
Images and Ideas: The Collection in Focus at the Berkeley Art Museum, University of California

Berkeley Art Museum

University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, California

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Descriptive Summary

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Icon and Emblem

Biography/Organization History

As the major patron of the arts throughout the European Renaissance, the Roman Catholic Church played a central role in the development of artistic tastes. Many early European paintings from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries depicted scenes from the Bible and were intended to decorate altars or chapels, or were made for private devotional use. Scenes of the birth of Christ, of episodes from the life of the Virgin Mary, and of incidents from the lives of the saints provided popular subject matter - subjects which an illiterate public could "read" and understand.

The tradition of iconic painting - devotional images of religious subjects - has an ancient lineage and derives ultimately from Greco-Roman portraiture and art of the early Christian church. During the Renaissance, this tradition came to encompass a kind of "disguised symbolism," where any painted, drawn, or carved detail might carry a symbolic message. Icons could thus be thought of as standardized signs conveying standardized meaning. By contrast, emblematic painting held more generalized messages and was usually intended to convey moral lessons to the viewer.

Iconic art is still popularly produced for the Eastern and Orthodox Christian churches.

Landscape with Mountains and a plume of smoke circa 1660 1968.25

<http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft65800661>

Creator/Collector: Jean Francois Millet

France, born Flanders, 1642-1679

Physical Description: oil on copper panel

Additional Note

In seventeenth-century France, a moral struggle was thought to exist between logic and emotion. This struggle was often depicted in landscapes where figures from classical mythology inhabit an idyllic, timeless setting.

Contemporary viewers understood landscapes such as Millet's to refer to heroic moral virtues. This type of carefully wrought landscape would then suggest the rational posture the viewer must adopt in the face of chaotic human passions.

The Road to Calvary circa 1632 1966.16 <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft88700779>

Creator/Collector: Peter Paul Rubens

Flanders, 1577-1640

Physical Description: oil and emulsion paint on wood

Additional Note

The traditional subject of Christ carrying the cross to the hill of Calvary here combines the emotional pathos of the exhausted Christ with the heroic dynamism of a triumphal procession.

The gray and brown tones of this ornately theatrical work would ordinarily suggest that it was a grisaille preparatory study. In such a study, Rubens quickly brushed in his first ideas in brown tones with white highlights. His studio assistants then transferred these sketches to the full-scale decorative programs.

The Berkeley grisaille, however, shows a level of detail usually found only in Rubens's completed altarpieces. It seems that Rubens, working alone, executed the grisaille for the use of an engraver, who then copied the composition onto a metal plate for printing. The Road to Calvary thus lets us see the artist's hand at work on an intimate scale, full of painterly vitality in expression and movement.

Ecce Homo (Behold the Man) undated 1957.1  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft4580058z>

Creator/Collector: Artist unknown

Flanders, late 15th century

Physical Description: wool tapestry

Gift of the Hearst Foundation

Additional Note

This remarkable tapestry retraces all the episodes of the Passion—the sufferings of Christ between the night of the Last Supper and his death.

The title of the work comes from the Latin version of the Gospel of St. John (XIX, 5): "Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe; Pilate saith unto them: Behold the man." Christ's presentation to the people forms the central episode of the tapestry.


The tapestry itself has an important lineage. It was commissioned as part of a cycle for the chapel and organ room at Knole, the extraordinary house built in 1457 by the then-Archbishop of Canterbury in Kent, England. As archbishop, Thomas Cranmer surrendered the house and its contents to the British crown in 1537. Elizabeth I then made a gift of it to Thomas Sackville, in whose family the tapestry remained until it was purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan in 1911. Morgan sold the tapestry to William Randolph Hearst in 1923, whose family ultimately donated it to the Berkeley campus.

Renaissance Bodies

Biography/Organization History

The Renaissance in European art is usually thought of as the period from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries - a period of creative rebirth when artists rediscovered an interest in depicting the human body in naturalistic ways. This interest related closely to the notions of humankind from the periphery to the center of the cosmos.

