

East Building

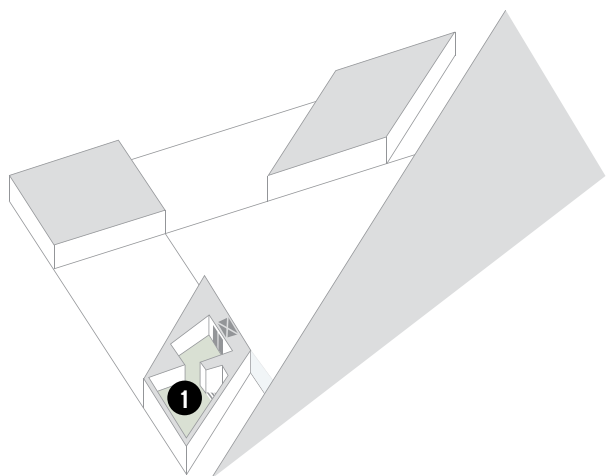
Highlights

A short tour of twenty works of modern and contemporary art in the National Gallery of Art collections.



1 Philip Guston *Rug*, 1976

How many legs can dance on a rug? How many connotations can inhabit an image? Guston was influenced by photographs of the liberation of the concentration camps, but these legs derive equally from the 1968 comic by R. Crumb, *Keep on Truckin'*. The pale moon, a symbol for Guston's wife, the poet Musa McKim, casts its slippery light on the strange organism below.



Tower Philip Guston



2 Pablo Picasso *Family of Saltimbanques*, 1905

Picasso may be the harlequin figure (far left) in this image of an itinerant circus troupe that often performed near his bohemian neighborhood of Montmartre in Paris. Young and poor himself, Picasso identified with these street artists. Their stark backdrop and disconnected gazes underscore the loneliness and marginality that the artist keenly felt.



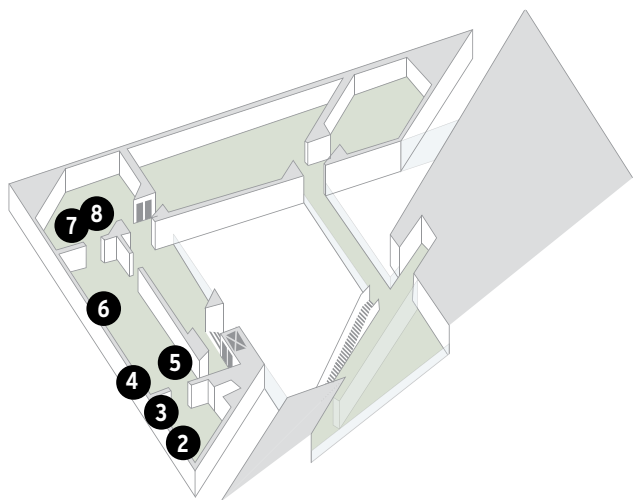
3 Henri Matisse *Open Window, Collioure*, 1905

People who saw Matisse's painting in 1905 got a glimpse of the future. This window opens onto the abstraction of the twentieth century. A pink sea, turquoise sky, and vines brushed with tadpoles of green—had color or form ever strayed so far from nature?



4 Juan Gris *Fantômas*, 1915

Fantômas, sadistic protagonist of best-selling, early twentieth-century crime novels—said to be nowhere and everywhere at the same time—haunts this still life that seems anything but still. A table, a glass, a newspaper, some fruit, a pitcher, a pipe, a chessboard, and more: each offers only a trace of itself, a contour here, texture or color there.



Upper Level Early Twentieth-Century Art



5 Piet Mondrian *Tableau No. IV; Lozenge Composition with Red, Gray, Blue, Yellow, and Black*, c. 1924/1925

Mondrian subverts the convention of a painting as a rectangular window by tilting it diagonally and emptying the center of color. The focus becomes the dynamic relationships among the geometric shaped and painted forms, all of which appear to be cut by the edge—except for one.



