



North Carolina Museum of Art

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The North Carolina Museum of Art Announces Transformational Donation of Artwork

Five modern paintings join the NCMA's permanent collection, including the Museum's first Picasso

Raleigh, NC—The North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) announces a transformational donation of five nineteenth- and twentieth-century paintings from Josie and Julian Robertson of New York, NY. This gift adds to the Museum's collection the first works by internationally renowned artists Pablo Picasso, Maurice de Vlaminck, Alfred Sisley, Emil Nolde, and Kees van Dongen, significantly growing and strengthening the NCMA's modern art holdings.

The Robertsons' philanthropic commitment to North Carolina stemmed from Julian's appreciation of his upbringing in Salisbury and graduating from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Josie, an art major in college, first introduced Julian to art while they honeymooned in Paris. Over the course of several years, the Robertsons built an esteemed collection of modern art. "We are grateful to the Robertson family for giving their treasured artworks to the NCMA to share with North Carolinians and all our visitors for generations to come," said Museum Director Valerie Hillings. "It is fitting that Picasso's *Seated Woman, Red and Yellow Background*, much beloved by the Robertsons, enters the collection as cultural institutions worldwide are commemorating the 50th anniversary year of the artist's death. We are delighted to showcase this and the pictures by Nolde, Sisley, van Dongen, and Vlaminck together in our West Building, celebrating groundbreaking developments in nineteenth- and twentieth-century art and the ongoing commitment of North Carolinian collectors to donating great works of art to the People's Collection."

Until now, European modernism has been underrepresented at the NCMA. With this gift the Museum importantly receives a dynamic, cubist portrait by Picasso, the first painting by the trailblazing artist to

enter the collection. A high-key nude by Kees van Dongen and a vibrant landscape by Maurice de Vlaminck serve as noteworthy examples of fauvism—the first avant-garde movement that was a harbinger of abstraction. A stormy seascape by Emil Nolde strengthens the Museum’s growing collection of German expressionist paintings. And a landscape by Alfred Sisley adds to the NCMA’s robust group of impressionist works, making the Museum a premier venue to engage with impressionism.

In 1947 the North Carolina General Assembly passed a bill authorizing the appropriation of one million dollars to purchase a collection of art for the people of North Carolina. Since then the collection has grown through acquisitions, commissions, and gifts to include more than four thousand works from antiquity to the present, encompassing the largest selection of Auguste Rodin sculptures in the American South; one of only two permanent Judaic galleries in a national art museum; and a distinguished global contemporary collection on view inside and in the Ann and Jim Goodnight Museum Park that features artists El Anatsui, Anselm Kiefer, Yayoi Kusama, Simone Leigh, Tomás Saraceno, Yinka Shonibare, Mickalene Thomas, Marie Watt, and Kehinde Wiley, among others.

A list of highlights of the NCMA’s recent acquisitions is below.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), *Seated Woman, Red and Yellow Background (Femme assise, fond rouge et jaune)*, 1952

Pablo Picasso was one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century and an active, dominant force in the development and innovation of modern art. Of his many accomplishments, Picasso is most recognized for originating cubism (with Georges Braque), inventing constructed sculpture, co-inventing collage in art, and developing and exploring other styles in modern art. *Seated Woman, Red and Yellow Background* is a portrait of Picasso’s muse and lover the French artist Françoise Gilot. The two were romantically involved between the early 1940s and the mid-1950s, and during this time Gilot bore two of Picasso’s children. By the time Picasso executed *Seated Woman, Red and Yellow Background*, however, their relationship had soured. Picasso translates this emotional tension through cubist techniques by severing Gilot’s body into fragmented forms and composing her face from contradictory halves. The portrait is striking in its sculptural composition. Reportedly the only woman to have ended a romantic relationship with Picasso, Gilot continued a celebrated artistic career until her recent death.

Alfred Sisley (French, 1839–99), *The Bridge at Moret on an April Morning (Le pont de Moret à matin d'avril)*, 1888

Alfred Sisley was born in Paris in 1839 to affluent British parents and maintained British citizenship throughout his life, despite some unsuccessful attempts to become a French citizen. Though he is well known today for his status as a founding member of the impressionists, he achieved relatively little commercial success and public recognition until the end of his life, remaining in a persistent state of financial stress. Although not always appreciated by critics, Sisley was nevertheless much liked and admired by many of his fellow artists. Sisley had a persistent fascination with the countryside and small villages of France, producing hundreds of varied landscapes on these subjects over the course of his career. *The Bridge at Moret on an April Morning* depicts one of most iconic landscapes in Sisley's oeuvre, showing the town of Moret from across the river Loing. The present work is one of the most comprehensive views of Moret, encompassing the bridge, the town gates, the church, and the houses, as well as the nature surrounding them. This is the first painting by Sisley to enter the NCMA's collection, and it will join works by Sisley's contemporaries and fellow impressionists, including Monet, Pissarro, and Boudin.

