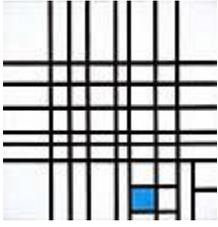


NGC Extended Labels
Submitted for translation 8 March 2011
by Graham Larkin, Curator of International Art



Thomas Cole
Tomb of General Brock, Queenston Heights, Ontario 1830
Oil on canvas
74.5 × 112.5 cm
Purchased 2009
no. 42494

Major General Sir Isaac Brock died in October 1812 while defending the heights of Queenston, Upper Canada, from the invading Americans. He was buried a few days later at Fort George, yet the site of his heroic charge remained unmarked until 1824 when his body was reinterred at Queenston Heights. Work soon began on a commemorative viewing tower, which was damaged beyond repair in 1840 and replaced with a new column in the 1850s. This idealized view by the British-American painter Thomas Cole depicts the site from the American side of the Niagara River, looking northwest toward the distant shores of Lake Ontario. Based on sketches made in May 1829, it was painted during a London sojourn in time to be shown at the Royal Academy summer exhibition in 1830. Unsold in Cole's lifetime, this painting passed to his heirs and was ultimately purchased by the National Gallery of Canada in 2009.



Piet Mondrian

Composition 12 with Blue 1936–42

Oil on canvas

62 × 60.3 cm

Purchased 1970

no. 15911

After a conservative training in his native Holland, Piet Mondrian developed a highly personal form of geometric abstraction, underpinned by a view of the artist as an engine of societal progress. He moved to Paris in 1912, to London in 1938 and, in 1940, to New York where he was lionized by the modern art establishment. Signed PM and dated 36/42, this painting is a transatlantic work, begun in Paris and completed in New York. Before completion it was photographed in Mondrian's Paris studio in 1937 and again in New York in 1941. The earliest photos show that the blue field and the one above it were originally coloured – probably yellow, judging from written testimony and the tonality of the black-and-white photos. There are also microscopic traces of blue paint in the field above the existing blue and in the two fields to their immediate left, indicating further changes as the work progressed.



Edward Wadsworth

Dazzle-ships in Drydock at Liverpool 1919

Oil on canvas

304.8 × 243.8 cm

Transfer from the Canadian War Memorials, 1921

no. 8925

During World War I the newspaper tycoon and politician Max Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook, was charged by the Canadian government with the creation of the Canadian War Records Office in London, England. In 1916–17 he established the Canadian War Memorials Fund to produce a visual record of all aspects of the war – a commission that led to over 300 works by over sixty artists from allied countries. Many of the more ambitious works by avant-garde British and Canadian artists, including this monumental painting, have entered the collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Edward Wadsworth shows a battleship being painted with erratically-patterned “dazzle” camouflage, fracturing the ship’s outline to elude the sights of German submarines. Artists across England were enlisted to design and oversee the painting of vessels. Wadsworth supervised the camouflaging at Liverpool and commemorated this activity in a painting where the staccato patterning extends beyond the boat to engulf the entire scene.



Jackson Pollock

No. 29, 1950 1950

Black and aluminum enamel paint, expanded steel, string, beads, coloured glass and pebbles on glass

121.9 × 182.9 cm

Purchased 1968

no. 15462

Raised in the Midwest, Jackson Pollock moved to New York in 1930 to study art. By 1947 he was living in Long Island making strikingly novel works by flinging paint and other materials (cigarette butts, glass, nails) onto canvases lain across the floor of his studio. In 1949 these “drip” or “poured” paintings earned the rebel artist a full-colour spread in *Life* magazine that asked: “Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?” Some thought so, the article explained, while others viewed him as a mere decorator or dauber. The following year Pollock agreed to make this large painting on a sheet of glass lain atop a structure permitting Hans Namuth to film him from below. Although a tribute to his spontaneity, the filming took months and pushed Pollock over the edge. When the filming was over he flew into a drunken rage, yelling at Namuth: “I’m not a phony, but you’re a phony.”



Francis Bacon

Study for Portrait No. 1 1956

Oil on canvas

197.7 × 142.3 cm

Purchased 1957

no. 6746

This life-sized portrait is derived from a photograph of a painting made three centuries earlier, Diego Velázquez's *Pope Innocent X*. In the assurance of his brushstrokes Bacon shows that he can come as close as any living painter to the bravura and lyricism of the Spanish master. Yet there is also something distinctly and disturbingly modern about the crazy armature of constraining gridlines, the forbidding, all-enveloping darkness, and the way the brushstrokes comprising the figure also do it violence. "I think," explains Bacon, "that Velázquez believed that he was recording the court at that time and recording certain people ... but a really good artist today would be forced to make a game of the same situation ... Also, I think that man now realises that he is an accident, that he is a completely futile being, that he has to play out the game without reason."



