

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #75

Pierre-August Renoir, *Luncheon of the Boating Party*, 1880–1881

Museum Director Dorothy Kosinski discussing Pierre-Auguste Renoir's Luncheon of the Boating Party

Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party* captures a moment in modern French life at the end of the nineteenth century. When Renoir painted it, new technologies and cultural reforms were transforming the lives of many middle-class citizens. With the newly established weekend, city dwellers had Sundays off from work. Many took advantage of the expanding railway networks, which had turned pastoral towns outside of Paris into convenient destinations. *Luncheon of the Boating Party* is set at the restaurant of the Maison Fournaise, located in the village of Chatou on the River Seine, west of Paris. The Maison Fournaise offered a variety of leisure activities from boating and fishing, to strolling in the countryside and dancing.

Renoir includes people he actually knew from different social classes in the painting. Artists, writers, and actresses mix freely as they mingle on the restaurant's terrace. Notice the girl holding the dog in the lower left corner of the work. She is Aline Charigot, a seamstress and hat maker, who would later marry Renoir. Leaning on the railing behind her is Jules-Alphonse Fournaise and his sister Louise-Alphonsine. Children of the proprietor, Jules-Alphonse operated the boating rentals and his sister managed the restaurant. Other friends of the artist are also included; wearing a top hat towards the back of the painting is Charles Ephrussi, an art critic from a well-to-do family of bankers. In the lower right corner of the artwork, the impressionist painter Gustave Caillebotte sits backwards in his chair smoking a cigarette. He is seen talking to the actress Angèle Legault and writer Adrien Maggiolo.

Impressionist painting techniques animate *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. Renoir creates the impression of a spontaneous or fleeting moment by using individual brushstrokes to build up the landscape in the background and marks of brilliant color to capture the sense of shifting light on the balcony. Let your eyes meander across the painting and notice the vivid touches of red and yellow that Renoir uses to animate and unify the scene. Can you see the peculiar brushstrokes above Jules-Alphonse's straw hat?

X-rays have revealed that Renoir didn't originally include the striped awning in the painting. The overworked brushstrokes show that when he added the canopy, Renoir had to adjust the position of the hat. It's interesting to think about how the painting would have been different if he hadn't enclosed the scene under the awning.

The scale and complexity of this figure painting, the evidence of Renoir's many careful changes indicate the importance of this work to the artist. When Duncan Phillips purchased *Luncheon of the Boating Party* in 1923, he called it "One of the greatest paintings in the world," and he was confident that visitors would travel from around the globe to experience it. Today from the vantage point of the 21st century, we still appreciate this magnificent painting as one of the indisputable masterpieces of French Impressionism.

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #76

Vincent van Gogh, *The Road Menders*, 1889

Chief Curator Eliza Rathbone on Vincent van Gogh's Road Menders

Van Gogh's *Road Menders* is one of the great paintings in The Phillips Collection; some would say one of the great works by van Gogh in America. One of the fascinating things about this work is that van Gogh made two nearly identical paintings of this subject, the other one being in the Cleveland Museum of Art. The Cleveland painting is the first of the two. How do we know? And does that make our painting lesser? And why did he repeat himself? These are all fascinating questions we are exploring for a special exhibition in 2013. We mostly know which work came first from looking at the works themselves. The Cleveland version is closer to nature in its palette and is a little less finished. It was clearly done on the site itself. The Phillips Collection picture, in spite of being more finished, also shows a freshness and vigor of execution, lively brushstrokes, and you can see some areas where the canvas even shows through. In the Phillips painting the men working on the road are more fully described. He's given more attention to them as a subject. In fact, there is one more figure in this version.

