

Joslyn Art Museum **TIMELINE – 1900 – 2001 in North America**

United States and Canada, 1900 A.D.–present

Overview

The twentieth century is often referred to as the "American Century." During these years, the U.S. emerges as one of two global superpowers, alongside the Soviet Union. A number of factors contribute to the growth of U.S. political and economic domination in the world. First, like Canada to the north, the U.S. possesses an enormous territory and vast natural resources. Second, these resources, along with a large labor pool bolstered by immigrants, fuel the development of industry and the creation of a middle class of consumers who buy manufactured goods with their wages. The international political significance of the U.S. is confirmed by its decisive roles in the two world wars.

As the United States emerges as an important world economic and political power, it also becomes central to the international art scene, with New York usurping the preeminent role previously played by Paris. At the beginning of the century, many American painters continue to work in a style influenced by French Impressionism. By the nineteen-teens, greater realism prevails in the work of the Ashcan School artists. The industrial and urban landscape that emerges in twentieth-century North America is captured by many artists. Among those who celebrate factories and other industrial forms are the Precisionist artists, including Charles Demuth (1883–1935), Charles Sheeler (1883–1965), and Ralston Crawford (1906–1978). During the early decades of the twentieth century, American artists also become more interested in organic and geometric abstraction, and begin to embrace modernism, a tendency that continues as European artists emigrate to the U.S. around the time of World War II.

From the late 1960s, the Vietnam War and the protests it provokes, followed by the Watergate scandal, the Arab Oil Embargo and resulting energy crisis, rampant inflation and recession in the 1970s, and concerns about the environmental consequences of industrialization, all combine to shake American confidence. These events are paralleled in the arts by a growing skepticism about artistic modernism and the emergence of the postmodern movement by the 1970s.

The political climate of the 1980s is relatively conservative in comparison with the 1970s, and economic recovery begins in the middle of the decade. At the same time, innovations in computer technology fundamentally change American life, touching every aspect of daily existence, including work, communications, and leisure. Artists embrace new means of making and exchanging visual images, for instance with ever-smaller and less expensive computers, more efficient compact disks, and videotape. New media will offer an important field for artists through the end of the century. Emerging technologies also create a "Tech Bubble" in which shares in computer-related companies become the objects of stock market speculation. The inflated share prices begin to tumble in early 2000, spelling the end of a period of prosperity and low unemployment.

Key Events

- **1900** In the design of the Ward W. Willitts House in Highland Park, Illinois, Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959) creates the "Prairie Style," a modernist aesthetic for architecture and design that complements the Midwestern landscape.
- **1901** U.S. President William McKinley (1843–1901) is assassinated and Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) becomes president. Known as a "trustbuster" and the nation's first conservationist president, Roosevelt expands the power of the federal government to regulate in the public interest. His administration's most important contributions are the development and enforcement of antitrust policies and the creation of a national park system.
- **1902** Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) begins publication of *Camera Work*, which will continue through 1917 and promotes modern photography as a fine art. In 1905, Stieglitz opens the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession at 291 Fifth Avenue in New York, where he exhibits the work of photographers as well as European and American modernist painters and sculptors.
- **1903** The Great Train Robbery, a ten-minute motion picture directed by Edwin S. Porter (1870–1941), is shown in theaters. Considered the first narrative film, it employs innovative techniques such as the jump-cut, the close-up, and camera movement that become the foundation of cinematic vocabulary.
- **1903** San Francisco-born expatriate Isadora Duncan (1878–1927) delivers a lecture in Berlin entitled "The Dance of the Future" and is soon hailed in the U.S. and Europe as the founder of modern dance.
- **1903** The Wright brothers, Orville (1871–1948) and Wilbur (1867–1912), successfully fly a gasoline-powered airplane at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.
- **1904** The Louisiana Purchase Exposition is held in St. Louis, Missouri. Other expositions, later in the century, will also showcase American technological, industrial, and cultural products, including the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco (1915), the New York World's Fair, "Building the World of Tomorrow," at Flushing Meadows, Queens (1939–40), and the second New York World's Fair (1964–65), which takes the theme "Man in a Shrinking Globe in an Expanding Universe."
- **1904** Ida Tarbell (1857–1944) publishes *The History of the Standard Oil Company*, an exposé of the oil monopoly. Tarbell, Ray Stannard Baker (1870–1946), and Lincoln Steffens (1866–1936), whose *Shame of the Cities* appears in the same year, form a trio of investigative journalists dedicated to exposing corruption in government and big business. Along with other "muckraking" crusaders, such as Upton Sinclair (1878–1968), their hard-hitting reportage leads to many social and political reforms during the Progressive Era.
- **1904–8** The architectural partnership of Greene & Greene—Charles (1868–1957) and Henry (1870–1954)—perfect the California bungalow style in a series of residences capped by the Gamble House (1908) in Pasadena. Melding the Hispanic Mission style and elements of Arts and Crafts, the Gamble House features impeccably crafted interior woodwork.
- **1905** Albert Einstein (1879–1955) formulates the Special Theory of Relativity while pursuing his doctorate in Zurich, Switzerland, and in 1916 formulates the General Theory of Relativity. Following Hitler's rise to power in Germany, Einstein emigrates to the U.S., where he is associated with the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.

