

FREDERICK HARTT

AND AMERICAN ABSTRACTION IN THE 1950s:
BUILDING THE COLLECTION AT WASHINGTON
UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS



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[1] For a discussion of Horst W. Janson's influence on the collection at Washington University, see Sabine Eckmann, "Exilic Vision: H. W. Janson and the Legacy of Modern Art at Washington University," in [H. W. Janson and the Legacy of Modern Art at Washington University in St. Louis](#) (St. Louis: Washington University Gallery of Art; New York: Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, 2002), 9-42.

From 1949 to 1960, Frederick Hartt served as curator of the Washington University art collection and professor in the Department of Art History & Archaeology. Hartt, a scholar of Italian Renaissance art, was hired to replace another distinguished Renaissance scholar, Horst W. Janson, who held the position of curator from 1944 to 1948. Janson, an émigré from Nazi Germany and a specialist on the sculpture of Michelozzo di Bartolommeo, had dramatically altered the collection at Washington University, purchasing approximately forty paintings, sculptures, and prints by many of Europe's leading modernists, with particular emphasis on Cubism, Constructivism, Surrealism, and exile art.[1] Complementing Janson's focus, Hartt developed the University's collection with an emphasis on American rather than European modernism. He acquired notable examples of vanguard American modernist abstraction that span the prewar and postwar periods, including works by leading members of the Abstract Expressionist movement, such as Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Philip Guston, at a critical time in the 1950s when American avant-garde practices were perceived as dominating the world art scene.

Frederick Hartt and the Art Collections Committee at Washington University

When Hartt arrived at Washington University in the fall of 1949, he was still completing his dissertation on the art of Giulio Romano at New York University. Some of his most significant experience with Renaissance art came as a soldier during World War II. Drafted into the US Army Air Corps in April 1942, in 1944 Hartt became a Monuments and Fine Arts officer for the Allied Military Government in Florence, Italy, where he oversaw the preservation of art in Tuscany and the repair of architectural monuments damaged by the war, an account of which he published as Florentine Art under Fire (1949). He also administered the restitution of hundreds of works of art stolen by the Germans while stationed in Florence. From 1945 to 1946, he served in Austria overseeing another restitution program of artworks stolen by the Nazis. After he was discharged from the war, he held a position as acting director at the Smith College Museum of Art from April 1946 to summer 1947, and was then awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to study in Florence from 1947-48.[2] In 1960, Hartt left Washington University to chair the art history department at the University of Pennsylvania, which he did until the mid-1960s, and then moved to the University of Virginia, where he taught until his retirement in 1984. During this time, Hartt became renowned as a scholar of Italian Renaissance art; some of his books include Giulio Romano (1958), Michelangelo: The Complete Sculpture (1969), History of Italian Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture (1969), and Michelangelo's Three Pietàs: A Photographic Study (1975).

As curator of the collection at Washington University, Hartt took annual or biannual trips to New York to search for new acquisitions to propose to the chancellor-appointed Art Collections Committee, which was charged with oversight of the University collection.[3] In making his acquisitions of modern American art, Hartt was following a precedent that had been set from the collection's founding in 1881, to purchase the art of the time. A 1959 statement of the responsibilities of the Art Collections Committee emphasized these goals, although it gave the Committee a fairly open framework from which to consider contemporary artistic production: "The aim of acquisitions

[2] The acquisitions made during Hartt's brief tenure as acting director at the Smith College Museum of Art provide an interesting comparison to those he purchased at Washington University. In the sixteen months that Hartt was at Smith College, approximately ten drawings, two prints, and four paintings dating from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries entered the collection, as well as one modern American painting, Marsden Hartley's Sea Window-Tinker Mackerel (1942). I thank Louise Laplante, Collections Manager and Registrar at the Smith College Museum of Art, for this information.

