From the Director

The genesis of the Archives of American Art Journal can be traced to 1960, when the six-year-old, Detroit-based organization issued its first Bulletin, a four-page newsletter that published brief articles on Archives collections, while emphasizing the various social activities of its members. However, as the collections grew in importance and research use increased, the Bulletin quickly evolved from a members’ newsletter to a more substantial publication with an increasingly scholarly focus. In 1964, the Bulletin became the Journal, a title considered more apropos of its serious intentions.

For over forty years, then, the Journal has been an important and distinguished forum to share information about the Archives of American Art and to publish the work of scholars who have drawn upon our collections for their work. In addition to scholarly articles, the Journal routinely publishes book reviews, excerpts from oral histories, and transcriptions of original letters and other documents from our collection. The Journal has also served as the principal means to keep the scholarly community and Archives supporters informed about our recent acquisitions and other pertinent news.

While the editorial content has continued to reflect the diverse and lively research made possible by our collections, the presentation of this material has grown stale and predictable. One of my first priorities as the new director of the Archives has been to initiate an assessment of the Journal with the goal of transforming it into a more informative and visually compelling publication. The current issue includes just a few of what we hope will be an ongoing series of design improvements over the next several issues.

As we move toward a redesign of the Journal, we remain committed to maintaining our traditionally high level of editorial discrimination in the articles and reviews that we publish. That standard is certainly achieved in Danielle Schwartz’s admirable overview of the career of the influential, but little-known, industrial designer John Vassos, some of whose papers are owned by the Archives of American Art, as well as in Mark Mitchell’s fascinating article on the evolution of art historian John Baur’s study of the luminist movement in American art. These essays, along with reviews of recent books on Walt Whitman, art dealer Edith Halpert, and the Empire State Building, make for a wonderfully rich and wide-ranging issue.

John W. Smith
ARCHIVES OF AMERICAN ART
Journal

VOLUME 46 NUMBERS 1–2 2006

From the Director page 2

ARTICLES
Modernism for the Masses: The Industrial Design of John Vassos
Danielle Schwartz page 4

First Light: John I. H. Baur, James Suydam, and Luminism
Mark D. Mitchell page 24

Art and Space: Park Place and the Beginning of the Paula Cooper Gallery
Liza Kirwin page 36

REVIEWS
David C. Ward on Ruth L. Bohan’s Looking into Walt Whitman: American Art, 1850–1920 page 41

Jennifer N. Thompson on Mark Kingwell’s Nearest Thing to Heaven: The Empire State Building and American Dreams page 45

Graham Shearing on Lindsay Pollock’s The Girl with the Gallery: Edith Gregor Halpert and the Making of the Modern Art Market page 48

RECENT ACQUISITIONS
Laura Orgon MacCarthy page 52

PAPER TRAIL
“Technique over Trend”: The Papers of Honoré Sharrer
Laura Orgon MacCarthy page 63
Modernism for the Masses: The Industrial Design of John Vassos

DANIELLE SCHWARTZ

This article examines a moment when modern design met mass manufacturing, a story told through the early career of John Vassos (1898–1985), a prolific but now little-known Greek-born American industrial designer, interior decorator, and illustrator, some of whose papers are held in the Archives of American Art. I first discovered the designer’s drawings years ago at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum and was immediately intrigued. Later, I learned that Vassos designed the first mass-produced television set and found that there has never been a full-length biography of, or major exhibition about, this important American designer.

Vassos entered the field of industrial design in the early 1920s, when the modern American consumer economy was beginning to emerge. Design as a profession was also being defined at the time, and designers were frequently called on to repackage or redesign large numbers of products and inventions destined for the rapidly growing market. Many American industrial designers, Vassos among them, were advocates of modern style, which they hoped would instill “art” into the inexpensive products they designed. Designers debated the question of how radical their designs could be, however, and in this period the push and pull between pure modernism and the needs of the mass market produced a distinctly American vernacular modernism. Some of Vassos’ mass-produced designs present vivid case studies of the place of ordinary objects in this process.

There are several reasons why Vassos is a relatively unknown figure in American design history. As a Greek American, Vassos faced the typical struggles of a new immigrant, and, with a heavy accent, stereotyping may have worked against him professionally. Unlike the contemporary designers Norman Bel Geddes, Raymond Loewy, and Walter Dorwin Teague, Vassos never had a large independent design consultancy, and over his career he produced relatively few designs under his own name. As a result, he was not as well publicized as these other designers—he never published his memoirs, for example—though he was always recognized by his colleagues. This relative obscurity was compounded after 1933, when Vassos got a job at the Radio Corporation of America (RCA). Even though for forty-three years Vassos was given wide responsibility there, because of the company’s secretive policies about its radio and television operations, he was never promoted as a name designer.

