

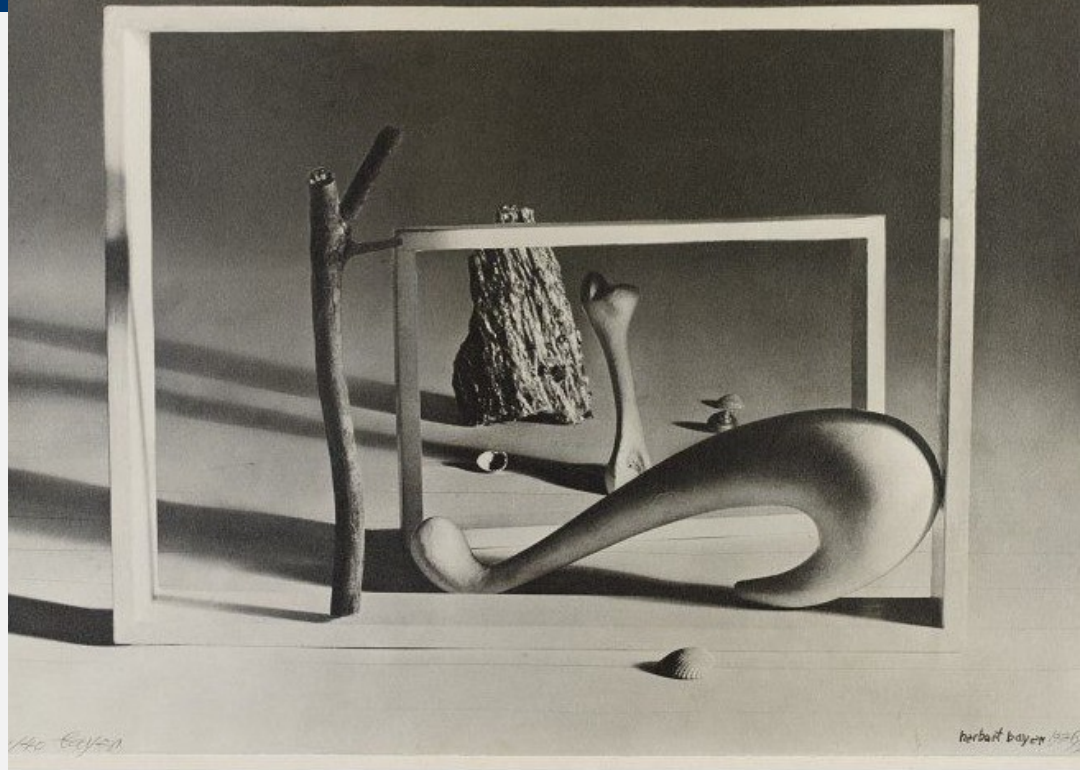
Docent Dates

Summer Break

September 23

9:15 Coffee

10:00 Docent Council Mtg



Herbert Bayer, *Shortly Before Dawn*, 1936 gelatin silver print, ed 12/40
Image: 9 1/2 x 13 3/8 SBMA June 21 – September 27
Gift of the Estate of Joella Bayer

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Dear Docents,

Our new board is hard at work with preparations for the upcoming service year. In the meantime, we'll stay connected through *La Muse*.

In this issue you'll find not one but two research papers on works by László Moholy-Nagy, just in time for the exhibition opening July 5th. Ralph Wilson has written a paper on *Composition*, ca. 1922-23, and Monica Babich on *No. 18, 1935*. Both papers will be useful for touring this summer.

Also in this issue I've included the partial reprint of a Wall Street Journal piece on "Docents Gone Wild," a look at what happens when we baby boomers carry our rebellious pedigree too far. As I read the article by Ellen Gamerman, I was grateful once again to be part of a Museum that values docent participation enough to maintain a decent standard of training. Ms. Gamerman's sample docents are beyond the pale. It seems to me that 'going wild' isn't so much a function of flaunting authority or disrespecting art as it is a reflection of inadequate training.

