

Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible

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March 18–September 4, 2016

Exhibition Location: The Met Breuer, 3rd and 4th floors

Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible examines a subject that is critical to artistic practice: the question of when a work of art is finished. Opening March 18, 2016, this landmark exhibition inaugurates The Met Breuer, ushering in a new phase for The Met's expanded engagement with modern and contemporary art, presented in Marcel Breuer's iconic building on Madison Avenue. With over 190 works dating from the Renaissance to the present—nearly forty percent of which are drawn from The Met's collection, supplemented with major national and international loans—the exhibition demonstrates the type of groundbreaking show that can result when the Museum mines its vast collection and curatorial resources to present modern and contemporary art within a deep historical context.

The exhibition examines the term “unfinished” across the visual arts in the broadest possible way; it includes works left incomplete by their makers, a result that often provides insight into the artists' creative process, as well as works that engage a *non finito*—intentionally unfinished—aesthetic that embraces the unresolved and open-ended. Featured artists who explored such an aesthetic include some of history's greatest practitioners, among them Titian, Rembrandt, Turner, and Cézanne, as well as modern and contemporary artists, including Janine Antoni, Lygia Clark, Jackson Pollock, and Robert Rauschenberg, who have taken the unfinished in entirely new directions, alternately blurring the distinction between making and un-making, extending the boundaries of art into both space and time, and recruiting viewers to complete the objects they had begun.

The accompanying catalogue expands the subject to include the unfinished in literature and film as well as the role of the conservator in elucidating a deeper understanding of artistic thought on the subject of the unfinished.

The exhibition is made possible by Leonard A. Lauder and The Dr. Mortimer and Theresa Sackler Foundation.

Additional support is provided by The Daniel and Estrellita Brodsky Foundation, the Jane and Robert Carroll Fund, Howard I. Hoffen & Sandra Hoffen, Kenneth and Rosalind Landis, Ann M. Spruill and Daniel H. Cantwell, and Northern Trust.

It is supported by an Indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

"*Unfinished* is a cornerstone of The Met Breuer's inaugural program and a great example of The Met's approach to presenting the art of today," said Thomas P. Campbell, Director and CEO of The Met. "Stretching across history and geography, the exhibition is the result of a cross-departmental collaboration, drawing on the expertise of The Met's outstanding faculty of curators. We hope the exhibition inspires audiences to reconsider the artistic process as they connect to experiences shared by artists over centuries."

Sheena Wagstaff, Leonard A. Lauder Chairman of Modern and Contemporary Art, added: "It is rare that an exhibition covering such a broad time span can trace a theme as intimate and essential to the creative process. This sweep of art history throws into sharp focus the ongoing concern of artists about the 'finishedness' of their work—which, in the 20th century, they co-opt as a radical tool that changes our understanding of Modernism."

Using works of art as well as the words of artists and critics as a guide, *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible* strives to answer four questions: When is a work of art finished? To what extent does an artist have latitude in making this decision? During which periods in the history of art since the Renaissance have artists experimented most boldly with the idea of the unfinished or *non finito*? What impact has this long trajectory had on modern and contemporary art?

The exhibition features works that fall into two categories. The first includes works of art that are literally unfinished—those whose completion was interrupted, usually because of an accident, such as the artist's death. In some instances, notably Jan van Eyck's *Saint Barbara* (1437), there is still debate about whether the artist meant the work to be a finished drawing, which would have been considered unusual at the time, or if it was meant to be a preparation for a painting. Because such works often leave visible the underlying skeleton and many changes normally effaced in the act of completion, they are prized for providing access to the artist's thoughts, as well as to his or her working process.

The second category includes works that appear unfinished—open-ended, unresolved, imperfect—at the volition of the artist, such as Janine Antoni's *Lick and Lather* (1993–1994). Antoni used a mold to create a series of self-portrait busts, half from chocolate and half from soap, fragile materials that tend to age quickly. After finishing the busts, she set to work unfinishing them, licking those in chocolate and bathing with those in soap, stopping once she had arrived at her distinctive physiognomy.

The unfinishedness of objects in this second category has been debated and appreciated at definite times, in definite places. Unlike the historical art presented in the exhibition, which includes a significant number of truly unfinished objects, art from the mid-to-late 20th and 21st centuries is represented almost entirely through the lens of *non finito*.

The exhibition is organized chronologically, spanning the third and fourth floors of The Met Breuer. The works are subdivided thematically, with each group representing a specific case-study in unfinishedness—corresponding to specific times (such as the Renaissance, Baroque, and Modern periods), media (prints and sculpture), artists (including Turner, Cézanne, and Picasso), and genres (most importantly portraiture).

