpture exhibition in Japan; it has recently been on long-term loan from Annalee Newman to the Tate Gallery. When it arrives at SFMOMA, it will join two other important works by Newman in the collection: *Untitled (Number 3)*, 1949, a gift of Annalee Newman; and *Untitled*, 1970, a fractional gift of Phyllis Wattis.

### **Motherwell Masterpiece**

The acquisition *Elegy to the Spanish Republic, No. 57, 1957–60*, by Robert Motherwell, is from the artist's series exploring the destruction of Spanish democracy, a central chapter in Motherwell's oeuvre. This monumental painting—with its vertical bands and oval shapes in black and white—demonstrates Motherwell's distinctive contribution to postwar Abstract Expressionism and the New York School. The work is a fractional gift to the Museum and has been on long-term loan to SFMOMA since 1993. It has been previously shown at SFMOMA a number of times; most recently, it was hung with a Clyfford Still painting from the same year and the recently acquired Mark Rothko, *No. 14, 1960*, to showcase a moment in American art history marked by the proliferation of large-scale abstract art. As with Still and Rothko, SFMOMA presented Motherwell's first one-person exhibition.

### **Major Early Marden**

Forming a bridge between Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism is the work of Brice Marden, whose recently acquired *The Dylan Painting, 1966*, joins two fractional gifts already part of the Museum's collection: *Grove Group II, 1972–73*, a fractional gift of Mimi and Peter Haas; and *Cold Mountain 3 (Open), 1988–91*, a fractional gift of Frances and John Bowes. The addition of *The Dylan Painting*, an important work from the first group of paintings Marden created by combining oil paint with wax, expands the Museum's holdings to include singular works from all three decades and periods of Marden's oeuvre. *The Dylan Painting* is a monochromatic canvas of richly toned and luminous gray, the largest of the seminal group of works Marden exhibited in his first one-person show in New York in 1966. It both reflects the lyrical paint fields of Abstract Expressionism and projects a return to the figure through the individual referenced in the title, Bob Dylan, who was among the artist's circle of associates at the time. Marden began working as Rauschenberg's studio assistant in the year he created *The Dylan Painting*, which is a fitting addition to the collection at the moment of the Rauschenberg acquisitions.

### **Important Giacometti Portrait Bust**

A noteworthy sculpture added to the Museum's holdings as part of this acquisition is Alberto Giacometti's *Tête (Trois quarts et profil) (Buste de Diego)* [Head (Three-quarters and Profile) (Bust of Diego)], 1957. Giacometti was one of the major sculptors of the post-war era in France. This highly stylized sculpture portrait of his brother, Diego, is an important example of a subject he explored throughout his career. It joins another portrait bust in the Museum's collection, *Annette VII, 1962*, a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Honig, and three other works, including another portrait sculpture of Diego.

### **Bourgeois's Spiders**

Joining the other sculptures in this group of recent acquisitions is Louise Bourgeois's *The Nest*, 1994, the first work by this influential and prolific artist to enter SFMOMA's collection. This monumental sculpture is one of the largest and most complex of a series of sculptures of spiders begun by the artist in 1994. Bourgeois has been creating art for over sixty years, rooted initially in Surrealism and moving through the context of Abstract Expressionism before becoming a central figure in the women's art movement of the 1970s. *The Nest* vividly evokes the twin nature of the spider as mother: nurturing her brood and viciously protecting them from intruders.

### **Exceptional Recent Kiefer Painting**

Anselm Kiefer's magisterial *Die Sechste Posaune* (The Sixth Trump), 1996, adds to SFMOMA's current holdings of work by this important contemporary German artist, which includes Kiefer's *Seraphim*, 1984, a fractional gift of Vicki and Kent Logan; *Osiris und Isis* (Osiris and Isis), 1985–87; and *Unternehmen Seelöwe* (Operation Sea Lion), 1975, also a fractional gift of Vicki and Kent Logan. *Die Sechste Posaune*, painted in Kiefer's characteristic palette of beiges and muted earth tones, focuses on the postwar German condition through its representation of a deeply furrowed, barren landscape. As with other Kiefer works, *Die Sechste Posaune* brings together landscape painting and history—in this case, biblical history through its reference to the Book of Revelations and the heralding of the end of the world. This painting, in addition to previous acquisitions of works by German artists such as Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke, increases the international scope of the Museum's permanent collection.

### **New Thiebaud Landscape**

Extending the Museum's commitment to Bay Area art and expanding the strong collection of Wayne Thiebaud works in the Museum's collection is Thiebaud's *Flatland River*, 1997. This recent painting is part of a series of landscapes the artist created of the Central Valley of California. While departing from his well-known subject matter of still lifes and cityscapes, *Flatland River* maintains Thiebaud's signature style in the focus on geometric elements and his richly hued and applied painting technique. It joins two superb paintings, *Sunset Streets*, 1985, and *Display Cakes*, 1963, among other Thiebaud works, as well as a 1997 gift from the Thiebaud family of 37 drawings and works on paper by the artist that are already part of SFMOMA's collection.

Several of the new acquisitions—including *The Nest* by Louise Bourgeois, *Die Sechste Posaune* by Anselm Kiefer, and *The Dylan Painting* by Brice Marden—will be placed on view from June 5 through July 28 as part of the exhibition *Art of Four Decades: 1958–1998*, featuring prominent works from the permanent collection. The addition of these works extends the momentum generated earlier this year in

building the collection through the purchases of Mark Rothko's *No. 14, 1960, 1960*; and Eva Hesse's *Untitled or Not Yet, 1966*; and through the gift of eight Robert Ryman paintings.

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The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is a private, not-for-profit institution supported by its members, individual contributors to Donor Circle, corporate and foundation support, federal and state government grants, and admission revenues. Annual programming is sustained through the generosity of the San Francisco Publicity and Advertising Fund/Grants for the Arts.

**Hours:** Open daily (except Wednesdays) 11 a.m.–6 p.m.; extended summer hours (Memorial Day–Labor Day) 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; open late Thursdays until 9 p.m.; closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day

**Admission prices:** Adults \$8; seniors (62 years and older) \$5; students with valid ID \$4; SFMOMA members and children twelve and under are admitted free. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free. Thursday evenings, 6–9 p.m., admission is half price.

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