

# RISD MUSEUM

## *Raid the Icebox Now with Sebastian Ruth: Witnessing*

September 13, 2019–July 26, 2020

Much of my work questions how to integrate musical experiences and the life of a community for mutual benefit. I've been inspired by educator John Dewey's project in the 1930s to find ways of "restoring continuity" between art and everyday life experience. Dewey worried that the formality of art spaces prevented people from seeing art as lively, meaning-rich encounters connected to our sense of purpose as humans in the world. Philosopher Maxine Greene took this a step further and said we can and must "lend works of art our lives"—we must allow ourselves to see art as speaking to our core questions, not in an abstract or cerebral way, but in a way that connects to our memories, our pasts, our lived lives.

In this gallery I've created a musical soundtrack for scoradatura (retuned) solo viola based on the blinking lights of the iconic Providence smokestacks, themselves a musical gesture. The works I've chosen from the RISD Museum collection seem captivated by a similar impulse—to see the everyday for its beauty. *Witnessing* invites us to consider our daily lives as aesthetic encounters.

**Sebastian Ruth** is a musician, educator, and organizer whose work has been in reimagining careers for musicians at the intersection of performance, teaching, and deep community collaboration. Through the work of Community MusicWorks, the organization he founded in 1997, Sebastian and his colleagues have continually experimented with the forms and traditions of music making. Sebastian thanks the following people who were critical to creating this project: Carson Evans, Carolyn Gennari, Erik Gould, and Jeremy Radtke of the RISD Museum, who collaborated on making the film; Jim Moses, who served as recording engineer; Marek Bennett, for noticing the lights and their musical potential; Sarah Ganz Blythe, for revealing the possibilities in working with the RISD Museum's collections; and Paolo Cardini, who shared this: "Hearing the soundtrack to the smokestacks will cause me to look for music everywhere." We hope it does the same for you.

*Raid the Icebox Now* is made possible by a lead grant from the National Endowment for the Arts with additional support from the RISD Museum Associates, Judy and Robert Mann, Taylor Box Company, and a generous in-kind gift from Meyer Sound Laboratories.

RISD Museum is supported by a grant from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, through an appropriation by the Rhode Island General Assembly and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and with the generous partnership of the Rhode Island School of Design, its Board of Trustees, and Museum Governors.

## CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

### Gallery 1

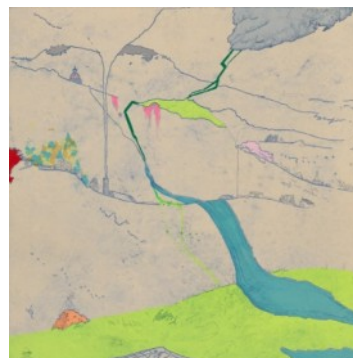
Sebastian Ruth  
American, b. 1975  
*Smokestacks*, 2019  
Single-channel color video with sound  
Courtesy of the artist TL131.2019.1

# RISD MUSEUM

Erik Gould  
American, b. 1964  
*Narragansett Electric Power Plant, Providence, 1992*  
Gold-toned printing-out paper print  
Museum purchase: gift of Joseph A. Chazan, MD 2019.9.2.1



Allison Bianco  
American, b. 1979  
*Workin' at the Textile Mill, 2014*  
Intaglio screenprint on wove paper  
Artists Development Fund and the AS220 Print Purchase Prize  
2015.49



Brett Weston  
American, 1911–1993  
*Trees in Water, 1960*  
Gelatin silver print  
Gift of Dan Miller 2008.112.10

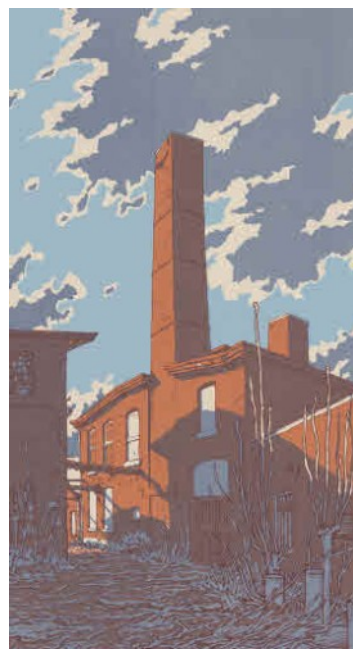


# RISD MUSEUM

Charles Ephraim Burchfield, designer  
American, 1893–1967  
M.H. Birge and Co., manufacturer  
American, 1834–1982  
*The Birches Wallpaper*, 1921  
Machine-printed paper with embossing  
Gift of Lila Harnett 2008.82.1



Ian Cozzens  
American, b. 1978 (RISD Student 1999–2003)  
*American Woolen Co., Valley Mills*, 2002  
Color screenprint on paper  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Joseph A. Chazan 2002.62.8



# RISD MUSEUM

Salvatore Mancini  
American, b. 1947  
*Atlantic Mill, Providence, 1994*  
From the series *Nature to Profit: The Transformation of the Blackstone River Valley*  
Gelatin silver print  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Joseph A. Chazan 2001.39.34