But then, I would say that, wouldn't I, as an SBMA docent. 🍷



Lori Mohr, Editor

Prepared for the Santa Barbara Museum of Art Docent Council by Ralph Wilson, 2015.

The format of this paper has been adapted for publication in La Muse



László Moholy-Nagy,
Hungarian, 1895-1946

Composition, ca. 1922-23

Paper collage on paper
12 x 11 in.

Gift of Charlotte Mack 1953.34.5



“One can never experience art through descriptions. Explanations and analyses can serve at best as intellectual preparation. They may, however, encourage one to make a direct contact with works of art.”

László Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision* (12)

László Moholy-Nagy, a recognized Bauhaus teacher in both Germany and the United States, is known for his experimentations using new materials, especially industrial, in creating art, and for the photogram, a camera-less process he developed for making shadowy, translucent photographs. However, before these innovations he was an artist very much influenced by early 20th century social as well as artistic developments in Europe, particularly Suprematism and Constructivism.

Suprematism, developed by Kasimir Malevich (1879-1935), was interested in the feelings elicited by pure geometric shapes, especially the square and the circle; the power of abstract art should come from “the supremacy of pure feeling in creative art” and not from the visual aspects of a work (Malevich, 67). Constructivism, conceived by Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953) and expanded by El Lissitzky (1890-1941), also employed non-representational geometric shapes but in conjunction with new, industrial materials in ways that the art had functionality; the object of all art—crafts, architecture, theater, music, industrial design, as well as the fine arts—was to improve life, to elevate society. Moholy was familiar with Malevich’s work, and in 1921 in Berlin he met and worked with Lissitzky, a former student of Malevich.

Moholy began dabbling in Constructivism’s tenets in the very early 1920s at about the same time he began experimenting with industrial materials, particularly painting on plastic. He was concerned with the emotional impact of the basic blocks of abstract art: “I discovered that ‘composition’ is directed by an unconscious sense of order in regard to the relations of color, shape, position, etc., and often by a geometrical correspondence of elements” (Abstract, 71).

The Constructivists debated the difference between construction and composition in 1921 at the Institute of Artistic Culture (INKhUK) in Moscow. Moholy added his own distinction: a “composition” relied on the artist’s subjective, aesthetic, and perceptive judgments; a “construction”, on the other hand, was the pre-determined result of the artist’s rational use of his intellect and technology to create a specific objective. Any change in process would destroy the objective of a construction, but a procedural change would only alter the appearance of a composition, not necessarily the intended impact. (See *New Vision*, 31, and Margolin, 15)



Portrait of László Moholy-Nagy, 1926, by Lucia Moholy

In his new experiments Moholy used a very dark plastic material, and to examine the visual and emotional impact of his abstractions, he manipulated geometric cutouts on black paper until he was satisfied with the result. “Composition” in the permanent collection of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art is one of these experimental collages on paper which invites our personal interpretations.

At its basic level “Composition” is a radial composition of intersecting lines enhanced by a circle segment that creates a focal point and contributes to the structure with both its straight and curved lines. However, to approach this composition as Moholy defined it (see above), one’s subjective response might find much more than a simple grouping of lines and shapes and instead see motion, tension, opposition, and harmonic resolution.

The dominant, bright circle segment against the black paper support demands our attention. With its singularity, the curve of the form confronts all of the other lines, including the edges of the paper and seduces our eye to be attentive and not wander off the picture plane. At the same time it directs our eye to the top of the free-hand, perpendicular white line which interjects the human touch in what otherwise is a composition of rigid, hard-edge forms. The thinness at the top of the line yields to the heavier base, persuading the viewer to examine the dark, diagonal form, which is more rectangular than linear. Where the lightest and darkest elements meet forms a cross with all of its emotional associations. The two linear rectangles intersect on the edge of the straight edge of the circle segment—a junction of the darker, cooler diagonal elements with the warm, hot circular segment.