Representations of the body thus occupy center stage during this period of European art. The paintings on view here describe a trajectory from heavily stylized representation, whose origins can ultimately be traced to Byzantine art of the medieval period, through a number of works from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in which High Renaissance ideals can be found. These ideals include carefully modeled, volumetric depictions of the human form, use of warm color and strong light effects, and increasingly sophisticated attempts to situate the body in three-dimensional space. The softly atmospheric three-dimensionality of the last painting in the group, Giovanni Caracciolo's Young Saint John, relate both to the distortions of form which characterized the sixteenth-century artistic style known as Mannerism and to the school of Caravaggio, a highly sensual style that looked closely at works from Greek and Roman antiquity.

Judith with the Head of Holofernes 1603-06 1943.2  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft5x0nb2qf>

Creator/Collector: Il Cavaliere d'Arpino
Italy, 1568-1640

Physical Description: oil on canvas
Bequest of Andrew C. Lawson

Additional Note

The Old Testament heroine Judith here holds the head of Holofernes after beheading him. Holofernes was the leader of the enemy forces that had besieged Judith's city of Bethulia. Judith had gained entry to Holofernes' camp by pretending to be a traitor.

For artists and a religious public, Judith's deed embodied the virtues of chastity, justice, and the triumph of humility over pride. By the sixteenth century, however, Judith was increasingly associated with less noble heroines, such as Salome. Both were often represented by male artists as the embodiment of feminine erotic tyranny over men.

The Young St. John in the Wilderness circa 1615 1968.42  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft167n99nh>

Creator/Collector: Giovanni Battista Caracciolo
Italy, about 1570-1637

Physical Description: oil on canvas
Bequest of Andrew C. Lawson

Additional Note

Caracciolo worked in the tradition of Caravaggio (1571-1610), whose distinctive use of dramatic contrasts of shadow and light (called *chiaroscuro*, light/dark), compressed space, and sensuous form constituted perhaps the greatest innovation in sixteenth-century Italian painting.

Caracciolo's limited palette of deep red and dark earthen tones focuses our attention on the young St. John. The seductive immediacy of the casually posed saint asserts his physical reality rather than his divinity. Such sensuality in a religious figure would have been unthinkable a hundred years earlier.


The Age of Enlightenment

Biography/Organization History

The eighteenth century in Europe and North America is often called the Age of Enlightenment, a period which placed great faith in the idea of human perfectibility. Reason was seen as the basis of all knowledge and indeed of larger notions of human growth and of existence itself. Knowledge was categorized and ordered; scientific exploration boomed; and the first dictionaries, encyclopedias, and museums for organizing and displaying information were created.

In the visual arts, the Age of Enlightenment took shape in a rediscovery of the art of the ancient world. Archaeological investigations (most notably the 1748 excavation of Pompeii) provoked a revival of interest in Greek and Roman artistic techniques, styles, and subject matter - along with a renewed taste for classical philosophy. These antique sources greatly influenced Enlightenment philosophers and statesmen such as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Jefferson, as well as artists throughout Europe.

The re-use of antique forms - in painting, architecture, poetry, even fashion - was thought to convey nobility of feeling along with a sense of control and order. At the same time, the eighteenth century saw an explosion of interest in genre scenes (subjects drawn from everyday life) and in comedic forms of satire.

Veduta del Palazzo de' NN: H.H.: Pisani 1750 1972.10  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft9r29p1r3>

Creator/Collector: Giovanni Francesco Costa

Italy, (?) -1773

Physical Description: Etching

Bequest of Andrew C. Lawson

Additional Note

The Vedute, or views of Venice, were a fashionable series of engraved urban scenes carried out by Costa (and other artists, including Canaletto). The views showed the homes and haunts of well-to-do Venetians in a distinctive, rigorous perspective.

Like Canaletto's, much of Costa's style traces to his work as a designer of stage sets, and, in Costa's case, as an architect. Costa worked with many of the most influential Italian Neoclassicists of his time, including the architect Andrea Palladio, for whom he designed the frontispiece of his seminal book, *The Five Orders of Architecture* (1746).

The American Canvas

Biography/Organization History

While it is impossible to characterize a field as broad as American painting through a small selection of canvases, the works on view here document several important moments in the history of American art. The first of these is the field known as Folk or Vernacular art. This was a style practiced by self-taught artists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who carried out portraits and scenes of everyday life in the early years of the American Republic. Most of this work comes from the New England states, from the hands of itinerant artists who created a market by selling their skills door to door. The Berkeley Art Museum's holdings in this area are among the richest in the western United States.

