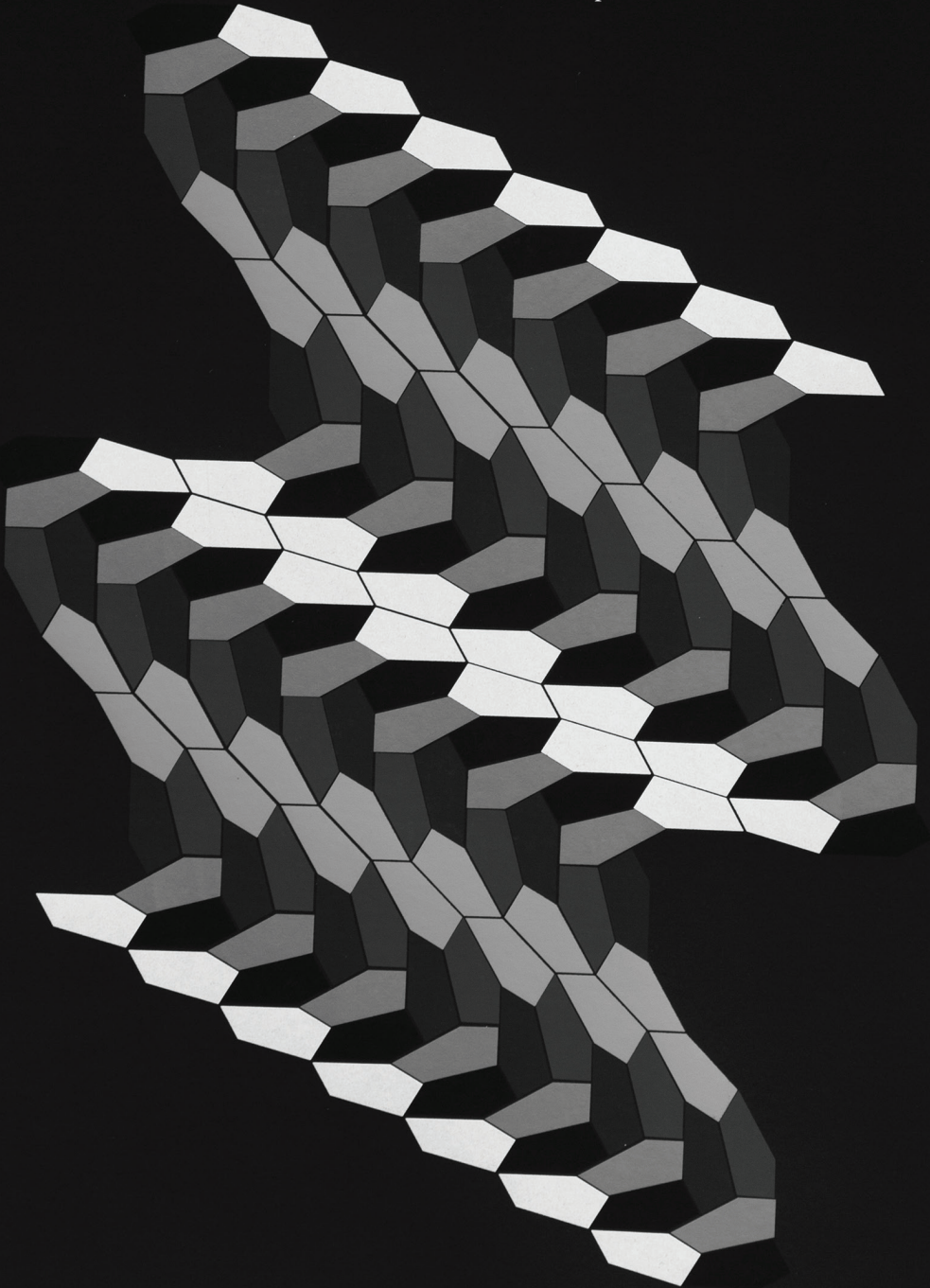


SEVEN DOORS

*Jan Tichy and the Chiaroscuro of Art Museum Collecting*

---

September 18–November 27, 2016







IN THIS UNIQUE PRESENTATION, artist Jan Tichy (b. 1974, Czech, resides in Chicago) has devised a special installation in direct response to the Museum's current position in its 75-year history—on the brink of a transformative renovation, with the vibration and sound of concrete demolition palpable. The Museum is typically celebrated for the art that it displays. But in the situation of systematic overhaul for renovation in which the SBMA finds itself, suddenly some doors that are habitually open, must be closed. Tichy is known for his time-based video installations, which are typically motivated by a specific social and institutional situation. In this case, the institution of the Museum is at a turning point in its evolution. Working with SBMA curators and with full access to the Museum's rich documentation, which has recently been organized and mostly digitized in anticipation of the Museum's 75th-anniversary year now underway, Tichy has combined his own work with seven objects that he has plucked from

the Museum's vast permanent collection. The result is a stunning, visually elegant, and meaningful exhibition in the hallowed spaces of the original 1914 post office structure, which was later designated the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 1941.

The seven works of art were selected by Tichy in order to delve into that which is hidden and not apparent in the spaces of the Museum. Ludington Court, named after founder Wright Ludington's father, is activated by a suite of silk screened prints by Tichy done in a range of muted hues from black to white and according to the same Zone System traditionally used in analog photography. Each is also inspired by one of 15 unique pentagons distinguished by its ability to form contiguous tiles into a single plane. While some of the tessellations result in tightly ordered patterns—some more compacted, some more undulating—several of the prints are actually the result of chance. Instead of carefully overlapping successive



silkscreens in different shades of black, gray, and sometimes white, Tichy breaks the form by allowing the screens to misalign. The representational pull of systematic order is thus ruptured by unique impressions. The suite of prints can be construed as an allegory, then, not only of artistic tradition through repetition and control (the mathematically and geometrically predetermined), but also of the value of chance in artistic creation. In the context of