

# PRESS RELEASE

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## SEATTLE ART MUSEUM PRESENTS LANDMARK MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY WORKS FROM THE WRIGHT COLLECTION

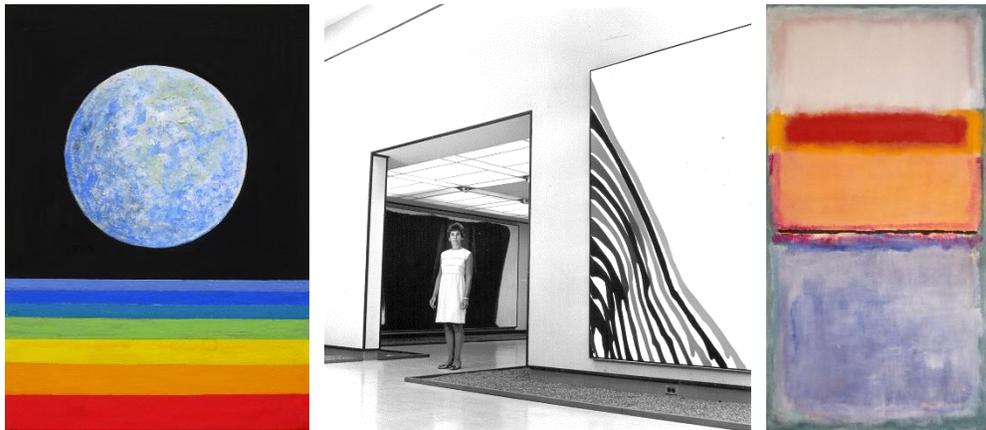
*City of Tomorrow* celebrates the intuitive eye and civic spirit of Virginia “Jinny” Wright

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SEATTLE, WA – The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) presents *City of Tomorrow: Jinny Wright and the Art That Shaped a New Seattle* (October 23, 2020–January 18, 2021), with landmark modern and contemporary paintings, sculptures, and drawings from the Wright Collection, along with historical and personal ephemera tracing Jinny’s life in art and her many contributions to the city of Seattle and Pacific Northwest region. On view are works by Mark Rothko, Helen Frankenthaler, Willem de Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg, Franz Kline, Philip Guston, Andy Warhol, Cindy Sherman, David Hammons, and more.

Philanthropist and collector Virginia “Jinny” Wright (1929–2020) played a pivotal role in the cultural development of Seattle and the Pacific Northwest. Along with her husband Bagley (1924–2011), Jinny generously supported numerous cultural institutions, including SAM. She served SAM for 60 years, including a stint as the President of its Board of Trustees. Over the course of her long career in art, Jinny was a collector, docent, board member, gallerist, curator, and constant advocate for art in the Pacific Northwest.

Her legacy looms largest with the Wright Collection, one of the most significant collections of modern and contemporary art in the region, the majority of which was gifted to SAM. Jinny began collecting in the early 1950s; she worked for the Sidney Janis Gallery, which debuted many of the artists of the time. Another pivotal moment came after Jinny and Bagley had moved back to Seattle: The future-focused 1962 World’s Fair, where Bagley helped secure funding for the iconic Space Needle and exciting contemporary art was on view. The ambitious scope of the Fair’s exhibitions inspired Jinny to establish the Contemporary Art Council (CAC), which brought many important exhibitions to Seattle. The CAC operated under the auspices of the Seattle Art Museum and ultimately led to the creation of the modern and contemporary art department at SAM in 1974.

“Jinny was the ideal collector, following her own infallible eye and always looking toward what would stand the test of time,” says Amada Cruz, Illsley Ball



Nordstrom Director and CEO. “She always intended for these incredible works to go to a museum; she had a sense of duty and joy in what a city museum could be. SAM was the lucky recipient of her generosity and service; we are grateful to her and to the Wright family for their example.”

“Jinny had an amazing eye and her enthusiasm was infectious. She believed in the artist’s ability to teach us something new, to make us see anew,” says Catharina Manchanda, Jon & Mary Shirley Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art. “She wanted Seattle to be a city where art thrives, and she built an extraordinary collection to serve as a foundation. In addition, Jinny and Bagley helped build the cultural institutions that would continue the work.”

In February 2020, Jinny said, “When I think about the future of the Wright Collection at SAM, I put my trust in the artists. I trust that future generations will value their work, that SAM will continue to provide meaningful access to it, and that the conversations that their work has inspired will continue.”

## EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

### Color Field Paintings and “The Rothko Story”



Entering the exhibition, the visitor is immersed in color, matching the energy Jinny brought to the art world. Color Field paintings by Helen Frankenthaler (*Painting With Frame*, 1946 and *Venus Revealed*, 1973), Jules Olitski (*Thigh Smoke*, 1966), and Morris Louis (*Mem*, 1957-60 and *Overhang*, 1960) join Mark Rothko’s *#10* (1952), a highlight of SAM’s collection and Jinny’s legendary first major purchase.

### The Seattle World’s Fair & the Contemporary Arts Council



Jinny’s exposure to the contemporary art exhibitions at the Seattle World’s Fair inspired the creation of the Contemporary Art Council (CAC) in 1964, which brought landmark exhibitions to the newly built Fine Arts Pavilion at Seattle Center under the Seattle Art Museum umbrella. In this gallery, ephemera from the World’s Fair; books, show catalogues, and photos from Jinny’s personal library; and correspondence of the early years of the CAC join works by Frank Stella, Kenneth Noland, Anne Truitt, and David Smith.

