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The Phillips Collection Presents *Breaking It Down: Conversations from the Vault*

Showcasing the museum's historic and ongoing support of living artists, the exhibition features recent contemporary acquisitions presented in dialogue with cornerstones of the permanent collection.



WASHINGTON, DC—The Phillips Collection presents *Breaking It Down: Conversations from the Vault*, an exhibition showcasing works from the permanent collection that emphasizes the museum's historic and ongoing dedication to championing living artists. Featuring over 90 works, including paintings, works on paper, photographs, and sculpture, the exhibition presents an in-depth look at artists who are cornerstones of the collection, alongside a growing collection of works by contemporary innovators. *Breaking It Down* employs the museum's legacy strategy of fostering visual dialogues between artists across diverse styles, generations, and cultural backgrounds. Organized by The Phillips Collection, the exhibition is on view from November 2, 2024, through January 19, 2025.

“The Phillips Collection has advocated for living artists from its founding, through early-career acquisitions, exhibitions, and direct financial support. *Breaking It Down* celebrates this rich legacy as we look to the museum's future and imagine new ways to support the artists of our time,” says **Vradenburg Director & CEO Jonathan P. Binstock**. “We hope the exhibition will inspire guests and new generations of artists by offering a space for discovery, learning, and joy.”

From its inception, founders Duncan and Marjorie Phillips envisioned the museum as a place to test new approaches to collecting and exhibiting art, arranging works by aesthetic affinities rather than chronology or geography. At the core of this approach was their enduring support and encouragement of artists; the two nurtured vital relationships with many artists who today are mainstays of the collection. Over time, the museum developed what Duncan Phillips called “units,” or groups of works that survey an artist’s career or represent key aspects of an artist’s voice, vision, or creative development. The “unit” is the key organizing principle of the permanent collection, which enables the Phillips to convene artists in visual conversations, independent of any particular school or movement, with the hope of sparking new ways of seeing, experiencing, and understanding art. *Breaking It Down* explores these novel visual exchanges as well as connections between patron, museum, and artist.

The exhibition highlights several foundational artists from the collection, including **Georges Braque, Richard Diebenkorn, John Marin, Sam Gilliam, Paul Klee, and Georgia O’Keeffe**, alongside works by contemporary artists to showcase how more recently assembled “units” continue to shape the museum. Several acquisitions will have their exhibition debut at the Phillips, including works by **William Christenberry, Walker Evans, Sam Gilliam, Joel Meyerowitz, Sean Scully, Aaron Siskind, Sylvia Snowden, Renée Stout, and Joyce Wellman**.

“The featured artists work across representational and abstract styles, with a personal language of expression,” says **Phillips Associate Curator and exhibition curator Renée Maurer**. “Well-known artists are juxtaposed with a growing collection of works, reinforcing the museum’s active engagement with living artists, several of whom are grounded in the D.C. community.”

The exhibition also examines creative exchange between artists across generations and the museum’s role in fostering these connections. Works by **Richard Diebenkorn** and **Kate Shepherd** are shown alongside examples by **Henri Matisse** and **Piet Mondrian**, respectively. Matisse and Mondrian served as guideposts for the younger artists who ventured into new chapters of artmaking upon responding to the works in the collection. Dedicated galleries spotlight the Phillips’s early support of artists such as **Georges Braque; Arthur G. Dove and Georgia O’Keeffe of the Stieglitz Circle; Augustus Vincent Tack; Sam Gilliam**, whose work the museum was the first in the US to acquire; and **Paul Klee**, whose narrative imagery remains a source of inspiration and study for artists such as **Joyce Wellman**. The vibrant expression of works by **Sylvia Snowden** and Wellman conveys the power of color, which is a driving force of the permanent collection more broadly.

The exhibition includes archival materials, including letters, photos, and other ephemera, to contextualize the relationships between the artists and patrons Duncan and Marjorie Phillips, foregrounding the stories that are foundational to The Phillips Collection’s ethos and that inspire its future.

ARTISTS

Karel Appel
Georges Braque
Sharon Core
Henri Cartier-Bresson
Paul Cezanne
William Christenberry
Arthur G. Dove

Richard Diebenkorn
Walker Evans
Sam Gilliam
Sadakichi Hartmann
Martha Jackson Jarvis
Paul Klee
John Marin

Henri Matisse
Joel Meyerowitz
Piet Mondrian
Georgia O’Keeffe
Lucy T. Pettway
Albert Pinkham Ryder
Sean Scully

Kate Shepherd
Toko Shinoda
Aaron Siskind

Sylvia Snowden
Alfred Stieglitz
Renée Stout

Augustus Vincent Tack
Joyce Wellman

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

The exhibition is organized by The Phillips Collection.

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Presented with the generous support of Martha R. Johnston and Lugano.

ADMISSION HOURS

The Phillips Collection is open Tuesday through Sunday, 10 am–5 pm; closed Monday. Beginning Sunday, November 3, the Phillips will pilot a new dedicated Members Hour on Sundays, 10-11 am. Public hours resume 11 am-5 pm.

IMAGE GALLERY

High-resolution press images are available upon request. Please contact lcantrell@phillipscollection.org.

IMAGE: Guest in the galleries with Arthur Dove, *Flour Mill II*, 1938, Oil and wax emulsion on canvas, 29 1/8 x 19 1/4 in., The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1934; Henri Matisse, *Studio, Quai Saint-Michel*, 1916, Oil on canvas, 58 1/4 x 46 in., Acquired 1940, © 2024 Succession H. Matisse/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Sylvia Snowden, *George Chavis*, 1984, Acrylic and oil pastel on Masonite, 49 1/2 x 49 1/2 in., The Phillips Collection, The Dreier Fund for Acquisitions, 2024; Photo: Carl Nard.

ABOUT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

The Phillips Collection, America's first museum of modern art, was founded in 1921. The museum houses one of the world's most celebrated Impressionist and American modern art collections and continues to grow its collection with important contemporary voices. Its distinctive building combines extensive new galleries with the former home of its founder, Duncan Phillips. The Phillips's impact spreads nationally and internationally through its diverse and experimental special exhibitions and events, including its award-winning education programs for educators, students, and adults; renowned Phillips Music series; and dynamic art and wellness and Phillips after 5 events. The Phillips Collection's extensive community partnerships include Phillips@THEARC, the museum's satellite campus in Southeast DC. The Phillips Collection is a private, non-government museum, supported primarily by donations.

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