6 Jean Dubuffet *Façades d'immeubles (Building Façades)*, 1946

Seeking directness and authenticity, Dubuffet deliberately modeled his art after that of children. He created the animated, crudely drawn stick figures of this postwar apartment complex by scratching through black paint to reveal hidden, delicate colors beneath.



7 Alberto Giacometti *The Invisible Object (Hands Holding the Void)*, 1935

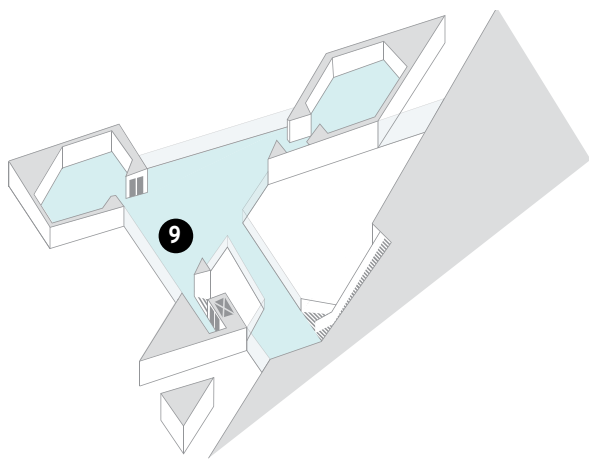
The hieratic and frontal pose of this otherworldly bronze goddess connects her to archaic times, yet the blank, staring face is derived from a modern-era protective mask. Immobilized behind it and within her throne-like enclosure, only her hands are free to communicate. They delicately describe an absence—or perhaps a memory.

8 Marcel Duchamp *Fresh Widow*, 1964 edition (based on a 1920 original)

The black leather panes of this small French window yield no view, redirecting our attention onto its own curious identity. Sculpture? Replica of an ordinary object? A slip of the tongue in saying the title brings about a change of meaning. Punning and double-taking, Duchamp plays with our expectations of art, even assigning the work's rights to his alter ego, Rose Sélavy.



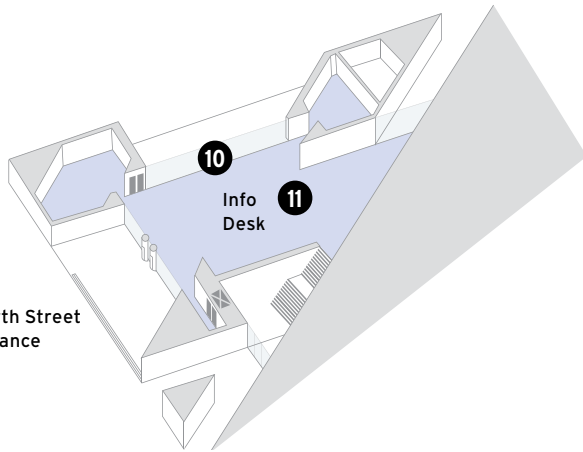
Please note that gallery configurations and wall locations change and may not be exactly as shown. Individual artworks may also be temporarily off view.



Mezzanine

9 Rachel Whiteread *Ghost*, 1990

Plaster's normal domestic application—to build up walls that enclose space—has been turned inside out. A room's interior, stripped of its protective architectural shell, has become a tangible volume. Its features—fireplace, door, and window—now recede, like ghosts. Habitable space, occupied by humans, disappears into an airless solid (but one with cracks).



Ground Level

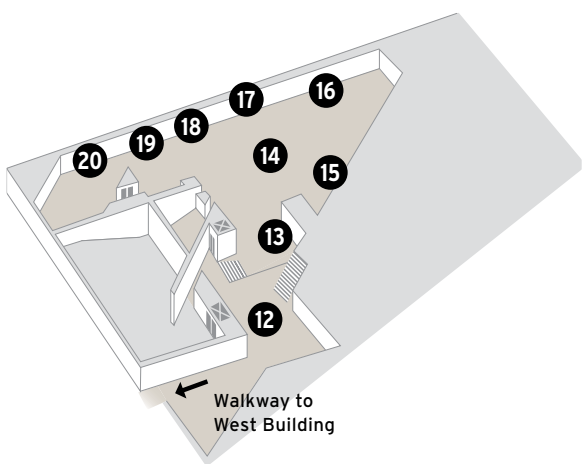
10 Andy Goldsworthy *Roof*, 2004–2005 (detail)

