

Clyfford Still | Museum
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CLYFFORD STILL MUSEUM REVEALS ARTIST'S BREAKTHROUGH TO ABSTRACTION DURING WAR YEARS



PH-620, 1942. Oil on canvas, 37.5x49 in.; PH-613, 1942. Oil on canvas, 42.5x33.5 in. © City and County of Denver

The War Begins: Clyfford Still's Paths to Abstraction

October 10, 2014–January 18, 2015

Denver, CO—This fall the Clyfford Still Museum explores Clyfford Still's dynamic personal and creative journey through the years of **World War II**. The exhibition highlights the previously unknown dialogue between Still's work in war industries and his early breakthrough into abstraction. This original, significant contribution to the scholarship and personal history of the artist marks the **third anniversary of the Clyfford Still Museum's opening**.

Forty of the 65 works on view—created between 1939 and 1945—have never been displayed in public before. Recently uncovered materials from the Clyfford Still Museum Archives, including wartime photojournalism from Still's library and blueprints from his shipyard job, contextualize their inaugural display. The selection presents a full spectrum of imagery extending from figuration to non-objectivity, including a series of increasingly abstract paintings of mechanistic presences and motifs. Intimate paintings of the artist's parents and a tender graphite sketch of his 16-month-old daughter, Diane, further illustrate this dramatic transitional stage in Still's life and vision, when the artist relocated with his burgeoning family to San Francisco's Bay Area—where he would meet **Mark Rothko in 1943**—to work in wartime ship and aircraft production.

The early 1940s was a time of enormous creative development for Still. A number of paintings from this period in California—exemplified by PH-613, 1942—establish Still's early move into an Abstract Expressionist style well in advance of other artists in New York City. Likewise, the monumental dimensions of PH-235, 1944, anticipate the Abstract Expressionists' use of large scale in the late 1940s. Along with these prominent examples, Still's diminutive works on paper also contain the germ of ideas that would grow into his subsequent large and daring oils on canvas. The exhibition reveals how the artist's non-objective work developed alongside his continued creation of carefully rendered representational images.

The War Begins: Clyfford Still's Paths to Abstraction is curated by Dr. David Anfam, Senior Consulting Curator and Director of the Clyfford Still Museum Research Center (CSMRC).

With this exhibition's presentation and an October rotation of works on paper, **more than 500 of the approximately 3,200 works by the artist** will have been displayed at the Museum since its opening in November 2011. *The War Begins* is the tenth special exhibition in the Museum's history.

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1941 was a watershed year in Still's professional career. That September, he resigned from his teaching position at Washington State College, moving with his family to the San Francisco Bay Area. From that fall through the summer of 1943, Still contributed to the war effort—as was appropriate for a stalwart opponent of fascism and totalitarianism—by working as a steel checker for the Navy in Oakland, then for the Hammond Aircraft company. Simultaneously, mechanistic elements entered Still's imagery, including detailed studies of industrial engineering paraphernalia. This influence gave Still's work a new geometric and sometimes blueprint-like cast. Although Still painted few oils in the early 1940s, they attained a striking, cryptic severity.

By March of 1943, when the artist had his solo retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Art, one chapter in his life had ended and another had begun. Next, Still accepted a teaching position at what is now Virginia Commonwealth University, in Richmond. From the fall of 1943 onwards he would spend the remainder of the war years there.

EXHIBITION PROGRAMS

Member Tours of *The War Begins: Clyfford Still's Paths to Abstraction*

Wednesday, October 15, 2014

4:30 and 5:15 p.m.

Led by senior consulting curator Dr. David Anfam, tour the Museum's newest exhibition. Reservations are required (720-354-4878 or clyffordstillmuseum.org) and space is limited.

Lecture: Of War, Machines and Metamorphosis

David Anfam

Senior consulting curator, Clyfford Still Museum and
director, Clyfford Still Museum Research Center

Thursday, October 30, 2014

6:30 p.m.

Anschutz Foundation Atrium

\$10 public; \$8 Museum members

Tickets available via clyffordstillmuseum.org

With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Clyfford Still's art began to change dramatically. Simultaneously, Still's life also entered a new phase as he left Washington State to work in war industries in San Francisco's Bay Area. David Anfam explores the enigmatic imagery that Still evolved during this turbulent period, his use of metamorphosis and how his art overall pursued its path into daring abstraction. Museum doors open for program at 6 p.m. The Lanny and Sharon Martin Galleries will remain open for 30 minutes following the program.

One Painting at a Time

PH-277, 1949

From *The War Begins: Clyfford Still's Paths to Abstraction*

Judy Anderson, founding and artistic director, Platte Forum

Wednesday, November 12, 2014

1 p.m.

Lanny and Sharon Martin Galleries

Free with Museum admission

One Painting at a Time is a signature Museum program that challenges participants to look beyond their first impression and spend quality time with a single painting. Join Judy Anderson on November 12 for reflection and conversation as we delve into an exciting work from *The War Begins*.

Due to the popularity of this free program, registration is required (clyffordstillmuseum.org).

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