- **1905** The founding convention of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), held in Chicago and led by William D. "Big Bill" Haywood (1869–1928), Eugene V. Debs (1855–1926), and Mary "Mother" Jones (1830–1930), is attended by labor radicals from across the United States. Over the next decade, the revolutionary IWW—later known as the Wobblies—recruits hundreds of thousands of workers and organizes dozens of strikes, forcing major concessions such as the eight-hour workday.
- **1905** The Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan are formed. In 1949, Newfoundland will become Canada's tenth province.
- **1905** The first nickelodeon opens in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, providing affordable entertainment—admission 5 cents—to the working-class urban population. By 1908, there are some 8,000 nickelodeons in the U.S., featuring an evening's bill of short films, live theater, and musical revues.
- **1906** A massive earthquake destroys much of San Francisco, igniting fires that ravage the city for three days. Hundreds of people die and thousands of buildings burn.
- **1907** The Belgian-American L. H. Baekeland (1863–1944) files a patent for Bakelite, a synthetic plastic. The material becomes popular in the Art Deco period of the 1920s, when it will be used in a variety of mass-produced goods.
- **1908** Lewis Hine (1874–1940) becomes staff photographer for the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC), traveling through the United States documenting child labor in various industries. Designed to evoke the sympathy of viewers and mobilize activism, Hine's images are circulated by the NCLC via exhibitions and pamphlets. His last large-scale documentary project will be a record of the construction of the Empire State Building in New York (1930–31), in which workers and labor itself share the spotlight with the awe-inspiring structure.
- **1908** The Ford Company produces the first Model T, of which 15 million are eventually sold. Ford's assembly-line method serves as an example for other industries and widespread automobile ownership transforms American culture, making possible wide-ranging and frequent travel, and the development of commuter suburbs far from city centers, among other things.
- **1908** A group of eight realist painters of urban life, later known as the Ashcan School or "The Eight," including William Glackens (1870–1938), Robert Henri (1865–1929), George Luks (1867–1933), and John Sloan (1871–1951), organize an exhibition at Macbeth Gallery in New York.
- **1909** Gertrude Stein (1874–1946) publishes *Three Lives*, a character study of three women. A native of Pennsylvania, Stein is for many years a prominent member of avant-garde artistic and expatriate circles in Paris.
- **1909** The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is founded in Springfield, Illinois, to promote the social, economic, and political goals of African Americans.
- **1910s** Greenwich Village in lower Manhattan emerges as an enclave of bohemian and radical culture, home to irreverent small presses, avant-garde art galleries and studios, and experimental theater groups.
- **1911** A fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York kills 145 workers. The tragedy becomes a rallying cry for the labor movement, spurring improved working conditions and safety regulations.

- **1911** The Masses magazine begins publication as a forum for left-wing culture and commentary. During the magazine's seven-year run, contributors such as Carl Sandburg (1878–1967), John Reed (1887–1920), and Bill Haywood (1869–1928) address labor struggle, class war, revolution, and women's emancipation, with political cartoons by artists including Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), Arthur B. Davies (1862–1928), and Abraham Walkowitz (1878–1965), and dozens of works by members of the Ashcan School. In 1917, The Masses is suppressed by the government because of its antiwar stance.
- **1912** New Mexico and Arizona become the forty-seventh and forty-eighth states of the U.S. The unique landscape and culture of the American Southwest will attract many artists, including Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), who will travel to New Mexico for the first time in 1929 and reside there permanently from 1949.
- **1912** The S.S. Titanic sinks in the North Atlantic after colliding with an iceberg; 1,513 people are killed.
- **1913** The International Exposition of Modern Art (the "Armory Show") is held at the 69th Regiment Armory in New York and introduces Americans to the modernist work of Matisse, Kandinsky, Brancusi, Picasso, Braque, and others on a large scale. Nude Descending a Staircase, a Cubist canvas by Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), creates a public sensation. Theodore Roosevelt labels the Futurist and Cubist artists in the exhibition "the lunatic fringe." Smaller versions of the show subsequently travel to Chicago and Boston.
- **1913** The Los Angeles Aqueduct is completed, the first in a series of major public waterworks that will transform the desert town into a sprawling metropolis.
- **1913** Cass Gilbert (1859–1934) designs the Woolworth Building, a Gothic tower, in New York. As a result of its medieval style and modern function, the building becomes popularly known as the "Cathedral of Commerce."
- **1913** Cecil B. DeMille (1881–1959) directs The Squaw Man in a rented barn in Hollywood, California. The film is a box-office smash and solidifies Hollywood's future as the movie-making capital of the world.
- **1914** Canada enters World War I with the British declaration of war against Germany. In 1917, the U.S. enters the war on the Allied side.
- **1915** Alexander Graham Bell (1847–1922) in New York and Dr. Thomas A. Watson (1854–1934) in San Francisco make the first transcontinental telephone call. The telephone is among the inventions that will revolutionize twentieth-century communications.
- **1915** The Ku Klux Klan is revived in Georgia, adding anti-Catholicism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism to its white-supremacist platform. The same year, the premiere of D. W. Griffith's (1875–1948) Birth of a Nation, a romantic depiction of Klansmen as heroic saviors of the South, sparks riots in several cities.
- **1916** Nurse and social reformer Margaret Sanger (1879–1966) opens a birth control clinic in Brooklyn, New York, the first in the United States, but it is closed by the police nine days later. After several arrests and prosecutions for "maintaining a public nuisance" in her attempts to educate women about contraceptives, Sanger finally succeeds in establishing a clinic in 1923.
- **1917** Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) exhibits his first readymade, Fountain, an upturned and signed urinal, at the Society of Independent Artists in New York. This work questions what it means to be an artist and what constitutes a work of art.

