

Subject to Change: Art and Design in the 20th Century, November 1, 2011-May 31, 2012

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Georgia O'Keeffe, American, 1887-1986

Pink Spirea, ca. 1922

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Robert R. Young Foundation in honor of The Robert R. Young Family 1987.078.1

Still-life painting was often dismissed as a purely decorative artistic pursuit and considered appropriate for female artists, who were often encouraged to depict flowers. Georgia O'Keeffe, who studied at the Art Students' League in 1907 and 1908, won a scholarship for still life. O'Keeffe's flowers abandon domestic space and close in on sensual forms of individual blossoms. Her simplified shapes and aggressively bright palette create a bridge from realism to abstraction.



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El Lissitzky, Russian, 1890-1941

Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky, Russian, 1893-1930, poet
R.S.F.S.R. State Publishing House, Russian, Moscow-Berlin

For the Voice (Dlia golosa), 1923

Construction-paper cover, letterpress text, illustrations, and
typographic designs

Mary B. Jackson Fund 2006.92.1

El Lissitzky was a convert to Kazimir Malevich's revolutionary use of total abstraction to express the spirit of the new Soviet society (see the plate to your left). He built on Malevich's flat, geometric shapes, placing them in illusionistic space in an attempt to bridge painting and architecture. *For the Voice* is a book of thirteen poems by Vladimir Mayakovsky. Lissitzky set them into a dynamic design that he hoped would provoke readers to recite aloud and spread their provocative content. Lissitzky liked to call himself an architect of the page; he created this design using only the elements in the compositor's type-case: letters, rulers, bars, bullets, and so on. A tour-de-force of hand typesetting, the design was executed by a Berlin typesetter who did not know Russian.



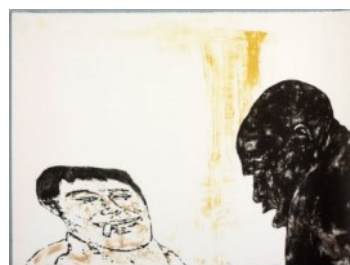
Leon Albert Golub, American, 1922-2004

Encounter, 1986

Color lithograph

Gift of Glenn Gissler 2006.99.1

This highly disturbing lithograph of the confrontation of two men addresses issues of power and its abuse, a theme that recurs throughout Leon Golub's work. An artist and political activist, Golub based much of his work on current events. Often the work does not include enough detail to specify the incidents that inspired the work. In this print, Golub underlines male posturing and the social denigration of others. His subjects are hard to look at, but unavoidable in the work and the world around us. Golub's jarring distortions and intensity of the markmaking enhance the emotional force of the image.



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Sherrie Levine, American, b. 1947

After Joan Miró, 1984

Graphite and watercolor on paper mounted on wood

Paula and Leonard Granoff Fund 2010.111

Sherrie Levine appropriates existing images in her work to challenge modernist ideals of originality, authenticity and authorship. To examine her place as a female artist within a history of art dominated by men, Levine began making copies of works by the great (male) artists, first re-photographing famous photographs and later copying paintings and drawings. Here she makes Miró her own through the nuance of her hand in applying the watercolor and pencil--a subtlety that would have been lost in the reproduction she worked from. It is interesting to note that in appropriating her images, her reference was always a reproduction and she recreated the work at that scale to bring attention to the role of the copy.



Richard Neutra, American, b. Austria, 1892-1970

Perspective view of the John Nicholas Brown "Windshield" House, 1936-1938

Diazo print with colored pencil, graphite, and gouache

Gift of the Richard J. Neutra Office 39.142.4

Richard Neutra's designs for a summer home on New York's Fishers Island exemplifies the International Style of Modernist architecture. Windshield house is functional and unornamented. Neutra adheres to the style's technical precision, expression of structure, lightening of mass. He also incorporated brand-new products, such as aluminum windows, linoleum, and Buckminster Fuller's one-piece Dymaxion bathroom. Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus school, recognized Neutra as a "lonely pioneer" who designed American buildings using the new artistic approach. Weeks after Windshield house was completed for the John Nicholas Brown family in 1938, it was severely damaged by a hurricane. Rebuilt and occupied by the Brown family until 1959, it was destroyed by fire in 1973.



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Baron Adolph de Meyer, American, b. France, 1868-1949
Standing Man in a Spanish Costume, ca. 1910
Platinum print on artist's mount
Florence Koehler Collection 49.017.2

Adolph de Meyer's photographs of the fashionable society in the first decades of the 20th century exemplify the Pictorialist aesthetic. Pictorialists argued that photographs, which were often dismissed as mere mechanical copies rather than artistic productions, could equal more traditional media such as painting. They favored impressionistic and hand-worked effects, such as this soft-focused print on a handcrafted mount. Rather than document the everyday, Pictorialists often staged subjects masquerading as historical, mythological or fantastical characters. In de Meyer's photograph, a man strikes a dramatic pose dressed in a short, tasseled jacket and the close-fitting trousers of a matador.



Félix Edouard Vallotton, Swiss, 1865-1925
The Bath (Le Bain), from the portfolio *The Original Print (L'Estampe originale)*, no. VIII, 1894
Woodcut on cream paper
Anonymous gift 53.346

This interior scene was economically carved from one woodblock and printed in flat black. To create the image, Félix Vallotton cut away the relatively few white areas to create this intimate scene of a woman at her bath. Especially beautiful is the spare, elegant curve of the top of the tub that describes the setting. Vallotton accentuated the woodcut's potential for abstraction, which he understood through studying Japanese prints, by limiting himself to contrasting black and white. Highly inventive prints such as this were widely exhibited and published in France in the 1890s and contributed to a revival of interest in the medium.

