

Charles E. Burchfield (1893–1967)

April 9, 1893

Born Charles Ephraim in Ashtabula Harbor, Ohio, son of William Charles Burchfield (merchant tailor) and Alice (Murphy) Burchfield (schoolteacher), the fifth of six children. Siblings are James, Frances, Louise, Joseph, and Fred. Paternal grandparents are the Reverend James M. Burchfield (who works in merchant-men's furnishings and becomes an Evangelistic preacher) and Elizabeth Kerr. Maternal grandparents are Ephraim Murphy (farmer) and Amy Moore.

1898

September: Father dies. Burchfield moves with his family to 867 East Fourth Street, Salem, Ohio, his mother's hometown.

1911

Graduates from high school as class valedictorian.

Works at the W.H. Mullins Company, a local manufacturer, filing automobile parts until he contracts typhoid fever. After recuperating, he returns to the W.H. Mullins Company in order to save money to go to art school.

1912–16

Attends the Cleveland School of Art, Ohio.

Reads a variety of books including essays by John Burroughs, *Autumn and Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, writings by Friederich W. Nietzsche, collections of Hindu and Buddhist myths, and *I Am an Agnostic* by Robert Ingersoll. Is also inspired by the music of Richard Wagner as well as by the Russian Ballet and designs of Leon Bakst. Introduced to the work of Aubrey Beardsley.

1914

Most likely sees exhibition of American Cubism and Expressionism at the Taylor Gallery, Cleveland. Sees

Chinese scroll paintings at Hatch Gallery, Cleveland, where he works as guard during show.

Cites Asian art as influence, including the Japanese artists Hokusai and Hiroshige.

1915

Begins to paint independently.

1916

Spring: Graduates from the Cleveland School of Art.

Fall: Awarded scholarship at the National Academy of Design in New York City, but leaves after one day in life class. Exhibition of watercolors at Sunwise Turn Bookshop owned by Mary Mowbray-Clarke in New York and at the Cleveland School of Art.

November 22: Returns to Salem and job at W.H. Mullins Company, where he continues to paint during lunch breaks.

Mowbray-Clarke remains his dealer until 1922.

1917

Creates series of motifs he titles *Conventions for Abstract Thoughts*.

He later refers back to this period as his "Golden Year" for its inventiveness, stylistic experimentation, and prolific output.

1918

Spring: Hears Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* and cites it as an important discovery in his career.

July: Inducted into U.S. Army at Camp Jackson, South Carolina.

1919

January: Honorably discharged with the rank of sergeant.

Returns to W.H. Mullins.

Spring 1920

Successful solo exhibition at the Kevorkian Gallery, New York, enables Burchfield to take a three-month leave of absence from work to paint full-time.

1921

Participates in exhibition at Cleveland Society of Artists, winning first prize in watercolor.

Exhibits at Harvard Liberal Club, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Watercolors by Charles Burchfield is presented at the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois.

Participates in *First Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting* at the Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; *The False Front* (1920–21) is awarded first prize in watercolor.

Water Color Paintings by American Artists (November 7–December 18), The Brooklyn Museum, New York. Museum subsequently purchases *February Thaw* (1920).

November: Obtains position as assistant designer at M. H. Birge & Sons, a quality wallpaper company at 390 Niagara Street in Buffalo, New York and moves to Buffalo.

Hears Anton Dvorák's *Symphony from the New World* for the first time. Cites Russian literature as an important interest, specifically Leo Tolstoy and Maxim Gorki.

1922

May 20: Marries Bertha Kenreich in Greenford, Ohio. They live in Buffalo.

1923

May 26: Daughter Mary Alice born.

Solo exhibition at Grosvenor Galleries, London, England.

1924

June 28: Daughter Martha Elizabeth born.

Montross Gallery in New York begins to represent Burchfield. Has first solo exhibition at Montross Gallery (March 18–April 5); shows there regularly until 1928.

August: Visits George Bellows in Woodstock, New York, and Robert Frost in Shaftsbury, Vermont.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, purchases *The False Front* (1920–21).

1925

April: Moves to 3574 Clinton Street, Gardenville (West Seneca), New York, where he lives until his death.

July 5: Daughter Sarah Ruth born.

1926

December 31: Daughter Catherine Esther born.

1928

July: Edward Hopper's essay on Burchfield appears in that month's issue of *Arts* magazine. Burchfield begins friendships with Hopper, and with Mr. and Mrs. Edward W. Root of Utica, New York, who arrange a meeting with dealer Frank Rehn.

1929

Included in *124th Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture* (January 27–March 17), Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

Lilacs (1924–27) awarded Jennie Sesnan Gold Medal Award.

Frank K. M. Rehn Galleries in New York begins Burchfield's long-time representation.

June 1: Son Charles Arthur born.