- **1917** The first commercial jazz recording, "Livery Stable Blues," made in New Orleans by the Original Dixieland Jass Band, launches a craze for the music. The 1925–28 recording sessions by Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong (1901–1971)—the first great jazz improvisationist—and his band, The Hot Five, set the standard for innovation among future jazz musicians.
- **1918** The Allies (Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, and the U.S.) are victorious in World War I; the Armistice is signed by Germany on November 11. The German peace treaty will be signed at the palace of Versailles, France, on June 28, 1919.
- **1918–20** A global influenza epidemic kills more than 20 million people.
- **1919** The Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified and goes into effect the next year, initiating the period of Prohibition, which does not end until 1933.
- **1919–21** Panic among U.S. elites inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution and a series of anarchist bombings, along with hostility to foreigners and fear of labor activism, meld into the Red Scare, a government crackdown on dissent. Thousands of anarchists, socialists, communists, and union organizers are rounded up in the Palmer Raids; hundreds are deported, others jailed.
- **1920s–early 1930s** Literary, visual, and performing arts flourish in Harlem, the African-American enclave of New York City, spurred by the mass migration of blacks from rural areas to northern cities. Poets, novelists, painters, and musicians of the "New Negro Movement"—later called the Harlem Renaissance—search for new forms of expression to convey their racial experiences and celebrate African-American cultural identity. Major figures of the Harlem Renaissance include poets Langston Hughes (1902–1967) and Countee Cullen (1903–1946), novelist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960), jazz composer Duke Ellington (1899–1974), political activists W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) and Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), photographer James Van Der Zee (1886–1983), and artists Aaron Douglas (1899–1979) and Archibald Motley (1891–1981).
- **1920** The Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution grants American women the right to vote. This is the culmination of a long struggle for the enfranchisement of women that began as the Suffragist movement in the nineteenth century.
- **1920** The U.S. and Canada join the League of Nations at its inception. The organization fosters cooperation among the Western powers.
- **1922** Sinclair Lewis (1885–1951) publishes *Babbitt*. Set in the fictional Midwestern town of Zenith, the novel satirizes the American virtues of conformity and boosterism.
- **1922** Émigré architect Rudolph Schindler (1887–1953) completes his studio-residence, the Kings Road House, in Los Angeles. A single-story, flat-roofed dwelling opening onto a garden through sliding doors, the house serves as a blueprint for a California style of residential architecture. Schindler's house becomes a gathering place for local intelligentsia, including fellow émigré architect Richard Neutra (1892–1970). The work of both architects will have a profound impact on postwar housing design.
- **1922** Hollywood's first Technicolor film, *Toll of the Sea*, starring Anna May Wong (1905–1961), is released. The two-color Technicolor process used in this film is replaced in 1933 by a superior three-color process. The first major film with sound, *The Jazz Singer*, starring Al Jolson (1886–1950), premieres in 1927, spelling the end of the silent film era.

- **1924** George Gershwin's (1898–1937) *Rhapsody in Blue*, a composition blending elements of popular and classical music, premieres in New York. As denizens of New York's Tin Pan Alley, George and brother Ira (1896–1983), a lyricist, compose hundreds of songs for Hollywood and Broadway, many of which remain standards of the pop and jazz repertoire.
- **1925** The *New Yorker* begins publication with an editorial staff including Dorothy Parker (1893–1967) and Robert Benchley (1889–1945), both founding members of the Algonquin Round Table, a group of writers famous for their merciless wit. So named for the group's daily lunches at a round table in New York's Algonquin Hotel during which attendees trade quips that are widely circulated in magazines and newspapers, the "Vicious Circle"—as they call themselves—rule as tastemakers on the literary and theater scene, and have an enduring impact on American humor.
- **1925** F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940) publishes *The Great Gatsby*, a novel exposing the moral bankruptcy of the Jazz Age, especially among the decadent rich. That same year, Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945) takes up similar themes in his novel *An American Tragedy*, an indictment of the materialist values of the American Dream, written in a naturalistic mode.
- **1925** The Scopes "Monkey" Trial, in which John Scopes of Tennessee is convicted for teaching Darwin's theory of evolution in public school, unfolds against the backdrop of an evangelical religious revival whipped up by fiery preachers and faith healers such as Billy Sunday and Aimee Semple McPherson.
- **1927** Charles A. Lindbergh (1902–1974) flies nonstop from New York to Paris in 33.5 hours, heralding a new age of transatlantic travel.
- **1927** Nicola Sacco (1891–1927) and Bartolomeo Vanzetti (1888–1927), Italian immigrants involved in labor strikes and political agitation, are executed for their purported role in a robbery-murder in Massachusetts. Convinced of their innocence, the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti galvanized intellectuals and artists around the world.
- **1927–28** Richard Neutra (1892–1970) designs the Health House, commissioned by Dr. Philip Lovell, a health and fitness advocate, in Los Angeles. It is the first completely steel-framed residence in the U.S. Built on a steeply terraced hill, its aggressively modernist aesthetic, tempered by Neutra's sensitivity to the southern California landscape, sparks international interest in Los Angeles architecture.
- **1928** Kodak produces the first 16mm movie film, which makes possible amateur color motion pictures.
- **1928–41** The Cranbrook Academy of Art is designed and constructed in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, by Finnish-American modernist Eiel Saarinen (1873–1950), who also serves as president of the Academy.
- **1928** Walt Disney (1901–1966) creates the cartoon character Mickey Mouse. Ten years later, in 1938, Disney produces the first feature-length cartoon, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.
- **1929** The U.S. stock market crashes on October 24, "Black Thursday," triggering a worldwide economic collapse—the Great Depression—that will last until the beginning of World War II.
- **1929** The Museum of Modern Art, New York, opens.
- **1929** Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) publishes *A Farewell to Arms*. Through the depiction of a romance between an American lieutenant in the Italian ambulance service and a British nurse, the novel captures the suffering and tragedy of World War I.

