

Phoenix Art Museum

News Release

MEDIA CONTACT:

Margaree Bigler, Assistant Director of Marketing and PR
602.257.2105 | margaree.bigler@phxart.org

American art installation at Phoenix Art Museum showcases paintings by Raymond Jonson never before exhibited in a public art museum

Transcendent Transcendentalists will feature abstract paintings from the Museum's collection alongside 12 airbrushed watercolors by the American modernist, on view for the first time to the general public

PHOENIX (February 22, 2019) – From March 30 through December 15, 2019, Phoenix Art Museum will present *Transcendent Transcendentalists*, the Museum's first installation funded by a 2018 grant from the Henry Luce Foundation and featuring abstract works by American modernists and Transcendental Painting Group members Raymond Jonson, Emil Bisttram, and Stuart Walker. A complement to the Museum's upcoming special-engagement exhibition, *Agnes Pelton: Desert Transcendentalist*, the installation will explore the artists' commitment to non-representational art through various works, including 14 paintings from the Museum's American art collection and 12 airbrushed watercolor paintings by Jonson, on view for the first time in a public art museum. On temporary loan from the Collection of Ronald and Maxine Linde, the never-before-exhibited works depicting the 12 signs of the zodiac will be on view for a limited run from March 30 through July 7, 2019, exclusively at Phoenix Art Museum.

"We are thrilled to present the first installation funded by the generous gift from the Henry Luce Foundation," said Amada Cruz, the Sybil Harrington Director and CEO of Phoenix Art Museum. "*Transcendent Transcendentalists* represents a unique opportunity for our Arizona audiences to engage with works by the Transcendentalists of the '20s and '30s, and we look forward to showcasing a number of abstract artworks from our collection alongside paintings that have never been presented to the general public until now."

In 2018, Phoenix Art Museum was named the recipient of a [\\$100,000 grant from the Henry Luce Foundation](#) in support of American art. The first installation funded by the gift, *Transcendent Transcendentalists* will feature 14 paintings drawn from the Museum's American art collection, focusing on the work of Raymond Jonson (1891–1982), Emil Bisttram (1895–1976), and Stuart Walker (1904–1940), all of whom were members of the Transcendental Painting Group. Founded by Jonson in 1938, the short-lived collective of artists promoted abstract, non-representational painting that explored the connection between art, spirituality, and the metaphysical world. Members of the group included Agnes Pelton (1881–1961), Lawren Harris (1885–1970), and Florence Miller Pierce (1918–2007), among others.

Through a wide range of works, *Transcendent Transcendentalists* encourages viewers to examine how Jonson, Bisttram, and Walker in particular experimented with space, light, and design in an effort to reach, depict, and guide viewers to higher planes of understanding and spirituality through abstract compositions of varying degrees. Installation highlights include Jonson's *City Dynamism* (1932), an abstracted albeit recognizable scene of a factory emitting billowing clouds of pollution into a geometric, color-blocked sky; and Bisttram's *Tensions* (1939), a diagram-like painting of geometric shapes and connecting lines that approaches abstraction with a strong sense of mathematics and symmetry.

In addition, *Transcendent Transcendentalists* showcases 12 airbrushed watercolor paintings by Jonson, on loan to the Museum from March 30 through July 7, 2019 from the Collection of Ronald and Maxine Linde. On view for the first time in a public art museum, they depict the 12 signs of the zodiac and are part of a series created in 1938 by Jonson and author, composer, and humanistic astrologer Dane Rudhyar (1895–1985). The two had been previously introduced by Agnes Pelton, and while Rudhyar supplied the drawings for the series, Jonson created the complementary paintings. After their tenure as part of the installation at Phoenix Art Museum, these works by Jonson will be replaced with landscapes from the Museum's American art collection.

“Transcendent Transcendentalists not only showcases the strength of the Museum’s collection, but it also reminds us that there were important sites for abstraction in the Southwest, far away from New York,” said Betsy Fahlman, PhD, the Museum’s adjunct curator of American art. “It is exciting to feature works in the installation that were executed in 1938, the year the Transcendental Painting Group was established, and the astrological theme of the zodiac series speaks directly to Jonson’s spiritual quest. The first owners purchased the series directly from the artist, and the paintings have been in the Linde collection for 30 years.”

The selection of works also complements and provides context to the Museum’s upcoming special-engagement exhibition, [*Agnes Pelton: Desert Transcendentalist*](#), on view from March 9 through September 8, 2019 in the Museum’s Steele Gallery. The first survey on the work of the obscure American painter in more than two decades, the exhibition features more than 40 of Pelton’s abstract landscapes to examine the artist’s often overlooked contribution to American Modernism.

“Pelton, Jonson, Walker, and Bisttram were all committed to the same values of using non-representational art to record strong spiritual sensibilities,” said Fahlman. “*Transcendent Transcendentalists* will enable viewers to discover and examine these connections across galleries, encouraging an even greater understanding of the works on view.”

About the Installation

Transcendent Transcendentalists will be on view from March 30 through December 15, 2019 in the American Art galleries. The installation is organized by Phoenix Art Museum and supported by the Henry Luce Foundation. For more details about the installation, please visit phxart.org/exhibition/transcendenttranscendentalists.

Admission is free for Museum Members; U.S. veterans and active-duty military and their families; Maricopa Community College students, staff, and faculty (with ID); and youth aged 5 and younger. Entrance to the exhibition is included in general admission for the general public. During voluntary-donation times, the exhibition is offered to the general public with pay-what-you-wish admission. Voluntary-donation times include Wednesdays from 3 – 9 pm, the first Friday of each month from 6 – 10 pm, and the second Sunday of each month from noon – 5pm. For a full breakdown of general-admission prices and hours, see bit.ly/VisitPhxArt.

To request interviews and high-resolution photography, contact the Marketing and Communications Office of Phoenix Art Museum at 602.257.2105 or margaree.bigler@phxart.org.

About Phoenix Art Museum

Phoenix Art Museum has provided access to visual arts and educational programs in Arizona for nearly 60 years and is the largest art museum in the southwestern United States. Critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions are shown alongside the Museum’s permanent collection of more than 19,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also presents festivals, a comprehensive film program, live performances, and educational programs designed to enlighten, entertain, and stimulate visitors of all ages. Visitors also enjoy vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum’s landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit phxart.org, or call 602.257.1880.

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