[3] During Hartt's tenure, the Art Collections Committee consisted of the dean of the School of Art, who served as chair of the Committee; the chair of the Department of Art History & Archaeology; and a faculty member of the School of Architecture. As the Committee's secretary, Hartt also kept the minutes of their meetings. The Art Collections Committee minutes as well as some correspondence with artists and dealers in the files of the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum are the main source of information on Hartt's collecting activities at the University. Unfortunately, existing records of the minutes are sporadic, dating from November 3, 1943, through May 12, 1954, with an additional document from 1959, "Washington University Art Collections Committee Responsibilities and Procedures."

[4] Kenneth Hudson, "Washington University Art Collections Committee Responsibilities and Procedures, 1959," Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum archives.

[5] This essay focuses on acquisitions proposed directly by Frederick Hartt that indeed today exemplify artistic innovation of the time as well as a few significant purchases of Renaissance art. Other purchases attest to the broader interests of the Committee members at this time, such as two Greek sculptures proposed by George Mylonas, a distinguished scholar of ancient Greek art and archaeology, and works by members of the faculty of the School of Art proposed by Kenneth Hudson, including by Walter Barker, Fred Becker, Paul Burlin, Fred Conway, Leslie Laskey, Edward Millman, and Charles Quest.

[6] See Michael Leja, [Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s](#) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

from contemporary art is to build a collection which in the future will exemplify the major trends and explorations which have contributed in our own time to the evolution of art concepts and creativity." [4] Hartt's interpretation of the "major trends"—his specific interest in abstract American art and how he perceived its relation to the works of European modernism already in the University's collection—is the subject of this essay. [5]

American Modernism

Hartt's acquisitions in the 1950s reflect the rising importance of modern American art, both at home and abroad, in which abstraction had become the dominant trend. For Hartt, who saw the devastating consequences of World War II firsthand, large-scale gestural abstraction was the aesthetic form that most captured the qualities of the postwar human condition. During and after the war, a mixture of existentialism, psychoanalysis, and anthropological discourses took hold in the United States and was popularized by the media. These theories proposed a vision of modern man as rife with unconscious and primitive instincts and impulses as well as existential angst about his position in the world—the combination of which art historian Michael Leja has called the "Modern Man discourse." [6] At the time, it was New York School painting, with its abstract gesture, traces of the bodily action of the artist, and references to primitive sources such as those found in Native American cultures and Jungian archetypes, that seemed to many to best convey the psychic condition of modern man. In both postwar America and Europe, the belief that the abstract gesture was a trace of an individualistic act of creation became conflated with a universalist position that held that gestural abstraction was a particularly modern phenomenon. This position was commonly expressed in the writings of Abstract Expressionist artists, critics, scholars, and the press. *Life* magazine's 1948 "Round Table on Modern Art" is a case in point. Published after a meeting of high-profile scholars and critics—including Clement Greenberg, Meyer Schapiro, Janson, and various museum directors from the US and Europe—at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the article concluded that "the troubles of modern art lead back into the troubles of the age.... The meaning of modern art is that the artist



Fig. 1
Jackson Pollock, *Sleeping Effort*, 1953



Fig. 2
Marsden Hartley, *The Iron Cross*, 1915



of today is engaged in a tremendous individualistic struggle—a struggle to discover and to assert and to express himself.”[7]

It appears that Hartt himself shared these commonly held beliefs in the importance of Abstract Expressionism, particularly the notion that the painterly gesture or mark was a direct translation of the feelings of the artist onto the canvas. Hartt did not publish criticism on modern art; his sole, but significant, contribution to the scholarship on modern art came in 1976 with his textbook Art: A History of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture. By this time, Hartt’s summary of the history of American modern art was also influenced by predominant cultural biases such as expressed in Irving Sandler’s The Triumph of American Painting (1970), which used the Abstract Expressionist aesthetic of personal freedom to advance the ethos of American democracy, presenting abstract art as a symbol of the American triumph over totalitarianism in World War II and a tool in the contested

[7] Life magazine, October 11, 1948, cited in Leja, Reframing Abstract Expressionism, 3. As examples of this type of artistic production, the article illustrated artworks by Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Willem de Kooning, Adolph Gottlieb, Jackson Pollock, and William Bazotes.

