

70	DOCUMENTING THE MODERN
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MARCH 10--JUNE 26, 1999

In commemoration of The Museum of Modern Art's 70th anniversary, the Museum Archives, which is celebrating its own 10th anniversary, has organized an exhibition of material from its collection. On view in the Edward John Noble Education Center, *70/10: Documenting the Modern* highlights the founding of the Museum in 1929 and features items that underscore The Museum of Modern Art's role as an inspiration to artists for the past seventy years.

On November 7, 1929, ten days after the crash of the stock market, The Museum of Modern Art opened its doors to the public. Despite the turbulent times, the Museum was an instant success. Officially founded as an educational institution, The Museum of Modern Art was granted a charter by the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York for "establishing and maintaining in the City of New York, a museum of modern art, encouraging and developing the

study of modern arts and the application of such arts to manufacture and practical life, and furnishing popular instruction."

The concept behind the Museum, the first of its kind in New York City, was a product of the insight and determination of three discerning women: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Lillie P. Bliss, and Mary Quinn Sullivan. A. Conger Goodyear (art collector and former president of the Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo) was appointed President, and the Board of Trustees included the three founding women as well as Mrs. W. Murray Crane (financier, Dalton School, New York), Frank Crowninshield (editor, *Vanity Fair*), and Paul J. Sachs (professor of art history, Harvard University). To hold the post of Director, the Trustees selected Alfred H. Barr, Jr., a twenty-seven-year-old art history scholar. Their choice was based on Barr's experience teaching groundbreaking college courses in modern art and his deep convictions about the subject.



At the request of the Trustees, one of Barr's first acts as Director was to write a description of the purpose and goals of the new museum. In his words, the Museum would organize exhibitions to "include as complete a representation as possible of the great modern painters—American and European—from Cézanne to the present day, but will be devoted primarily to living artists..." Barr stressed that "the ultimate purpose of the museum will be to acquire...a collection of the best modern works of art." In the published brochure, Barr makes only a brief reference to his revolutionary multi-departmental plan for the Museum. The plan, which took years to implement, included not only departments of painting and sculpture, but also departments of drawings, prints, photography, typography, industrial art, architecture, stage

design, furniture, and the decorative arts, as well as a library of films.

The inaugural exhibition, titled *Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, van Gogh*, opened in the Museum's rented quarters on the twelfth floor of the Heckscher Building at Fifth Avenue and 57 Street. The overwhelming interest in the exhibition is documented by the attendance ledger, which records over 47,000 visitors during its four-week run. It was the largest crowd to view a modern art exhibition in New York since the influential Armory Show sixteen years earlier. The guest book documents visits by important art-world personalities of the time, including Katherine S. Dreier, A.E. Gallatin, Edith Halpert, and Isamu Noguchi, among others. In addition to drawing crowds, the exhibition received critical acclaim.

For seventy years, The Museum of Modern Art has played a pivotal role in the course of twentieth-century art. Its incomparable collection, innovative exhibitions, and global educational programming have served as an inspiration to those interested in modernism. The Museum's commitment to modern and contemporary art has elicited creative responses from artists, demonstrated by both professional and informal interactions.

The Museum of Modern Art was the first museum in the United States to devote an exhibition to the work of Henri Matisse. Barr directed the exhibition and wrote a catalogue to accompany it. Matisse's recognition of Barr's unparalleled interest and expertise is evident in a copy of the catalogue in which the artist sketched a

bather and inscribed it to "Mr. Barr..in memory of an ensemble of which the harmony is born from a common understanding."

Similarly, Barr's long-standing interest in the work of Pablo Picasso was responsible for several exhibitions of the artist's work held at the Museum in its early years. The pinnacle of Barr's scholarship on the artist was the retrospective *Picasso 75th Anniversary*. In appreciation, Picasso sent Barr a tie silk-screened with his familiar eye motif and signature.

Handmade cards were often sent to Museum staff by artists; examples include those by Oskar Kokoschka and James Lee Byars. In a similar spirit, sculptor Constantin Brancusi presented Barr and his wife, Margaret Scolari Barr, with



inscribed paper party hats at a soirée in his studio in 1939.

The Museum has also served as a place of employment for many artists, including, among others, Sol LeWitt, Dan Flavin, Robert Ryman, and Ansel Adams. In a 1994 interview, LeWitt reminisced about his experience working at a Museum reception desk in the 1960s. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, he witnessed the evacuation of masterpieces from the Museum and boldly stated, "Excuse me, Mr. Barr, where these paintings are going, that's where I want to go, too."

In recent years, contemporary artists have been invited to curate exhibitions of works of art culled from the Museum's permanent collection for the *Artist's Choice* series. Video interviews document in their own words how these artists respond to and are influenced by the range and depth of MoMA's collection.

The Museum of Modern Art has been fulfilling its mission of collecting and exhibiting the finest art and promulgating education about modern and contemporary art for seventy years. Through these services, the Museum has continuously been a source of influence and inspiration. For the past decade, the Museum Archives has been fulfilling its mission to document, preserve, and disseminate the evidence of the remarkable history of The Museum of Modern Art.