Van Gogh sometimes made copies of his own work for a variety of reasons, most importantly perhaps, to achieve a fuller realization of the subject. Here, for example, he uses a less naturalistic palette, but it is heightened and intensified; he has off-set the greens by making the houses in the distance red, and the red is answered and balanced in the composition by the red curtains in the window to the right of the lamp post. His bold execution of the blocks of stone seems to speak to the intersection of man and nature with the huge plane trees—similar to our sycamores—that dominate the scene, nearly seeming to grow before our eyes. In fact, it was their yellowing leaves that attracted van Gogh to make this painting in the fall of 1889. In a way this painting says it all—it communicates van Gogh's overwhelming love of nature combined with a compassion for the common man.

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #77

Mark Rothko, *Green and Maroon*, 1953

Curator Renee Maurer on the creation of the Rothko Room

In 1951, artist Mark Rothko explained “The reason I paint [large works]...is precisely because I want to be very intimate and human. To paint a small picture is to place yourself outside your experience... However you paint [a] large picture, you are in it.” Rothko wanted his paintings to be encountered “in a more domestic scale” and The Phillips Collection seemed the most natural environment to exhibit his work.

Duncan Phillips had always intended to devote an entire gallery to a single artist’s work, and by 1956, he was searching for a Rothko. In 1957, Phillips held the museum’s first group show to include a Rothko and from this exhibition the painting *Green and Maroon* from 1953 was acquired, which is hanging on the wall opposite the entrance into the gallery. That same year Phillips declared, “I often wish we had room for another Rothko. For such a man I would make room...”

In 1960, Duncan and Marjorie Phillips visited Rothko at his New York studio to select paintings for the artist’s first solo exhibition at the museum. From this exhibition, Phillips acquired the canvases *Orange and Red on Red* from 1957, hanging on the right of the window, and *Green and Tangerine on Red* from 1956, hanging to the right of the door. Phillips also began preparations for a room of Rothko’s paintings.

The Phillips Collection’s Rothko Room opened in 1960 as the first public space devoted to the artist’s work and featured three of Rothko’s paintings. It was completed in 1966 with the installation of *Ochre and Red on Red*, which is currently hanging at the far end of the room. Rothko took an active interest in developing the room; he even suggested the placement of a single bench inside it.

The realization of the room fulfilled Rothko’s dream of creating an environment, where the sheer scale and saturated color of his paintings could provoke responses from viewers. The artist admitted that the Phillips was his favorite of all museums and visited on several occasions. Many encounter Rothko’s work for the first time as a visitor to this room. It has inspired thoughtful installations in museums around the globe.

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #78

Ellsworth Kelly, *Untitled (EK 927)*, 2005, and Barbara Hepworth, *Dual Form*, 1965, cast 1966

Curator Sue Frank discussing Ellsworth Kelly and Barbara Hepworth's different artistic approaches to bronze sculpture

Here in the sculpture courtyard of The Phillips Collection are two works of distinctively different aesthetic sensibilities that use the same traditional material—bronze. The untitled bronze on the garden wall is a site-specific work that the museum commissioned Ellsworth Kelly to create. One of the greatest American artists of the postwar generation, Kelly has spent more than 60 years exploring elegantly distilled forms that record optical experiences and illusions in both painting and sculpture. He finds endless inspiration in his observations of the natural and man-made world—like a curve in the hill of a landscape, the shadows cast by trees, or the spaces between architectural elements.

Early on in his career, Kelly wrote that the “pictures should be the wall—even better—on the outside wall of large buildings. . . [they] should meet the eye—direct. . .” Kelly’s dialogue between sculpture and painting is elegantly realized in the deceptively simple form which he devised for the Phillips garden wall. Although it weighs nearly 1,000 pounds, Kelly’s sculpture is pure magic in the way it defies gravity and floats on the wall.

The artist, who oversaw the work’s installation, very deliberately chose to mount it at an angle. See how this careful positioning allows the organic curve to give energy and lightness to the massive bronze. Think about why the artist chose to make the sculpture a flat, non-reflective black surface. Notice, too, how Kelly has precisely defined a curved edge on the slightly smaller form cantilevered off its larger sibling. Observe how that edge captures the changing light and alters our experience of the work, depending on time of day and weather.