Moholy was interested in the relationships of opposite or contrasting elements, particularly as they contributed to achieving “a natural balance of intellectual *and* emotional power” (New Vision, 15). In “Composition” what first appears to be a fairly static composition is full of implied movement and conflict as the separate elements resonate with each other and with the viewer, whose initial curiosity is rewarded by examining the syntax of this geometric language and discovering the balance obtained with these disparate yet surprisingly compatible elements.

Moholy’s geometric abstractions were meant to be non-representational, non-symbolic, and non-narrative works. His art is the art of design and feeling, and Moholy’s collages are attempts to reach a harmonious unity and not something with inherent, objective meaning. The artist was interested in the viewers’ emotional response to his work and believed “that mathematically harmonious shapes, executed precisely, are filled with emotional quality, and that they represent the perfect balance between feeling and intellect” (Abstract, 80). He thought that abstract art “creates new types of spatial relationships, new inventions of forms, new visual laws—basic and simple—as the visual counterpart to a more purposeful, cooperative human society” (Abstract, 76). Art and society are intrinsically linked. Joyce Tsai eloquently summarizes his vision:

“For Moholy, the most effective means of reaching the masses was by reconfiguring the senses to enable a new perception of historical and political conditions. According to this logic, human beings must first learn to perceive relationships within a work of art and become attuned to the ways in which subtle shifts in color, form, and space might fundamentally alter the balance of a composition. In this process, the newfound ability to discern formal relationships might expose the mutability of other kinds of relationships in the world—political, economic, and social.” (Tsai, 25-26)

Moholy was an enormously influential artist and teacher from the 1920s until his death, despite his unremarkable beginnings. László Weisz was born in Hungary in 1895 and later took Moholy-Nagy as his surname (from the town name where he grew up and the name of a lawyer friend who helped support the family). After service in the Austro-Hungarian army he enrolled in art school, ultimately moving to Vienna and then to Berlin. In 1922 Walter Gropius (1883-1969), founder of the Bauhaus, named Moholy to the faculty of the school where he taught the crucial introductory course (“vorkurs”) as well as classes in sculpture, painting, printmaking, typography, and design. He effectively moved the school closer to its original mission of integrating art and industry, but he did not advocate a rigid course of instruction. He aimed to develop the students’ curiosity as well as creativity:

“To reach this objective [of striving for the closest connection between art, science, and technology] one of the problems of Bauhaus education is to keep alive in grown-ups the child’s sincerity of emotion, his truth of observation, his fantasy and his creativeness.” (New Vision, 11)

Moholy resigned from the Bauhaus in 1928 and began a successful career as a free-lance designer in multiple media. With the rise of the Nazi party, he moved to London where he continued with various design jobs. In 1936 he designed special effects for Hungarian producer Alexander Korda’s science fiction film “Things to Come”. The following year he moved to Chicago to become the director of the New Bauhaus. The school failed to attract sufficient financial backing and closed within a year, but Moholy opened his own School of Design in 1939, later becoming the Institute of Design. Moholy-Nagy died in 1946, three years before the school became part of the Illinois Institute of Technology.

Moholy recognized the challenges of abstract art early in his career: “As a young painter I often had the feeling, when pasting my collages and painting my ‘abstract’ pictures, that I was throwing a message, sealed in a bottle, into the sea. It might take decades for someone to find and read it.” (Abstract, 76).

Seven decades after Moholy-Nagy wrote that sentiment, we are still challenged to interpret his message and read the beauty of his “‘abstract’ pictures”.

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Wassily Kandinsky — http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wassily_Kandinsky#Bauhaus_.281922.E2.80.931933.29



Ellen Lawson Touring *Ray Strong*

Photos by Mooneen Mourad

Note: Ellen studied painting with Ray Strong in his private group



Cartoon submitted by Shirley Waxman





László Moholy-Nagy
Hungarian, 1895-1946

No. 18, 1935

Dufay color photograph
(Light Filtering)
from 'Vision in Motion', 1947.
11 x 8 in.



