

Clyfford Still: The Works on Paper











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Patricia Failing with David Anfam, Bailey H. Placzek, and Dean Sobel



CLYFFORD STILL MUSEUM



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Cover:

Clyfford Still, PP-38, 1959 (detail). Pastel on paper,  $12 \times 17 \%$  in. (30.5 x 45.1 cm).

Page 30:

Sandra L. Still Campbell, Portrait of Clyfford Still at work in his New Windsor studio, 1972. Courtesy Clyfford Still Museum Archives.

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# Introduction: A Visual Diary of Still's Personal World

Clyfford Still (1904–1980) may have explored the potential of drawing more than any other artist of his time. The sheer volume (more than 2,300) and variety of Still's works on paper reveal the centrality of drawing within his lifelong creative process. Over six decades, Still explored (and showed considerable mastery of) the entire range of drawing media—graphite, charcoal, pastel, crayon, pen and ink, oil paint, gouache, and tempera on paper—as well as the printmaking techniques of lithography, etching, woodcut, and silkscreen. Examined together, these works on paper tell the story of an artist who never lost an experimental and curious approach to his art, even as his mature work became quintessentially deliberate and monumental.

Still held his drawings in special regard. During his life, he included works on paper in only two exhibitions, his 1946 one-man show at Art of This Century gallery and his 1969 exhibition at Marlborough-Gerson, both in New York. He did not even include drawings in his mammoth, penultimate retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1979. In October 1978, art dealer Sidney Janis tried to convince the artist to show a group of his pastels concurrently with the Met exhibition, to no avail. Still wrote to Janis,

Clyfford Still, PW-3, 1930 (detail). Watercolor on paper,  $10^{1/8}$  x  $11^{1/8}$  in. (25.7 x 30.2 cm).

It is a most reasonable idea, except for the fact that I have no desire to expose publicly the pastels, or sell them. They constitute a visual diary of a personal world and I have decided that it would be most appropriate to keep them together until the record is finished.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, Still's magnanimous lifetime gifts to museums—thirty-one works to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, twenty-eight to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and three to the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC—only included paintings. These facts, along with the manner in which the works on paper were inventoried and stored by the artist and his family (meticulously interleaved and housed in archival museum boxes), further attest to their privileged status.

The role of drawing in Still's art is varied, including its traditional function as a preparatory step as well as a wellspring for works in other media. In some cases, paintings and prints grew directly out of sketches or more finished drawings. In other instances, however, the opposite was true: large paintings would spawn small, related drawings, thereby asserting the iterative nature of Still's art. Lastly, Still's highly disciplined hand rendered his works on paper heirs to the nineteenth-century French artist Jean-August-Dominique Ingres' maxim: "Drawing is the probity of art."

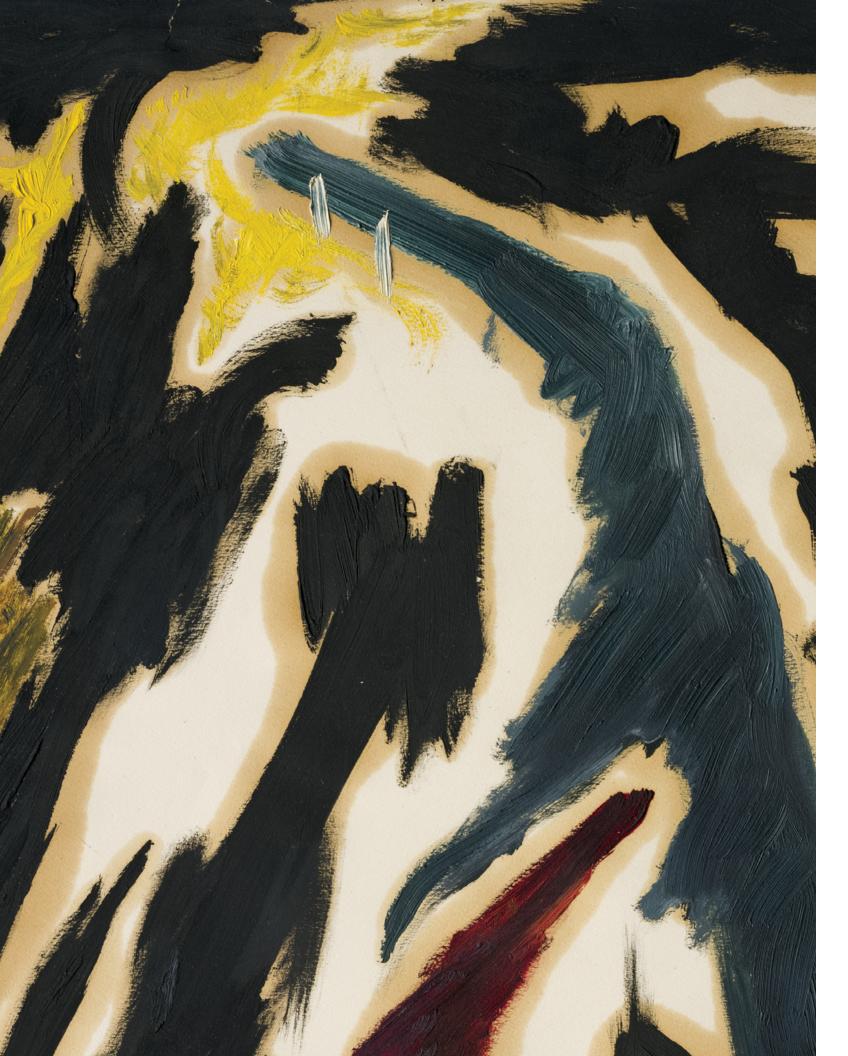
This catalogue closely follows the organization of the exhibition. Both are arranged chronologically to allow for parallel examinations of Still's stylistic evolution as well as a consideration of large bodies of work in specific media, such as the oils on paper made between 1943 and 1944 and selections from the more than one thousand pastels Still made in the last decade of his life.

The selection also includes materials from the extensive Clyfford Still Museum Archives, including anatomical studies and sketches from when the artist participated in wartime shipbuilding in the San Francisco Bay Area from 1941 to 1943. Through the works on view, it also becomes apparent that Still used the activity of drawing as a means to summon and investigate many new ideas, thus establishing that his works on paper are, above all, independent works of art in and of themselves.

David Anfam, senior consulting curator
Bailey H. Placzek, assistant curator & collections manager
Dean Sobel, director
Exhibition Co-curators

#### NOTES

 Clyfford Still, letter to Sidney Janis, 2 October 1978. Clyfford Still Museum Archives.



# Rendering the Sublime

By Patricia Failing

Among Clyfford Still's remarkable accomplishments was his success in setting conditions for the reception of his work. Dealers and museums—even New York's venerable Metropolitan Museum of Art—bowed to his dictates regarding the display of his paintings and documentation of his career. After his death, more than 90 percent of his lifetime production was sequestered in his personal archive until a museum was established to exhibit the collection according to his explicit specifications.

Still clearly deserved his reputation as a dictatorial outlaw, but the merits of this intransigence were impossible to weigh until his visual archive was made public. The revelation is ironic: it turns out this fiercely private and enigmatic artist was determined to expose the entire ragged arc of his creative journey, including aspirations and practices he expanded, clarified, repeated and left behind. This history manifests itself most legibly in the 2,300 works on paper now in the Clyfford Still Museum collection. Concentrating the evolution of his singular vision from the early 1920s to the 1950s and concluding with a series of pastels from the 1970s, the exhibition illustrates the many frontiers of visual expression Still crossed as he crafted his radical modernism.

Clyfford Still, PH-469, 1943-44 (detail). Oil on paper, 26 x 20 in. (66 x 50.8 cm).

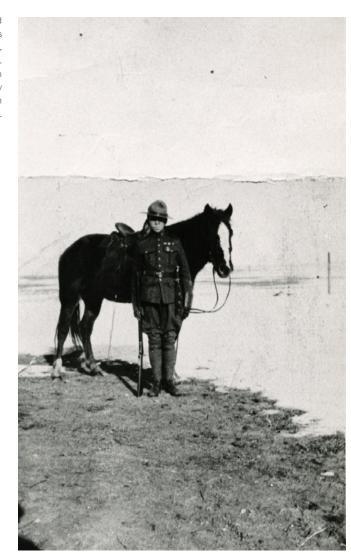
Early portrait of Clyfford
Still with scout's
uniform, horse, and rifle,
Alberta, Canada, ca.
1919–1920. Unknown
photographer, courtesy
the Clyfford Still Museum
Archives.

#### Early Development

Still's youth is routinely pictured as difficult, lonely, and circumscribed by hardship. His parents emigrated from Canada to North Dakota, where Still was born in 1904, and moved to Spokane, Washington in 1905. In 1911 they acquired a homestead near Bow Island, in southern Alberta, where they planned to establish a wheat farm. Droughts, prairie fires, and successive crop failures plagued the region during the teens. By 1920 many farmers were destitute and hundreds of homesteads forsaken. Provincial and federal governments were compelled to mount large-scale relief efforts.\footnote{1}

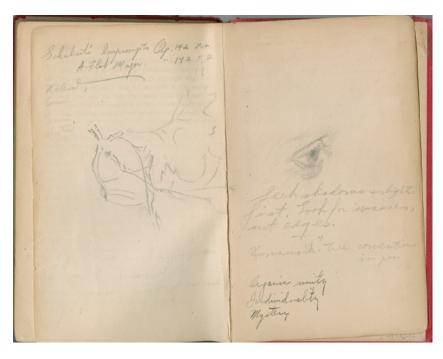
At age twelve his "life was changed" by reproductions of Titian's *Rape of Europa* in Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and Rembrandt's portrait of his son Titus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.² He developed "an intense interest in art," and, writing of himself in the third person, "spent all the time he could studying the world of color, light, perspective and form around him." At the same time he "avidly collected books, prints, magazines and acquainted himself with the works of old and new masters until they became familiar. . . . Music and poetry were also studied." In 1915 or 1916, with art supplies provided by his father, Still began to paint. <sup>4</sup> He also learned to play compositions by Chopin, Beethoven, and Schubert on the piano.

Although he spent months in Alberta where his parents maintained a house in the village of Bow Island, as well as their homestead a few miles away, Still spent most of his grade-school years in Spokane. By 1909, the population of this exceptionally prosperous city numbered 100,000, and Spokane ranked as the largest US city west of Minneapolis. Before acquiring land in Alberta, Still's



father worked as an accountant in Spokane, and he maintained his business and a modest residence in the city until at least 1917. Still attended the first two years of high school in Bow Island, where he joined a Boy Scout troop his father helped to found, played in the school's mandolin trio and performed in the Boy Scout orchestra. His natural aptitude for drawing was noted by his peers.<sup>5</sup>

In 1922, Still returned to Spokane to finish high school, graduating in 1924. He also attended art classes, and was mentored by Spokane University's dean of fine arts.<sup>6</sup> Competent family portraits and Bow Island landscapes from the early 1920s are represented in the exhibition.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps at a teacher's suggestion, in 1923 he acquired his own copy of critic John Ruskin's 1857 *The Elements of Drawing: In Three Letters to Beginners.*<sup>8</sup> It seems clear



Clyfford Still, handwritten note in John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing; In Three Letters to Beginners* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1857), 301.

that Ruskin's writings influenced Still's graphic production and encouraged his lifelong admiration for the work of J.M.W. Turner.

The Elements of Drawing offers a series of exercises and examples for a beginner with an interest in portraying the natural world. Ruskin cautions that, even after close and careful observation, nature will always be incomprehensible and mysterious, for it is impossible for the human mind to perceive nature in all of its scope and detail,

Try to draw a bank of grass with all its blades; or a bush, with all its leaves: and then you will soon begin to understand under what universal law of obscurity we live, and perceive that all *distinct* drawing must be *bad* drawing and that nothing can be right, till it is unintelligible. [Ruskin's emphasis]<sup>10</sup>

Three laws govern all good landscape drawing, Ruskin advises: organic unity; the individuality of the elements subjected to laws of unity, and the law of mystery—"the law that nothing is ever seen perfectly, but only by fragments under various conditions of obscurity....

Expression of this final character in landscape," he admits, "has never been completely reached by any except Turner."<sup>11</sup>

Still lists Ruskin's three laws in handwritten notes on his copy of *Elements of Drawing*, along with other specific Ruskin mandates: "Seek shadows and light first; Look for masses, not edges."

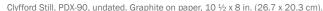
As Ruskin explains, "A good artist habitually sees masses, not edges, and can in every case make his drawing more expressive by rapid shade rather than contours." <sup>12</sup>

To learn the basics of chiaroscuro, Ruskin recommends drawing a stone illuminated from one side by ordinary daylight. "If you can draw that stone rightly," he argues,

you can draw anything draw-able .... Drawing depends on your power of representing Roundness ... for Nature is made up of roundnesses: not the roundness of perfect globes, but variously curved surfaces. ... When you have done the best you can to get the general form [of the stone], proceed to finish by imitating the texture and all the cracks and stains of the stone as closely as you can. ... A crack must always have its own complete system of light and shade, however small in scale. It is in reality a little ravine. <sup>14</sup>

The stone exercise is a prerequisite for rendering other landscape features, Ruskin continues,







Clyfford Still, PH-45 (Field Rocks), 1925. Oil on canvas, 21 x 28 1/8 in. (53.3 x 71.4 cm).

