

## INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUNDER

The Clyfford Still Museum was founded to promote public and scholarly understanding of the late artist's work, through the presentation and preservation of the Clyfford Still and Patricia Still estates, totaling approximately 2,400 artworks donated to the City of Denver in 2004 and 2005. Considered one of the most important artists of the 20th century, Still was among the first generation of Abstract Expressionist artists who developed a new and powerful approach to painting in the years immediately following World War II. The new museum provides visitors with an unprecedented opportunity to experience and understand the legacy of Clyfford Still, an artist whose life has been shrouded in mystery and the bulk of whose work has been hidden from public view for over 30 years. This document includes biographic information about the artist, a history of the Still collection, and details regarding the museum's facilities and programming.

### **About Clyfford Still**

Born in North Dakota in 1904, Clyfford Still spent the first 30 years of his life in western Washington state and southern Canada. His early works, from the first half of the 1930s, are marked by an exaggerated figurative style, but by the late 1930s Still began to simplify his forms, shifting from representational painting to abstraction.

Still's mature style, marked by purely abstract form and monumental scale, was achieved early in his career and years before his contemporaries, causing the artist to be widely considered as one of Abstract Expressionism's first innovators. His work also inspired a variant of the movement in San Francisco's Bay Area, where Still lived for most of the 1940s and was an influential teacher. Scholars consider Still alongside Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman in studying the most significant contributors to the Abstract Expressionist movement.

In the late 1940s, Still began showing with The Art of This Century and Betty Parsons Gallery in New York, the two galleries responsible for introducing American Abstract Expressionism to the world. Still's relationship with the art world was tumultuous, however, and in 1951, shortly after moving to New York, he ended his involvement with commercial galleries. In 1961, he moved from New York to Maryland, further severing his ties with the art world.

From 1950 until his death in 1980, Still exerted enormous control over how his works were exhibited, selling very little art and frequently rejecting exhibition opportunities. Believing that his purity of vision could be maintained only if his work could be shown in a setting as a single body, he gifted two large groups of work to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, with the restriction that the works could never travel or be shown among other artists' work. In 1979, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art organized the largest survey of Still's art, which was the most comprehensive retrospective of his lifetime and the largest presentation ever afforded by the institution to the work of a living artist.

### **The Still Estate and Will**

After the artist's death in 1980, the Clyfford Still estate was sealed off from public and scholarly view. Still's will stipulated that his estate be given in its entirety to an American city willing to establish a permanent quarters dedicated solely to his work, ensuring its survival for exhibition and study. In August 2004, the City of Denver, under the leadership of Mayor John Hickenlooper, was selected by Still's wife,

Patricia Still, to receive the substantial Still collection. In 2005, Patricia Still also bequeathed to the city her own estate, which included select paintings by her husband as well as his complete archives.

### **Collection**

The Still Museum collection, which represents nearly 94 percent of the artist’s lifetime output, comprises approximately 2,400 works created by the artist from 1920 through 1980, including 825 paintings, 1575 drawings and prints, and three sculptures. Many of these works have never been seen by the public, and all have been removed from view for at least three decades. Collection highlights include Still’s rarely exhibited and virtually unknown drawings and early works, never-before-seen masterworks from the height of his career, and over 300 works from Still’s breakthrough period as an innovator of the Abstract Expressionist movement.

The collection also encompasses the artist’s archives, including personal letters, photographs, journals, sketchbooks, and other documentation of Still’s work. These materials provide new scholarship and interpretive opportunities and enrich museum visitor experiences with insight into Still and his creative evolution. In addition, direct correspondence between Still and other leading artists of the time reveal the esteem in which he was held by his contemporaries. These letters and documents remain of considerable value in the ongoing evaluation of Still and mid-century American art.

### **Programming**

The museum hosts a rotating series of exhibitions, drawn from its extensive collection and designed to enhance public understanding of Still’s significant role in the evolution of American art and explore various aspects of Still’s life, career, and creative output. Interdisciplinary public and education programs, including lectures, films, and gallery tours, encourage deeper reflection of Still’s practice and new associations and analyses of his work. The 2012 spring lecture series invites guest curators, art historians, and artists to explore Clyfford Still’s Western roots. The Still museum is also working on initiatives with its neighboring institutions including the Denver Art Museum on collaborative programming designed to help contextualize and complement its single-artist collection.

### **Museum Facilities**

Designed by Brad Cloepfil and Allied Works Architecture, the Clyfford Still Museum is the newest addition to Denver’s burgeoning Cultural Arts District and is located adjacent to the Denver Art Museum in the city’s Civic Center Cultural Complex. The two-story, 28,500-square-foot building includes a series of light-filled galleries on its upper level, designed specifically to display Still’s work. This floor also features an education gallery, where visitors can further investigate ideas presented in the exhibition galleries and where intimate programs are held. Additional educational facilities as well as the library and archives, collection storage, a conservation laboratory, public areas, and administrative offices are located on the first floor.

#### **Museum Address**

1250 Bannock Street  
Denver, CO 80204

#### **Museum Hours**

Tuesday – Sunday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
Friday: Open until 8 p.m.

#### **Admission**

Members and Children under 5 Free  
Adults \$10  
Students/Seniors (65+) \$6  
Youth (ages 5-17) \$3

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