“Design is the organization of materials and processes in the most productive way, in a harmonious balance of all elements necessary for a certain function” - Moholy-Nagy

In this early color photograph, a low, semi-aerial view looks over onto sliced rectangles of brightly colored cellophane inserted into one another to form crosses spread seemingly haphazardly across a white, light-washed surface. Squares, circles, triangles and parallelograms with intersecting tints, tones and shadows form a shifting mix of hues cast onto a white plane. The crosses create converging beams of light and shadow, a layering of space and confounding of depth. Forms are cluttered together toward the top of the composition and dissipate toward the viewer, enticing one’s visual entry. Punched holes cast elliptical shadows, producing windows onto a multiplicity of tints and shades. The overlapping slices linger in a figurative sense as fluttering birds to then settle into pure abstraction, defying the construction of space. As a photographic still of an installation, László Moholy-Nagy has cemented this ephemeral moment of light and color in space-time.



Portrait of László Moholy-Nagy, 1926, by Lucia Moholy

Moholy-Nagy was a painter, printmaker, sculptor, photographer, designer, filmmaker, teacher, philosopher and visionary. His theories were greatly influential during the post-war period and concerned the relationship between space, time, and light with man. In 1923 he joined the Bauhaus at the invitation of its founder, Walter Gropius, where he turned the school’s leaning toward the experimental, practical and technological. After arriving in the U.S., he established the highly influential Institute of Design in Chicago and wrote a book, “The New Vision”, a manifesto for art and design education. His second book, “Vision in Motion”, is the continuation of his philosophies expressed in “The New Vision”, published posthumously in 1947, and in which *No. 18* can be found in dialogue with other images and text.

In “Vision in Motion”, Moholy-Nagy expresses the Constructivist, Bauhaus

belief in the transformative power of art as an agent for positive social change and technology, the very enabler of war-time atrocities, as the means by which to embrace the future and understand man's place in the modern industrial world. He argues for the release of old ideologies and encourages the achievement of an integrated state between the intellect and emotion, the social and technological. He encourages artists to exercise organizational design across all media extending to all aspects of life.

Moholy-Nagy's paintings of the 1920s employ new materials such as cheap, colorful, glossy plastic cellophane like those assembled and captured in this photograph. In the abstract of "The New Vision" he writes, 'I became interested in painting-with-light, not on the surface of the canvas, but directly in space. Painting transparencies was the start ... I hit upon the idea of transparency as an epiphany. This problem has occupied me for a long time ... My work since those days [in Berlin] has been only a paraphrase of the original problem, light.' For Moholy-Nagy, transparency is the 'new medium of spatial relationship', the shared principle in art, the 'kunstvollen' (artistic will) of modern culture articulating the shades from light to color. It was on his return to photography that he found his footing, the medium's product itself being created from light.

With the introduction of the camera, artists had to learn how to see again, not only creatively, but also from a post-war perspective. In the 1920s and '30s a plethora of photographic techniques came about such as photograms, photomontages, and color photography. Moholy-Nagy used Dufaycolor to expose this early color photograph; it is a French additive film process for both stills and film photography based on a four-color screen process. The film has a transparent base on which is printed a fine, transparent color pattern of alternating blue and green squares and red lines (the reseau). The pattern is repeated 20-23 times per millimeter and then is coated with a highly sensitive panchromatic emulsion. Light passes on exposure through the reseau before reaching the emulsion, breaking the image up into the respective colors.

For example, when a red object is photographed, red light passes through the red parts of the reseau, but not the green and blue areas. Development leaves a black-silver deposit behind the red element which is then bleached away following more exposures. The unaffected areas of silver behind the blue and green become black-silver deposits and the bleached areas remain clear.

