

# From Rothko to Rodin: landmark exhibitions dominate fall art offerings

Deep dives – including shows on Frank Stella, the Dutch masters, and Chicago’s first architecture biennale – give American art lovers lots to look forward to

**Jason Farago in New York**

Tuesday 25 August 2015 10.12 EDT

## **Kongo: Power and Majesty**

The world’s greatest museum is mustering all its resources – and has secured loans from more than 50 other collections – for this unprecedented exhibition of central African art. (The title’s spelling, with an initial K, serves to distinguish the pre-colonial civilization, which stretched as far as contemporary Angola, from the Belgian colony and current republics.) Instead of looking only at art from the time of European conquest, this show engages five whole centuries of Kongo sculpture, ivories and textiles, looking at the economic exchanges and political developments that shaped Kongo society and art. The highlight: 15 large-scale *nkisi*, or “power figures,” the extraordinary nail-studded totems that served as a conduit between this world and the spirit realm.

*Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, opens 18 September*

## **Mark Rothko**

Joyous or mournful, impassive or transcendent, Rothko’s cloudy abstract paintings – made by staining the untreated canvas with multiple thin layers of pigment – can evoke a whole host of emotions in a single viewer. This will be the first proper American retrospective for the Latvian-born painter since the Whitney’s outing in 1998, and it’ll span his whole career, from the Surrealist-inspired early work to the gloomy near-monochromes of his last years. If you make the pilgrimage to Houston, don’t miss the Rothko Chapel a short drive away: a downbeat but restorative sanctuary of art.

*Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, opens 20 September*

## **First Chicago Architecture Biennial**

A pet project of Rahm Emanuel, the Windy City’s obstreperous mayor, this city-spanning new initiative looks at the state of the building arts in America’s second Gilded Age. The participants include not just practicing architects – such as the French duo Lacaton & Vassal, masterminds of the barely-there Palais de Tokyo in Paris – but also artists (like Pedro Reyes) and hybrid outfits such as the Turner Prize-nominated collective Assemble. The main draw, however, is a local figure: Theaster Gates, who’s set to open a community arts center in an old bank on Chicago’s south side.

*Various locations, Chicago, opens 3 October*

## **New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic, 1919–1933**

ADVERTISING

It’s 1920: the German Empire has crumbled, and Berlin is a city of cripples and crooks, communists and cabaret stars. In the torrent of the Weimar years, painters such as Christian Schad, George Grosz and Max Beckmann depicted their fellow Germans with hard but thrilling insight. Yet the highlight of this impressive show, curated by LACMA’s formidable Stephanie Barron and seen earlier this year at the Museo Correr in Venice, is the photography – from stern black-and-white portraits by August Sander to alienated, sometimes surreal compositions of workers and machines.

*Los Angeles County Museum of Art, opens 4 October*

## **Class Distinctions: Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer**

With more than 70 paintings, from portraits by the titular superstars to lesser-known works by Pieter de Hooch and Jan Steen, this years-in-the-making show examines the Dutch Golden Age through the lens of social standing. Black-clad stadholders and fur-bedecked Haarlem merchants brush against the rising middle class, such as a shipbuilder and his wife who commissioned Rembrandt to paint an extraordinary double portrait. Paintings depicting only the poor were, of course, rarer. But in Hendrick Avercamp’s paintings of skaters gliding or tumbling on a frozen canal, the master of Dutch winter scenes revealed that everyone mixes on the ice. (*In 2016, the show travels to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.*)

*Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, opens 11 October*

## **Greater New York 2015**

The museum is not spilling much detail about this year's edition of the once-every-five-year showcase of contemporary art – but here are two hints that it could be good. One: the curatorial team is led by Peter Eleey, who has lately organized knockout exhibitions of the late artists Maria Lassnig and Sturtevant. And two: instead of using the show as yet another launching pad for bright young things, they're reformatting Greater New York to include artists from all generations, and to interrogate the city's ongoing transformation from gritty artistic powerhouse to antiseptic financier playground.

*MoMA PS1, New York, opens 11 October*

## **Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia**

They turned on, they tuned in, they dropped out. This psychedelic exhibition looks at an overlooked tendency in art of the 1960s: the imagining and even the construction of alternative models of living, usually in the service with drug use and free love. Paintings, prints and architectural models are joined by interactive elements, such as wild furniture designs and such ecological experiments such as a grove of fruit trees under heat lamps. *(In 2016 the show travels to the Berkeley Art Museum.)*

*Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, opens 24 October*

## **Frank Stella**

“What you see is what you see,” declared the American abstract painter, who gets the first major retrospective in the Whitney's new waterfront home. Back in 1959, when he was only 23, he stormed onto the American art scene with his wordless, poker-faced paintings of black stripes on shaped canvases. Yet as he grew older, Stella shifted to baroque, unrestrained paintings on technically sophisticated three-dimensional canvases – works that received a pasting from the critics when they first appeared, but are now ripe for reassessment. *(In 2016 the show travels to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and the de Young, San Francisco.)*

*Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, opens 30 October*

## **Norman Lewis**

It's hard to believe this is the first proper retrospective for this subtly incisive painter, who lived from 1909 to 1979 and who broadened the terrain of both abstract painting and of black American art. Though he was a key figure in abstract expressionism, Lewis held onto representational resonances throughout his career and found in jazz a significant inspiration for his delicate, improvisatory compositions. This show, with nearly 100 works, should go a long way to repositioning Lewis in the canon of American postwar innovators.

*Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, opens 13 November*

## **Rodin: Evolution of a Genius**

With just shy of 200 works, this hulking show doesn't just look at the final bronzes and marble works of the great French sculptor. It also examines his working process, via the inclusion of initial plaster models, and his attention to how his art circulated: Rodin commissioned photographers and retouchers to shoot his sculptures in just the right light. The show is up right now in Montreal; if that leg of the tour is any guide, expect a crowd.

*Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, opens 21 November*

More features

## **Topics**

Art

Museums

Save for later Article saved

Reuse this content