Other works on view here describe the artistic discovery of the West in the late nineteenth century. Two historically important paintings of Yosemite by Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Hill speak to the ruggedly dramatic glories of the western landscape. They are by-products of the continuing belief in Manifest Destiny - the nationalistic political argument that justified the U.S.'s westward expansion and seizure of lands throughout the nineteenth century. By contrast, works by William Keith from early this century describe in gentle tones and soft atmospheric effects a more domesticated landscape, one suitable for quiet habitation and as yet unmarred by the enormous population influx of more recent decades.

Yosemite Winter Scene 1872 1881.4

Creator/Collector: Albert Bierstadt
United States, born Germany, 1830-1902
Physical Description: oil on canvas
Gift of Henry D. Bacon

Additional Note

Bierstadt's Yosemite landscapes encapsulate nineteenth-century America's overriding fascination with the West. For the artist, and for a public eager for images of American natural beauty, the soaring rocks and valley walls of Yosemite embodied the American West's awe-inspiring grandeur and permanence. The paintings expressed the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny—a nationalistic sense of mission to expand ever westward, and to lead the rest of the world.

View of Providence, Rhode Island circa 1825 1992.22 <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft4s2004tp>

Creator/Collector: Artist unknown
United States, 19th century
Physical Description: oil on panel
Gift of W. B. Carnochan

Additional Note

Panoramic scenes of early American streets and buildings were painted to record for posterity the landmarks of the changing urban setting. The people of Providence appreciated them and the recognition they brought to their home town.

In this case, all the buildings have been identified. The church was then called the First Congregational Church, on South Water Street. Its belfry still holds the largest bell cast by Paul Revere's Massachusetts foundry.

Marine Scene circa 1840 1974.23 <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft6x0nb3f3>

Creator/Collector: Artist unknown
United States, 19th century
Physical Description: oil on canvas
Gift of W. B. Carnochan

Additional Note

Seascapes such as this recorded the early triumphs of American commerce. The movement of the steam packet Atlas, with a sailing sloop to the left, suggests the vitality of business and industry, including the important role of the steam engine in revolutionizing shipping and travel. Marine scenes also provided a record of everyday life for New England artists and residents.

The Road to the Modern

Biography/Organization History

Several of the most important movements in nineteenth-century French art are included here, collectively describing the advent of Modernism in European art. Naturalism, a movement concerned with the realistic depiction of the natural world, is represented by several canvases of about 1860 from the so-called Barbizon School, a group of artists working out of doors for the first time in the history of European high art, they notoriously led the way toward plein air painting, a practice that placed great value on the direct and unmediated experience and depiction of nature.

Works such as these by Rousseau, Daubigny, and Diaz enormously influenced the Impressionist generation which followed. Represented here by works by Boudin, Pissarro, and the young Ensor, these artists took plein air painting to a new stage, focusing increasingly on transient light effects and ways in which the landscape is perceived by the human eye.

The last group of works suggests ways in which the eye moved from being an instrument of perception to one of subjective expression, placing primacy on the role of the individual artist. In these pieces by artists such as Cezanne and Gauguin, along with a late work by Renoir, we find an interesting fracturing of the image, and interest in decorative patterns and textures that seems to deny the importance of Renaissance perspective. Surface textures created by the artist's materials - rather than their use in creating a realistic representation of the observable world - also come to dominate. Collectively these interests led the way to the art of the twentieth century, explored in the following galleries.

Landscape undated 1976.15  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft7j49p0n4>

Creator/Collector: Charles-Francois Daubigny
France, 1817-1878

Physical Description: oil on canvas
Gift of Polly Hatch Mosby (Mrs. David Clayborn Mosby), Class of '22

Additional Note

Daubigny's art sprang from a humble vision of the rural countryside.

In an age of economic prosperity, Daubigny and other artists (including Diaz de la Pe-a and Rousseau) set themselves in opposition to urban life by establishing the practice of painting out-of-doors at Barbizon, in the Fontainebleau Forest. Daubigny's vision of a universally accessible land inhabited by common people posed a counterpoint to the new cosmopolitan brilliance and modernity of a revitalized Paris.

