

RISD MUSEUM

Building Blocks: Contemporary Works from the Collection, May 6, 2011-March 25, 2012

Whereas most buildings are situated in rural, suburban, or urban environments, the works in *Building Blocks* are meant to be experienced in relation to the interior space of the museum gallery or a domestic setting. Illuminating the relationships between art and architecture, many of the objects here depend on walls, corners, or ceiling rafters for context and completion. They also encourage interaction among viewers—whether generated by a house that is large enough to enter or by small-scale sculptures that invite observation from a bird's eye perspective. Several works refer directly to architectural forebears—from a 15th-century Venetian palazzo to a 1960s modernist German garage—or are based on the modular progressions of Minimalist cubes and planes. Some pieces depict, or are, actual buildings, while others utilize basic geometric elements to investigate the structural possibilities of space, volume, and form. Moreover, several artists use tools or materials associated with building construction as their medium or subject matter.

A number of the works in this gallery are new to the collection and are on view at the Museum for the first time. Representing a range of styles, techniques, and scales, all of the objects abandon the functional requirement of shelter and open the subject of architecture to our imagination and to our engagement with the space around us.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

R. Buckminster Fuller, American, 1895-1983, designer
American Serigraphics Co., American, printer
Carl Solway Gallery, publisher
Hennegan Co., printer
Laminar Geodesic Dome, Inventions: Twelve Around One, 1981
Screenprint in white ink on clear polyester film overlaid on
Gift of Hasbro, Inc. 1994.050

R. Buckminster Fuller, American, 1895-1983
American Serigraphics Co., American, printer
Carl Solway Gallery, publisher
Hennegan Co., printer
Non-Symmetrical Tension - Integrity Structures, Inventions: Twelve Around One, 1981
Screenprint on paper
Gift of Hasbro, Inc. 1994.050.13A



RISD MUSEUM

R. Buckminster Fuller, American, 1895-1983, designer
American Serigraphics Co., American, printer
Carl Solway Gallery, publisher
Hennegan Co., printer
*Non-Symmetrical Tension - Integrity Structures, Inventions: Twelve
Around One*, 1981
screen print
Gift of Hasbro, Inc. 1994.050.13B

Steve Keister, American, b. 1949
Untitled (red), 1978
Vinyl acrylic and suede on wood
Gift of Art Resources Transfer, Inc. 2003.120.1

Steve Keister explores color, material, planes, and volume in the construction of hard-edged, angular forms. *Untitled (Red)* employs several materials, focusing on the surface treatment and texture of the irregular polygon. Red suede softens a shape that is expected to be rigid, and light passing through the sculpture reveals its lavender painted interior.



Sol LeWitt, American, 1928-2007
Inverted Six Towers, 1987
White-painted wood
Purchased in honor of Phillip M. Johnston, Director of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1998-2003; accessioned by the 2002-03 Fine Arts Committee; Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2003.24

Sol LeWitt, a pioneer of Conceptual art, rejected the value traditionally placed on the artist's hand and instead allowed the concept of a piece, often related to mathematical systems or instructions, to generate the work. *Six Towers* is part of his "Open Cube" series, which uses simple progressions of modular units to

create complex geometric structures. The sequential configuration of *Six Towers* emits an optical vitality that blurs the boundaries between the architectural form of the sculpture and the spaces within and around it.



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Christian Marclay, American, b. 1955, video artist

Telephones, 1995

Video, color, sound

Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 2004.60.2

Telephones is a montage of classic film excerpts in which actors and actresses first dial then answer, speak into, listen on, and hang up telephones. Marclay's sequencing of film clips is akin to building an architectural structure brick by brick. The movie scenes also show the protagonists talking on the phone against the backdrop of architectural film sets: domestic interiors, hotel rooms, and the now antiquated semi-private, semi-public shelter of a telephone booth.

Mimi Smith, American, b. 1942

Open Door, 1974

knotted thread, wood tape measures, screws

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2006.103

Open Door is part of a series of life-size contour drawings of architectural elements, furniture, and appliances that Mimi Smith made from knotted thread pinned to the wall. Her subject matter is based directly on the interior architecture and furnishings of the house that she and her family were living in at the time. The piece incorporates measuring tapes with thread, which Smith obsessively knotted, referencing women's "handiwork" and underscoring the labor-intensive tedium of domestic tasks. In this and other works Smith suggests the efforts of the feminist movement of the 1970s to resist the limits of traditional female roles. The "open door" may be seen metaphorically as the gateway to possibilities that exist beyond the confines of homemaking and motherhood.



