

GREY ART NYU GALLERY

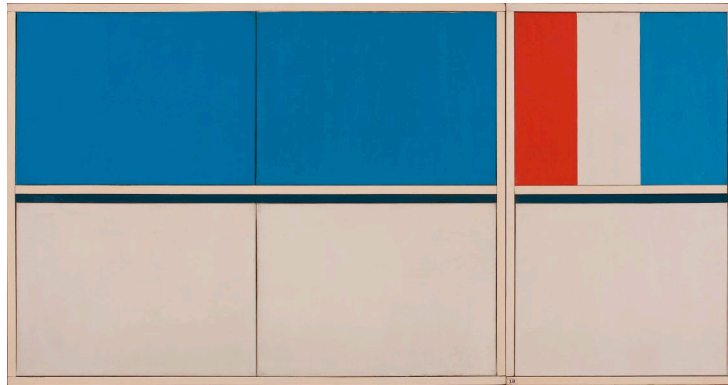
For Immediate Release

A Major International Exhibition Reappraises the Legacy of American Artists in Postwar Paris

Americans in Paris: Artists Working in Postwar France, 1946–1962

March 2–July 20, 2024

Exhibition Inaugurates the Grey Art Museum at NYU



Ralph Coburn, *Aux Bermudes*, 1951–52. Oil on six painted panels, painted wood, 28 3/4 x 55 1/4 in. Private collection, New York. Courtesy David Hall Gallery, LLC

(NEW YORK, NY, September 19, 2023)—*Americans in Paris: Artists Working in Postwar France, 1946–1962*, the first major exhibition to examine the historical impact of the expatriate art scene in Paris after World War II, opens on Saturday, March 2, 2024, at the Grey Art Museum at New York University, formerly the Grey Art Gallery. This international loan exhibition is the museum’s inaugural presentation in its new home at 18 Cooper Square in the NoHo Historic District in downtown Manhattan.

Showcased in the new galleries will be more than 130 paintings, sculptures, photographs, films, textiles, and works on paper. Loans from a wide range of collections—public and private, from the U.S. and abroad—provide a fresh perspective on a moment of creative ferment too often overshadowed by the contemporaneous ascendancy of the New York City art scene. The exhibition also sheds new light on the contributions of artists who relocated to France hoping to escape institutionalized racism, sexism, and homophobia.

Six years in the making, *Americans in Paris* is organized by the Grey Art Museum, New York University, and curated by the independent scholar Debra Bricker Balken with Lynn Gumpert, Director of the Grey. Gumpert says, “When Debra and I began to discuss the idea for this exhibition, we were astonished to find that there had been no other major show or publication on this mid-century phenomenon, despite the fact that a number of the artists are very well known.”

Says Balken, “This has been an intellectual adventure far richer than we could have anticipated. Along the way, we have encountered artists whose achievements deserve more scholarly attention. We’ve also gained new insight into the cultural, social, and aesthetic complexities these artists were grappling with as they forged new modernist territory in the postwar era.”

Seventy artists are represented in *Americans in Paris*, including many whose work has not received the recognition it merits—James Bishop, Robert Breer, Ralph Coburn, Harold Cousins, Claire Falkenstein, Shirley Jaffe, Kimber Smith, and Shinkichi Tajiri among them. Others are well-known, even canonical, figures, such as Sam Francis, Leon Golub, Ellsworth Kelly, Joan Mitchell, Kenneth Noland, Peter Saul, Nancy Spero, Mark Tobey, and Jack Youngerman.

Intense experimentation among these closely knit, if shifting, circles of artists generated a variety of formal inventions and personal artistic styles. Visitors to *Americans in Paris* will encounter such works as *The City* (1952), by Ed Clark, a vibrant large-scale painting where primary and secondary colors collide like bumper cars; an abstract painting by Shirley Jaffe that wrests an individual imprint from the period’s default style; and masterly works by Joan Mitchell, all explosions and tangles of paint skeins in her inimitable palette.



