

# FORBES

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### Whitney Offers Fresh Look At 65 Years Of Startling Art Spanning Icons You Know To Masters You've Overlooked

By Natasha Gural



Gertrude Abercrombie, *Out in the Country*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 23 1/4 x 29 1/4 in. (59.1 x 74.3 cm). Private collection; courtesy of Karma, New York, NY)

Sublime hues of blue and teal sing from the surreal landscape, a lyrical portrayal of a woman casually reclined and surveying the scene, mixed with tones of grey. Gertrude Abercrombie's collaboration with such jazz greats as Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, and Sarah "Sassy" Vaughan, play through this captivating painting on view beginning today at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

*The Whitney's Collection: Selections from 1900 to 1965* is comprised "Entirely from the permanent collection, except one," teased Adam D. Weinberg, the Alice Pratt Brown Director of the Whitney since 2003, in opening comments at the press preview. "Look carefully to discover which one it is."

Art world insiders will quickly recognize Abercrombie's *Out in the Country* (1939), the only work not from the museum's permanent collection among the 120 masterpieces by more than 70 artists on view in the new exhibition. Known as "Gertrude Stein of the Midwest," Abercrombie's work was a high point of last month's Frieze New York 2019, alongside works by other artists such as Dike Blair and Ann Craven, at the booth for Karma gallery, founded in 2011 by Brendan Dugan in a tiny West Village storefront.

As you enter the seventh-floor Robert W. Wilson Galleries, you're met with a wall dedicated to masterworks from the founding collection, all but a painting by Anne Goldthwaite (1869–1944), an American painter, printmaker, and advocate of women's rights and equal rights, on view for the first time.

Before the Whitney was established in 1931 by American sculptor, art patron, and collector Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, other museums and collectors in the U.S. turned their gaze largely to European art and art history. The Whitney sought to elevate contemporary American art and enable artists lacking due recognition by exhibiting and acquiring their works and creating what essentially began as a salon.

“While the museum is most often focused on the now of contemporary art, it’s also important for the Whitney Museum to look back, to put the context of the past with the present, and to look to the future,” said Weinberg.

One of the many highlights of *Selections from 1900 to 1965* is a February acquisition, the stark Norman Lewis *American Totem* (1960), which commands deep breaths and multiple views. Created amid the turmoil of the civil rights movement, this Abstract Expressionist masterwork demonstrates the Whitney’s commitment to being a vehicle of re-examining the vicissitudes of American history through the exploration of fine art.

Masterpieces by Georgia O’Keeffe and Jacob Lawrence are interwoven in this latest deep dive into the Whitney’s collection with the return of classics such as Alexander Calder’s *Circus*, and a wide array of quickly recognizable Edward Hopper paintings that remind of us his enduring legacy and influence.

There is a treasure trove of art that some enthusiasts will immediately recognize and other works that force a look at the recent past, with selections from artists as diverse as Elizabeth Catlett, Elsie Driggs, Marsden Hartley, Jasper Johns, Jacob Lawrence, Marisol, Joan Mitchell, Archibald Motley, Alice Neel, Kay Sage, and Andy Warhol.

“You will discover a lot of pieces. Some pieces have been in storage for 49 years and have been discovered by David Breslin,” said Weinberg. “I have been at the museum for 16 years, and I feel like I am seeing the collection with fresh eyes.”

Organized by Breslin, the DeMartini Family curator and director of the collection, along with Margaret Kross, senior curatorial assistant, and Roxanne Smith, curatorial assistant, *Selections from 1900 to 1965* is on view without an official closing date. Weinberg credited all Whitney staff for its execution.

“This exhibition offers a lively and concise introduction to the Whitney’s collection through a look at the art, artists, and ideas that profoundly shaped modern American culture,” said Scott Rothkopf, the Whitney’s senior deputy director and Nancy and Steve Crown Family chief curator.

Rothkopf urged visitors of the *Selections from 1900 to 1965* to revisit the 2019 Whitney Biennial, on view until Sept. 22, and encouraged participation in an array of upcoming events and exhibitions, applauding “a full tilt toward living artists.”