

Webs, Loops, and Skeins in Modern and Contemporary Art, February 24, 2006-April 23, 2006

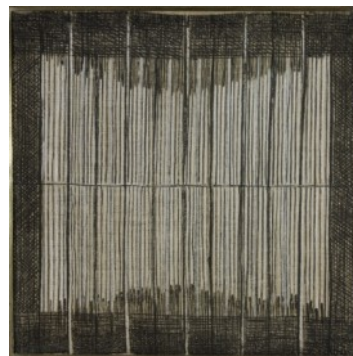
"Web," "loop," and "skein" are terms usually associated with textiles, but they are also surprisingly common referents for the formal qualities of a wide range of art created over the past 60 years. These words are particularly apt for describing the linear, gestural painting of American Abstract Expressionists such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, whose work gained critical acclaim in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Their calligraphic abstractions were meant to convey the direct process and expression of the artist, an idea borrowed from Surrealists who emigrated to the United States before and during World War II. The Surrealists' commitment to "automatic writing" - allowing the unconscious to guide the creative process - was extremely influential. The artist's gestures, whether handwriting or larger movements of the body, became the vocabulary of personal self-discovery and revelation of his or her psychological states.

Moving forward from the work of the Abstract Expressionists, this exhibition explores how such processes have continued to resonate for generations, not just in painting and drawing, but also in sculpture and printmaking. The artists who came immediately after the Abstract Expressionists frequently removed personal associations by combining handmade marks with mundane imagery. For example, Jasper Johns used numbers as subject matter, and Cy Twombly filled heroic-scale paintings with illegible scrawls. Some artists eliminated the emotional and individual references in their work by reducing their compositions to basic geometric elements, such as Robert Mangold's compositions of the 1960s and 1970s of simple shapes drawn within polygons. Others evaded the personal by using industrial materials or machinelike precision to create optically vibrant pieces. The grid structure so essential to many of these works has since relaxed, as in Sol LeWitt's gouache drawing, *Web-Like Grid*, 2001.

Drawn primarily from the Museum's collection, this exhibition highlights many recent acquisitions by younger artists, including those made with the Paula and Leonard Granoff Fund for the purchase of contemporary drawing and The Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Agnes Martin, American, 1912-2004
Untitled, 1960
Oil on canvas
Gift of the Bayard and Harriet K. Ewing Collection 1993.105.12



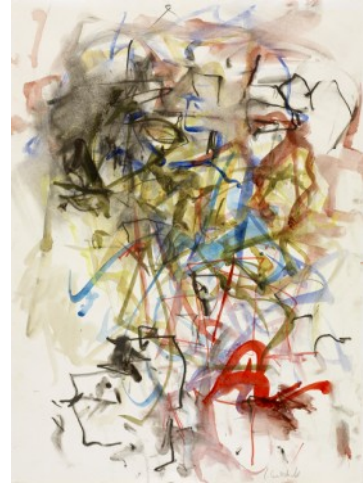
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Joan Mitchell, American, 1926-1992

Untitled, 1966

Watercolor on paper

Gift of The Bayard and Harriet K. Ewing Collection 1993.105.3



Louise Bourgeois, American, b. France, 1911-2010

Harlan and Weaver Intaglio

Peter Blum Edition

Untitled, 1989-91

Drypoint on paper

Edgar J. Lownes Fund 1994.007



For those familiar with Bourgeois's remarkable body of work, the spirals might evoke eyes and breasts, two of her recurring motifs, but here they are bound together like safety pins. Bourgeois's work typically bears the intense physicality of its making. The rich, velvety, yet nervous line is the result of her use of drypoint. For this technique, one uses a needle to scratch directly into a metal plate. It is one of the most challenging ways to draw in printmaking. She prefers an instrument that needs force in its application and is interested in metaphorical readings of her technique and its relationship to subject matter.

