

The Museum of Modern Art

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No. 8

FOR RELEASE:

Wednesday, January 17, 1968

PRESS PREVIEW:

Tuesday, January 16, 1968

11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection consisting of 103 paintings and sculpture by three generations of 20th century artists will be on view in a special exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art from January 17 through March 4 before starting an international tour. It is one of the most important gifts received by the Museum.

The collection has been given on terms the Museum describes as extraordinarily generous and farsighted. It ranges from such classics of 20th century art as Picasso's Painter and Model, acquired in 1932 four years after it was painted, and Boccioni's Dynamism of a Soccer Player of 1913, to very recent portraits of the donor and well-known gallery owner by Marisol, Segal and Warhol never before exhibited. George Segal's life-size plaster figure (1957) shows Mr. Janis standing beside an easel on which is one of Janis' favorite paintings, a 1933 Mondrian. The Marisol is called Portrait of Sidney Janis Selling a Portrait of Sidney Janis.

After the initial showing of the collection at the Museum, the works will travel to other museums for 2 1/2 years. Thereafter, the Museum is free to determine when and which works it will exhibit. At any time after ten years after the donor's death the Museum may dispose of any of the works in order to acquire others consistent with the spirit of the Janis Collection, including the future vanguard then current.

The collection will be discussed and illustrated in a complete catalogue to be issued in the Fall of 1968 under the general editorship of William S. Rubin, Curator of Painting and Sculpture, who first suggested to Mr. Janis that he make his decision in favor of this museum. Meanwhile, the Museum has issued a 24-page illustrated brochure with an introduction by Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

Sidney Janis, 72, and his wife, Harriet, who died in 1963, began to collect 20th century art in the late 20's. "We had an idea to acquire significant examples by the more challenging 20th century artists," Mr. Janis says. "As the collection
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grew and new artists came into view, the work of the most promising (frequently the most difficult) of these younger artists was added. With the rise of still another generation this activity was to continue, and so today the collection includes works by recognized artists, with notable exceptions, from Cubism onward, including the naifs, through Abstract Expressionism to Pop and Op."

During the 30's and early 40's, Mr. Janis was primarily active as a collector, lecturer and writer. In 1939 he retired from his business, M'Lord Shirt Company, to devote all his time to art. He was a member of the Advisory Committee of The Museum of Modern Art from 1933 until the early 40's. In 1939 Mr. Janis was instrumental in bringing Picasso's Guernica to this country as a benefit exhibition for the Spanish War Refugees. Subsequently the mural went to The Museum of Modern Art where it remains today on extended loan from the artist. Three years later Mr. Janis helped organize an International Surrealist exhibition for the benefit of French War Relief.

His first book "They Taught Themselves," biographical accounts and analyses of contemporary primitive American painters such as John Kane and Morris Hirshfield, was published in 1942. His second book "Abstract and Surrealist Art in America" was published in 1944, and in 1946, with his wife, he wrote "Picasso: The Recent Years," dealing with the artist's life and art during the German Occupation. Mrs. Janis also co-authored with Rudi Blesh a history of early jazz, called "They All Played Ragtime," a monograph on Willem de Kooning and "Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques."

In 1948 Janis opened his now famous art gallery on East 57 Street. His own collection, however, did not become part of the stock but remained intact, with additions during the 50's and 60's.

"...Many times many of the pictures that I have in the collection are the result of the fact that the gallery was 'stuck' with those pictures; we couldn't sell them, so I bought them. And in many cases they were the best things we had. A lot of people were under the impression over the years that I skimmed off the

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best things, but it's not so. On the contrary, I just waited for them to be awfully lonesome and then I acquired them," Mr. Janis says.

"In every private collection one searches, often in vain, for capital works," Alfred H. Barr, Jr., observes in the checklist accompanying the show. "There are, I believe, at least two such superb paintings in the Janis Collection, Picasso's magnificent Painter and Model of 1928 is remarkable for its intensity and complex invention. Perhaps of greater historic consequence is Boccioni's Dynamism of a Soccer Player of 1913; gigantic in scale, furious in energy, it is the culminating painting by the leader of the Italian Futurists."

Recently Mr. Janis described his purchase of the Picasso. He had just seen Painter and Model in an exhibition at Paul Rosenberg's in Paris where he fell in love with it and went to see it every day. Eventually he made arrangements to buy it by trading in a handsome work by Matisse. "After the deal was sealed I asked Paul Rosenberg why he parted with this magnificent picture on a trade-in on the Matisse. He said, 'Janis, I'll tell you. The Matisse I can sell immediately, the Picasso I wouldn't be able to sell for thirty years,' And I was the proud possessor of a great Picasso."

"Highly desirable too," Mr. Barr continues, "are many other works of exceptional quality: for instance, two cubist Picassos of 1913 and 1914; Klee's Actor's Mask; a Dali of his best vintage; and a remarkable 1914 Mondrian, subtle in color and quite different from the six later Mondrians in the Janis collection and the ten already in the Museum...."

"Furthermore what may at first seem superfluous will be valuable in supplying material for study in depth, freshening the Museum galleries with the unfamiliar works by familiar artists, and enabling us to make loans to other institutions and to the Museum's traveling exhibitions. Traveling shows, especially those touring abroad, are now starved for material, particularly in the field of recent American painting so richly represented in the Janis collection."

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Describing another way in which the Janis collection helps the Museum, Mr. Barr says "The Museum buys many paintings by young, or at least little-known, artists in the hope that as time passes the purchases will have seemed wise. Time then passes; some of the artists have indeed proved their worth, and to such a degree that we urgently need their more recent and mature work; but, quite rightly, their prices have often gone up beyond the limits of the Museum's purchase funds. To a remarkable degree the Janis collection has come to our aid." And he cites the Janis Kline of 1962 painted a decade later than that owned by the Museum, and the Janis de Koonings, dating six, eight and nine years later than the Museum's (1958, 1960 and 1961). "Six of the best younger Americans -- Kelly, Lichtenstein, Marisol, Oldenburg, Segal, and Wesselmann -- are represented in the Museum by one or two works each, dated between 1959 and 1962; works by the same six in the Janis collection were completed in 1966 or 1967; and, it may be added, almost all are of exceptional interest and quite different in style...."

Photographs, checklist and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 245-3200.