

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**COLD WAR MODERN: THE DOMESTICATED AVANT-GARDE TO OPEN AT THE
DAVIS MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CENTER IN WELLESLEY**

A multi-media exhibition exploring the avant-garde in art, music, and design in the United States between 1945 and the early 1960's, and the role it played in shaping popular consumer culture, *Cold War Modern: The Domesticated Avant-Garde*, will be on view September 15, 2000 through June 17, 2001 at the Davis Museum and Cultural Center at Wellesley College.

From the infamous drip paintings of Jackson Pollock to Knoll's ubiquitous "Womb Chair," the mobiles of Alexander Calder to the cool jazz of Miles Davis, and Franz Kline's expressionistic black & white paintings to CBS's coverage of the Nixon-Khrushchev "Kitchen Debates," *Cold War Modern* will examine the politics of the era and the culture of grandeur, self-confidence, and almost spiritual supremacy that was encouraged as a symbol of American freedom and democracy.

The idea for *Cold War Modern* grew out of a seminar given by Wellesley College art historian Patricia Gray Berman and music professor and composer Martin Brody. According to Berman and Brody, "In the years between the end of W.W.II and the early 1960's, American elite and popular culture achieved a remarkable ascendancy, a manifestation of 'the American century,' in which abstract expressionist painting, atonal music, and Free Jazz came to be celebrated. Hailed as the era of the 'triumph of American painting' and the beginning of a 'great and luxuriant musical culture in America,' this was a time of unprecedented creativity in and promotion of music, the visual arts, and the functional arts in the United States. Rather than tracing the development of these arts, this installation examines their commodification and popularization."

According to Judith Hoos Fox, curator at the Davis Museum and Cultural Center, “Cold War politics played a significant role in determining the impetus to create on the one hand, and the

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means and drive to produce and consume, on the other, and serves as a common backdrop to our exploration of 1950s American culture. In addition to paintings, sculpture and photography from the permanent collection, original texts written by artists and critics of the day will be

incorporated into the installation. Music, designer furniture, films, fabrics, and advertisements from popular 1950s home magazines featuring the above items will be included. Related books, cds and videos will be available in a resource area.”

Cold War Modern is organized into three themes -- *New Frontiers*, *New Origins*, and *Freedom*. Each examines the convergence of the rhetoric and ideology of the Cold War with the musical and artistic aesthetics and techniques of the age.

New Frontiers

“It seems to me that modern painting cannot express our era (the airplane, the atomic bomb, the radio) through forms inherited from the Renaissance or from any other culture of the past. Each era finds its own technique.” Jackson Pollock

During the Cold War, the rapid advance of science and technology symbolized America’s material, intellectual and even spiritual supremacy over the Soviet Union. The popularity of science fiction films and the marketing of “space age” materials and objects transformed scientific discovery into futuristic domesticity. The avant-garde found both inspiration and the means of producing new forms in the burgeoning research industry. The works of artists such as Berenice Abbott, Harold Edgerton, Matta and Kay Sage demonstrated a fascination with science and the space age. Furniture designed by Harry Bertoia, Ray and Charles Eames, and Donald Knorr and music composed by John Cage and Milton Babbitt embraced new technologies.

New Origins

"Man's first expression, like his first dream, was an aesthetic one..." Barnett Newman, 1947

American artists declared their independence from European influences in turning toward non-European sources and the chimeric imagery of "pre-history." Non-western cultures and religions offered forms and ideologies which artists and composers embraced. In a search for their primal origins, artists explored mythic, totemic imagery with universal meaning. Dorothy Dehner, Adolph Gottlieb, Dmitri Hadzi, Norman Lewis, Seymour Lipton,
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Jackson Pollock, Aaron Siskind and Marc Tobey are among the artists included with furniture designed by George Nakashima and music performed by Elvis Presley and Harry Belafonte.