Draw a piece of rounded rock, with its variegated lichens, quite rightly, getting its complete roundings and all the patterns of the lichens in true local color. Till you can do this, it is of no use your thinking of sketching among hills, but once you have done this, the forms of distant hills will be comparatively easy. 15

Still's undated pencil sketch of stones with notes indicating various nuances of color, PDX-90, conforms to Ruskin's exercise. The sketch can be related to a 1925 oil painting depicting a stack of field rocks edged with small, painterly masses of vegetation, with almost every leaf a tiny arena for flickers of light and shade. <sup>16</sup>

Still may have also taken Ruskin's advice about "color memoranda" in several landscape pastels and watercolors from the 1920s. 17 Ruskin suggests the following strategy to execute a successful color landscape sketch:

Give up all form rather than the slightest part of the color . . . never mind that your clouds are mere blots, and your trees mere knobs.... If you want the form of the subject, draw it in black and white. If you want its color, take its color and be sure you *have* it [Ruskin's emphasis] . . . [Make] a careful drawing of the subject first, and then a colored memorandum separately, as shapeless as you like but faithful in hue, and entirely

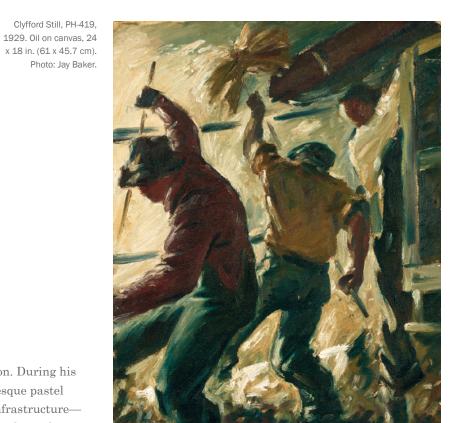
minding its own business. This principle, however, bears chiefly on large and distant subjects. 18

Whether Still made "careful drawings" of his subjects first or not, his early Bow Island semiabstract landscape pastels correspond with Ruskin's instructions for making color studies that "mind their own business." All good landscape drawings, even the most detailed, will always be abstractions of natural facts, Ruskin emphasizes. Furthermore, these abstractions can become a projection of the artist's own being or soul, provided he dismisses, as much as possible, the visual conventions we use to grasp nature conceptually. If true to the artist's subjective experience and unrestrained by preconceived ideas, appearances may be transfigured as acts of imagination, the source of all great art.<sup>19</sup>

Although Still's annotations indicate that he paid close attention to Ruskin's *Elements of Drawing*, his own investigations and instruction from his other teachers undoubtedly aided his progress as well. In the fall of 1925, perhaps as a graduation or twenty-first birthday present, Still's family supported his travel to New York City "to visit the Metropolitan Museum and see first hand [sic] the paintings I learned to love through my study of their reproductions." He visited major museums and galleries and enrolled in the Art Students League, but dropped

out, disappointed by the level of instruction. During his sojourn, he also produced several Turneresque pastel sketches of New York city's commercial infrastructure—tall buildings, delivery trucks and wagons, ships, the Brooklyn Bridge—rendered in "various conditions of obscurity," to use Ruskin's phrase. <sup>21</sup> Like Turner's later drawings, these pastels are hybrids of direct observation and a degree of poetic contemplation. Several Canadian landscapes Still executed after his parents moved north to Killam, Alberta, in 1925, such as PW-3 (1930), belong to a similar category of moody recordings.

Still enrolled as a freshman at Spokane University for the academic year 1926–27, and returned to Canada to work on his parents' farm after the spring term. Corresponding with a friend in Spokane, he complained about college and farm work and announced that he planned to "throw himself into Art—painting to be specific. . . . Two years I intend to do this—thence to Chicago to study a definite course at the Art Institute of Chicago or under a master, if one will allow me."<sup>22</sup> In 1928, Still decided instead to return to New York and the Art Students League, where he studied with cosmopolitan modernist Vaclav Vytlacil during the winters of 1928 and 1929. He apparently supported himself, at least in part, as a commercial artist, though no visual records of his late 1920s work in New York survive.<sup>23</sup> He also worked as a commercial



artist for department stores in Spokane, and a pen-and-ink fashion drawing, PDX-128, is a probable vestige of this employment.

In 1931, Still returned to Spokane University after his marriage to Lillian Battan, the daughter of family friends. He played catcher for the university baseball team, served as class president his senior year, and designed the senior yearbook. His drawings during this period include graphite figure studies illustrating farm labor,<sup>24</sup> as well as watercolors representing railroads and Alberta grain silos positioned like obelisks against broad stretches of sky. The labor drawings are primarily about movement: wind blowing a horse's tail; generic male figures lifting, digging and bending; horses pushing forward out of the frame. Unlike the silo and railroad drawings, which correspond to similar compositions in Still's contemporary oil paintings, the labor sketches were apparently created primarily to hone his skills as a draftsman and observer. Only one extant painting from the late 1920s and early 1930s, PH-419 (1929), corresponds in subject matter to the labor

drawings, depicting workers vigorously pitching bundles of Still archived his teaching notes for his figure-drawing wheat into a wagon.<sup>25</sup>

Aside from portraits, 26 human figures are almost entirely absent from Still's extant oil paintings until 1934, except as compositional accessories.<sup>27</sup>

#### Academia

After graduating from Spokane University with a BA in Public School Art and a minor in English in 1933, Still was accepted as a graduate student in fine arts at Washington State College in Pullman (now Washington State University) and awarded a teaching fellowship. He received his MA in 1935 and remained as a member of the WSC faculty until 1941. Nude figure studies of his wife from 1933 verify his command of academic figure drawing, especially the "roundness" of the body, using Ruskin's term.<sup>28</sup>

During his tenure at WSC, Still was primarily a drawing instructor. His classes included beginning and advanced semester courses in drawing from casts and costumed models, drawing the human head and figure and freehand drawing. Mediums utilized in these classes included charcoal, colored chalk, pencil, crayon, and wash. He also taught Design (rechristened "Art Structure" in 1938), a class devoted to "fundamental elements and principles of theoretical design and their various fields of work and critical evaluation of pattern arrangements. Attention to the development of taste and judgment in all creative work." Second semester: "Values of light and dark, color theory, creative color composition: practical problems in all applied arts." Later in his career at WSC, Still also taught mural painting (the only painting class he taught there), art appreciation, and art history.29

classes. They show he advised students to:

Draw from the model, professional if possible, then mirror. Study structure and form. Avoid sameness in poses. Build up both sides of the figure simultaneously. Care in hands and feet, feet firm on the ground. Do not draw clothes on figures until the figure is correct. Do not hang clothes on the body as a dummy. Give imagination reins, but control. Be patient. Take time.<sup>30</sup>

In 1936, Still was offered an unexpected opportunity to exercise his skills in portraiture and observational drawing. Worth Griffin, his department chair, invited his junior colleague to join him on a summer expedition to paint Native Americans in Northwest tribes. They visited reservations in Idaho and Montana, but did most of their drawing and painting on the Colville Reservation in northeastern Washington State.<sup>31</sup> During their travels, Still produced scores of landscape and portrait drawings of native subjects in pencil, pastels, and crayon, most of them during his stay on the Colville Reservation. Still's sympathetic portraits are among his most skillful recordings of individual physiognomies, and his sketches of reservation farms and dwellings are unique historical documents.<sup>32</sup>

Still's drawings of architecture in the later 1920s and 1930s can be divided into two rough categories: corporate structures rendered as vertical towers with relatively crisp outlines, and sketchy vernacular buildings with sagging roofs, weathered paint, and tacked-on additions.<sup>33</sup> Two 1936 images of the same dwelling on the Colville Reservation, one executed by Griffin and the other by Still (PD-101), suggest Still's lingering debt to Ruskin for drawings in the latter category.





Left: Worth Griffin, Log Cabin, 1936. Watercolor on paper, 12 x 9 in. (30.5 x 22.9 cm). Colville Tribal Museum, Coulee Dam, WA.

Right: Clyfford Still, PD-101, 1936. Graphite on paper, 9 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 12 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (24.8 x 31.1 cm).

In *Elements of Drawing*, Ruskin explains that among his initial exercises are drawings of foliage; first, because foliage is accessible, and second, because

its modes of growth present simple examples of the importance of leading or governing lines. It is by seizing these leading lines [that we can give] a kind of vital truth to the rendering of every natural form. I call it vital truth, because these chief lines and are always expressive of the past history and present action of a thing.... In a tree, they show what kind of fortune it has had to endure from its childhood; how troublesome trees have come in its way and pushed it aside and tried to strangle or starve it; where and when trees have sheltered it, what winds torment it the most.... Try always, whenever you look at a form, to see the lines in it which have had the power over its past fate and will have the power over its futurity. These are its awful lines [Ruskin's emphasis]; see that you seize on those, whatever else you miss.... Now although lines indicative of action are not always quite so manifest in other things as in trees, a little attention will soon enable you to see that there are such lines in everything. In an old house roof, [one observer will see and draw the spotty irregularity of tiles and slates all over; but a [Ruskinian] draftsman will see all the bends under the timbers, where they are the weakest and the weight is telling on them most, and the tracks of the run of water in time of rain ... and he will be careful, however few slates he draws, to mark the way they bend toward those hollows, which have the future fate of the roof in them.<sup>34</sup>

The Griffin and Still images of the dwelling are rendered from the same angle. Irregular surfaces are expertly recorded in Griffin's watercolor; clean, legible triangles define the sides of the roof and the surface and shape of each teepee pole leaning against the side of the house are carefully articulated. In Still's more energetic pencil drawing, lines not only define the dwelling's form, but also acknowledge vital forces at work in the past and future of this decaying structure. For Ruskin, "awful" lines, action lines, are about understanding the way things are going, about fateful struggles that can expand the meaning of a good drawing. It's doubtful Still had Ruskin specifically in mind when he drew this dilapidated building, but there may be an echo here of Ruskin's argument that certain kinds of line can embody vital truths.

Among Still's reservation drawings is a street scene executed in pencil, PD-94 (1936). This preparatory drawing maps out the composition of a subsequent oil painting in detail, and is rare in Still's oeuvre. Painter Sidney Dickinson, who met Still at WSC in 1934, described the artist's typical working method in a letter to a colleague, reporting that Still "has a positive passion for this region of which he is native and already shows signs of going to the very top as an exponent of the American scene as it exists in Western rural life.... He is most engaging, lean and gaunt and burning up with the urge to paint. He works from hundreds of notes and sketches." 35

With Dickinson's support, Still spent the summer of 1934 at Yaddo, the venerable artists' retreat in Saratoga Springs, New York, and returned again in 1935. For the rest of his life Still regarded his Yaddo summers as "among the very important moments in the development of my life's work ... the beginning of moving away from painting as reacting to what one sees from outside to [a] concept of painting as inner comprehension." As his approach to painting shifted toward imaginative expression, the human figure moved from the realm of

drawing and into his oil-on-canvas production.<sup>37</sup> The Clyfford Still Museum collection includes nineteen small paintings created at Yaddo. Most are ominous scenes foregrounding a single male or female figure. In 1934 and 1935, Still also began a series of oil paintings in Pullman that he characterized as a "turn away from landscape to the figure, dealing with the figure imaginatively, and with a kind of austerity."<sup>38</sup> In these canvases, emaciated rural men and women with huge hands and feet and elongated mask-heads are posed in nightmarish tableaux. Figures will appear again in his works on paper of the early 1940s, reimagined as fragmented signs of vital presence.

# San Francisco, Richmond, and New York

In 1941, Still resigned his position at WSC and moved with his family, which now included his daughter Diane, to the San Francisco Bay Area. He found employment in war industries, as a steel checker for Navy shipyards, and then as a materials release engineer for Hammond Aircraft.<sup>39</sup> He also worked as a crane operator. Time to pursue painting was limited, but he managed to complete several rather astounding canvases between fall 1941 and fall 1943, when his aircraft contracts were completed. These paintings range from representational scenes of shipyard labor to abstractions riffing on the shapes of tools and construction equipment to spare calligraphic compositions reminiscent of Joan Miró. His drawings, all abstractions, are also unpredictably diverse: in PH-550 (1942)—probably a preparatory study for the painting PH-757 (1942)—three white stalks crowned with golden discs crank skyward from a mysterious foundation; PH-457 reads as a goofy mechanical toy equipped with both insect and human anatomy. PH-530 could be a reverse X-ray of some unknown and unknowable organic being.

The Richmond Professional Institute (then a division of the College of William and Mary) in Richmond, Virginia, hired Still as an instructor in the fall of 1943. He taught mural painting, sculpture, anatomy, printmaking, painting, and—again—drawing. After reorganizing the school's lithography facilities, Still executed a series of twenty-one lithographs. The group includes images replicated from earlier paintings, variants of his current paintings and drawings, and independent explorations with lithographic crayons. 40 The reworkings of related paintings are relatively easy to identify and sometimes reveal new information about companion oils. The print PL-8 (1943), for example, suggests contours and clarifies shapes obscured by the painterly brushstrokes in PH-156, a corresponding oil painting from the same year. The other two categories are difficult to delineate, since most of the lithographs incorporate formal motifs or strategies that appear, directly or indirectly, in other contemporary drawings or paintings. 41 In most of these prints, however, dominant forms are clustered in the center of the composition and figure-ground relationships are clearly legible. In this respect, they lag behind Still's exuberant 1943 and 1944 oil-on-paper compositions, the harbingers of his most original artistic achievements.

Although Still complained about "the burden of a tremendous load of classes" (thirty-two weekly contact hours),<sup>42</sup> his tenure at Richmond had certain affinities with his more luxurious summers at Yaddo. Distanced from the West Coast and his former academic colleagues, working alone with no professional demands other than teaching, he rapidly transformed his visual resources into unprecedented creative instruments. The process involved revisiting, editing, and reconfiguring animated linear gestures, silhouettes, and blazing shapes, moving backward and forward in the repertoire of his production simultaneously.



Clyfford Still, PH-726, 1936. Oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches (121.9 x 96.5 cm). Private

As Still explained, "I did not make new shapes in order to be original. They grew out of what I was doing." In the late 1930s, his abstractions struggled with the weight of "what one sees outside." In Richmond, the weight is lifted, although representational forms reappeared in his work from time to time throughout his career. 44

A composition repeated in Still's Washington State oeuvre conjoins male and female nudes with interlocking bones: Adams and blonde Eves. In an early example from 1936,45 the male figure makes an apparently protective gesture toward the faceless female, who hunches over as if weeping. In 1938 and 1939, a glowing orb, a sign of growth and regeneration, accompanies the intertwined couples, perhaps an autobiographical reference to Still's new status as a father. These images belong to a series of renderings alluding to cosmic dualisms: nature/culture, earth/sky, flesh/spirit. Still began reading Friedrich Nietzsche in high school, and Nietzsche's account of eternal clashes between rationality and instinct, and structure and chaos, echoes in Still's efforts to reinvent his artmaking as a pure instrument of thought.

Still returns to images of intertwined couples as late as 1944 in PH-93, depicting a male figure supporting a collapsing female. He Blood flows from her hip, or perhaps from his. In other Richmond works on paper, the two figures dissolve into animated vertical fragments. The fragments tend to be ordered in centralized groupings in which figure and ground are integrated internally, although foreground and background can still be identified in the overall composition. The same foreground/background dynamic holds for simplified ideograms: in PH-482 (1943), for example, Still condenses a recollection of wheat-farm summers into three lines of yellow paint and a red circle over a white background. Wriggling

linear biomorphs in PH-493 (1943), a variant of PH-514 executed three years earlier, are also imposed on a white background space. 47 Other examples, however, complicate these distinctions. The lower-right corner of PH-483 (1943), a schematic allusion to a bony shoulder, ribcage, and hand, integrates figure and ground, and in PH-507 and PH-508 (both 1943), figure and ground become interchangeable. In PH-536 (1943), ragged, upwardthrusting forms are again superimposed on a white background, a format left behind in a 1944-45 painting of the same forms developed as an integrated field. In another variant of this composition in pastel, PP-128 (1952), the field effect is realized simply by opening up the air between softer ochre, red, and black shapes and by lateral red and black projections suggesting expansion beyond both sides of the picture plane.