- **1929** *Strange Interlude* by playwright Eugene O'Neill is banned in Boston. The published version of the play becomes a national bestseller, reinforcing O'Neill's reputation as a dramatist who transformed American theater from frivolous melodrama to intense, often harsh, psychological and realistic explorations of the underbelly of American life.
- **1930** The Chrysler Building in New York, designed by architect William Van Alen (1888–1954), is erected at breakneck pace in a competition to build the world's tallest skyscraper. Exemplifying the Art Deco style, the building's tower ornamentation is based on the hubcaps used on Chrysler automobiles.
- **1930s** The Regionalist movement is embodied in the paintings of Grant Wood (1892–1942), John Steuart Curry (1897–1946), and Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975). Rejecting the tenets of modernist art and theory, the Regionalists depict indigenous American subjects in a realist mode, often in murals commissioned for post offices, schools, libraries, and other public buildings under the auspices of the Federal Art Project, a Depression-era government program.
- **1931** The Statute of Westminster ratifies the 1926 Balfour Report giving Canada internal and external legislative authority. This represents an important step in Canada's movement toward political autonomy.
- **1931** Mrs. Hattie Caraway (1878–1950, Democrat from Arkansas) is appointed to finish the Senate term of her late husband and then becomes the first woman to be elected to the U.S. Senate when she is voted in for a full term in the same year.
- **1931** The Group Theatre, a left-wing collective of actors, directors, and playwrights, is formed in New York by Harold Clurman (1901–1980), Cheryl Crawford (1902–1986), and Lee Strasberg (1901–1982). Producing socially conscious plays such as *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), the collective pioneers the method acting technique.
- **1932** The International Style exhibition opens at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Curated by architect Philip Johnson (born 1906) and art historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock (1903–1987), it introduces an American audience to recent developments in European modernist architecture.
- **1932** Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945) is elected president of the United States in a landslide victory for the Democratic party. Roosevelt's "brain trust" develops economic and social reforms—known collectively as the New Deal—designed to stimulate economic recovery, create jobs, and provide relief to the millions of Americans impoverished by the Depression.
- **1932** Eleven West Coast photographers, including Ansel Adams (1902–1984), Imogen Cunningham (1883–1976), and Edward Weston (1886–1958), hold an exhibition in San Francisco at which they announce the formation of Group f/64, dedicated to a "pure" photography that captures the world "as it is," and opposed to the aesthetic manipulations of Pictorialism.
- **1932** Amelia Earhart (1897–1937) becomes the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic. In 1937, she will be lost on a Pacific flight.
- **1932** The 102-story Empire State Building in New York is completed, although the Depression means that there is little demand for office space and the structure is dubbed the "Empty State Building."
- **1932** Radio City Music Hall is completed in New York, designed by Donald Deskey (1894–1989) and others, as part of the larger Rockefeller Center project. The group of functionally and formalistically integrated Art Deco buildings provides a model for subsequent ambitious urban development projects.

- **1933** A liberal arts college is founded in Black Mountain, North Carolina, and becomes a locus for the dissemination of Bauhaus ideas through its European émigré teaching staff, including the German Josef Albers (1888–1976). Black Mountain College remains a site for the production of experimental multimedia work until it closes in 1957.
- **1933** Mexican muralist Diego Rivera (1886–1957) is commissioned by Nelson Rockefeller (1908–1979) to create a mural for the RCA Building in New York's Rockefeller Center. Because the painting, entitled *Man at the Crossroads*, contains a portrait of Lenin, Rivera is prevented from completing it, and Rockefeller later has it destroyed. The leftist politics and social content of Rivera's work, along with that of his compatriots José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949) and David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1975), who also spend time in the U.S. during the 1930s executing various public commissions, influence many American artists employed in government-sponsored New Deal projects during the Depression.
- **1934** Choreographer George Balanchine (1904–1983) and dance enthusiast Lincoln Kirstein (1907–1996) found the School of American Ballet, which later trains students for the New York City Ballet.
- **1935** The federal government launches the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which, like other New Deal programs, provides employment for artists. Ben Shahn (1898–1969), Stuart Davis (1892–1964), and Jackson Pollock (1912–1956), among thousands of other artists, produce murals, sculptures, posters, and other graphic materials for public buildings and for exhibitions held in dozens of community art centers established across the country by the Federal Art Project. Photographers document the living and working conditions of Americans during the Depression with the support of the Resettlement Administration (later called the Farm Security Administration). Among the photographers is Dorothea Lange (1895–1965), whose images of the Dust Bowl exodus become symbols of the migrant experience.
- **1935–39** The Federal Theatre Project, funded under the aegis of the WPA to provide work for unemployed theater personnel, stages hundreds of innovative and politically controversial plays in some forty cities across the United States. The project introduces millions of Americans to live theater, fostering the growth of black theater and the careers of individual artists such as Orson Welles (1915–1985) and John Houseman (1902–1988).
- **1936** Construction of "Fallingwater," the Edgar J. Kaufmann House in Bear Run, Pennsylvania, begins. Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959), the house blends structurally daring concrete cantilevers with rugged stone relating the building to its wooded site.
- **1936** On assignment for *Fortune* magazine, photographer Walker Evans (1903–1975) and journalist James Agee (1909–1955) set out for Hale County, Alabama, where they document the conditions of tenant farmers in the American South. Rejected by the magazine, Evans' photos and Agee's text are compiled in the landmark book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, published in 1941.
- **1936** The Photo League, committed to a documentary photography allied to progressive political and social movements, establishes a school in New York under the directorship of Sid Grossman (1913–1955) and begins publication of its provocative journal *Photo Notes*. Among the League's projects is *Harlem Document*, supervised by Aaron Siskind (1903–1991), which records life in New York's African-American community. In the late 1940s, the League is declared a "subversive" organization by the U.S. Attorney General and many of its members are blacklisted.
- **1936** *Modern Times*, a film directed by and starring Charlie Chaplin (1889–1977), premieres. The film satirizes some of modernity's major developments, especially factory work.

