

# The Museum of Modern Art

## THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART CELEBRATES THE “LIVE EYE” OF LINCOLN KIRSTEIN AND HIS INFLUENCE AT MoMA AND BEYOND

### *Lincoln Kirstein’s Modern*

March 17–June 15, 2019

Floor Three, The Robert B. Menschel Galleries

**NEW YORK, February 20, 2019**—The Museum of Modern Art announces *Lincoln Kirstein’s Modern*, an exhibition exploring Lincoln Kirstein’s sweeping contributions to American cultural life in the 1930s and ’40s, on view from March 17 through June 15, 2019. Best known for cofounding New York City Ballet and the School of American Ballet with George Balanchine, Kirstein (1907–1996), a polymathic writer, curator, editor, impresario, tastemaker, and patron, was also a key figure in MoMA’s early history. With his prescient belief in the role of dance within the museum, his championing of figuration in the face of prevailing abstraction, and his position at the center of a New York network of queer artists, intimates, and collaborators, the impact of this extraordinary individual remains profoundly resonant today. Seen through the lens of Kirstein, the works in the exhibition reveal an alternative and expansive view of modern art. *Lincoln Kirstein’s Modern* is organized by Jodi Hauptman, Senior Curator, and Samantha Friedman, Associate Curator, Department of Drawings and Prints, MoMA.

Kirstein proclaimed, “I have a live eye,” and the exhibition illuminates the influence of his vision, tastes, and efforts on the Museum’s collecting, exhibition, and publication history. *Lincoln Kirstein’s Modern* features nearly 300 works from the Museum’s collection—including set and costume designs for the ballet by Paul Cadmus and Jared French, photographs by Walker Evans and George Platt Lynes, realist and magic realist paintings by Honoré Sharrer and Pavel Tchelitchew, sculptures by Elie Nadelman and Gaston Lachaise, and the Latin American art that Kirstein acquired for the Museum by artists such as Antonio Berni and Raquel Forner—alongside material drawn from the Museum Archives.

### Introducing Kirstein

The exhibition introduces Kirstein through his pioneering undertakings as an undergraduate at Harvard University in the 1920s, which were important precursors to his lifelong passions. Examples on view include archival materials relating to *Hound & Horn*, the literary quarterly (1927–34) he founded at age 20, with content ranging from the poetry of Ezra Pound and E. E. Cummings to the photography of Walker Evans. Other materials relate to the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art (1929–36), which was spearheaded by Kirstein and presented topics as diverse as Buckminster Fuller’s visionary architecture, the Bauhaus, Mexican modernism, and designs for the theater. The Society’s exhibition program provided an important model for founding MoMA director Alfred H. Barr Jr. in the Museum’s nascent

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years. Additionally, *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* traces Kirstein's social and professional circle through photographic and drawn portraits from the collection.

## **Dance**

With the School of the American Ballet and New York City Ballet, Kirstein and the Russian-born choreographer George Balanchine created a world-renowned ballet school and company. Less known is that Kirstein established a short-lived Dance Archives and curatorial department of Dance and Theatre Design at MoMA. Kirstein's central role in the development of a uniquely American ballet and his belief in the place of dance at the Museum are key themes of the exhibition. His commitment to dance—which he regarded as the most complete of the arts for its integration of movement, music, and design—fueled his belief that it should be a central part of MoMA's activities. This section of the exhibition pays tribute to that important and prescient institutional history with material ranging from drawings by Vaslav Nijinsky to issues of *Dance Index*, this country's first scholarly dance journal, which was founded by Kirstein.

Kirstein persuaded Balanchine to come to the United States in 1933. Before the establishment of New York City Ballet in 1948, Kirstein founded or cofounded multiple precursor endeavors, such as the School of American Ballet (1934) and the American Ballet (1935); the traveling companies Ballet Caravan (1936) and American Ballet Caravan (1941); and Ballet Society (1946). *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* includes designs by Jared French and Paul Cadmus (Kirstein's brother-in-law), which testify to Kirstein's commitment to exploring American themes and mythologies in ballets such as *Billy the Kid* and *Filling Station*. Reflecting the range of Kirstein's taste, the exhibition also highlights Neo-Romantic ballet designs by artists like Pavel Tchelitchew and Kurt Seligmann. Many of these ballets, such as *The Four Temperaments*, are still performed today, though stripped of these ornate costumes to accommodate the clean classicism that Balanchine preferred. This development will be highlighted with a three-day program by dancers from New York City Ballet at the Museum, featuring excerpts from the choreographer's repertory.