Willy Heeks, American, b. 1951

The Set, 1993

Oil on canvas

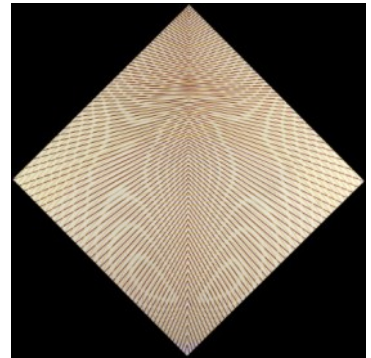
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William A. Small, Jr. 1994.095.5



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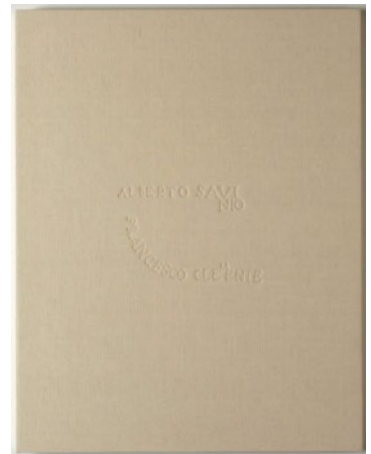
Peter Sedgley, English, b. 1930
Trace, 1964
Oil on board
Gift of Richard Brown Baker 1996.11.49

Peter Sedgley, like Jesús Rafael Soto, whose work is also on view in this exhibition, is associated with what became known in the 1960s as Op art, short for Optical art. Characterized by after-images and the optical vibration effect created by dazzling color and geometric patterning, Op art became an international phenomenon. Sedgley was included in the seminal exhibition *The Responsive Eye* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1965.



Francesco Clemente, Italian, b. 1952
Alberto Savinio
Petersberg Press, Inc.
Departure of the Argonaut, 1986
Letterpress with lithography
Mary B. Jackson Fund 1996.72

When Clemente was invited by Petersberg Press to illustrate a text of his choosing, he turned to Salvino's 1918 recounting of his journey to the Salonika front during World War I. Clemente's passion for the tale is played out on every double-page spread through richly imaginative imagery that varies quite dramatically in style from chapter to chapter. This page, one of the last in the book, seems to refer to Salvino's line, "A tangle of uncertainties, suspicions, and tragedy come to choke us from afar," which is literally delineated by pressing a prepared tangle of knotted string onto the lithographic matrix.

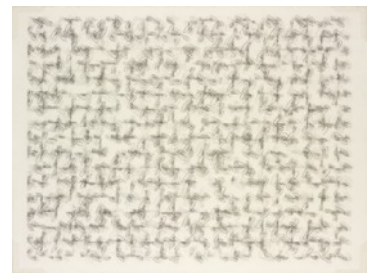


Irene Lawrence, American, b. 1940
Singular Multiples, 1994-96
Etching and drypoint
Gift of the artist and museum purchase: Gift of the Artist's
Development Fund of the Rhode Island Foundation 1997.34.2

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Irene Lawrence, American, b. 1940
Singular Multiples, 1994-96
Etching and drypoint
Gift of the artist and museum purchase: Gift of the Artist's
Development Fund of the RI Foundation 1997.34.5

Jacqueline Ott, American, b. 1948, (RISD MFA 1973, Sculpture;
Former RISD Faculty)
Continuum #12, 1995
Graphite on wove paper
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Joseph A. Chazan 1998.99.1



Sam Gilliam, American, b. 1933
Louis Stovall, 1937
Workshop, Inc.
Providence (On the 6:36 at 9:00), 1999
Color screenprint on paper
Gift of the Printmaking Department, Rhode Island School of Design
1999.49.3



Jane Kent, American, b. 1952
Richard Ford
Privacy, 1999
Illustrated book with 7 etchings
Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2000.94



Martin Puryear, American, b. 1941
Jean Toomer, American, 1894-1967
Arion Press
Cane, 2000
Illustrated book with 10 woodcuts
Edgar J. Lownes Fund 2001.35



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Loops and webs of hand-hewed wooden strips are commonly found in Puryear's elegant sculptures, which hover between abstraction and representation. When Puryear chose to illustrate Toomer's *Cane* (first published in 1923), it is not surprising that he also chose to create his images by carving wood blocks. *Cane*, a collection of poems, short stories, and one play, is divided into two sections. The first included stories of black women in rural Georgia, and each opens with Puryear's abstract portrait of that character. Esther is rendered here.