Vassos’ versatility was another factor. Because he excelled in disparate areas of design, his work is somewhat difficult to peg. Before going to RCA, Vassos created a varied body of work that ranged from print advertisements to book illustrations to industrial and interior designs. His creative facility in so many areas set him off, but also prevented him from receiving as much publicity as he might have had if his career had followed a more predictable course.

Without a solo practice, high-profile
John Vassos working on an RCA New Yorker radio, ca. 1940. John Vassos Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
autobiography, or popular book putting forward a coherent viewpoint, Vassos’ ideas about design have survived in a scattered form. Throughout the articles, lectures, letters, profiles, and professional publications that survive in his papers, however, Vassos articulated a philosophy shaped by a strong commitment to modernist aesthetic ideas and the promotion of industrial design in America. Though Vassos supported modernist principles throughout his career, his work also expressed an American preference for comfort, functionality, and commercial viability.

Unlike some mass-market designers, Vassos always took into account the specific characteristics and functional requirements of the commercial products he was commissioned to package. In the case of his designs for radios and televisions, Vassos recognized the importance of creating visual and tactile templates that allowed people to adapt easily to the new machines, which after their introduction so radically transformed time, space, and culture by bringing voices and images created elsewhere into the private space of people’s homes.

John Vassocopoulos, a name he shortened to Vassos around 1920, was born in Romania to an affluent Greek family that moved to Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), where his father ran a newspaper. As a young artist, Vassos published brash political cartoons that eventually made him a target of the Turkish police. Facing imprisonment, he fled to the United States in 1919.

Arriving first in Boston, Vassos worked as a window washer before finding work as sign painter, stage designer, and then as an artist for a gramophone company in Boston. Around 1921 he moved to New York, where he opened the New York Display Company, which made graphics for film premieres. Vassos continued to design for the theater and pursued his art education at the Art Students League, where he took classes with John Sloan. At the league he met other artists, including P. K. Thomajan and Margaret Bourke-White, and at the same time he became part of the Greenwich Village arts scene. In New York he also met Ruth Carriere, a fashion writer, whom he married in 1923.

Vassos started to make money with his art by the early 1920s, at first doing print advertisements for small companies and then picking up work from department stores. As his reputation grew, he got longer-term advertising contracts with the makers of Cammeyer shoes and Packard cars. Vassos liked his images to drip off the page, and he used graphic techniques like the full-page bleed and pulsating lines to give the impression of energy. To create dramatic effects in his advertising, he often juxtaposed strange objects or emphasized a singular but ordinary element—an arm, a shoe—which he elongated to make it look extraordinary. In an advertisement for Paragon distributors, for instance, a woman’s head springs from a plant, and in advertisements for Packard, long cars emerge out of dreamy urban streets. These kinds of striking images were typical of many print promotions at this time.
when advertising men were beginning to develop techniques calculated to sell goods by appealing to customers’ emotions.10

Vassos got a big break in 1926, when an editor for the publisher E. P. Dutton saw his cover illustration for a Columbia University stage production of Oscar Wilde’s Salome. The publisher quickly hired him to illustrate a trilogy of works by Wilde—Salome, The Ballad of Reading Gaol, and The Harlot’s House.11 Salome, published first, contained black-and-white illustrations that combined the eroticism of art nouveau, the tilted and distorted perspectives of German Expressionism, and a distinctly American sensationalism. Hailed after their publication as the work of a modern Aubrey Beardsley (who had illustrated the controversial 1894 version), Vassos’ career was launched.

The Wilde books were followed by eleven others with Dutton, including Contempo (1929), Ultimo (1930), and Humanities (1935). The designer’s illustrations—which he called “projections,” suggesting a connection between emotions and graphic design—were meant to shock and entertain viewers rather than be observed dispassionately, and critics applauded Vassos’ condensed narratives and innovative style.12

The images revealed Vassos’ intense ambivalence about the machine age. The criticisms of power, the mass media, and capitalism that Vassos made so dramatically in his illustrations were also comments on contemporary debates about the alienating effects of mechanization on human life and the obligation of artists to comment on them. Several of Vassos’ images were republished with articles on the dangers of the machine age.13

Vassos’ most influential book in these years was Phobia (1931), a study of phobias triggered by urban life that he produced with the help of Freudian psychoanalyst Harry Stack Sullivan.14 Intended to be educational, it presented twenty-three full-page drawings accompanied by text written by Vassos. Depicting phobias ordered in increasing intensity from nichtophobia, or fear of the dark, to pantophobia, or fear of everything, Vassos showed his victims in the grip of unbearable fear and anxiety. Using themes he had already explored in Contempo, Vassos created stark, modern, and specifically urban settings for his depictions of extreme psychological torment.

