

NADFAS LECTURE

THEODORA CLARKE

MoMA & Alfred Barr: The Founding of the Museum of Modern Art in New York

In 1929 The Museum of Modern Art was founded in New York with the central aim of helping the general public to understand and enjoy contemporary art. MoMA was designed to challenge the conservative policies of traditional museums. The founding Director Alfred H. Barr aimed to provide America with "the greatest museum of modern art in the world."

In this lecture we reveal the story of the rise of modern art in America and of the man responsible for its triumph. We follow the trajectory of Barr's career from the 1920s through the 1940s. We will examine Barr's approach to modern art and how the museum's collections, exhibitions, and publications all expressed his vision. The museum helped to define a narrative for modernism and Barr played a significant role in promoting major artistic movements in Europe such as Abstraction, Cubism, Surrealism and Expressionism.

The rich and varied collection of The Museum of Modern Art constitutes one of the most comprehensive and panoramic views into modern art. From an initial gift of eight prints and one drawing, the collection has grown to include over 150,000 works of art, 22,000 films and 300,000 books. We will examine some of the most famous pictures in the history of modern art by artists such as Van Gogh, Picasso, Kandinsky and Cézanne.

This is also a story about a museum director who wanted to reinvent modern art and completely changed the appearance of art history through innovative museum displays. Using MoMA as a case study we will follow the development of ideas about art, museums, exhibitions and the history of art in the socio-political context of the first half of the 20th century. Drawing on Barr's extensive correspondence, this lecture also paints vivid portraits of luminous contemporaries such as the collectors Katherine Dreier and Solomon Guggenheim.

Theodora Clarke is an expert and lecturer on Russian art and twentieth century modernism. Visit her website: www.theodoraclarke.co.uk.