In *No. 18* he illustrates his 'New Vision' style of photography, characterized by low-angle and aerial perspectives intended to encourage the viewer to 'see the world anew' as Joyce Tsai states in the SBMA 2015 exhibition catalogue. Across media, Moholy-Nagy explored the transformation of light, reflection and transparency and in photography he developed an approach much like his 'Light Space Modular' kinetic sculpture of 1931-5 which explored the interaction of space, light and time with the viewer. Despite advances in the study of optics, he believed there was still much to be understood about man's physiological and biological reactions to light and shade, brightness and darkness, refraction, color and value.

No. 18 relates to the Suprematist art theory which originated in Russia with Kazimir Malevich in 1912 and emphasized the primacy of 'pure feeling in creative art'. More significant than objective form were evoked feelings. Suprematist works are constructed with simple geometric forms such as the square, circle, and the cross, as exemplified in this work. The chameleon-like nature of Maholy-Nagy's installation in its exploration of color and form presents an ever-shifting composition should the original beholder's viewpoint have changed even marginally. His capturing the ephemerality of a single moment in space-time in this photo explores the subjectivity of truth in an age of post-war cultural self-realization.

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From Our Book Group



This summer we're offering a choice of two books: For those looking a read on contemporary art appealing to the "middlebrow or low-brow," we suggest "Playing to the Gallery: Helping Contemporary Art in Its Struggle to be Understood" by Grayson Perry.

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/aug/31/playing-to-the-gallery-grayson-perry-review>

For those preferring something a little more "highbrow," Jill Finsten recommends "Rendez-vous With Art" by Philippe de Montebello and Martin Gayford. For a more in-depth discussion, here's a review <http://www.wsj.com/articles/book-review-rendez-vous-with-art-by-philippe-de-montebello-and-martin-gayford-1410558272>

Have a great summer and happy reading! 

Can You Hear Me Now?



Cartoon submitted by Sue Billig

Judy Seborg's correct email: seborgj@gmail.com

The email as published in the June La Muse was incorrect. I regret the error.

Please send changes in contact information to Rachael for general distribution.

By Ellen Gamerman June 24, 2015, Wall Street Journal

Submitted by Ann Hammond

Retired Baby Boomers with time on their hands are hustling to become museum tour guides. But this volunteer workforce can be tougher to manage than paid staff, touching the art, misstating facts and committing other infractions.



Yet while institutions say they welcome this new wave of graying volunteers, behind closed doors some museum staffers are growing impatient with docents flouting their supervisors, misstating facts, touching the art, and other infractions. “There’s been an uptick in ‘docents gone wild’ moments,” said Maggie Guzowski, who runs the arts-employee blog “When You Work at a Museum.”

Working as a tour guide is no trivial matter. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York demands a three-year commitment from its volunteer tour guides. The Museum of Modern Art in New York stations its volunteers around the museum to answer questions and provide information but doesn’t ask them to give tours—only paid professionals are allowed in that role. New York’s Whitney Museum of American Art uses docents for public tours, but it asks paid experts to guide student groups.

At the Whitney, only about 30 docent candidates are picked from more than 100 applications, with about 10 dropping off before the end of training. Contenders embark on at least a year of study, examining art history and the finer points of public speaking, including gesturing and eye contact. Some hopefuls are cut if they fail to grasp the content or commit the time. Docents must step up to their responsibilities—usually once-a-week shifts—or face the consequences. “If someone’s flaking out, that’s grounds for dismissal,” said Ellen Tepfer, the museum’s manager of docent and teaching fellow programs.