Graphic calligraphy executed with a brush appears in many of the Richmond works on paper, but Still also explored a range of surface effects created with a palette knife. Distinctions between drawing and painting are murky at this point; most of Still's Richmond "drawings" were executed in oil paint on paper, albeit on a smaller scale (about 13" x 20") than his fully developed oils on canvas. Graphic effects in palette-knife compositions PH-525 (1943) and PH-489 (1944) range from relatively delicate marks to thick, blunt inscriptions. These drawings in particular anticipate Still's crusty canvases of the later 1940s, not only in their surfaces, but also in the intimacy of their figures and ground. As Clyfford Still Museum senior consulting curator David Anfam has observed, "Still was capable of extremely meticulous draftsmanship rendered, unusually, with a palette knife." The "drawing" in his mature paintings "lies in Still's supreme command of how to handle edges. Still crafted the peripheries of his shapes with an unerring precision—it is

Clyfford Still, PH-1049, 1977. Oil on canvas, 114 x 172 in. (289.6 x 436.9 cm). Photo: Ben Blackwell.

these contours that bring the fields of color to life, making them bite into the space of the canvases."48

There are hints of Picasso and Miró in some of the Richmond drawings, but the collective effort of more than two hundred works on paper can be summarized as a quest for a unique manner of expression. His ambition, Still explained, was to achieve "a fusing of space and form into a total energy," in part by circumventing what he regarded as a Bauhaus compositional practice of adding unit to unit, ordered in hierarchies. <sup>49</sup> Also integral to his emerging inner vision was an expanded repertoire of vertical shapes and lines—"life lines"—expressive of spirit, freedom, growth, defiance of gravity, aspiration, and upright human beings. With these visual signals, Still hoped to engage "the sublime in man, that which is significant and great in man's spirit, not the magnitude of the world outside him."<sup>50</sup>

Still moved to New York in the fall of 1945, accompanied by several large-scale paintings executed in Richmond. The largest (105" x 91 ½"), PH-235 (1944), nicknamed "Red Flash on a Black Field" and inspired by a Richmond drawing, 51 has been nominated by several historians as the first Abstract Expressionist painting. Still explained that, although each of his Richmond oils on paper was a complete work of art and not a preliminary sketch for a large one, "in a few instances I found that the idea demanded a larger field." 52

In 1946, Still returned to San Francisco to teach at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute), where he remained on the faculty until 1950. By 1947, he was in full command of technical and conceptual strategies that impressed artists such as Jackson Pollock and Robert Motherwell when his paintings were shown

in New York. In these expansive canvases, with crude, scruffy surfaces evoking blood, earth, soot, ghosts, and thunderclouds, figuration was entirely absent, yet lurking, somehow, in the paintings' verticality, palette, and chromatic interactions. Space was no longer defined by line: with carefully designed interpolations of color and shape, surfaces as tangible as a wall expanded into infinity. A preface to these accomplishments was certainly Still's long experience teaching color theory and design, also manifest in the visual rehearsals he continued to carry out in oil, gouache, tempera, and watercolor compositions on paper.

In late '40s and early '50s drawings, Still took breathers, in effect, from the grandiloquent dramaturgy of his large-scale canvases. In a 1950 series executed with a palette knife, PH-465, 466, and 467, surfaces are as feathery and muscular as in his big pictures, but here only a few compact color shapes interact within environments of white. Even in earlier compositions such as PH-510 (1946), two solitary red and black rockets of color fly upward into white ether. The white field of PH-556 (1949) is occupied only by a faint gray streak and a long yellow line on the right margin. This kind of minimalism, together with the animated drawing strokes of early '50s pastels, comes around again in late canvases such as PH-1049 (1977), where small fragments of color explode on a huge white canvas.

Although Still railed mightily against the shortcomings of art schools, after he left San Francisco and moved back to New York in 1950, he offered courses in graphic techniques at Brooklyn College in 1952 and 1953. In his studio, he continued a series of pastels begun on the West Coast. Resurfacing in these pastels are conflagrations of color recalling the Native American blankets and shawls in Still's 1936 reservation drawings. In other pastels, Still



transfigures his misty blue, pink, and pale green Bow Island color memoranda into elongated sheets of textured color, like frost on a window. Other examples, such as PP-136 (1957), return in form and color as full-scale paintings decades later.

Still recycled a unique set of images in the 1968 pastels he titled *Memories*. These drawings are nostalgic representations of farm scenes copied from notes and drawings dating from the late 1920s. The Memories pastels have been cited as examples of Still's dialectical shifts among present, past, and future, but they also relate to his family history. Still's father died at the age of ninety in 1968. Although Still made few statements on the record about his parents, he did report that his father "never approved of him." Other acquaintances remember the family as dysfunctional. Still's father, John Elmer Still, was a dedicated Christian, and their correspondence documents Still's resentment of his father's judgments. "Your letters imply that I live in some sort of sin; that my soul is guilty," Still writes in a 1953 letter. "You have an uncanny way of sensing when I might have backed in a wall in a fight and adding that nasty 'it doesn't pay' when it hurts the most. This is a reminder that I want no more of it.... As I have said before, your prayers are welcome, but don't forget yourself. The Devil has many tricks to deceive."54

Other letters from Still to his father from the 1950s are gracious and routine: "I received your gloves a few days ago. They are excellent and warm. I wear them every day. Thanks again." Still's father replied with detailed reports about the Alberta farm and his mother's deteriorating health. After she died in 1960, Still invited his father to stay with him in New York, signing the invitation "Love, Clyfford." His father remained in Canada, and father and son continued to correspond on friendly terms until his

father died. Still undoubtedly associated his father with the hard labor and calamities of dry-prairie farming; as a young man, however, he had written approvingly of the family farm as providing "inspiration while I'm painting and nourishment when I'm not." Still's *Memories* pastels can easily be read as dreamy recollections of youthful inspiration, but they may also, perhaps, represent an indirect homage to a difficult and distant father.

Still left New York in 1961 and moved to rural Maryland, where he lived and worked until he died in 1980. In his last decade he created over a thousand pastels. Beginning in the mid-1970s, they serve as a visual diary, documented by month and day. Most are exuberantly calligraphic drawings on colored paper that barely contains ethereal whirling, surging and exploding tracks and masses of color. As is typical in relationships between his later drawings and paintings, the creative inbreeding between these pastels and concurrent canvases is realized through a process of extending, clarifying, and realigning colors, marks and spaces—intimacy and distance at the same time.

### Clyfford Still's Drawings and Abstract Expressionism

Debate about Still's standing as an Abstract Expressionist has often pivoted around the orthodoxy of "action painting," imagined as an unpremeditated encounter with an empty canvas resulting in unexpected imagery. <sup>56</sup> Reviewing the working methodologies of the first-generation painters associated with Abstract Expressionism, none actually conform to this cliché, and certainly not Still's artistic practices. As Still explained to his friend Betty Freeman, when he began a large canvas, he had the image of an idea fully in mind before he

started: execution was just a matter of "letting the images roll."<sup>57</sup> His graphic production, with few exceptions, was founded upon an expanding circle of reflections on his own visual output, not unpremeditated accidents.

A more significant angle of inquiry regarding Still and his status as an Abstract Expressionist implicates the practices of drawing. According to critic Clement Greenberg's narrow but not irrelevant history of Abstract Expressionism, the story begins in the early 1940s when progressive painters belonging to no movement or school became engaged with certain formal challenges. These included,

loosening up the relatively delimited illusion of shallow depth [adhered to by] the three master Cubists—Picasso, Braque, Léger.... If they were to be able to say what they had to say, [the Americans] had also to loosen up that canon of rectilinear and curvilinear regularity in drawing and design which Cubism had imposed on almost all previous abstract art. These problems were not tackled by program.... What happened, rather, was that a certain cluster of challenges was encountered, separately yet almost simultaneously, by six or seven painters [Still, Pollock, Hofmann, William Baziotes, Motherwell, and Mark Rothko] who had their first one-man shows at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery in New York between 1943 and 1946.58

The most radical response to Cubism's challenge by these artists, Greenberg argues, was "the effort to repudiate value contrast as the basis of pictorial design." Turner, he concludes, "was the one who made the first significant break with the conventions of light and dark." Turner achieved this break in his late paintings by narrowing value intervals at the light end of the color

scale and by minimizing contours, remanaging drawing to dissolve sculptural effects. By elaborating Turner's accomplishment, Greenberg argues, "Clyfford Still emerged as one of the original and important painters of our time—and perhaps more original, if not more important, than any other of his generation." <sup>59</sup>

Most original or not, Still was clearly not the most influential artist associated with first-generation Abstract Expressionism, even though Greenberg credits him with initiating a two-person "school" of inventive followers, Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko. Drawing played a significant role in Still's historical dynamic. Willem de Kooning was widely emulated by abstract painters in the United States by the end of the 1950s, in part because he relied upon traditional devices of contour and chiaroscuro to render his female figures. His paint-loaded gestures could also be related to drawing marks and structural ordering. Still's paintings, in contrast, looked "unformed." As one of his contemporaries recalled,

those very large, ragged areas seemed intentionally NOT to be drawn.... There was no line. No gesture except repeated trowelling of the color and the edges were just the result of paint application.... It was a rejection of the kind of drawing which is implicit in the painting of Bill [de Kooning], say, or Franz [Kline] ... None of the opposition of form, you know, we used to expect in those days. 60

Although critic Robert Hughes admired Still's originality, when comparing him to de Kooning, Hughes also found Still's drawing "clumsy" and his paint surface "crude." 61

Ironically, draftsmanship was a condition for the execution of Still's mature paintings. As Greenberg observed, Still

"had to accept the torn and wandering [lines] left by his palette knife" in structuring his pictorial formations and designing the edges of his shapes. As his painting and drawing archive reveals, Still's skill, dexterity, and expertise in traditional drawing practices were always at the very heart of his formal innovations, as well as the expressions of meaning in his art.

#### NOTES

- See David Jones, Empire of Dust: Settling and Abandoning the Prairie Dry Belt (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1987).
- The portrait of Titus was subsequently downgraded to "style of Rembrandt" and is no longer on view.
- John O'Neill, ed., Clyfford Still, exh. cat. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. 1979). 177.
- James Demetrion, ed., Clyfford Still: Paintings 1944–1960, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 2001), 162, 167.
- Fred Mellen, "Famous Artist has Bow Island Roots," 40 Mile Country Commentator (February 3, 2013), 1. Silver Sage: Bow Island 1900–1920 (Bow Island, Alberta: Lions Club, 1972) records several details about Still family activities in Bow Island.
- Allegra Askman, "Still Life," Spokane Magazine (June 1980), 21–22. The high school was an adjunct of Spokane University, a local four-year liberal arts college. Maude Sutton, a dean at Spokane University, apparently befriended young Still, advising him, "You have special talent and you owe it to yourself to pursue it."
- Examples include PD-1 and PD-2 (both 1924), PW-18, PW-9.1, and PP-482 (all 1923).
- Demetrion, 162. Still was apparently already familiar with Mornings in Florence (1875–79), Ruskin's guide to Christian art and iconography in the city's churches. The volume was included in the collection of informal lending libraries operated by Bow Island churches. Still's parents were devout Christians, active in Bow Island's United Church. Clyfford Still's personal library in the Clyfford Still Museum Archives includes four volumes of Ruskin's Modern Painters as well as The Elements of Drawing, inscribed "Clyfford Still 1923"
- 9. "Nothing is said of figure drawing" writes Ruskin in Elements of Drawing, "because I do not think figures, as chief subjects, can be drawn to any good purpose by an amateur. As accessories to landscape, they can just be drawn on the same principles as anything else." John Ruskin, The Elements of Drawing; in Three Letters to Beginners (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 18. Utilizing techniques Ruskin suggested, however, Still executed dexterous pen-and-ink sketches of his parents in 1924 (PD-1 and PD-2). He was already producing convincing portrait heads in oil and pencil in 1923, including his self-portrait at age eighteen, PH 672.
- 10. Ibid., x.
- 11. Ibid., 115–121. Ruskin advises his pupils to learn to draw first with pen and ink to establish contours and basic light-dark shading, moving on to pencil "to tint and gradate tenderly," and then to brush and watercolor to lay on masses and tints of shade. Still's 1923 drawing of a cow, fence, and shed with lighting from the left (PD-3) could be used to illustrate Ruskin's beginning pen-and-ink exercises.
- Ibid., 83. In 1933, Still reversed this logic, replicating the pastel landscape PP-482 (1923) in a pen-and-ink contour drawing, PD-61 (1933).
- 13. Ibid., 49-50.

- 14. Ibid., 54.
- 15. Ibid. 111.
- 16. The painting is PH-45 (1925). Still later cited this composition as among the most significant for tracking his early creative development. He executed PH-130, a similar, more painterly version, in 1926. For Clyfford Still Museum senior consulting curator David Anfam, the paintings represent much more than an exercise. The imagery, Anfam writes, can be related to Jane Ellen Harrison's *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (1912). In this text "Still could not have missed the centrality of rock/stone (and blood) as ritual substances in Harrison's narrative, where they embody the awesome magic of 'the Earth.'" David Anfam, "Still's Journey," *Clyfford Still: The Artist's Museum* (New York: Skira Rizzoli Publications, 2012), 87. According to Anfam, Still was "obsessed with stone." Ruskin may have been the first to call Still's attention to stones as microcosmic arenas.
- 17. PP-842 (1923), PP-26 and PP-27 (both 1922), and PW-22 (1927), for instance, could be characterized as "color memoranda."
- 18. Ruskin. Elements, 136.
- Ibid., ix, xii. Ruskin's views on creative imagination are elaborated in volumes of Modern Painters, which Still also owned.
- 20. Demetrion, 162.
- 21. These pastels include PP-845, PP-846, PP-847, PP-848, PP-849, and PP-850 (all 1925).
- Clyfford Still, letter to Weldon Schimke, 13 August 1927. Clyfford Still Museum Archives.
- 23. Thomas Hart Benton was also an instructor at the Art Students League in 1928 and 1929. Although Still's 1920s farm paintings have been associated with Benton's regionalism, Still chose to work with Vytlacil (1892–1984), an acolyte of Hans Hofmann.
- PD-10, PD-11, PD-13, PD-14, and PD-15 (all 1930) are representative examples.
- 25. Oil paintings PH-1001 and PH-616 (both 1929), also represent farm laborers, but the figures are seated or resting.
- Still regarded his portraits as mere "factual records," never part of his serious work. Clyfford Still, exh. cat. (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1976), 109.
- 27. Aside from PD-419 (1929) and the two canvases listed in note 25, the CSM collection includes only one other pre-1934 oil with a focus on the human figure, PH-784 (ca. 1924), which appears in a photograph of young Still at the easel. This photograph reveals that the painting's subject was originally a farmer plowing with horses, and was more about the horses than the farmer. The painting was later cut down and the horses eliminated.
- Still also depicted his wife's torso in a succinct pen-and-ink outline, PD-39 (1933), reminiscent of Matisse's drawings. Anfam suggests, however, that Still may have modeled his style on the reductive linearity of American cartoonist Al Frueh.
- Several WSC course catalogs with class descriptions from the 1930s and 1940s are posted online at https://research.libraries.wsu.edu/xmlui/ handle/2376/5781. Others are housed in Manuscripts and Special Collections, Holland Library, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington.