Fig. 3
Stuart Davis, *Max #2*, 1949



Fig. 4
Arthur Garfield Dove, *Sand and Sea*, 1943

Cold War battle against Soviet Communism.[8] Nonetheless, Hartt's textbook provides some guidance as to his thinking about American abstraction when he made his purchases in the 1950s. Hartt celebrated the particularly American qualities of the postwar generation of artists: "America's greatest single contribution to the history of modern art is the Abstract Expressionist movement." [9] At the heart of the movement, he explained, was the idea that "exalted individualism and unfettered expression of the inner life" could be expressed through the free application of paint. Moreover, he said, the movement grew out of a new appreciation for the individual that emerged in the postwar period under the freedom of democratic societies.

Hartt's view of Abstract Expressionism, however, was more than simply nationalistic. Although he celebrated its American qualities (particularly its emotional intensity and scale), he saw its formal roots in European modernism, specifically the expressionism of Wassily Kandinsky and the automatism of Surrealism.[10] This formalist approach was also a contemporary way of understanding the emergence of American abstraction, exemplified by Alfred H. Barr, Jr.'s influential exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, including Cubism and Abstract Art in 1936. In his 1976 textbook, Hartt credits the 1951 exhibition Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America, also at the Museum of Modern Art, with bringing official recognition to Abstract Expressionism. A broad survey of American painting and sculpture from 1912 to 1950, the exhibition created a genealogy of the development of abstraction in America, beginning with the influential Armory Show in 1913 up to the most recent art of the time.[11] In it, American abstraction was divided into two waves (the first generation active roughly 1912 to 1925, the second in the 1930s through the 1950s), following the trajectory of modern art through neo-Impressionism, Cubism, Constructivism, Surrealism, and eventually into either geometric or gestural abstraction. All of the Abstract Expressionist artists whose works Hartt purchased are represented in the project, including Jackson Pollock [Fig. 1], Willem de Kooning [Fig. 9], Philip Guston [Fig. 10], and Arshile Gorky [Fig. 11], as well as many of the artists who today are lesser known, such as the sculptor Peter Grippe [Fig. 6] and the abstract painters Jimmy Ernst and John Heliker. [12] The exhibition's account of the historical develop-

[8] On this aspect of Abstract Expressionism, see Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

[9] Frederick Hartt, Art: A History of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1976), 454.

[10] Jacques Lipchitz's The Joy of Orpheus I (1945) [Fig. 7], which Hartt purchased in 1952 for \$1,080, could be seen as a work that combines the principles of European Cubism and Surrealism with the organic forms of American gestural abstraction.

[11] The exhibition was curated by Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, then director of the Painting and Sculpture department at the Museum of Modern Art. Interestingly, Ritchie, like Hartt, had served in the Monuments and Fine Arts section of the United States military, and was also stationed in Austria repatriating objects stolen by the Nazis.

[12] A number of artists whose works were donated to the University's collection during Hartt's years as curator were also in the show, including William Baziotés, Carl Holty, and Hans Hofmann. Baziotés's Night Form (1947) [Fig. 16] and Hofmann's White Space (1947) were donated to the University by the Frederic Olsen Foundation in 1954. Holty's Untitled (1950) as well as a number of works of significant European modernism, including Pablo Picasso's Portrait of Sylvette (1954) [Fig. 15], were given by Mr. and Mrs. Richard K. Weil in 1959.



[13] Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1951), 65.

[14] Max #2 and Sand and Sea were both purchased from the Downtown Gallery, for \$765 and \$1,800 respectively; The Iron Cross was purchased from Paul Rosenberg for \$1,800.

ment of American modernist abstraction, a narrative that soon became canonical, might also help explain why Hartt did not purchase works by artists associated with other types of movements in American art, such as American regionalism or Social Realism, that arose in the 1930s. Promoting Abstract Expressionism as the culmination of an evolution of avant-garde production with roots in European modernism, the project presented a perspective that held little regard for the “chauvinistic tendencies in American Scene painting” and “the inadequacy and sentimentality of most of the Social Realist painters.” [13]

