GOING GLOBAL
ABSTRACT ART AT MID-CENTURY

McCormick, Wasserman, and Davidson Galleries

19 June 2022 – 25 September 2022

Tentative Checklist + Labels
Last Updated: 6-2-2022
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OP ART

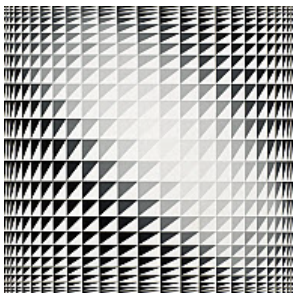
In October 1964, Time magazine ran an unsigned piece, “Op Art: Pictures That Attack the Eye,” and the movement called Op Art (Optical Art) was born. The journalist recognized that an international group of artists was working with geometric patterns to create optical illusions, including a sense of movement. The article lists several artists whose works are on view in this gallery, including Yaacov Agam (Israeli, active in Paris), Richard Anuszkiewicz (American, active in New York), Bridget Riley (British, active in London), and Jesús Rafael Soto (Venezuelan, active in Paris). Their artworks’ patterns instantly engage the viewer with a visual zing but do not reference emotions, history, objects, or past experiences. Even someone who has never been inside a museum can immediately understand these works, and the artists often stressed that they had no political or emotional message. Nonetheless, their work helps us to see that our brains process and interpret everything we see.

Yaacov Agam (Israeli, b. 1928)
New Year, III, 1971
acrylic on aluminum
29 1/8 × 40 1/2 × 3 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Robert B. and Mercedes H. Eichholz, 2014.17.1

Agam, among the most internationally known Israeli artists, moved to Zurich in 1949 to study with Johannes Itten, whose textbooks on color theory and design remain relevant. Agam relocated to Paris in 1951 and remains there today. He became famous for his lenticular sculptures, whose corrugated surfaces change as the viewer shifts positions. Many Op Artists believed that such optical effects precipitated a different, deeper form of viewing, one that does not allow a viewer to easily pass by. The artwork exists as one thing, but it can never be seen as a whole. Agam feels similarly and has thought about his art as a metaphor for Jewish religious beliefs. In a recent interview, he summarized a paradox that relates to the experience of his art: “There is no shape except in the complete shape, and the complete shape is infinite.”

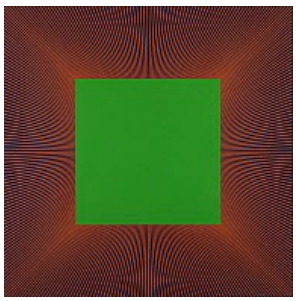
Eduardo MAC ENTYRE (Argentine, 1929-2014)
Tramas sobre negro, 1965
oil on canvas
40 × 60 × 1 1/4 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Robert B. and Mercedes H. Eichholz, 2014.17.16

Born in Buenos Aries to European immigrants, Mac Entyre focused on industrial design and graphic art. The crisp array of lines and patterns in this painting show his training in technical drafting for engineering and machining of parts. In 1960, Mac Entyre and Miguel Angel Vidal published Arte generativo (Generative art), a manifesto for a new art movement that stressed the illusion of movement and visual dynamism in art. For them, lines “turn and vibrate, they gyrate within their own form and vibrate by intermingling.” In this painting, the concentric rings seem to propagate from center points, as if they are expanding waves of energy. One of the principles of Generative Art is that these patterns have the appearance of growing and changing, as if they were time-bound phenomena.



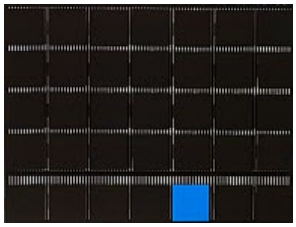
Bridget RILEY (British, b. 1931)
Annul, 1965
emulsion on board
21 1/4 x 21 1/4 in. (54 x 54 cm)
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase, 1965.62

Like other Op artists, Riley has been insistent that there is no deeper meaning to her work, no hidden symbols. She has said that sometimes scientists and mathematicians have seen waveforms in them, but she insists this is coincidence. She has explained that "I work 'from' something rather than 'towards' something. It is a process of discovery, and I will not impose a convenient dogma, however attractive." Exploratory drawings have always been a key part of her process. As she draws, she observes the visual effects that appear as patterns and colors play against each other. Then, she scales them up for refinement. Eventually, she transforms them into paintings.



Richard ANUSZKIEWICZ (American, 1930-2020)
Centered Green, 1979
acrylic on canvas
frame: 85 1/8 × 85 1/8 × 2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell Kleinhandler, 1983.46

A major figure in American Op Art, Anuszkiewicz explored the visual frisson that arises from the application of bright colors and geometric patterns. He drew inspiration from German-born artist Josef Albers, whose famous series Homage to the Square is a study of colors' infinite variations and startling interactions. Anuszkiewicz takes his predecessor's experiments a step further, with starburst patterns that leap off the wall. As a result, his work gives the illusion of emitting light.