- **1938** The Federal Highway Act authorizes a feasibility study for what will become the Interstate Highway System. Government support for highway construction will spell the demise of passenger rail service in many parts of the United States and will contribute to the growth of suburbs and urban sprawl.
- **1938** The dirigible Hindenburg, touted as a superior new form of transportation, burns. The event is captured on film and will be seen around the world.
- **1938** The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) is formed to investigate Communist influence in the United States.
- **1939** World War II begins when German troops invade Poland. France and Britain declare war on Germany and Canada follows suit. Following the Japanese bombing of the American military installation at Pearl Harbor, Hawai'i, on December 7, 1941, the U.S. and Britain declare war on Japan; Germany and Italy declare war on the U.S. In 1944, Allied forces land on the Normandy beaches on D-Day and Paris and Rome are liberated from their German occupiers. The U.S. begins its offensive in the Pacific. In 1945, the war ends when the U.S. drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. Research into atomic weaponry had begun with the Manhattan Project of 1941.
- **1939** John Steinbeck's (1902–1968) *The Grapes of Wrath* is published. The proletarian novel tells the story of a farming family from Oklahoma, displaced by the Dust Bowl, who travel to California to find employment as migrant agricultural workers.
- **1939** The film *Gone with the Wind* is made, based on a novel by Margaret Mitchell (1900–1949), produced by David O. Selznick (1902–1965), and directed by Victor Fleming (1883–1949). In the same year, the film *The Wizard of Oz* is released. It is the work of four different directors, although Victor Fleming is the one credited, and it stars Judy Garland (1922–1969) as Dorothy.
- **1940** Itinerant folk singer and trade unionist Woody Guthrie (1912–1967) writes "This Land Is Your Land" in response to Irving Berlin's ultrapatriotic "God Bless America." That same year, Guthrie records the album *Dust Bowl Ballads*, a compilation of songs written on the road during the Depression years. Guthrie's life and work will inspire another generation of musicians and activists in the 1960s.
- **1941** The film *Citizen Kane*, directed by Orson Welles (1915–1985), debuts. The film is recognized for its rich characterizations as well as for the technical mastery of the medium demonstrated by Welles, who acted as writer, director, and star.
- **1942** Edward Hopper (1882–1967) paints *Nighthawks* (Art Institute, Chicago), an iconic depiction of loneliness and isolation in contemporary American life. Hopper maintains allegiance to a harsh realist mode throughout his life, creating stark urban and rural scenes scored by bright artificial light and deep shadows.
- **1942** Peggy Guggenheim (1898–1979) opens the gallery *Art of This Century* in New York. Romanian-Austrian architect Frederick Kiesler (1890–1965) designed the interiors that were intended to complement the Surrealist and abstract art on display.
- **1943** Michael Curtiz (1888–1962) directs the film *Casablanca*, starring Humphrey Bogart (1899–1957) and Ingrid Bergman (1915–1982). The romantic film becomes a twentieth-century classic.
- **1944** The American Society of Industrial Designers is founded to advocate high-quality design of industrial products, a larger concern at mid-century. Among the most advanced designers of the period is Norman Bel Geddes (1893–1958), whose work encompasses the practical design of everyday commodities such as

typewriters and radios, and large-scale visionary projects such as the Futurama exhibit at the 1939 New York World's Fair.

- **1944** The dance "Appalachian Spring," choreographed by Martha Graham (1894–1991), premieres in New York. It is one of the works in which she virtually invented modern dance.
- **1944** Marian Anderson (1897–1993) becomes the first African American to debut at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, in Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*.
- **1945** The Charter of the United Nations is ratified by the U.S. as one of the original fifty-one member states. The UN is intended to foster the peaceful resolution of conflicts, as well as cooperation, between the nations of the world.
- **1945** The conclusion of World War II begins a prolonged period of economic expansion in the U.S. Among the postwar American art movements that receive popular and critical attention worldwide is Abstract Expressionism, which includes two subgenres: action or gesture painting, associated with the work of Jackson Pollock (1912–1956), Lee Krasner (1908–1984), Willem de Kooning (1904–1997), Franz Kline (1910–1962), and others, and color field painting, represented by the work of Mark Rothko (1903–1970), Barnett Newman (1905–1970), and Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967). Although Abstract Expressionism is mostly thought of as a movement in painting, it has some correlation to the sculpture of David Smith (1906–1965).
- **1948** The U.S. Congress passes the Marshall Plan Act for the reconstruction of Western Europe.
- **1948** A period of political tension—the Cold War—between the U.S. and the USSR begins. The conflict comes closest to escalating into all-out nuclear war with the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.
- **1948** Architect Philip Johnson (born 1906) builds his "glass house" in New Canaan, Connecticut. The house reduces the elements of building to its essentials: a horizontal slab on the ground, vertical supports, and a flat roof. A transparent glass wall wraps around the house and opens it to the rural site. A comparable building is the Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois, designed by German émigré architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969).
- **1948** Alfred Kinsey (1894–1956) publishes *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, followed by *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in 1953. Kinsey's research opens up the field of the study of human sexuality.
- **1949** *Death of a Salesman*, a play by Arthur Miller (born 1915), debuts. The play illustrates the plight of a man who cannot survive in the consumer economy of postwar America.
- **1950** At a Republican Women's Club in Wheeling, West Virginia, Senator Joseph McCarthy (1908–1957) makes an incendiary speech, claiming that the U.S. State Department has been infiltrated by Communist spies. During the Red Scare of the 1950s, called "McCarthyism" after its prime mover, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) will persecute suspected Party members, orchestrating several high-profile hearings around the entertainment industry. Among the thousands of people who are blacklisted as a result of a HUAC investigation are performers Lena Horne (born 1917) and Paul Robeson (1898–1976), and writers Arthur Miller (born 1915), Dashiell Hammett (1894–1961), and Lillian Hellman (1905–1984).
- **1950** The Korean War begins when North Korea invades South Korea, using Soviet military equipment and training, and captures Seoul. Under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964), the United Nations Command recaptures Seoul, which is taken back by North Korea in 1951, then subsequently recaptured again. In 1953, the Korean armistice is signed at P'anmunjŏm.