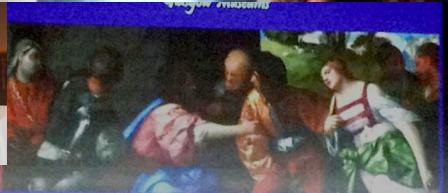
Managing a generation of volunteers who grew up as rebels isn’t always easy. At the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, some volunteers revolted last year after the museum tried to overhaul its docent program. In an effort to reach a broader audience and attract some younger tour guides, the museum told its docents there would be a new system, one that included direct outreach to college-aged students interested in arts-related careers. The Hirshhorn initiated a structured schedule of work shifts, additional training and periodic performance evaluations, requirements that certain docents had challenged in the past, said museum spokeswoman Kelly Carnes. “There was this culture of resistance,” she said. “They really felt entitled after spending enough time here not to make any changes from the way they had previously done things.”

Volunteers who try to spice up tours by improvising may do so at their peril.

For the remainder of the article, click on the link below.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/museums-seek-greater-control-of-docents-1435166404?KEYWORDS=Docents+gone+wild>

It Was a Very Good Year



Santa Barbara Museum of Art
February 8 – May 3, 2015

Shirley, Community Speaker's Program

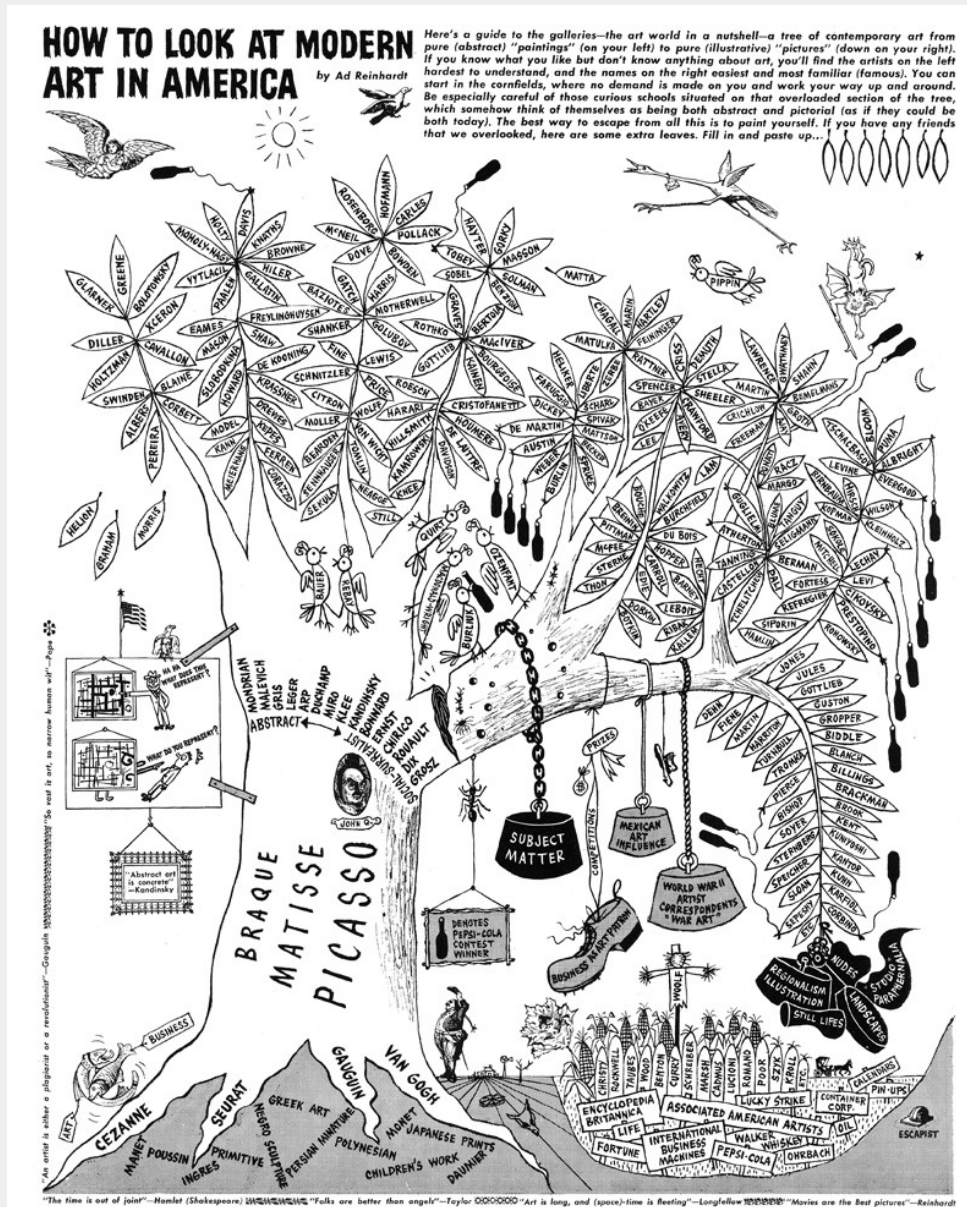


The Tree of Modern Art

Submitted by Sue Billig

In this famous cartoon of 1946 Ad Reinhardt tried to encapsulate the essence of the artistic modernism with its history and inherent conflicts within the American context. The tree of modern art has its roots deep in history - the Greeks are here, and so are Persian miniatures and Japanese prints. The roots represent the four pillars of Post-Impressionism: Vincent Van Gogh, George Seurat, Paul Cezanne, and Paul Gauguin. The tree is burdened by the weights of "subject matter" and "business as art patron," and a cartoon within the cartoon mocks the perpetual debate of representation versus abstraction. By juxtaposing business and art, Reinhardt aptly comments on the situation of the avant-garde in the United States, where the public and, more importantly, the patrons were rather biased against the abstract art, often calling it "degenerate" and "subversive."