- 30. State College of Washington teaching notes, Clyfford Still Museum Archives.
- 31. The Colville Reservation was established in 1872. People from twelve different tribal groups were ultimately assigned to the reservation. In 1912–13, the Colville Indian Agency Headquarters was moved to the small town of Nespelem, Washington, a venue for Fourth of July celebrations that included weeklong, intertribal pow-wows attended by native people in new and heirloom regalia. Construction of the Columbia River's Grand Coulee Dam, which joins reservation land on its east end, began in 1933. Its consequences for reservation culture were severe: no provisions for a fish ladder were made for Grand Coulee, and by 1938, the progress of the dam had stopped all salmon from migrating upriver.
  - Still and Griffin were headquartered in Nespelem in 1936, and in 1937 established a Washington State Summer Art Colony there. The colony, designed primarily to attract art teachers and advanced students during their summer breaks, continued until 1940. Griffin taught portraiture. Still served as colony instructor in 1937 and 1938, in charge of landscape painting and composition.
- 32. Among Still's Colville drawings in the exhibition are PP-241, PP-485, PP-486, PP-489, and PP-494 (all 1936). In 2015, the Clyfford Still Museum mounted a broad survey of Still's reservation drawings and paintings, "Clyfford Still: The Colville Reservation and Beyond, 1934–1939," and published an exhibition catalogue with the same title.
- 33. There are oil paintings related to the second category as well: PH-423 (1927) for example, represents wooden buildings and sheds with missing side boards and a yard filled with debris. The two categories sometimes merge: in PH-422 (1929), for example, weathered sheds and broken fences coexist with sleek grain silos.
- 34. Ruskin. Elements, 91, 96.
- 35. Sidney Dickinson, letter to Elizabeth Ames, ca. March 1934. Ames correspondence, Box 289, Yaddo Records, The New York Public Library Special Collections. The Clyfford Still Museum Archives includes several genres of Still's period notes, including drawings with written notations; sketchbook pages with several rectangles containing fragmentary images, rehearsals for future production; cursory outlines for the basic compositional structure of paintings; fully articulated sketches; and color memoranda. Still also occasionally worked from photographs as aides mémoire.
- 36. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 108.
- 37. Reflecting on his mature production, Still proclaimed, "The figure stands behind it all." At its most simplistic, this statement might reference the shift of figurative imagery from observational works on paper to his mid-1930s oil-on-canvas "experiments in the manipulation of the human figure in the interests of interpretive design." Anfam analyzes the broader implications of Still's proclamation about the figure in his essay "Clyfford Still's Art: Between the Ouick and the Dead" in Demetrion, 21–28.
- 38. David Anfam, *Clyfford Still* (London: University of London at the Courtauld Institute of Art, 1984), 50.
- 39. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 109.
- 40. Ibid., 110.

- 41. I'm indebted to Clyfford Still Museum assistant curator and collections manager Bailey Placzek for her expertise in tracking relationships between Still's lithographs and his other past and contemporary paintings and drawings.
- 42. O'Neill, 181.
- 43. Betty Freeman, "Clyfford Still: A Study, 1968," 86. Betty Freeman Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
- 44. Even some of the Richmond drawings include not just vestiges of figuration but straightforward representational imagery: stalks of wheat appear in PH-547 (1943), for example, together with black fragments reminiscent of the head and arms of his mid-1930s mask head figures.
- 45. PH-726 (1936). Other examples of this imagery include PH-434 (1938) and PH-398 (1939). Anfam relates PH-726 to Picasso's 1903 La Vie. The ominous content of Still's depictions is also reminiscent of Max Ernst's conjoined amoebic figures in paintings such as The Kiss (1927).
- 46. The shapes in PH-674 (1944) reference the bones of intertwined couples as
- 47. David Anfam, "Repeat/Recreate: Still's Multiplying Vision," Repeat/ Recreate: Clyfford Still's Replicas, exh. cat. (Denver: Clyfford Still Museum Research Center, 2015), 52. Anfam relates this image, with its "twinned dark simulacra," to Still's "almost obsessive tendency to group his motifs in pairs," a trend that imbues some of these images with disquieting attributes of the uncanny.
- 48. "David Anfam on Abstract Expressionism," abstract critical (December 12, 2013) http://abstractcritical.com/note/david-anfam-on-abstract-expressionism/
- 49. O'Neill, 180.
- 50. Freeman, 66.
- 51. The drawing is PH-555, 1943. Oil on paper, 19 7/8 by 25 5/8 in. (50.4 x 65.1 cm). Still made two versions of the painting modeled after this small study, PH-235 (1944) in the Clyfford Still Museum collection, and PH-671 (1944), which belongs to New York's Museum of Modern Art. As Still explained, "(Sometimes) the importance of an idea or breakthrough merits survival on more than one stretch of canvas."
- 52. Thomas Kellein, ed. *Clyfford Still 1904–1980*, exh. cat. (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1992), 149.
- 53. Still executed a closely related composition as a 108 x 92 in. oil on canvas, PH-379, 1950 (1950-K-No. 1).
- Clyfford Still, letter to John Elmer Still, ca. 1953. Clyfford Still Museum Archives.
- 55. Clyfford Still, letter to Weldon Schimke, 1927. See note 22.
- 56. Harold Rosenberg, who introduced the term "action painting," later complained about misreadings of it. Action painting "is not a letting go, a surrender to instantaneity, except as a ruse," he insisted. Automatic drawing, however, was a source of inspiration for several of the first-generation Abstract Expressionists—notably Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko—although Still rejected the theoretical framework underpinning of these investigations. See *The Interpretive Link: Abstract Surrealism into Abstract Expressionism, Works on Paper, 1938–1948*, exh. cat. (Newport Beach, CA: Newport Harbor Museum of Art, 1986).

- 57. Freeman, 72.
- Clement Greenberg, "American-Type Painting," Art and Culture: Critical Essays by Clement Greenberg (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 211–12.
- ). Ibid., 22:
- Raymond Parker, quoted in Irving Sandler, The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the 1950s (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 11–12.
- 61. Robert Hughes, "The Tempest in a Paint Pot," *Time* (November 26, 1978),
- 62. Greenberg, 226.



The Exhibition



# The Draftsman

Clyfford Still was a prolific draftsman from an early age. His works on paper dating from before 1935—in various degrees of finish—number more than 500, more than all the extant works from the next fifteen years, many dating from the 1920s when Still was only in his twenties.

By depicting himself, members of his family, and even a dramatic skull, Still established drawing as a means to record what is essentially life and death. This human element balances his deep engagement with nature, which is evident in his depictions of the landscape.

#### New York Pastels

pp. 36-37

Executed in 1925 when Still was twenty-one years old, these sketches attest to his precocious handling of line and space. Created during his first trip to New York City, they also reveal an unknown side of Still's repertoire—namely, an eye for the urban scene that is reminiscent of the work of the so-called Ashcan School of early American modernism.





PD-70 (The Artist's Mother or "Reading Woman"), 1930 Graphite on paper  $8 \ ^{3}/\!\! \text{s x } 6 \ ^{4}/\!\! \text{2 in. } (21.3 \ x \ 16.5 \ \text{cm})$ 

PD-102, ca. 1931 Charcoal on paper 19 x 15 ½ in. (48.3 x 39.4 cm)

This somber image, reminiscent of the skulls that feature in Paul Cézanne's late work, is a virtuoso exercise in light and shade, and also echoes the importance of human anatomy in Still's paintings (see also the Anatomy notecards, p. 73).



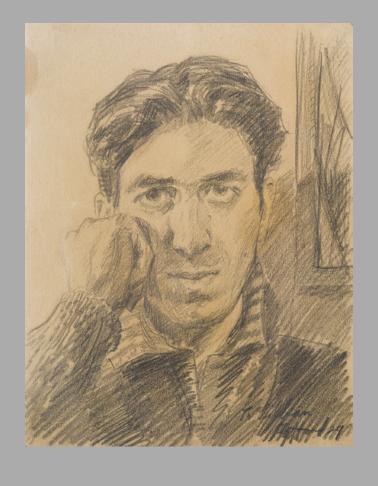


PD-28 (Portrait of the Artist's Mother), 1928 Graphite on paper 11 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 8 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (29.5 x 21.9 cm)

PD-1 (Portrait of the Artist's Father), 1924 Pen and ink on paper  $7\ ^{1}\!\!/_{2} x \ 6\ ^{1}\!\!/_{8} in. \ (19.1 \ x \ 15.6 \ cm)$ 







PD-29 (Self Portrait), 1925 Graphite on paper 8 <sup>7</sup>/s x 6 in. (22.5 x 15.2 cm)

PD-2 (Portrait of the Artist's Mother), 1924 Pen and ink on paper 8 ¾ x 7 ½ in. (22.2 x 19.1 cm)

PD-12 (Self Portrait), 1929 Graphite on paper 11 ½ x 8 in. (29.2 x 20.3 cm)





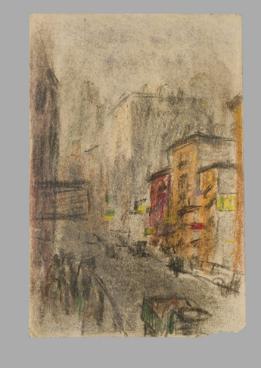
PP-850, 1925 Pastel on paper 5 \(^5/8\) x 8 \(^1/2\) in. (14.3\) x 21.6 cm)

PP-845, 1925 Pastel on paper 5 1/8 x 8 1/8 in. (14.9 x 22.5 cm)









PP-846, 1925 Pastel on paper 5 1/8 x 8 1/8 in. (14.9 x 22.5 cm)

PP-848, 1925 Pastel on paper 5 1/8 x 8 1/8 in. (14.9 x 22.5 cm)

PP-847, 1925 Pastel on paper 5 1/8 x 8 1/8 in. (14.9 x 22.5 cm) PP-849, 1925 Pastel on paper 8 ½ x 5 ½ in. (22.5 x 14.9 cm)



# Landscape

Works made between 1923 and 1936 exemplify Still's early interest in recording the world around him, especially the landscape, as well as the other most enduring theme in his oeuvre: the figure. Sketches that capture motion riding, plowing, digging—coexist with studies of grain elevators and other buildings that stress robust structure. Since drawing necessarily involves simplification—threedimensional volumes become two-dimensional planes and lines—it always entails a certain degree of abstraction. Early on, Still drew inspiration from this aspect of the medium. His pastels and watercolors of the Alberta landscape were strikingly abstract for their time, almost as though the stroke of the brush or the crayon condensed the scenery into an idea rather than an illustration. The pastel stick itself provided a readymade mix of color and linemaking.

From the Renaissance onward, the Old Masters extracted diverse possibilities from draftsmanship. On the one hand, drawings could be quick, realistic studies—made on the spot—which became the basis for more elaborate, highly considered paintings. On the other hand, works on paper were sometimes conceived as fully finished, complex pieces in and of themselves. Still followed this bifurcated lineage. For example, in his graphite sketches of farm labor on the Alberta prairies during the 1920s and '30s, Still explored both directions: the spontaneous and sensual,



and the deliberate and austere. Furthermore, by playing with the two contrasting drawing modes, he overcame the restrictive Renaissance distinction between drawing (disegno) and coloring (colore), instead creating an art in which one dynamic fueled the other.

#### Structures

pp. 42-43

These architectural structures reflect the angular, faceted style of treating masses that is found in the mature art of Paul Cézanne (about whom Still wrote a master's thesis in 1935). Their verticality also turns them into stalwart surrogates for the upright human presence.

### Early Farm/Worker Studies pp. 44-45

Drawing requires a rigor and skill that expose a maker's ability in a way that painting, with its more seductive materiality, can readily disguise. Still's works on paper—in particular, the graphite studies of Alberta farm workers—show that he was a natural draftsman. In his writings, Still insisted on the importance of the "hand" as an extension of the eye and mind. This idea reveals a philosophical dimension in Still's practice: it implies that his incisive draftsmanship was the physical embodiment of his innermost sensibilities.

#### Color Studies

pp. 46-49

These early pastel and watercolor landscapes depict a central concern with space—conceived alternately as a desolate emptiness or as ethereal fields of color. Significantly, Still later recalled, "[J. M. W.] Turner painted the sea, but to me the prairie was just as grand."

PW-29, 1929 (detail). Watercolor on paper,  $7 \frac{7}{8} \times 11 \frac{1}{4}$  in. (18.1 x 28.6 cm).









PDX-65, ca. 1930 Graphite on paper 12 x 9 in. (30.5 x 22.9 cm)

PDX-21, ca. 1930 Graphite and crayon on paper 9 x 12 in. (22.9 x 30.5 cm) PDX-245 (verso), ca. 1930 Graphite on paper 9 x 6 in. (22.9 x 15.2 cm)

PDX-246, ca. 1930 Graphite on paper 5 x 8 in. (12.7 x 20.3 cm)







PW-1, 1931 Watercolor on paper 10 <sup>5</sup>/s x 13 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (27 x 33.7 cm) PW-4.1, 1931 Watercolor on paper 10 ½ x 14 ½ in. (26 x 36.2 cm)

PH-655, 1928 Oil on paper 12 x 19 in. (30.5 x 48.3 cm)

The distinctly sloped line seen here in the askew trajectory of the train's smoke reappears throughout Still's career. After its emergence in his early landscape works, it develops in the 1940s as a figural reference [see, for example, PH-547 (1943), oil on paper] and later becomes a key compositional element in his abstractions [PH-696 (1970), oil on poster board].

















PD-101, 1936 Graphite on paper 9 3/4 x 12 1/4 in. (24.8 x 31.1 cm)

PD-56, 1931 Graphite on paper 8 1/8 x 11 1/8 in. (22.5 x 30.2 cm) PD-13, 1930 Graphite on paper 8  $^{7}/_{8}$  x 11  $^{7}/_{8}$  in. (22.5 x 30.2 cm)

PD-15, 1930 Graphite on paper 8 1/8 x 11 1/8 in. (22.5 x 30.2 cm)

Still often made certain internal elements and passages within individual works—here, the two men facing one another—echo each other, suggesting that doubling and repetition were important aspects of his art.

