## THE WHITNEY'S COLLECTION SELECTIONS FROM 1900 TO 1965

The Whitney Museum of American Art was established in 1930 by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, a sculptor and patron, to champion the work of living American artists. In the early twentieth century, museums and collectors in the United States were skeptical of modern art and still privileged works by European artists. Mrs. Whitney's seismic contribution was to recognize both the importance of contemporary American art and the need for supporting the overlooked artists who made it. She created a gathering place for the artistic community in New York, and regularly exhibited and acquired work by emerging artists. The collection Mrs. Whitney assembled with the Museum's first director, Juliana Force, was art historically rigorous and vibrantly idiosyncratic. It embraced disparate approaches and foregrounded how artists uniquely reveal the complexity and beauty of American life. In a statement that coincided with the opening of the Whitney Museum, curator Hermon More made the spirited claim: "We look to the artist to lead the way." This exhibition begins with selections from the Whitney Museum's founding collection and then examines (largely chronologically) major movements and genres, as well as key achievements by individual figures such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Jacob Lawrence. Icons of the collection are featured in galleries dedicated respectively to Calder's Circus and the work of Edward Hopper. More recent acquisitions are on view as well, including Norman Lewis's American Totem (1960), a painting made at the height of the civil rights movement by an underappreciated protagonist in the story of Abstract Expressionism. Such additions demonstrate that the Whitney's collection is a dynamic cultural resource that allows us to continually reframe American history and artistic production. The artists whose works are presented here met war and peace, economic collapse and recovery, new technologies, and social discord and progress with a range of responses. In keeping with its mission and ideals, the Whitney Museum continues to look to artists of the past and of today—to lead us forward.

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**>700 Introduction** 

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