In Phobia, as in Salome, Vassos treated individual suffering and pain, erotic longing, and death in a series of mesmerizing, terrifying images that also indicted the scale, pace, mechanization, and monotony of modern urban society. With a framework drawn from Freudian psychology, which had been introduced in the United States only in the 1920s, Vassos depicted the victims of phobias fleeing a modern city setting so hostile that it heightened their terror to overwhelming levels.

Of Vassos’ books, Phobia had the greatest mass appeal, and it was featured in the June 1936 and February 1937 issues of Esquire, where his ideas about fear and urban life were discussed.15 Throughout his career Vassos often referred to the book, using it to support the claim...
that he had insight into the human psyche and expertise in determining the psychological state of consumers—knowledge that he drew on in his work.

As Vassos’ fame grew, he became a fixture in the New York arts scene. Dubbed the “quintessential modernist,” Vassos was active, well known, and warmly written about by his colleagues. “Our penthouse on 82nd Street became a salon of drinking conversationalists,” he noted. “Ruth likes newspaper men and women, and I like artists. They mix compatibly.” Guests included Harry Hopkins, radio personality Rudy Vallee, and others.

In the late 1920s, Vassos pursued a wider range of professional activities. He took part in exhibitions in galleries and private homes around the city. With the help of Dutton, he gave a series of lectures on modern art and design that went beyond simple book promotion. Inspired by the work of Le Corbusier, whose important book Vers Une Architecture was published in English in 1927, Vassos talked about the
new modernist ideas and gave slide shows arguing on behalf of an American vernacular in industrial design and architecture. In his lectures, Vassos wrestled to reconcile the kind of mass-market product design he was starting to do at this time with Le Corbusier’s grander ideas. By the late twenties and early thirties, mass-market design was becoming an increasingly important part of Vassos’ professional life, and the tug of war between utopian modernism and mass-market practice came to preoccupy him considerably from this time on.

Vassos entered industrial design work by way of product restyling and packaging, working with the growing market of manufacturers who realized the value of “styling and beauty,” as the advertising man Earnest Elmo Calkins called this new marketing tool. For his first important design, Vassos transformed a glass lotion bottle by the Armand Company into a portable container with a unique screw-off top that enabled the bottle to be reused as a flask when the lotion was emptied. The clever container, whose curved shape allowed it to be carried easily in a back or shirt pocket, was extremely popular during Prohibition, and sales of Armand lotion increased dramatically after the bottle was introduced.
Typically for the time, Vassos considered a wider context as he worked on his design. He held the opinion, for instance, that a designer should always consider how a new product package was to be displayed. “The styling and designing of a product,” he later elaborated, “is not where the work of the industrial designer stops. Promotion and presentation after the styling and designing have been done are equally important and are a very definite part of the industrial designer’s job.”

Vassos acted on his idea by asking his friend Bourke-White to photograph his new bottle, trading interior design work for stylish presentation photos, which both he and Bourke-White used in their portfolios. Bourke-White installed and shot the new product as if it were an art object by setting up her shots with characteristically dramatic lighting and heightened attention to form and texture. Using soft curtains and a shiny, sensuous surface that reflected the product label in a pool of light, Bourke-White created an appealingly emotional “por-
trait” of the bottle. The photographer was in many ways the ideal person to photograph Vassos’ design because she was able to capture, even in a single object, the heroic quality that people associate with the machine age aesthetic.26

Following this first success with product design and enormous publicity efforts on his own behalf, Vassos found work with a number of manufacturers for whom he reworked existing products using the increasingly popular streamline style. His work was varied during the 1930s, when some of his most notable designs included a Lucite pen for the Waterman Company, a never-manufactured streamlined bicycle called the aerobike (for which he also received a design patent), kitchen appliances, and an innovative but never-produced beverage dispenser for the Coca-Cola Company, to be used at soda fountains all over the country.27 Perhaps his most groundbreaking design in these years was a turnstile for the Perey Turnstile Company.