PD-16, 1930 Graphite on paper 9 x 12 in. (22.9 x 30.5 cm)

PD-10, 1930 Graphite on paper 9 x 12 in. (22.9 x 30.5 cm) PD-65 (The Grain Wagon), 1931 Graphite on paper 8 1/8 x 11 1/8 in. (22.5 x 30.2 cm)

PD-11, 1930 Graphite on paper 9 x 11 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (22.9 x 30.1 cm)







PP-27, 1922 Pastel on paper 4 ½ x 6 in. ( 10.5 x 15.1 cm)

PP-26, 1922 Pastel on paper 5 1/8 x 8 3/4 in. (14.9 x 22.2 cm)

PP-25, 1922 Pastel on paper 8 ¾ x 11 ¾ in. (22.2 x 29.9 cm)





PP-482, 1923 Pastel on paper 7 ¾ x 11 ¾ in. (19.7 x 29.8 cm)

PP-842, 1923 Pastel on paper 7 x 10 in. (17.8 x 25.4 cm)









PW-29, 1929 Watercolor on paper 7 1/s x 11 1/4 in. (18.1 x 28.6 cm)

PW-30, 1925 Watercolor on paper 7 x 10 in. (17.8 x 25.4 cm) PW-18, 1923 Watercolor on paper 8 ½ x 11 ¼ in. (21.6 x 28.6 cm)

PW-22, 1927 Watercolor on paper 5 \(^1/4\) x 6 \(^7/8\) in. (13.3 x 17.5 cm)



PW-3, 1930 Watercolor on paper 10 ½ x 11 ½ in. (25.7 x 30.2 cm)





PW-9, 1923 Watercolor and gouache on paper 7 ½ x 10 ¾ in. (19.1 x 27.3 cm)

PW-6 (Lake Moraine), 1929 Watercolor on paper 7 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 11 in. (19.7 x 27.9 cm)



#### PW-11, 1930 Watercolor on paper

#### 8 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 11 in. (22.2 x 30.5 cm)

Painted when Still was twenty-six years old, after several graphite and pen and ink studies, this watercolor shows his precocious command of the medium and is executed in a style reminiscent of Winslow Homer. Typically, there is symbolism: the crows and dead animals picture a landscape of wintry death.



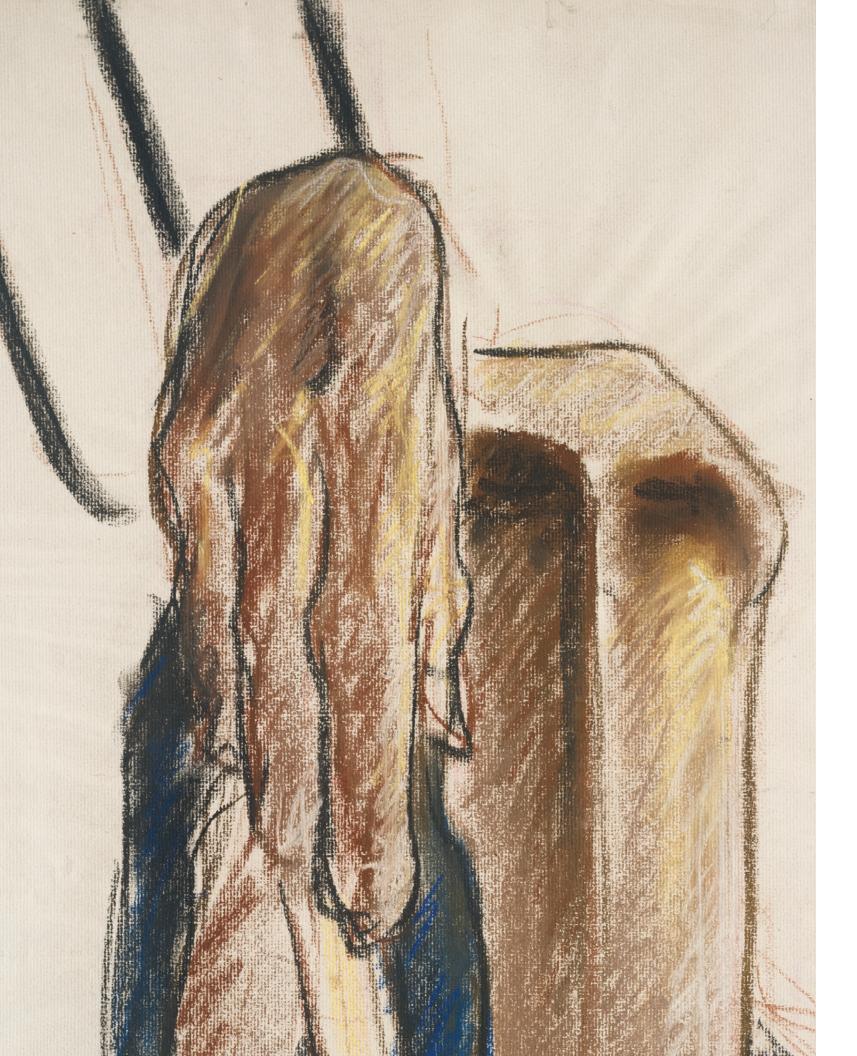
# The Figure

Still always stressed that the figure, nature, and the landscape were the three essential components of his art. During the 1930s, he created an ensemble of several moderately large drawings in charcoal and pastel using his wife, Lillian Battan, as a model. These studies add a relatively unexpected dimension to the well-known image of Still as a radical abstractionist: Still could draw with ease in a highly conventional—indeed, almost academic—manner. Furthermore, the choice of a feminine subject proved significant. In the years ahead, when Still began to treat the figure far more imaginatively, certain of his demonic and monstrous presences—as seen in a 1935 pastel (PP-4) and two lithographs from 1943–44—retained feminine traits such as long hair.

#### Nespelem

pp. 60-61

In contrast to these conventional works, Still produced a substantial group of pastels during the summer of 1936, when he spent time at the Nespelem reservation of the Colville Confederated Tribes in northeastern Washington State. These delicate and refined images range from elaborate portraits of the Native Americans to deft records of their attire, dwellings, and environment. The drawings are distinguished by their coloring, involving vivid notes of violet, orange, and lemon yellow. These idiosyncratic hues return, transformed, in Still's abstractions.



### Pen-and-Ink Drawings

p. 62

Two distinct pen-and-ink drawings display Still's skill in that medium. The first depicts a flapper—broken down into distinct flattened shapes—in a rare instance of almost wry, anecdotal observation. The second drawing is macabre: crisp outlines delineate a skeletal head and hand reminiscent of Frankenstein's monster.

### Two Lithographs

p. 63

These two prints are from a series of twenty-one lithographs created between 1943 and 1944, and stem from earlier paintings. The drama of their chiaroscuro (a contrast of light and dark), which includes a bright sun and gleaming axe-head set against shadowy bodies, reflects Still's Manichaeanism: an ancient philosophy that envisions a dualistic universe in which darkness and light (and good and evil) contend.

PP-7, 1935 (detail). Pastel on paper, 25 x  $18\frac{1}{2}$  in. (63.5 x 47 cm).





PD-19, 1933 Charcoal on paper 25 x 19 in. (63.5 x 48.3 cm)

PD-20, 1933 Charcoal on paper 25 x 19 in. (63.5 x 48.3 cm)







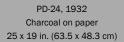
PP-8 (Portrait of Lillian Augusta Battan Still), 1933 Pastel on paper 25 x 19 in. (63.5 x 48.3 cm)

PP-5, 1933 Pastel on paper 25 x 19 in. (63.5 x 48.3 cm)

PP-6, 1933 Pastel on paper 25 x 19 in. (63.5 x 48.3 cm)







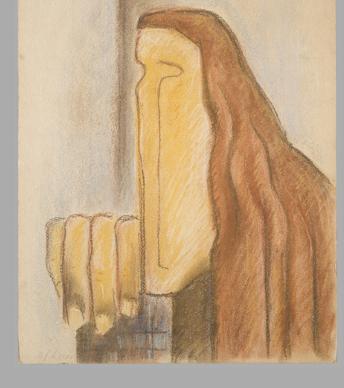
Here, Still portrays his first wife, Lillian Battan Still, wearing a dress printed with distinctive multipetal flowers. Curiously, a similarly shaped flower appears in PH-753 (1938) (oil on canvas, CSM) as the figure's eye, suggesting that the abstracted figure shown in the later work may also be a representation of Lillian.

PD-18, 1933 Charcoal on paper 25 x 19 in. (63.5 x 48.3 cm)



PD-21, 1932 Charcoal on paper 25 x 19 in. (63.5 x 48.3 cm)





PP-7, 1935 Pastel on paper 25 x 18 ½ in. (63.5 x 47 cm)

Still's many pastels often belie the stereotyped perception of his art as an abstract treatment of craggy, sublime landscapes. Indeed, his work in pastel could be by turns delicate, incisive, and imaginative—as in this macabre recasting of the farmer from Grant Wood's American Gothic (1930).

PP-4, 1935 Pastel on paper 24 ½ x 19 in. (62.2 x 48.3 cm)





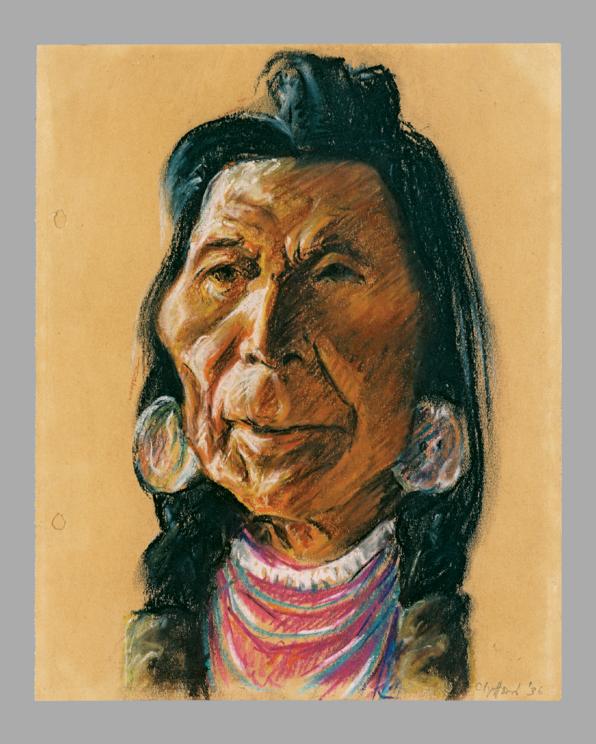




PP-485, 1936 Pastel on paper 9 x 12 in. (22.9 x 30.5 cm)

PP-494, 1936 Pastel on paper 9 x 12 in. (22.9 x 30.5 cm) PP-489, 1936 Crayon on paper 9 x 12 in. (22.8 x 30.5 cm)

PP-486, 1936 Pastel on paper 9 x 12 in. (22.9 x 30.5 cm)



PP-241 (Portrait of Willie Andrews), 1936
Pastel on paper
12 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 9 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (31.1 x 24.7 cm)
Still's portrait of Willie Andrews reveals not only his sympathy for Native Americans, but also his deft touch and rich use of color.





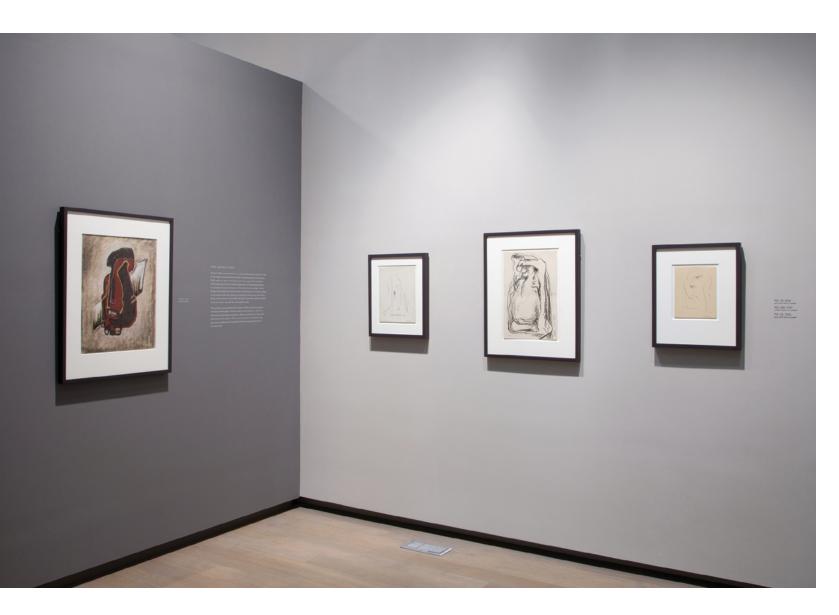




PDX-128, ca. 1923–33 Graphite, pen and ink on paper 12 x 9 in. (30.5 x 22.7 cm) PD-58, 1935 Pen and ink on paper 11 ½ x 8 in. (29.2 x 20.3 cm)

Still often employed line to capture the essence of a subject, subsequently reinforcing it with shading, volumes and planes. In this iconic early portrayal of a man's head and hand, the anatomy is reduced to bare tracery. Remarkably, here Still tapped the period's popular culture—specifically Hollywood's Frankenstein (1931) and Bride of Frankenstein (1935) movies—for the skeletal hand and skull-like profile of his ominous personage.

PL-21.7, 1943 Lithograph 15 ½ x 11 ¼ in. (39.4 x 28.6 cm) PL-11.1, 1944 Lithograph 14 <sup>5</sup>/8 x 11 ½ in. (37 x 29.2 cm)



## First Abstractions

The late 1930s and early 1940s was a fascinating period for Still's practice, as his output swung between the poles of representation and abstraction. The works on paper from this time were part of Still's reinterpretation of his own artistic approach and of representational art as a whole. In virtually all cases, they feature upright, slender shapes that replace his earlier work's images of people, architecture, and machines. Now reduced to compelling contours and other linear forms, their presence is intensified through the pictorial qualities inherent to his oil, pastel, pen-and-ink, and graphite media.

### Drawing/Painting/Process

p. 72

It was common for Still to revisit pictorial ideas from his past, lending them new life. In certain examples, the compositions have been transposed across media, each relying on the inherent properties of their respective media and techniques to determine their ultimate makeup. For example, the forms in PH-536 are more tightly composed than those in PP-128, a parallel pastel work with a lighter, more ethereal presence accentuated by the medium's powdery nature.



"Notes"

p. 73

The small "notes" (as Still called them) presented here reveal very early examples of the artist mapping, in microcosm, abstract compositions that test various arrangements of color, surface, line, and shape.

#### Anatomy Sketches

p. 73

Still's burgeoning abstraction was based in perception, drawing, and draftsmanship. From his earliest years, Still observed life around him, pursuing the study of human anatomy during his formal art training. He progressively reduced these figurative images into cryptic symbols: lines, outlines, volumes, and planes.

### San Francisco Shipbuilding Sketches

pp. 74-75

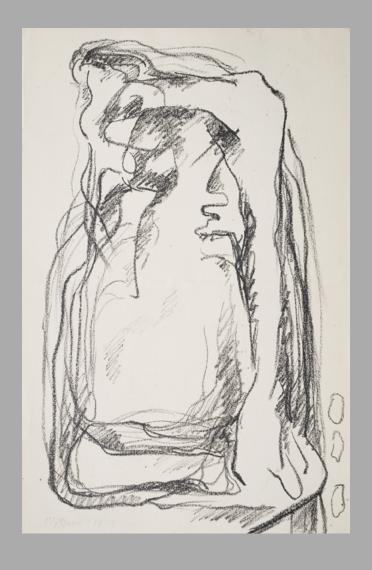
In 1941, when the United States entered World War II, Still relocated to the San Francisco Bay Area. There, he worked in shipbuilding and aircraft construction for the war. These sketches, drawn from the Clyfford Still Museum Archives, feature the cranes, pulleys, and mechanical devices Still saw at work. He regarded these studies as a type of visual notetaking. They range from highly representational watercolors and blueprintlike studies to more cryptic small sketches in graphite, all showing Still's continual interest in compelling upright forms.