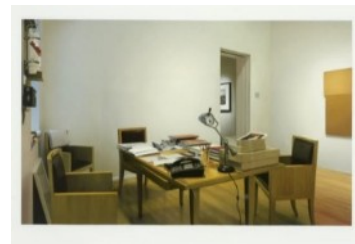
Andrew Grassie, Scottish, b. 1966

Private: Office, 2006

Tempera on paper on board

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2006.75

Andrew Grassie's *Private: Office* shows the interior space of an art gallery, which the public rarely sees. The artist's meticulous application of tempera gives the painting the crisp, realistic qualities of a photograph. Although people are absent from Grassie's



composition, there are signs of human presence: chairs are pushed back from the table, reading glasses rest on desk papers, printed images are partially out of their storage boxes, a drawer is slightly ajar, and a telephone is angled toward the edge of the table. These incidents suggest the active process behind creating exhibitions, representing artists, and selling art.

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Brian Chippendale, American, b. 1973, (RISD student, 1991-2000)

Home on the Run, 2006

Screenprinted papier mache on wood frame, mixed media objects

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2007.27.1

Chippendale made *Home on the Run* in response to the threat of being evicted from his studio in the Olneyville neighborhood of Providence. Having been evicted previously from several Providence mill buildings—including the now legendary Fort Thunder in Olneyville's Eagle Square—Chippendale created his house on wheels as a stand-in for his home, a room he can symbolically roll to his next address. Like his studio, its walls are covered floor to ceiling with bright, screenprinted patterns and collaged images.



Lucy Williams, English, b. 1972

Parkhaus, 2008

Mixed media

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2008.39

Lucy Williams's richly detailed constructions bring color and texture to images of modernist buildings. Based on vintage photographs she finds in magazines, the works incorporate the materials of architectural models with the process of collage. In the tradition of modern architectural photography, Williams's compositions are notably devoid of human presence. *Parkhaus* depicts the façade of Parkhaus Hauptwache, a multi-story parking garage built in 1955–1956 in the center of Frankfurt am Main and designed by architects Max Meid and Helmut Romeick. This innovative landmark building, which resembles a department store, was one of the first large public garages in the Federal Republic of Germany. Williams employed a variety of processes to give the work its own architectural character: the smooth sky was achieved by airbrushing, while the bricks of the building's façade are hand-painted wooden strips, placed individually, or laid, like bricks themselves.



Shirley Tse, American, b. 1968

Do Cinderblocks Dream of Being Styrofoam?, 2003

Extruded polystyrene foam

Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 2008.61

Shirley Tse works primarily with plastics and other synthetic materials. This corner sculpture is made with mass-produced Styrofoam modules that resemble cinderblocks and were designed to build inexpensive furniture (shelving and storage boxes, for example). Tse's arrangement and carved motifs, along with the pink pastel color, contrast with the unornamented utilitarian nature of ordinary cinderblocks. Philip K. Dick's science-fiction novel *Do Androids Dream*

RISD MUSEUM

of Electric Sheep? (1968) inspired the title of the sculpture, which alludes to the impossibility of heavy cinderblocks being made from lightweight Styrofoam.

Eugene von Bruenchenhein, American, 1910-1983

Untitled (turquoise closed vessel), 1981

Painted clay

Gift of Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz 2009.115.1

Eugene von Bruenchenhein, an untrained "outsider artist," worked in various mediums including photography, painting, drawing, and sculpture as well as poetry. For these ceramic vessels, the artist painstakingly gathered clay from construction sites, removed the impurities, and fired his work at home in his oven. Hundreds of clay leaves are assembled into tower-like structures and then painted in a variety of colors, thus merging natural and architectural forms. Made for what the artist called "love of creation," they were intended to be used to hold dry flowers or as incense burners.



Eugene von Bruenchenhein, American, 1910-1983

Untitled (blue and gold open top vessel), ca. 1960s-1983

Painted clay

Gift of Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz 2009.115.2

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Eugene von Bruenchenhein, American, 1910-1983
Untitled (copper/green open top vessel), ca. 1960s–1983
Painted clay
Gift of Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz 2009.115.3

Eugene von Bruenchenhein, an untrained “outsider artist,” worked in various mediums including photography, painting, drawing, and sculpture as well as poetry. For these ceramic vessels, the artist painstakingly gathered clay from construction sites, removed the impurities, and fired his work at home in his oven. Hundreds of clay leaves are assembled into tower-like structures and then painted in a variety of colors, thus merging natural and architectural forms. Made for what the artist called “love of creation,” they were intended to be used to hold dry flowers or as incense burners.