The turnstile, which was first used in the Chicago exposition of 1933, became a standard in the field—you have probably passed through a Perey turnstile designed by Vassos if you have ever taken the New York Subway.28 The company asked Vassos to include new features that would eliminate unnecessary staff, increase entrance capacity, and control the flow of people as they went in and out of the turnstiles. Vassos placed the turnstile (whose main mechanism, after the redesign, looked like a milking stool turned on its side) in a sleek silver case decorated with three vertical speed whiskers. The design was a great success and created just the sense of speed, movement, and efficiency that the manufacturer sought. Vassos later turned to his work in Phobia to explain the psychology behind his design, noting that he had tried to imagine experiences of customers who would pass through the machines. In particular, Vassos wanted phobic people to feel more comfortable as they passed into the subway. As he explained, “Here my knowledge of the aichmophobic’s reaction—fear of pointed objects—guided me, and I produced a simple contrivance with gently curving surfaces, with any disturbing design around the feet of the user eliminated.”29 Vassos thought the turnstile was one of his best pieces of industrial design, and it remained in use all over the country long after streamlining went out of style.30

By the late 1920s, Vassos had also started to design interiors. At first he installed modernistic window and counter displays for stores like Namm’s in Brooklyn, Kaufmann’s Department Store in Pittsburgh, and Macy’s in Manhattan, all of which were experimenting with modern design as a sales tool.31 The modern style was at this time becoming strongly associated with principles laid out in the developing field of consumer psychology, which sought to systematize the manipulation of consumers to increase profits. When many restaurants and stores were renovated, for instance, their designers busily revamped interiors with Taylorist principles in mind. The assembly line and other markers of mass production influenced many of these renovations,

John Vassos Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
giving the new designs a strong modern signature. Designers often sought to treat the new restaurant interiors almost as if they were real assembly lines in a factory, shaping them to guide workers to be more efficient and customers to be more free spending.

In his restaurant work, Vassos planned each detail—including furniture and interior arrangements, color schemes, lighting, and uniforms—using the new ideas. To help him tailor his designs in such a way that customers’ actions were guided and made more predictable, Vassos closely examined such things as density, traffic, and sales figures. His goal was greater precision in measuring how, when, and why consumers did what they did when they ate out.

Vassos’ innovative 1930 design for Nedick’s hot dog stand at Broadway and Forty-seventh Street was a case in point. The designer attempted to create a standardized but highly entertaining experience during each customer’s trip to the new shining modern interior.
Unlike many “fast food” stands at the time, customers had to walk inside to make their purchases. Vassos designed an integrated interior in which a free-standing curvilinear counter—one of the first in the country—powerfully suggested speed and movement. Lighting was carefully controlled to encourage spending, and the curving counter was shaped to ensure that the servers would move as efficiently as possible.

Vassos developed similar ideas at the 1931 Rismont Tea Room, which he transformed into a similarly streamlined hub. The restaurant looked machine-like, with opulent metal trim, shining surfaces, and clever interior lighting, and functioned as efficiently as possible. To guarantee high turnover in the busy restaurant, Vassos deliberately designed the chairs so that customers moved on quickly after they had finished their meal. “The chairs are comfortable,” he explained, “if one doesn’t sit too long on them.”

Vassos also did private interiors, including his own upper West Side penthouse, which was published in *Pencil Points*, and Bourke-White’s new office-studio in the Chrysler Building. For both, Vassos modified Le Corbusier’s idea of the home as a machine for living and Bauhaus strategies of modern design, developing forms that avoided excess ornamentation and installing modular furnishings suited to the small spaces of skyscraper apartments. Declaring that “the true modernist eliminate[s] all unnecessary detail in attaining a practical—and by reason of its intense practicality, a beautiful—result,” Vassos softened the aesthetics of his European sources for the American sensibility.

Anticipating an important design he developed for the 1939 World’s Fair, Vassos installed Bourke-White’s photographs and books in cozy corners. Vassos also took pains to surround the photographer with the modern factory-made materials of her clients at Pittsburgh Plate Glass, Armstrong Cork, Alcoa Aluminum, and DuPont. For instance, in the semi-indirect lighting system he designed, he used frosted glass held by aluminum strips to furnish “cakes of light.” This carefully designed office received critical acclaim.

As Vassos’ career blossomed, he received some public praise for his industrial design practice. In 1934, he was listed in a *Fortune* magazine article as one of the top ten most important designers in the country; others listed were Teague, Loewy, and Henry Dreyfuss. Proclaiming that “his subject is psychoanalysis,” the unnamed author took pains to establish that Vassos’ understanding of the psychology of buyers set him apart; the success of *Phobia* was no doubt behind the author’s assertion.