this installation, they also stand for the social systems that produce institutions like the fine art museum, which is at once an ordered collection of works of art as well as an accidental collage; the product of chance encounters of donors, artists, and the community. Centralized in the court is a small Roman Herm also gifted by Ludington. In a single case are two examples of objects no longer actively collected by SBMA that are usually closeted in the depths of storage: trumpets, also known as oliphants, made from elephant tusk ivory, a substance that is no longer legally harvested for art-making

or any other purpose. The trumpets in turn rhyme with those found in a famous woodcut by the great Renaissance master Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) called *The Seven Trumpets of the Apocalypse*, dated to 1498. The woodcut, in many ways, functions as a kind of key for the objects selected for this installation. It is protected by a piece of black paper from the intensity of natural light streaming from the skylights, which Tichy elected to have fully uncovered. In their monochromatic elegance, Tichy's suite of prints is evocative of the same impulses to order and chaos so indelibly rendered in Dürer's apocalyptic woodcut. They represent the ideal of mathematical and geometrical perfection as a distillation of spiritual transcendence, a constant thematic of the Western tradition of art since the Renaissance.

The installation continues in von Romberg Gallery down the hall, in which two brilliant gelatin silver prints by Ansel Adams are installed along with a life-size bronze by the



19th-century American sculptor, Charles Niehaus, draped in cloth to allude to its usual absence from view, again in the depths of art storage. Tichy further interrelates the individual parts of the installation through a time-based video projection, inspired by the motif found in the impluvium of Ludington court (a vestige of the 1941 redesign of the original post office), which casts these works of art in relative illumination and obscurity through a digital chiaroscuro (an art historical term that alludes to the play of light and shadow in Baroque painting) to adumbrate the organic genesis of the Museum's permanent collection with shifts in taste and value. In sum, the installation is a response to the struggle to preserve cultural representation through the repository of the Museum, even as it must respond to the ever present natural forces that threaten it, whether water, fire, or the violent seismic events that have decimated whole cities, including our own, in the past 100 years.