Fig. 5
Lyonel Feininger, *Brücke I (Bridge I)*, 1913

Frederick Hartt's Acquisitions of American Abstraction

Hartt's acquisitions of American art fall into two groups: the early practitioners of abstraction in the 1910s and 1920s—artists that Hartt called, in his 1976 textbook, “the Pioneers”—and the New York School, the generation of artists emerging after World War II associated with Abstract Expressionism. As Hartt described them, the pioneers were the first generation of American painters to break with naturalism through contact with European modernism, primarily German Expressionism and Cubism. Works by three of these artists were some of Hartt's earliest purchases at Washington University. In January 1952, he proposed to the Committee the acquisition of Marsden Hartley's The Iron Cross (1915) [Fig. 2] and some later works by the early pioneers, Stuart Davis's Max #2 (1949) [Fig. 3] and Arthur Garfield Dove's Sand and Sea (1943) [Fig. 4]. [14] These works not only build on the purchases made by Jan-son by connecting to the primarily European Cubist and Constructivist works of his tenure, they also expand on them by responding to the new relevance of American art. Both Davis and Dove, for instance, with their references to specifically American iconography, could be said to express an American approach to modernist form and subject matter—the interlocking, biomorphic shapes and application of sand in Dove's abstract landscape evoke the coast of Long Island where he lived, while the vibrant, geometric shapes of Davis's canvas have a foundation in the streets, docks, and iron works of Gloucester, Massachu-



Fig. 6
Peter Grippe, *The City II*, 1946



Fig. 7
Jacques Lipchitz, *The Joy of Orpheus I*, 1945



Jackson Pollock 1951

setts, where he worked. Hartley's The Iron Cross and Lyonel Feininger's Brücke I (Bridge I) (1913) [Fig. 5], another early purchase by Hartt, were likely selected because they are seminal examples of early American modernism associated with movements of German Expressionism and Cubism at their height in the 1910s.[15] In the minutes of the Art Collections Committee, Hartt stated that Feininger's painting shows "an unusually romantic and lyrical side of the Cubist movement" and observed that the University would find it difficult to ever again acquire a work of this nature.[16] Hartley's Iron Cross was identified as "one of the earliest abstract pictures painted by an American," with an important recent exhibition history.[17]

Hartt began to purchase works by the postwar generation of abstract artists concurrently with his purchases of the American pioneers. In February 1950, during the same meeting in which he proposed purchasing the painting by Feininger, he successfully presented two works by American Abstract Expressionists—Robert Motherwell's Dirge (1949) and David Hare's terracotta sculpture Man Getting Up (1949)—both offered by the Samuel Kootz Gallery.[18] A year later, Hartt purchased a series of six screen prints of Jackson Pollock's black enamel paintings from the Betty Parsons Gallery [Fig. 8].[19] Parsons, like Kootz, was one of the main early supporters of Abstract Expressionism; Hartt's patronizing of these American galleries, in contradistinction to Janson, who generally worked with galleries run by European exiles supportive of European modernism, such as the Buchholz Gallery, is also indicative of the larger cultural shift toward American art in the postwar period.

Pollock's screen prints were exhibited at Washington University's Student Center in 1953, and their reception suggests some of the challenges that Hartt most likely faced in purchasing such avant-garde work. Today, the black enamel paintings, executed in the style of Pollock's early figurative work, are regarded as the beginning of Pollock's turn away from pure abstraction and the end of his drip period. In 1951, Pollock was one of the most important Abstract Expressionist painters of the time—the infamous Life magazine article, which asked readers "Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?" had appeared in 1949, and in Art Digest James Fitzsimmons described Pollock's enamel paintings as "his most ambitious and complex to date." [20]

[15] Bridge I was purchased from the Buchholz Gallery for \$2,000.

[16] Art Collections Committee minutes, February 10, 1950.

