American Modernism shines at Kresge Art Museum
Kresge Art Museum, MSU

EAST LANSING, MI — Kresge Art Museum at Michigan State University opens 2010 with American Modernism, 1920s to 1940s, an ambitious display showcasing over 100 paintings, prints, photographs, sculpture and drawings from the museum collection. The exhibition is on view January 11 through March 14, 2010, and guests attending the sneak peek party, Puttin’ on the Glitz, Saturday, January 9, 2010, will enjoy a special preview of the show.

American Modernism, 1920s-1940s, focuses on the years around the two world wars, when artists in America were in search of a distinctly modern style that was novel, inventive and forward-looking. Modernists applauded new technology and machines, and experienced the newest innovations. They sought artistic approaches that were in tune with the changing world and looked to Europe for inspiration, especially Paris and Germany. In turn, numerous European artists sought refuge from the Nazis during WWII by immigrating to America, further influencing American modernism. If American artists did not go abroad, they still had opportunities to see what was happening in Europe in special exhibitions in the United States.

The 1913 Armory Show in New, Boston and Chicago had a profound influence on artists, and its intention to shock America succeeded enormously well. Artists and audiences were introduced to Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism, and to artists Cezanne, Gauguin, van Gogh and Matisse. American artists experimented with these techniques, including Surrealism, and by the mid 1930s, non-figurative abstract painting was beginning to be preferred by many. The impetus for American Modernism, 1920s-1940s is Kresge Art Museum’s acquisition of Hananiah Harari’s painting, Birth of Venus, 1936, that was included in many of the Abstract American Artists exhibition in the 1930s.
Curator of the exhibition and KAM director, Susan J. Bandes, explains, “The period between the 1920s and 1940s is often overlooked in American art history because of the myriad ways artists responded to modernity. This exhibition seeks to acquaint the viewer with some of the approaches artists took to convey modernism, the explorations that were underway, and to introduce a number of now-forgotten artists to viewers and to see many others anew.” Surveying the exhibition, Bandes also notes, “What is fascinating about this period is that the one can feel the artists struggling and seeking a new way to record modern life that was not realistic – their energy is palpable. These artists paved the way for Abstract Expressionism and for New York to become the artistic capital of the world” by the 1950s.

An illustrated 28-page catalogue written by Dr. Susan J. Bandes, Kresge Art Museum director, accompanies the exhibition, which is sponsored by the MSU Federal Credit Union.

Admission is free to Kresge Art Museum. Kresge Art Museum is located on the first floor of the Kresge Art Center at the intersection of Physics and Auditorium Roads, on the campus of Michigan State University in East Lansing, MI. Museum hours are Monday through Friday, 10 to 5 p.m., Thursday until 8 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. The museum is closed November 26-29, 2009. For additional information, call (517) 355-7631 or visit www.artmuseum.msu.edu.

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**Caption/Credit for attached IMAGE:** Hananiah Harari (American, 1912-2000) *Birth of Venus*, 1936, oil on canvas, 44 x 56 inches, Kresge Art Museum, Michigan State University, MSU purchase, funded by the Nellie M. Loomis Endowment in memory of Martha Jane Loomis, 2009

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