The visitor's experience of Tichy's installation highlights the intersection between his

own work—essentially, a sustained meditation on the expressive potential of light and dark—and the themes of the exhibition. As visitors move from the darkened space of the video gallery, which asks for their attention as it shifts from light to dark over the course of around 10 minutes, and reemerge into the full-on Santa Barbara sunlight flooding into Ludington Court, they have a visceral, physiological response. This sense of elation is the simple chemical byproduct of our bodily response to sunlight, especially after having been immersed in darkness. The oscillation between light and shadow is a shared feature of the seven objects Tichy selected from the permanent collection. Experienced together with his own work, itself responding to the same representational systems of light and shadow, Tichy's conceptual installation is a moving, allegorical meditation on the fate of art itself as dictated by the unforeseen limitation and potentialities of the fine art museum. Whether exposed to light or concealed in darkness, the permanent collection of the museum necessarily reflects the social and natural forces that continue to shape it.





Type 1



Type 13 (broken)



Type 4



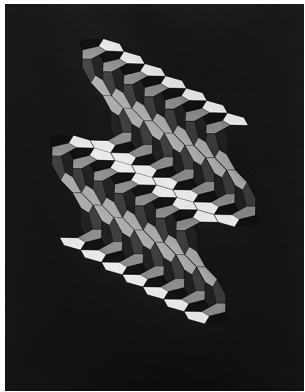
Type 13



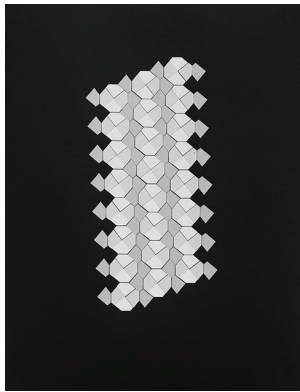
Type 11



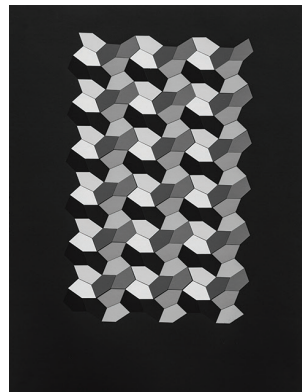
Type 15 (white)



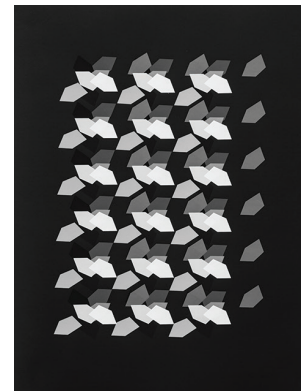
Type 15 (black)



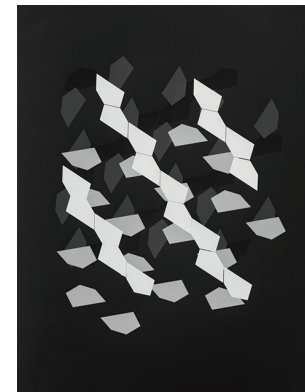
Type 10



Type 8



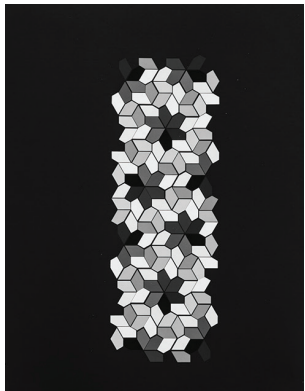
Type 8 (broken)



Type 7 (broken)



Type 7



Type 5



Type 5 (broken)

JAN TICHY (CZECH, B. 1974)

*On the Decomposition of a Plane,*  
Type 1–15, 2016

Acrylic on paper  
Courtesy of the artist

All of these prints are inspired by tiling patterns, also called tessellations, that are produced by irregular pentagons that can be fit together on a flat surface without overlapping or gaps. Something of a mathematical curiosity, there are currently fifteen such pentagons (the most recent having been discovered just last year) with the possibility that still more will emerge

over time. The tessellations are further enhanced by Tichy's use of a multi-layered silk screening technique using shades of pure black gradating to pure white, corresponding to the American photographer, Ansel Adams' Zone System, which established eleven 'stops' of perceptible hues. Tichy's silkscreens underscore the illusion of three dimensions implicit in the very form of the tessellated pentagons through a similar gradation of hues. The velvety effects of dramatic chiaroscuro (modeling through gradations of light to dark) in Adams' gelatin silver prints are the photographic equivalent of the spatial illusionism generated by the incised lines of Dürer's woodblock prints.