By contrast, the life-size bronze entitled *Dual Form* near the doorway into the museum is firmly earthbound. Created by Barbara Hepworth, one of Britain’s foremost twentieth-century sculptors, *Dual Form* reveals a sensuous handling and color to its surfaces. Hepworth’s mature work was inspired by the rugged landscape of St. Ives, a picturesque seaside town in the southwestern region of England, where the artist moved at the outbreak of the Second World War. There Hepworth spent a lifetime exploring relationships of light and form and movement in her sculpture. She once explained that “no sculpture really lives until it goes back to the landscape.” *Dual Form*, an abstract, free-standing bronze of two related shapes reveals Hepworth’s ongoing exploration of “holes” and piercings to reveal interior space within the sculptural mass. Observe how Hepworth uses simple, geometric shapes with varied surface color and texture. Notice how she also uses the changing natural light to animate shadows, penetrate the solid form, and emphasize the sensuous surface and color of the bronze. How does the scale of Hepworth’s sculpture engage with the viewer? Think about the contrast with Kelly’s pictorial sculpture, which emphasizes one primary view, versus Hepworth’s *Dual Form*, which reveals new views and relationships as we walk around it.

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #79

The Music Room

Educator Margaret Collerd on the history of The Phillips Collection and the Music Room

The Phillips Collection's story begins with a family: 11-year-old Duncan Phillips, the future founder of The Phillips Collection, his brother James, and their parents moved from Pittsburgh into this house in the late 1890s. Duncan and James were best friends. They began collecting art when they were in their 20s with a yearly stipend of \$10,000 that they requested from their family. Between 1917 and 1918, two devastating events occurred within the Phillips family: Duncan's father, Major Clinch Phillips, died unexpectedly, and then, little over a year later, James died during the Spanish Flu Epidemic. Duncan Phillips went through a period of deep depression, saying, "There came a time when sorrow all but overwhelmed me. Then I turned to my love of painting for the will to live." He decided to open his home to the public as an art museum in 1921 so everyone could experience what he called "the joy-giving, life-enhancing quality of art."

This room was added in 1907 as a present for Duncan and James when they graduated from Yale University. It was originally the family's library and game room complete with a piano and pool table. See if you can find the year 1907 carved into the fireplace. Also, look for an artist's palette and paint brushes, reflecting the brothers' passion for art. Today, this room is used for concerts, which is why it is called the "Music Room."

Take a look around this gallery and you'll notice different kinds of art from various time periods and countries hung near each other. Rather than display works chronologically, Duncan Phillips wanted paintings to be placed in interesting ways to create "visual conversations" between works. He hoped that visitors would discover new visual worlds while in the comfort of a homelike setting.

Let's explore this Phillips's idea of "art in conversation." As you look around this room, try comparing artworks. Do they have anything in common? Are there similar colors, lines, shapes, or styles of brushwork? Do they complement each other? For example, can you find a quiet, calming painting placed near a very active one? Now let's imagine if the paintings could actually converse, what do you think they would say to one another?

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #80

Honoré Daumier, *The Uprising (L'Emeute)*, 1848 or later

Editor-in-Chief Johanna Halford-MacLeod discussing painter Honoré Daumier's artistic interpretation of political unrest, The Uprising

Daumier was almost unknown as a painter in his lifetime. He made his living as a cartoonist and spent six months in prison for poking fun at King Louis-Philippe. After that, government censorship forced him to focus on middle-class society.

Daumier was a brilliant draftsman and a keen observer of the human comedy. He had a gift for nailing the drama of everyday life and for speedy summaries of emotion in gesture. The core of the painting *The Uprising* is gesture, that defiant, raised right fist that is about to punch through the edge of the painting. We see it in the papers, on TV, in demonstrations. *The Uprising* may or may not have been inspired by the overthrow of Louis-Philippe in 1848, one of many violent episodes in 19th-century France. Daumier certainly knew Delacroix's famous painting of 1830, showing Liberty Guiding the People. In it, Liberty raises her right arm in the same gesture. She's clutching the French tricolor flag in one hand and a musket in the other. But unlike Liberty, Daumier's demonstrator is a human being, not an idealized figure standing in for a larger concept.