Jesús Rafael SOTO [Venezuelan, 1923-2005 (active France)]
Homenaje al humano, from the series, "An American Portrait, 1776-1976", 1975
wood and aluminum, ed. 18/25
19 1/2 x 26 x 5 1/2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Transworld Art, 1976.49.7

Soto completed art school in Venezuela and then directed the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Maracaibo. In 1950, he decamped to Paris because of the deteriorating political situation—there was a military coup in 1948—and a general hostility toward abstraction. In Europe, he studied Piet Mondrian's late abstractions and Josef Albers's Homage to the Square series. He also met Pierre Boulez, a French composer whose music is based on patterns and math but does not honor melody. Soto borrowed from Boulez the idea that sounds could be broken into a numerical system and then replayed for startling and often unharmonious effects.

In this Soto sculpture, the interaction between the hanging elements and the black and white stripes works analogously to Boulez's compositional method. In interviews, Soto resisted attributing symbolic meanings and argued that chance plays a big part in how a viewer sees the work. The striking visual moiré effects of this artwork "cannot be foreseen," yet it does not happen "independently of laws." The artwork sets up a system, like a game of chess, then the viewer, as she moves around the piece, "plays" the game. The experience for each person is slightly different, though it is always the same artwork.

Carlos CRUZ-DIEZ [Venezuelan, 1923-2019 (active France)]
Physichromie No. 352, 1967
acrylic on board with plexiglass
24 x 47 5/8 x 1 3/8 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of the ARCO Collection, 1995.53.5

Like Jesús Rafael Soto, whose work is also on view in this gallery, Cruz-Diez left Venezuela for Paris because of the political situation during the 1950s. In an interview, he recalled the military police showing up at an artists' party and everyone feeling "like flies." He said, "I was never very political. I once sat in a Communist Party meeting and realized that in order to join the party one has to be obedient—I've never been obedient."

He relocated to Paris in 1960, worked as a graphic designer, and continued his experiments with color in the Physichromie series. Walk back and forth, and watch as the colors and patterns shift. You, the viewer, complete the work, and there is no correct angle from which to see it. As with many abstract artists in this exhibition, Cruz-Diez sought to make work that was wholly in the present, with no history, no cultural references. He said, "The Physichromies . . . force us to deal with an event of color happening in the moment, without past or future."

Gyula KOŠICE (Argentine, 1924-2016)
Red, 1968
acrylic, lightbox, wood, electrical cord
37 x 23 1/2 x 12 1/2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of the ARCO Collection, 1995.53.7

Fascinated by technology and committed to the art of the future, Gyula Košice spent his artistic career experimenting with new materials. He claimed to have been the first artist to make a work entirely out of neon gas and glass tubing, and he invented "hydraulic sculpture," which uses moving water and bubbles as sculptural mediums.

Czechoslovakian by birth, Košice immigrated to Argentina as a child. He became a leading figure of the Argentine avant-garde, cofounding the influential Madí group in 1946, which helped transmit and transform Bauhaus ideas in Latin America. He rejected painting as old-fashioned, declaring that the canvas and its frame were "a thing of the past."

From 1946 to 1972, he developed La ciudad hidroespacial (The hydrospatial city), a series of plexiglass sculptures and models imagined as a supra-terrestrial city suspended in space. These were futuristic cities. Red is from the same period as La ciudad hidroespacial. Perhaps it is a prototype for a lamp or lighting source, an architectural model for some immense light sculpture, or a model for a giant old-fashioned cathode-ray tube television. For viewers in 1968, its silvery paint, plastic parts, and lights looked like the space-age machines connected with the Soviet and American space exploration programs, Soyuz and Apollo.

Rogelio POLESELLO (Argentinian, 1939-2014)
Multiplier, 1971
Plexiglass
78 5/8 x 39 x 3/4 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Robert B. and Mercedes H. Eichholz, 1995.50.4

Polesello trained at Prilidiano Pueyrredón Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes in Argentina and began exhibiting at the precocious age of 22. Throughout his career, he adopted new ways of making art using spray guns, metal sheets, and eventually plastic. Today, plastic is synonymous with cheapness, disposability, and environmental destruction. During the 1950s and 1960s, however, it retained an aura of promise, and it fit with the period's fervent belief in technology's ability to ameliorate all social ills. Plastic was a futuristic and avant-garde material that portended the capitalist utopia just around the corner. Here, Polesello uses the refractive properties of plexiglass to make miniworlds that change and float as the viewer moves around.

Like many of the Latin American artists in this exhibition, Polesello exhibited in Washington, D.C., at the Pan-American Union. This was a cultural organization that played a part in the United States's support of anti-Communist and authoritarian regimes in Latin America.

GESTURAL ABSTRACTION

The hurried splatter of a watercolor brush, a dollop of bright red paint, or pencil marks scribbled in an unknown language. The paintings of Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Pierre Soulages, Edward Chávez, Fernando de Szyszlo, and Maria Helena Vieira da Silva demonstrate the emotional charge held by colors brushed on a canvas with gusto and attention. We imagine ourselves reaching out across time to experience directly the artists' hands, arms, and minds as they dripped, splashed, scraped, and brushed. This ability for colors and marks to express raw feelings motivated many abstract artists during the mid-20th century, as they aimed to fill their paintings with emotion but not any obvious subject matter, to tear away the barriers to perception and reach inside a person's mind.

