

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

AMERICAN

SCULPTURE

1951



David Smith. *Flight*. h. 33½ inches

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SCULPTURE 1951

A NATIONAL COMPETITIVE EXHIBITION

December 7, 1951—February 24, 1952

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART: *New York, 1951*

FOREWORD

The Trustees of The Metropolitan Museum of Art take pleasure in presenting American Sculpture 1951. This is the second of three large competitive exhibitions planned in accordance with the policy announced by the Museum in January 1949 of increasing its activity in the contemporary American field.

The first of these exhibitions, American Painting Today, 1950, was held last year. The response by artists throughout the United States was most gratifying. Of 6,248 artists who submitted to our juries, 307 from 34 states, Hawaii, and the District of Columbia were finally exhibited. Through this exhibition artists, critics, and public were enabled to evaluate fully all trends now existing in our country. The striking growth and development of American painting in recent years was fully apparent; its vitality, authority, and great diversity of style were at once perceived. It was noted that our painting had lost much of its regional and national flavor, that it had become susceptible to wide and universal influences, that it had become highly subjective and seemed little concerned with the forthright presentation of objective reality.

The response of the sculptors to the present competitive exhibition has also been most generous. Almost 1,100 sculptors, from every region of the country, submitted some 5,000 photographs of one or more of their works to our jury. For the members of the jury these photographs constituted a unique and most informative review; it is to be regretted that their experience could not have been shared by others interested. Once again the remarkable eclecticism of our time became apparent; styles present, historic, and prehistoric passed before us, styles pure at times, at times fused together. In this profusion, examples of our academic tradition took their place as a small though important tributary to the main and universal stream. This mingling of cultures, which is reported in the contemporary artistic expression of many countries, is certainly a phenomenon of our time. And, indicating as it does an increasing respect for the aspirations and traditions of others, it is perhaps both important and prophetic.

Though trends in painting and sculpture have always been closely allied, it was observed that our sculptors have been less willing than our painters to abandon realism, to relinquish natural form. The human figure, which has been somewhat neglected on canvas of late, appeared again and again before the jury. To be sure it was somewhat buffeted by the abstract forces abroad—compressed, elongated, geometrized. It remained, however, paramount and recognizable. Though it is natural that men who work in three dimensions should cling to objective reality while those who work in two dimensions are forsaking it, we have a small but vital group of sculptors who are experimenting with non-objective shapes. And as this trend is so evidently the delight of youth and the despair of age it may be expected to increase.

From the many works offered the jury finally selected 94. With the representation of the jurors a total of 101 pieces are at present on display. Certainly the large mass of material that came before the jury constituted a cross section of the sculptural activity of our country today. From it the jury carefully selected what appeared to them to be the best examples, and with admirable impartiality attempted to balance clearly perceived trends through adequate representation. Thus it is hoped that the present exhibition will complement the painting exhibition which preceded it and will enable observers to assess even more accurately the artistic state of the union.

The Museum proposes to hold in 1952 a national competitive exhibition for drawings, water colors, and prints, comparable to the exhibitions of paintings and sculpture. The terms of this competition, together with the amounts in prizes, will be announced in the near future. Thus in a cycle of three years American artists will have had an opportunity to enter competition, and new talent will have been brought to the attention of the public. At the completion of this course the program will be reassessed to determine whether or not these exhibitions should become a regular and revolving activity.

In connection with the exhibition program the Museum will

increase its acquisition of works by contemporary American sculptors for its permanent collections. Because specific funds for the purchase of contemporary American sculpture were lacking, the Trustees in 1950 authorized the Purchasing Committee to allocate out of unrestricted purchase funds a sum of \$100,000 to be used for the acquisition of such sculpture over a five-year period at the discretion of the Committee on American Art. It is felt that the collection of contemporary American sculpture should be brought into balance with the collection of American painting, which for many years has had the specific support of the Hearn Funds for its improvement.

On behalf of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum I should like to thank the many sculptors who have co-operated with us towards the success of the present exhibition. I should like to thank W. H. Noble, Jr., of the Fairmount Park Art Association and Henri Marceau of the Philadelphia Museum of Art for their assistance and advice at its inception. I am most grateful to Roland McKinney, Consultant to the Department of American Art at the Metropolitan Museum, who has directed the many vital and difficult arrangements for the exhibition and has undertaken its installation. The members of the Jury of Admission served for long hours with fortitude and devotion. On behalf of the Museum I should like to express my appreciation to them. And I should like to thank the Jury of Awards, who faced a task perhaps less formidable but most exacting.

ROBERT BEVERLY HALE

Associate Curator of American Art

17: Milton Hebard. *The Storm*. H. 45 inches

16: Luise Meyers Kaish

Mother and Child

H. 20 inches