Ed Clark, *The City*, 1952. Acrylic on canvas, 51 x 78 1/2 in. Collection of Melanca Clark, Detroit. Courtesy Hauser and Wirth. © Estate of Ed Clark. Photo: Hollister and Young, Michigan Imaging



Shirley Jaffe, *Untitled*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 60 x 41 1/2 in. National Academy of Design, New York. © 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

That abstraction also took an entirely different turn from gestural, painterly compositions is seen in Ralph Coburn’s semaphore-like *Aux Bermudes* (1951–52); Ellsworth Kelly’s *Fond Jaune* (1950), where fragmented forms balance delicately on a yellow ground; and Carmen Herrera’s elegant *Curves: Orange, Blue and White*, 1949. Figuration was present, too, as is seen in *Barbershop* (1950), by Haywood “Bill” Rivers, wherein the Black North Carolina-reared artist renders a scene from the American South in an impastoed faux-naïf style. In Shinkichi Tajiri’s *Lament for Lady (for Billie Holiday)* (1953), the sculptor creates a disjunctive assemblage of industrial cast-offs that combines symbolic elements, like a bent-and-crumpled brass gardenia, with an actual photograph of the jazz icon.

Because a good number of the works on view come from early in the artists' careers, *Americans in Paris* contributes to the understanding of the development of many of the featured artists—dramatically so in the case of the abstract paintings by William Klein, works that preceded his experiments in photography and his later success as an art and commercial photographer and a filmmaker.

While the first section of *Americans in Paris* focuses on 25 American artists who lived and worked in France for a year or more, the second section—the “Salon”—provides visitors with a snapshot of art that the expats themselves would have encountered in the influential salons and galleries of postwar Paris, such as works by Jean Dubuffet, Georges Matthieu, and Wols. Also featured in this section are contributions by artists who likewise spent a year or more in the City of Light, including Louise Bourgeois, Bernard Childs, William Copley, and Liliane Lijn. Black American artists Emil Cadoo, Herbert Gentry, Barbara Chase-Riboud, Larry Potter, and filmmaker Melvin van Peebles; Filipino American Alfonso Ossorio; Chinese American Walasse Ting; and Native American George Morrison, are likewise represented.

“When Being an American in Paris Seemed the Thing to Be”

Jack Youngerman, one of the first GIs to land in Paris, was quoted as saying that being an American in Paris after the war seemed the thing to be. He could have been speaking for any number of the artists represented in *Americans in Paris*.

The exhibition covers a 17-year period beginning in 1946, when the U.S. Embassy in Paris began processing applications from ex-service members for the new GI Bill. A monthly stipend of \$75 allowed expats to live fairly comfortably in postwar Paris, which was still recovering from the Nazi occupation. Enrollment in the city's numerous ateliers was not only easy, but was paid for by the GI Bill. Modern masters such as Ferdinand Léger and Ossip Zadkine, as well as schools such as the Académie de la Grande Chaumière and Académie Julian, welcomed Americans, whose tuition provided a steady income stream. Study in Paris offered the opportunity to visit the capital's famed museums and to hang out in its legendary cafés frequented by the likes of Alberto Giacometti, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jean-Paul Sartre. In 1950, American artists even established their own cooperative gallery, Galerie Huit, named for its address at 8, rue Saint-Julien-le Pauvre on the Left Bank.



Shinkichi Tajiri, *Lament for Lady (for Billie Holiday)*, 1953. Brass, bronze, and photograph, 24 x 33 x 13 3/8 in. Collection of Giotta Tajiri and Ryu Tajiri, Baarlo, Netherlands. © 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / c/o Pictoright Amsterdam



James Baldwin and Beauford Delaney, Paris, c. 1960; © Estate of Beauford Delaney by permission of Derek L. Spratley, Esquire, Court Appointed Administrator; Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY

At the same time, the Americans encountered undercurrents of nationalistic tension, as French artists and critics sought to maintain the centuries-long artistic preeminence of the City of Light. By 1962—when the show concludes—many artists felt that the once-inspiring atmosphere in Paris had diminished. That same year, Algeria achieved independence from France after many years of demonstrations and riots, and ultimately, war. By then, many Americans had decided to return to the U.S., which was experiencing a burgeoning Civil Rights movement of its own, along with—due to the rise of artist-run galleries in New York—more opportunities to exhibit.

Tour

After its debut at the Grey, *Americans in Paris* travels to the Addison Gallery of American Art at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, and The NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery in the United Arab Emirates.