Ernst Wilhelm NAY (German, 1902-1968)
Chromatik stark und zart (Untitled), 1956
oil on canvas
49 x 78 1/2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Bequest of Sarah Reed Platt, 1973.47

Here, basic colors are modulated by variations in tone and saturation—each chromatic variant presented directly in the form of a disc. For the artist, the circle bears no symbolic value and thus is a strong form through which a note of pure color may be expressed. The colors appear unbounded by their lines, quietly floating, gliding, fusing, separating, drifting in an indistinct, fluid space. The constellation of colorful forms in many ways embraces the work of abstraction pioneer and color theorist Wassily Kandinsky, who argued that colors had the potential to vibrate the soul.

Ernst Wilhelm Nay studied in Paris, Italy, Poland, and the Norwegian Lofoten islands. In 1937, his abstraction was condemned as "degenerate" by Nazi officials, and he was forbidden to exhibit his work in Germany. Conscripted into the German army in 1940, the artist was stationed in France, where he befriended Kandinsky.

Pierre SOULAGES (French, b. 1919)
10 Mai 1961, 1961
oil on canvas
63 3/4 × 51 1/4 in. (161.9 × 130.2 cm)
frame: 64 3/4 × 52 3/8 × 1 3/4 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Robert B. and Mercedes H. Eichholz, 2014.17.25

As a child in rural France, Soulages discovered ancient cave paintings similar to those at Lascaux and Altamira (c. 36,000 BCE), and the experience of coming upon these timeless paintings in the darkness has never left him. "I made these [black paintings] because I found that the light reflected by the black surface elicits certain emotions in me . . . for thousands of years, men went underground, in the absolute black of grottoes, to paint with black." Soulages merges 20th-century abstraction with some of the oldest known artworks. In this example, black paint was layered over a red/purple base, then selectively scraped away. To emphasize the lack of subject matter and cultural references, he titled the painting with the date he completed it.

Edward CHAVEZ (American, 1917-1995)
Elemental Landscape, 1956
Oil on canvas
31 ¾ x 54 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Amalia de Schulthess, 1963.34

This painting breaks apart the rocky desert landscape of the Southwest and then reassembles those pieces into a mosaic of bright color and pattern. The combination of landscape and abstraction interweaves European and Latin American modernism with Indigenous art forms. The artist described himself as “an American painter with a Mexican heritage and a desire to explore that heritage.” This painting suggests that he was also trying to engage with a precolonial history. Its patterned surface recalls the geometric designs of ancient Southwestern people, such as the Mogollon or Mountain groups.

Chávez spent his childhood following seasonal labor demands, seeking farm work in Colorado and New Mexico. During World War II, he undertook military service in Belize, Brazil, Wyoming, and Virginia before returning to civilian life in Colorado. He spent periods of study in Mexico, Florence, Italy, and the Arctic Circle in the early 1950s before relocating to Woodstock, New York, to teach at the Art Students League of New York and later at Syracuse University.

Fernando de SZYSZLO (Peruvian, 1925-2017)
Mar de Lurin, 1989
acrylic on canvas
39 1/2 x 39 1/2 in.
frame: 40 3/4 x 40 3/4 x 1 3/4 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Jerry and Mary Kay Gardner, 1997.73

In Paris during the 1950s, Szyszlo studied art and befriended such luminaries as the Mexican poet Octavio Paz, Mexican painter Rufino Tamayo, and Colombian muralist Alejandro Obregón. He also learned about Surrealism and its conjuring of the deep past and the ghosts of the unconscious. These experiences prompted him to use abstraction to express the troubled history of Peru. At the time, abstract art was seen as yet another European and American cultural imposition, and Szyszlo initially attracted intense criticism from Peruvian artists and intellectuals.

In 1988, he wrote: “To work and try to create in Latin America, we live exhausted by the worst characteristics of the 20th century without having yet surpassed the darkest conditions of the 19th century.” This painting shows how he negotiated that impossible position. Lurin is a region of Peru where desert mountains meet the sea, and the interlacing of waves and triangles evokes that intersection. The ribbons and strands of paint act like the woof and weft of a loom to weave this image into existence. Perhaps this reflects the artist’s fascination with Peru’s extraordinary textile traditions, including those of the Quechua, Inca, Chancay, and Moche peoples, which predate Spanish colonization and remain vital in the 21st century.

Maria Helena VIEIRA DA SILVA (French, 1908-1992)
Cité Lacustre, 1957
oil on canvas
31 3/4 × 39 1/4 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Robert B. and Mercedes H. Eichholz, 2014.17.9

Born in Lisbon to an affluent family, Vieira da Silva was exposed to avant-garde art at a young age, seeing the Ballets Russes under the direction of Sergei Diaghilev and also the Italian Futurists. After studying art in Lisbon, she moved to Paris in 1928, then fled France for exile in Brazil during World War II. After returning in 1947, she settled into her distinctive lapidary abstraction with minute marks that cohere into a loose grid that might reference the facades of Lisbon or Paris. Her other tendency is a diaphanous, all-over effect without right angles or straight lines. These feel like a view into a leafy tree, a cloud, or the trembling surface of a lake. This painting’s double title, Lakeside City or Winter in Holland—with its reference to a city and to nature—shows her pulling together cities and human constructions with the natural world. The crosses might reference a street grid or windows, while the lower right has brachial, vine-like forms.