Note: The 1946 version of the cartoon was originally printed in the newspaper P.M. and reprinted in ARTnews in 1961 with the new version. Current copyright status is undetermined. Source: How To Look At Modern Art In America, 1961. Ad Reinhardt papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



THE LAST PAGE

In Our Own Backyard

ON LOCATION IN MALIBU 2015 PAINTINGS BY THE CALIFORNIA ART CLUB

May 23 – Aug 2, 2015
Reception to Meet the Artists: Saturday, May 23, 5–7 PM



"Dusk, Leo Carillo" / 40"x44" / oil on canvas

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Special Exhibitions

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- Curiosity Lab
- 0 to 60 by Richard Salas
- Ray Strong: Artist in Residence**
- Bee Cell: A Video Environment
- Magic Planet
- Noorpark Southern Mammoth
- JELLES & friends at the Sea Center
- DEEP

Ray Strong: Artist in Residence

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June 4–October 4, 2015

Ray Strong (1905–2006) began painting Oregon landscapes when he was eight years old. His professional training included the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco, the Art Student's League of New York, and mentoring from James Swinnerton, Maynard Dixon, Frank Van Sloun, and Frank DuMond. Strong developed his reputation as a muralist and painter in the American realist tradition while participating in the federal Public Works of Art Project during the 1930s. In 1960 he relocated with his family to Santa Barbara to paint diorama backgrounds for the Museum's new bird hall. As Artist in Residence, Strong worked alongside curators and exhibit preparators to capture the grand and diverse landscapes of central California. The exhibit, part of a city-wide celebration of Ray Strong's life features the stories behind these magnificent dioramas along with 14 additional paintings from the Museum's permanent collection of his works. Highlights of the exhibition include two of his cool toned oil-on-metal Santa Cruz Island coastscapes, as well as panel paintings created with sculptor William Gordon Huff for the Palo Alto Junior Science Museum in 1941.

For more information: tsherden@sbmnh.org

For information on The Ray Strong Project, a city-wide collaboration that includes a series of exhibitions at twelve different venues and release of the book *Ray Strong: American Artist*, visit theraystrongproject.com.

Lori Mohr, Editor
Mohrojai@aol.com