Freedom

"...I want gesture--any kind of gesture, all kinds of gesture--gentle or brutal, joyous or tragic: the gestures of space soaring, sinking, streaming, whirling; the gestures of light flowing or spurting through color." Elaine DeKooning, 1959

To the Cold Warrior, "freedom" meant Democracy, the antithesis of Communism, the experience of being free from totalitarian control. For artists, "freedom" meant the ability to create without the constraints of academic or antiquated rules, to invent new visual languages and experiment with new media, to create new styles, techniques and visions that had never been seen or expressed before. These expressions of freedom, seen in the work of James Brooks, Alexander Calder, Philip Guston, Hans Hofmann, Franz Kline, Lee Krasner, Robert Motherwell and Jackson Pollock, soon provided patterns for a style seen in fabric, dishes, and throughout the suburban home. The music of Ornette Coleman, Miles Davis and Chuck Berry embodied a freedom of expression, body, mind, color, sound, language, and structure.

Special programming for *Cold War Modern* includes a film series that is free and open to the general public. Beginning **Thursday, September 21**, with a collection of socio-political shorts

including *Nixon Meets Khrushchev: Plain Talk in Moscow (The Kitchen Debate)*, *Duck and Cover*, *In the Suburbs*, and *Survival Under Atomic Attack*. The series continues on **Thursday, September 28** with John Frankenheimer's 1962 politically-charged *The Manchurian Candidate*, and on **Thursday, October 19**, with Robert Aldrich's 1955 cult spy thriller *Kiss Me Deadly*, and concludes on **Thursday, October 26**, with Fred Wilcox's 1956 sci-fi classic *Forbidden Planet*. All films, shown at the Collins Cinema, will begin at 7:00pm.

Educational programs include "Open Class" sessions and lectures, which bring the general public together with Wellesley College faculty, students, and guest speakers. On **Thursday October 5** at 6:30 pm in Collins Cinema University of California, Santa Barbara Ph.D. candidate and former curator of the architecture collection at the Library of Congress Cristina Carbone presents "*An American Taj Mahal: The Suburban Home as Cold War Propaganda*". On **Thursday, October 19**, 2:50-4pm, Professor of English Vernon Shetley will discuss film noir in the context of the Cold War in Founders 120. On **Thursday, November 2**

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at 6:30pm in the Collins Cinema, University of Minnesota Professor of American Studies and History Elaine Tyler May, author of *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Basic Books, 1999), discusses "Containment at Home: Cold War, Warm Hearth." Special guided tours of *Cold War Modern* are available by advance request by calling 781-283-3382.

The **Thursday, September 14** opening reception for *Cold War Modern* will be celebrated in retro style. Patricia Gray Berman and Martin Brody will incorporate art, music, film and TV clips into their 5:15pm welcoming presentation on *Cold War Modern: The Domesticated Avant-Garde* in the Collins Cinema. From 6:00 - 7:30pm, revelers will revisit the 1950s in music, fashion, and food, with a rocking reception and live broadcast by WZLY on the Davis Museum plaza. Retro dress is encouraged.

The DMCC's *Cold War Modern* installation coincides with several exhibitions being presented in New England. The Currier Gallery in Manchester, New Hampshire, is presenting *American*

by Design, 1930-1960: Three Decades of Innovation, an exhibition capturing the rapidly changing profile of American consumer products from the streamlined 1930s to the space age 50s, October 7 - January 7. In the Spring of 2001, The Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University is presenting a photography show of images from the 1950's.

Cold War Modern and related programs are made possible by a major grant from Wellesley College Friends of Art. Additional funds have been provided by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Sandra Cohen and David Bakalar Fund for Art, Constance Rhind '81 Fund for Museum Exhibitions, E. Franklin Robbins Charitable Trust, June Feinberg Stayman '48 Art Fund, and Judith Blough Wentz '57 Museum Programs Fund. The Prelinger Archives and Wilsonart also have supported the project.

The Davis Museum and Cultural Center, located at 106 Central Street in Wellesley, Mass., is open Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday from 11-5, Wednesday and Thursday from 11-8, and Sunday 1-5. Admission is free and free parking is available. Recorded information about Davis Museum exhibitions, events, and driving directions is available at 781-283-2051.

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For further information, photographs, or to arrange a visit or interview, please contact Nina J. Berger at 781-283-2034.

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During the 2000-2001 academic year, Wellesley College celebrates its 125th anniversary, its special place in liberal arts education and the world, the accomplishments of its alumnae, and the significance of the college, its historic beauty and the continuing legacy of the landscape and architecture.