Seascape undated 1966.70  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft467nb1pj>

Creator/Collector: James Ensor
Belgium, 1860-1949

Physical Description: oil on canvas
Gift of James R. Good

Additional Note

This small, almost abstract seascape tells us much about the young artist finding his own voice.

Seascape stands as a transitional work, in which the artist overcame the thick, muddy colors of his formal training. Instead, he has lightly painted the clear, cool colors of the sky and sea. Ensor's study of light eventually turned, in his mature works, to the use of intense, unmixed colors applied in swirls of paint.

Nature morte la cruche de Quimper (Still life with Quimper pitcher) 1889 1990.11 

<http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft267nb066>

Creator/Collector: Paul Gauguin

France, 1848-1903

Physical Description: oil on canvas mounted on panel

Gift of Frieda S. Nadolny in memory of Annemarie Nadolny

Additional Note

This still life contains elements from two cultures-Brittany and Martinique-which suggest Gauguin's interest in so-called "primitive" art.

The pitcher comes from the small Breton village of Quimper, whose pottery only ceased production in 1983. Sophisticated Parisians viewed this type of pottery as rustic, even inferior when compared to more elegant glazed earthenware produced in other factories. For Gauguin, however, elements of the "naive" or even "primitive" were appealing.

Gauguin visited Martinique in 1887, when he painted the canvas "Dans les vagues" (In the waves) which appears in the background. The female figure throws herself into the ocean, the waving arc of her body mirrors the Quimper pitcher. She becomes as much a part of the surface patterning as the pitcher or the tablecloth.

The Forest of Fontainebleau circa 1860 1920.1  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft967nb54r>

Creator/Collector: Theodore Rousseau

France, 1812-1867

Physical Description: oil on canvas

Bequest of Phoebe Apperson Hearst

Additional Note

Rousseau and his followers in the Barbizon school believed that the simplest forms of nature-trees, a sky at sunset-could speak directly to humankind.

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Body and Psyche

Biography/Organization History

The relation between the body and the psyche has intrigued philosophers for centuries. To what degree does our psychology reflect our physical being? Does our body give clues to our psychological state? Does our psyche live on after death? Are there such things as extra-sensory perceptions? Beginning with the Romantic movement of the early nineteenth-century, these kinds of questions have greatly interested artists as well. Depictions of the human form often no longer relied on straight-forward naturalistic approach, but, rather, sought to express invisible, internal psychic phenomena through the exaggeration or unusual manipulation of the human body.

These concerns continued to be important in the twentieth century. Some artists, such as Louise Bourgeois, pushed the depiction of the human body to such an extreme that the figure became virtually unrecognizable. Others, such as the photographer Diane Arbus, elicited uncanny impressions of psychological states through a direct, almost documentary approach. Some artists, especially those affiliated with the Surrealist movement, recognized the psychological potency of parts of the body in isolation. Artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, in particular, created works in which parts of the body stand in - in an elliptical, haiku-like fashion - for various psychological complexes. Following the lead of Surrealist artists like Rene Magritte, contemporary artists such as Nancy Grossman and Robert Gober have recently extended the parameters of the body to include clothing and costume, exploring ways in which such coverings become virtually inseparable from both our body and our psyche.

La Douleur (Grief) circa 1922 1968.24  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft9779p1h6>

Creator/Collector: Aristide Maillol

France, 1861-1944

Physical Description: bronze

Gift of The Norton Simon Foundation, Fullerton, California

Additional Note

The French town of Ceret commissioned this sculpture in 1920 to commemorate the dead of the First World War. As his early sketches for the work indicate, Maillol's conception of the work evolved from a figure wracked with grief to one who-in this final version-expresses meditative calm.

The Modern Portrait: Photography

Biography/Organization History

Since its invention in the early nineteenth century, one of the main uses of photography has been portraiture. Given its exceptional veracity, photography was an ideal medium for this use. Over the decades, however, many artists discovered that in addition to its ability to produce a seemingly exact and naturalistic image of the subject, photography had the capacity to express subtle shades of personality and mood, and even, to fictionalize the sitter. Some artists, such as Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden and Julia Margaret Cameron, took this quintessential modern tool and used it to create images that appeared to have been taken in ancient times.

