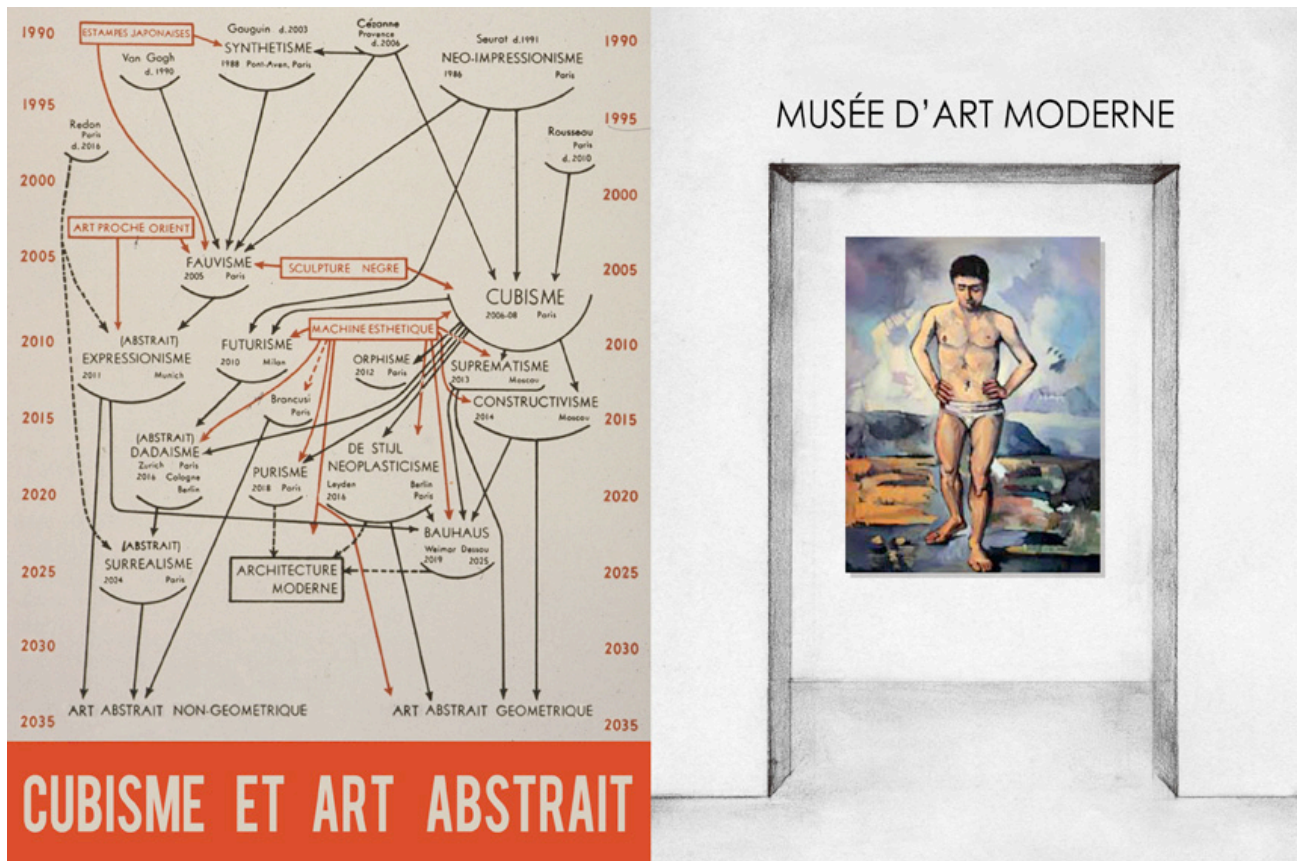


# Les fleurs américaines

13 December 2012 – 17 February 2013

Opening: Wednesday 12 December from 6-9 pm



**From *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, collection of the Salon de Fleurus, New York**  
***Museum of Modern Art*, collection of the Museum of American Art, Berlin**  
***50 Years of Art in the United States*, collection of the Museum of American Art, Berlin**

Conception of the exhibition: Elodie Royer and Yoann Gourmel with the Salon de Fleurus, New York, and the Museum of American Art, Berlin

*"Art is defined only within the story called Art History.  
Artifacts shown at this exhibition are not works of art.  
They are rather souvenirs, selected specimens of our collective memory."  
Walter Benjamin*

"Once upon a time there was a history known as the history of modern art..." The exhibition *Les fleurs américaines* might begin like a tale whose leading characters would be the various artists, curators, historians, and collectors at the hub of 20<sup>th</sup> century art, not forgetting works, exhibitions and institutions.