- **1951** Julius (1918–1953) and Ethel (1915–1953) Rosenberg are sentenced to death for espionage against the U.S., during the height of the McCarthyist period. Many Americans will remain skeptical about the Rosenberg's guilt, especially that of Ethel.
- **1951** J. D. Salinger (born 1919) publishes *The Catcher in the Rye*. The story of runaway prep-school student Holden Caulfield in New York expresses the dissatisfaction of youth with adult culture.
- **1951** Architect Gordon Bunshaft (1909–1990), of the firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, designs the office building known as Lever House in New York. In 1958, the Seagram's Building by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) is constructed nearly opposite Lever House on Park Avenue. The two buildings epitomize the adoption by North American corporations of a modernist idiom developed in Europe before World War II.
- **1952** Composer John Cage (1912–1992) creates his first performance works in collaboration with dancer/choreographer Merce Cunningham (born 1919) at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Cage's ideas about chance as a fundamental element of the artmaking process, along with Duchamp's notion of the found object or readymade, will strongly influence artists coming to maturity in the 1950s, including Robert Rauschenberg (born 1925) and Jasper Johns (born 1930), who will make his first flag painting in 1954.
- **1953** Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1961), Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe during World War II, is elected president of the U.S. and will serve until 1961.
- **1954** The U.S. Supreme Court rules that racial segregation is in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. This begins a long struggle for Civil Rights for African Americans and other minority groups in the U.S. that continues into the 1960s. The movement's landmark events of the 1950s include the bus boycott against racial segregation in Selma, Alabama (1955), and the school desegregation crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas (1957).
- **1954** R. Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983) exhibits a cardboard model of his geodesic dome, a proposed solution to the need for quickly and easily produced dwellings, at the Milan Triennale, which includes architectural and urban projects.
- **1955** News of Jonas Salk's (1914–1995) successful human trials of the polio vaccine are made public. The vaccine virtually eliminates in the U.S. a disease that had crippled many children and adults, including the former president, Franklin D. Roosevelt.
- **1955** Simon Rodia (1879–1965) completes work on the Watts Towers in Los Angeles, begun in 1921. Without formal architectural or engineering training, Rodia built two towers more than 100 feet tall with steel rods and hoops, and covered with a mosaic of found materials.
- **1956** Elvis Presley (1935–1977) releases his first number-one hit, the song "Heartbreak Hotel." Many other hit songs will follow and Presley will become known as the "King of Rock and Roll."
- **1957** Jack Kerouac (1922–1969) publishes *On the Road*, which makes him a cult hero of the Beat movement.
- **1957** Tatyana Grosman (1904–1982) establishes Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE), a printmaking workshop, in West Islip, New York. ULAE sets the standards for a postwar printmaking renaissance in the United States.
- **1957** Leonard Bernstein's (1918–1990) musical *West Side Story* premieres on Broadway. It is a popular retelling of the Romeo and Juliet story in the guise of contemporary New York gang culture.

- **1958** The U.S. establishes the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), which leads to astronaut Alan Shepard's (1923–1998) first manned American space flight in 1961.
- **1958** The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959), opens in New York. Wright had begun working on the commission for a building to house the Guggenheim's collection of modernist art in 1943. The museum represents a sculpturally and spatially rich use of concrete.
- **1959** The first public "happening" is produced by Allan Kaprow (born 1927) at the Reuben Gallery in New York. Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg are among the performers. Influenced by Jackson Pollock's process of action painting, the teachings of John Cage on chance and indeterminacy in art, and ultimately Dadaism, Kaprow defines a happening as a choreographed event that facilitates spontaneous interactions between objects—which include performers—and visitors.
- **1959** Alaska becomes the forty-ninth state and Hawaii the fiftieth state in the union. The United States thereby takes its definitive form for the rest of the twentieth century.
- **1960** John F. Kennedy (1917–1963) is elected president of the United States, the first Catholic to hold the office. He serves until his assassination in Dallas, Texas, by Lee Harvey Oswald (1939–1963) in 1963. Kennedy's presidency is known as the "Camelot" era.
- **1960** The Minimalist movement begins and maintains an important place in the art world for about a decade. Practitioners include Carl Andre (born 1935), Robert Morris (born 1931), Dan Flavin (1933–1996), Brice Marden (born 1938), Robert Ryman (born 1930), and others.
- **1961** Joseph Heller (1923–1999) publishes *Catch-22*, the author's first novel set against the background of his experience in World War II as a bombardier. The title becomes a catch-phrase to describe inescapable situations.
- **1961** The phrase "concept art" is first used by Henry Flynt (born 1940). It comes to have a more general application to the work of artists Sol LeWitt (born 1928), Joseph Kosuth (born 1945), and others. During the following decade, Conceptual and performance art demonstrate the possibilities of making art without producing saleable objects.
- **1962** The TWA terminal, designed by Eero Saarinen (1910–1961), is constructed at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York. The building's poetic evocation of flight in its curving forms signals a turn away from the austerity of mid-century high modernism.
- **1962** Andy Warhol (1928–1987) paints *Campbell's Soup Cans*, a key work of the Pop Art movement. Warhol and other artists associated with the movement, including Claes Oldenburg (born 1929) and Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997), satirize Americans' voracious consumption of manufactured products in the postwar period.
- **1962** Yale University's Art and Architecture Building, designed by Paul Rudolph (1918–1997), opens. It is an important monument of New Brutalism, a style that—in contrast to the trim and sleek aesthetic of 1920s modernism—emphasizes the tactility and roughness of its materials, often poured-in-place concrete.
- **1963** Bob Dylan (born 1941) records "Blowin' in the Wind." The song becomes an anthem of the antiwar movement in the late 1960s and early '70s.
- **1964** African Americans are guaranteed the right to vote with the passage of the Twenty-Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