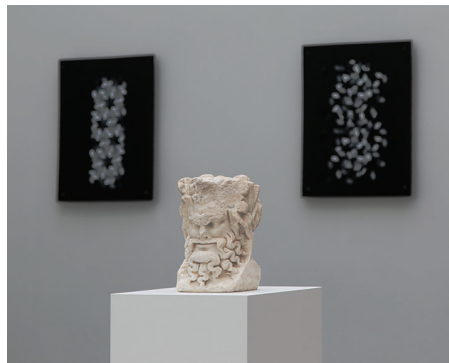


ALBRECHT DÜRER (GERMAN, 1471–1528)  
*The Seven Angels Sounding Trumpets from the Apocalypse*, 1498  
 Woodcut on paper  
 Museum purchase with funds provided by the Women's Board, 1966.26

This woodcut is one of a series of fifteen prints illustrating the Book of Revelation (8:6–13; 11:15–19) which is considered the masterpiece not only of Dürer's career, but of the entire history of the woodcut medium. In a single image, the artist represents the seven calamities that God caused to befall the world (hail and fire, meteors that destroy all sea life and then, freshwater creatures, the darkening of the sun and moon, a plague of locusts to torture humanity, a demonic army that kills a third of all humanity, and finally, the summoning of seven angels with the further seven bowls of God's wrath). The relevant passages in Latin that the woodcut illustrates bleed through from the back of the print, which would have been bound as a page in a book, first published more than five centuries ago.

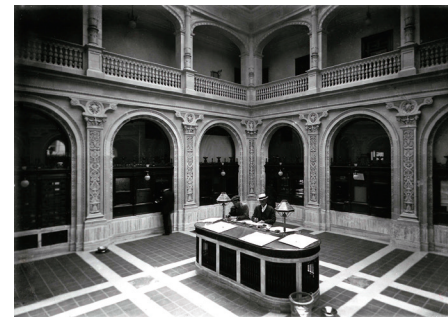
Acquired by the SBMA Women's Board in 1966, it is one of a handful of old master prints retained in the permanent collection. This image of God's terrible and final judgement, rendered entirely through degrees of shadow and light created by the grooves incised into a block of wood, inked, and then impressed on paper, functions at once as a warning against sinners and as an extraordinary door through which the viewer can access divine

inspiration and thus, salvation. Like all fragile works on paper, which are light sensitive, this print normally 'rests' in complete darkness. For the purposes of this special installation, we have chosen to mask the print to shield it from the intensity of sunlight streaming from the skylight of Ludington Court, which is usually mediated by a tarp. While the Museum ensures the image's preservation, it can only do so by severely restricting its visibility. Thus, this print, not only through its subject but through its very fallibility as an image that imperceptibly and inevitably must fade over the course of time, functions as an apt metaphor for the paradoxical nature of the fine art museum and its mission—to preserve art for posterity—something which it strives to advance, but all too often, either fails to do (in the face of natural catastrophe) or is forced to contradict as its collecting parameters morph over time.



*Janiform Herm (Satyrs)*  
 Roman, 1st c. CE  
 Marble  
 Bequest of Wright S. Ludington, 1993.1.105

A herm was originally a pillar-like sculptural representation of Hermes, messenger god of antiquity, who functioned as a form of protection at entrances to homes, sanctuaries, and other types of buildings. In this example, there are two aspects represented, front to back, making it a janiform or double herm. On one side is a youthful satyr with a pine wreath on his head, while on the other is an aging satyr with grape vines intertwined in his locks. In the context of this installation, the herm occupies temporarily what would otherwise be felt as a glaring absence—the tall funerary loutrophoros that had graced Ludington Court since its dedication by Wright Ludington to his father for the exhibition of Greek and Roman antiquities, also donated by Ludington when the Museum first opened its doors in 1941. The placement of the herm recalls the actual centrality of the service desk that was at the heart of the original post office, as seen in the vintage photograph below. All of the antiquities have been temporarily removed because of the impending demolition of this space for seismic retrofitting.