[17] Correspondence from Kenneth Hudson to Central Administration, February 28, 1952. In his letter, Hudson observed that the painting was exhibited in a large, recent survey of American art, Revolution and Tradition: An Exhibition of the Chief Movements in American Painting from 1900 to the Present, at The Brooklyn Museum of Art from November 15, 1951, to January 6, 1952. Perhaps more significantly in Hartt's eyes, the painting was also exhibited at Alfred Stieglitz's Gallery 291 in 1916. Stieglitz's gallery was both an important disseminator of European modernism and a prominent promoter of American contemporary art; Hartt commented on its significance in his textbook.

[18] Dirge was priced at \$200 (Hartt later requested a \$50 reduction in the price) and Man Getting Up sold for \$150. (These works are no longer in the collection of the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum.)

[19] The purchase of the prints by Pollock, for \$100, was not approved by the Committee until May 1952; however, correspondence indicates that their acquisition had been under consideration for many months (correspondence from Frederick Hartt to Betty Parsons, May 23, 1952, Betty Parsons Gallery Records and Personal Papers, The Archives of American Art, Washington, DC).

[20] "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?," Life magazine, August 8, 1949; James Fitzsimmons, "Jackson Pollock," The Art Digest 26, no. 6 (December 15, 1951): 19.



Fig. 9
Willem de Kooning, *Saturday Night*, 1956

St. Louis, however, did not have a history of collecting such cutting-edge American art, and Hartt may have been concerned about what the local reception of Abstract Expressionist works would be. Purchasing a series of prints, which could also appeal to the School of Fine Arts with its long history of printmaking, was one way to test the waters. Indeed, when the prints were exhibited at the Student Center, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch ran an article on the “controversial work of Pollock,” recounting various viewers’ interpretations of the shapes and figures hidden in the drips, and suggesting a certain amount of ambivalence about these seemingly spontaneous, untutored abstractions.[21]

From then on Hartt would purchase a major work by an American Abstract Expressionist every year—with the exception of 1955, which he spent as a Fulbright research fellow in Florence—until he departed for the University of Pennsylvania in 1960. Early in 1952, Hartt purchased Willem de Kooning’s Sail Cloth (1949) from the Sidney Janis Gallery, which was becoming increasingly commercially successful and prominent in the New York art scene.[22] In January 1953, Hartt purchased from Janis his first major Abstract Expressionist work, Arshile Gorky’s large-scale Golden Brown Painting (1943-44) [Fig. 11]. [23] The painting had been in the Arshile Gorky Memorial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in January and February of 1951. In January 1954, he purchased one of the last ten paintings ever made by Jackson Pollock, Sleeping Effort (1953) [Fig. 1]. Purchases of Willem de Kooning’s Saturday Night (1956) [Fig. 9], Philip Guston’s Fable I (1956-57) [Fig. 10], John Heliker’s Athens: White Rocks (1957), and Conrad Marca-Relli’s The Arrival (1958) followed in subsequent years.[24]

If it may have seemed like a risk to acquire a work of Abstract Expressionism in 1951, by 1956 the Washington University Magazine was enthusiastically promoting the recent purchase of de Kooning’s Saturday Night. The author of the essay observed that “the effect of buying a canvas by DeKooning [sic], leader of the currently powerful Abstract-Expressionist School, is like bringing to the campus a great teacher in his prime.”[25] Similarly, when Saturday Night was exhibited in the University’s Givens Hall in an exhibition of primarily Abstract Expressionist work, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch cited an Art News article calling de Kooning “the most influential painter at work today.”[26]

[21] Howard Derrickson, “Art and Artists: Controversial Work of Pollock,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 25, 1953.

[22] The purchase price of Sail Cloth is unknown; the painting is no longer in the collection of the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum.

[23] The purchase of the painting was approved by the Committee on January 28, 1953, for \$3,000.

[24] From Sidney Janis Gallery, Sleeping Effort was purchased for \$3,000; Saturday Night was purchased for \$4,000 (less a discount and Sail Cloth in exchange); and Fable I was purchased for \$2,800. Athens: White Rocks was purchased from Kraushaar Galleries for \$1,450, and The Arrival was purchased from Sam Kootz Gallery for \$3,600.