Laura Owens, American, b. 1970, (RISD BFA 1992)

Untitled, 1999

Graphite and acrylic on paper

Paula and Leonard Granoff Fund 2001.60

Owens cites both the history of the grid and the artist's handwriting in this work with her lattice-like pattern and doodled flowers, but also suggests more commonplace sources such as wallpaper and textiles designs. Her rich allusions, economy of means, and casual approach open up new possibilities for contemporary drawing.



Lari Pittman, American, b. 1952

Optimal setting for atmospheric conditions that can induce melodrama in the male, 2001

Acrylic, alkyd paint, aerosol enamel, and gesso on paper

Paula and Leonard Granoff and Museum Acquisition Funds 2001.63



Jim Hodges, American, b. 1957

Stretch 92: Spider Web, 1992

Silver chain

Gift from the Collection of Mr. And Mrs. Barnet Fain 2001.80.27



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Ann Hamilton, American, b. 1956

wreathe, 2001

Embossed paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund and Prints, Drawings, and Photographs Account
2002.5

Across the sheet's topography of bumps and incisions, a script is discernible but not legible. Although language and text are at the heart of much of Hamilton's work, she often makes them indecipherable. Here, layer upon layer of the artist's handwriting, embossed in the sheet, cancels out everything that was recorded; yet meaning is revealed. The physicality of the script becomes primary, and we see a labor of love as she records information of significance to her in her own hand.



Judyth vanAmringe, American, b. 1945

Nest II, 2000

Glazed stoneware

Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Joseph A. Chazan 2002.94



Sue Williams, American, b. 1954

Busy with Face in Middle, 1997

Oil on canvas

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2003.15



Sol LeWitt, American, 1928-2007

Web-like Grid, 2001

Gouache on paper

Paula and Leonard Granoff Fund 2003.9



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Tayo Heuser, American, b. 1956, (RISD BFA 1978)
Untitled, 2004
Pen and ink with graphite underdrawings on prepared paper
Rhode Island Foundation Fund 2005.37



Christian Marclay, American, b. 1955
Cascade, 1989
Magnetic tape
Mary B. Jackson Fund 2006.2

Marclay is a unique figure in contemporary art, known for merging various types of visual media (sculpture, installation, video, collage) with music, performance, and sound-related forms to create new multidisciplinary art. Although his aesthetic has been greatly influenced by rock, he was trained as a visual artist, not as a musician. In *Cascade*, Marclay works with everyday material: old-fashioned reel-to-reel audiotape. The use of found objects is a tradition that dates back to Marcel Duchamp during the early 20th century and that was subsequently extended to sound by composer John Cage and the Fluxus artists in the 60s and 70s. Marclay bought large quantities of magnetic tape on Canal Street in New York and used it to create this sculpture and several other important works in the late 80s and early 90s. Loosely massing tape into a number of skeins that are bundled together at the top, Marclay allows the material to find its own form; thus the dimensions of the piece vary depending on the ceiling height of the space in which the sculpture is suspended.



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Franz West, Austrian, b. 1947
"Uncle" Chair, 2005
Metal and textile bands
Mary B. Jackson Fund 2006.20.1



Franz West, Austrian, b. 1947
"Uncle" Chair, 2005
Metal and textile bands
Mary B. Jackson Fund 2006.20.2



Martin Boyce, Scottish, b. 1967
Ventilation Grills (Punching through the Clouds), 2004
brass, acid-etched, laser-cut; four parts
Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2006.5.1

These three gates are part of an ongoing body of work involving what Boyce describes as "a kind of dislocated and fragmented park landscape." The white gate, the last in the sequence, shows the grid of the first (black) gate subtly transformed into a linear drawing of a young tree.