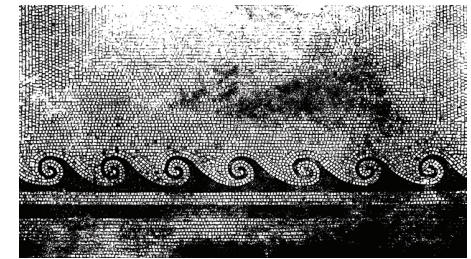
*Oliphant*  
 Democratic Republic of Congo, Mangbetu Tribe,  
 19th century  
 Ivory  
 Gift of Mrs. Max Schott (Alice F.), 1945.4.19

*Oliphant*  
 Democratic Republic of Congo, 19th century  
 Ivory  
 Gift of Baroness von Wiesenberger, 1979.87

These two oliphants (side-blown trumpets or horns) have probably never been put on display since their accession into the permanent collection in 1945 and in 1979, respectively. They remain part of an eclectic array of African objects in the permanent collection, some of which are of indisputable Museum quality.



To the Mangbetu people, these types of objects were viewed as symbols of power. The lighter example was probably made specifically for the Western tourist trade and was never played. Both have been recommended for deaccession by specialists. Recently, illegal trafficking in ivory has given rise to an increasingly high-profile campaign to stop the indiscriminate poaching of African and Asian elephants. It is no longer possible to even acquire or sell objects made from ivory other than domestically.



JAN TICHY (CZECH, B. 1974)  
*Installation No. 31 (Seven Seas)*, 2016  
 Single channel HD video projection, 10 minutes  
 Courtesy of the artist

The motif used in this projection can be found in the impluvium (an ancient Roman water feature, of which the one centered in Ludington Court is a facsimile). The motif, which is repeated seven times in the image, slowly emerges by degrees in accordance with the 255 steps of grayscale currently utilized in all digital images. The highest notes of reflection are actually the result of sediment that has accumulated from the running water of the fountain over the course of the last seventy-five years. Water, which is the natural enemy of most fine art, is now considered anathema in art museums according to current art conservation best-practice, even though, ironically, the impluvium has been one of the most beloved features of Ludington Court since its



inauguration. Its eventual disappearance due to the ongoing renovation of the original 1914 post office is thus literally enacted in Tichy’s time-based wall projection. A kind of moving elegy to the design of the court as envisioned by the museum’s founder, Wright Ludington, the video is a testament to the past incarnations of what was once a Federal post office, while metaphorically illuminating or masking the social forces that must continue to shape the formation of the Museum’s permanent collection and its presentation.

**ANSEL ADAMS (AMERICAN, 1902–1984)**

*Winter Sunrise, Sierra Nevada, Lone Pine, 1942*

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Margaret Weston, 2005.76.2

*Trailside, Near Juneau, Alaska, 1947*

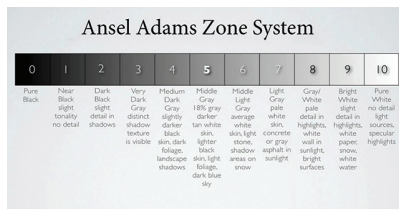
Gelatin silver print

Gift of Margaret W. Weston, 2008.73.1

Ansel Adams is considered one of the great master photographers of the last century. Over the course of his long career, Adams devised and perfected the Zone System, a process that made it possible to standardize areas of black, white and gray in a photograph, as illustrated by the schematic below. Although photography is often presumed to be an ‘objective’ registration of whatever the camera records, it is more often the product of extremely refined manipulation. Dark room techniques like the classic gelatin silver print, register the image through the exposure of chemicals (in this case silver) to light. However, Adams developed techniques to further enhance and edit the image to achieve a perfection of form and gradations of light to dark that we see in both of these examples.