Other artists combined the portrayal of particular subject with a keen attention to the formal, abstract properties of composition. Ilse Bing's self-portrait emphasizes spacial and technical issues over emotional and psychological concerns, while Peter Hujar's portrait of Susan Sontag has a severe, almost sculptural formality. In addition, John Guttman's portrait of a clown balances a striking perpendicular composition with a wonderfully evocative subject. Some artists exploited the inherent properties of photography to capture a sense of motion, as in Tim Gidal's intense diptych of the Austrian writer Karl Krauss giving a public speech. Others, like Anne Brigman, incorporated non-photographic elements, such as the halo-like rays in her portrait, Saint Gustav, to accentuate the character of the photographic image.

We are grateful to Richard Lorenz, whose generous loans from his collection make this presentation possible.

Elaine (from The Idylls of the King) 1874 1995.68  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft958008km>

Creator/Collector: Julia Margaret Cameron

England, born in India, 1815-1879

Physical Description: albumen print

Purchase made possible by a bequest from Phoebe Apperson Hearst

Color and Form

Biography/Organization History

The exploration of form and color for their own sake is one of the distinctive features of twentieth-century art. In the first decades of this century, artists such as Robert Delaunay, Kasimir Malevich, and Wassily Kandinsky pioneered the creation of so-called non-objective art. Their approach turned away from the world of recognizable things and adopted a vocabulary of abstract shapes, lines, colors, and textures. For some artists, especially Kandinsky, these abstract components did not lose their representational purpose; instead of representing things in the visible world, they visualized spiritual or emotional forces that could not be seen with the naked eye.

For others, however, art gave up its representational role entirely. In works here by Alexander Calder, Ad Reinhardt, and Donald Judd, it would probably be fruitless to search for any represented "subject" visible or invisible. Instead, the purpose of the work is to express the simple material qualities of the thing itself. Thus, the interest in the Reinhardt, for example, lies largely in the extraordinary optical effect created by the subtle differences in shades of black that comprise its abstract grid. In the Judd, we are invited to sense volume, while the Calder mobile embraces the play of random motion.

Untitled 1978 1978.10  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft1t1n99w2>

Creator/Collector: Donald Judd
United States, 1928-1993

Physical Description: plywood

Purchased with the aid of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and funds provided by the University Art Museum Council

Additional Note

Since the mid-1960s, Judd has used the basic form of a box to create works that refer insistently to themselves. His sculptures typically express the most simple relationships of planes and volumes, and are created with ordinary, industrially manufactured materials. About his work, Judd wrote:

"A shape, a volume, a color, a surface is something itself. It shouldn't be concealed as part of a fairly different whole. The shapes and materials shouldn't be altered by their context....I wanted work that didn't involve incredible assumptions about everything. I couldn't begin to think about the order of the universe or the nature of American society. I didn't want work that was general or universal in the usual sense. I didn't want it to claim too much."

Composition 1937 1966.20  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft8199p0zt>

Creator/Collector: Joan Miro
Spain, 1893-1984

Physical Description: oil on board

Gift of Julian J. Aberbach and Joachim Jean Aberbach

Additional Note

In *Composition*, flowing lines criss-cross the surface, dividing areas of uncovered burlap and composition board, lightly daubed color, and sections of more thickly and evenly applied paint.

Here, Mir- has created a fantasy world in which the imagery is apparently derived less from distortions of known things than from a free-floating exploration of color and materials.

Black Knight circa 1960 1968.74  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft0q2n9936>

Creator/Collector: Jean Tinguely

Switzerland, 1925-1991

Physical Description: Steel, wire, electric motors

Gift of Julian J. Aberbach and Joachim Jean Aberbach

Additional Note

Tinguely's sculpture shares with its Minimalist counterparts (such as the work of Judd and Flavin) a use of ordinary, commercially manufactured materials and a devotion to pure abstraction. But it is quite different in appearance and temperament.

Contrary to Minimalism's static and orderly forms, Tinguely creates sculptures that not only point and swerve every which way; they even move. With a dark sense of humor, Tinguely pokes fun at the machinery and purposefulness of our industrial age.