Virginia JARAMILLO
Obrinus, 1976
oil on canvas
59 × 59 × 2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Berda Morley, 2018.27

Jaramillo was born in El Paso but spent her early years in Los Angeles, where she attended Otis College of Art and Design. She exhibited regularly in L.A. and lived in Watts with her husband and family until the 1965 rebellion, when she relocated to New York City and immersed herself in its art scene. She contributed to the feminist magazine Heresies, exhibited in the Whitney Annual, and was the sole woman in the now famous De Luxe Show (1971), a racially integrated exhibition of abstract art in Houston, Texas. She remains an abstract artist today.

The title Obrinus refers to a species of butterfly, called the olivewing, native to South America, whose wings are green on the underside. The green allows the butterfly to blend in with the forest. Here, however, the painting does not seem to depict a butterfly. Jaramillo gives the feeling of immersion in a forest, of wandering amidst a green mass of leaves that have blocked out the sky.

LAYERS / ISLANDS

This section of the exhibition focuses on images that are, on the one hand, shallow—with no sense of opening onto a vast vista or landscape—and on the other, multilayered. Such an approach is a legacy of Cubism, which was co-discovered by Pablo Picasso and George Braque around 1906 and which shaped artistic practices across the next century and beyond. Within a narrow space, there are many overlapping parts and gradations. A rough comparison is a computer monitor with a number of tabs or windows open. Even though we know the screen has no depth, only pixels, we "stack" icons, windows, and other images creating a layered virtual space that remains two dimensional.

Lucio FONTANA [Italian, 1899-1968 (active Argentina)]
Concetto spaziale (Spatial Concept), 1968
etching, relief printed, with embossing and punctures, ed. 109/210
25 3/8 x 18 3/4 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Arthur and Yolanda Steinman, 1985.50.24

Fontana was born in Argentina to an Italian father, who carved funerary monuments, and an Argentine mother. Throughout his life, he traveled between the two countries. By the 1930s, he was not only a fervent advocate for abstract art in Italy and France but also an equally vociferous Fascist, designing sculptures for the party's Milan headquarters. He returned to Argentina in 1940 but then moved to Milan in 1947 to found Spatialism. Around that time, he punctured the artwork's surface and developed a practice based on cuts, folds, and deformations of the paper, which he believed could revivify art by making it concrete and actual. Fontana wrote in one of his manifestos that "The gesture [of attacking the artwork's surface], once accomplished, lives for a second or a millennium, for we are convinced that, having accomplished it, it is eternal."

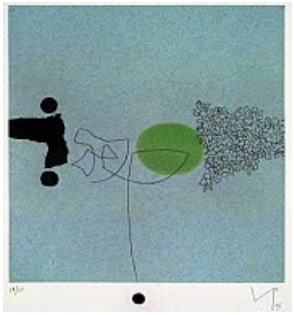
Ben NICHOLSON (British, 1894-1982)
Topaze, 1951
oil and pencil on canvas
38 1/4 × 49 1/4 × 1 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Bequest of Suzette Morton Davidson, 2002.31.3

After making his first abstract painting in 1923 during a stay in Paris, Nicholson promoted this new style in his native Britain. He staged the first all-abstract exhibition in the United Kingdom and co-edited a 300-page survey of modern art, Circle (1937). In 1939, he moved to rural Cornwall with his wife, the sculptor Barbara Hepworth, and they lived in a ramshackle home near the ocean with their newborn triplets. There, he worked in a windowless studio arranging a collection of glass vases and carafes on tables that fed into still lifes, such as this one, that read as if composed of layers of glass sheets. He said, "All the 'still lifes' are in fact land-sea-sky scapes," which could apply to this painting, with its cloudy background of grays and browns that evokes the foggy English landscape and its undulating line at the top, which might be hills in the distance.

Kenzo OKADA [Japanese, 1902-1982 (active USA)]
Insistence, 1956
oil on canvas
76 × 52 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase, Donald Bear Memorial Fund, 1959.69

Okada studied art in Japan and then lived in Paris from 1924 to 1927. He returned to Japan and established himself as an artist. In 1950, he relocated to New York and soon had exhibitions at Betty Parsons Gallery, which was showing such luminaries as Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Robert Rauschenberg. In 1968, Okada reflected on his life in America and its impact on his art: “When I was in Japan I was always thinking about Western things. That trouble is gone because I am here in the West. And, step by step, every year my feeling was, oh, I am Japanese, and I was sort of haunted by Japanese traditions . . . before I came here I didn’t think much about Japanese things.” Okada’s clouds of color and the deft black lines that resemble a katakana character channel the ink and brush technique of traditional Japanese painting.