Mark Rothko

No. 16 1957

Oil on canvas

265.5 × 293 cm

Purchased 1993

no. 36856

From 1947 until his suicide in 1970 Mark Rothko made paintings consisting of stacked rectangles suspended against a coloured ground. *No. 16* is one of his most luminous and best-preserved works in this style. Although window-like in its geometry, this painting does not set out to show us anything beyond fields of colour. Seeing *No. 16* amid other recent works by the artist at the Venice Biennale in 1958, one Italian critic praised the invention of “a tonal painting that does not mirror or reproduce an atmosphere, but invents and creates a new one.” One way in which the paint moves beyond mere picturing is by overreaching the edges of the wooden stretcher, saturating the canvas on the sides with the same striking red. The frontal plane exhibits a characteristic push-and-pull, with the white paint sitting on top of the red yet registering more as an absence or a view through.



James Rosenquist

Painting for the American Negro 1962–63

Oil on canvas

203 × 533.4 cm overall; panels: 203 × 177.8 cm each

Purchased 1967

no. 15292.1-3

The format and technique of this gigantic three-piece work recall James Rosenquist's training as a billboard painter. Yet in place of the billboard's coherent design and obvious message we are served a jumble of fragments copied from the pages of magazine advertisements. The title alludes to the civil rights movement, which was in full swing by the early 1960s. While African-Americans – at the time mainly referred to as Negro (black) or coloured – struggled to end segregation from the “white” majority, Rosenquist separated his palate like a kid messing with the settings on a colour TV. Despite the tonal distortion, fragmentation and mix of representational conventions, the visual language of advertising permits easy distinction between “black” and “white” bodies. This quintessentially Pop painting is also concerned with the transience of popular media at a time when colour television was new and billboards were on the wane.



Dan Flavin

the nominal three (to William of Ockham) 1963

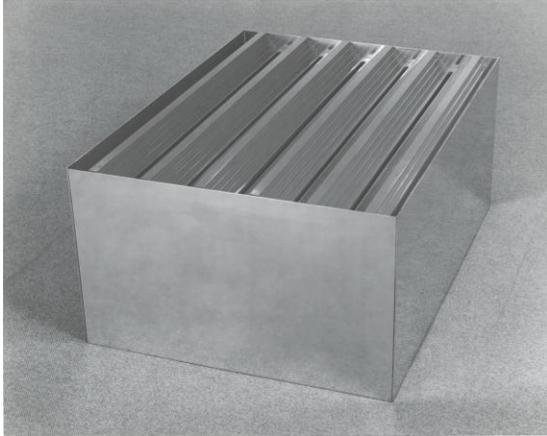
Cool white fluorescent light

Fluorescent bars: 243.8 cm installed vertically

Purchased 1969

no. 15811

The title of this work refers to the philosophical doctrine of Nominalism, which rejects abstract objects or universal entities. Dan Flavin dedicates the work to William of Ockham (c. 1287–1347), the English philosopher whose name is most clearly associated with Nominalism. Ockham famously argues that entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity, which means that in developing theories one should not postulate the involvement of any more things than are required for an adequate explanation. This plea for parsimony clearly appealed to Flavin at a time when he was reducing his art to minimal arrangements of prefabricated fluorescent lights – in this case, a serial “additive system” that intimates further groupings of four, five, etc. The evenly-spaced units were close together when first exhibited at New York’s Green Gallery in 1964, and set further apart in subsequent installations beginning with the great 1969 survey of Flavin’s work at the National Gallery of Canada.



Donald Judd

Untitled 1964

Brass and wood with red enamel paint

54.6 × 125.5 × 92.7 cm

Purchased 1973

no. 17189

Born in Missouri, Donald Judd studied philosophy and art history in New York, where he gained fame beginning in 1964 as a designer of factory-produced “objects” made of wood, metal and/or Plexiglas. Avoiding representation or any other form of reference, his works are mainly untitled. When this floor-based piece was first exhibited at the Kaymar Gallery in New York in 1964, it was made entirely of red-painted wood and comprised six stepped bars projecting above a box. Four brass sides flush with the tops of the bars were added before the work was shown in the 1965 exhibition *Polychrome Construction* at the Isaacs Gallery in Toronto. From there it was acquired by a fellow exhibitor, the Canadian artist Michael Snow, who sold it to the National Gallery of Canada in time for a groundbreaking 1975 exhibition surveying Judd’s career, complete with a full catalogue of his works to date.