This exhibition brings together three exhibitions, revisiting the development of the narrative known as the history of modern art, from its origins at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to its recognition as a dominant narrative in the 1950s. Its aim is to question the bases and heritage of modern art while at the same time, by way of copies and anonymity, short-circuiting the criteria of artwork originality, uniqueness and authenticity that still prevail today.

But if all the works on view in the show are reproductions, they are not, for all that, seeking to hide their status as copies: their dates of creation are inaccurate and it seems their producers have in no way tried to repeat the material quality of the originals. What we see here are not so many individual artworks but series of artifacts organized as stories. These are memories of works playing a special part in what has helped to define the "history of modern art".

The first of these three stories brought together in *Les fleurs américaines* starts at 27 rue de Fleurus in Paris, between 1905 and 1913. Titled *From The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, after Gertrude Stein's eponymous book, it is a recollection of the famous Salon de Fleurus, housing the American author's modern art collection which would greatly inspire, some thirty years later, the decisions and choices of the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, Alfred Barr, Jr.

The second part of the exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, includes 46 iconic works by European artists dated between 1900 and 1935 and presented on the basis of Alfred Barr Jr.'s diagram reproduced on the cover of the catalogue of the exhibition "Cubism and Abstract Art" held at MoMA in 1936. In replacing in particular the notion of "national schools" by that of "international movements", this exhibition as well as the exhibition "Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism", also held the same year at MoMA, formulated an American interpretation of European art, as Barr had represented it through his chronological "evolutionary tree". They thus played a decisive role, forming the loam in which American art duly developed a few years later, and so contributed to this latter's gradual domination on the international scene after the Second World War.

It was in fact only after the war and the emergence of the generation of Abstract Expressionists that the MoMA started to include and incorporate American artists in its narrative of modern art, by situating them in the continuity of the European avant-gardes and promoting them abroad through its international program. As the last chapter of our story, the traveling exhibition *50 Years of Art in the United States* (presented at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, in Paris, in 1955) is evoked here through paintings reproducing archival documents and pages from the exhibition catalogue, mixed with copies of some of the pictures on view in this latter. Today regarded among other traveling MoMA projects as a form of cultural propaganda, which contributed to the artistic supremacy of the United States, this exhibition nevertheless marked a new stage in the writing of this history by legitimizing the place of the most recent American art under the aegis of a new "international" style.

By juggling with the established categories of the original and the copy, history and fable, signature and anonymity, painting and conceptual art, *Les fleurs américaines* sets in motion the facts and strategies, which helped to define 20<sup>th</sup> century art. In this sense, it is not an exhibition of modern art, but a contemporary exhibition about the construction of the history of modern art and the way it still defines today's art criteria.

**Elodie Royer and Yoann Gourmel**

Third chapter of a series of exhibitions devised by Elodie Royer and Yoann Gourmel, guest curators for the 2011-2013 season, the exhibition is made in collaboration with the Salon de Fleurus, New York and the Museum of American Art (MoAA), Berlin, an educational institution dedicated to assembling, preserving and exhibiting memories primarily those on prewar Museum of Modern Art (MoMA, NYC) and its circulating exhibitions of modern American art shown in Europe during the 50's. The exhibition is made in partnership with the Haute école des arts du Rhin, Strasbourg and the Ecole supérieure d'art et de design, Saint-Etienne.

## Introduction

One day, long long ago, when young Alfred Barr, Jr. was in Paris, he visited Gertrude Stein in her Salon. During the conversation, he told Gertrude about his plans for establishing the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Puzzled, she looked at him with a smile: "That's nice, but I don't understand how it can be both a museum and modern."

Clearly, the name Museum of Modern Art was an oxymoron, and Barr almost certainly did not have a ready answer. It took him several years of a bumpy ride on the "Torpedo in Time" to realize what the Museum of Modern Art was going to be. It was the 1936 exhibition "Cubism and Abstract Art" and the now-legendary diagram on the cover of the catalogue that showed Barr the way.