[25] Howard Derrickson, “Dream of Campus Art Gallery,” Washington University Magazine, October 1956, 12.

[26] “Washington U. Buys De Kooning Painting,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch, May 15, 1956.



[27] Hartt, [Art: A History of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture](#), 456.

Once again, it is Hartt's 1976 textbook that suggests in retrospect what Hartt may have been thinking when he purchased these paintings. In the textbook, Hartt explores seven Abstract Expressionist leaders at length, including Gorky, Pollock, and de Kooning. In making a canvas, Pollock is described, for example, as moving "freely, dripping, spilling, throwing the color, apparently with total abandon as he performed a kind of pictorial dance whose choreography is recorded on the canvas," his colors "intertwined in deadly conflict." [27] In a work by de Kooning, "the eye moved from vortex to vortex, always more passionate and intense,

Fig. 10
Philip Guston, *Fable I*, 1956–57



as if from crater to seething crater.” [28] Hartt’s description of Gorky’s Golden Brown Painting, the only work from Hartt’s tenure at Washington University that is discussed and illustrated in his textbook, grounded the Abstract Expressionist gesture in European modernism, particularly Surrealist automatism, but conceived of the painting as a response to the artist’s primitive impulses: “the regularity and surface precision of the Surrealists have vanished, and the often erotically suggestive shapes move, swell, and turn with the greatest abandon, yet with a distinct rhythmic relationship to the delicate calligraphy of the brush-

[28] *Ibid.*. 455.

Fig. 11
Arshile Gorky, *Golden Brown Painting*, 1943–44



[29] Ibid. work.” [29] If these artists are also described as being utterly different from one another—another aspect of the individualism that arose in this moment—Hartt’s descriptions share an appreciation for the emotional intensity and sense of scale that he considers characteristic traits common to Abstract Expressionism.

Renaissance and Baroque Art

While Hartt primarily acquired works of American modernism, he also made a significant purchase of a group of five Renaissance and Baroque drawings, his only acquisitions of this type at Washington University, that reflect his scholarly interests in Renaissance art as well as his belief in the importance of the university museum as a teaching in-

Fig. 12
Unknown, *Parnassus*, 16th century



stitution. The drawings were selected for their ability to demonstrate a wide variety of artistic techniques at a time in the Renaissance when drawing was emerging as an important and collectible medium in its own right. As Hartt explained to the Committee, his objective in acquiring the works was to “bring the student nearer to the process of creation and even preserve some of the freshness of the actual moment of creation.” [30] Giovanni Grimaldi’s two-sided Landscape with Tower and River Scene with Boats (both from the seventeenth century), then thought to be by the sixteenth-century Renaissance artist Annibale Carracci, may have served as an example of “pure” landscape, landscape in which the human presence is incidental, a genre that Carracci was known for having invented. Luca Cambiaso’s Penitent Magdalene (c. 1570-80), depicting a common subject in the Renais-

[30] Art Collections Committee minutes, January 13, 1950. Only a few months earlier, Hartt had recommended that the Committee establish a policy to purchase “works of art which bring the student in closer touch with the creative process, such as drawings, sketches, studies, unfinished works, etc.” (Art Collections Committee minutes, December 2, 1949). Although no official policy was established, it seems likely that the purchase of these works was the outcome of that earlier idea.

Fig. 13
Sir Peter Paul Rubens,
Parade of the Captured Chiefs, 1600–8



sance, employs the contrast between the deep black of iron gall ink, applied in thick strokes with a pen, and the white of the page to create form. Parnassus, a drawing by an unidentified sixteenth-century French artist [Fig. 12], demonstrates speed of conception and technique with wash applied in a swift painterly manner, while Two Female Figures, by an unidentified sixteenth-century Italian artist, is composed in a more academic fashion, with careful shading to create three-dimensional forms, following the classical tradition of Raphael and Michelangelo. [31]