Andy Warhol

Brillo Soap Pads Boxes 1964

Plywood boxes with serigraph and acrylic

Boxes: 43.2 × 43.2 × 35.6 cm each

Purchased 1967

no. 15298.1-8

The National Gallery of Canada is one of three collections that owns more than one of the hundred or so Brillo Boxes produced by Pop artist Andy Warhol for an exhibition at New York's Stable Gallery in the spring of 1964. That legendary show comprised a high maze of wooden boxes resembling supermarket cartons. These were fabricated by a cabinetmaker and screen-printed by Warhol and assistants using ordinary house paint. It was the Brillo boxes, with their brash design in the colours of the American flag, that made the most lasting impact, ensuring Warhol unequalled notoriety. In February 1965 the Toronto dealer Jerrold Morris tried to bring eighty Warhol boxes from New York for an exhibition, but when NGC director Charles Comfort refused to recognize them as art they were held at the customs office and subject to a 20 percent duty. An uproar ensued, and the following year the directorial veto power was lifted.



Joseph Kosuth

One and Three Tables 1965

Wood table and photostat enlargements

Table: 74.9 × 60.3 x 61 cm; photostat of table: 117.8 × 91.8 cm; photostat of definition: 61 × 61 cm

Purchased 1973

no. 17259.1-3

One and Three Tables juxtaposes a real table, a 1:1 scale photograph showing the same table as installed, and a dictionary definition of the word “table.” When he made this seminal and pioneering work of Conceptual Art in 1965, Joseph Kosuth was a twenty-year-old art student living in New York. Part of a more extensive series that also includes one and three chairs and saws, this work is born of a conviction that artists should “question the nature of art” and that art inheres in ideas rather than in their physical manifestations. The present work ponders the non-equivalence of a thing and its representation in photography or language. In a 1969 article declaring his debt to various philosophers and to the trailblazing conceptual artist Marcel Duchamp, Kosuth insists that “art with the least fixed morphology is the example from which we decipher the nature of the general term *art*.”



Carl Andre

Lever 1966

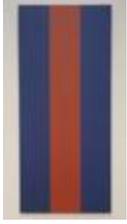
137 firebricks

11.4 × 22.5 × 883.9 cm installed; brick: 11.4 × 22.5 × 6.4 cm each

Purchased 1969

no. 15898.1-137

Consisting of a straight line of 137 firebricks, this shockingly minimalist sculpture was produced in 1966 for the groundbreaking *Primary Structures* exhibition at the Jewish Museum, New York. It sets out to differentiate and measure space, and in so doing to make or remake a place. Andre insists that a good piece is transportable – that is, it can perform this place-making function when transferred to any fairly neutral and generous gallery space. A typical work by Andre takes traditional industrial materials such as brick, wood or metal and makes them serve a purely aesthetic function. It is, of course, a defiantly new aesthetic that continues to provoke after many decades. In making art that is flat and repetitive, and in refusing to transform the stuff out of which his works are made, Andre rejects a millennia-long tradition of sculpture that is precious, craftsmanly, gestural, figurative, hierarchical and monumental.



Barnett Newman

Voice of Fire 1967

Acrylic on canvas

543.6 × 243.8 cm

Purchased 1989

no. 30502

The most popular venue at the 1967 World's Fair in Montreal was the American Pavilion, with more than 11 million visitors. The building took the form of a huge geodesic dome designed by Buckminster Fuller, housing exhibits on many forms of American culture including paintings by leading artists of the day. *Voice of Fire* was the contribution by Barnett Newman, a redoubtable veteran of the New York School known for making paintings so bold and elemental that they redefined the medium. Due to the limited floor space and soaring ceilings of the Expo 67 pavilion, the works were mounted on huge pieces of sailcloth suspended from the ceiling. These unique conditions permitted Newman to make an unusually tall painting. In 1990 the National Gallery of Canada purchased this austere and daunting work from Newman's widow, leading to a heated nationwide debate over its value. The following year she donated the posthumously-titled painting *Yellow Edge*.