Salvatore Mancini  
American, b.1947  
*Royal Mill, Fiskeville, Rhode Island, 1994*  
From the series *Nature to Profit: The Transformation of the Blackstone River Valley*  
Gelatin silver print  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Joseph A. Chazan 2001.39.30



Denny Moers  
American, b. 1953  
*Factory Structures I, Poland, 1999*  
Gelatin silver print, selectively fogged and toned  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Joseph A. Chazan 2001.82.5



Utagawa Hiroshige  
Japanese, 1797–1858  
*Lumberyards, Fukagawa (Fukagawa Kiba)*  
From the series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (Meisho Edo Hyakkei)*, 1856  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Gift of Mr. Curtis B. Brooks 48.350



# RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Kunitaru II  
Japanese, 1830–1874  
*Prospering Tokyo: Steam Engine, Horse and Carriages, and Rickshaw*  
(Tokyo jōkisha basha jinriki hanei zu), 1870s  
Polychrome woodblock print  
Anonymous gift 85.195.11



Ma Da  
Chinese, 1903–1978  
*The Foundry, 1944*  
Woodblock print  
Gift of Colonel Marcellus and Emily Duffy 1994.097.1



## Gallery 2

Much of my work questions how to integrate musical experiences and the life of a community for mutual benefit. I've been inspired by educator John Dewey's project in the 1930s to find ways of "restoring continuity" between art and everyday life experience. Dewey worried that the formality of art spaces prevented people from seeing art as lively, meaning-rich encounters connected to a sense of purpose as humans in the world. Philosopher Maxine Greene took this a step further and said we can and must "lend works of art our lives"—we must allow ourselves to see art as speaking to our core questions, not in an abstract or cerebral way, but in a way that connects to our memories, our pasts, our lived lives. Witnessing considers how museum galleries can be places to see the everyday as art and art as belonging to the everyday. Smokestacks and factory scenes, a cluster of chairs, trees next to water—how are these possibilities for stopping and seeing differently?

What happens when we reimagine the chairs Andy Warhol selected from the RISD Museum collection and presented in this space 50 years ago not simply as static chairs on racks, but as a living scene? In this gallery, composer/violinist Jessie Montgomery and I collaborated to imagine the life these chairs might have, and to pair an improvised musical score with recordings of a story circle we facilitated. We asked the storytellers to reflect on the question of tradition versus innovation in their lives—much as Warhol's installations were innovations 50 years ago, but have now become a tradition with which to grapple. We invite visitors to contribute their own voices.

Sebastian Ruth  
American, b. 1975  
Jessie Montgomery  
American, b. 1981  
*Story Circle, 2019*  
Sound installation  
Courtesy of the artist TL131.2019.2

# RISD MUSEUM

American  
Braced Bow-Back Windsor Chair, 1780–1800  
Maple, ash, pine  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. William Colaiace 1991.178.2A

American  
Braced Bow-Back Windsor Chair, 1780–1800  
Maple, ash, pine  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. William Colaiace 1991.178.2B

American  
Armchair, 1900s  
Steel, chrome, plywood  
RISD transfer 1993.006

American  
Side Chair, ca. 1938  
Steel, chrome steel, plywood  
RISD transfer 1993.007

American  
Side Chair, 1760–1770  
Wood; paint  
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.819

# RISD MUSEUM

American  
Fan-Back Windsor Side Chair, ca. 1790–1800  
Chestnut, maple, ash  
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.955



American  
Fan-Back Windsor Side Chair, 1795–1805  
Maple, pine, ash  
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.961



American  
Child's Windsor High Chair, 1770–1800  
Oak, maple, chestnut, ash, hickory  
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.965



# RISD MUSEUM

Thonet Brothers  
American, 1849–present  
Child's Chair, ca. 1920  
Beech, cane  
Gift of Thomas S. Michie 2005.26



American  
Windsor Armchair, 1780–800  
Oak, ash or hickory, maple, poplar  
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.427



American  
Braced Bow-Back Armchair, ca. 1780–1800  
Pine, maple, ash or hickory  
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.428





# RISD MUSEUM

American  
Continuous-Arm Windsor Chair, 1780–1800  
Pine, maple, ash or hickory (?)  
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.429

American  
Windsor Side Chair, late 1700s  
Wood  
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.432A

American  
Windsor Side Chair, late 1700s  
Wood  
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.432B

American  
Fan-Back Windsor Side Chair, 1780–1790  
Pine, maple, ash or hickory  
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.436

American  
Windsor Armchair, 1700s  
Maple with paint  
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.577

American  
Windsor Armchair, 1875–1900  
Maple with paint  
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.580

# RISD MUSEUM

Charles Eames  
American, 1907–1978  
Ray Eames  
American, 1912–1988  
Herman Miller Furniture Co.  
American, 1923–present  
DCW (Dining Chair Wood), 1948  
Molded plywood, walnut veneer  
Gift of the Bayard and Harriet K. Ewing Collection 72.097



Mr. Hoxie  
American, late 1700s-early 1800s  
Braced Bow-Back Windsor Armchair, 1780–1810  
Maple, ash, pine, mahogany  
Gift of William S. Redmond in memory of Dorothy M. McVay 84.236

