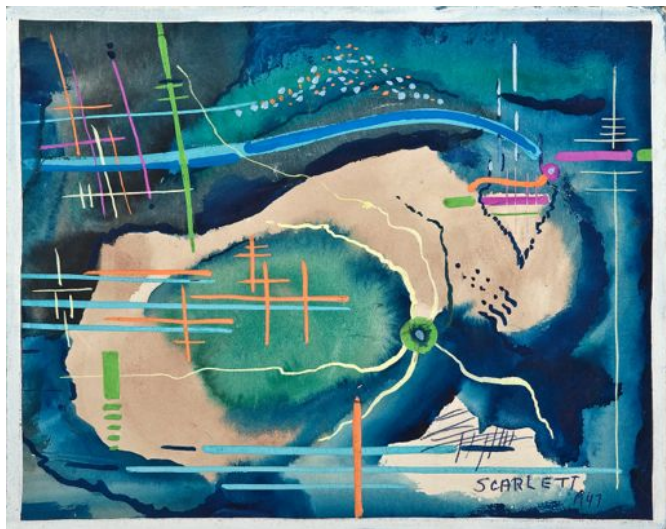


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## ROLPH SCARLETT [1889-1984]

paintings on paper

September 5 – October 13, 2014



*Untitled (RS174)*, 1947, graphite, ink and gouache on illustration board  
8 ¼ x 11 ¼ in



*Untitled (RS175)*, 1946, gouache on board, 10 x 9 ¾ in

From September 5 to October 13, the Drawing Room presents selected gouache paintings on paper and monoprints by the early modernist painter, designer and engineer Rolph Scarlett, whose fanciful abstractions celebrated the ascent of American non-objective painting from the 1920s onward.

Concurrent exhibitions featuring terracotta reliefs by Costantino Nivola [1911-1988] and paintings on canvas and paper by Jack Youngerman will also be on view.

Born in Guelph, Ontario, Rolph Scarlett was not only an innovative painter but also an inventive jewelry and set designer. His work in all media echoed the striking modernism of his visual art. Showing his paintings widely in over one hundred exhibitions that took place over the span of 75 years, Scarlett's dynamic use of color, nuanced form and elastic sense of space placed him at the forefront of American non-objective painting during its infancy.

In 1937, Scarlett's paintings caught the eye of Hilla Rebay, the founder and first director of The Museum of Non-Objective Painting, which would be known later as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. With the support of Rebay and the art patrons Solomon and Irene Guggenheim as well as the inspiration of works by Wassily Kandinsky, Rudolf Bauer and Paul Klee, Scarlett developed a visual language that placed him at the epicenter of geometric abstraction. Buoyed by a 1938 Guggenheim fellowship that allowed him to paint full time, the following year he was appointed the museum's chief lecturer. Scarlett was inspired by the lyrical abstractions of Kandinsky that he first encountered at The Armory Show in 1913. Later, through his association with Rebay the important German abstractionist, Rudolf Bauer, mentored him. Both artists shared the belief that non-objective painting was the primary vehicle toward the expression of pure creativity. Scarlett would become one of the most collected artists by the Guggenheims, who owned more than sixty of his paintings and monotypes.

From 1908 to 1909, Scarlett studied with William Merritt Chase, John Sloan and George Luks at the Art Student's League while refining his craftsmanship in watchmaking and industrial design in New York. His first exposure to modernist painting was at Alfred Stieglitz's gallery in 1910, where he was stimulated by John Marin's

watercolors and the abstractions of Georgia O'Keeffe. While visiting Switzerland in 1923 he met the German-Swiss artist, Paul Klee, who advised Scarlett that working in small scale would allow him to better understand the interrelationships of form. Klee's work was an important source of influence on his development.

Over some seven decades, Scarlett's paintings morphed between geometric abstraction's taut precision and the all-over gestalt of Abstract Expressionism. With his vibrant palette and sensitivity to line, form and spatial depth, he created rhythmic dreamscapes. Scarlett often said he wanted to "create something that never existed before." In doing so, his paintings have been significant in the formation of a uniquely American form of abstraction that predated Indian Space Painting, a movement that combined elements of Native American and pre-Columbian art in faceted, mosaic-like abstractions, by over a decade.

Scarlett made his living in scenic, commercial and industrial design. His stage design took him from Toledo to Hollywood, where he created sets for *King Lear*, for the world premiere of Eugene O'Neill's *Lazarus Laughed*, for George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman* and numerous of D.W. Griffith's films. Returning to New York in 1933, he designed sets for Radio City Music Hall and later for the 1939 New York World's Fair Amusement Center. As a freelance industrial designer, Scarlett's works included silverware, birdcages, storefronts, refrigerators, game boards, amusement rides and mechanical devices. His broad career interests notwithstanding, throughout his life Scarlett remained true to the myriad possibilities in non-objective art. He lived and worked in Woodstock, New York from 1955 until his death at the age of 95 in 1984.

Rolph Scarlett's work is represented in numerous public collections including the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas; the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph, Ontario; the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Quebec; The Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden, University of Nebraska, Lincoln; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York and the University of Guelph, Ontario.

[www.drawingroom-gallery.com](http://www.drawingroom-gallery.com)

**Gallery hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday 10-5; Sunday 11-5**

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