

The Museum of Modern Art

25

50th Anniversary



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MAJOR POLLOCK ACQUISITIONS ANNOUNCED BY THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The Museum of Modern Art has announced the acquisition of seven key paintings by Jackson Pollock. The works are from the collection of Lee Krasner, the artist's widow. Four are purchases and three, including the largest and best known, Easter and the Totem, are gifts. Miss Krasner is giving these to honor the memory of the artist on the approach of the 25th anniversary of his death. The works extend in date from c. 1936 to 1953 and, in combination with the ten paintings and five works on paper already in the Collection, make it possible for the Museum to exhibit a superb overview of this great artist's work. Heretofore the Museum's Collection had been largely focused on the work of 1946-51, especially the 3 1/2 year span of the classic "poured" paintings begun early in 1947. The new acquisitions set these works within an equally fine representation of early, transitional, and late paintings. William Rubin, Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, announced that all these and other works promised to the Museum Collection would be shown in an exhibition entitled "Pollock in the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art" sometime after the opening of the Museum's new quarters.

In a letter to the Museum, Miss Krasner, who for some years has not wished to part with the Pollocks remaining in her possession, indicated that she had given The Museum of Modern Art first choice among the works she owned

and offered a number of them as gifts, in recognition of the fact that the Museum had already built the world's finest collection of Pollock's work.

The seven works display a remarkable diversity in style and character. The Flame of c. 1936, the earliest of the new acquisitions, is a semi-abstract, "Baroque" painting which, though it reflects Pollock's affinity with Ryder and other American masters, is already stamped with the urgent painterly intensity that would characterize his later work. Circle, of about 1937, a tondo of sinuous forms in bright reds, yellows and oranges, signals Pollock's interest in the symbols of American Indian art even as it reflects a secondary debt to Surrealism. Mask, of 1938-39, is a directly totemic image that combines, as in Picasso and Masson, an interest in a psychological interpretation of myth with inventive drawing and bold execution. Bird of c. 1940, represents the climax of Pollock's earliest period. In a heraldic, symmetrical image built up with rich incrustations of pigment and sand, a regal bird with a giant Cyclopean eye stands astride a fallen totem of Indian heads.

Stenographic Figure of 1942 is characterized by Mr. Rubin as Pollock's "breakaway" picture which initiated the evolution that five years later produced the artist's all-over poured paintings. "In the rapid notation -- the 'doodle' or scribble -- which Pollock laid over the broad areas of color in this brilliant picture," Mr. Rubin observes, "we get the first intimation of that ceaseless 'automatic' calligraphy that marks his most advanced work."

There were Seven in Eight, of 1945, a large horizontal painting that Pollock himself highly prized, is a singular document of the artist's creation of the all-over style. Pollock first painted this impressive work

as a frieze of semi-abstract, totemic figures. Some months later he went back to the canvas and added a web of extended arabesqued lines 'fleshed out' with dripping and spattering of liquid enamels. This "overpainting," which links the surface in a taut abstract manner while rendering the underlying imagery indistinct marked a major step toward non-figuration and all-over painting. When asked by his wife why he added the top layer, Pollock replied: "I choose to veil the image." This covering-over of totemic images characterized many of the works of 1945-46 and constituted the phase immediately anticipating the poured paintings.

Easter and the Totem of 1953, one of a small number of major works of Pollock's last years, is unique among the latter for its combination of lyrical, almost Matissean color with "totemic" forms of an open and organic type, less literal and more evocative than those Pollock used in the 1940's. Despite its large size, it is an intimate painting, whose relaxed configuration and decorative colors signalled a momentary respite in a troubled and sometimes despairing mood of Pollock's final years.

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