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BUCHMANN ON ART: 'WHERE WE ARE' AT THE WHITNEY

By Stephanie Buchmann, May 10, 2017



Engaging in an interesting dialogue with the current Whitney Biennial, this stunning installation organized by David Breslin with Jennie Goldstein and Margaret Kross depicts another tumultuous time in American history.

Comprised of works from the museum's collection, "Where We Are: Selections from the Whitney's Collection, 1900-1960" focuses on the first six decades of the 20th century — when life changed drastically due to two World Wars, the Industrial Revolution, economic collapse, and growing demands for civil rights. Artists responded in myriad ways, documented here by a variety of iconic works by Louise Bourgeois, John Steuart Curry, Edward Hopper, Jasper Johns, Jacob Lawrence, and Georgia O'Keeffe, among many others.

In addition, less prominent names, such as Palmer Hayden, Archibald Motley and PaJaMa, as well as more obscure works by well-known artists like Ellsworth Kelly, are featured. One such gem comes in the form of an envelope, which was sent from Merce Cunningham to Robert Rauschenberg. On it, we find a drawing of two American flags by

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their mutual friend Jasper Johns. To assure cohesion, the exhibition traces five themes: family and community, work, home, the spiritual, and the nation.

Meanwhile, its title is derived from a phrase in W. H. Auden's poem "September 1, 1939," which he wrote in New York City at the outset of World War II, referring to the day Germany invaded Poland. When thinking of Auden's words while viewing this installation, one cannot help but further contemplate the fragility of peace, as we still know it.