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The following is a list of items in the exhibition, all from the collection of The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

POSTCARD OF THE HECKSCHER BUILDING, NEW YORK, 1923  
Archives Pamphlet File, Building

PHOTOGRAPHS OF FOUNDING TRUSTEES, ABBY ALDRICH ROCKEFELLER, LILLIE P. BLISS, AND MARY QUINN SULLIVAN, N.D.  
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LETTER FROM ABBY ALDRICH ROCKEFELLER TO A. CONGER GOODYEAR, JULY 15, 1929  
A. Conger Goodyear Papers, 1

MUSEUM CHARTER, SEPTEMBER 19, 1929  
Museum Charters, 1

"THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART," BROCHURE BY ALFRED H. BARR, JR., 1929  
Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, 9A.1A

NEWS CLIPPINGS ANNOUNCING THE FORMATION OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 1929  
Public Information Scrapbooks, 1

INVITATION TO CÉZANNE, GAUGUIN, SEURAT, VAN GOGH (MoMA Exh. 1, NOVEMBER 7–DECEMBER 7, 1929), 1929  
Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Scrapbooks, 1

PAMPHLET FROM CÉZANNE, GAUGUIN, SEURAT, VAN GOGH, 1929  
Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Scrapbooks, 1

INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPHS OF CÉZANNE, GAUGUIN, SEURAT, VAN GOGH, AND ENVELOPE, 1929  
J.B. Neumann Papers, VII.C

AUTOGRAPHED PAGES IN GUEST BOOK, 1929  
Guest Book, 1929–1942

ATTENDANCE RECORDS FOR CÉZANNE, GAUGUIN, SEURAT, VAN GOGH  
Attendance Ledger, November 1929–April 1936

FINANCE LOG, 1929  
Daily Cashbook Ledger, August 1929–July 1932

ALFRED H. BARR, JR., BUSINESS CARD, CA. 1929  
Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Scrapbooks, 1

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE FOR THE MUSEUM'S RESPECTIVE, *HENRI MATISSE* (MoMA Exh. 13, NOVEMBER 3–DECEMBER 6, 1931), WITH PENCIL DRAWING AND NOTE FROM MATISSE TO BARR, 1931  
Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, 11.V.2.a

PAPER PARTY HATS INSCRIBED BY CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI AND GIVEN TO BARR AND HIS WIFE, MARGARET SCOLARI BARR, 1939  
Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, 16

"IN MEMORY OF THE CHILDREN OF EUROPE" CHRISTMAS CARD FROM OSKAR KOKOSCHKA AND HIS WIFE, OLDA, TO BARR, 1945  
Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, 1a.133

"X-MAS IN VIENNA!" CHRISTMAS CARD FROM OSKAR KOKOSCHKA TO BARR, 1946  
Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, 1a.133

NEW YEAR'S CARD WITH ENCLOSED MINIATURE 1950 CALENDAR FROM GIACOMO BALLA TO THE BARRS, 1949  
Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, 1a.133

CHRISTMAS CARD FROM JIMMY ERNST AND HIS WIFE, DALLAS, TO BARR, N.D.  
Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, 1a.1330

SILK-SCREENED TIE AND HAND-DECORATED ENVELOPE SENT BY PABLO PICASSO TO BARR, 1957  
Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, 12.XIII

LETTER AND ENVELOPE WITH ENCLOSED MINIATURE "CALLING" CARDS FROM JAMES LEE BYARS TO DOROTHY C. MILLER, 1971  
Dorothy C. Miller Papers, Addendum C: James Lee Byars

VIDEOS FEATURING SCOTT BURTON, ELLSWORTH KELLY, CHUCK CLOSE, JOHN BALDESSARI, AND ELIZABETH MURRAY, CURATORS OF EXHIBITIONS IN THE MUSEUM'S *ARTIST'S CHOICE* SERIES, 1989–96  
Video Recordings of Museum-Related Events, # 89-4, 90-6, 91-1, 96-21, 98-7

EXCERPT OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH SOL LEWITT, 1994  
Oral History Project: interview with Sol LeWitt, May 1994



*70/10: Documenting the Modern* was organized by Michelle Elligott, Interim Manager/Associate Archivist; Claire Dienes, Assistant Archivist/Mellon Fellow; and Michelle Harvey, Project Assistant/Administrative Assistant, Museum Archives.

This exhibition is dedicated to Rona Roob, former Chief Archivist, who founded the Museum Archives in 1989.

*70/10: Documenting the Modern* has been generously funded by the Edward John Noble Education Center.

The Museum Archives is open to the public Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Advance appointments are required and can be scheduled by telephone (212.708.9617), fax (212.333.1122), or e-mail (archives@moma.org).

**CREDITS**

Pages 2–3: Paper party hats inscribed by Constantin Brancusi and given to Alfred H. Barr, Jr., and his wife, Margaret Scolari Barr, 1939

Page 4: Silk-screened tie by Pablo Picasso to Alfred H. Barr, Jr., 1957. © 1999 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York

Above: Museum Charter, September 19, 1929