Throughout the 1930s, as he worked on a large variety of commissions, Vassos continued to explore new technologies and materials. His designs for lighting in exhibition displays, including the innovative use of “artificial” lighting for the Packard company booth at the Roosevelt Hotel, garnered him attention in magazines such as *Signs of the Times*, *Edison Magazine*, *Lighting*, and the *Nela Park Magazine* of the General...
Electric Company. He became a spokesperson for the makers of Bakelite, who were pleased to associate themselves with the rising designer. In his displays of commercial products, Vassos was able to experiment with and show materials that he continued to use, particularly Formica, fabricoid, and brushed aluminum.

In 1933, Vassos was working for WCAU, a flagship CBS radio station in Philadelphia, when he met a visiting RCA executive. The man immediately hired Vassos to work on the company’s radio lines. With radio manufacturing on the rise, it was a dream-come-true for the designer. RCA gave Vassos even broader responsibility almost immediately, and during his many years at the company, he worked on many projects. Vassos designed consumer products and developed marketing concepts (including the company logo, “the magic brain,” in 1935), and worked as a graphic designer, brand analyst, and representative to the sales team. He educated RCA’s top management about design, modernized the design of many manufactured products and
new radio lines, and created visual coherence across company platforms, including in-house equipment, transmitter architecture, logo design, and sales displays. Vassos also worked on top-secret projects, such as Vladimir Zworykin’s seminal electron microscope, for which he designed a streamlined case that reduced the size and bulk of the machine.

Design for radio at this time was not a settled matter, and leading manufacturers looked to their designers to create the ultimate radio form. Radios presented industrial designers with an opportunity to use new materials and production techniques to develop a product that did not fit easily into any existing traditions. From the round radios of Teague to the colorful Catalin box type, there was little consensus on the form that radios should take. Confronted with a tangled mess of wires and tubes, designers were torn between thinking of radios as pieces of furniture or as entertainment devices akin to phonographs. They were more sure about the large role radios could have in promoting modern design on a wider scale, simply because they knew it was a product that millions of people were likely to buy.

Vassos viewed radio design in this broad context and considered much more than RCA’s bottom line by linking the problem to the larger debate over modernism and how the new modern style was to be introduced to American consumers. In a letter to Richard Bach, a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and an advocate of industrial design, Vassos expanded on his design philosophy for the radio. He compared his style with that favored by Philip Johnson, the curator of the Museum of Modern Art’s April 1934 “Machine Art” show, in which Johnson rejected streamlining in favor of a uncompromising engineering-influenced design style that Vassos thought was too harsh for American consumers. In his radios, Vassos consciously bridged the gap between the harsh Bauhaus functionalism that was advocated by the “pure” design advocates and the gentle modifications of streamlined styling, which infused easy-to-use designs with novelty while also reflecting some basic tenets of modernism. Vassos thought that most customers—people who may not have even been aware that a modern radio was designed by an “artist”—would be persuaded of the benefits of good modern design by exposure to attractive, accessible, and functional products designed in a modified modern style. Only then would consumers prefer modern radios to older, more traditionally designed models, and only then would modernist style be accepted more broadly in American homes.

At RCA, Vassos used a range of methods to both improve and simplify his radios, terms he viewed as synonymous. He stuck to his rejection of Johnson’s hard-line precepts, making his designs appealing to a wide audience. He mixed well-defined circles and squares, introduced simple protruding knobs, and softened the edges of the radios with curved plastic. Sweeping grills over the speakers created long horizontal lines, tracing the top of the radio to create an elegant and
asymmetrical receiver that was not harsh or “too radical.” Vassos' gentle forms would go a long way to support modernist ideas because, he explained, “A program of gradual change must be laid out and followed because any radical change, even if it be for the better, is dangerous for any standard product on the market. The public will not accept it.” This philosophy was perhaps best expressed in the plastic New Yorker radios he designed, a line that was selected by the Architectural Forum as the “1940 plastic expression of contemporary radio.” Vassos' approach was confirmed when more than 120,000 sets were sold.

Vassos made many other improvements to the radio, notably to user interfaces. He introduced push-button tuning and also worked on an innovative car radio with a chromium-plated spring that lifted the radio out into the user's hand. The best-known of his innovations was a novel template for the radio dial that replaced the large circular knob called the airplane or Zenith dial: “We . . . put in the horizontal dial, which is the normal way of reading from left to right.” Vassos' common-sense appeal and modified modernist forms carried over into his other work at RCA.

