

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN  
PAINTING

from the **James A. Michener  
Collection** Allentown Art Museum  
Pennsylvania

an exhibition organised by the Auckland City Art  
Gallery for the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council

*The New Zealand tour of this Collection has been made possible by the kindness and co-operation of the Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, Pennsylvania, and its Director, Richard Hirsch.*

## CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN PAINTING

At the conclusion of a successful circuit of the nine State Museums of Australia, the Allentown Art Museum now welcomes the opportunity to present to the public of New Zealand a significant selection of contemporary American paintings from the outstanding James A. Michener Foundation Collection.

Not all of the trends of contemporary American painting could be included in this important exhibition because of the limits in dimensions imposed by the air transportation of the works to be loaned. Nevertheless, great effort has been made to survey, in these forty pieces, the many directions being taken by American artists and, also, to provide what we feel is a valid indication of future developments which may well arise from these current outlooks.

For the purpose of the present catalogue, it was suggested to the writer that it would be of interest to point out the regional basis within the U.S.A. from which the artists represented here derive their styles and approaches to the pictorial problem. It is, I believe, a commentary on the art of our time that parochial categories, grounded in geography, are virtually meaningless and become more so with every passing day. The galleries active on the American West Coast display emphatically the artists of the so called "New York School", while the New York galleries return the compliment to the artists of the West Coast with considerable frequency. Influential art publications give nation-wide and world-wide coverage to established or promising artists working in the most diverse areas. As a result, regional distinctions simply can no longer be expected to provide the categories by which American painting can be either classified or judged. Global instant communication accounts for the same geographical fuzziness far beyond the continental borders of the United States.

Such exhibitions as the Venice Biennale demonstrate the increasingly homogenized geography of the present art world, wherein only the "Socialist Realism" of the artists of the Communist-Bloc countries offers a dissonant note to the tone of the prevailing International School.

It has been fifty years since the American public was shocked into livid anger or uproarious hilarity by the first "modern art" shown in this country on the occasion of what is known as the Armory Show of 1913. The impact of that exhibition, however, was far greater on American practicing artists than it was on the then enthroned Victorian standards of the general public. As a result, our artists flocked to Paris to absorb the new gospel of the Fauves and the early Cubists, such as Braque and Picasso. American modernists, between the two World Wars, found themselves, thus, more than slightly tributary to the European main-stream. The American 1930's saw a significant break with this particular foreign allegiance as, under the political pressures that developed during the Depression, a parenthesis of art with a "social message" developed here, concurrently with a short-lived and self-conscious effort to create "regional schools" around the country. It was after World War II that American art flowered into its own idiom and shortly gained influence and leadership in the world art scene thanks to the vigorous independent expressions of those who have been called the "Action Painters". With devastating speed, in view of the previous historical slow course of evolution from one school of art to its successor, these Abstract Expressionists of America have taken on, by the mid-sixties, virtually the position of Old Masters of contemporary American art.

Currently, more novel paths are being explored by artists suddenly propelled into the vanguard through the limelight of publicity. Some of these paths may prove to be dead-ends if it is found that, as in some aspects of Pop Art, the premise that *anything* is art if only the builder of it, or the assembler of it, or the paster-upper of it, proclaims himself to be an artist, may be a very sterile one in the end. Others, using familiar images or seeking patterned colour relationships that are visually rewarding, may fail in a bid for immortality even though they open up new trails for the expression of man's varied concerns. The present exhibition surveys all but the most desperately extreme trends in the contemporary American picture. The selection has, we believe, the merit of reasonable comprehensiveness: it also defines the many sources from whose flow future American styles will evolve. In presenting this exhibition to the public of New Zealand, we feel that we are offering excellent representative works by serious Americans and not mere reflections of temporary fads and fashions. What is to be seen here is significant, as part of the American artist's view of his world and as a comment upon what he conceives to be his purpose.

RICHARD HIRSCH

*Director, Allentown Art Museum*

## David Adickes

- 1 PORTRAIT OF JAMES MICHENER 48 × 37

## Walter Barker

- 2 SUN DOGS 62 × 120

## William Baziotas

- 3 MARINER 66 × 78

## Robert Beauchamp

- 4 WHITE WITCH, BLACK WITCH 50 × 69

## Lawrence Calcagno

- 5 EARTH FIRE 81 × 67

## Giorgio Cavallon

- 6 UNTITLED 48 × 30

## James Dine

- 7 FOUR COATS 72 × 120

## Jimmy Ernst

- 8 ANTICIPATION 49 × 72

**Sam Fischer**

9 TRANQUILLITY 36×32

**Sam Francis**

10 BLUE MOTION II 45×37

**Helen Frankenthaler**

11 LISA'S SUPPER 69×75

**Morris Graves**

12 GOLDEN GOAT 35×47

**Sante Graziani**

13 UCCELLO (Young Woman—Fenway Court) 36×48

**John Grillo**

14 AFTER THE SUN STORM 51×85

**Philip Guston**

15 ALCHEMIST 61×67

**Hans Hofmann**

16 ELYSIUM 84×50

17 X ORANGE 52×60

**John Hultberg**

18 ANGEL IN THE CITY 65×100

**Alfred Jensen**

19 MAYAN TEMPLE 76×50

**Lester Johnson**

20 STUDIO INTERIOR 68×80

**Ellsworth Kelly**

21 HIGH YELLOW 80×57

**Franz Kline**

22 BLACK AND WHITE No. 2 79×60

**Karl Knaths**

23 THE BAKERY 41 × 59

**Morris Louis**

24 WATER-SHOT 84 × 53

**Conrad Marca-Relli**

25 THE CONVERSION 57 × 87

**Nicholas Marsicano**

26 WOMEN OF GREEN WAYS 70 × 90

**Joan Mitchell**

27 ROCK BOTTOM 77 × 68

**Kyle Morris**

28 QUADRANT M 48 × 72

**Kenneth Noland**

29 SPLIT SPECTRUM 69 × 69

**George Ortman**

30 THE GOOD LIFE 48 × 72

**Stephen Pace**

31 57-21 60 × 80

**William Palmer**

32 LANDSCAPE 40 × 40

**Raymond Parker**

33 UNTITLED 70 × 88

**Robert Richenburg**

34 RED PIERS 77 × 56

**Larry Rivers**

35 DEAD VETERAN 81 × 52

William Ronald

36 TARA 66×60

Ben Shahn

37 FROM THAT DAY ON 71×35

Theodoros Stamos

38 LEVANT No. 8 84×43

Harold Stevenson

39 ARM OF DON JUAN 95×35

Esteban Vicente

40 NUMBER 9 48×60