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Jim Dine, American, b. 1935
Pink Bathroom, 1963
Color lithograph on paper
Museum Membership Fund 66.274.2

The loose and energetic drawing that covers this print is consistent with Jim Dine's description of himself as "a student and child of Abstract Expressionism." The only evidence that this image could suggest the pink bathroom referenced in the title is the toothbrush at the right edge. The print is related to a series of monochrome paintings with similar brushwork that the artist made in 1962---each with a few actual objects, such as a mirror, toothbrush and toilet paper holder---attached to the canvas. Because Dine brought objects from everyday life into his work, he is often associated with the Pop Art movement. Yet, Dine's work is very much about his own life and memories; the bathroom objects were among those he grew up looking at in his family's hardware stores.



Paul Berthon, French, 1872-1909
Society of the Friends of the Arts of Manche (Société des amis des arts de la Manche), 1899
Color lithograph
Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 74.096

This is a version of a poster---before text was added---created to announce the fourth exhibition of the artist's circle *Society of the Friends of the Arts of Manche* that opened in Cherbourg on July 2. (Manche is an area on the northwest coast of France). Berthon designed about a dozen posters, many of them advertising art exhibitions and periodicals. As in many poster designs of this period, the influence of Japanese prints can be seen in the flat, simplified shapes and areas of patterning. The poster's sinuous lines, especially in the woman's hair, dress, and irises, are characteristic of the period's Art Nouveau design as seen in the Hector Guimard stained glass to your right and the Gorham writing desk below.



RISD MUSEUM

Jasper Johns, American, b. 1930

Bread, 1969

Embossed lead hand-colored with oil paint

Museum purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 75.076

Moving away from the personal and emotional content of the Abstract Expressionists, Johns's subjects are "things the mind already knows" as he famously stated. He depicts familiar objects, in this case a slice of bread, in sensuous materials and techniques suggesting the meaning can be found in process. His choice of lead was driven by both its material and visual properties. Its weight gives it a solid presence, yet its gray color, common to many of his paintings of the 1960s, has a constantly changing patina. The shape of the bread slice, the same size as an actual piece, is embossed into the lead sheet and painted to create an illusion. Johns shifts our attention "from object as subject," as one critic has stated, "to object as unit of scale and space, to object as pure drawing."



Vija Celmins, American, b. 1939

Cirrus Editions, Ltd., printer

Ocean, from the portfolio *Untitled Portfolio* 1975

lithograph

Museum purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 75.110.3

In the early 1970s, Celmins began creating highly detailed images of ocean waves, clouds, the night sky, and the desert floor. These subjects from the natural world remain central to her work today and are represented in the portfolio that includes this print. Based on black-and-white photographs, these lithographs emphasize both the uniqueness of her subject, in this case each closely scrutinized wave, as well as an abstract pattern of texture that seems to stretch beyond the page in every direction.



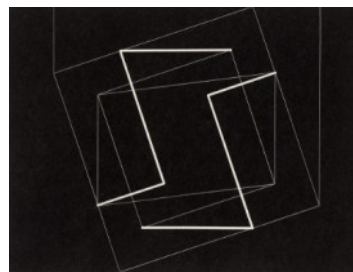
Josef Albers, American, b. Germany, 1886-1976, designer

Transformation A, 1950

Relief-printed engraving (from a machine-engraved brass plate) on Corinthian paper

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Jaffe 77.016

Josef Albers was one of the most influential teachers to emerge from the Bauhaus, Germany's renowned design school. When the school closed in 1933, following the Nazi's rise to power, Albers came to America. This print was created between his long tenures at Black Mountain College in North Carolina and Yale University in Connecticut. In this and related works, Albers explored illusionistic



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effects that could be created with precise, unwavering lines to counter a belief that hand-made was better than machine-made. To produce the cleanest possible line, he had his drawing machine cut into the engraving plate at the Composing Room, a typesetting shop in New York. His limited abstract vocabulary and keen perceptual awareness were guided by the Constructivist aesthetics that guided Lissitzky's book below.

Aaron Siskind, American, 1903-1991, (RISD Faculty 1971-1976, Photography)

Terra Cotta, Illinois 5, 1961

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Mr. Robert B. Menschel 77.145.24

From the 1940s to the end of his life, Siskind created a metaphorical language by framing abstractions of the world around. Walls and distressed surfaces held emotional resonance in their evidence of the passage of time and human activity. In this image he isolated a single vegetal stalk in the center of a pitted, earthen surface. Both invitingly tactile and visually arresting, the photograph collapses natural and man-made forms into an abstract field of texture and pattern, while suggesting larger issues such as the fragility or resilience of life.



Carlotta M. Corpron, American, 1901-1988

Solarized Calla Lilies, 1948

Gelatin silver print

Museum purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 80.146

Throughout her career, Carlotta Corpron viewed light, rather than photography itself, as her chosen medium. Inspired by how the play of light and shadow transformed natural forms, Corpron experimented with the optical effects of many techniques. In this work she exposed her negative a second time, resulting in a reversal of the tonal values from positive to negative. Through her technique and composition, she created a lyrical image that also exemplifies the reductive modernism of early 20th-century photographers.



Roy DeCarava, American, 1919-2009

Five Men, 1964, 1964

Gelatin silver print

Jesse H. Metcalf Fund 84.222.1

Roy DeCarava's photographs of New York in the 1950s and 1960s combine the personal and the political. *Four Men, New York* was made in response to the 1963 bombing of the 16th St. Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, which resulted in the deaths of four young



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girls. An artist's statement reveals that the men were leaving a Harlem memorial service for the schoolgirls. His close cropping of their heads (there is possibly another head cut off at the bottom right) is neither an overt commentary on nor a document of this event. While the deep tonal range of the image contributes to the somber emotions surrounding the event, the ambiguity of his composition transcends the specific historical and political circumstances of its production.