As the visual coordinator for the company’s corporate image, Vassos redesigned in-house equipment, including the transmitters. For these large, bulky machines, Vassos created streamlined exteriors devoid of excess ornamentation to “express the tempo and spirit of the most modern invention of the age—the radio.” In addition to creating a shell for the equipment, he sought to integrate the design plans with the RCA brand overall by creating continuity and visual harmony across the company’s various product divisions. His transmitter buildings were gently curved; without any harsh geometric volumes, they reflected clearly his ideas about streamlined modernism. Vassos planned the buildings’ every detail with careful attention to shape and materials, which included steel, cement, glass, and aluminum. Resembling radio tubes and showing the smooth, rounded curves that characterized most RCA equipment at the time, the transmitter structures...
were built across the country as the company expanded its broadcasting division.

In 1935, Vassos was asked to come up with an appropriate form for RCA’s newest media technology, the television, a machine that had been anticipated for decades and, like radio, was one that could not be based on an earlier form. RCA was not sure how to promote the new medium, and Vassos was intimately involved as the company prepared for the commercial launch of the new product.

RCA debuted the new machine at the 1939 World’s Fair in New York, where one of the first American public broadcasts over the RCA equipment took place as Franklin Delano Roosevelt opened the fair on 30 April. In a splashy PR effort designed to show users that television was real and not magic, Vassos installed a “phantom television” in a transparent Lucite case that he placed inside the entrance to the RCA pavilion. But he also faced a number of real-world design challenges, most importantly the need to create a saleable design to exhibit at the RCA pavilion and elsewhere at the fair. Vassos’ solution for the design of the TRK-12—as they called the first television model named for its twelve-inch screen—merged the new with the old, fusing the then-futuristic lines of the airplane with the rich patinas and substantial forms of classic case furniture.

The most difficult problem was how to put the bulky television mechanism and screen in a case that was both attractive and functional. Working with the technological givens, Vassos’ main invention, based on British television precedent, was in the exterior cabinet. He mounted the enormous picture tube inside the cabinet so that the image had to be projected upwards and then reflected off a mirror placed higher up inside the partially raised lid of the standing case. When the set was not in use, the screen could be stowed inside the cabinet, and the expensive wood case looked like a piece of furniture rather than a mechanical receiving set. Like his RCA radios, Vassos had put forward a gentle modernist style that merged functionality, streamlining, and a familiar form to make a new piece of furniture that
might help win over the public to television. Plugging his design for a juried competition for excellence in design, Vassos emphasized proudly that it had a modern design. There was, he said, no extraneous decoration “whatsoever, even the louvers at the very top of the cabinet functionally are for a purpose—to let the extreme heat [of the mechanism] escape” so as to cool the set. He designed three other models for the 1939 debut, the TRK-9, TRK-5, and the TT-5, which had variations in size and sound capacities.

In 1940, the company showed another version of the television at the fair’s “America at Home” pavilion, which displayed sixteen model rooms by major designers like Donald Deskey and Russel Wright to “dramatize the development of design in manufactured articles and [the] consequent improvement of taste in everyday living.” Vassos included the television screen in a multiunit functional display cabinet installed in an innovative model media room, which producers of the pavilion titled the Musicorner. The Musicorner was a small media “hive” of only 16 feet by 15 feet that contained the television, a 16mm sound film projector, a radio, and a phonograph. Vassos’ design was
one of the first rooms ever designed to house the new electronic entertainment machines in an interior scheme that also allowed for more ordinary amusements like books and games. In the new design, Vassos modified the idea of the home as a machine for living, creating a room complete with a functional “entertainment system where ease of operation, acoustic qualities, and visibility [were] the prime objectives” and without any meaningless decoration. In this room (and in the one he did for RCA at the 1964 World’s Fair) Vassos’ Musicorner led to many requests for him to lecture or consult on design. Despite the striking display and publicity that television received at the fair, the press was not impressed by the new technology. When the World War II began, RCA halted the manufacturing program and went into war production.

Vassos enlisted in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and specialized in espionage, camouflage, and the decipherment of enemy codes with the Intelligence Corps in North Africa and the Middle East. After 1945 he resumed work at RCA, where he designed many products over the years, including another integrated design for a television living room.
for the 1964 World’s Fair and designs for the company’s new color
televitions. Vassos also undertook a number of varied projects—
redesigning lobbies for Skouras and United Artists theaters, for
instance—and deepening his commitment to the progressive Silver-
mine Guild of artists in New Canaan, Connecticut, where a hall named
in his honor is still in use.\textsuperscript{54}

After the war, Vassos played an important role in the evolution of
industrial design as a profession, particularly in the area of design edu­
cation. In 1945, he and Alexander Kostellow, director of design at
Pratt Institute, developed and copyrighted a pioneering curriculum for
design students. The two men conferred with other industrial design
educators on three continents and created a guide that established uni­
versal standards for industrial design education. Vassos was a founding
member of the American Designers Institute, which later became the
Industrial Designers Society of America, and was its first president; he
also served as the president of the American Design Institute from
1938 to 1941.\textsuperscript{55}