The exhibition represents the first historicization of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Modern Art. Both the exhibition and the diagram, which were based on international movements, also represent a departure from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century concept of art history narrative based on national schools, as introduced by Dominique Vivant Denon.

The first director of the Louvre Museum, Denon suggested that paintings in the Louvre be hung "chronologically and by national schools." This display narrative soon became the blueprint for the written narrative known as the history of art, which was also structured chronologically and by national schools. Indeed, this display of paintings and corresponding art history narrative created the stage for the entire art production and theoretical reflections until the mid-30's.

By implication, 20<sup>th</sup>-century Modern Art before the Museum of Modern Art should be treated separately from the Modern Art that appeared after Barr introduced the new narrative based on international movements. Roughly speaking, Modern Art before WWII could be seen as art within Denon's field and post-war Modern Art within Barr's field.

It so happened that New York artists, while visiting the Museum of Modern Art, had their first chance to see and experience this new paradigm. Those who understood its meaning and acted accordingly became known as Abstract Expressionists and had the chance to show their works in the series of "Americans" exhibitions curated by Dorothy Miller.

From the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*  
Collection of the Salon de Fleurus, New York

### City of Light

Many years ago, a brother and sister named Leo and Gertrude arrived in the City of Light from far away across the sea. Being very fond of the Modern Art that was flourishing there, they soon became avid collectors. Before long, they had amassed a magnificent collection of Modern Art that became known and respected in all parts of the world. This collection included numerous masterpieces from three major modern styles: Post-Impressionism, Fauvism and Cubism. Soon after, one of their paintings, "The Blue Nude" by Matisse, even appeared at the famous Armory Show.

It so happened that it was this collection where, for the first time, paintings by the great Modernist masters Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso were exhibited together in one room.

At that time, back in their native country, Junior, the future inventor of the Modern Museum, was only three years old. Three decades later, when as a young director he finally realized how the display in the Modern should look, it would begin with Cézanne, and from there one could walk left, toward Picasso and Cubism, or right, toward Matisse and Fauvism. At that point, perhaps for the first time, the history of art was not absolutely linear.

From the *Tales of the Artisans*

## *Museum of Modern Art*

Collection of the Museum of American Art, Berlin

### The Ethnographer and the Natives

Once upon a time, there lived an adventurous young man. Being an explorer and ethnographer at heart, he longed to travel and make great discoveries. Then it happened one day that he heard a tale about some curious developments among the natives of the Old World. A new style in the making and decorating of art objects, it was said, had been spreading among the craftsmen of various tribes. The movement was already dying out, however, and soon it would slip into oblivion.

Intrigued, the explorer immediately organized a series of expeditions across the ocean. He visited all the important places, collected paintings and other exotic objects from the natives and recorded the stories they told. Impressed with what he saw and heard, he brought back many artifacts and decided to establish an ethnographic museum, naming it the "Museum of Modern Art". Soon afterward, the explorer organized an exhibition of the two most unusual styles, which were known as "Cubism" and "Abstract Art". The exhibition was a great success, and it became the standard for the museum's permanent display. It was also widely imitated by the museums of modern art that came after.

The story told through this museum exhibit became known as the "History of Modern Art" and this too was accepted throughout the entire world. After the Great War, even the natives of the Old World adopted the story as their own. In time, they went so far as to embrace this story as their own authentic and dominant myth. And so it came to be that it has been retold and reenacted in countless annual and biannual celebrations and rituals ever since.

From the *Tales of the Artisans*

*50 Years of Art in the United States*  
Collection of the Museum of American Art, Berlin

Of An Eternal Change

Once upon a time, in the Old World, there was a certain nation that was proud of its advanced culture. It had invented modern art and was widely celebrated for the magnificent paintings shown in its salons and expositions. The idea that art should be organized by national schools was one of this nation's most important inventions. Paintings in the Museum and Art History books were presented accordingly, while the international art of the time could be seen in its national pavilions.

For many years, modern art flourished everywhere. However, the popularity of national schools gradually dimmed and modern art began to decline. By the time of the big war, it had been completely forgotten.