Created for this site, *Roof* consists of nine hollow domes of stacked slate. The view from the Mezzanine reveals a rippling configuration around velvet black oculi. "I wanted to make a piece that had a physical connection between the city and its origins," Goldsworthy has said, referring to the city of Washington's many domes and its neoclassical architecture. The forms also recall a variety of human-made and natural constructions—cairns, hives, and yurts.



11 David Smith *Voltri VII*, 1962

Created in Italy with materials found in an abandoned factory, *Voltri VII* responds to the pull of an ancient place. Machine wheels and attenuated forms suggesting an Etruscan funeral cart combine with forgings that rise like silent ululations.



Concourse Art since 1950



12 Richard Serra *Five Plates, Two Poles*, 1971

Like a house of cards, this "plate-and-pole" work seems intimidatingly precarious, yet also in perfect balance. Move around it to shift your experience of its weight, mass, and gravity.



13 On Kawara *Title*, 1965

Kawara's *Title* seems like a billboard advertisement that evokes a politically charged time and place. Unlike advertising, however, it refuses to deliver a direct message. Instead, it generates associations by way of the words, the magenta color, and the tiny paper stars at each corner, reminiscent of those that appear as US military insignia.



14 Robert Gober *The Slanted Sink*, 1985

"I remember thinking that life would be different when I could see for myself the interior of the sink," Gober recalls of his childhood. The not-quite-sinks that he made in New York during the height of the AIDS epidemic balance subversive wit with nostalgia and grief.



15 Henri Matisse Cut-Outs *Large Composition with Masks*, 1953 (detail)

On view Mon–Sat, 10:00–3:00;
Sun, 11:00–3:00

Matisse's final artistic triumph was "cutting into color." He conducted rhythmic color symphonies by "drawing" with scissors, then composing, recutting, and combining the resulting shapes. "It's like a dance," he said.



16 Jackson Pollock *Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)*, 1950 (detail)

Trace the arcs of black, white, russet, silver, and blue to understand this work's delicate, layered composition. Laying canvas on the floor of his Long Island studio, Pollock then dripped and poured paint on it, "signing" it with handprints (upper left corner and top).



17 Barnett Newman *Fourth Station* from *Stations of the Cross* series, 1958–1966

"I used a white line that was even whiter than the canvas, really intense," Newman said of the fourth of these works. That was when he realized he was in the middle of a series of fourteen paintings that together would represent Christ's Passion. Can abstract paintings tell a story or convey feelings of tragedy? You be the judge.



18 Mel Bochner *Theory of Boundaries*, 1969–1970 (detail)

If "at/in" describes the hard-edged square at left, then "over/in" must refer to the seepage of pigment over the edges, and so on. Bochner slyly reveals the "mechanism" of his work's creation by inscribing a word fraction on each square, perhaps to teach us a different way of thinking about the artist's process.



19 James Rosenquist *White Bread*, 1964

There is no realism here. Rosenquist, a former sign painter, straddles the languages of commercial art and abstraction. Four overwhelming and perfect slices of bread—as unyielding as marble—are squeezed between fields of yellow, making a peculiar sandwich. Yellow condiment spreads across the white bread the way paint covers a canvas.



20 Jasper Johns *No*, 1961 (detail)

A study in denial? Gray tones, a mixture of hot wax and pigment, assume a lumpy, obtuse surface. Refusal dangles on a wire. Yet colors emerge from the gloom, and forms burrow underneath. Behind the suspended metal NO, an imprint and multiple shadows of the word speak to us. It is signature Jasper Johns—mute/expressive, neutral/charged—above all, painting that enacts contradiction.