B. Wurtz, American, b. 1948
Untitled, 1987-1992
Mixed media (four gelatin silver prints with a cinderblock on a wooden platform)
Gift of the Joe Barron Collection 2009.57

By placing a found chunk of concrete on a platform, B. Wurtz literally and symbolically elevates that commonplace building material to the status of sculpture. The accompanying large black-and-white photographs set behind the concrete monumentalize the found object, depicting it from various angles and magnifying its surface texture and unevenly fractured edges and corners. Seen against the backdrop of a cloudy sky, the concrete suggests a geological formation, eroded by the elemental forces of nature and time.

Steve Keister, American, b. 1949
Diamond, 1991
Corrugated plastic
The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection: Fifty Works for Fifty States, a joint initiative of the Trustees of the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection and the National Gallery of Art, with generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Institute for Museum and Library Services 2009.59.12

Steve Keister explores color, material, planes, and volume in the construction of hard-edged, angular forms. In *Diamond*, brown plastic resembles corrugated cardboard. Depending on the angle from which it is viewed, the suspended geometric form appears to be in varying stages of completion, giving vitality to a static object.



RISD MUSEUM

Ron Nagle, American, b. 1939

Waiting for Jumbot, 2009

Earthenware with glaze

Purchased with funds donated by Yvette Boisclair and Mark Mandell
in honor of Judith Tannenbaum 2009.94

Ron Nagle's small-scale ceramic sculptures use complex, layered glazing techniques to create a range of surfaces—from smooth, liquid-like glosses to highly textured matte finishes. The process often involves firing each piece up to twenty times. *Untitled*, 1981, takes characteristic features of a cup (handle, lip, and foot, for example) and alters them to the point of negating functionality. *Waiting for Jumbot* is from Nagle's "weeorama" series, which evokes miniature tableaux or stage-sets. Its title refers to Samuel Beckett's seminal play *Waiting for Godot*, imbuing the lone tiny red cube with a suggestive existential dimension. The title and matte gray glaze also evoke Jumbo, the famous 19th-century circus elephant, adding a note of humor.



Arnie Zimmerman, American, b. 1954

The Brawlers, 2006

Stoneware clay, glaze and epoxy

Gift of the artist 2010.1.1

Arnie Zimmerman's ceramic sculptures of men at work in the city are part of an epic narrative about urban growth and the human condition that the artist has been working on for the past decade. Diminutive construction workers and tenement buildings evoke a playful mythical world but a closer look reveals signs of the city's more ominous side as workers endlessly toil or brawl. Zimmerman uses a traditional salt-firing method, which results in unexpected colors, running glazes, blemishes, and scorch marks that materialize along with characteristic natural tones and glossy surfaces. His imperfect figures are a striking contrast to the highly refined 18th-century European porcelain figurines collected by the aristocracy, examples of which are on view in the Museum's Porcelain Gallery.

Arnie Zimmerman, American, b. 1954

Boiler Men, 2008

Stoneware clay, glaze and epoxy

Gift of the artist 2010.1.2

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RISD MUSEUM

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Arnie Zimmerman, American, b. 1954

Man on I-Beam with Jar, 2005

Stoneware clay, glaze and epoxy

Gift of the artist 2010.1.3

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Kate Blacklock, American, b. 1957, (RISD MFA 1987,

Sculpture/Ceramics; Adjunct RISD Faculty 2002-)

Venetian Openings, 1997

Porcelain, china paints, luster

Gift of the artist 2010.60

Venetian Openings is from a series of vase-like sculptures that Kate Blacklock created between 1995 and 2000. Here she was inspired by architectural motifs from the Palazzo Contarini del Bovolo, a 15th-century palace built in Venice and known for its dramatic exterior spiral staircase. The twisting, asymmetrical form of *Venetian Openings* mimics the staircase, and the building's signature arches and balconies are painted onto the vase form. Bricks and windows are pressed onto the surface to create fragmented bas relief traces of the palazzo. The work is intended to be viewed in the round to experience the organic shape, varied motifs, and movement of the form.



RISD MUSEUM

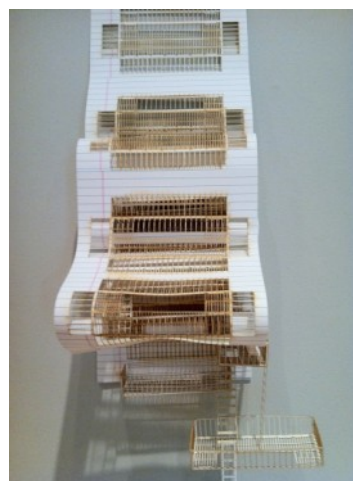
R. Buckminster Fuller, American, 1895-1983
Six Part Push Pull Tensegrity, ca. 1979
Stainless steel and Dacron cable
Gift of Estrellita Karsh, in memory of Yousuf Karsh 2011.3