Victor PASMORE (British, 1908-1998)
The Plough and the Stars, 1974
color aquatint, ed. 53/60
sheet: 28 x 24 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Arthur and Yolanda Steinman, 1985.50.54



Victor PASMORE (British, 1908-1998)
Sensory World, 1996
color aquatint, ed. 53/60
etching and aquatint, ed. 13/35
sheet: 17 1/2 x 23 in.
image: 11 1/2 x 11 1/2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Arthur Steinman, 2003.112.34

Beginning in 1947 under the influence of Ben Nicholson (whose Topaze is on display in this gallery), Pasmore dropped his Monet-inspired landscapes and took to radical abstraction; he continued in this vein for the rest of his career. In 1966, he began working in a curvilinear style and also became devoted to printmaking and collaborated with many printmakers—in this case, White Ink, a studio active in South London during the 1970s.

Even though his art is wholly abstract, with no obvious references to subject matter, Pasmore often uses titles that relate to contemporary events. The Plough and the Stars refers to a 1926 play by Seán O’Casey that was made into a film by John Ford in 1936. It is fictional but depicts what was a real Irish paramilitary group trying to overthrow the British during the Easter Rising of 1916. Perhaps Pasmore refers to the assassinations and bombings happening across Northern Ireland and England during the 1970s, a particularly violent period of the Troubles (mid-1960s–1998), as the conflict between Catholic Republicans and Protestant Unionists came to be known.

Mathias GOERITZ [German, 1915-1990 (active Mexico)]
Message, 1960s
Wood, plaster, nails, paint and iron
27 5/8 x 27 1/2 x 3 5/8 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Robert B. and Mercedes H. Eichholz, 1995.50.1

Goeritz grew up in Berlin, Germany, where he obtained an advanced degree in fine arts before leaving at age 26 because of his Jewish ancestry. After living in Morocco and Spain, he arrived in Mexico in 1949 and embarked on a career as an artist, poet, and architect. He collaborated with Luis Barragán, the famed Mexican architect, on the iconic Torres de Satélite (Satellite City Towers) in the suburbs of Mexico City.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Goeritz made gold-leafed panels like this one because he believed the arts must recover what he called their "spiritual function." The shimmering of the gold reflects light, and the puncture patterns suggest light radiating from above. These panels are not signed by the artist, and they were often made by craftspeople based on his directions, which makes them more anonymous and less tied to the artist's individualism and ego. With their gold background, these panels resemble icons found in Eastern Orthodox Christian churches; in fact, Goeritz's panels were used as altar screens in a chapel designed by Barragán.

Gunther GERZSO (Mexican, 1915-2000)
Le temps mange la vie (El tiempo se come a la vida)
Time Eats Life to the Core (Le Temps Mange la Vie, El Tiempo Se Come a la Vida), 1961
oil on masonite
17 3/4 x 25 1/2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase with funds provided by Jon B. & Lillian Lovelace, Eli & Leatrice Luria, The Grace Jones Richardson Trust, an Anonymous Donor, Lord & Lady Ridley-Tree, SBMA Modern & Contemporary Art Acquisition Fund, the Ala Story Fund, and the SBMA Visionaries, 2002.50

Gerzso was born in Mexico to a Hungarian-Jewish father and a mother from Berlin, Germany. As a teenager, he studied in Switzerland and lived with his maternal uncle, an art dealer in Lugano. Between 1935 and 1941, he designed sets for the Cleveland Play House in Ohio. He went on to art direct more than 150 films in the Mexican film industry between 1943 and 1962.

In this painting, planes of color float and overlap in a shallow space. Could the large white rectangle be a stage or a huge curtain waiting to be lifted to reveal a drama? Will the colored planes on the right suddenly move to reveal an actor? The poet Octavio Paz described Gerzso's work as "painting at the halfway point of time, suspended over the abyss . . . painting-before-the-event. Before-what-is-going-to-happen."

TAJIMA Hiroyuki 田嶋 宏行 (Japanese, 1911-1984)
Yulina, 1968
dye-resist relief woodblock
image: 23 3/4 x 18 in.
sheet: 24 7/8 x 19 1/2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Roy Clifford Bogseth, 1991.76.2

Tajima's shapes float in a shallow, dark pool of pigments illuminated by a soft glow that seems to come from inside. Tajima started off dyeing textiles in the 1930s and later studied color photography processes, so that by the time he studied woodblock printing, his technical repertoire for handling color pigments was extremely broad. He developed an inventive method of working with the block that involved adding layers of paper, carving into them, and shellacking them. He also used a resist process, covering white areas with waxy substances that repelled the inks and kept the paper below bright.