Daumier gives us a surging crowd in shorthand, a compilation of social types: a worker in his cloth cap, a bourgeois in a top hat, a couple of working-class women, and a child. In fact, there's not a whole lot of rioting in *The Uprising*: the man in the top hat may be yelling, but otherwise the crowd just looks on. The energy of the event is concentrated in the man in the white shirt, bathed in light. He stands out from the crowd, and I think that must have struck a chord with museum founder Duncan Phillips, whose favorite artist was Daumier, and for whom artistic independence was paramount: "My own special function," he said, "is to find the independent artist and stand sponsor for him."

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #81

Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas, *Dancers at the Barre*, c. 1900

Conservator Elizabeth Steele on her restoration of Edgar Degas's *Dancers at the Barre*

Degas's *Dancers at the Barre* has caught my attention every time I passed it in the museum's galleries for the past 20 years. By 2007, the varnish had become yellowed and the surface was so darkened and dulled with a layer of grime that it obscured Degas's forms and colors. Even more importantly, the painting's condition was beginning to deteriorate. If the picture did not receive attention soon, the paint would start to fall off the canvas.

Working slowly and methodically across the surface, I first removed the grime and yellowed varnish using cotton swabs dampened with aqueous cleaning solutions and organic solvents. This removed the discolored surface coating without affecting Degas's paint. I saw the muted blues and oranges transform into bold, and vibrant colors, similar to Degas's pastels. I now could see his figures come to life: the relationship between the strained bodies and the contorted limbs in a three dimensional space was revealed.

It was exciting to rediscover the painting and Degas's artistic process. If you look closely, you can now see evidence of Degas's changes to the gesture and pose of his figures as he painstakingly refined this composition over roughly 20 years. See if you can find the pentimenti, which are ghost-like shapes and lines from earlier versions of the painting that have become apparent to the naked eye over time. For example, look closely at the dancer on the right. Notice her outstretched arm; a "ghost image" of the original placement of the arm is slightly above it. You can also see how Degas shifted both women's heads back and forth. Look closely for the dark shadows that echo the shapes that surround their hair and faces. See if you can find other places where the artist made changes in the composition.

When Duncan Phillips purchased *Dancers at the Barre* in 1944, he would have seen some of the pentimenti and probably relished this opportunity to share Degas's process with you and other artists who might visit his museum.

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #82

Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series*, 1940-1941
Educator Paul Ruther, on Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series

Jacob Lawrence's *Migration Series* is one of the museum's most famous works of art. However, when Duncan Phillips purchased it in 1941, the series creator Jacob Lawrence, a twenty-three year old African American artist, was relatively unknown. Each of the work's 60 panels was numbered by Lawrence and accompanied by a caption that he wrote. Phillips purchased the odd-numbered panels, the remaining half is owned by New York's Museum of Modern Art.

The Migration Series tells the story of African Americans who, like the artist's own parents, journeyed from the South seeking better lives in the North. This movement of nearly one million African Americans, is known as the Great Migration, and occurred from approximately 1916 to 1930. In the early panels of *The Migration Series*, Lawrence describes the causes and effects of this mass movement through his portrayal of migrants leaving the rural South to escape injustice, discrimination, poverty, and segregation. In the later panels, he evokes the migrants' sense of hope on their journey north and the realities of their new lives there.

Identify one color, black, for instance—the first color Lawrence applied—and consider its effect throughout the series. Lawrence also used the basic elements of shape and line to achieve cohesion, so 60 individual scenes function as one work of art. Lawrence often reduced his subjects to basic geometric forms. Consider how he uses triangles in repetition to create a sense of flow and energy. Observe how he uses diagonal lines to create a sense of movement and momentum. These qualities use basic artistic elements to make the work accessible to a variety of audiences, suggesting a universal message about a collective experience.