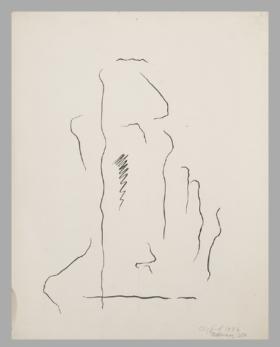
#### Fine Art Prints

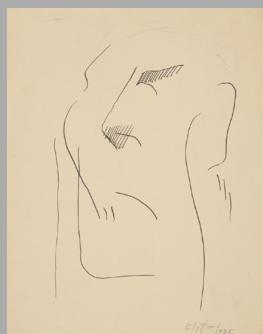
pp. 76-77

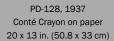
This period is also marked by the occurrence of Still's only fine art prints, executed in lithography, etching, woodcut, and silkscreen—nearly the full array of printmaking techniques. They foreshadow the flattened space and otherworldliness of his signature Abstract Expressionist works of the later 1940s.

PH-550, 1942 (detail). Oil on paper, 16  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 11  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (41.9 x 29.2 cm).









PD-59, 1936 Pen and ink on paper 14 x 11 in. (35.6 x 27.9 cm)

PD-25, 1935 Pen and ink on paper  $10^{3}/_{8} \times 8^{1}/_{8}$  in. (26.4 x 20.6 cm)







PN-11, 1939 Pastel on paper 11 ¼ x 6 ½ in. (28.6 x 16.5 cm)

PN-12, 1939 Pastel on paper 10 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 6 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (26.9 x 17.1 cm)

PP-227, 1937 Pastel on paper 25 x 19 in. (63.5 x 48.3 cm)













PN-10, 1939 Pastel on paper 10 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 5 in. (27.3 x 12.7 cm) PN-13, 1939 Pastel on paper 10 x 4 ½ in. (25.4 x 11.4 cm) PSS-1, 1936 Silkscreen 16 ½ x 9 ¾ in. (41.9 x 24.8 cm) PH-457, 1942-43 Oil on paper 19 ½ x 12 ½ in. (48.7 x 31.8 cm) PH-550, 1942 Oil on paper 16 ½ x 11 ½ in. (41.9 x 29.2 cm)

The vertical projections seen in this oil on paper are a recurrent theme in Still's visual vocabulary. While it may allude to vegetation and the rising wheat stalks familiar to Still from his time in rural Alberta, it is also found in his early sketches of animal skeletons with their ribcages silhouetted against the sky and in his mechanistic abstractions from the 1940s. See, for example, PN-4 (1939), pastel and crayon on paper; and PH-482 (1943), oil on paper.

PH-530, 1942 Oil on paper 19 x 12 ½ in. (48.3 x 31.8 cm)





PL-16.9 (Figure), 1944 Lithograph 13 ½ x 4 ¾ in. (33.3 x 12.1 cm)

PH-536, 1943 Oil on paper 20 x 13 in. (50.8 x 33 cm)





PE-5.1, 1941 Etching 7 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 3 in. (19.7 x 7.6 cm)

PP-128, 1952 Pastel on paper 17 5/s x 12 in. (44.8 x 30.5 cm)





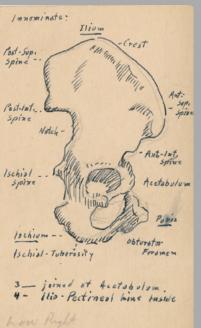


PN-1, 1942 Pastel on paper 7 ½ x 10 ½ in. (19.1 x 26.7 cm)

PN-2, 1942 Pastel on paper 8 x 10 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (20.3 x 27.3 cm)

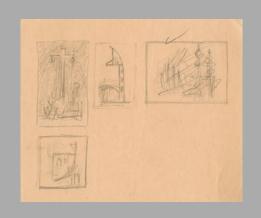
PN-4, 1939 Pastel on paper 11 ¼ x 8 in. (28.6 x 20.3 cm)





Anatomical studies, ca. 1935 Ink and graphite on paper each 5 x 3 in. (12.7 x 7.6 cm)

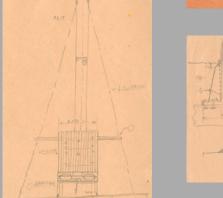
A selection of eighty-one hand-drawn anatomical notecard studies discovered in the Clyfford Still Museum Archives suggest that Still was an avid student of human anatomy.

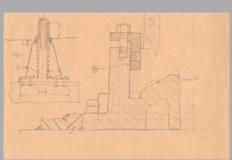




















PNX-36, ca. 1941 Graphite on paper 4 x 4 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (10.2 x 11.7 cm)

PDX-270, ca. 1941 Graphite on paper 6 x 4 in. (15.2 x 10.2 cm) PDX-269, ca. 1941 Graphite on paper 6 x 4 in. (15.2 x 10.2 cm)

PDX-273, ca. 1941 Graphite on paper 6 x 4 in. (15.2 x 10.2 cm) PDX-277, ca. 1941 Graphite on paper 6 1/s x 3 1/2 in. (15.6 x 8.9 cm)

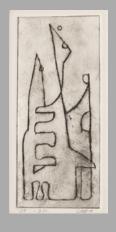
PDX-271, ca. 1941 Graphite on paper 3 x 5 in. (7.6 x 12.7 cm)

PDX-268, ca. 1941 Graphite on paper 4 x 6 in. (10.2 x 15.2 cm) PNX-25, ca. 1941 Graphite, watercolor, pen and ink on paper 11 x 8 ½ in. (27.9 x 21.6 cm) PNX-41, ca. 1941 Watercolor and graphite on paper  $4 \times 3^{1/8}$  in.  $(10.2 \times 7.9 \text{ cm})$ 

PNX-42, ca. 1941 Watercolor and graphite on paper 3  $^{1/4}$  x 2  $^{3/6}$  in. (8.3 x 6 cm)

PNX-40, ca. 1941 Watercolor and graphite on paper  $4\,^3/\!\!/ s$  x  $2\,^4/\!\!/ 2$  in. (11.1 x 6.4 cm)

PNX-45, ca. 1941 Graphite on paper 5 3/4 x 5 1/2 in. (14.6 x 13.9 cm)









PE-2.3, 1939 Etching 6 x 2 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (15.2 x 7 cm)

PL-18.1, 1943 Lithograph 12 <sup>7</sup>/s x 8 ¾ in. (32.7 x 22.2 cm) Related to PH-93 (1944), oil on paper. PL-8.5, 1943 Lithograph 12 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 7 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (32.4 x 19.1 cm)

PL-6.7, 1943 Lithograph 10 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 8 in. (27.3 x 20.3 cm)









PL-12.5, 1943 Lithograph 10 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 8 in. (27.3 x 20.3 cm)

PL-10.4, 1943 Lithograph 11 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 9 in. (29.9 x 22.9 cm) PL-19.1, 1943 Lithograph 13 x 8 ¼ in. (33 x 21 cm) PL-9.1, 1943 Lithograph 12 ¾ x 8 ¾ in. (41.6 x 30.2 cm)



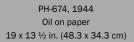
### The Richmond Oils

In late 1943, Still moved to Richmond, Virginia, where he took a teaching position at what is now Virginia Commonwealth University. Over the following eighteen months, the artist made roughly one hundred drawings almost exclusively with oil paint. Many of these compositions (PH-480, PH-488, PH-536) later progressed into large paintings on canvas.

These often mysterious works on paper are in fact quite revealing about how Still synthesized various representational forms into abstract lines, profiles, and marks (for example, the suggestion of a head, torso, and stalks of wheat are found in PH-547). On the other hand, many others constitute Still's most abstract compositions to date (PH-535, for example).

As with his paintings, Still executed many of these drawings with a palette knife rather than a brush, perhaps because a knife produces a more incisive, tactile mark. Still's technique emphasizes draftsmanship—arguably to a greater extent than those of his Abstract Expressionist colleagues. Silhouettes, crisp dabs of pigment, meticulously traced and sculpted contours, and slender vertical strokes (which the artist called "life lines" to denote their vitality) seem to define the immanence of lurking inner forces.









PH-93, 1944 Oil on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm) Related to PL-18 (1943), lithograph.

PH-492, 1943
Oil on paper
19 1/8 x 13 1/8 in. (50.5 x 33.5 cm)
Exhibited at Richmond Professional Institute, 1945, and in Still's first New York one-person exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery, 1946.









PH-547, 1943 Oil on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm) PH-488, 1943 Oil on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm) PH-483, 1943 Oil on paper 17  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 12  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (43.8 x 31.8 cm)

In this work, as in many from this time, traces of figuration are still evident, here in the bonelike diagonal form that seems to end in a hand in the lower left corner.

PH-482, 1943 Oil on paper 19 x 12 ½ in. (48.3 x 31.8 cm)





PH-545, 1943 Oil on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

PH-496, 1943 Oil on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)





PH-498, 1943 Oil on paper 18 ½ x 12 in. (46.2 x 30.5 cm)

PH-528, 1943 Oil on paper 19 x 11 ½ in. (48.3 x 29.2 cm)



PH-481, 1943 Oil on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)





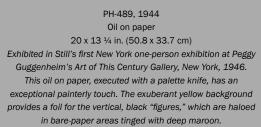
PH-478, 1944 Oil on paper 26 x 20 in. (66 x 50.8 cm)

PH-527, 1944 Oil on paper 19 1/8 x 12 in. (48.7 x 30.5 cm)



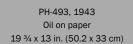
PH-515, 1945
Oil on paper
26 x 19 ½ in. (66 x 49.5 cm)
Exhibited in Still's first New York one-person exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery, 1946.











PH-525, 1943 Oil on paper 20 x 13 in. (50.8 x 33 cm)





PH-534, 1944 Oil on paper 19 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 13 in. (50.2 x 33 cm)

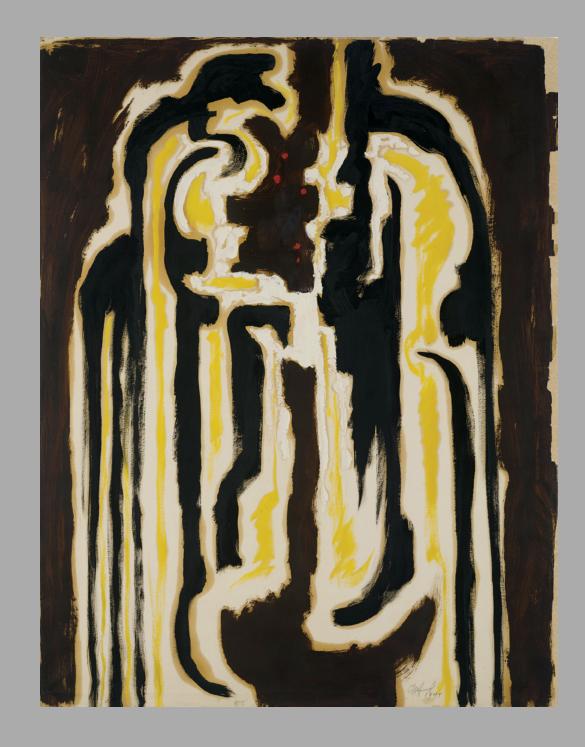
PH-539, 1944 Oil on paper 20 x 13 ¼ in. (50.8 x 33.7 cm)

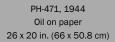


PH-464, 1944
Oil on paper
22 x 17 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (55.9 x 43.8 cm)
Exhibited at Richmond Professional Institute, 1945, and in Still's first New York one-person exhibition at Peggy
Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery, New York, 1946.



PHX-13 (Fear), 1945
Oil on paper
25 ¾ x 19 ½ in. (65.4 x 49.5 cm)
Private Collection, Denver, Colorado.
This drawing was initially owned by Betty Parsons, whose eponymous gallery nurtured the careers of many of the Abstract Expressionists.





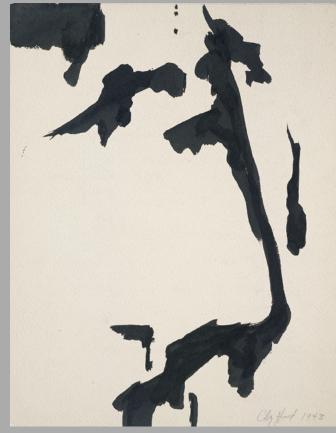




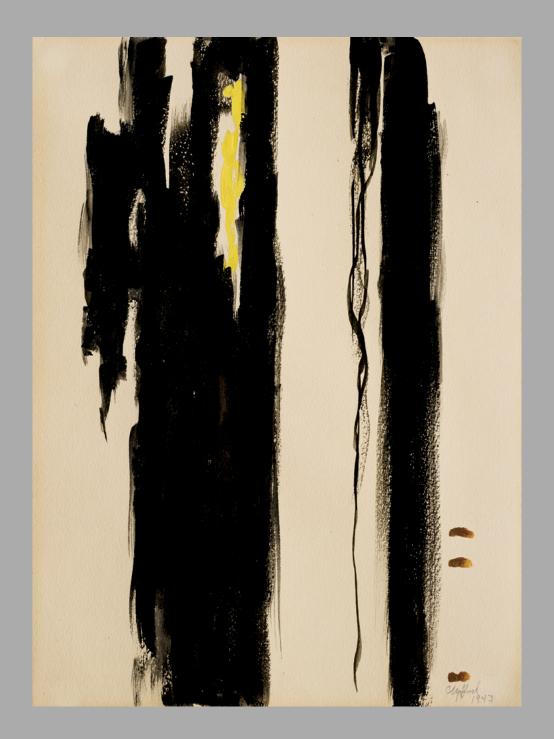
PH-523, 1944
Oil on paper
26 x 19 ½ in. (66 x 49.5 cm)
Exhibited in Still's first New York one-person exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's Art
of This Century Gallery, 1946, and at Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1947.