Fabricated with industrial materials, this sculpture recalls the reduced, hard-edge geometry of painting, architecture, and design associated with abstract modernist movements of the early and mid-20th century, beginning with Constructivism. However, the artist's thoughts about the relationship between the natural and the manmade in today's urban environments are surprisingly poignant and poetic. Drawn to the topography of parks – from lush Victorian landscapes to desolate inner-city sites "where a bench and a trash can are the only clues" – he says that "For me newly planted saplings seems to represent something vulnerable and resistant. They're the

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teenagers in the park caught in sodium spill of the streetlights. Just hanging in there. Almost visible but evolving and dreaming” (Correspondence of January 2006 from the artist to Judith Tannenbaum, Richard Brown Baker Curator of Contemporary Art, The RISD Museum,).

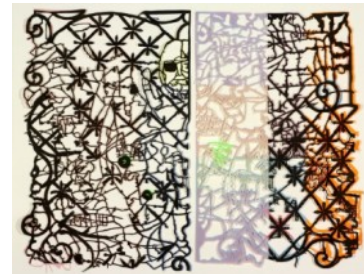
Simon Periton, English, b. 1964

Spaccanapoli 2, 2004

Cut and colored paper on two sheets

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2006.9

Rather than looking to Henri Matisse, master of paper cutouts, Periton takes his inspiration from the lowly paper doily. By magnifying the scale and opening up the structure, he pushes the physical limits of this weblike decorative medium. Often resembling ornamental gridded windows or gates, these works belie the delicate material from which they are made. The Museum's piece was inspired partly by a month-long residency in Naples and is named for one of the city's main streets, which was a source for the work's graffiti passages.

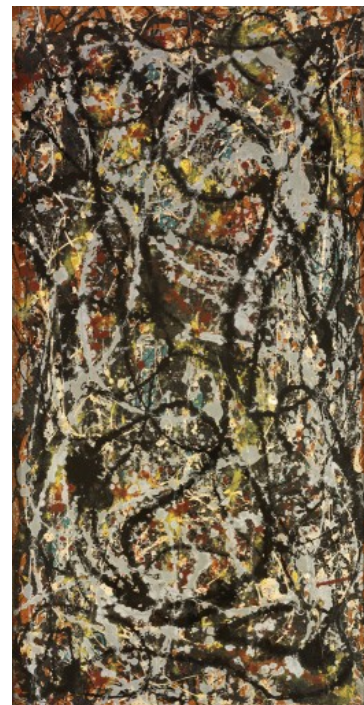


Jackson Pollock, American, 1912-1956

Magic Lantern, 1947

Oil, enamel, and carpet tacks on canvas

Gift of Mrs. Peggy Guggenheim 54.005



Willem de Kooning, American, 1904-1998
Black and White Abstraction, ca. 1950
Sapolin enamel on chart paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 56.186



Jésus Rafael Soto, Venezuelan, 1923 - 2005
Green and Black Immaterial Curves, 1966
Wood, metal, and paint
Nancy Sayles Day Collection of Modern Latin American Art 66.152

A Venezuelan who lived in Paris for many years, Soto was known for his pioneering of kinetic relief sculpture featuring a fixed background of thin parallel lines and a foreground of freely moving wires. Time and movement are important concerns in Soto's work, not only because the wires themselves may move, but also because a striking optical impression of movement occurs as the viewer changes position in relation to the sculpture. For the artist, this effect was a reminder to viewers that the world is in a constant state of flux. The fact that the sculpture also appears to dematerialize and become light and space reinforces the idea of impermanence and transmutation.