### Abstract Expressionism and Assemblage



Bold gestures and lyrical compositions dominate the works on view in this section, all examples of what would become the highly influential Abstract Expressionism movement. Jinny was working at the Sidney Janis Gallery in the 1950s, finding herself at the heart of this new direction, and she began to collect these works. Works on view include the sculpture *Giant Wedge of Pecan Pie* (1963) by Claes Oldenburg, *Octave* (1960) by Robert Rauschenberg, and *Thermometer* (1959) by Jasper Johns. *Untitled* (1964) by Philip Guston and *Cross Section* (1956) by Franz Kline are hung side-by-side, echoing their placement over the years in the Wright family home.

### Minimalism and Light & Space



Jinny also collected Minimalist sculpture such as *Untitled* (1967) by Donald Judd; later she acquired works from California's Light & Space movement including *Untitled* (1957) by Larry Bell, *High Finish Box* (1971) by John McCracken, and *White Light Painting (Inner Band Series)* (1997) by Mary Corse. This section also features an audio interview Jinny recorded with KUOW arts reporters Marcie Sillman.

### Pop Art and Jinny as Gallerist



The subsequent gallery features examples of Pop art, including *Dishes* (1964) by James Rosenquist, *Great American Nude No. 66* (1965) by Tom Wesselmann, and *Flowers, from the Flowers portfolio* (1970) by Andy Warhol. Visitors will also learn about Jinny's work as a gallerist and advocate; she opened Current Editions Gallery in Seattle's Pioneer Square in 1967, and for the next six years, sold original work by Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, James Rosenquist, Frank Stella, Andy Warhol, and other artists she admired. 30 years later, she'd open a non-

commercial space, The Wright Space, on Dexter Avenue, curating different thematic exhibitions that were free and open to the public.

### Public Art in Western Washington

In *City of Tomorrow*, visitors can explore Jinny's contribution to public art projects in Western Washington via The Virginia Wright Fund, which was established in 1969 by Jinny's father Prentice Bloedel. Large-scale photo murals recreate *Broken Obelisk* (1971) by Barnett Newman, which is installed in the University of Washington's Red Square; works from Western Washington University's sculpture garden; and works donated to SAM's Olympic Sculpture Park, by artists such as Ellsworth Kelly, Mark di Suvero, Roxy Paine, and Tony Smith.

### 1980s-90s: Jinny's Sense of Humor



During this time, Jinny served as President of SAM's Board of Trustees; with the building of the downtown Seattle Art Museum in 1991 and the rededication of the Seattle Asian Art Museum in 1994, it was a time of enormous change and growth for SAM. Likewise, Jinny branched out in her collecting, acquiring works that speak to her inexhaustible curiosity as well as her sense of humor. Works on view include large-scale photography from Cindy Sherman and John Baldessari, a painting by Andy Warhol, and irreverent sculpture by Robert Gober, Jeff Koons, Elizabeth Murray, and Maurizio Catellan.

**Image credits:** *Sun Spectrum*, 1959, Charmion von Wiegand, American, 1896–1983, gouache on paper, 13 3/4 × 9 3/4 in., Gift of the Virginia and Bagley Wright Collection, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2014.25.84, © Estate of Charmion von Wiegand; Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY. Virginia Wright at the exhibition *Morris Louis: Veils and Unfurleds*, Seattle Art Museum Pavilion, 1967, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections. © Mary Randlett. *#10*, 1952, Mark Rothko, American, 1903–1970, oil on canvas, 81 3/4 × 42 1/2 × 2 1/4 in., Seattle Art Museum, Gift of the Virginia and Bagley Wright Collection, 91.98. © Artist or Artist's Estate. *Painting with Frame*, 1964, Helen Frankenthaler, American, 1928–2011, oil on canvas, 36 1/4 × 43 7/8 in., Gift of the Virginia and Bagley Wright Collection, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2014.25.23. © Artist or Artist's Estate. *Wolfeboro III*, 1966, Frank Stella, American, born 1936, fluorescent alkyd paint on canvas, 160 3/4 × 99 3/4 in., Seattle Art Museum, Gift of the Virginia and Bagley Wright Collection, 73.8, © Frank Stella/Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. *Untitled*, 1954, Philip Guston, American, 1913–1980, oil on canvas, 51 × 48 3/4 in., Gift of the Virginia and Bagley Wright Collection, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2020.15.12, © Musa Mayer. *Untitled*, 1967, Donald Judd, American, 1928–1994, stainless steel and blue Plexiglas, ten units, 6 × 24 × 27 in., Gift of the Virginia and Bagley Wright Collection, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2014.25.35, © Estate of Donald Judd/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. *Dishes*, 1964, James Rosenquist, American, 1933–2017, oil on canvas, 50 × 60 in., Gift of the Virginia and Bagley Wright Collection, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2014.25.65, © 2020 James Rosenquist Foundation / Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. *Two Onlookers and Tragedy (With Mice)*, 1989, John Baldessari, American, 1931–2020, color and black-and-white photographs, oil tint, 92 × 64 in., Gift of the Virginia and Bagley Wright Collection, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2014.25.5. © Artist or Artist's Estate.

## ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and rededicated as the Asian Art Museum in 1994, and it reopened on February 8, 2020 following an extensive renovation and expansion. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a “museum without walls,” free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.