Peter Paul Rubens's drawing Parade of the Captured Chiefs (1600-8) [Fig. 13] was the most expensive and historically significant purchase of the group. [32] The drawing serves as an example of the convention of copying in the Renaissance and Baroque periods. It is a counterproof—a direct copy made by laying a sheet of blank, dampened paper over a drawing, then rubbing it or putting it through a press so that the original transfers onto the new sheet in reverse-of Giulio Romano's Triomphe de Scipion (Triumph of Scipio). [33] As such, it is the only acquisition during Hartt's tenure that relates directly to his own scholarship, specifically the two-volume book Giulio Romano that he was working on while teaching at the University. Rubens used white gouache to rework the counterproof, adding a series of detailed and delicate highlights throughout the composition. More specifics about Hartt's interest in this work are left to conjecture, as the Art Collections

Fig. 14
El Greco, *The Resurrection*, c. 1600–5



[31] The four drawings were purchased from the Durlacher Brothers Gallery in New York for \$275, \$150, \$135, and \$120, respectively.

Committee minutes simply present it as of “undisputed quality.” [34]

Hartt also helped facilitate the somewhat serendipitous acquisition of El Greco’s The Resurrection [Fig. 14] (c. 1600-5), the only other acquisition of a Renaissance work during his years at Washington University. In the fall of 1951, Perry Rathbone, director of the City Art Museum (now the Saint Louis Art Museum), was considering purchasing the painting for his own institution when a review of his budget indicated a shortfall. Instead of returning the painting to New York, Rathbone recommended that the painting be considered for purchase by Washington University. Hartt was supportive of Rathbone’s interest in the work; he wrote him a letter indicating that he found its quality to be on par with the most significant works by El Greco in American

[32] Parade of the Captured Chiefs was purchased from the Schaeffer Galleries in New York for \$2,000.

[33] The original drawing by Romano was created as a design for a series of tapestries made for the sixteenth-century French king Francois I; it illustrates the triumphs of the famous Roman general Scipio Africanus.

[34] Art Collections Committee minutes, February 1, 1950.

Fig. 15
Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Sylvette*, 1954



public collections.[35] After its purchase, only a few years later an article in the Washington University Magazine celebrated The Resurrection as the University's "most outstanding and important painting," a work that is ideal for teaching "because it anticipates modernism's eloquent idioms... and subordinates form to rhythmic power, in the manner of today's Expressionists." [36] Although it is not clear whether Hartt concurred with this view of the work—the article was written by a former art critic for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, then a development writer for the University—it is interesting that the painting was understood at least in part according to its relevance to Expressionist art, a term broad enough to encompass European modernism and American Abstract Expressionism.

Hartt's purchases thus indicate a focused and concentrated engagement with the radical art of his time, forming a bridge between the existing University collection of European modernism and the Abstract Expressionist painting that helped establish the United States as the center of cultural postwar production.

Karen K. Butler
Assistant Curator

[35] Correspondence from Frederick Hartt to Perry Rathbone, November 26, 1951, archives of the Saint Louis Art Museum. The painting was purchased in January 1952 for \$35,000 from Rosenberg & Stiebel Gallery in New York. Hartt published a color plate of another, larger version of The Resurrection (c. 1596-1600, in the collection of the Prado Museum) in his 1976 textbook.

[36] Derrickson, "Dream of Campus Art Gallery," 12.



MILDRED LANE KEMPER ART MUSEUM

This volume is published on the occasion of the exhibition Frederick Hartt and American Abstraction in the 1950s: Building the Collection at Washington University in St. Louis at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum at Washington University in St. Louis. On view from May 4 through August 27, 2012, the exhibition was curated by Karen K. Butler, assistant curator at the Kemper Art Museum.

From 1949 to 1960, Frederick Hartt served as curator of the Washington University art collection and as professor in the Department of Art History & Archaeology. A respected scholar of Italian Renaissance art and the author of numerous publications—including the influential textbooks History of Italian Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture (1969) and Art: A History of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture (1976)—his acquisition of seminal works of American abstraction significantly shaped the collection at Washington University in the 1950s.

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