- **1964** The British singing group, the Beatles, arrive in New York for their television appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show and become an instant sensation.
- **1964** The term "optical art" is coined in Time magazine to describe painting and sculpture that makes use of optical effects to evoke physiological responses in the viewer. Proponents of Op Art include Bridget Riley (born 1931), Larry Poons (born 1937), and long-time practitioner Victor Vasarely (1908–1997).
- **1965** Students demonstrate in Washington, D.C. against U.S. bombings of North Vietnam. The peace movement will gain momentum as U.S. involvement in Vietnam escalates, through the late 1960s.
- **1965** Race riots erupt in the South Central Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts.
- **1965** Richard Meier (born 1934) designs the Smith House in Darien, Connecticut. This work establishes his national reputation and will be followed by many prominent commissions, including the Getty Center in Los Angeles in 1985.
- **1966** Architect Robert Venturi (born 1925) publishes *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, a major statement of the postmodern movement.
- **1967** The "Summer of Love" begins in April, centered in San Francisco with the Free Love movement.
- **1967** The film *The Graduate*, starring Dustin Hoffman (born 1937) and directed by Mike Nichols (born 1931), is released. Its themes include the disaffection of youth from the postwar society of their parents as well as the vacuity of upper-middle-class suburban life in the 1960s.
- **1968** Senator Robert F. Kennedy (1925–1968) is assassinated in Los Angeles. In the same year, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968) is murdered in Memphis, Tennessee. In the mid-1950s, King had emerged as one of the prominent leaders of the Civil Rights movement.
- **1968** Violence erupts at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago as Mayor Richard Daley (1902–1976) uses the police to squelch antiwar protests.
- **1968** Pierre Elliott Trudeau (1919–2000) is elected prime minister of Canada. He will serve until 1984.
- **1968** The epic science-fiction film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1928–1999), is released.
- **1969** A group exhibition devoted to Conceptual art, entitled *January 1–31: 0 Objects, 0 Paintings, 0 Sculptures*, is mounted by New York dealer Seth Siegelaub and features the work of four artists: Joseph Kosuth (born 1945), Lawrence Weiner (born 1940), Robert Barry (born 1936), and Douglas Huebler (1924–1997). As a movement, Conceptualism critiques the political and economic structures that sustain Western art forms, and Conceptual artists produce works intended to convey ideas—often through the use of text alone—rather than to be appreciated as precious commodities.
- **1969** The Woodstock music festival is held in upstate New York. Not only do important rock musicians and groups of the period perform, but the entire event becomes associated in the popular imagination with the youth culture of the late 1960s.
- **1969** Apollo 11 is launched from Cape Kennedy in Florida; Neil Armstrong (born 1930) becomes the first man to walk on the moon.

- **1969** The Stonewall riot in New York begins the struggle for Gay Liberation. The movement is part of a larger struggle for equal rights for oppressed groups, including racial minorities and women.
- **1970** Members of the National Guard open fire on a group of student antiwar protesters at Kent State University in Ohio. Four are killed and eight are wounded.
- **1970** Architect Frank Gehry (born 1929) designs the "Contour" chair (1987.357). His Easy Edges furniture, often made of layered and corrugated cardboard, shows the dual influence of architectural models and the contemporary environmental movement which draws attention to commonly discarded materials.
- **1970** Environmental awareness spawns earthworks, sculptural projects on the scale of the landscape itself. Perhaps the best-known example is Robert Smithson's (1938–1973) large-scale Spiral Jetty, built out of rock and earth in the Great Salt Lake in Utah.
- **1971** The term "Post-Minimalism" is used by critic Robert Pincus-Witten (born 1935) to describe the contemporary work of Richard Serra (born 1939) and Eva Hesse (1936–1970).
- **1972** U.S. troops withdraw from Vietnam; a cease-fire agreement is signed the following year. In 1975, President Gerald Ford (born 1913) declares the Vietnam War officially over.
- **1972** President Richard Nixon (1913–1994) visits China and the Soviet Union, establishing a *détente* with the latter power. The Watergate political scandal also begins. A House Impeachment Inquiry follows in 1973 and Nixon's resignation is announced in 1974. Nixon is succeeded by his vice-president, Gerald Ford (born 1913), who pardons him in a controversial move.
- **1972** The Godfather, directed by Francis Ford Coppola (born 1939), is released. It is the film version of an immensely popular novel of the same year by Mario Puzo (1920–1999) chronicling a fictionalized Italian Mafia family.
- **1973** The U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade* guarantees abortion and privacy rights for women.
- **1973** The Arab Oil Embargo generates an energy crisis with resulting price hikes and scarcity of fuel. The energy crisis contributes to the economic woes of the mid-1970s.
- **1976** Alex Haley (1921–1992) publishes *Roots*. The popular novel, later a television program, brings the historical experience of African Americans in the U.S. to a large audience.
- **1976** The avant-garde opera *Einstein on the Beach*, by Robert Wilson (born 1941) and composer Philip Glass (born 1937), premieres.
- **1977** A blackout in New York City is precipitated by lightning strikes of power lines. The ensuing looting and disruption are seen as signs of urban decay.
- **1977** The Camp David Accords, facilitated by President Jimmy Carter (born 1924), lead to the signing of two peace agreements between Israel and Egypt.
- **1977** Walter De Maria (born 1935) installs *The Lightning Field* near Quemada, New Mexico. In the same year, he re-creates his 1968 *Earth Room*, a gallery filled with dirt, at the Heiner Friedrich Gallery in New York. With the latter work, De Maria becomes prominently associated with the earthworks movement.