A number of other artists, including Peter Sedgley (whose painting *Trace* is on view in this gallery), were associated with that became known in the 60s as Op art, short for Optical art. Characterized by after-images and the optical vibration effect created by dazzling color and geometric patterning, Op art became an international phenomenon.

Cy Twombly, American, 1929 - 2011
Untitled, 1968
Oil and crayon on canvas
The Albert Pilavin Memorial Collection of 20th-Century American Art
69.060



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Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt), Venezuelan, b. Germany, 1912 - 1994
Maurice Sanchez, American, 20th century
Tamarind Lithography Workshop
Untitled, 1966
Lithograph
Nancy Sayles Day Collection of Modern Latin American Art 70.040

Lines and their spatial relationships were the focus of Gego's startlingly inventive body of work, and not just in two-dimensional works on paper, but perhaps with even greater originality in her "dibujos sin papel" ("drawings without paper"), which are elegant wire constructions. Here, the soft lithographic crayon records the variations in pressure and the movement of her eccentric freehand parallel lines. The energy of her drawing is barely contained by the structure of her composition. Her parallel lines seem to quiver, held within a shallow space by the jumble of scribbles across the center.



Ibram Lassaw, American, 1913-2003
Zodiac House, 1958
Copper, bronze
Gift of George Staempfli 70.056

Robert Mangold, American, b. 1937
Distorted Circle within a Polygon II, 1972
Acrylic and graphite on shaped canvas
The Albert Pilavin Memorial Collection of 20th-Century American Art
73.018



Richard Peter Stankiewicz, American, 1922-1983; d. 1983
1960-11, 1960
Welded scrap metal
The Albert Pilavin Memorial Collection of 20th Century American Art
73.032

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Cy Twombly, American, 1929 - 2011
Donn Horatio Steward, American, 1921-1986
Universal Limited Art Editions
Untitled II, 1967-1974
Etching and aquatint
Mary B. Jackson Fund 74.119

Jasper Johns, American, b. 1930
Gemini G.E.L.
Figure 8, from the portfolio *Color Numerals*, 1969
Color lithograph
Mary B. Jackson Fund 74.120



James Rosenquist, American, 1933 - 2017
Fred Genis, Dutch, b. 1934
Hollander Workshop
Irwin Hollander, American, b. 1927
Castelli Graphics
Bunraku, 1970
Lithograph on paper
Mary B. Jackson Fund 75.008



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David Smith, American, 1906-1965

Untitled, 1960

Ink and oil paint on paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 78.049



Mary Bauermeister, German, b. 1934

The Art Investment Report, 1973

Lithograph

Gift of Argosy Partners and Bond Street Partners 80.113

In 1962, Studio Mary Bauermeister opened in Cologne, Germany. The venue hosted concerts, happenings, and performances presented by artists such as John Cage, David Tudor, and Nam June Paik. Bauermeister was one of the early members of Fluxus, an international group of artists who particularly opposed the commercialization of art, among other things. From the early 1960s through the 70s, they created ephemeral events and publications often based on everyday life experiences. Bauermeister typically incorporated hand-written text into her work, here a spoof on art investing. It is interesting that she produced this piece as a limited-edition print with a marketplace value.

Elizabeth Murray, American, 1940-2007

Spill One, 1981

Charcoal and oil pastel on paper

Pearl and Ernest Nathan Purchase Fund 82.024

Murray belongs to a generation of artists who reintroduced imagery and gestural mark-making to the predominantly cool, reductive aesthetic of the 1970s. This drawing was made during the year in which she began presenting recognizable subject matter, and its repeated circular forms are reminiscent of the abstract spirals of her previous work. The exuberance with which she depicts the coffee cup is characteristic of her best pieces, as is the unusual shape of the sheet. One might venture to see her fascination with spills, a recurring theme in her work, as a nod to the action of Pollock's drip technique.