Primeval 1952 1970.74  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft300003p4>

Creator/Collector: William Baziotas

United States, 1912-1963

Physical Description: oil on canvas

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John S. Bolles in memory of Carolyn Jane Bolles, University of California, Class of 1918

Additional Note

As indicated by the title of this work, Baziotas was fascinated by the earliest stages of life on earth and the harrowing struggles that make up the evolutionary process.

In this work, two contrasting forms appear like highly primitive creatures, seemingly engaged in some kind of combat or confrontation.

Before the Caves 1958 1966.63  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft8k4007qh>

Creator/Collector: Helen Frankenthaler

United States, born 1928

Physical Description: oil on canvas

Anonymous gift

Additional Note

Characteristic of Helen Frankenthaler's paintings of the 1950s, *Before the Caves* consists of swirling stains of colors. Her staining process was a significant new direction that followed after Jackson Pollock's drip paintings and led the way to color field painting. In this process, washes of oil paint are quickly applied to raw canvas. The watery consistency of the paint results in luminous colors and many accidental splashes that enhance the emotional quality of the artist's gestures.

Months after this painting was completed, Frankenthaler and Robert Motherwell, both of whom had recently studied with artist and teacher Hans Hofmann, traveled to the caves of Altamira on their honeymoon. The twice present, floating numeral "173" is actually the same as Motherwell's house number at the time.

Central Avenue 1969 1985.54  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft5h4nb29m>

Creator/Collector: Philip Guston


Canada, 1913-1980

Physical Description: oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs. Philip Guston and Musa Jane Mayer

Additional Note

Guston paints two hooded, cigar-smoking figures driving in a jalopy with what appear to be a crudely made cross and two guns. The apparent allusion to the Ku Klux Klan is made more ominous by the shadow under the car, which indicates that it is "High Noon," a time that has become synonymous with the final showdown. Guston's cartoony, childlike style adds an ironic dimension suggesting, perhaps, that such features of our society as the Ku Klux Klan are as absurd as they are menacing.

Number 207 (Red over Dark Blue on Dark Gray) 1961 1965.33  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft9v19p1ts>

Creator/Collector: Mark Rothko

United States, born Russia, 1903-1970

Physical Description: oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs. Philip Guston and Musa Jane Mayer

Additional Note

Typical of Rothko's work after 1949, Number 207 (Red over Dark Blue on Dark Gray) follows a format of stacked rectangular forms painted atop a field of color. A key aspect of this format is spatial ambiguity. In Number 207, for example, a subtle illusion of depth results from Rothko's process of building up the forms with washes and thin layers of at least two or more related colors for each form. The clouded edges of the forms, which obscure definite overlapping, and colors that variously recede from or push towards the viewer intensify the sense of instability and movement.

Rothko, who along with many other artists in the 1930s and early 1940s had keen interests in mythic imagery, developed this format in an attempt to arrive at a contemporary expression of spirituality.

Rothko taught at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute) during the summers of 1947 and 1949. In 1967, Rothko was a Regents' Lecturer in the Department of Art at the University of California at Berkeley.

Voltri XIII 1962 1968.45  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft3n39n804>

Creator/Collector: David Smith

United States, 1906-1965

Physical Description: steel

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene E. Trefethen, Jr.

Additional Note

In the Italian town of Voltri, near Genoa, Smith made twenty-six large sculptures in thirty days with the help of a team of Italian workers. These sculptures, comprised of metal scraps and abandoned tools, were inspired by the vacant metal shop where they were fabricated. Voltri XIII is built from an ingot cart used by iron workers to carry hot oversized iron pieces from ovens to hammers. Welded to the weight-bearing bar (or "spoon," or "tongue") of the cart are playful forms selected by Smith from a scrap heap. In Smith's own words, "Voltri XIII is a circus wheel chariot with the spoon turned over, a solid guitar forging with a punched hole-with a cloud part [rolled iron sheet] below and above its tongue." This work brings together Smith's life-long experimentations with geometric composition, fanciful shapes, and an industrial aesthetic.

Approaching the New Millennium

Biography/Organization History

This section presents a variety of works by an emerging generation of Bay Area artists.

All made within the last ten years, these works suggest the great diversity of approaches to art-making that are current today. While the Bay Area has, in the past, been identified with certain over-arching styles (e.g. Bay Area figurative painting), the works here show that artists perhaps now feel freer to choose methods and styles that respond to their particular expressive needs.

