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| Hofmann, Hans (1880-1966) |
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| Hans Hofmann was a German-American painter associated with Abstract Expressionism. Known as much for his paintings as for his role as a teacher, Hofmann moved to New York City in 1932. Much older than the core group of New York School painters, Hofmann acted as a kind of bridge between European and American modernism. Hofmann’s paintings are highly recognizable: they feature large planes of thickly applied, bold colour, often interspersed with expressionistic fields of gestural painting. The result, which can be seen in his 1962 painting *Memoria in Aeternum,* is a dynamic play with depth of field and colour relations. Hofmann referred to this spatial and optical play as the “push-pull” effect, indicating the manner in which areas of a canvas can appear to push back behind the picture plane and pull forward into the viewer’s space, while simultaneous reading as flat surface. The spatial and material relationality introduced through this device influenced a generation of New York painters and critics, both those taught directly by Hofmann and those who learned of his theories through second parties. Hofmann’s students from this period include Lee Krasner, Helen Frankenthaler, Frank Stella, Allan Kaprow and, importantly, Clement Greenberg. Many of their first lessons in modernist painting took place in his school.  Hofmann lived in Paris from 1903 to 1914, a formative period for modernist painting and for Hofmann. In Paris, Hofmann had contact with the founders of Cubism (Picasso and Braque, as well as Leger and Delauney) and Fauvism, and began painting in a highly chromatic, decorative fashion. Not long after returning to Munich, Hofmann opened his first art school in 1915, initiating his long career as an art instructor. Upon his arrival in New York City, Hofmann began teaching at the Art Students League, before opening his own school in 1933.  File: hoffman1.jpg  Hans Hofmann, Yellow Table on Green 1936. Oil on board. 60 x 47 1/2 inches (152.4 x 120.65 cm) Collection Dallas Museum of Art, fractional gift of The Rachofsky Collection in honor of Dr. Dorothy Kosinski, the Barbara Thomas Lemmon Curator of European Art. http://www.dma.org  In both Munich and New York, Hofmann was concerned to share what he had learned from the Parisian painters and to promote a particularly modernist mode of painting, which emphasized the “plastic” content of the visual arts. Demonstrations of his influence on the direction painting was to take in the U.S. are to be found in Hofmann’s early drip paintings, which would come to influence Jackson Pollock (exposed to Hofmann through his wife Lee Krasner). Hofmann’s emphasis on enunciating the picture plane as an expression of medium specificity became a key tenet in Greenberg’s theory of modernism. In 1957, Hofmann was awarded a retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art. In 1958 he closed his school in order to dedicate his time more fully to painting. In 1960, by then in his early eighties, Hofmann was one of four artists chosen to represent the U.S. in the Venice Biennale.  File: hoffman2.jpg  Hans Hofmann, Memoria in Aeternum, 1962. Oil on canvas. 7' x 6' 1/8" (213.3 x 183.2 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. http://www.moma.org/collection/browse\_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A2698&page\_number=9&template\_id=1&sort\_order=1 |
| Further reading:  ( Hans Hofmann Catalogue Raisonné)  (Greenberg)  (Hofmann)  (Hunter)  (Seitz) |