WHITNEY

PRESS RELEASE

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WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART PRESENTS *CHARLES BURCHFIELD: ELEMENTAL*

Drawn entirely from the Whitney's collection, the exhibition brings together rarely seen watercolors spanning more than four decades of Charles Burchfield's visionary engagement with the natural world

New York, NY, October 21, 2026 — The Whitney Museum of American Art presents *Charles Burchfield: Elemental*, an exhibition exploring Charles Burchfield's (1893–1967) lifelong pursuit of what he described as the "tremendous force of nature." Drawn entirely from the Whitney's collection, the presentation brings together nine watercolors created between 1916 and 1960, tracing more than four decades of the artist's singular engagement with the natural world and his transformation of landscape into an expression of emotion, atmosphere, and spiritual intensity.

Opening October 22, 2026, *Charles Burchfield: Elemental* spans Burchfield's career, from the radical experimentation of his early works to the expansive, visionary landscapes of his later years. Flowering meadows, insects, storms, rain, changing seasons, and turbulent skies become more than observations of the environment in Burchfield's work. Through heightened color, rhythmic forms, and an intensely personal visual language, the artist rendered nature as something alive, psychologically charged, and continually in motion.

“As we contend with a vulnerable planet, the watercolors in *Charles Burchfield: Elemental* are important and resonant today,” said Caroline Webb, Curatorial Assistant. “Burchfield's attention to the dynamic cycles of the natural world and the care and reverence with which he articulated his unique perspective on nature in its most expansive sense reveals, as he once put it, ‘how vital nature is, besides being beautiful.’”

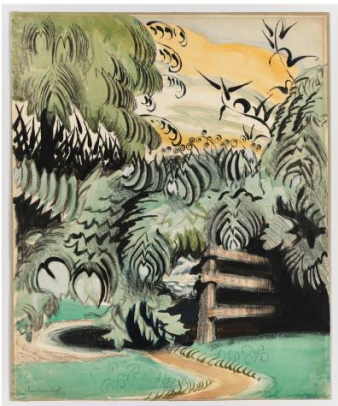
Among the works on view are *Cricket Chorus in the Arbor* (1917), *An April Mood* (1946–55), and *Cold September Rain* (1957). Together, the works reveal Burchfield’s remarkable ability to translate sensory experiences—the sound of insects, the movement of wind, fluctuations of light, or the arrival of a storm—into compositions that approach the transcendent. Rather than representing landscape as a fixed setting, Burchfield envisioned the natural world as an elemental force capable of reflecting states of memory, wonder, solitude, and awe.

Burchfield began developing this distinctive approach to watercolor early in his career. His works from the 1910s demonstrate an already unconventional understanding of landscape, in which trees, flowers, weather, and sound seem to possess their own emotional and spiritual presence. Across the decades that followed, he continually returned to these subjects, expanding upon earlier compositions and developing increasingly immersive visions of the environment. The works gathered in *Elemental* demonstrate the extraordinary continuity of this pursuit across his career.

The exhibition also marks seventy years since the Whitney organized Burchfield’s landmark 1956 retrospective, an important moment in the Museum’s longstanding engagement with the artist. The Whitney has collected Burchfield’s work for generations, establishing a significant representation of his practice within its holdings of twentieth-century American art. *Charles Burchfield: Elemental* offers a new opportunity to consider that history while examining the continued resonance of his deeply personal interpretations of the American landscape.

Charles Burchfield: Elemental is part of an ongoing Whitney initiative to bring rarely seen works from the Museum’s collection into public view. The presentation follows exhibitions dedicated to Wanda Gág, Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, Claes Oldenburg, and Andy Warhol, highlighting the depth of the Whitney’s holdings while offering new perspectives on artists central to the history of American art.

Charles Burchfield: Elemental is organized by Caroline Webb, Curatorial Assistant.



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ABOUT THE WHITNEY

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for ninety years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

Whitney Museum Land Acknowledgment
The Whitney is located in Lenapehoking, the ancestral homeland of the Lenape. The name Manhattan comes from their word Mannahatta, meaning "island of many hills." The Museum's current site is close to land that was a Lenape fishing and planting site called Sapponckanikan ("tobacco field"). The Whitney acknowledges the displacement of this region's original inhabitants and the Lenape diaspora that exists today.

As a museum of American art in a city with vital and diverse communities of Indigenous people, the Whitney recognizes the historical exclusion of Indigenous artists from its collection and program. The Museum is committed to addressing these erasures and honoring the perspectives of Indigenous artists and communities as we work for a more equitable future. To read more about the Museum's Land Acknowledgment, visit the Museum's website.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Public hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 10:30

am–6 pm; Friday, 10:30 am–10 pm; and Saturday and Sunday, 10:30 am–6 pm. Closed Tuesday. Visitors twenty-five years and under and Whitney members: FREE. The Museum offers FREE admission and special programming for visitors of all ages every Friday evening from 5–10 pm and on the second Sunday of every month.

Image credit:

Charles Burchfield, *Cold September Rain*, 1957. Watercolor, chalk and charcoal on paper mounted on board, 29 15/16 × 39 3/4 in. (76 × 101 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Charles Simon Bequest 96.60.10. Reproduced with permission from the Charles E. Burchfield Foundation and the Burchfield Penney Art Center

Charles Burchfield, *Cricket Chorus in the Arbor*, 1917. Transparent and opaque watercolor, brush and ink, and wax crayon on paper mounted on board, 22 1/8 × 18 3/16 × 1/8 in. (56.2 × 46.2 × 0.3 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Anne and John Straus 2009.203. Reproduced with permission from the Charles E. Burchfield Foundation and the Burchfield Penney Art Center

Charles Burchfield, *August Evening*, 1916. Watercolor and graphite pencil on paper, 19 15/16 × 14 in. (50.6 × 35.6 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lesley G. Sheafer, 55.43. Reproduced with permission from the Charles E. Burchfield Foundation and the Burchfield Penney Art Center

Charles Burchfield, *Noontide in Late May*, 1917. Opaque and transparent watercolor, and graphite pencil on paper, 22 × 18 in. (55.9 × 45.7 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase 31.408. Reproduced with permission from the Charles E. Burchfield Foundation and the Burchfield Penney Art Center

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