PH-469, 1943-44 Oil on paper 26 x 20 in. (66 x 50.8 cm)

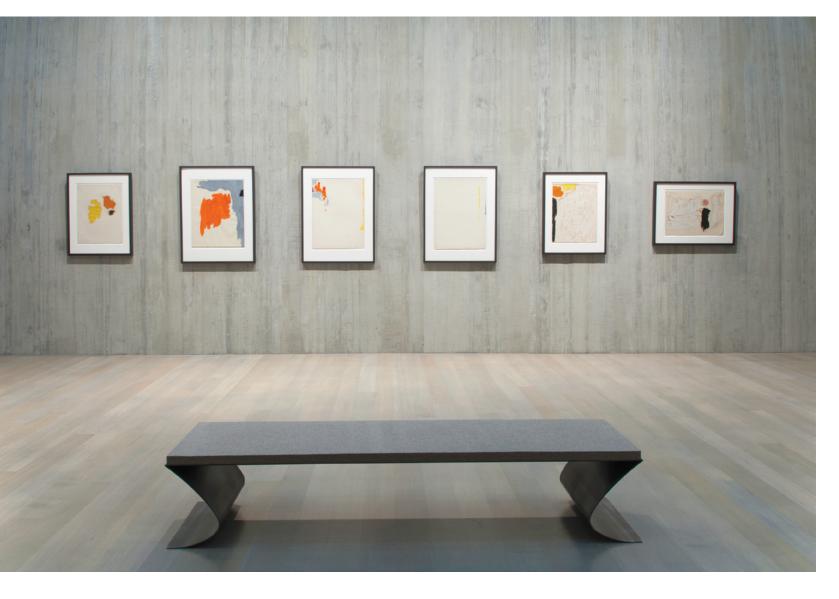




PH-507, 1943 Watercolor on board 17 ½ x 14 ½ in. (44.5 x 36.8 cm) PH-508, 1943 Watercolor on board 17 1/8 x 13 1/4 in. (43.5 x 33.7 cm)



PH-535, 1943
Oil on paper
18 x 11 in. (45.7 x 27.9 cm)
Exhibited at Richmond Professional Institute, 1945, and in Still's first New York one-person exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery, 1946.
Among the many drawings Still made during his prolific Richmond period are several near-total abstractions, such as this drawing, which predicts the imagery of his Abstract Expressionist paintings of the later 1940s.

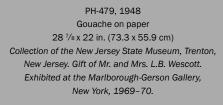


### San Francisco

In 1946, Still accepted a teaching position at what is now the San Francisco Art Institute. Despite a relative surge in drawing output during the first half of the 1940s, his works on paper number fewer than forty in the second half. Although it is tempting to attribute this scarcity to his busy teaching schedule, before Still left for New York in 1950 he made more than a hundred paintings on canvas, which are arguably some of the greatest paintings of his career. Thus, it is more likely that Still used this time to nurture his advancing style in the larger, more dramatic format of stretched canvases.

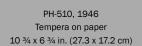
Certain late-1940s works on paper closely mirror the direction of Still's paintings, such as PH-479 (1948) and the tour de force PH-455 (1949), both of which boast dense, richly rendered imagery executed in high-key color. Special attention should also be given, however, to a less typical group of works, which emphasize large areas of bare paper that become expressive passages of "silence" within each composition. While areas of undrawn paper and unpainted canvas were not uncommon in Still's earlier 1940s production, these austere images represent his most daring use of this technique until the 1960s, when it became a fundamental characteristic of his late works.





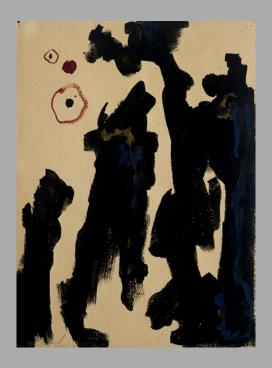






PW-24, 1946 Gouache and watercolor on paper 11 x 8  $^{1}/_{8}$  in. (27.9 x 20.6 cm)





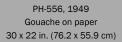
PW-28, 1946 Watercolor on paper 10 5/8 X 13 3/4 in. (27 x 34.9 cm)

PH-505, 1946 Gouache on paper 15 x 11 in. (38.1 x 27.9 cm)









PH-456, 1949 Gouache on paper 29 ½ x 22 in. (74.9 x 55.9 cm)

PH-466, 1950 Oil on paper 25 x 19 in. (63.5 x 48.3 cm)







PH-573, 1949 Gouache on paper 27 ½ x 21 ½ in. (69.9 x 54.6 cm)

PH-467, 1950 Oil on paper 19 x 25 in. (48.3 x 63.5 cm) PH-465, 1950 Oil on paper 25 x 19 in. (63.5 x 48.3 cm)





PH-513, 1946 Tempera on paper 15 ½ x 14 in. (39.4 x 35.6 cm) PH-557, 1949 Gouache on paper 22 x 15 in. (55.9 x 38.1 cm)



PH-455, 1949 Gouache on paper 30 x 22 in. (76.2 x 55.9 cm)

Made near the end of his fertile time in San Francisco, this gouache on paper, one of the largest drawings Still ever made, is a masterwork of his Abstract Expressionist period. Though seemingly non-objective, the three horizontal lines at the bottom of the yellow form correspond to ribs seen in earlier figural works, suggesting that the maroon form on the right could also be viewed as a figure in dialogue with the yellow one. Later in his career, Still declared, "The figure stands behind all my work."









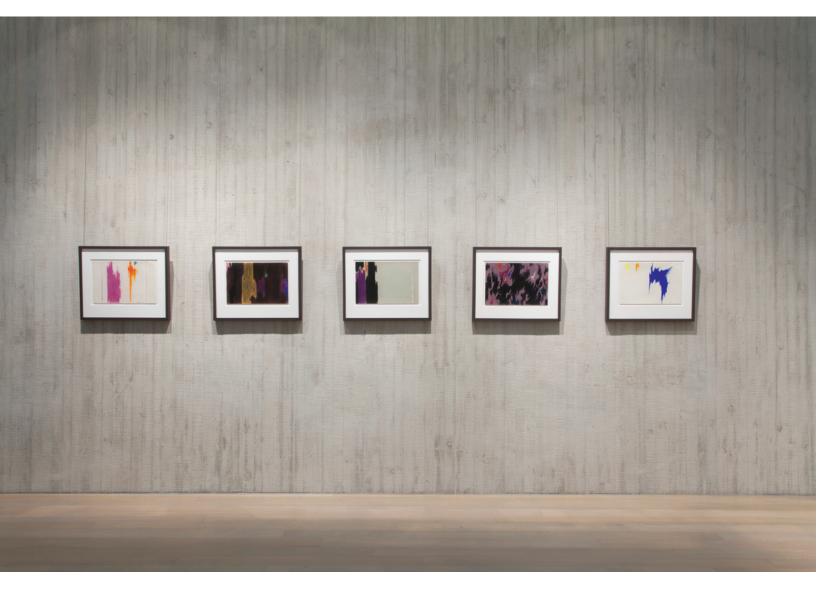




PP-1047, 1950 Pastel on paper 5 x 7 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (12.7 x 19.7 cm)

These small pastels are from a group of twenty-five that seem to have been taken from a single small, spiral-bound sketchbook. Dating from the height of Abstract Expressionism, they signal Still's return to pastel, a medium that he used for most of his drawings from this point forward.

PP-1046, 1949 Pastel on paper 5 x 7 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (12.7 x 19.7 cm) PP-182, 1952 Pastel on paper 5 x 7 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (12.7 x 19.7 cm) PP-639, 1950 Pastel on paper 5 x 7 ¾ in. (12.7 x 19.7 cm) PP-1042, 1949 Pastel on paper 5 x 7 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (12.7 x 19.7 cm) PP-1049, 1949 Pastel on paper 5 x 7 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (12.7 x 19.7 cm)



# New York City

In 1950, Still began an eleven-year sojourn in New York City. By withdrawing his work from public exhibition and sale the following year, Still strove to take control over how his art was seen. With this liberation from the mainstream art world came a renewed sense of artistic clarity and drive. Still executed almost the same number of canvases as works on paper (roughly 280) during his time in New York, demonstrating the pivotal role drawing continued to play in his visualization and working processes.

With the exception of a few watercolors, Still's works on paper from this time are almost all done in pastel, a medium familiar to him from his youth in Alberta, and one that intensifies the immediacy of markmaking, surface materiality, and dramatic color that characterize his canvases from this period. Though a few pastels from this phase relate directly to later paintings (PP-136, for example, is a study for a painting created nearly twenty years later), most of them are independent explorations of form and composition.





PW-25, 1949 Watercolor on paper

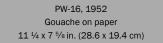
7 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 5 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (19.7 x 14.3 cm)

PW-26, 1949

Gouache and watercolor on paper

6 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 5 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (16.8 x 14.6 cm)







PWX-4, ca. 1950 Watercolor and gouache on paper 8 % x 5 in. (21.3 x 12.7 cm)



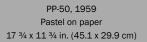


PWX-10, ca. 1950 Gouache and watercolor on paper  $6\,^{1/4}$  x  $5\,^{1/8}$  in. (15.9 x 13 cm)

PWX-13, ca. 1950 Watercolor on paper 7 ½ x 5 ¾ in. (18.1 x 14.6 cm)







PP-219, 1958 Pastel on paper 13 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 11 in. (34.9 x 27.9 cm)





PP-155, 1956 Pastel on paper 13 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 11 in. (34.9 x 27.9 cm)

PP-197, 1953 Pastel on paper 13 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 11 in. (34.9 x 27.9 cm)





PP-145, 1956 Pastel on paper 17 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 11 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (44.8 x 29.9 cm)

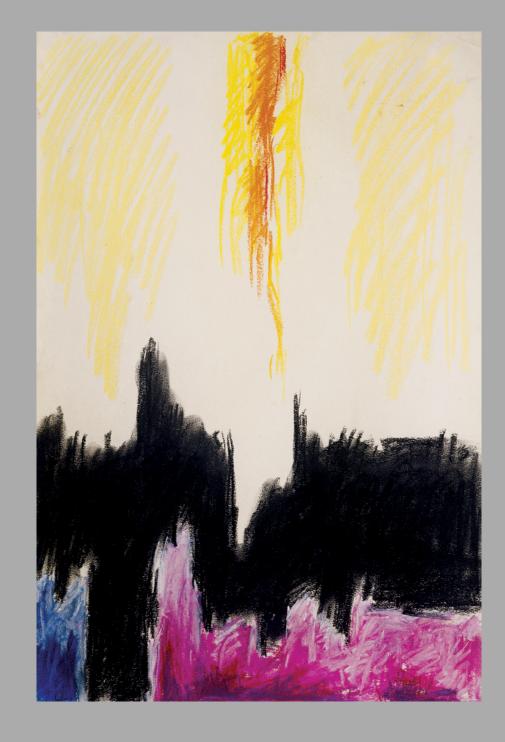
PP-42, 1959 Pastel on paper 17 1/8 x 11 1/8 in. (45.4 x 30.2 cm)





PP-216, 1958 Pastel on paper 13 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 11 in. (34.9 x 27.9 cm)

PP-95, 1959 Pastel on paper 17 ½ x 12 ¾ in. (44.45 x 32.4 cm)

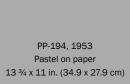


PP-115, 1959
Pastel on paper
17 ½ x 11 ¾ in. (44.5 x 29.9 cm)

Many of Still's drawings feature areas of bare paper. He believed that emptiness and voids could be as expressive as drawn passages, much like rests in music or pauses in language.







PP-188, 1951 Pastel on paper 13 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 11 in. (34.9 x 27.9 cm)



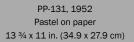


PP-63, 1958 Pastel on paper 13 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 11 in. (34.6 x 27.9 cm)

PP-62, 1958 Pastel on paper 13 5/s x 11 in. (34.6 x 27.9 cm)







PP-336, 1951 Pastel on paper 12 x 9 in. (30.5 x 22.8 cm)

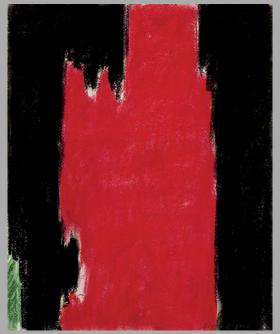




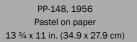
PP-11, 1958 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

PP-15, 1956 Pastel on paper 13 5/8 x 11 in. (34.6 x 27.9 cm)









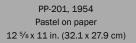
PP-104, 1952 Pastel on paper 13 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 11 in. (34.9 x 27.9 cm)



PP-252, 1955 Pastel on paper 12 x 9 in. (30.5 x 22.8 cm)

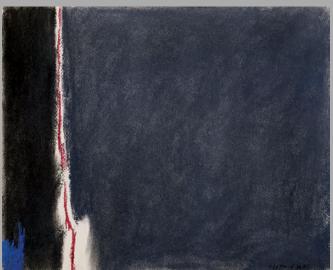






PP-187, 1950 Pastel on paper 13 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 11 in. (34.9 x 27.9 cm)









PP-101, 1958 Pastel on paper 11 x 13 ¾ in. (27.9 x 34.9 cm)

PP-278, 1954 Pastel on paper 9 x 12 in. (22.9 x 30.5 cm) PP-22, 1951 Pastel on paper 11 x 13 ¾ in. (27.9 x 34.9 cm)

PP-295, 1954 Pastel on paper 9 x 12 in. (22.9 x 30.5 cm)



PP-113, 1962 Pastel on paper 12 x 17 <sup>3</sup>⁄<sub>4</sub> in. (30.5 x 45.1 cm)





PP-53, 1959 Pastel on paper 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm)

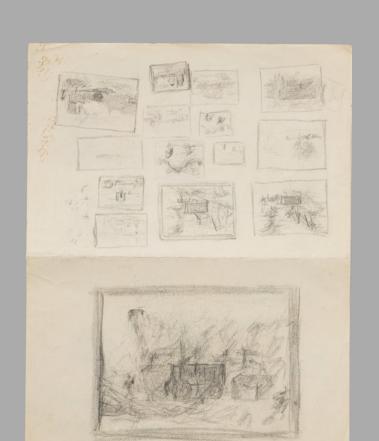
PP-38, 1959 Pastel on paper 12 x 17 ¾ in. (30.5 x 45.1 cm)





PP-40, 1959 Pastel on paper 12 x 17 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (30.5 x 45.1 cm)

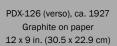
PP-136, 1957 Pastel on paper 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm)











Four pastels in the exhibition, titled by Still Memory (following page), are from a series of seven drawings that Still created in 1968, the year his father died. Four small graphite sketches found in a stack of his early, undocumented works have a clear connection to the later Memory drawings: one imagines Still having the nostalgic urge to re-create the scenes as an homage to the Alberta landscape and farm scenes that pervaded his youth. At the same time, the concise, lyrical tone of the later work illustrates how Still's artistic vision had evolved since he first recorded the moments as a young man.

PDX-160, ca. 1927 Graphite and watercolor on paper 2 3/8 x 3 in. (6.1 x 7.6 cm)

PDX-165, ca. 1927 Graphite on paper 2 3/8 x 3 3/4 in. (6.1 x 9.7 cm)

PNX-28, ca. 1927 Graphite on paper 2 3/8 x 3 3/4 in. (6.1 x 9.7 cm)









PP-235 (Memory), 1968
Pastel on paper
9 x 12 in. (22.9 x 30.5 cm)
After PDX-126 (verso) (ca. 1927), graphite on paper.