Lewis BALTZ (American, 1945-2014)
#8, Noah Wall, Ranger Yachts, Costa Mesa, 1974
Gelatin silver print, ed. 3/21
Image: 6 x 9 in.
Sheet: 8 x 10 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Robert von Sternberg, 1994.36.1

Lewis BALTZ (American, 1945-2014)
#32, South Wall, Brinderson Mechanical Corp., Costa Mesa, 1974
Gelatin silver print
Image: 6 1/8 x 8 7/8 in.
Sheet: 8 x 10 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Robert von Sternberg, 1994.36.2

In a series of 100 photographs, Baltz portrays the fronts of bland, prefabricated industrial buildings in Orange County, California. His use of a high-contrast film should have made these harshly black and white, but he did careful work in the darkroom to bring out a range of grays. The effect gives these utterly unremarkable structures visual interest. There are the three cypress trees, feeling for the irregular surfaces of the walls, and wonky parking lines on the asphalt. All the nicks and imperfections of the real world add a patina that gives these manufactured structures some distinctiveness, even as the photographs are resolutely neutral, as if documents for a survey
or government report.

Arnold NEWMAN (American, 1918-2006)
Igor Stravinsky, 1946
Gelatin silver print
image: 6 7/8 x 13 in.
sheet: 11 x 14 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Arthur and Yolanda Steinman, 1983.69.123

André KERTÉSZ (American, b. Hungary, 1894-1985)
Martinique, 1972
gelatin silver print
image: 10 3/4 x 13 3/4 in.
sheet: 11 x 13 7/8 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Arthur and Yolanda Steinman, 1983.69.84

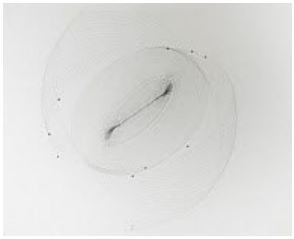
William A. GARNETT (American, 1916-2006)
Train Crossing the Desert Near Kelso, California, 1974
Gelatin silver print
8 7/8 x 13 1/2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Arthur and Yolanda Steinman, 1983.69.55

Recognized for his aerial photographs, California photographer and pilot William A. Garnett documented suburbia, city life, industrial encroachment, and natural landscapes from odd, new perspectives. Here, unmoored by an absent horizon line, a train appears suspended in the spatial expanse of a seemingly boundless desert sprinkled with creosote bushes.

SIGNS & SYMBOLS

Instead of the all-at-once unity of a Pierre Soulages or the overwhelming visual “zing” of a Jesús Rafael Soto or Richard Anuszkiewicz (all on view in the adjacent gallery), the artists in this gallery question how we understand everyday language and what counts as art. Sometimes they worked in a Pop Art vein and took up everyday commercial ads, traffic signs, or mass media imagery. Others delved into the paradoxes of color, what words mean, and what an artwork is on a philosophical level.

For instance, Jasper Johns’s Souvenir I (1972) contains a rectangle of gray ink that drips and pools—not so different from the gestural paintings in the adjacent gallery. Johns adds some twists, however. There are labels that read “flashlight” and “mirror,” and neither can be found in this image. Also, he drew a frame and a tiny ledge on which rests a disk with a photograph of himself. Is this a self-portrait? Is the artist mocking the emotional tone of gestural abstraction? How can the gray middle be a mirror?



Terry FOX (American, 1943-2008)
Pendulum Spit Bite, 1977
Spit bite aquatint, ed. 14/25
image: 35 3/4 x 44 3/4 in.
sheet: 39 3/4 x 49 in.
frame: 48 1/4 × 56 3/4 × 1 1/2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum Purchase, funds provided by the SBMA Contemporary Graphics Center, William Dole Fund, 1978.7.24

In 1977, Terry Fox hung a hose from the studio ceiling of Bay Area publisher Crown Point Press. Applying to its end acid, or the “spit” referred to in the work’s title, he then swung the hose. The print’s dots and patterns roughly record the trajectory of the hose as it sputtered acid. As it circled in diminishing loops, the droplets of acid bit into a metal plate.
The pendulum’s path resembles the concentric shapes of a labyrinth, a form that the artist had referenced in performances in the 1970s. He likened the experience of walking through a labyrinth to a path toward recovery. Fox was in remission from Hodgkin’s disease.

Fox began his artistic career as a painter while living in Rome from 1962 until 1967, then moving to Amsterdam and Paris before San Francisco. He became involved in the Bay Area Conceptual art scene of the 1970s. He spent the remainder of his life in Italy, Austria, Belgium, and Germany

Pat STEIR (American, b. 1940)
Roll Me a Rainbow, 1974
color lithograph
21 3/4 x 29 1/2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of the ARCO Collection, 1995.53.14

Pat Steir is one of the few artists in Going Global who has remained in New York for her entire career. She is known for her sprayed paintings that resemble waterfalls or bursts of rain, but this lithograph is about the process of making. Rather than a complete image, she shows us the steps or pieces, as if this were a sketch or experiment. To one side, black ink has been applied as a splash, as a brush mark, as pencil, and finally, stamped in the shape of an iris. This same flower impression reappears in the primary colors of red, yellow, and blue, as if it were a test of different ink colors. At the center is an abstract black square with ink seeming to drip off the bottom, topped with a color spectrum of the sort art students produce in painting class or, perhaps, as a way to calibrate the printing press and lithograph colors. On one level, the parts of this lithograph are abstract, with references to geometry, such as the black square and small colored squares on the right. On another level, this piece requires us to reflect on the intellectual and mechanical process of making a print.

