

**Inaugural Exhibition:**  
**Selections from The Soloviev Foundation Gallery**

On view:  
May 24, 2023 – May 19, 2024



Works left to right: Alberto Giacometti, *Caroline in a Red Dress* (1965); Alberto Giacometti, *Portrait of Yanaihara* (1961); Henri Matisse, *Portrait of Paul Matisse X* (1946); Henri Matisse, *Autoportrait* (1945); Henri Matisse, *Acrobats* (1952); Africa, Fang, *Head from a reliquary ensemble* (19th Century); Alberto Giacometti, *Grande Figure* (1947); Joan Miró, *Portrait of Ramon Sunyer (The Goldsmith)* (1918); Pablo Picasso, *Portrait d'un poète* (1941). Photo: Bonnie Morrison.

THE INAUGURAL EXHIBITION of the Soloviev Foundation's collection focuses on its European and American holdings, including major works such as Pablo Picasso's *Still Life "Le Torero"* (1911) and Henri Matisse's large-scale collage *The Acrobats* (1952) as well as underseen treasures, such as Al Held's immersive abstraction *North-Northeast* (1972) and Jean-Michel Basquiat's multimedia canvas *Parts* (1984). In bringing such art together, this presentation tells canonical stories of modern and contemporary art like those found in New York City's most important collections while discovering still new facets within these narratives. It offers the Foundation's audiences an opportunity to encounter these works firsthand.

Divided into three gallery spaces, the exhibition features work from the late nineteenth-century to the contemporary period. Each gallery optimizes a facet of the collection: one room presents a textbook account of European modern art. Included are a sampling of Paul Cézanne's later watercolors, which convey the artist's lyrical, yet structured grammar of flat planes of color and the resulting dismantling of visual perception. The gallery then moves on to Picasso's proto-Cubist and Analytic Cubist moments, before proceeding to the fragmentary, machine aesthetics seen in Fernand Léger's *Musical Instruments* (1926). At the end of the gallery sits Matisse's monumental *Acrobats* (1952), among the largest of the artist's famed cut-outs. By constructing the same figure in two different ways—one more consolidated, the other more splintered, jagged—Matisse explored the abstract, even conceptual limits of his typically expressive project.<sup>1</sup>

On the other side of this room, the exhibition concentrates on three of the collection's central figures: Balthus, Alberto Giacometti, and Jean Dubuffet. It looks to their portraiture to understand how artists imagined the interwar and post-war European figure, whether as recipient of resurrected tradition (Balthus), dirtied inhabitant of "raw" anti-culture (Dubuffet), or philosophical enigma (Giacometti). In his portrait of the Cassandre-Mouron family, Balthus works in the exacting verisimilitude perfected in nineteenth-century academic painting. Blushes of skin tone, pleats in cloth, and grain of wood are rendered visible

by his exacting hand. Yet, not unlike the Surrealists with whom he trafficked, Balthus pushes facticity into the uncanny. The painting is realistic without being plausible: the daughter of the Cassandre-Mouron family has seemingly outgrown sitting on her mother's lap, while her little brother is both too young and too old. He wears the sailor's costume of a young child but reads the newspaper as if a far more learned adult. Amidst the radical untethering of studio media in European modernism, Balthus preserves the dictates of figurative painting but exacerbates them to the point of alienation.

Dubuffet, alternatively, drags painting down to a more archaic origin. Inspired by the artistic output of children, psychiatric patients, and self-taught or "outsider" artists, Dubuffet conceptualized a category of "raw art" (*l'art brut*) that evinced a primal potency to account for artistic practices unmarked by historical precedent or academic training. A painting like *Le jongleur* (1944) flaunts conventions of artistic mastery. For the representationally challenging task of depicting a juggler, with emphasis on the figure's hands and six balls that should each reflect light and shadow differently, Dubuffet foregoes all efforts toward mastery. The balls float without perspective in front of the juggler's limbs, the juggler himself being comprised of crude descriptive marks. The color palette disavows all chromatic strategy. It instead mixes greys, tans, browns, silvers, and reds for a morass of earth tones that befits Dubuffet's raw project.

If Balthus's look to some origin for painting is historical, and Dubuffet's almost ethnological, Giacometti's is philosophical. His *Portrait of Yanaihara* is especially striking it depicts Isaku Yanaihara, a close friend of Giacometti and important conduit between the Japanese intelligentsia and Parisian letters. The painting belongs to the so-called "Yanaihara Crisis," in which the two spent hours on portrait sessions that only rarely resulted in a finished work.<sup>2</sup> In the portrait on view, the philosopher registers as a spectral apparition, seemingly vanishing in real time. Typical Giacometti, the depiction alternates between moments of great overelaboration, as in the drawn-over hands, and great under-description, as in the thinnest of graphite lines that make up Yanaihara's limbs. In such a work, Giacometti teased out distinctions between what he understood as "likeness,"





Works left to right: Cy Twombly, *Untitled* (1961); Joan Miró, *Painting* (1926); Joan Miró, *Painting* (1927); Joan Miró, *Paysage animé* (1935). Photo: Bonnie Morrison.

