

NEWS RELEASE

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Joslyn Art Museum Announces Gift from Schragger Collection, Newly Acquired Western Work

(Omaha, NE) – Joslyn Art Museum has received an important mixed-media painting by American artist Frank Stella (b. Malden, MA, 1936), a gift of the Phillip Schragger Collection of Contemporary Art from Terri, Harley, and Beth Schragger. The substantial work, *Nogaro* (1982) from the *Circuit* series (1980–84), measures approximately ten by ten feet and will be a highlight of Joslyn's reinstatement of its permanent collection galleries of contemporary art in March. This is the first major work by Stella to enter Joslyn's collection.

Joslyn's executive director and CEO Jack Becker noted the significance of the acquisition. "Frank Stella is a defining Postwar artist, and we are delighted to own such a monumental Stella work. It will absolutely shine in the surroundings of the Pavilion galleries, and will be enjoyed by visitors to Joslyn for decades. Equally important is the stellar collection from which this piece comes. Phil Schragger was certainly one of Nebraska's great art collectors, building one of the most important and ambitious collections in the region. We are honored to receive this gift."

About Frank Stella and *Nogaro*

Stella began painting as a teenager and continued this pursuit while studying history at Princeton University. Upon finishing his undergraduate degree in 1958, Stella moved to New York City, where he encountered the work of Jasper Johns for the first time. In Johns' early canvases, Stella saw the potential for a new visual language that called upon the gestural quality and prominent brushstrokes of Abstract Expressionism, but allowed images to be taken at face value. Later, Stella would say of his own paintings, "What you see is what you see."

Working in series has been central to the artist's methodology since the late-1950s. During that decade and into the 1960s, he created several bodies of work that featured complex variations of geometric shapes and bold line. Later in the 1960s, he began incorporating large fields of saturated colors into his paintings. A second major transition occurred in the early 1970s, as Stella turned away from flat picture planes to begin experimenting with relief. His work became



increasingly voluminous, growing away from the wall into the viewer's physical space. By the 1980s, Stella had totally eschewed the austere flatness of his early canvases. These late works feature bold, graffiti-like paint application that emphasizes the shape of the underlying metal support to create forms that appear to float in space.

The new Joslyn acquisition, *Nogaro* (1982) is from Stella's *Circuit* series (1980-84), which includes 22 wall-mounted aluminum pieces, all named for cities with well-known car racing tracks. These dynamic, curvilinear constructions reveal the loose approach to form Stella achieved late in his career and epitomize his deft handling of three-dimensional space. Here, all references to the traditional picture plane have been eliminated, allowing the wall to become the frame that contains Stella's painting. This direct engagement with site would prefigure the artist's more recent forays into public art projects and architectural design.

Joslyn's internationally recognized collection of Western American art has a new addition – *The Prairie Fire* (1851) by Henry Ritter (German, 1816–1853). The first Museum purchase of 2014, the work is now on view in Joslyn's Durham Gallery (gallery 7) in the Memorial Building. Born in Montreal to a German father and an English mother, Ritter grew up in London and Hamburg, where he began his artistic training. Beginning in 1836, he studied at the Düsseldorf Academy under Karl Sohn and Rudolf Jordan. Ritter's abilities developed rapidly, and he became one of the leading genre painters in Germany.



Although he settled in Düsseldorf, Ritter's first language was English, and his contemporaries often referred to him as an American.

The Prairie Fire is a thoroughly American subject, depicting the desperate flight of a band of Native Americans from a fast-moving prairie fire. As smoke from the distant flames fills the sky, figures on horseback race toward the safety of a hill in the foreground. Among those who have reached higher ground, Ritter depicted a wide range of reactions to this traumatic event. The women on the left violently mourn the passing of a young brave, while two men on the right respond with expressions of fear and melancholy. Only the tall warrior and his companion at the center of the composition seem to bear their ill fortune with stoic restraint.

Fires were one of the most popular subjects for nineteenth-century plains images, and feature regularly in early tales of the American West, as well as in paintings by William T. Ranney and Charles Deas. Both dangerous and hypnotically enticing, prairie fires were a shared experience for many on the plains, impacting settlers, Indians and explorers alike. Rising out of these ashes were tales of heroism and bravery in the face of nature's assault. One of the most dangerous natural force on the plains, fire embodied man's constant struggle against nature.

PICTURED: (PAGE 1) Frank Stella (American, b. 1936), *Nogaro*, 1982, from the *Circuit* series (2nd version), mixed media on aluminum, 115 x 120 x 24 inches, Gift of the Phillip Schragger Collection of Contemporary Art from Terri, Harley, and Beth Schragger; (PAGE 2) Henry Ritter (German, 1816–1853), *The Prairie Fire*, 1851, oil on canvas, Museum purchase with funds from the Ethel S. Abbott Art Endowment Fund, the Jack Drew Endowment for 18th- and 19th-Century Art, the Durham Center for Western Studies Art Endowment Fund, and the Ethel C. Flannigan Trust, 2014.1



Our Mission – Joslyn Art Museum collects, preserves, and interprets the visual arts of the highest quality, fostering appreciation and enjoyment of art for the benefit of a diverse audience.

Our Vision – To be cherished and respected as a premier art museum.

The Museum was a gift to the people of Omaha from Sarah Joslyn in memory of her husband, George, who made his fortune as president of the Western Newspaper Union. The Museum's original 1931 building is one of the finest examples of Art Deco architecture in the nation, with 38 types of marble from seven countries. The Walter and Suzanne Scott Pavilion, a 58,000-square-foot addition built in 1994, was designed by renowned British architect Norman Foster as his first U.S. commission. The Museum features galleries, a 1,000-seat concert hall, fountain court, education technology gallery, lecture hall, classrooms, sculpture garden, café, and shop.

Free General Museum Admission. Exhibition admission varies (exhibitions with a ticket fee for non-member adults are advertised as such). Museum Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, 10 am–4 pm; Thursday, 10 am–8 pm; closed Monday and major holidays.

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