- **1977** The film *Star Wars*, directed by George Lucas (born 1944), debuts. The romantic futuristic tale is immensely popular but achieves even greater renown when the title is adopted for President Ronald Reagan's proposed missile defense system.
- **1977** Architect Frank Gehry (born 1929) transforms his traditional house in Santa Monica, California, with an addition assembled from common materials like plywood and chain-link fencing. Gehry's mature style is represented by the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain (1995).
- **1979** Artist Sherrie Levine (born 1947) rephotographs images by Walker Evans as a means of making art that questions the notion of originality. Over the next decade, Levine, Dana Birnbaum (born 1946), Barbara Kruger (born 1945), and others will become prominent in the Appropriation Art movement.
- **1980** Former actor and California governor Ronald Reagan (1911–2004) is elected to the U.S. presidency and is the object of an unsuccessful assassination attempt shortly thereafter. He will serve two terms and his vice-president, George H. W. Bush (born 1924), will serve one term as president. Together, they will preside over a period of economic expansion (in the mid- to late 1980s) and conservative policy making.
- **1980** The personal computer ("PC") is launched by IBM; the Apple Macintosh computer is introduced in 1984. Laptop computers become available in 1986. These models bring computing into the home and lead to their widespread use in education, business, artmaking, and leisure activities.
- **1980** The first exhibitions of Neo-Expressionist art are held in New York. The term is used to describe a diverse group of international artists who emerge during the decade and reject the austere minimalism of some 1970s art. The Americans associated with the movement are Julian Schnabel (born 1951), David Salle (born 1952), Eric Fischl (born 1948), and others.
- **1982** The New Canadian Constitution is ratified by all provinces except Québec, where a French-Canadian separatist movement has been active since the 1960s.
- **1982** The U.S. Embassy in Beirut is bombed, killing 63 people and injuring 120. The Islamic Jihad claims responsibility.
- **1984** Brian Mulroney (born 1939), a bilingual lawyer from Québec, leads the largest Conservative landslide in Canadian history and is elected prime minister. He has a decisive impact on Canadian politics for nine years, until he steps down in 1993 and Kim Campbell (born 1947) becomes Canada's first woman to hold the office.
- **1985** The Los Angeles County Museum of Art organizes an exhibition of works by Barbara Kruger (born 1945), which combine found photography and succinct, humorous slogans deconstructing the representations of power inherent in mass-media imagery. Kruger is one of many artists of the 1980s, sometimes dubbed the "pictures generation," who explore the coercive and seductive dynamics of the media.
- **1986** The Iran-Contra Affair, the greatest U.S. government scandal since Watergate, unfolds when hearings reveal that the Reagan administration has been covertly funneling funds to the Nicaraguan contras that were made by selling arms to Iran.
- **1986** The widely televised space shuttle Challenger disaster erodes public confidence in the U.S. space exploration program begun in the 1960s.
- **1987** A worldwide stock market crash, including a drop in the value of the U.S. stock market of 500 points in one day, signals the end of a period of economic exuberance and the beginning of a recession.

- **1990** The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq triggers the first Gulf War and U.S. Operation Desert Storm in 1991.
- **1991** The "grunge" style, originating in Seattle, Washington, becomes nationally fashionable and has an impact on popular music and clothing.
- **1992** William Jefferson ("Bill") Clinton (born 1946) of Arkansas begins a two-term presidency, buoyed by renewed economic prosperity but plagued by scandal.
- **1993** Terrorists bomb the World Trade Center in New York, causing six deaths and hundreds of injuries among the workers in the two towers.
- **1993** A fifty-one-day siege of the compound held by David Koresh (1959–1993), the leader of an extremist religious group, the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, ends with an assault by FBI agents and an explosion and fire that kill Koresh and seventy-six followers.
- **1993** The play *Angels in America, Part One* by Tony Kushner (born 1956) makes its Broadway debut. It examines the history of the epidemic of HIV-AIDS since the 1980s, which has been particularly prevalent in the gay community.
- **1994** The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is implemented. The controversial treaty is credited with stimulating economic exchanges between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico, but also charged with leading to the export of manufacturing jobs from the U.S. to its southern neighbor.
- **1995** The Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City is bombed and 168 people are killed. Timothy McVeigh (1968–2001) and Terry Nichols (born 1955) are convicted of having carried out the crime. McVeigh receives the death penalty and Nichols a life sentence.
- **2000** The "dot-com" bubble, a speculative frenzy of investment in Internet-related stocks, bursts as the NASDAQ exchange tumbles and hundreds of start-up companies fold.
- **2000** The U.S. presidential election culminates in a legal challenge. George W. Bush (born 1946), the son of former president George H. W. Bush (born 1924), is eventually declared the winner as a result of a Supreme Court decision disallowing the recounting of votes in Florida, which might have resulted in the victory of Democratic challenger Al Gore (born 1948).
- **2001** On September 11, four passenger planes are hijacked by terrorists and deliberately crashed into the World Trade Towers in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and an open field in Pennsylvania. More than 3,000 people die in the attacks and the Trade Towers collapse. Within a month, the U.S. launches air strikes in Afghanistan, targeting the Taliban regime and Saudi-born dissident Osama Bin Laden, who is suspected of masterminding the September 11 attacks.

Source: "United States and Canada, 1900 A.D.–present". In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/11/na/ht11na.htm> (October 2004)