Though he was widely known among professional designers, later
in his life Vassos was eager to become better known by the general
public because he thought his career in some way told the story of
industrial design in his lifetime. Encouraged by the numerous awards
he received, he began an autobiography, but after writing about his
early years in the United States, he stopped; apparently he pitched the book to several publishers, but the manuscript was never finished. After his death his papers were deposited at the Archives of American Art and Syracuse University. These records vividly tell the story of Vassos—an under-recognized artist who devoted his talents to making the myriad of new forms demanded by modern society and so helped integrate modernism into design for mass production.

Danielle Schwartz is an assistant professor of communication at American University, Washington, D.C. She was a fellow at the Archives of American Art and at the Wolfsonian Museum, and has contributed to Design Issues.
This manuscript is based in part on my dissertation, “From Turnstile to Transmitter: John Vassos, Industrial Designer, 1927–1941” (McGill University, 2005). Acknowledgements are gratefully extended to Professors Will Straw and Jonathan Sterne at McGill University, Liz Kirwin at the Archives of American Art, Amelia Goerlitz of the Smithsonian American Art Museum; Sergio Cortesini, James Wechsler, Eugene Resnick; Alex Magoun at the David Sarnoff Library, and Elliot Sivowitch of the National Museum of American History, for their suggestions and help as I prepared this article. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Douglass Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship in American Art generously provided support for work on this article.

1. American industrial design was born of the unification of design and industry and fostered through an alliance of museums and department stores. The European modern design styles that American designers drew from often had utopian underpinnings—for instance those found at the Bauhaus, where modernism had a socialist foundation—and strict functionalist aesthetics. In contrast, industrial design in the United States was highly commercial in its orientation. Designers here pushed manufacturers to embrace the modern style, but were required to soften the harsh geometry associated with European modernism. American modern design for mass production used modified geometric shapes and clean surfaces required of the “anti-ornament” movement coupled with softer lines, curves, and colors. The result was the so-called streamlined style, which was based on the stripped-down aerodynamic design associated with airplanes and became fashionable after the Depression. See Walter Storey, “Beauty Linked Firmly to Design: An Exposition Reveals How Art Is Applied to the Latest Products of the Machine,” New York Times, 1 April 1934, p. 16; and Donal M. and Martha Candler, Art and the Machine: An Account of Industrial Design in Twentieth-Century America (New York, London: Whitley House, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1936). For a more recent discussion, see Jeffrey Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited, 1925–1939 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979). Some designers working in the United States did have a utopian vision of industrial design, see Paul T. Frankl, Machine Made Leisure (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1932).

2. My dissertation, “From Turnstile to Transmitter: John Vassos, Industrial Designer, 1927–1941” (McGill University, 2005), treats all aspects of Vassos’ career in depth, including his political engagement and how it meshed with his work all through his life.

3. Once streamlined became the dominant style in American industrial design, it was widely applied to buildings and inanimate objects, for example vacuum cleaners, pens, screwdrivers, and cameras. As a result, in the case of many products, streamlining—originally symbolic of the frictionless speed of airplanes—no longer reflected their actual function.

4. Vassos was hired to do portraits of the company’s recording artists (see a speech honoring Vassos, Rismont Restaurant, 1931, box 8, p. 8, John Vassos Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution [hereafter Vassos papers, AAA]; and A. C. Erisman, American Catalin Corporation, to Vassos, 17 July 1933). 5. He studied at ASL between 1921 and 1922, and also studied at the American School of Design (see biographical information, box 23, Vassos papers, AAA).

6. In the early thirties, Vassos co-founded the modern experimental Dance Center in collaboration with choreographer Senya Gluck-Sandor, who created a dance based on one of Vassos’ books (Gluck-Sandor to Vassos, 22 December 1936, box 7, Vassos papers, AAA. See also three pieces by John Martin, New York Times, 20 November 1932, p. x2; New York Times, 31 March 1933, p. 22; and New York Times, 20 September, 1936, p. x2). Vassos published some avant-garde set designs in The Dance between October 1930 and January 1931 (box 3, Vassos papers, AAA).