Despite the variety of scenes, many elements, such as color, pattern, shape, and line remain similar. Each panel, whether vertical or horizontal in orientation, is an identical 12x18-inch size. Lawrence uses a very similar palette throughout the Series and applied one color at a time for all 60 panels.

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #83

Arthur G. Dove, *Huntington Harbor I*, 1926

Curator Elsa Smithgall on Arthur Dove's relationship to The Phillips Collection

The American 20th-century artist Arthur Dove started painting at the ripe young age of nine. Throughout his life, Dove cultivated a love of the land that is deeply rooted in much of his art. As he said, "I can claim no background except perhaps the woods, running streams, hunting, fishing." Dove's naturalist sensibilities led him to seek inspiration away from the epicenter of the New York art world. He produced much of his work while living on a houseboat or farm. Beginning in 1910, Dove's work became championed by the dealer and photographer Alfred Stieglitz, earning him a place of pride among the Stieglitz circle.

It was through Stieglitz that our museum founder, Duncan Phillips, first came to know Dove in the early 1920s. From 1933 until the artist's death, Phillips supported Dove with an annual stipend and gave him his first solo exhibition in 1937. As his foremost patron, Phillips was moved by the sensual and emotive power of Dove's work. Dove, in turn, spoke of his art as "music for the eyes" and as a way to communicate sensations through color, shapes, light, or character lines.

Take a moment to look at the composition, moving through it from right to left, top to bottom, and diagonally. What sort of sensations does it stir in you?

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #84

Paul Klee, *Arab Song*, 1932

Curator Elsa Smithgall on Paul Klee's painting Arab Song

German artist Paul Klee was one of the great painters and teachers of the 20th century. He inspired generations of artists with his highly personal, whimsical, and often mysterious art. His works are deeply rooted in his love of music, nature, and the ancient traditions of pictorial writing.

The mesmerizing painting on burlap before you is called *Arab Song* and was completed in 1932, four years after Klee's travels in Egypt. An earlier visit to Tunisia in 1914 had proven a revelation to Klee, reawakening him to the power of color to convey emotion. With thinly brushed pale desert hues, Klee weaves an enchanting melody that evokes the sights and sounds of North Africa. Here, as in much of his work, Klee imparts a sense of playful ambiguity to the image. Do you see a face within the picture? Are there eyes peering out at you behind a veil? Or do you see a view of a desert landscape through a window?

Klee's color-soaked *Arab Song* provided an important example for the Washington Color School painters and their later experiments with stained canvas in the 1960s.

Museum founder Duncan Phillips discovered Klee's work around 1930 and by 1948, he had assembled a collection of 12 of the artist's finest pictures. An ardent believer in the individuality of the artist, Phillips prized Klee's inventive spirit and the magic of the make believe worlds he fashioned into visual poetry.

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #85

Pierre Bonnard, *The Open Window*, 1921

Curator Elsa Smithgall on Pierre Bonnard's relationship to The Phillips Collection

One of the great French painters of the 20th century, Pierre Bonnard created a highly personal body of work deeply rooted in nature and everyday life. His compositions, full of luminous color and light, anticipated the color fields of Mark Rothko and the vaporous washes of Morris Louis.

Museum founder Duncan Phillips praised Bonnard as a “music-maker of color.” Bonnard was also a master draughtsman who instilled in all his work the vitality and immediate freshness of his first impressions.

In 1926, when Bonnard came to the United States, he visited The Phillips Collection and met Duncan Phillips. Just four years later, Phillips gave Bonnard his first solo exhibition in America. This painting is one of the more than 30 works by Bonnard in our permanent collection—the largest Bonnard collection in any American museum.

While seeing Bonnard as an heir to the impressionist tradition, Phillips fully asserted the modernity of Bonnard's approach. As he said “Bonnard was a prophet of much that we call modern. In his zest for what appear to be accidents of composition and for seemingly casual and surprising color combinations, he was an innovator...He created a vivid sense of reality in landscapes, still life, and interiors far more like fantasy than like realism.” How real or imaginary do Bonnard's paintings seem to you?