the objective appearance of some person, and “resemblance,” the mental and mnemonic registration of the same.<sup>3</sup>

The middle galleries feature a section dedicated to Joan Miró, another pivotal figure in the collection. It highlights his so-called “dream paintings,” produced most prominently in the mid-1920s and then resumed in greater scale a decade later. *Peinture* (1926) exhibits the standard format for these works: glyphic, zoomorphic, or even bacteriological-seeming forms float across a neutral ground. These forms occupy various states of animacy; some appear as simplified characters or entities while others may simply act as decorative marks. Such confusion in realms of reality speaks to Miró’s membership within Surrealism, whereby the unconscious and pre-rational modes of experience might

be imaged and expressed. Yet *Peinture* evinces a more grounded approach than the heady theories of Surrealism might suggest: the monochromatic hue derives not from a layer of paint but from the inherent, tawny fibers of the canvas. The threads of the support interact with Miró's marks as collaborators in a picture of variable perception.

Immediately adjacent rests Cy Twombly's *Untitled (The Empire of Flora)* (1961). In the proximity between the two artists, the exhibition instigates various conversations. Whereas Miró's marks exist in the Surrealist space of the dream or the unconscious, Twombly imbues his drawing and painting with an emphatic corporeality. Produced just after the American artist had moved to a



Works left to right: Morris Louis, *Gamma Kappa* (1960); Henry Moore, *Working Model for Draped Reclining Figure* (1976-1979). Photo: Bonnie Morrison.



new apartment in Rome's red-light district, *Untitled* follows Twombly's typical compilations of errant scribbles and smears, but its subtitle hints at another set of meanings.<sup>4</sup> Flora, the Roman goddess of plant life and botany, was also a municipal deity who oversaw reproduction in general. During the festival of Flora, for example, sex was actively celebrated and encouraged.<sup>5</sup> Twombly viscerally evokes this context through imagery that evokes bodily forms and processes.

Another such pairing sees a later work by Dubuffet, *Le rédacteur* [*The Editor*] (1951) alongside two sculptures by Isamu Noguchi from 1979, the abstract *Mantra* and the provocative *Idi Amin*. Both works present differing accounts of figures with relative degrees of power, whether Dubuffet's professional who applies corrections to a draft before him or Noguchi's Ugandan dictator, who had fled into exile the year before. Where Dubuffet turns the editor into a childlike stick-figure with a toothy grimace, Noguchi, typical of his "stone" works from that year, employs a modernist grammar of reduced form. Though *Amin* imposes in his ominous frontality, Noguchi also suggests a certain state of precarity. The sculpture's basalt stones rest unmounted on a wooden pedestal. Thus, just as every dictatorship is liable to collapse, so too does this sculpture physically risk toppling down.

The exhibition's street-facing gallery tells a story of American large-format painting. Franz Kline's *Untitled* (1954) represents the achievements of American Abstract Expressionism in its muscular swathes of paint and slicing lines. At times referred to as "action painting," this movement understood its medium not as optical surface but as forensic site of gesture. For instance, the conclusion of each stroke often provides evidence of motion through excess paint or enamel remnants. Next to Kline sits Al Held's *North-Northwest* (1972), exemplary of a hard-edged abstraction that tempered the theatricality of Abstract Expressionism. Held originally worked with only flattened shapes but in his black-and-white painting of the 1970s, he proceeded to add three-dimensions to each motif. As the viewer's eye configures space across the canvas, Held's polygons jostle, advance, and retreat. Kinetic activity in Kline and Held transfers from the motion of the painter to the properties of form.

Basquiat's *Parts* rounds out the grouping. The painting adopts a compositional approach and cadmium hues seen in Matisse's *The Red Studio* (1911), now at the Museum of Modern Art. Whereas the French artist created a veritable inventory of his own art, Basquiat's approach gathers errant images redolent of the urban graffiti in which he worked. A central blue figure resembles a combination of Twombly and Kline, and Xeroxed drawings surround it, acting as a 1980s variation on modernist collage. The fusion of text and image in *Parts* is referentially opaque. Much like the appearance of language in Cubist painting, the painting includes product descriptions, foreign words, and conversational speech. Basquiat's work thus hints at the very logic of the collector, who brings things together that might otherwise seem out of reach.

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#### ENDNOTES

- 1 On *Acrobats*, see Elizabeth Cowling et al, *Matisse Picasso* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002), 417-8. Thank you to Lisa Cherkerzian for her assistance with research.
- 2 On the crisis, see Akihiko Takeda, "An Unknown Country: Isaku Yanaihara's Giacometti Diaries," in Peter Read and Julia Kelly (eds), *Giacometti: Critical Essays* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 187-207.
- 3 As Giacometti put it, "I am not attempting likeness but resemblance." Quoted in *Alberto Giacometti: A Retrospective Exhibition* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1974), 37.
- 4 "Cy Twombly," Sotheby's, <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2012/contemporary-art-evening-auction-112022/lot.57.html>.
- 5 Ariadne Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins: Sex and Category in Roman Religion* (London: Routledge, 1998), 92.