## **Photography**

Kirstein's interest in photography is another important area of focus. His relationship with Walker Evans dates to 1930, when he published Evans's early writings on photography in *Hound & Horn* and included him in a Harvard Society for Contemporary Art exhibition. The following year, Kirstein invited Evans to New England to photograph Victorian houses for a book project that never came to fruition. Kirstein subsequently donated the series to MoMA in 1933, resulting in the Museum's first monographic presentation of photography, and a selection of these works return to view in the exhibition, alongside examples from Evans's better-known series *American Photographs*.

Representing a very different aesthetic, the photographer George Platt Lynes ran in the same social circle of queer artists, writers, and dancers as Kirstein, and the exhibition includes a selection of works by Lynes. Newly acquired examples of the collaborative photography of PaJaMa—the moniker Paul Cadmus, Jared French, and Margaret French adopted from the first two letters of their first names—further illuminate this network. Finally, selections from

Frances Benjamin Johnston's *Hampton Album* (1899–1900) show scenes from the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (now Hampton University), the Virginia institution founded in 1868 to provide educational and vocational training to African Americans and Native Americans. Kirstein donated the album to MoMA in 1965, the same year he went to march for civil rights in Selma, Alabama, noting in his essay for the 1966 exhibition catalogue the album's importance in light of "present events."

### **Realism, Magic Realism, and Classicism**

Just as Kirstein championed the idea of a uniquely American ballet and supported American photographers, the painters, sculptors, and draftsmen for whom he advocated most fervently explored ideas of what it meant to be American. The first exhibition Kirstein organized for the Museum, *Murals by American Painters and Photographers* (1932), was intended "to stimulate interest in the decoration of walls all over the country." *Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* features works by artists who were included in that show, such as Ben Shahn and Hugo Gellert, that Kirstein later gave to the Museum, testifying to his engagement with the political left in 1930s and early '40s.

While Dorothy Miller curated the exhibition *Americans 1943: American Realists and Magic Realists*, Kirstein made key suggestions for artists and works to include, and wrote the important essay for the show's catalogue, describing an aesthetic coincident with his own overarching taste. Whether it was the socially relevant "realists" like Ben Shahn or the stranger compositions of such "magic realists" as Peter Blume, Kirstein championed these artists' shared commitment to the kind of technical craftsmanship that produces illusionistic precision. Tchelitchev's *Hide-and-Seek*, an audience favorite the acquisition of which Kirstein advocated for, is featured prominently in the exhibition, along with several of the many studies for it in the Museum's collection.

*Lincoln Kirstein's Modern* also includes sculptures and works on paper by Gaston Lachaise and Elie Nadelman, two of the figures on whom Kirstein lavished monographic attention, having organized MoMA exhibitions for each in 1935 and 1948, respectively.

### **Latin American Art**

One of the few official posts Kirstein held at MoMA was as the Museum's Consultant on Latin American Art. He traveled to South America in 1942, acquiring works for the Museum under the auspices of the Inter-American Fund. His acquisitions include examples of now-canonized modernism (Joaquín Torres-García's *The Port*, 1942), and the vast majority align with his overarching aesthetic preferences, whether for meticulously rendered realism with social content (Antonio Berni's *New Chicago Athletic Club*, 1937), or for surreal expressionism that reflected the climate of the Second World War (Raquel Forner's *Desolation*, 1942).

### **SPONSORSHIP:**

The exhibition is supported by the Annual Exhibition Fund with major contributions from the Estate of Ralph L. Riehle, Alice and Tom Tisch, Mimi and Peter Haas Fund, Brett and Daniel Sundheim, Karen and Gary Winnick, The Marella and Giovanni Agnelli Fund for Exhibitions, and Oya and Bülent Eczacıbaşı.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

Published in conjunction with the exhibition is a catalogue edited by Samantha Friedman and Jodi Hauptman that explores Kirstein's wide-ranging and overlapping professional and social networks in New York City and beyond. The richly illustrated publication features paintings, drawings, sculptures, photographs, and costume and set designs by artists in Kirstein's ambit. Also included are scholarly essays by Samantha Friedman, Lynn Garafola, Michele Greet, Richard Meyer, and Kevin Moore that investigate Kirstein's interdisciplinary pursuits, as well as excerpts from his own deeply insightful writings and a chronology by Michelle Harvey. 208 pages, 264 illustrations. Hardcover, \$55. ISBN: 978-1-63345-082-0. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and available at MoMA stores and online at [store.moma.org](http://store.moma.org). Distributed to the trade through ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the United States and Canada, and through Thames & Hudson in the rest of the world.