The art world has become increasingly international as people travel more and become conscious of global issues and trends. Uri Tzaig, recently the subject of a Matrix exhibition here titled Homeless, has no permanent home at all, but rather travels from city to city connecting with artists and art scenes as he goes.

Even among those artists who are relatively stationary, these recent works show that their themes are cosmopolitan and universal rather than absorbed in regional issues or aesthetic problems. Nayland Blake's *Miracled Birds* is based on the turn-of-the-century autobiography of a noted schizophrenic that served as an important case study for Freud, Jung, and Lacan. D-L Alvarez's *Shawl* is a poignantly ephemeral work suggestive of the compelling human drive for comfort. Anne Appleby's monochromatic work is from a series title "Geezis" - the Ojibway word for things that come from the light, as well as for sun and month - whose paired paintings are about light and its absence.

While ephemerality and vulnerability are certainly traits shared by a number of these works, there is an equal measure of almost baroque grandiloquence. Catherine Opie's photographic portrait captures the flamboyant irreverence of the late Jerome Caja, a painter and performance artist who inspired many Bay Area artists before his untimely death from AIDS last year.

Untitled ("Miracled Birds") 1989 1989.6  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft0j49n5b8>

Creator/Collector: Nayland Blake

United States, born 1960

Physical Description: mixed media

Gift of Roselyne and Richard Swig

Additional Note

This work is based on the life of Daniel Paul Schreber, who documented his own experiences of delusional paranoia in *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903). Schreber's book was the subject of much interpretation, especially regarding the causes of homosexuality, by psychologists such as Freud, Jung, and Lacan.

Blake's tableau attempts to strip away a century of analysis and return to explore Schreber's own extraordinary imagination. The framed texts allude to some of the numerous "realms" that Schreber described as existing in the world of his hallucinations. The disembodied wings echo his belief in the existence of "miracled birds," which, along with "devils" and "fleeting improvised men," occupied the "Posterior Realm."

Spirit and Cosmos

Biography/Organization History

Jay DeFeo's painting *The Rose*, on loan from the Whitney Museum of American Art until December 1997, provides the impetus for this grouping on the theme of "Spirit and Cosmos." *The Rose* is a mandala-like image/object (composed of one ton of paint) of luminous, radiating lines and planes. Its simultaneous physicality and immateriality capture a sense of great spiritual power immanent within the forms and substances of reality. The simple, star-like image echoes innumerable representations of the spirit and cosmos throughout history, from the "Rose" windows of the Gothic cathedrals to the Native American "God's-eye" weaving to the Buddhist lotus blossom.

The other works in this section suggest a variety of approaches to spirituality and cosmic vision. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's three-channel video *Passages, Paysages* is an evocative, open-ended exploration of physical and spiritual dislocation. Her work embraces multiple languages and media to suggest an experience that is simultaneously intensely personal and universal. Charles Ross's *Sunlight Convergence/Solar Burn* captures in sculptural form evidence of the daily movement of the sun over consecutive days, thereby indicating our presence in a larger cosmic order.

Other works in this section attempt a similar goal, albeit in more symbolic fashion. Terry Fox's *Diagram of the Turns in the Chartres Labyrinth* explores the hidden order and meaning of the labyrinth embedded in the floor of the Chartres Cathedral. Based on the spiritual formulae of Tantric mysticism, a group of drawings from the Rajasthan region of India suggest a similar appreciation of correspondences between geometry and spirituality. The Indian artist Acharya Vyakul's drawings also derive from Tantric models; however, in these contemporary works, the artist has imbued the images with personal emphasis and aesthetic sensibility. Several twentieth-century American artists, such as Bruce Conner, Mark Tobey, Paul Kos, and Louise Bourgeois have alluded to the cosmos and experiences of the spirit through abstract, personally-derived imagery.

Sunlight Convergence/Solar Burns: 10 Days, July 27 through August 5, 1971, New York City 1971 1972.104.1-10

 <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft1c600328>

Creator/Collector: Charles Ross

United States

Physical Description: wooden planks, painted white, some with solar burns

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harry W. Anderson, California

The Beat Generation

Biography/Organization History

"The Beat Generation" is a term applied to the loosely affiliated communities of artists, writers, and musicians active in the 1950s and 1960s in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and elsewhere who rejected the social and cultural values of the status quo in favor of a more profound, often spiritual mode of existence and art-making.