August: Resigns as head of design department of M. H. Birge & Sons to paint full-time.

Included in *Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans* (December 13–January 12, 1930), The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Museum purchases *Noontide in Late May* (1917).

1930 Included in *Retrospective Exhibition of American Paintings and Architecture* (March 15–April 7), at Royal Academy, Stockholm, Sweden.

First of a series of solo exhibitions (March 17–April 5) at Frank K. M. Rehn Galleries, New York.

Charles Burchfield: Early Watercolors 1916–1918 (April 11–26), The Museum of Modern Art; exhibition gains artist major national recognition.

Hears Sibelius's *Second Symphony* for the first time. Sibelius's life and work become major inspiration for Burchfield.

Serves on the art juries for the *Carnegie International* and the *Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Annual*.

1932

Burchfield cites “nationalist spirit” of Sibelius’s *Finlandia* as model for his work’s ambitions. During 1930s is also inspired by biography of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and novels by Scandinavian writers including Knut Hamsun, Selma Lagerlöf, and Sigrid Undset.

1933

Destroys large portion of work he created during 1919. Participates in *A Century of Progress: Exhibition of Paintings and Sculptures* (June 1–November 1), the Art Institute of Chicago.

Early Watercolors of Charles Burchfield (November 5–February 15), Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington, DC.

June 13: Sister Frances dies.

June 23: Mother dies.

1934

Participates in *19th International Biennial Art Exhibition* (May 12–October 12), Venice, Italy.

Watercolors and Drawings by Sheeler, Hopper, and Burchfield (December 5–31) Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University.

1935

Included in *The 1935 International Exhibition of Paintings* (October 17–December 8), Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. *The Shed in the Swamp* (1933–34) is awarded second prize.

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller donates first of many works by Burchfield to The Museum of Modern Art.

1936

Fortune magazine commissions artist to paint the railroad yards at Altoona and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and in 1937, to paint sulphur and coal mining operations in Texas and West Virginia.

December: *Life* magazine runs story titled “Burchfield’s America.”

1938

Water Colors and Oils by Charles Burchfield (March 8–April 3), Department of Fine Arts, Carnegie Institute.

Included in *Trois Siècles d’Art aux Etats-Unis* (May–July), Musée du Jeu de Paume, Paris, France.

Included in the *Great Lakes Exhibition 1938–39* (November), Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.

1939

Included in *Art in Our Time* (May 9–November 1), The Museum of Modern Art.

Serves on regional committee to select art for and participates in *American Art Today* at the New York World’s Fair.

1940

Exhibition of Water Colors by Charles Burchfield, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University.

Participates in *Thirty-eighth Annual Philadelphia Water Color Exhibition* (November 3–December 8), Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

New Fallen Leaves (1938) is awarded Dana Water Color Medal.

1940–55

Burchfield serves on Guggenheim Fellowship selection committee.

1941

Participates in *20th International Exhibition of Water Colors* (July 17–October 5), Art Institute of Chicago; travels as *Contemporary American Water Colors* (October 16–November 9), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

House of Mystery (1924) is awarded Watson F. Blair Prize.

Paintings by Charles Burchfield (April 20–May 10), Cleveland School of Art.

Exhibits in *Artists for Victory* (December 7–February 22, 1942), The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

1942

Receives Award of Merit Medal, National Institute of Arts and Letters, New York

1943

Completes *The Coming of Spring (1917–1943)*, his first reconstruction or composite painting.

Elected member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

1944

Charles Burchfield: A Retrospective Exhibition of Water Colors and Oils 1916–1943 (April 14–May 15), Albright Art Gallery.

Receives the Chancellor's Medal from the University of Buffalo, New York.

1945

Twenty-eight works from the Albright Art Gallery's retrospective exhibition circulated by the American Federation of Arts.

1946

Included in *Pioneers of Modern Art in America* (April 9–May 19), Whitney Museum of American Art.

Participates in *American Painting from the 18th Century to the Present Day* (June–July), Tate Gallery, London, England.

1948–55

Member of Board of Directors, Albright Art Gallery; also serves on Art Committee.

1949–1953

Teaches periodically at the Art Institute of Buffalo, New York; Ohio University, Athens; University of Buffalo, New York; University of Minnesota, Duluth; and Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, New York.

Introduced to the Finnish writers including Alexis Kivi, Sally Salminen and Unto Seppänen.

1952

Participates in *American Water Colors, Drawings and Prints 1952: National Competition Exhibition* (December 5–January 25, 1953), The Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Sun and Rocks (1918–50)* awarded prize.

1953

The Drawings of Charles E. Burchfield (November 4–December 31), Cleveland Museum of Art.

1954

Elected N.A. (made full member) of the National Academy of Design, New York.

1955

Series of health problems begin.

