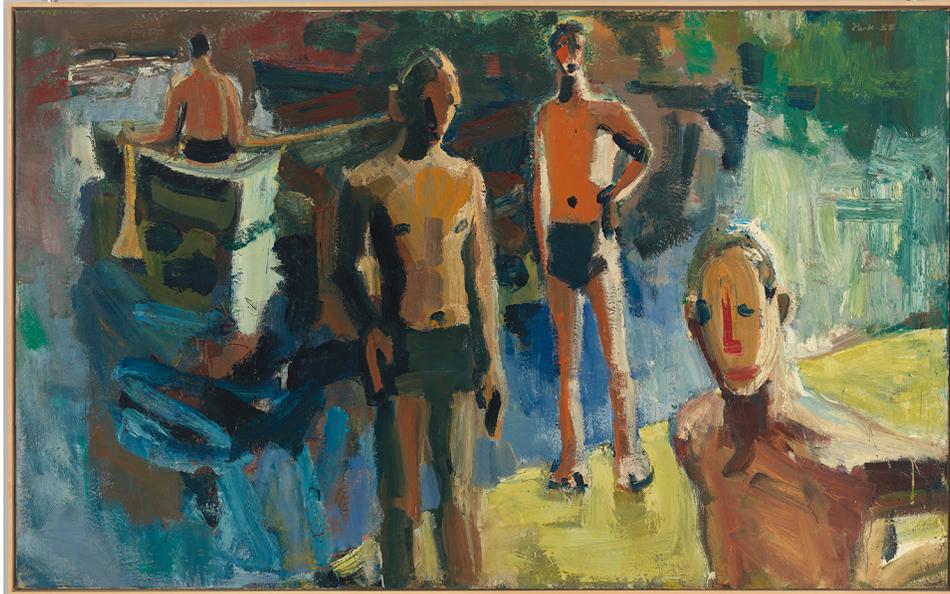


SFMOMA ANNOUNCES FIRST LARGE-SCALE EXHIBITION OF DAVID PARK IN MORE THAN 30 YEARS

Pioneer of Bay Area Figurative Art Is Celebrated with Career Retrospective of Approximately 125 Works



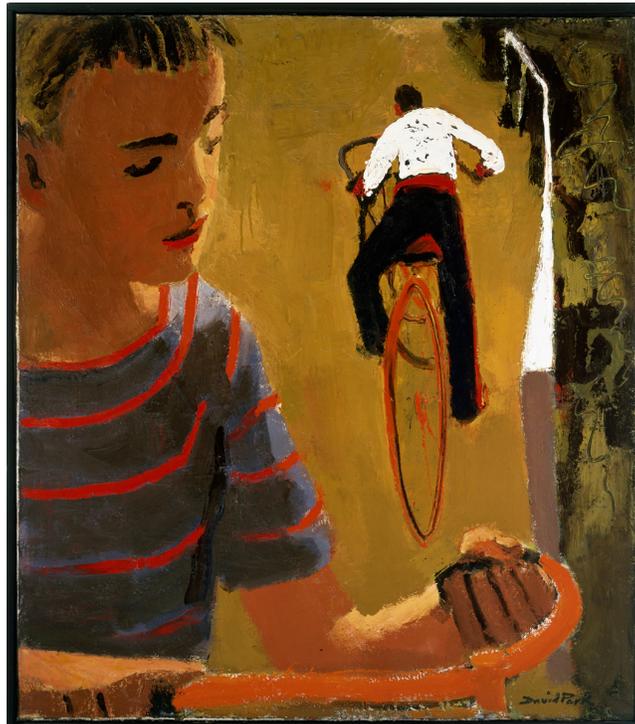
***David Park: A Retrospective*
October 4, 2020–January 18, 2021**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (October 31, 2019; updated September 30; 2020)—At the age of 38, in late 1949 or early 1950, artist David Park (1911–1960) filled his Ford with as many of his Abstract Expressionist canvases it could fit and abandoned them at the city dump. The work he made next shocked the Bay Area art world. At a moment when serious American painting was dominated by abstraction, Park emphatically reintroduced the figure into his practice and began painting “pictures,” as he called them—a radical decision that led to the development of the Bay Area Figurative Art movement. On view at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) from October 4, 2020, to January 18, 2021, *David Park: A Retrospective* will be the first major exhibition of Park’s work in three decades and the first to examine the full arc of his extraordinary career.

Featuring approximately 127 works displayed chronologically and ranging from the artist’s early social realist paintings from the 1930s to his final works on paper from 1960, *David Park: A Retrospective* is organized by SFMOMA and curated by Janet Bishop, Thomas Weisel Family Chief Curator and Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA. The first galleries of the exhibition reveal a restless artist, in the first decades of his career, deftly moving from style to style in search of a distinctive voice that culminate in a rare group of surviving abstractions from the late 1940s. At the heart of the presentation will be a rich selection of the 1950s Bay Area Figurative canvases for which Park is best known.

“I can’t think of any artist who could wield a loaded brush quite like David Park,” said Bishop. “He was a profoundly gifted artist who had two great loves: paint and people. Toward the end of his life, his fascination with the potential of his medium coupled with his appreciation for the human figure led to a group of canvases in which the universal humanity of his subjects comes pulsing through in the most powerful way.”

