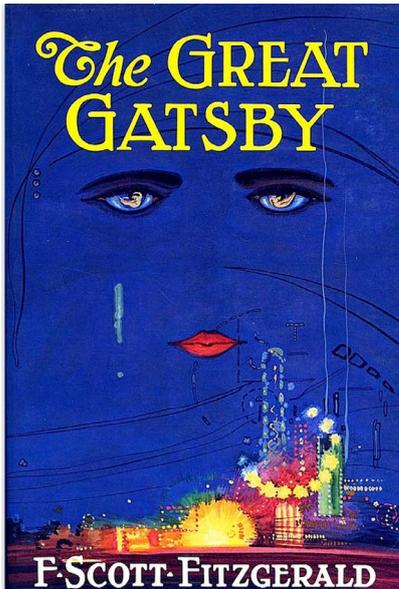


PRESS RELEASE

16 April 2018, for immediate release:



AMERICAN COOL ARTS FESTIVAL

7–31 May 2018

In the American Cool Arts Festival, the Ashmolean invites visitors on a journey through the Jazz Age to explore the art, music, film and literature that were born out of the Roaring Twenties, the Depression-bitten '30s and the booming years of World War II. Coinciding with the spring exhibition, **AMERICA'S COOL MODERNISM**, the three-week festival includes a line-up of talks, performances and film-screenings held with festival partners **Blackwell's Bookshop**, **Curzon Cinema** and **Oxford Playhouse**.

The headline event is the **American Cool LiveFriday** on 25 May at the Museum. Guests will find themselves in the company of celebrated writers of early-twentieth century America: Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald will be in costume and at the bar in hidden speakeasies around the Museum. This is a chance to flout Prohibition and forget Wall Street losses with bathtub gin and scintillating conversation. *The Gatsby Girls* will demonstrate how to do the Charleston; *Dragprov Revue* will revive the *Ziegfeld Follies*; and *Pegasus Theatre* will perform pieces from famous musicals including *42nd Street*, Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*, and the send-up of 1920s culture, *The Boy Friend*. This was also the golden age of cinema when *the movies* became *the talkies* and MGM invites us to witness a miracle - 'Garbo Talks!' - in a screening of the 1930 classic, *Anna Christie*.

During the festival, leading experts on American modern art will participate in a **lecture series** about the artists featured in the exhibition. Curator, Dr Katherine Bourguignon, will discuss the notion of 'cool modernism' and why it applies to American art of the period. Miguel De Baca, the 2018 Terra Foundation Professor of American Art at Oxford University, will talk about America in the interwar years and how a nation of dramatic contradictions - from the Empire State Building to the Dust Bowl farm - provoked artists to seek new forms of expression and grapple with the question of what it meant to be American. Focused talks on individual artists will include Georgia O'Keeffe, Edward Hopper and less well-known names like Charles Sheeler whose work is a highlight of the show.

Like the painters and photographers in the exhibition, novelists, poets and playwrights were keenly affected by the radical changes taking hold in America from the 1920s onwards. Writers reflected on the rapid growth of cities, the Machine Age proliferation of new technologies like Henry Ford's Model T, and the migrations of tenant farmers to the west and poor African Americans to the north. **A special display at Blackwell's Bookshop** in Broad Street will pair works of art with contemporary literature by writers including John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston. Blackwell's Norrington Room will host panel discussions about art and literature in the '20s and '30s and the state of the American nation today with **renowned speakers including Professor Sarah Churchwell and award-winning playwright and critic Bonnie Greer OBE**.



The Curzon Cinema in Oxford's new Westgate centre will show a **miracle of film history, *Dawson City – Frozen Time***. Located in Yukon Territory, Canada, Dawson City has a story inextricably linked with the Gold Rush. In 1978 a cache of 533 nitrate film prints were found buried in the permafrost on a construction site in Dawson. The discovery contained footage of Klondike prospectors from 1896–99; newsreel of events like the 1919 World Series; and movies by pioneering directors like D.W. Griffiths and Allan Dwan. *Dawson City – Frozen Time* is the documentary made by Bill Morrison in 2016 using the excavated films, archive material and early photographs to tell the story of the frontier town and early American filmmakers.

