“FOR AMERICA” LAUNCHES NATIONAL TOUR PRESENTING 100 ARTWORKS AND 200 YEARS OF AMERICAN ART FROM THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN

(NORTH YORK, NY)—The National Academy of Design (NAD) is pleased to announce the national tour of For America: Paintings from the National Academy of Design, an exhibition created in collaboration with the American Federation of Arts (AFA). For America is the first exhibition to highlight the fundamental characteristic of the National Academy’s collection: the joint presentation of an artist’s portrait with her or his representative work. The exhibition’s 100 extraordinary paintings present not only a visual document of the Academy’s membership but a unique history of American painting from 1809 to the present. The eight-venue tour will commence on February 20, 2019 at the Dayton Art Institute, Ohio, and then travel to the following institutions across the United States: New Britain Museum of American Art, CT (October 16, 2019 to January 26, 2020); The Society of the Four Arts, Palm Beach, FL (February 15 to April 11, 2020); Dixon Gallery & Gardens, Memphis, TN (July 19 to September 27, 2020); New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe (October 22, 2020 to January 17, 2021); Figge Art Museum, Davenport, IA (February 20 to May 9, 2021); Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA (June 6 to September 12, 2021); and one additional museum. The exhibition is curated by Diana Thompson, Director of Collections and Curatorial Affairs, NAD; and Jeremiah William McCarthy, Curator, NAD.

“For America offers a nuanced story of American art,” says Pauline Willis, Director and CEO of the American Federation of Arts. “The exhibition’s national tour will bring these important paintings to audiences across the country, enriching the dialogue of scholars, students, and artists of all ages with the first-hand experience of American masterpieces.”

From its founding in 1825 to the present, the NAD has required all Academicians elected to donate a representative work to the Academy’s collection, and from 1839 to 1994, the Academy also required Associates to present a
portrait of themselves, whether painted by their own hand or that of a fellow artist. Exhibition co-curator Jeremiah William McCarthy, Curator for the Academy says: “Essentially, this exhibition presents the way artists see the world alongside the way they see themselves inhabiting that world. It’s an unprecedented look at the history of American painting written by its makers.”

“This is the largest travelling exhibition of the Academy’s painting collection we have ever undertaken,” says Diana Thompson, exhibition co-curator and the NAD’s Director of Collections and Curatorial Affairs. “It allowed us to include beloved icons, such as William Merritt Chase’s The Young Orphan, alongside lesser-known gems like Charles White’s Matriarch, which has recently undergone conservation and will be on view to the public for the first time in decades, as well as new gifts like Peter Saul’s Self-Portrait, the only one he’s made up to this point.”

EXHIBITION DETAILS

The first of five exhibition sections, Founding an American School, explores the origins of the Academy and the accompanying rise of the Hudson River School and American genre painting. Asher B. Durand’s impressive Self-Portrait (ca. 1835) and Landscape (1850) provide an exceptional lens through which to view one of the Academy’s founders: the figures depicted in the latter work speak to the importance of artists’ relationships, one’s place in the natural world, and the power of interpretation. Other featured works include portraits of polymath and explorer Eliza Greatorex and noted landscapist Worthington Whittredge, as well as superb examples of this native school of painting from Albert Bierstadt, Frederic Edwin Church, and John Frederick Kensett. This section also provides the opportunity to view the earliest of Eastman Johnson’s self-portraits (ca. 1859-60) alongside a scene drawn from his series devoted to the American South.

A New Internationalism reveals the impact of contemporary European art and art education on the pedagogy of the Academy and its associated school of fine arts. William John Whittemore’s striking portrait, Charles Court-
ney Curran (1888-89), provides an archetypal representation of the American artist in Paris, depicting the painter sketching from a classical statue at the Louvre. This section traces artists’ friendships and social networks abroad, with the intimate friendship of Robert Frederick Blum and William Merritt Chase as a telling case study. The two traveled throughout Europe together in the first half of the 1880s, frequently depicted one another, and were elected Associate National Academicians in the same year. While some of Chase’s critics perceived an aloofness in his figures, the artist’s emotionally stirring portrait of Blum forges a deeper connection between the duo’s well-known paintings The Young Orphan and Two Idlers, framing each in a new light.

**Painting America** explores the Academy’s nascent role in the early twentieth century as the purveyor of artistic tradition in the United States. Strongly rejecting European modernism, the Academy compensated by widening its national base. This resulted in a geographically diverse and highly representative collection of landscapes and scenes of American life, from Daniel Garber’s New Hope School of Pennsylvania Impressionism to Ernest L. Blumenschein’s interpretations of the American Southwest. This section also explores the importance of intergenerational mentorship within the Academy, recorded visually in two works from the same year by the influential and important teacher Robert Henri and his student George Wesley Bellows, one of the most celebrated artists of his generation. Bellows’s *Three Rollers* (1911) was created alongside his mentor Henri on a trip the two took together to Maine.