1956

Charles Burchfield (January 11–February 26), Whitney Museum of American Art; retrospective continues on six-venue national tour through 1957. The Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts; San Francisco Museum of Art, California; Los Angeles County Museum, California; The Phillips Gallery, Washington, DC; The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio.

Edward Wales Root, 1884–1956: An American Collector (April 28–May 26), Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York, honors major bequest that includes numerous Burchfield works.

Longtime dealer Frank Rehn dies. John Clancy takes over Rehn's gallery and continues to handle Burchfield's work until 1975.

1958

Elected to American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York.

1959

Spring: Begins cortisone treatments which results in increased artistic output.

Included in *Contemporary American Watercolors and Drawing* (May 1959–May 1960), Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; tours nationally to eighteen venues.

Twenty-five Years of American Painting, organized by the City Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri; United States Information Agency, tours internationally through mid-September 1960 to museums in Italy, Germany, Sweden, and England.

Ten Modern Masters of Art, American Federation of Arts, New York (January 1959–January 1960), tours nationally to twelve venues.

1960

Awarded Gold Medal of American Academy of Arts and Letters.

1961

Paintings, Water Colors, and Drawings by Charles Burchfield (July 1–September 9), Ogunquit Museum of Art, Maine.

1962

Paintings by Charles Burchfield (May 13–June 10), Edward W. Root Center, Hamilton College, Clinton, New York.

1963

Included in *The Decade of the Armory Show, New Directions in American Art 1910–1920* (February 27–April 14), Whitney Museum of American Art.

Charles Burchfield: Recent Paintings (April 24–May 19), Upton Hall Gallery, State University College at Buffalo, New York

Charles Burchfield: Early Watercolors (April 24–May 19), Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.

Becomes art consultant for State University College at Buffalo.

November: Suffers heart attack.

1964

Paintings by Charles Burchfield (December 3–January 3, 1965), The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

1965

Charles Burchfield: His Golden Year: A Retrospective Exhibition of Watercolors, Oils and Graphics (November 14–January 9, 1966), the University of Arizona Art Gallery, Tucson, Arizona.

1966

December 9: The Charles Burchfield Art Center, a museum dedicated to the artist, inaugurated at the State University College at Buffalo, New York.

Included in *200 Years of Watercolor Painting in America: An Exhibition Commemorating the Centennial of the American Watercolor Society* (December 9–January 29, 1967), The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Burchfield establishes The Charles E. Burchfield Foundation.

1967

January 10: Dies of a heart attack in West Seneca, New York.

1968

Charles Burchfield Memorial Exhibition (March 1–April 21), The American Academy of Arts and Letters and The National Institute of Arts and Letters, New York.

1970

The Nature of Charles Burchfield—A Memorial Exhibition (April 9–May 31) Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.

1974

Charles E. Burchfield Watercolors (March 27–April 20), Kennedy Galleries Inc., New York.

1975

Kennedy Galleries Inc. begins representation of The Charles E. Burchfield Foundation. Hosts regular exhibitions through 2004.

Included in *The Whitney Studio Club and American Art 1900–1932* (May 23–September 3), Whitney Museum of American Art.

1978

Included in *Representations of America* (March 15–May 15) at Hermitage Museum, Leningrad, U.S.S.R.

1978–83

Charles Burchfield: The Charles Rand Penney Collection tours nationally to nineteen venues by Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, New York, and Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

1980

Charles Burchfield (June 25–August 17), Whitney Museum of American Art.

1984

Charles Burchfield (January 30–March 25), The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

1986

An American Visionary: Watercolors and Drawings by Charles E. Burchfield (March 20–May 16), the Boston Athenaeum, Massachusetts.

1987

The Early Works of Charles E. Burchfield 1915–1921 (December 13–February 7, 1988), the Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio.

1993

Celebration of centennial of Burchfield's birth: The Charles E. Burchfield Foundation helps newly founded Burchfield Homestead Society buy the artist's childhood home in Salem.

Charles E. Burchfield: The Sacred Woods (June 12–July 30), organized by Burchfield Art Center, opens at the Drawing Center, New York; travels to Minnesota Museum of American Art, Saint Paul; Burchfield Art Center, Buffalo State College, New York; Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

1994

Charles Rand Penney donates his Burchfield collection to Burchfield Art Center, Buffalo State College, New York. In recognition of the new gift, center changes its name to Burchfield-Penney Art Center.

1997

The Paintings of Charles Burchfield: North by Midwest (March 23–May 18), the Columbus Museum of Art; travels to Burchfield-Penney Art Center, Buffalo, New York; National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

2005

DC Moore Gallery, New York begins representation of The Charles E. Burchfield Foundation.

2006

Tempests and Romantic Visionaries: Images of Storms in European and American Art, Oklahoma City Museum of Art, Oklahoma City, OK

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