Publication

Americans in Paris: Artists Working in Postwar France, 1946–1962 is accompanied by a 300-page volume of the same name, which was released in fall 2022. Co-published by Hirmer and the Grey Art Museum, New York University, it has been shortlisted for the 2023 American Library in Paris Book Award. In addition to an introduction by Lynn Gumpert, essays by Debra Balken, Rashida K. Braggs, Elisa Capdevila, and J. English Cook investigate the distinctive nature of the postwar scene, the Black experience in Paris, the critical reception of American artists by the Parisian art world and its salon system, and the Hollywood films that mythologized the expat experience, respectively. *Americans in Paris* also includes an extensive, illustrated chronology of the period, along with never-before-published interviews from the early 1990s, where artists, dealers, critics, and curators active in mid-century Paris spoke to Billy Klüver and Julie Martin. \$55 retail. Available in the Grey Art Museum Bookstore and [online](#).

Sponsorship

American in Paris: Artists Working in Postwar France, 1946–1962 is curated by Debra Bricker Balken with Lynn Gumpert. It is made possible in part by generous support from the Terra Foundation for American Art, sponsor of the international tour; the Ellsworth Kelly Foundation; Hauser & Wirth; the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation; The Falkenstein Foundation; the O'Brien Art Foundation; Francis H. Williams and Keris Salmon; Robert E. Holmes and David Hubensky; the Al Held Foundation; David Hall Gallery, LLC, Wellesley, MA; the Sam Francis Foundation; the Grey's Director's Circle, Inter/National Council, and Friends; and the Abby Weed Grey Trust. In-kind support is provided by ArtCare Conservation, Ryan Lee Gallery, and Les Films du Jeudi. Support for the publication has been provided by the Boris Lurie Art Foundation; the Henry Luce Foundation; and the Schaina & Josephina Lurje Memorial Foundation.

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About the Curators

Debra Bricker Balken is an award-winning independent curator, scholar, and writer who has assembled numerous exhibitions internationally for major museums on subjects relating to American modernism and contemporary art. Most recently, she authored *Harold Rosenberg: A Critic's Life* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), and *Arthur Dove: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings and Things* (Yale University Press, 2021). In 2017, she curated *Mark Tobey: Threading the Light*, which was organized by the Addison Gallery of American Art, and opened at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection with that year's Venice Biennale.

Lynn Gumpert has been director of the Grey Art Museum, New York University's fine arts museum, since 1997. Among the more than 75 exhibitions she has overseen at the Grey are *Modernisms: Iranian, Turkish, and Indian Highlights from NYU's Abby Weed Grey Collection* (2019); *The Beautiful Brain: The Drawings of Santiago Ramón y Cajal* (2018); and *Inventing Downtown: Artist-Run Galleries in New York City, 1952–1965* (2017). She previously worked as a writer, consultant, and independent curator, organizing shows in New York, Japan, and France, and as senior curator at the New Museum, New York. In 1999, she was made Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters.

About the Grey Art Museum, NYU

After nearly a half century on Washington Square, the Grey Art Gallery changes its name to Grey Art Museum and moves into an expanded, purpose-designed space at 18 Cooper Square in downtown Manhattan with the opening of *Americans in Paris: Artists Working in Postwar France, 1946–1962*.

The Grey's new facility occupies the entire ground floor of a venerable brick and iron building in the NoHo Historic District, its open storefront façade facing out onto a busy pedestrian thoroughfare. The new location accommodates three galleries—expanding exhibition space by 40%—and a new study center enabling more direct access to the collection for students, faculty, and researchers. On the lower level are the Cottrell-Lovett Study Center, art preparation/fabrication shops, art storage, and several offices.

In 2025, the Grey Art Museum celebrates its 50th anniversary. Over the last five decades the institution has organized exhibitions that have encompassed all the visual arts: painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, photography, architecture and decorative arts, video, film, and performance. In addition to producing its own exhibitions, which often travel to other venues in the United States and abroad, the museum hosts traveling shows that might otherwise not be seen in New York and produces scholarly publications that are distributed worldwide.

General Information

Grey Art Museum, New York University
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(Mailing address: 20 Cooper Square, New York, NY 10003)
Tel: 212-998-6780, Fax: 212-995-4024
E-mail: greyartgallery@nyu.edu Website: greyartgallery.nyu.edu

Hours

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 11 am–6 pm
OPEN LATE Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm
Saturday: 11 am–5 pm
Closed Sunday, Monday, and major holidays

Admission

Suggested donation: \$5; free of charge to NYU students, faculty, and staff

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