Maurice de Vlaminck (French, 1876–1958), *The Bridge at Poissy (Le Pont de Poissy)*, 1905

Maurice de Vlaminck was a French painter, musician, writer, draftsman, and printmaker. Along with André Derain and Henri Matisse, Vlaminck was one of the creators of fauvism and an important figure in the movement. Primarily self-taught, Vlaminck came to painting after a chance encounter in 1900 with Derain, who at the time was an aspiring artist. The two would become lifelong friends, and they rented a studio, the Maison Levanne, in Chatou—a village just west of Paris. Vlaminck drew great inspiration from the audacious canvases of Vincent van Gogh, having seen many Van Gogh exhibitions between 1900 and 1905. *The Bridge at Poissy* was painted by Vlaminck the year he and Matisse, Derain, Henri Manguin, and others debuted their radical techniques of painting at the Salon d'Automne in Paris. Insulted by their severe style, French critic Louis Vauxcelles classified Vlaminck and his daring colleagues as a group of “wild beasts” or fauves, as these painters have come to be known. The scene in Vlaminck's painting depicts a bridge, which has since been destroyed, across the river Seine in the town of Poissy in the western suburbs of Paris. A large river barge dominates the foreground, while slender boats— distinguished by broad strokes of blue paint atop bespeckled water—race down the river. The densely accumulated, undisguised brushwork and application of

paint mirrors the expressive work of Van Gogh, while Vlaminck's choice in color energizes the composition and is a hallmark of Fauvism.

Emil Nolde, (German, 1867-1956) *Fishing Boat (Red Sky) [Fischkutter (Rotter Himmel)]*, 1916

Emil Nolde was a pioneer of Expressionism, and his unique contribution to 20th-century German art lies in the intense emotion of his radically simplified, vivid pictures. Born in the town of Nolde (present-day Denmark), Nolde—who changed his surname in 1902 in homage to his hometown—studied art at various academies in Germany and in 1899, while living in Paris, attended the Académie Julian. After a nightmarish event in 1910, when Nolde experienced a powerful storm while traveling on a small fishing trawler, the artist spent decades exploring the sea with a high degree of intensity. In *Fishing Boat (Red Sky)*, Nolde recounts his experience, creating a thrilling picture that is deeply expressionist. The work features a brooding color palette that's been applied through broad, gestural strokes. A fishing boat in the foreground attempts to navigate rough waters as its sail billows right toward calmer water. Storm clouds are wide swept, while areas of the background featuring penetrating reds lend the picture a sense of dramatic depth. "This day," Nolde recalls about his traumatic experience, "has remained so fixed in my memory, that for years afterwards all my paintings of the sea consisted of wildly heaving green waves and only a little edge of yellow sky on the upper fringe." Nolde visualizes this frightening memory in *Fishing Boat (Red Sky)*—a work once in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, III—and in the process has produced one of the strongest representations of his noteworthy seascapes.

Kees van Dongen, (Dutch, 1877-1968,) *Reclining Nude (Femme nue allongée)*, c. 1904-1905

A key player in the early-twentieth century avant-garde, Kees van Dongen is known for his portraits of singers, sex workers, and celebrities alike, rendered in strident, Fauvist colors. Van Dongen pioneered a new aesthetic of portraiture that influenced several significant 20th-century artists. Van Dongen was born into a Dutch bourgeois family in Rotterdam. After working in the family brewery until he was sixteen, he enrolled full-time at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Rotterdam, and later moved to Paris at the age of 20. Van Dongen first exhibited there in 1904, and the following year he achieved fame and notoriety when he participated in the Salon d' Automne in the company of Henri Matisse, André Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck, and others. Van Dongen's *Reclining Nude* presents an extremely bright Fauvist palette, with almost garish colors associated with the movement. The model in the portrait is most likely a sex worker of Montmartre, whose distorted body is boldly depicted through amplified

colors. Rather than conventional flesh tones, Van Dongen chose a radical combination of ochres, blues, deep brown, striking red, creamy whites with pink tints, and most surprisingly, acid green. Fond of depicting highly charged erotic imagery in his paintings, Van Dongen also expressed admiration for his female subjects, often choosing figures who lived on the margins of Parisian society.

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About the North Carolina Museum of Art

The North Carolina Museum of Art's collection spans more than 5,000 years, from antiquity to the present, making the institution one of the premier art museums in the South. The Museum's collection provides educational, aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural experiences for the citizens of North Carolina and beyond. The 164-acre Museum Park showcases the connection between art and nature through site-specific works of environmental art. The Museum offers changing special exhibitions, classes, lectures, family activities, films, and concerts.

The Museum is located at 2110 Blue Ridge Road in Raleigh and is home to the People's Collection. It is the art museum of the State of North Carolina, under the auspices of Governor Roy Cooper; an agency of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, guided by the direction of Secretary D. Reid Wilson; and led by Director Valerie Hillings.

About the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

The N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) manages, promotes, and enhances the things that people love about North Carolina – its diverse arts and culture, rich history, and spectacular natural areas. Through its programs, the department enhances education, stimulates economic development, improves public health, expands accessibility, and strengthens community resiliency.

The department manages over 100 locations across the state, including 27 historic sites, seven history museums, two art museums, five science museums, four aquariums, 35 state parks, four recreation areas, dozens of state trails and natural areas, the N.C. Zoo, the N.C. Symphony, the State Library, the State Archives, the N.C. Arts Council, the African American Heritage Commission, the American Indian Heritage Commission, the State Historic Preservation Office, the Office of State Archaeology, the

Highway Historical Markers program, the N.C. Land and Water Fund, and the Natural Heritage Program. For more information, please visit www.ncdcr.gov.