

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

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MUSEUM TO BE CLOSED FOR FIVE DAYS FOR INSTALLATION OF AIR CONDITIONING UNIT

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The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, will be closed from Monday, March 10, through Friday, March 14, while a new air conditioning unit is installed to replace the present obsolete 19-year old equipment. Galleries, penthouse, auditorium and restaurants will re-open on Saturday, March 15. Offices and the Museum school will not be effected by the work.

One of the first Museums in the world to air condition its galleries in 1939, the Museum of Modern Art is now forced by increasing attendance, which overloads the present machinery, and the normal obsolescence of the plant, to install a new unit. Furthermore, the new unit, incorporating recent developments in the field of air conditioning, will enable the Museum to maintain 24 hour ideal temperature, relative humidity and clean air throughout the entire building, not just on gallery floors as formerly. The carpenters' shops where pictures are often framed, the receiving space where they are unpacked, the storage tills where they are kept when not on view, and the restoration laboratory and offices will be incorporated in the new system along with the Members' Penthouse and the Art Lending Service on the Museums' sixth floor.

The new air conditioning system should greatly increase the comfort of the Museum's thousands of visitors and the office staff, but above all it will ensure proper atmospheric conditions for the Museum's Collection of paintings and for the hundreds of works loaned for temporary shows by other institutions and private collectors each year.

Paintings, less adaptable to changing conditions than people, and complicated in physical structure, need a constant temperature and relative humidity, as their various parts respond unevenly to moisture. The wooden frame around the picture, the wooden stretcher on the back, and glue sizing put on the canvas before the artist applies paint on the surface, all react to changes in relative humidity at varying rates. If the relative humidity rises rapidly, the glue sized canvas for example, may absorb water from the air so quickly that the painting sags and buckles. Paintings on wood panels are even more sensitive to humidity changes as the wood warps and cracks. Excessive humidity can even cause mold to grow on paintings.

Cleanliness is another important element in preserving paintings. Many industrial cities, including New York, London and Chicago, have so much soot and sulphur in the air that some varnished paintings develop a "bloom"--blue and cloudy areas caused by the reaction of the natural varnish on the surface of the painting to moisture and chemicals in the air.

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The advantages of relative humidity control were dramatically demonstrated during World War II when the National Gallery in London transferred hundreds of paintings to the Manod quarries for safe keeping. Relative humidity in the quarry proved to be constant and such an enormous improvement over the Museum galleries that blistering and other damage to which the paintings had been subject, disappeared. While the great majority of the paintings in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art were painted during the last 50 years and are therefore not yet in danger (the various parts are still fairly flexible), installation of the new system should insure their preservation for the future.

One of the largest objects to enter the Museum, the 23 ton Carrier Steam Absorption Refrigeration Machine is about 7 feet wide and 15 feet long. It will be brought in in three sections and lowered into the sub-basement through the freight elevator shaft. Now being manufactured in Syracuse, it will be trucked to New York and is due to arrive on Tuesday, March 11.

Work of installing ducts for the new system will be spaced over the coming months and is planned so as to interfere as little as possible with the Museum's normal schedule of exhibitions and special events. Fred S. Dubin and Associates are consulting engineers for the job and Wolff and Munier, contractors.

For additional information please contact Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York. CI 5-8900.