For the festival's final weekend, there will be two performances at Oxford Playhouse. In ***Dorothy Parker Takes a Trip*** actor and soprano Sarah Gabriel will bring the audience along on a musical tour of the brilliant mind and lacerating wit of Dorothy Parker with readings from her letters, poems and essays, and songs by George Gershwin, Rodgers & Hart and Hoagy Carmichael. In the evening musician, writer and broadcaster Neil Brand will perform ***The Silent Pianist Speaks*** celebrating the great works of Silent Film and the accompanists who breathed life into early movies. Brand will provide improvised accompaniment and laconic commentary on film classics from the works of a young Billy Wilder to the sublime comedy of Laurel and Hardy.

Dr Sarah Doherty, Festival Organiser, Ashmolean Museum, says: 'America in the early-twentieth century has to be one of the brightest, most interesting and entertaining periods in the history of art, literature and popular culture. Over the three weeks of American Cool we want to give people a taste of what it was like to live through these decades of amazing change when artists were responding to everything from the bright lights of the modern city to the despair of the Wall Street Crash. We're lucky to be working with a range of outstanding performers, experts and festival partners who are going to bring the exhibition to life for our visitors with the film, music, writing (and drinks!) of Jazz Age America.'

HIGHLIGHT EVENTS

For a full programme visit www.ashmolean.org/americascoolmodernism

American Literature Display at Blackwell's Bookshop

From 23 March

The great writers of early-twentieth century America are paired with works of art in the Ashmolean's exhibition.

A Streetcar Named Desire

Tues 7–Sat 12 May | Oxford Playhouse

Temperatures soar and a family is torn apart by passion and violence in Tennessee Williams' 1947 classic.

Bonnie Greer and Sarah Churchwell: The State of the Nation

Thur 10 May, 7pm | Blackwell's Bookshop

Panel discussion with leading experts on American culture and society.

1920s Ashmolean Pop Up at the Westgate Centre

12 May 2018, 12pm–6pm

1920s dancing and music from the Gatsby Girls and Beetroot Acapella



Dawson City – Frozen Time

Wed 23 May, 6.15pm | Curzon Cinema, Westgate Centre

Bill Morrison's documentary about the miraculous discovery of early American films buried in the Gold Rush town of Dawson, Canada.

American Cool LiveFriday

Fri 25 May, 7pm | Ashmolean Museum

A line-up of music, theatre, dance and more celebrating the art and culture of America from the Roaring Twenties to the glamour of 1930s Hollywood.

Dorothy Parker Takes a Trip

Sun 27 May, 3pm | Oxford Playhouse

A musical performance and readings by actress and soprano Sarah Gabriel.

The Silent Pianist Speaks

Sun 27 May, 7.30pm | Oxford Playhouse

A performance from musician and broadcaster Neil Brand.

ENDS

▪ **FURTHER INFORMATION:**

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▪ **NOTES TO EDITORS**

Event: AMERICAN COOL ARTS FESTIVAL
Dates: 7–31 May 2018
Tickets: www.ashmolean.org/tickets

▪ **PRESS IMAGES:**

Images for editorial use are available to download at: <http://bit.ly/2luPBaU>

▪ **CREDITS:**

The American Cool Arts Festival is organised with thanks to:
The Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford
Blackwell's Bookshop
Curzon Cinema
Oxford Playhouse

▪ **AMERICA'S COOL MODERNISM**

O'Keeffe to Hopper

23 March–22 July 2018

The Ashmolean's spring exhibition presents works by American artists that have never before travelled outside the USA. AMERICA'S COOL MODERNISM: O'KEEFFE TO HOPPER, shows over eighty paintings, photographs and prints, and the first American avant-garde film, *Manhatta*, from international collections. Thirty-five paintings have never been to the UK and seventeen of these have never left the USA at all. The exhibition examines famous painters and photographers of the 1920s and '30s with early works by Georgia O'Keeffe; photographs by Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand and Edward Weston; and cityscapes by Edward Hopper. It also displays the pioneers of modern American art whose work is less well-known in the UK, particularly Charles Demuth (1883–1935) and Charles Sheeler (1883–1965). On show will be major pieces by the so-called precisionist artists. These include Demuth's *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold* (1928, from the Met), the painting Robert Hughes described as the 'one picture so famous that practically every American who looks at art knows it.'

The exhibition is organised by the Ashmolean and the Terra Foundation for American Art and is curated by Dr Katherine Bourguignon of the Terra Foundation and Dr Xa Sturgis, Director of the Museum.