

American Modernist Works from Charles Butt's Collection Go On Display at the Blanton Museum of Art for the First Time

This spring, 'American Modernism from the Charles Butt Collection: From Edward Hopper to Alma Thomas' brings the influential Texan's 20th-century art collection to the public



AUSTIN, TX — February 4, 2026 — The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas presents the first exhibition dedicated to the collection of businessman, philanthropist, and Texas native **Charles Butt**. Opening March 8, 2026, ***American Modernism from the Charles Butt Collection: From Edward Hopper to Alma Thomas*** brings together more than 80 paintings and works on paper by icons of American modern art. The exhibition is organized by Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth.

A visionary collector, Charles Butt has played a pivotal role in preserving and celebrating American modernism through his carefully curated collection of landmark works, which showcase the movement's richness and reflect his vision of American creativity as well as his civic dedication and commitment to education. The exhibition will be on view at the Blanton Museum of Art through August 2, 2026, as part of a multicity tour of major Texas museums. The Blanton's presentation is managed by Carter Foster, Chief Curator and Deputy Director of Collections.

"We are honored to bring this extraordinary collection to Austin," said **Simone Wicha, Director of the Blanton Museum of Art**. "Charles Butt's vision as a collector reflects his deep belief in expanding access to art and education—a mission we share at the Blanton. We look forward to sharing these remarkable works, many of which have never been seen outside his private collection."

American Modernism from the Charles Butt Collection spans artworks from the late 19th century through the 1970s, featuring some of the most notable artists of the era, including **Edward Hopper, Ellsworth Kelly, Jacob Lawrence, Joan Mitchell, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Alma Thomas**. It features seven thematic sections that illustrate throughlines of Butt’s collection:

- **Breaking Form: Cubism and Its Legacy:** The exhibition opens by examining the impact of Cubism on American art. Artists working across the twentieth century, including Arthur Dove and Stuart Davis, absorbed and transformed Cubism’s fractured forms, multiple perspectives, and emphasis on structure. Works in this section trace these innovations through collage, abstraction, and figuration, including later responses by artists such as Romare Bearden, who adapted Cubist strategies to narrate modern American life.
- **Urban Encounters:** As American cities expanded rapidly in the early twentieth century, artists turned their attention to the psychological and social dimensions of urban life. This section explores how painters captured the rhythms, isolation, and intensity of the modern city. Works by artists such as Edward Hopper, Marsden Hartley, and Alice Neel depict cityscapes and interiors shaped by anonymity, proximity, and emotional tension—revealing how urban environments transformed both subject matter and artistic approach.
- **Intimate Perspectives:** A smaller, focused section dedicated to portraiture and personal relationships, Intimate Encounters highlights works that reflect closeness, trust, and interior life. Artists such as Bill Traylor, Rufino Tamayo, and Milton Avery reveal how intimacy—whether familial, communal, or psychological—can shape both subject and style. These works invite sustained looking and underscore the personal dimensions of modernism.
- **Precisionism:** Positioned in dialogue with Breaking Form, this section examines Precisionism, an American movement that fused Cubist structure with sharp realism to depict industrial and architectural subjects. Artists embraced clarity, order, and geometric balance to represent factories, bridges, and urban infrastructure, reflecting both admiration for and ambivalence toward modern progress. This section includes works by Charles Sheeler, Charles Demuth, and George Ault.
- **The Language of the Sea:** The sea is a fundamental motif in art history—and, following a childhood spent near the Gulf of Mexico in Corpus Christi, Texas, it is also a major influence on Charles Butt’s collecting. This section focuses on artists’ connections to America’s coastlines and the economic and sociocultural symbols often found in marine painting. Works in this section range from realist seascapes by painter George Wesley Bellows, to more emotionally freighted works like *Flight of the Thielens* by Thomas Hart Benton, which depicts the harrowing experience of the artist’s neighbors, the Thielen family, as their beachfront home on Martha’s Vineyard was destroyed by a hurricane and they fled to safety.
- **Land Progressions:** This section explores the significance of land in the creation of American Modernism and how artists reimagined the landscape tradition in response to

their environments. Early, mid-career, and late paintings by leading American modernist Marsden Hartley reveal the artist's dramatic stylistic evolution through depictions of the varying terrains of his home state of Maine and the arid climate of New Mexico. Other works reflect the tension between industry and nature. For example, John Marin's *Weehawken Series*—of which Butt has collected multiple examples from the series—depicts changes to land and sea caused by industrial encroachment in the harbor city of Weehawken, New Jersey. Marin responded to this turmoil with an innovative style that fused elements of Impressionism and Fauvism to convey the rapid pace of change in modern America, developing an expression that would later influence a generation of Abstract Expressionists.

- **Edges of Abstraction:** The exhibition's final section spans most of the 20th century and explores the gradual and often experimental move toward abstraction in American art. Rather than presenting abstraction as a single rupture, these works show how artists navigated the boundary between representation and non-objective form—testing the expressive potential of color, geometry, and surface to redefine what painting could be. Central to this section are female artists such as Joan Mitchell, Blanche Lazzell, and Alice Trumbull Mason, who saw themselves as revolutionaries, optimistically employing abstraction to create new visual styles and to break from the hypermasculine nationalism that characterized much of the era's art.

American Modernism from the Charles Butt Collection: From Edward Hopper to Alma Thomas premiered at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth and, after the Blanton Museum of Art, it will travel exclusively to the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, and the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio.

American Modernism from the Charles Butt Collection: From Edward Hopper to Alma Thomas is organized by the Amon Carter Museum of Art.

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PRESS PREVIEW

Thursday, March 5, 3:30pm.

Press are invited to a first look at both Spring exhibitions, *American Modernism from the Charles Butt Collection* and *Run the Code: Data-Driven Art*, with Blanton curators.

PRESS IMAGES

Available [here](#).

About the Blanton Museum of Art:

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art holds the largest public collection in Central Texas with more than 22,000 objects. Recognized as the home of Ellsworth Kelly's *Austin*, its major collecting areas are modern and contemporary U.S. and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance

and Baroque paintings, and prints and drawings. The Blanton offers thought-provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.

About Charles Butt

Charles Butt (b. 1938) is the Chairman of H-E-B and a prominent philanthropist deeply committed to education in Texas. He is the grandson of H-E-B's founder Florence Butt, who started the first H-E-B in 1905 with just \$60. Charles's mother, Mary Elizabeth Holdsworth Butt, was a teacher and advocate for mental health and social justice and instilled in Charles the value of education and the importance of serving others. Charles became president of H-E-B in 1971, and later established the Charles Butt Foundation, which supports charitable organizations and nonprofit causes ranging from disaster relief to environmental efforts to hunger relief and education. Through his personal, professional, and philanthropic pursuits, he has continued to advance the lives of Texans by developing educational and community-centered partnerships focused on providing equitable and prosperous futures.

Image Captions:

(Left) Charles Sheeler, *On a Shaker Theme*, 1956, oil on canvas, Collection of Charles Butt
(Right) George Ault, *Provincetown: Boat and Houses*, 1922, oil on board, Collection of Charles Butt