**Postwar Realisms** outlines how realism in its various incarnations remained a viable alternative to American abstraction, which dominated the postwar period. Highlights include Ivan Albright’s otherworldly *Self-Portrait* (1948), a melancholic yet visionary *Self-Portrait* (1945) from Andrew Wyeth, and Richard Estes’s photorealist *NYC Parking Lot* (1969). Although women had been admitted to the Academy since its inception, at mid 20th century, the Academy broadened its membership to encompass a diversity of American experiences including artists of color. For example, the exhibition includes Charles White’s diploma portrait *Matriarch* (1967)—a portrayal of his great-aunt Hasty Baines, born into slavery in 1857 on the Yellowby plantation in Ridgeland, Mississippi. Painted 110 years after her birth, in the thick of a decade rife with political and social unrest, the deeply personal work stood for White as a symbol of wisdom and courage—universal themes also explored in his mature work *Mother Courage II* (1974).

The exhibition’s final section, **For America**, presents paintings from living National Academy members whose work addresses contemporary concerns while harkening back to America’s storied past. This section shows that one of the most vital artistic legacies within American art is an undaunted commitment to realism, especially the figurative tradition, which has been championed by artists across centuries. The Academy is a living institution that counts 460 of today’s leading artists and architects as members, and paintings by Emma Amos, David Diao, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, and Peter Saul provide mirrors for the present, ways of imagining and grappling with the past, and, finally, dreams for a possible future.

PUBLICATION

For America: Paintings from the National Academy of Design
Edited by Jeremiah William McCarthy and Diana Thompson

This exhibition will be accompanied by a richly-illustrated scholarly catalogue. Essays by a roster of distinguished historians and art historians, curators, artists, and architects delve into single artworks or pairs of paintings, while others explore themes such as the representation of landscapes and the figurative tradition in American art. Further contextualizing works in the exhibition, 18 current Academicians—such as Catherine Opie and Fred Wilson—contribute personal responses to individual artworks.

In addition to the exhibition's co-curators, essayists include writer and critic Jarrett Earnest; Jennifer A. Greenhill,
Associate Professor of Art History, University of Southern California; Kenneth Haltman, H. Russell Pitman Professor of Art History, University of Oklahoma; Patricia Hills, Professor Emerita of American Art & African American Art, Boston University; Alexander Nemerov, Carl and Marilyn Thoma Provostial Professor in the Arts and Humanities, Stanford University; Susan Rather, Professor of Art History, University of Texas, Austin; Akela Reason, Associate Professor of History & Director of the Museum Studies Certificate Program, University of Georgia; Kimia Shahi, PhD candidate in art history, Princeton University; Elizabeth A. Spear, PhD candidate in art history, University of Iowa; Jonathan F. Walz, Director of Curatorial Affairs & Curator of American Art, The Columbus Museum; and Alona C. Wilson, Director of Collections and Exhibitions and Chief Curator, Museum of African American History, Boston and Nantucket.

CURATORS

Diana Thompson is Director of Collections and Curatorial Affairs at the National Academy of Design. Presently, she is leading a major initiative to document and digitize the Academy's entire permanent collection for the creation of a comprehensive online database devoted to the institution's collection and membership. This educational resource is available to a global audience at nadatabase.org.

Jeremiah William McCarthy is Curator at the National Academy of Design. Before joining the Academy, he was an Associate Curator at the American Federation of Arts. There, he organized two national tours, including Women Artists in Paris 1850-1900, which was presented at the Denver Art Museum, the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, and the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts.

CREDIT

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ABOUT THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN

Founded in 1825, the National Academy of Design is the leading honorary society for visual artists and architects in the United States. Building upon our rich history, the National Academy advocates for the arts as a tool for education, celebrates the role of artists and architects in public life, and serves as a catalyst for cultural conversations that propel society forward.

Our National Academician membership is a vibrant, intergenerational community of artists and architects from many backgrounds that honors the full diversity of practitioners in the United States. Across our varied creative practices, we are unified in our shared belief in the power of art and architecture.
Through our individual work and collective initiatives, we support our communities, peers, and the next generation of creative thinkers. Each year, new National Academicians are inducted into our membership by current members. This honor cannot be applied for or solicited.

At the heart of the National Academy is our ever-growing collection. Academicians choose and contribute a work of their own creation, building upon our distinguished legacy. Today, our permanent collection totals over 8,000 works and tells a singular history of American art and architecture as constructed by its creators. We organize major exhibitions and proudly loan our works to leading institutions around the world, in addition to providing resources that foster scholarship across disciplines.

ABOUT THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS

The American Federation of Arts is the leader in traveling exhibitions internationally. A nonprofit institution founded in 1909, the AFA is dedicated to enriching the public’s experience and understanding of the visual arts through organizing and touring art exhibitions for presentation in museums around the world, publishing scholarly exhibition catalogues, developing innovative educational programs, and the fostering of a better understanding among nations through the international exchange of art.

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