In these two extraordinary visions of nature shot far and near, Adams uses light and dark to create dramatic contrasts and distinct, virtually abstract areas. Somewhat akin to the subject it represents, *Winter Sunrise* becomes visible only sporadically as it would in nature, by the light from the video projection next to it. This photograph was made by Adams when he was engaged in an FSA project to document the Japanese-American internment camps:

*While [photographing] at Manzanar [a Japanese-American internment camp] for a fortnight in the winter of 1944, Virginia and I arose very early in the mornings and drove to Lone Pine with hopes of a*



*sunrise photograph of the Sierra. After four days of frustration when the mountains were blanketed with a heavy cloud, I finally encountered a bright, glistening Sunrise . . . I waited, shivering for a shaft of sunlight to flow over the distant trees. A horse grazing in the frosty pasture stood facing away from me with exasperating, stolid persistence. I observed the final shaft of light approaching. At the last moment the horse turned to show its profile, and I made the exposure. Within a minute the entire area was flooded with sunlight and the natural chiaroscuro was gone.*

Tichy’s installation helps to recover Adams’s desire to see the isolation of the rugged Sierra mountains as a metaphor for social isolation, in this case the paranoid ostracization of the Japanese-Americans during WWII, as well as the sublime inspiration by which to elevate American idealism to overcome such prejudice.



**CHARLES HENRY NIEHAUS (AMERICAN, 1855–1935)**

*The Scrapper (Greek Athlete Using a Strigil), 1883*

Bronze

Museum purchase in honor of Robert Henning, 2007.55

Born in Cincinnati, Niehaus is all but forgotten in the history of art. During his lifetime, he earned critical praise for the unconventional naturalism of his work, which was in part the result of his years of study at the Munich Royal Academy from 1877–1880. The subject of this monumental sculpture is in emulation of a type invented in classical antiquity by the Greek sculptor Lysippos and depicts an athlete in the act of scraping the sweat from his body with a curved piece of metal known as a strigil. Many of the most celebrated sculptures produced by the ancient Greeks are only known through the many copies made after them by the Romans. The originals are lost.

This cast was actually produced specifically at the request of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in whose collection exists a related monumental sculpture of a Greek athlete probably conceived at the same time by Niehaus, and also derived from a

type associated with Lysippos. For reasons that are not publicly known, in 1956 the Met decided to exclude the object from its permanent collection (an action called ‘deaccession’ in museum parlance), just forty-five years after it had paid the artist to produce it. SBMA acquired the sculpture from a private dealer nine years ago, but has not opted to include it for active display since then. It remains shrouded in the Museum’s storage vault, where Tichy encountered it one year ago. Since antiquity, bronze has been prized as an expensive medium of indefinite lifespan. Here its silhouette is illuminated only briefly by the video projection, before it is once again plunged into darkness.

**JAN TICHY (CZECH, B. 1974)**

*Type 4, 2016*

Acrylic on paper

1 of an edition of 7, plus artist’s proof

Courtesy of the artist

This is a limited edition print, made by Tichy specifically for the Museum’s 75th anniversary gala as an exclusive benefit of the uppermost levels of sponsorship. Similar to the suite of prints on view in Ludington Court, this print is distinguished by the use of a reflective silver, acrylic paint, which, echoes the gelatin silver process used by Ansel Adams in the two photographs on view in von Romberg gallery.







JAN TICHY is an artist and educator, who lives and works in Chicago. His work uses multimedia to investigate the expressive potential of light as a means of social and political engagement. Tichy is currently Assistant Professor at the Department of Photography at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

EIK KAHNG is Assistant Director and Chief Curator at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Kahng and Tichy collaborated on the formation of this exhibition, and in particular, on the articulation of Tichy's concepts in this exhibition booklet and the installation didactics.

THE SANTA BARBARA MUSEUM OF ART is one of the finest museums on the West coast and is celebrated for the superb quality of its permanent collection. Its mission is to integrate art into the lives of people through internationally recognized exhibitions and special programs, as well as the thoughtful presentation of its permanent collection.



*This publication has been generously underwritten by Charlene and Tom Marsh.*