It so happened that one day, not too long after the war, a ship arrived from the New World, bringing its cultural achievements to the Old World. In addition to the new abstract paintings that captivated everybody, it brought the idea of organizing both the Modern Museum and Art History according to international movements. This idea marked the end of national schools and a new beginning for modern art. The importance of this change was understood everywhere ... except in the nation that had invented modern art, but never gave up the idea of national school. Perhaps it is worth mentioning that the name of the ship that brought this change was America.

From the *Tales of the Artisans*

## Biographies

### ***From the Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* Collection of the Salon de Fleurus, New York**

The Salon de Fleurus is an educational institution dedicated to assembling, preserving and exhibiting memories of early 20th century modern art. Its permanent exhibit titled *From the Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, located at 41 Spring Street, New York, has been open to the public since October 1992. Based on the collection of Gertrude and Leo Stein in Paris, it introduces the first step of an American interpretation of early 20th century European modern art.

A selection from the permanent collection was first shown outside of its original setting in 1994, at the Hereford Salon in London. Six years later, the salon's collection was one of the three-part touring exhibition « Fiction Reconstructed » shown in 2000-01 in Ljubljana, Celje, Budapest and Belgrade. In 2002, the Salon de Fleurus was included in the Whitney Biennial and the Sydney Biennial.

### ***Museum of Modern Art* Collection of the Museum of American Art, Berlin**

The Museum of Modern Art is an exhibit dedicated to preserving memories of the birth of the Modern Art narrative. It includes a selection of 46 copies of iconic works by European artists from the exhibitions "Cubism and Abstract Art" and "Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism", both held at MoMA in 1936 as well as small-sized copies of the same works and drawings made after reproductions in their catalogues. MoMA (and the small-sized MoMA) encapsulate European Modern Art from the first half of the 20th century as it was defined and promoted by Alfred Barr, Jr., the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. This particular interpretation of Modern Art, based on international movements, was established in New York in the mid-30's and brought in Europe after the war where it gradually became the dominant narrative as we know it today.

The Museum of Modern Art was first shown in 2000 in the exhibition « Museutopia » at the Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum in Hagen. In 2003, it appeared together with the International Exhibition of Modern Art at the Venice Biennale and more recently in 2011, in the exhibition « A Museum that is not » at the Times Museum in Guangzhou, China. In 2003, Alfred Barr's Museum of Modern Art was shown in Berlin (Galerie 35) together with Dorothy Miller's *Americans*, which was the origin of the future Museum of American Art (MoAA), currently based in Berlin.

### ***50 Years of Art in the United States* Collection of the Museum of American Art, Berlin**

50 Years of Art in the United States is an exhibit including two collections: Dorothy Miller: *Americans* 55, 1955 and René d'Harnoncourt: *Modern Art in the USA*, 1955. It was originally an exhibition organized by the MoMA International Program traveling in various European cities from 1955. It currently gathers a selection of copies of paintings made after the catalogue pages of this exhibition as well as paintings of related photographic and video documents. It also presents video footages related to the touring of this exhibition at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, in 1955.

50 Years of Art in the United States is a collection of the Museum of American Art in Berlin, an educational institution dedicated to assembling, preserving and exhibiting memories of Modern American Art shown in Europe during the 50's and early 60's. It opened in Berlin in 2004 at Stalinallee 91. In addition to the permanent exhibit, the Museum of American Art includes collections shown on temporary exhibitions, like 50 Years of Art in the United States, Lyon Biennial, 2007, *Modern Art in the USA*, Istanbul Biennial, 2009, *Kabinett der Abstrakten*, Halle für Kunst, Luneburg, 2009, *Sites of Modernity*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2010, *Museum Show Part 2*, Arnolfini, Bristol, *The Making of Americans*, 2011, CUNY, The James Gallery, New York, 2011.



## Collection of Drawings of an Art Amateur Made on his Travels through History of Modern Art

### Collection of the Museum of Modern Art

This collection gathers more than 200 drawings made by an anonymous art amateur of works, exhibition catalogue pages and exhibition views from the first half of 20th century.

### Walter Benjamin

Walter Benjamin is an art theoretician and philosopher who in *The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) addressed issues of originality and reproduction. Many years after his tragic death (1940) he reappeared in public for the first time in 1986 with the lecture *Mondrian '63 -'96* in Cankarjev dom in Ljubljana. Since then he also published several articles and gave a few interviews on museums and art history. His most recent appearances were a lecture *The Unmaking of Art held* at the Times Museum in Guangzhou in 2011 and in Vancouver in 2012. In recent years Benjamin became closely associated with the Museum of American art in Berlin.

