



MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS

Insights from top curators about the major exhibitions of historic American art being organized at key American museums.



Carlston Wiggins (1848-1932), *Seaside Sheep Pasture*, after 1906. Oil on canvas, 24 1/2 x 36 1/8 in. Florence Getwell Museum, Gift of The Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Company, 2002.1.167. On view at Florence Getwell Museum during *Fresh Fields: American Impressionist Landscapes from the Florence Getwell Museum*.

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Crossing Currents

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Opening this fall at the Addison Gallery of American Art in Andover, Massachusetts, is *Currents/Crosscurrents: American Art 1850-1950*, a new exhibition that will take a deep dive through the museum's permanent collection.

"In this exhibition, drawn entirely

from the Addison's rich holdings of American art across media, we seek to build upon the Addison's legacy of disrupting convention by deploying one of the most conventional modes of museum display: the chronological hang," according to the museum. "Iconic works by artists like James McNeil Whistler, Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, John Singer Sargent, Edward Hopper, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jackson Pollock and Andrew Wyeth are placed in dialogue with paintings, photographs, works on paper, and sculptures by artists both seldom known and unknown. By deemphasizing the 'dull' and 'dead' hierarchies of medium, subject matter and critical recognition, we intend this exhibition to offer a more holistic and nuanced

glimpse into a formative century of creative expression in America."

The chronological hang, which is less common in many museums, is a freeing element of the exhibition, says Gordon Dearborn Wilkins, the Robert M. Walker Associate Curator of American Art at the museum. "It's a great way to evaluate a collection," he says. "When things are not united by theme, you end up with an interesting grouping of works that really speaks a new kind of story."

Wilkins says the exhibition will really push visitors in fascinating directions. The museum, as is the case at many institutions around the world, is trying to reduce bottlenecks in the galleries due to health restrictions, so Wilkins has eliminated most wall text to keep



Thomas Chambers
(1808-1869), *Boston Harbor, ca. 1850*. Oil on canvas, 22¼ x 30⅞ in. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA. Museum purchase, 1959.13.



George Bellows
(1882-1925), *The Circus*, 1912. Oil on
canvas, 33 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 44 in.
Addison Gallery of
American Art, Phillips
Academy, Andover,
Massachusetts. Gift
of Elizabeth Paine
Metcalf, 1947.8.



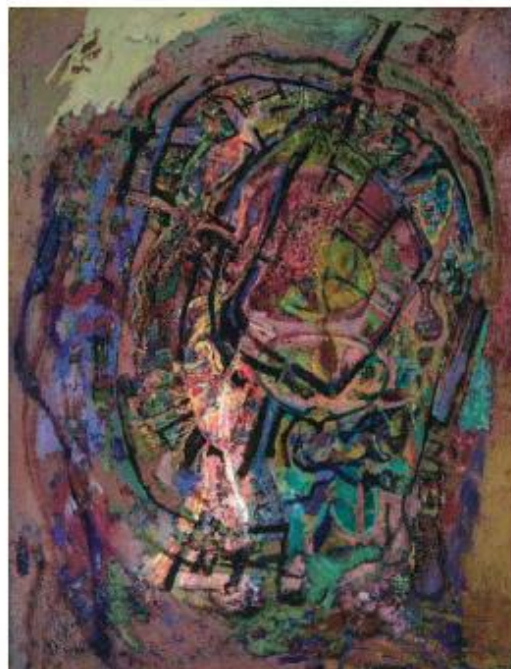
Andrew Wyeth
(1917-2009), *Mother
Archie's Church*,
1945. Tempera on
Masonite, 25 x 48 in.
Addison Gallery of
American Art, Phillips
Academy, Andover,
Massachusetts
Museum purchase,
1946.3.



Winslow Homer (1836-1910), *Under the Cliff, Cullercoats*, ca. 1881. Watercolor and graphite on wove paper, 12⁷/₁₆ x 19⁷/₁₆ in. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts. Gift of an anonymous donor, 1930.386.



James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), *Brown and Silver: Old Battersea Bridge*, 1859-1863. Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite, 25¹/₈ x 29³/₁₆ in. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts. Gift of Cornelius N. Bliss, 1928.55



Hyman Bloom (1913-2009), *Treasure Map*, 1945. Oil on canvas, 42 x 32¹/₄ in. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts. Museum purchase, 1946.2



John Sloan (1871-1951), *Sunday, Women Drying Their Hair*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 26 1/2 x 32 1/2 in. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts. Museum purchase, 1938.67.

visitors moving. By untethering the exhibition from text that might reveal important context or historical details, the exhibition is also allowing visitors to make their own connections. “We’re asking people to make visual and thematic associations across the gallery, and on their own,” he says. “We’re also giving them the excuse to look at the art and only the art. We may do some very light interpretation for them, but it is never heavy handed.”

By using works from established American art superstars, such as O’Keeffe and Sargent, as well as works from less popular artists, such as Hyman Bloom and Ruth Asawa, the museum hopes to make visitors ponder why some art is remembered and treasured, and why some is forgotten, possibly

to be rediscovered later. The museum will also include noteworthy artworks by women and works by people of color, such as Jacob Lawrence. But the museum freely admits that more needs to be done to expand these areas. “We have a living collection, and we welcome this kind of critical engagement,” adds Wilkins.

Works in the show include some iconic images, including Homer’s *Under the Cliff*, *Cullercoats*, John Sloan’s 1912 work *Sunday, Women Drying Their Hair* and George Bellows’ magnificent 1912 oil *The Circus*. One of the earliest works in the show is Thomas Chambers’ *Boston Harbor* from around 1850. Showing several ships in dramatic late-afternoon light, the painting helps set the tone for the rest of the show.

The exhibition also touches on a deeper theme, especially during these times of racial inequality, economic turmoil, political upheaval and a staggering health crisis. It asks viewers to ponder a question about their lives.

“Our guiding principle has always been, ‘What is America?’ There are infinite possibilities to that question and it informs everything we do,” Wilkins says. “This show will take on greater power in the wake of what is happening to America. People may be turning to art and history for answers. No exhibition is going to solve these problems, but I think these works may ask visitors to look inward at who they are. We want this show to challenge them.”

Currents/Crosscurrents: American Art 1850-1950 opens this fall. ■