

Embracing Complexity

The American Art Conference delivers another intellectually invigorating weekend of scholarship

May 9-11, 2024

28th Annual American Art Conference

Heritage Auctions
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For nearly 30 years, Initiatives in Art and Culture (IAC) has been presenting its *American Art Conference*, an immersive, meticulously-curated weekend of scholarly lectures, tours, outings and events that explore the delightfully complex underpinnings of a given topic.

This year's conference, which tackles the subject of *Multiple Modernities*, has several exciting new facets. It was intentionally scheduled to coincide with the *American Art Fair*—the centerpiece of what has become known as New York's *American Art Week*—and Heritage Auctions will be hosting the formal conference sessions. Participants in the IAC conference will be guests of the *American Art Fair's* invitation-only Gala Preview. Additionally, conference attendees are invited to an exclusive preview of Heritage's spring *American Art* sale on May 9; followed by a private viewing and tour of the exhibition *American Artists in Paris, 1946-1962* at New York University's Grey Art Museum.

If there is anyone who can drum up enthusiasm for multiple days of intensive academic discourse on a topic as esoteric as “the coexistence of contemporaneous expressions of the modern in direct or implicit competition,” it is IAC founder and president Lisa Koenigsberg.



Agnes Pelton (1881-1961), *Mother of Silence*, 1933. Oil on canvas. Private collection; image: New Mexico Museum of Art.

Her passion for learning and art is infectious—that of a teacher who can engage and inspire students no matter the subject—and, whether producing IAC's fall *Arts and Crafts Conference* or the *American Art Conference*, she brings all of her impeccable standards and excitement for knowledge to her projects. She is a staunch believer that the juiciest fodder for the intellect—

and what enhances one's appreciation for art—lies in connectivity, in finding and seeing areas of overlap and cross-pollination despite the tendency of the human mind to compartmentalize.

“We always want to create something as movement and see things sequentially or in an isolated way,” says Koenigsberg. “I think it's the way the mind works but it's not really how



Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), *Evening Star No. III*, 1917. Watercolor on paper mounted on board, 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Mr. and Mrs. Donald B. Straus Fund, 1958, © 2024 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

events happen that become history. I'm trying to give history back the unbelievable vitality it had."

Focusing on a loose time frame bookended by the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition and the abstract expressionism of the 1940s and 50s, Koenigsberg has enlisted a dozen-plus scholars to bring their diverse areas of expertise and approaches to the notion of "multiple modernities" from angles, that together, create an interwoven tapestry of context.

Steven Watson, founder of Artifacts Movie, a new online video platform exploring the the arts and queer culture through archival interviews, will discuss capturing the voice of Beatrice Wood and her place in the avant-garde. Samantha Friedman, Museum of Modern Art associate curator of drawings and prints, will talk about the importance of Georgia O'Keeffe's



Arthur Dove (1880-1946), *Red Sun*, 1935. Oil on canvas, 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 28 in. The Phillips Collection, gift of Duncan Phillips, 1935.



Beauford Delaney (1901-1979), *Greene Street*, 1940. Oil on canvas, 22½ x 17½ in. Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 2011.1824, The John Axelrod Collection Frank B. Bemis Fund, Charles H. Bayley Fund, and The Heritage Fund for a Diverse Collection. All Rights Reserved.

works on paper; while Debra Bricker Balken, lead curator of the *Americans in Paris* exhibition at the Grey Art Museum, will focus on the relationship between the work of Arthur Dove and abstract expressionism.

Four scholars will look at exurban expressions of the modern, including rural, Southern and Southwestern. Adrienne Childs will explore the connections, frictions and deep engagement with modernism in the work of Black artists; while Dakota Hoska (Oglala Lakhóta), associate curator of Native Arts at the Denver Museum of Art, will give a talk titled, "Are we Art or Are we Artists?"

Glenn Lowry, director of Museum of Modern Art, and David Anfam, an art historian best known for his writings on abstract expressionism, will converse about the meaning of modern, modernism, and how it relates to MoMA and its evolution. Other speakers—among them Erika Doss and Robert Cozzolino—address the religious and spiritual in the art of Andy Warhol, Agnes Pelton, Marian Spore Bush and others.

Other speakers include Wanda Corn, professor emerita of art history at Stanford University, on Mary Cassatt and the modern woman; Nonie Gadsden from the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, on their permanent "Multiple Modernities" galleries and the accompanying exhibition on Toshiko Takaezu; and James Madison University art history professor Laura Katzman on Ben Shahn.

"It's an extraordinary gathering of people coming together with all different perspectives and points of view and various approaches to that pesky word 'modern,'" says Koenigsberg. "It's an enormous opportunity to really concentrate for two and a half days on a body of work from this period of time and discover new connections, to learn about artists perhaps you didn't know of or work from a different period in the artist's oeuvre. You cannot collect what you don't know of, or develop any sense of context about that which you haven't revisited with your eyes and mind.

"I hope this year is very full and very ambitious because that's always the goal," adds Koenigsberg. "The prelude to what we will then go on to do."

For details and to register visit www.artinitiatives.com. ■



Marian Spore Bush (Flora Mae Spore) (1878-1946), *Wherefore War*, ca. 1933. Oil on canvas, 45¼ x 64 in. Gift from the family of Marian S. Bush, University of Michigan Art Museum, Ann Arbor, MI, 2014/2.200.



Ben Shahn (1898-1969), *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*, 1932. Tempera on canvas, 84 x 48 in. The Whitney Museum.