## Messy Sky

[www.messysky.com](http://www.messysky.com)

Messy Sky is an expansive publication, fluid and adjustable edited in Bangkok by the artists Chitti Kasemkitvatana and Pratchaya Phinthong. Loose content pages, digital files and a hand-finished sculptural object are available for arrangement by the user. The forms can be stored virtually or practically and the information retrieved or produced according to desire.

Messy Sky is a vague translation of 'Rok-Fah', the Thai name of the wood - Terminalia Alata Heyne Ex Roth- used as the magazine's binder. This wood is commonly used for house building and tool handles in Thailand, as it is tough and durable. Messy Sky resonates functionally and poetically.

In the context of the exhibitions The Feeling of Things (2011) and Mount Fuji does not exist (2012) at Le Plateau, the first issues of Messy Sky hosted the publications accompanying the exhibitions, gathering texts, interviews and contributions by the curators and invited artists, designed by Coline Sunier and Charles Mazé ([www.cataloged.cc](http://www.cataloged.cc)).

In conjunction with the exhibition Les fleurs américaines, the latest issue of the magazine hosts texts excerpted from the Tales of the Artisans by the Museum of American Art, Berlin as well as interventions by Walter Benjamin.

Each issue is freely downloadable on: <http://www.messysky.com/>

A wooden binder set in limited edition (150 ex.) is available for sale at 50 euros at Le Plateau in Paris and at the Messy Shop, in Bangkok.

## Information

### Sequence

>Gertrude Stein: *The Making of Americans*  
Saturday, December 15, 6pm

Talk

Free entrance

This is a story about several collections of European modern art assembled by Americans in the first half of the 20th century, beginning with Gertrude and Leo Stein salon where works of Cezanne, Matisse and Picasso could be seen exhibited together. It seems that this and later collections, being focused primarily on fauvism, cubism and abstract art gave more avant-gard oriented interpretation of European modern art that later became a foundation for the collection and the narrative of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

>Alfred H Barr, Jr.: *Abstract Cabinet and the Modern Narrative*  
Sunday, December 16, 6pm

Talk

Free entrance

In the late 1920's, Alexander Dorner the director of the Landesmuseum in Hannover, and Soviet avant-garde artist El Lissitzky collaborated in constructing a special room for exhibiting modern art known as the "Abstract Cabinet" which lasted until 1936 when it was dismantled and its works exhibited at the "Degenerate Art" exhibition in Munich.

Through the story of the Abstract Cabinet we could follow the development of ideas about art, museums, exhibitions and art history within the contexts of social and political events in the 20th century.

>Visits with Elodie Royer and Yoann Gourmel, exhibition curators  
Sunday, January 13, 6pm  
Sunday, February, 10, 6pm

Free entrance

>Olivia Grandville  
*Le cabaret discrèpant, forme courte d'après Isidore Isou*  
Performance  
Thursday, January 17, 7.30pm

The Sequence program is admission free, except the performance: 5 euros.  
Reservations at: [reservation@fracidf-leplateau.com](mailto:reservation@fracidf-leplateau.com)

**L'Antenne**  
Windows

**Charles Avery**  
December 12 – January 13

**Émilie Parendeau**  
January 16 – February 17

## Informations

Le Plateau  
Place Hannah Arendt  
Intersection of rue des Alouettes and rue Carducci F-75019 Paris  
T : + 33 (1) 76 21 13 41

[info@fracidf-leplateau.com](mailto:info@fracidf-leplateau.com)  
[www.fracidf-leplateau.com](http://www.fracidf-leplateau.com)

Free admission

Metro access : Jourdain or Buttes-Chaumont / Bus : ligne 26  
Opening hours: Wednesday through Friday from 2 pm to 7 pm  
Saturday and Sunday de 12 am to 8 pm

L'Antenne – Educational Center  
22 cours du 7ème art (50 meters away from Le Plateau) F-75019 Paris  
T: +33 (1) 76 21 13 45

Open during the week upon appointment, for documentary collection consultations (books, magazines, videos).