This small selection of works is meant to provide an historical context for Jay DeFeo's monumental painting, *The Rose*, on loan from the Whitney Museum of American Art through December 1997. Created between 1958 and 1965, *The Rose* epitomizes the commonly held Beat Generation ideal of achieving spiritual awakening without renouncing the imperfection and physicality of everyday life.

Wallace Berman's *Silent Series #1* juxtaposes strangely disembodied hands with images taken from the mass media and everyday life while the caustic humor of Joan Brown's *Fur Rat* captures the typically Beat Generation appreciation for the lowlier aspects of existence. A somewhat more lighthearted spirit is evident in Harry Redl's photograph of Allen Ginsberg, Robert LaVigne, and a friend playing in a tree in Berkeley, and in Ed Kienholz's bittersweet weathervane.

A number of more recent works indicate the continuing importance of Beat Generation artists. Two works by Bruce Conner, the photogram *Angel* (1975) and his *Ink Blot Drawing* (December 19, 1991) exemplify the artist's ongoing investigation of symbolism and the psyche. A "paste-up" collage by Jess, Robert Duncan Reading at the LeConte Auditorium (1970) is a fanciful tribute to the artist's partner, the poet Robert Duncan, and makes an interesting comparison with Jess's much earlier, yet equally whimsical, "paste-up" collage, *Seventy XXth - Success Story* (1953).

Fur Rat 1962 1970.5  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft9489p19f>

Creator/Collector: Joan Brown

United States, 1938-1990

Physical Description: Gift of the artist

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harry W. Anderson, California

Additional Note

Like other artists of San Francisco's Beat movement, Brown's work of the late 1950s and early 1960s incorporates everyday materials assembled into new and provocative forms.

"'Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we will die' is the attitude which was prevalent at the time," said Brown. "There was a rebellion against the slicker materials [and] a delight taken in using rattier materials. The rattier the better." Here, Brown has covered a wooden armature with fur from an old fur coat to depict an oversized rat with a menacing tail—an image from one of her dreams.

Jay DeFeo: The Rose

Biography/Organization History

Between 1958 and early 1966, Jay DeFeo worked continuously on her epic painting, The Rose, which she began on the canvas of an abandoned painting. She was intent on producing an image of radiating form, an image with a center. The painting was very much a process piece, as DeFeo worked on it daily in the Fillmore Street apartment she shared with her then-husband, Wally Hedrick. For eight years, she layered on and then scraped away massive amounts of paint, carving the accretion down like a block of marble and adding wire, beads, pearls, and wooden strips. The painting also went through what DeFeo called art historical stages - Archaic geometric and then Baroque, ultimately Classical. In the end, it had grown to almost 11 feet high, 8 inches thick in places, and weighed over 2,300 pounds; it was, in the words of George Herms, "the ultimate living creature."

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and art patron J. Patrick Lannan were interested in purchasing the work, but DeFeo turned them down, convinced that it was not finished. In 1965, she and the painting were forced to leave the building and The Rose was removed, an event documented by Bruce Conner in his movie, The White Rose. DeFeo continued to work on The Rose at the Pasadena Art Museum, where it was finally exhibited in 1969, with a second showing later that year at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. It was then moved to the San Francisco Art Institute, where, in 1974, it was covered with plaster for support and protection and stored behind a wall of a conference room. Although the legend grew about The Rose, it remained sealed and unseen until 1995, when it was excavated and restored in a major conservation effort by a team of conservators, who used traditional methods as well as the newest technologies to create a backing strong enough to support the great weight of the paint. The Rose is on loan from the Whitney Museum of American Art through 1997.

The Rose 1958-1966  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft4h4nb1cv>

Creator/Collector: Jay DeFeo

United States, 1929-1989

Physical Description: oil on canvas with wood, beads, pearls and mica Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art

Gift of the Estate of Jay DeFeo and purchase, with funds from the Contemporary Painting and Sculpture Committee and The Judith Rothschild Foundation