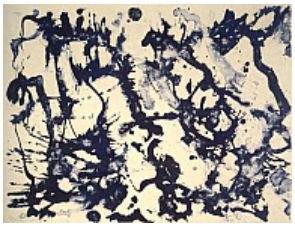
Allan D'ARCANGELO (American, 1930-1998)
Untitled, 1968
color serigraph, ed. 50/100
29 1/2 × 23 1/2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Arthur and Yolanda Steinman, 1985.50.18

Ralph GIBSON (American, b. 1939)
New York, 1968, printed 1997
gelatin silver print
image: 9 1/8 x 6 1/8 in.
sheet: 14 x 11 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Arthur B. Steinman, 2000.50.35

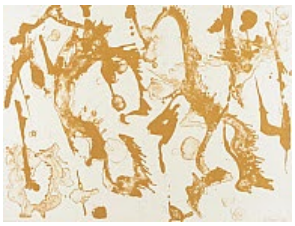
Fernando VILCHIS (Mexican, 1932-2004)
Señal no. 11, 1971
color lithograph, ed. 130/150
plate: 15 7/8 x 19 1/2 in.
sheet: 22 1/8 x 29 5/8 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Carton y Papel de Mexico, 1972.33.9

The red-and-yellow-striped boards in the D'Arcangelo print might be warnings to keep people away from a road hazard, construction site, or railroad crossing. Vilchis's print has what look like roadway signs to direct and caution drivers. Gibson's photograph has a giant arrow pointing "here." While all of these read as if they were signs we encounter on the road, navigating airports, or walking into buildings, they imply a message and direction but then withhold it. D'Arcaneglo attended college in Mexico City and relocated to New York, where he spent most of his life. Gibson mostly worked in New York, but Vilchis taught at the Universidad Veracruzana in Mexico.

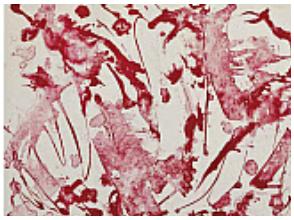
Jasper JOHNS (American, b. 1930)
Souvenir I, 1972
lithograph
image (irreg.): 21 1/4 x 26 1/2 in.
sheet (irreg.): 28 3/4 x 38 1/4 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Betty and Bob Klausner to the Contemporary Graphics Center / William Dole Fund Collection, 1986.76.3



Lee KRASNER (American, 1908-1984)
Primary Series: Blue Stone, 1969
lithograph, ed. 78/100
22 3/4 x 30 1/8 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. Stanford Robertson, 1979.46a



Lee KRASNER (American, 1908-1984)
Primary Series: Gold Stone, 1969
lithograph, ed. 53/100
22 1/2 x 30 1/8 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. Sanford Robertson, 1979.46b



Lee KRASNER (American, 1908-1984)
Primary Series: Rose Stone, 1969
lithograph, ed. 63/100
21 7/8 x 29 1/4 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. Sanford Robertson, 1979.46c

Lee Krasner, the widow of Jackson Pollock, was a committed abstract artist throughout her long career in New York. She was notoriously tight-lipped about the meaning of her work, leaving the viewer to pay careful attention to the art itself for clues. Here, by using the same size paper for each lithograph and connecting them as a series, she primes the viewer to play a game of compare and contrast. The red one, with its splashes and puddles, is the loosest; the yellow one is structured with verticals that tilt a little to the left; and the blue one feels the most consistent and “all over” in effect. Moreover, by using red, yellow, and blue and titling the prints Primary Series, she stresses the building blocks of color. Rather than employing the all-at-once quality of a painting, like the Pierre Soulages on view in this exhibition, she works through a process, and these lithographs act as recordings of those steps.

George TSUTAKAWA (American, 1910-1997)
Obos #5, 1957
wood
34 × 19 1/2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase, Third Pacific Coast Biennial Fund, 1959.56

This sculpture is about dynamic balance. The bowls seem to glide and shift as you walk around the sculpture. They evoke visual and physical equilibrium as well as balance, harmony, and order. The elemental forms of Western abstraction merge with the to or butto, the Japanese pagoda, and the Buddhist practice of stone stacking, a form of prayer and ritual.

Born in Seattle to Japanese immigrants, George Tsutakawa spent his childhood in Japan, returning to the United States at age 16. After 1941, his family was moved to a concentration camp, while the artist was drafted into the U.S. Army. He admitted to spending his late adolescence and early adulthood attempting to forget his Japanese heritage and Americanize himself. He studied American and European art and cited Alexander Archipenko as a major influence; Archipenko completed an artist residency at the University of Washington, where Tsutakawa studied and later taught. However, in 1956, after nearly 30 years of working as a professional artist in a Western style, the artist revisited Japan. Realizing that something fundamental had been missing from his work, he decidedly began integrating his heritage into his practice. In his later life, he described his art as more Japanese than American.