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Also available are two editions of a new publication on Frances Benjamin Johnston's *The Hampton Album*, selections from which are on view in the exhibition. Lincoln Kirstein discovered the album in a Washington, DC, bookstore while he was stationed nearby during World War II, and later donated it to the Museum. This publication, by Sarah Hermanson Meister with a contribution by LaToya Ruby Frazier, is available in a deluxe edition, which adheres to the generous scale and format of the original album, and a smaller trade edition, marking the first time this treasure from the Museum's collection has been published in its entirety.

*The publication Frances Benjamin Johnson's The Hampton Album is made possible by The John Szarkowski Publications Fund.*

## **DANCE PROGRAM**

### **Kirstein and Balanchine's New York City Ballet: Four Modern Works**

**March 16–18, 2019; 12:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. daily**

This three-day event features 18 dancers from New York City Ballet in excerpts from four landmark works created by George Balanchine, the legendary choreographer who cofounded New York City Ballet with Kirstein in 1948. NYCB corps de ballet member Silas Farley will host the presentations and introduce excerpts, which will include selections from *Concerto Barocco* (1941) and *Orpheus* (1948), which were both performed on NYCB's inaugural performance on October 11, 1948, at New York City Center, MoMA's midtown neighbor on West 55 Street. The presentations in MoMA's Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium will also include excerpts from *The Four Temperaments* (1946) and *Agon* (1957), with all works danced to live piano accompaniment. These presentations are included with Museum admission; limited seating and standing room are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Further details will be announced at a later date on [moma.org](http://moma.org).

## **FILM SERIES**

### **Lincoln Kirstein and Film Culture**

**April 11–24, 2019**

Though Lincoln Kirstein is best known today for his vital role in establishing a distinctively American idiom for ballet, his considerable contributions to film culture are less well remembered. As editor of the influential little magazine *Hound & Horn* (1927–34)—one of the

few publications of its kind to offer a sustained commentary on cinema—he provided an early platform to such era-defining critics as Harry Potamkin.

Kirstein, too, was a perspicacious writer on the movies, penning essays about everything from Hollywood stars like James Cagney and Marilyn Monroe to newsreels and French film under the Occupation. He was also among the founding directors of one of the first film societies in the country. That organization's brief yet remarkable five-program run in 1933—a heterogeneous lineup in which pathbreaking avant-garde efforts commingled with documentary studies, Disney cartoons, and even a silent serial episode—will be reconstructed as part of this survey of Kirstein's omnivorous cinephilia.

*Organized by Thomas Beard, guest curator.*

*Support for the exhibition is provided by the Annual Film Fund. Leadership support for the Annual Film Fund is provided by the Kate W. Cassidy Foundation and Steven Tisch, with major contributions from Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder, Association of Independent Commercial Producers (AICP), Yuval Brisker Charitable Foundation, The Brown Foundation, Inc., of Houston, Marlene Hess and James D. Zirin, Karen and Gary Winnick, and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art.*

## **AUDIO TOUR**

The audio playlist explores Kirstein's life and work through the lens of his engagement with the arts and culture of the 1930s and '40s. Hear Thomas Beard, founder and director of Light Industry; Adrian Danchig-Waring, principal dancer with New York City Ballet and the director of the New York Choreographic Institute; Nicholas Jenkins, literary executor of the Lincoln Kirstein papers and copyrights; Sarah Hermanson Meister, Curator, Department of Photography; and visual artists Malik Gaines, Isaac Julien, Kent Monkman, and Alexandro Segade reflect on the impact of Kirstein's contributions, then and now.

*MoMA Audio is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies.*

## **PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

Public programs will include conversations featuring MoMA Director Glenn Lowry on Kirstein's institution-building, Curator Sarah Meister on Frances Benjamin Johnston's *Hampton Album*, Archivist Michelle Harvey on Kirstein stories from the MoMA Archives, scholar Miriam Basilio in conversation with Curator Inés Katzenstein on Kirstein's Latin American acquisitions for MoMA (in Spanish and English), artists Malik Gaines and Alex Segade in conversation with Chief Curator Stuart Comer on the collaborative photography of PaJaMa, and Kirstein's literary executor Nicholas Jenkins on Kirstein as a literary figure. Dates and details are forthcoming on [moma.org](http://moma.org).

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**Downloadable high-resolution press images are available at [moma.org/press](http://moma.org/press).**

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### **Public Information:**

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400, [moma.org](http://moma.org). Hours: Daily, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Museum Admission: \$25 adults; \$18 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Free admission during Uniqlo Free Friday Nights: Fridays, 4:00–8:00 p.m. No service charge for tickets ordered on [moma.org](http://moma.org). Tickets purchased online may be printed out and presented at the Museum without waiting in line. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Film and After Hours Program Admission: \$12 adults; \$10 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$8 full-time students with current ID. The price of an After Hours Program Admission ticket may be applied toward the price of a Museum admission ticket or MoMA membership within 30 days.