Though his art training was minimal enough that he was essentially self-taught, Park was a natural draftsman and his gift for rendering the human form was established in early childhood. After moving from his native Boston to California at the age of 17, Park lived for most of his adult life in the Bay Area. He became a beloved and highly influential teacher at both the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute) and the University of California, Berkeley, and he was at the center of a vibrant community of Bay Area artists including Elmer Bischoff, Richard Diebenkorn, Paul Wonner and others.



In the spring of 1951, Diebenkorn saw an image of Park’s *Kids on Bikes* (1950) for the first time and remarked, “My God, what’s happened to David?” In the early 1950s, figurative painting in the United States was perceived as either old-fashioned or better suited for propaganda than the avant-garde. Park described his skepticism of abstraction as more personal than dismissive of the Abstract Expressionist movement as a whole. He noted in 1952, “I believe the best painting America has produced is in the current non-objective direction. However, I often miss the sting that I believe a more descriptive reference to some fixed subject can make. Quite often even the very fine non-objective canvases seem to me to be so visually beautiful that I find them insufficiently troublesome, not personal enough.” As Bishop notes in the catalogue, by “some fixed subject” Park really meant *people*.

The powerful paintings Park created in the decade that followed his dramatic trip to the dump and departure from abstraction reveal a fresh approach to his long-term interests in vernacular and classic subjects—portraiture, domestic interiors, musicians, rowers and bathers. Though he rarely painted directly from life, Park drew inspiration from his own lived experience, as seen in *Rehearsal* (ca. 1949–50), which pictures the jazz band for

which he served as pianist; *Boston Street Scene* (1954), a view of the neighborhood where he grew up; and *Interior* (1957), for which his wife Lydia and fellow painter Bischoff posed. Over the course of the 1950s, Park continued to monumentalize everyday acts, revealing the universal humanity of his subjects with expert paint handling and an extraordinary sense of color.

Between 1958 and 1959, Park reached his expressive peak, reveling in the lush qualities of paint to create intense, psychologically charged and deeply felt canvases such as *Standing Couple* (1958), *Four Men* (1958), *Two Bathers* (1958) and *The Cellist* (1959). When this fertile period was cut short by illness in 1960 and he could no longer work on canvas, Park transferred his creative energy to other media. In the last months of his life, while bed-ridden, he produced a remarkable 30-foot-long felt-tip pen scroll—which will be on view exclusively at SFMOMA—and a poignant and radiant series of gouaches. The latter depict the timeless, key subjects of his artistic career: the human figure alone and in groups, mothers and children, domestic activities and the familiar moments of everyday life.

DAVID PARK AND HIS CIRCLE: THE DRAWING SESSIONS

Organized to accompany *David Park: A Retrospective* and on view concurrently on the museum's second floor, *David Park and His Circle: The Drawing Sessions* will examine the weekly figure drawing sessions initiated by Park, Elmer Bischoff and Richard Diebenkorn in 1953. These artists' gatherings, which expanded during the decade to include additional friends and colleagues, were held in each other's Bay Area studios with hired models, both male and female. Together, the artists focused on mastering the human form by repeatedly drawing models in various poses, and experimenting with both traditional and alternative materials. Organized by Sara Wessen Chang, SFMOMA curatorial assistant of painting and sculpture, the show will feature 33 drawings and two sketchbooks that capture the collegial and dynamic nature of these sessions.

VENUES AND DATES

The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth: June 2 to September 8, 2019

Kalamazoo Institute of Arts: December 21, 2019 to March 15, 2020

SFMOMA: October 4, 2020 to January 18, 2021

SUPPORT

Major support for *David Park: A Retrospective* is provided by Doris Fisher, Patricia W. Fitzpatrick in honor of Neal Benezra, Janet and Clint Reilly, and anonymous donors. Generous support is provided by Jean and James E. Douglas, Jr., Mary J. Elmore, Christine and Pierre Lamond, the Stuart G. Moldaw Public Program and Exhibition Fund, Susan and Bill Oberndorf, the Bernard and Barbro Osher Exhibition Fund, the Thomas Weisel Family, Pat Wilson, and Anita and Ronald Wornick. Meaningful support is provided by the Wyeth Foundation for American Art. Additional support is provided by Robert and Daphne Bransten, Susan A. Engs, and Helyn Goldenberg and Michael Ayer.

Generous support for *David Park and His Circle: The Drawing Sessions* is provided by the Agnes Cowles Bourne Bay Area Contemporary Arts Exhibition Fund and Bobbie and Mike Wilsey.

CATALOGUE

An illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition and includes essays by exhibition curator Janet Bishop, Thomas Weisel Family Chief Curator and Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA; Lee Hallman, associate curator at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; Corey Keller, curator of photography at SFMOMA; Tara MacDowell, associate professor and Founding Director of Curatorial Practice at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia; and Sara Wessen Chang, curatorial assistant of painting and sculpture at SFMOMA, who also contributed a chronology. The catalogue is published by SFMOMA in association with University of California Press.

HOURS AND ADMISSION

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San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

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Media Contacts

Jill Lynch, jilynych@sfmoma.org, 415.357.4172

Clara Hatcher Baruth, chatcher@sfmoma.org, 415.357.4177

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David Park, *Four Men*, 1958; Whitney Museum of American Art, purchase, with funds from an anonymous donor; © Estate of David Park; courtesy Natalie Park Schutz, Helen Park Bigelow, and Hackett Mill, San Francisco

David Park, *Kids on Bikes*, 1950; Myron Kunin Collection; © Estate of David Park; courtesy Natalie Park Schutz, Helen Park Bigelow, and Hackett Mill, San Francisco