Isamu NOGUCHI (American, 1904-1988)
Ceremony, 1982
jasper top, granite base, wood pedestal
73 1/2 x 35 3/4 x 17 1/2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum Purchase with funds provided by the Mary and Leigh Block Fund, 1983.40

Noguchi's peripatetic travels were an inspiration for this exhibition. Born in Los Angeles to an American mother and Japanese father, he spent his childhood in Japan, then moved to New York for medical school, then to Paris to work as Constantin Brancusi's assistant for a few years. He returned to New York and established himself as a sculptor, and along with other Japanese-Americans, lived in a concentration camp during World War II.
Though he worked in many mediums, including paper, wire, concrete, and steel, Noguchi apprenticed with a stone carver in the 1930s and at times traveled to Peru, Japan, and Italy to source the perfect marble, basalt, granite, or jasper. For his Zen garden projects, he often took rocks straight from nature unchanged and merely placed them. This sculpture is chiseled. Like the other sculptures shown here, there is a delicate balancing act. Noguchi sets up a symmetry but then elegantly undoes it. Notice that the cedar wood seems like a perfect H, but a careful look reveals that the two sides differ. Similarly, the hefty stone sticks out a bit to the right.

Édgar NEGRET (Colombian, 1920-2012)
Tower No. 3, 1969
painted aluminum
52 x 14 x 8 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Robert B. and Mercedes H. Eichholz, 1995.50.3

Negret spent most of his life in Colombia but lived in New York in 1948–50 and 1953–63. He bolted together industrial metal parts to make units that he then repeated. As with Tower No. 3, these units are hollow, so they join together like segments of tube. This sculpture's precarious yet stable tilt resembles the works in this exhibition by Tsutakawa and Noguchi. All of them have a dynamic balance that reminds the viewer that gravity is part of what the sculptor has to overcome.

Kansuke YAMAMOTO (Japanese, 1914-1987)
Untitled (wall with window), 1940
Gelatin silver print
10 7/8 x 7 3/4 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum Purchase with Photography Acquisition Funds, 2006.61.3

Kansuke YAMAMOTO (Japanese, 1914-1987)
Untitled (fields and sewing machine), ca. 1950
Gelatin silver print
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum Purchase with funds provided by the Wallis Foundation, 2006.57.8

Yamamoto studied French language at Meiji University in Tokyo and introduced French Surrealism to Japan during the 1930s with his photography, poetry, and by publishing avant-garde magazines, such as Yoru no Funsui [The Night's Fountain]. The magazine lasted only four issues because it ran afoul of censorship laws that tried to extinguish Western influences in the years before WWII. In 1939, Yamamoto was questioned by the Special Higher Police (Tokubetsu Koto Keisatsu), and he stopped publishing. This photograph from after his interrogation might reflect a return to safe subject matter. There is a traditional Japanese plaster coated wall with a window and protruding drainpipe. The photograph's close up view turns the window and wall into a pattern, perhaps an oblique reference to Cubist aesthetics that had been popular with some Japanese artists in the 1930s.

AMANO Kazumi 尼野和三 (Japanese, 1927-2001)
Self Portrait, 1965
Color etching, ed. 3/30
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Carol L. Valentine, 1991.146.26

Amano initially studied furniture design in Toyama, Japan, where he was born, but later became a print maker and moved to Tokyo. In the 1960s, he rode the wave of an international fascination with Japanese prints. He exhibited in Lugano, Switzerland; Ljubljana, Slovenia; Cracow, Poland; Seattle, Washington; Florence, Italy; and at the 1967 São Paulo Biennale. He moved to the United States to teach in 1968 and permanently relocated to New York City in 1975.

By the 1970s, Amano's art engaged with philosophy, especially that of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a widely published French Jesuit priest whose writings mixed Catholic theology, Darwinism, and cosmology. While this etching does not clearly reference de Chardin, it does suggest that the idea of a "self" might be a phantasm or made up of competing and inscrutable parts.

Max COLE (American, b. 1937)
Los Angeles Series #1, 1981
Etching, ed. 5/50
image: 11 3/8 x 15 3/4 in.
sheet: 22 1/8 x 27 1/2 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Anonymous Gift, Courtesy of L.A. Louver Gallery, 1983.66.5

Max COLE (American, b. 1937)
Los Angeles Series #3, 1981
Etching on blue-grey paper, ed. 5/50
image: 11 1/4 x 15 1/2 in.
sheet: 22 1/4 x 29 1/4 in.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Anonymous Gift, Courtesy of L.A. Louver Gallery, 1983.66.7

[no image]

Max COLE (American, b. 1937)
Los Angeles Series #2, 1981
Etching on paper, ed. 5/50
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Anonymous Gift, Courtesy of L.A. Louver Gallery, 1983.66.6

Max Cole lived in Los Angeles until 1978, then New York and Germany, and since 2011 in Northern California. Across her long career, she has exhibited frequently in Europe, especially German-speaking countries. These etchings are typical of her mode of abstraction that usually has grays and neutral tones along with geometric patterns. These etchings have repeated lines that are austere and impersonal while also being expressive and emotional.