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Stuart Davis Exhibition Opens at National Gallery of Art, Washington; Showcases Jazz-Infused Paintings and Explores His Unique Working Method

On view November 20, 2016–March 5, 2017



Stuart Davis, *Package Deal*, 1956. gouache and pencil on paper
Lawrence B. Benenson Collection
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Washington, DC—One of the most important American modernists, Stuart Davis blurred distinctions between text and image, high and low art, and abstraction and figuration, crafting a distinct style that continues to influence art being made today. On view at the National Gallery of Art, West Building, from November 20, 2016 through March 5, 2017, *Stuart Davis: In Full Swing* features some 100 of his most important, visually complex, jazz-inspired compositions, offering a new exploration of his working method.

In Full Swing is the first Davis exhibition at the National Gallery of Art and the first major Davis exhibition anywhere to consistently hang later works side by side with the earlier ones that inspired them. From the paintings of tobacco packages and household objects of the early 1920s to the work left on his easel at the time of his death in 1964, *In Full Swing* highlights Davis's unique ability to assimilate the imagery of popular culture, the aesthetics of advertising, the lessons of cubism, and the sounds and rhythms of jazz into works that hum with intelligence and energy.

"With a long career that stretched from the early 20th century well into the postwar era, Stuart Davis brought a particularly American accent to international modernism. Davis's works are visually complex, mobilizing bold colors and jagged forms in jangling, jazz-inspired compositions," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, Washington. "We are grateful to the many major U.S. museums that lent works, and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid, which has contributed two rarely seen paintings, as well as to the sponsors, including Altria Group.

"We have supported visual and performing arts for more than 50 years. We are pleased to sponsor the *Stuart Davis: In Full Swing* exhibition to celebrate a unique voice of mid-20th-century American optimism, which importantly helped launch the era of pop art. We are proud of our long-standing partnership with the Gallery and once again glad to support an exceptional exhibition," said Bruce Gates, Altria's senior vice president of External Affairs.

Organization and Support

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, where it was on view from June 10 through September 25, 2016.

The exhibition is made possible by Altria Group in celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art. Major support is provided by the Henry Luce Foundation. The Terra Foundation for American Art also provided generous support. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the

After Washington, the exhibition will travel to the De Young Museum, San Francisco, from April 8 through August 6, 2017 and the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, from September 16, 2017, through January 8, 2018.

Exhibition Highlights

Stuart Davis: In Full Swing differs from previous exhibitions on the artist not only in its degree of focus but also in its organization. From 1940 on, Davis rarely painted a work that did not make a careful reference to one or more of his earlier compositions—a distinctive aspect of his method.

Along with Alexander Calder, Edward Hopper, and Georgia O'Keeffe, Stuart Davis is one of the four most important American modernists. All had long careers that stretched from the early years of the 20th century well into the post–World War II era. All but Davis have had major exhibitions at the National Gallery of Art: O'Keeffe in 1988, Calder in 1998, and Hopper in 2008.

Starting from decidedly provincial roots as a left-wing illustrator of urban life around New York, and with only a brief sojourn in Paris (1928–1929), Davis brought the lessons of French modernism into American painting between the wars and then emerged in the 1940s with a bold and original manner. In blurring distinctions between text and image, high and low art, and abstraction and figuration, Davis's works have remained vital and continue to influence art being made today. He is often seen as a precursor of both pop art and contemporary abstraction.

Omitting his first decade, when he worked as an illustrator while he tried out various modernist styles, the exhibition focuses on the brilliant sequence of moves that began in 1921 with his paintings of tobacco packages and household objects and ended only with his death in 1964. Highlights of the exhibition include all four of Davis's breakthrough egg-beater paintings of the 1920s, three major murals from the 1930s, and 25 paintings from the 1950s, his greatest decade. Principal lenders include the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Phillips Collection.

Curators, Catalog, and Related Activities

Coordinating the exhibition for the National Gallery of Art is Harry Cooper, curator of modern art. His co-curator, Barbara Haskell, oversaw the presentation at the Whitney.

Published by the National Gallery of Art and DelMonico Books, an imprint of Prestel Publishing, the 250-page, fully illustrated exhibition catalog includes scholarly essays by Cooper and Haskell and a detailed chronology. The catalog is available in hardcover for purchase in the Gallery Shops at <http://shop.nga.gov/>; (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002 (phone); (202) 789-3047 (fax); or mailorder@nga.gov.

Gallery Talks

Stuart Davis In Full Swing (50 mins.) Diane Arkin: December 3, 5, 12, 13, 15, 16 at 2:00 and December 4 at 1:00
West Building

Lectures and Book Signings

Stuart Davis: In Full Swing — An Introduction to the Exhibition
November 20 at 2:00
East Building Auditorium

Harry Cooper, curator and head, department of modern art, National Gallery of Art

Concerts

Donal Fox, jazz piano
December 3 at 12:30, 2:00, and 3:30
West Building, M-78b

Jazz pianist Donal Fox performs three short sets in the large room of the Stuart Davis exhibition, in front of the monumental painting *Swing Landscape* (1938).

Film Series

Alternate Takes: Jazz and Film
February 3, 4, 10, 11, 17, 18, 24, 25, 12:30
East Building Auditorium

A series of documentary, narrative, and experimental screenings representing distinctive interpretations of jazz in the cinema, as well as archival rarities showing major mid-century jazz artists.

Documentary Film

Narrated by John Lithgow, the accompanying film explores Davis's use of avant-garde styles to capture the energy of modern America. A 15-minute version is shown in the exhibition, and a 30-minute version is screened in the West Building Lecture Hall Theater. The film was made possible by the H. R. H. Foundation.

Press Contact:

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt, Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc, and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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Exhibition Press Release

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[Stuart Davis: In Full Swing](#)

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Questions from members of the media may be directed to the Department of Communications at (202) 842-6353 or pressinfo@nga.gov

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