A new, light-based installation by Tatsuo Miyajima, created especially for *Unfinished*, will be on view in the Tony and Amie James Gallery in the lobby of The Met Breuer (late April through early fall).

Exhibition Credits

Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible is curated by Andrea Bayer, Jayne Wrightsman Curator in the Department of European Paintings; Kelly Baum, Curator of Postwar and Contemporary Art in the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, both at The Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Nicholas Cullinan, former curator in The Met's Department of Modern and Contemporary Art and current Director of the National Portrait Gallery in London, all working under the direction of Sheena Wagstaff, Leonard A. Lauder Chairman of Modern and Contemporary Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Many curators, conservators, fellows, and research assistants at The Met contributed to this exhibition and its accompanying catalogue, including experts from the Museum's departments of American Paintings and Sculpture, Drawings and Prints, European Paintings, European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, Paintings Conservation, and Modern and Contemporary Art.

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a 336-page fully illustrated catalogue that constitutes the most exploratory, yet also comprehensive, introduction to date of the long history of the unfinished in the visual arts, film, and literature. The book is divided into two main sections that roughly correspond to the periods 1435–1900 and 1900–2015. It contains essays by 13 curators, scholars, and a conservator on a range of artists and subjects related to the theme of the unfinished. The catalogue also features interviews with five contemporary artists—Vija Celmins, Marlene Dumas, Brice Marden, Luc Tuymans, and Rebecca Warren—whose work is represented in the exhibition; and a section of brief catalogue entries on each of the objects featured in the exhibition that explores the significance of the work, with an emphasis on its place in the broader narrative and, frequently, an account of its reception. The catalogue is published by The Met and distributed by Yale University Press.

The catalogue is made possible by the Samuel I. Newhouse Foundation, Inc. and the Roswell L. Gilpatric Publications Fund.

Related Programs

A series of experimental films made by many of the 20th and 21st century's most innovative filmmakers are being shown in conjunction with the exhibition. Organized by Thomas Beard, founder and director of Light Industry, a venue for film and electronic art in Brooklyn, these screenings, which take place on The Met Breuer's second floor, address the unfinished in cinematic terms. Details on screening times will be available at a later date.

In collaboration with The Met, The Orchestra Now (TÖN) will present “The Unfinished,” a performance at Carnegie Hall of two unfinished works: Schoenberg’s Chamber Symphony No. 2 and Mozart’s Great Mass in C minor. The concert will include a panel discussion with the Museum’s Sheena Wagstaff and Andrea Bayer; TÖN’s music director Leon Botstein; Columbia University’s Elaine Sisman, Anne Parsons Bender Professor of Music; and others. Fri, May 13, 2016, 7:30–9:45 pm; tickets start at \$25.

Related programs include a Sunday at The Met on May 8 that considers the idea of the unfinished in relation to works across times and cultures and a lecture series on June 20 presenting new scholarship on the subject. Starting April 19, exhibition tours will be held every Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday at 12:30 pm and Thursday at 6:30 pm. Family tours for families with children ages 3-11 will be held monthly, beginning in April, on the second Saturday of every month through the run of the exhibition. An Art Explore program on Sunday, June 5 will engage teens ages 11-14 with themes related to the exhibition. Additionally, a blended (onsite/online) workshop series for K-12 educators on April 6 and 16 will explore when a work of art is finished and how it has changed over time. For more information about these programs and other related to the exhibition, please visit metmuseum.org/events.

The Sunday at The Met program is made possible by The Merrill G. and Erita E. Hastings Foundation.

The exhibition is featured on the Museum’s [website](#), as well as on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#) using [#MetUnfinished](#) and [#MetBreuer](#).

About The Met Breuer

The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s modern and contemporary art program is expanding to include a new series of exhibitions, performances, artist commissions, residencies, and educational initiatives in the building designed by Marcel Breuer on Madison Avenue and 75th Street. Open to the public beginning March 18, 2016, The Met Breuer provides additional space to explore the art of the 20th and 21st centuries through the global breadth and historical reach of The Met’s unparalleled collection.

Other programs featured as part of The Met Breuer’s inaugural season include a major thematic survey, *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible* (March 18—September 4, 2016), which looks at unfinished works of art from the Renaissance to the present day; the largest exhibition to date dedicated to Indian modernist Nasreen Mohamedi (March 18—June 4, 2016); and a month-long performance installation, by Artist in Residence Vijay Iyer (March 18-30, 2016). Upcoming exhibitions include a presentation of Diane Arbus’s rarely seen early photographic works (July 12–November 27, 2016) and the first museum retrospective dedicated to Kerry James Marshall (October 25, 2016–January 29, 2017).

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Updated May 18, 2016

Image: Alice Neel. *James Hunter Black Draftee*, 1965. Oil on canvas. COMMA Foundation, Belgium, © The Estate of Alice Neel