Buckminster Fuller's Tensegrity sculpture (the title is a contraction of "tensional integrity") demonstrates the designer's principle of "discontinuous compression and continuous tension." It represents an infinitely expandable modular form in which the six metal rods are held together only at their terminals by string. This modular system, similar to the structure of an atom and other forms in nature, is applied on a larger scale in Fuller's geodesic domes and his Dymaxion House. Black-and-white images with text and Mylar overlays make Fuller's two-dimensional renderings of his futuristic engineering projects and designs as dynamic as the three-dimensional Tensegrity. The complete portfolio serves as a visual retrospective of Fuller's lifetime accomplishments as an inventor, engineer, architect, and artist.



Sarah Sze, American, b. 1969
Notepad, 2008
Offset lithograph and lasercut paper
Mary B. Jackson Fund 2011.6

Sarah Sze's large-scale installations often feature an accumulation of found everyday objects, but here she uses a subtractive process to create a self-contained wall sculpture depicting a common object. Sze made a two-dimensional lined notepad and transformed it into a three-dimensional cascading series of balconies, ladders, and staircases that re-create in miniature the fire escapes characteristic of old New York City apartment buildings. The paper is browned at the edges—evidencing the process of laser engraving. All the tiny rectangular pieces of paper that were cut away to create the multilayered architectural form are collected in a pile on the floor.



Jan Schoonhoven, Dutch, 1914 - 1994
Slant Levels in Four Directions, 1966
painted cardboard on wood
Gift of Mr. Roy R. Neuberger 67.164

Jan Schoonhoven was a founding member of the Dutch art group Nul, which was established in 1960 in rebellion against 1950s expressionistic painting. Rather than using active gestural brushwork, these artists aimed to represent space with uniform, monochromatic fields of color and serial compositions. By 1960 Schoonhoven had limited his palette exclusively to white, but there is still evidence of the artist's hand at work in his minimalist wall reliefs. *Slant Levels in*



RISD MUSEUM

Four Directions consists of a square panel divided into a grid of twenty-five squares, each of which consists of four smaller faceted square units. The geometric regularity is modified somewhat by the play of light across the variously tilted surfaces, creating a sense of depth, movement, and surprising variation.

Ray Krueger Metzker, American, 1931-2014

Wispy #2, 1974

gelatin silver print

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Gilman Angier 78.072

Known for black-and-white, composite street scenes and landscapes, Metzker also explored new photographic processes in two studio-based series from the early 1970s, *Whimsies and Wispies* (represented here). Commenting on the way he alternated between capturing fragments of the outside world and free experimentation in the studio, Metzger said, "The studio is a world apart from the street. Both have a different beat. The street demands selection and the studio, construction, physical manipulation."

Jennifer Losch Bartlett, American, b. 1941, designer

Prawat Laucheron, printer

Brooke Alexander Gallery, publisher

Hiroshi Kawanishi, printer

Simca Print Artists, Inc., printer

Chip Elwell, American, 1940-1986, printer

Maurice Sanchez, American, 20th century, printer

Paula Cooper Gallery, American, publisher

Graceland Mansion, 1978-1979

Drypoint, etching and aquatint, serigraph, woodcut and litograph on paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 79.119



Graceland Mansion is a five-part print in which each section employs a different technique. The title refers to rock 'n' roll icon Elvis Presley's home in Memphis, Tennessee. The print is based on Jennifer Bartlett's painting of the same name from 1977, which depicts five views of a simple geometric house, rotating front to back with a shadow cast by the sun rising on the left and setting on the right. The composition takes this serial format even further by highlighting the particular qualities of each print process. A grid structure is more or less apparent in each section, and the five-color palette of blue, brown, tan, gray, and black is similarly consistent while the central image and surface treatment shift from section to section.

RISD MUSEUM

Ron Nagle, American, b. 1939

Untitled (cup), 1981

Glazed earthenware

Marken Scholes Shedd Memorial Fund 81.062

Ron Nagle's small-scale ceramic sculptures use complex, layered glazing techniques to create a range of surfaces—from smooth, liquid-like glosses to highly textured matte finishes. The process often involves firing each piece up to twenty times. *Untitled*, 1981, takes characteristic features of a cup (handle, lip, and foot, for example) and alters them to the point of negating functionality. *Waiting for Jumbot* is from Nagle's "weeorama" series, which evokes miniature tableaux or stage-sets. Its title refers to Samuel Beckett's seminal play *Waiting for Godot*, imbuing the lone tiny red cube with a suggestive existential dimension. The title and matte gray glaze also evoke Jumbo, the famous 19th-century circus elephant, adding a note of humor.