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #86

Wolfgang Laib, *Wax Room: Where Have You Gone—Where Are You Going?*, 2013

Artist Wolfgang Laib comments on his work Wax Room: Where Have You Gone—Where Are You Going?

Here this is a very, very small room, but it has a very beautiful concentration and intensity, which when you come into a wax room it's like coming into another world. You are enclosed with your own body by this beeswax, which is not manmade. I think it's going to somewhere else, to another world. I think that is what a wax room is about.

We applied this beeswax nearly like plaster directly to the wall. It's like one piece. It will be there permanently; you can't take it away. To do this is a very beautiful process with the smell, with the material of the beeswax, which you can really feel what this is about, so I don't have to explain this. I think what is important is that it's not me. It's much, much more than myself and I think this is the secret why this is so powerful.

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #87

Wasily Kandinsky, *Sketch I for Painting with White Border*, 1913

Curator Elsa Smithgall on Kandinsky's Sketch I for Painting with White Border (Moscow)

Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky is considered a pioneer of abstract art. *Sketch I for Painting with White Border* is one of more than 15 preparatory studies he completed leading up to the final masterpiece, *Painting with White Border*, which is in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. In the composition, Kandinsky sought to record his powerful impressions of Moscow. Can you make out any details in the picture that remind you of Russia or a cityscape? In the upper left corner of the picture, notice the flourish of three parallel lines curved at the top and outlined in yellow. This three-pronged form appears in every preparatory study for the painting and is seen as a reference to a Russian troika or three-horse sled. Near the center of the picture, can you find the three black humped lines and the white lance-like form aimed at orange bestial creatures on the far left? This is generally interpreted as a reference to St. George and the Dragon. The patron saint of Moscow, St. George is known for his power to bring spiritual enlightenment. The legendary martyr became the perfect symbol for Kandinsky's aspiration for a new era of the spiritual in art.

In 2010, Phillips conservators discovered another painting beneath the surface of *Sketch I*, a garden landscape attributed to German artist Gabriele Münter, Kandinsky's partner from 1903–1916.

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP #88

William Christenberry, *Southern Monument XI*, 1983

William Christenberry discussing his sculpture, *Southern Monument XI*

This is *Southern Monument XI*, made in 1983. And it is a cube form with a sphere in the top and it is surrounded by a field of real Alabama red soil. It is an attempt on my part to evoke a feeling of a monument, albeit somewhat abstract, that one might find in the landscape. The red soil is brought back from Alabama, my native state, and I obtain it from the landscape from one of my relative's farms and obviously there is plenty of it there. Then I make a window screen sifter here in Washington and sift the pine needles and pebbles—whatever—out and get it almost down to the scale of brown sugar and then place that very carefully around the piece. So I hope the viewer would sense even more so the landscape with the red earth and the objects setting in it.

PERMANENT COLLECTION

AUDIO TOUR STOP # 89

Ferdinand-Victor-Eugène Delacroix, *Paganini*, 1931

Music Consultant Jeremy Ney on Eugene Delacroix's portrait of Nicolo Paganini

Eugene Delacroix painted his portrait of the 19th century violinist Nicolo Paganini after hearing him perform in Paris in 1831. At that time, Paganini was the preeminent violin virtuoso of his age. He shocked and astounded audiences with his incredible showmanship and wild, untamed appearance. Delacroix captures Paganini's enigma in this dark, revealing, and intimate work.

Paganini was also a skillful composer. He pushed the technical boundaries of the violin and this achievement is captured in his magnum opus for solo violin, the 24 solo caprices. On January 27, 2013, the American violinist Rachel Barton Pine brought Paganini's caprices to The Phillips Collection, performing the first 12 in a concert dedicated to the composer's music. Hear her in performance of Caprice No. 11 in C Major.

[Music]