

# *Pen to Paper* Exhibition from the Smithsonian Reveals the Lost Art of Letter Writing

**INFORMAL AND PERSONAL HAND-WRITTEN NOTES PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO THE LIKES OF CALDER, CASSATT, O'KEEFFE, POLLOCK, SARGENT, AND OTHER ICONIC ARTISTS**

**WEST PALM BEACH, FL (March 15, 2017)** – Just as putting pen to paper to create a line in a drawing is an artistic act, so is writing a letter. The exhibition *Pen to Paper: Artists' Handwritten Letters from the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art* *Pen to Paper*, on view at the Norton from April 18 through June 25, 2017, reveals the beauty and intimacy of the craft of letter writing. From casually jotted notes to elaborately decorated epistles, the exhibition explores the handwriting of celebrated artists such as Alexander Calder, Mary Cassatt, Willem de Kooning, Winslow Homer, Robert Motherwell, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jackson Pollock, John Singer Sargent, Edward Weston, and others.

Comprised of more than 30 letters that date from the 18th century to the early 1980s that delve into the lives of artists, their unique handwriting, and private correspondences, *Pen to Paper* poses the question: Do handwritten letters confirm assumptions about the artists or suggest new understandings? The answer to this question varies as much as the letters and artists who wrote them. As cultural objects, the handwriting and illustrations are visually insightful while the sentiments peel back some of the enigmatic layers of venerated artistic giants

In the summer of 1932, for example, American sculptor Alexander Calder sat down in his Parisian studio and wrote a brief letter to his friend, George Thomson. Within this seemingly routine message, Calder describes his most recent exhibition of “abstract sculptures which moved – so swaying when touched or blown...” Today, we know these “abstract sculptures” as Calder’s avant-garde mobiles, such as *Grasshopper*, circa 1947, which is on view in the Norton’s Nessel Gallery. This early description of such works offers a singular and contemporaneous view into Calder’s creative process as he is laying the groundwork for his iconic kinetic sculptures. This correspondence, and others like it, demonstrates the capacity of artists’ writings to provide new insight into their work and psyche through the everyday gesture of handwriting.

**(MORE)**

Throughout the exhibition, text by a network of art historians, curators, and artists provide additional information surrounding each letter's circumstances as well as examine the 'look' of each artist's handwriting and what it can reveal about their artistic oeuvre.

***Pen to Paper* will be celebrated on Thursday, April 20 during Art After Dark with the following programs:**

- **5:30 – 8:30 PM** / A DIY Workshop encourages visitors to re-discover the lost art of letter writing.
- **6:30 – 7:30 PM** / Lecture by Liza Kirwin, Deputy Director of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, discusses the Smithsonian's collection of artists' handwritten letters.
- **Throughout the evening**, members of the Norton's College Committee will conduct Spotlight Talks on select letters.

*Pen to Paper* is organized by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

### **ABOUT THE NORTON MUSEUM OF ART**

Founded in 1941, the Norton Museum of Art is recognized for its distinguished holdings in American, European, and Chinese art, and a continually expanding presence for Photography and Contemporary art. Its masterpieces of 19th century and 20th century European painting and sculpture include works by Brancusi, Gauguin, Matisse, and Picasso, and American works by Stuart Davis, Hopper, O'Keeffe, Pollock, and Sheeler.

The Norton presents special exhibitions, lectures, tours, and programs for adults and children throughout the year. In 2011, the Norton launched RAW (Recognition of Art by Women), featuring the work of a living female painter or sculptor and funded by the Leonard and Sophie Davis Fund/MLDauray Arts Initiative. In 2012, the Norton established the biennial, international Rudin Prize for Emerging Photographers in partnership with Beth Rudin DeWoody, named in honor of her late father, Lewis Rudin.

In 2016, the Norton broke ground for a visionary expansion designed by architecture firm Foster + Partners, under the direction of Pritzker Prize-winning architect Lord Norman Foster. The project reorients the Norton's entrance to the main thoroughfare of South Dixie Highway, restoring the symmetry of the museum's original 1941 design, and includes a new 42,000-square-foot West Wing that doubles education space, and increases gallery space for the Norton's renowned collection. The transformation of the Museum's 6.3-acre campus will create a museum in a garden, featuring new, verdant spaces and a sculpture garden.

The Norton is located at 1451 S. Olive Ave. in West Palm Beach, FL., and during construction through December 2018 is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday noon to 5 p.m. and Thursday, noon to 9 p.m., **and is free to the public**. Free parking and shuttle service is available at 1501 S. Dixie Highway. The Museum is closed on Mondays and major holidays. For additional information, please call (561) 832-5196, or visit [www.norton.org](http://www.norton.org).

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