PP-242 (*Memory*), 1968

Pastel on paper

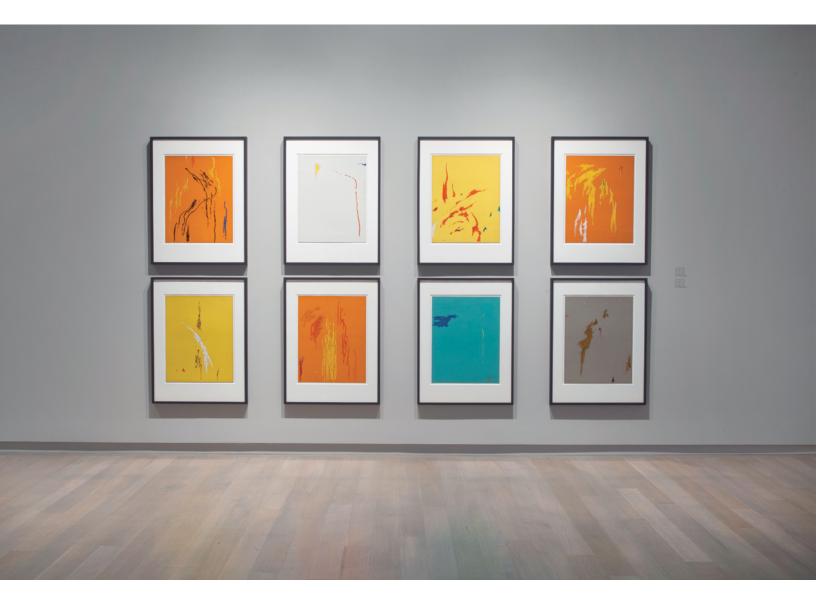
12 x 14 in. (30.5 x 35.6 cm)

After PNX-28 (ca. 1927), graphite on paper.

PP-234 (Memory), 1968
Pastel on paper
9 x 12 in. (22.9 x 30.5 cm)
After PDX-160 (ca. 1927), graphite and watercolor on paper.

PP-237 (*Memory*), 1968
Pastel on paper
9 x 12 in. (22.9 x 30.5 cm)

After PDX-165 (ca. 1927), graphite on paper.



## The Late Drawings

Still moved to rural Maryland in 1961 where he remained until his death in 1980. This period was the most prolific chapter of his artistic career. He produced more than 1,100 works on paper during these years, primarily in pastel on colored, dime-store construction paper. These pieces exhibit what cultural critics sometimes describe as attributes of a "late style." Here, Still achieved a new sense of daring whimsicality and graceful use of line. He also placed a greater emphasis on voids during these final years, which demonstrates his enduring interest in the expressive play between positive and negative space. Where his earlier, classic Abstract Expressionist works embody qualities associated with an intense, awe-inspiring journey toward universal truth, his later works—and those on paper in particular—exhibit signs of liberation, humility, and peace.

In this sense, distinct affinities exist between Still's pastels and the lightness of Ludwig van Beethoven's final pieces of chamber music (an analogy Still made himself). In Still's late style, the colored-paper grounds serve as a "given," like the predetermined key of a piece of music. Yet, while the colored paper acts as the backdrop for the "action" created on the surface, it is simultaneously visually pulled forward to play an active role in the composition, creating a greater sense of movement and freedom than ever before.



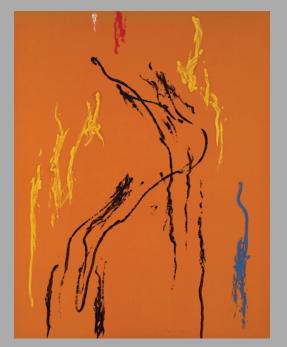
#### Final Works

pp. 144-146

Within this vast body of pastels on paper, there are multiple groups representing sudden bursts of creativity over a few days or in a single week. Dated to the day, these suites reveal that Still regarded his pastel works as a kind of journal. In a 1978 letter to Sidney Janis, he stated that they "constitute a visual diary of a personal world and I have decided that it would be most appropriate to keep them together until the record is finished."

Selected from a group of forty-three pastels created between January 1 and January 4, 1980, six months before Still's death, these pastels are a few of his last works: his concluding statements.

PP-1448, 1980 (detail). Pastel on paper, 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm).





PH-703, 1970 Oil on poster board 28 x 22 in. (71.1 x 55.9 cm)

PH-699, 1970 Oil on poster board 28 x 22 in. (71.1 x 55.9 cm)



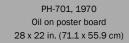


PH-696, 1970 Oil on poster board 28 x 22 in. (71.1 x 55.9 cm)

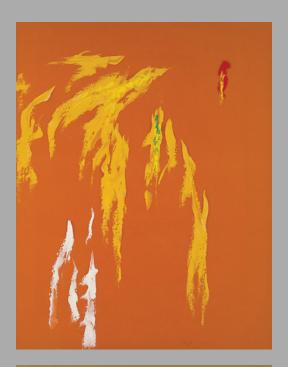
PH-698, 1970 Oil on poster board 28 x 22 in. (71.1 x 55.9 cm)







PH-702, 1970 Oil on poster board 28 x 22 in. (71.1 x 55.9 cm)





PH-695, 1970 Oil on poster board 28 x 22 in. (71.1 x 55.9 cm)

PH-694, 1970 Oil on poster board 28 x 22 in. (71.1 x 55.9 cm)







PP-595, 1971 Pastel on paper 6 x 9 in. (15.2 x 22.9 cm) PP-596, 1971 Pastel on paper 6 x 9 in. (15.2 x 22.9 cm) PP-594, 1971 Pastel on paper 6 x 9 in. (15.2 x 22.9 cm)



















PP-450, 1970 Pastel on paper 12 x 9 in. (30.5 x 22.9 cm)

PP-708, 1975 Pastel on paper 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm) PP-872, 1976 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

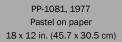
PP-410, 1970 Pastel on paper 12 x 9 in. (30.5 x 22.9 cm) PP-476, 1970 Pastel on paper 12 x 9 in. (30.5 x 22.9 cm)

PP-888, 1976 Pastel on paper 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm) PP-993, 1977 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

PP-709, 1975 Pastel on paper 12 x 16 1/8 in. (30.5 x 42.9 cm)

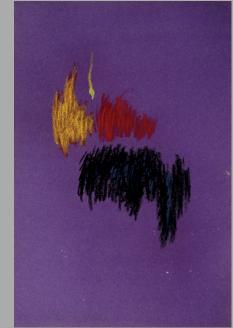






PP-366, 1970 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)



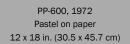


PP-1352, 1979 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

PP-575, 1971 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)







PP-645, 1975 Pastel on paper 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm)

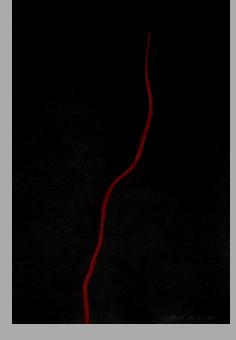




PP-611, 1972 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

PP-606, 1972 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)



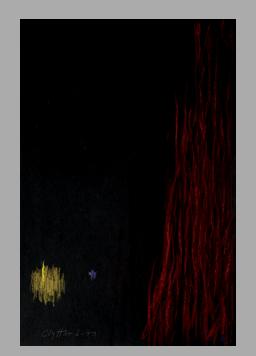














PP-1124, 1978 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

PP-919, 1977 Pastel on paper 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm) PP-734, 1975 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

PP-609, 1973 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm) PP-718, 1975 Pastel on paper 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm)

PP-610, 1973 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm) PP-367, 1970 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

PP-654, 1975 Pastel on paper 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm)

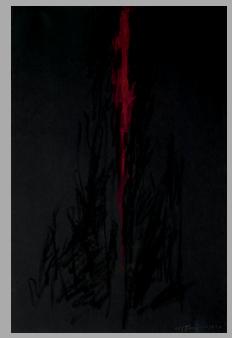




PP-502, 1970 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

PP-539, 1971 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

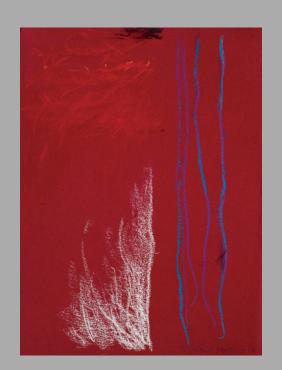


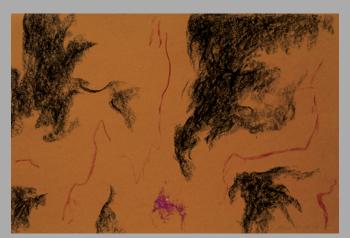


PP-512, 1970 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

PP-589, 1972 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)









PP-805, 1976 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

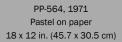
PP-723, 1975 Pastel on paper 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm)

PP-480, 1970 Pastel on paper 12 x 9 in. (30.5 x 22.9 cm)

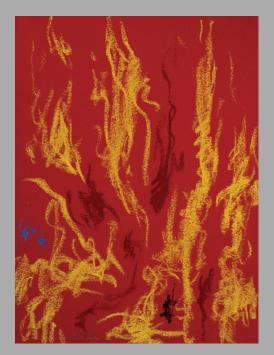
PP-1462, 1976 Pastel on paper 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm)







PP-1380, 1979 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)





PP-468, 1970 Pastel on paper 12 x 9 in. (30.5 x 22.9 cm)

PP-1443, 1980 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)







PP-240, 1968 Pastel on paper 12 x 9 in. (30.5 x 22.9 cm)

PP-971, 1977 Pastel on paper 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm)

PP-714, 1975 Pastel on paper 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm)





PP-1431, 1980 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

PP-1433, 1980 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)





PP-1432, 1980 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)

PP-1436, 1980 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)



PP-1435, 1980 Pastel on paper 18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)



PP-1448, 1980 Pastel on paper 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm)

## Acknowledgments

This publication and the exhibition it accompanies represent a number of firsts for the Clyfford Still Museum. Perhaps most exciting, this is the first exhibition to coincide with the Museum's fifth anniversary. (Coincidentally, this publication is the fifth book published by the Museum in as many years.) It is also the first exhibition dedicated to Still's graphic art, a momentous occasion, but one imposed by the fact that the artist retained almost all of his drawings for his personal collection. Even though the Museum galleries almost always feature a selection of drawings, and certain special exhibitions have included works on paper, the present exhibition includes several dozen drawings that are being exhibited for the first time.

Also of note: this is the first Museum exhibition to include a hands-on, interactive art studio. Dubbed "the DRAWING Room," this space features drawing activities, artist demonstrations, and a community-created art installation. Finally, this publication is our first in a digital format. This new platform not only offers greater portability; it also provides the unique ability to examine Still's often-detailed artworks through a powerful deepzoom feature. Since it is available as a free download, its reach will be exponentially greater than any of our print-only volumes.

We are very grateful for the support provided by U.S. Bank. As our lead sponsor for our inaugural year, and a supporter of projects every year since, U.S. Bank has been a model of corporate philanthropy, for the Clyfford Still Museum and many other cultural organizations in Colorado and beyond. Hassan A. Salem and Linda A. Tinney of U.S. Bank Colorado have been key to this ongoing support. I would also like to acknowledge the National Endowment of the Arts, which provided a generous grant as part of its Art Works program.

Two lenders, the New Jersey State Museum and a private collection, are fortunate to own important Still works on paper outside the artist's estate, a rarity for any collection. We are grateful that both were able to part with their works so they could join and round out this exhibition.

Both the exhibition and publication bear richer fruit due to the eyes and minds of my esteemed colleagues David Anfam, senior consulting curator, and Bailey Placzek, assistant curator and collections manager, who joined me as co-curators of this exhibition. The entire staff similarly rose to this occasion. Victoria Eastburn, director of education and programs, conceived of the DRAWING Room, and Sarah Wambold, director of digital media, designed and managed the production of this publication, the digital version of which was developed

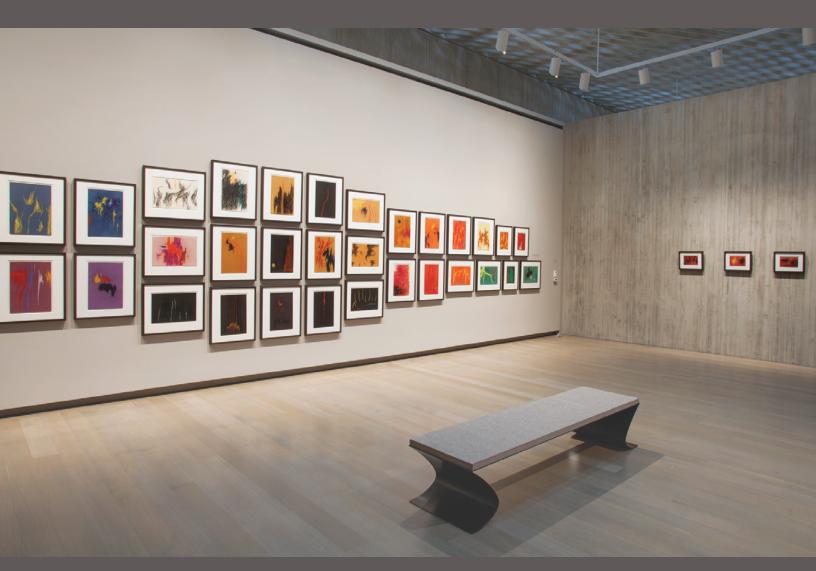
by Marty Spellerberg. Emily Kosakowski, registrar, was also instrumental to many aspects of this exhibition, as was David Finch, facilities manager, who oversaw several alterations to the galleries, many necessitated by the fragile nature of the artworks. Jessie de la Cruz, the Museum's archivist and digital collections manager, provided expertise and assistance, while Matt Rue lent his usual skills to the exhibition design.

Patricia Failing, professor emerita at the University of Washington, provided the main essay for this publication, drawing heavily on her extensive research of Still's early art and life. This essay, her second for a Museum publication, follows the similar in-depth research she performed for the exhibition she curated for the Museum in 2015, *Clyfford Still: The Colville Reservation and Beyond*, 1934–1939. I would also like to acknowledge Lauren Weinberg who edited this publication.

I would also like to acknowledge the contributions made by Joan Prusse, deputy director; Mark Colvin, controller; John Eding, director of marketing and communications; Lydia Garmaier, director of visitor services; Kelly Merrion, director of membership and development; Sonia Rae, director of audience engagement; and James Squires, chief conservator. I'd like to extend one final thanks to the many visitors to the Museum over the past five years who, in ways big and small, have helped spread the word about Clyfford Still and his amazing legacy.

Dean Sobel Director

Clyfford Still: The Works on Paper is the first exhibition devoted exclusively to Still's graphic art. This exhibition of some 260 works reveals the centrality of drawing within Still's life-long creative process, and challenges assumptions about Still's place in art history.



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