7. In the middle twenties Vassos did advertising work for Brokaw Brothers, a clothes company (box 1, Vassos papers, AAA); and other businesses (see tear sheets in box 21, Vassos papers, AAA). His first print job for a department store was with Best & Company (see Vassos’ unpublished autobiography, box 12, Vassos papers, AAA), and his successful work for them was followed by commissions from other big New York stores like Lord & Taylor, Bonwit Teller, and Wanamaker’s (see box 8, Vassos papers, AAA, for Vassos’ account of his success with a campaign for Wanamaker’s). Box 1 of the Vassos papers at AAA contains tear sheets for advertisements published in Vogue, 15 November 1926; Vogue, 15 August 1927; and the New Yorker, 8 February 1930.

8. The full series of Vassos’ Packard ads and many other tear sheets can be found in box 1 of the Vassos papers, AAA. These include over thirteen different ads that he did for the company that were published in magazines like the New Yorker as well as advertisements for Cammeyer and Paragon Distributing Company.

9. An advertisement that Vassos did for Lord & Taylor’s furniture is a rare example of his skill at drawing conventional illustrations. See box 1, Vassos papers, AAA.


11. Dutton published Salome, a Tragedy in One Act, by Oscar Wilde; Conceptions by John Vassos in 1927. The Ballad of Reading Gaol, by Oscar Wilde; Interpretations by John Vassos followed in 1928; and The Harlot’s House, and Other Poems, by Oscar Wilde; Interpretations by John Vassos in 1929.

12. “Probably no artist today uses gray and black use the illustrations and articles for Esquire, p. 85ff. Vassos received permission to use the illustrations and articles for Esquire from his publisher (see Vassos to Pascal Covici, 19 October 1935, box 8, Vassos papers, AAA).

13. This involvement is clearly laid out in the blurb on Vassos in Willis Birchman, Faces and Facts By and About 26 Contemporary Artists, privately printed, 1937, copy in “autobiographical materials,” box 12, Vassos papers, AAA.


16. In the middle twenties Vassos did advertising work for Brokaw Brothers, a clothes company (box 1, Vassos papers, AAA); and other businesses (see tear sheets in box 21, Vassos papers, AAA). His first print job for a department store was with Best & Company (see Vassos’ unpublished autobiography, box 12, Vassos papers, AAA), and his successful work for them was followed by commissions from other big New York stores like Lord & Taylor, Bonwit Teller, and Wanamaker’s (see box 8, Vassos papers, AAA, for Vassos’ account of his success with a campaign for Wanamaker’s). Box 1 of the Vassos papers at AAA contains tear sheets for advertisements published in Vogue, 15 November 1926; Vogue, 15 August 1927; and the New Yorker, 8 February 1930.

17. Vassos wrote and illustrated the February 1937 article entitled “A Case of Acrophobia,” Esquire, p. 85ff. Vassos received permission to use the illustrations and articles for Esquire from his publisher (see Vassos to Pascal Covici, 19 October 1935, box 8, Vassos papers, AAA).

18. Ibid., p. 31.

19. Hopkins, who at this time was in the Roosevelt Cabinet at Albany, was involved with Barbara Duncan, a friend of Ruth’s (see Vassos’ unpublished autobiography, box 12, Vassos papers, AAA). Hopkins and Vassos remained friends for years (see correspondence with Harry Hopkins, 1943, box 12, Vassos papers, AAA). For more on the arts culture of New York in the 1920s, see Lewis A. Erenberg, Steppin’ Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); and W. Parker Chase, New York: The Wonder City (1932; New York: New York Bound, 1983), New-York Historical Society, General Collection.

20. For more on the influence of Le Corbusier on American industrial design, see Meikle’s chapter “Machine Aesthetics” in Twentieth Century Limited, pp. 19–38.

21. Lectures were held at social clubs, including the Junior Federation of the Jewish Philanthropic Societies (Joseph Franken to Vassos, 16 January 1933, box 7, Vassos papers, AAA), the Men’s Club at Cranford (Vassos to Orasamus Stack Sullivan, 29 June 1935, box 8, Vassos papers, AAA, in which Vassos asks him to list Phobia along with Vassos’ other books, acknowledging that it would be a “graceful gesture and a courtesy on the part of E. P. Dutton towards Covici”).
For Vassos' ideas about window design, see “The Odyssey of John Vassos,” in “RCA Murals,” box 2, Vassos papers, AAA; included are “Is Modern Design Permanent Expression?” or “The Art of Illustrations,” “Modern Art – Design and Interiors,” and the “Art of Graphically Portraying Emotions and Ideas.”


24. Vassos to Mr. Brown, Gray and Dudley Stoves, 11 July 1936, box 8, pp. 1–2, Vassos papers, AAA.

25. They also shared job leads and props. Letters between Bourke-White and Vassos are held in the Margaret Bourke-White Papers, Syracuse University, box 53, under “Vassos.”


27. The Coca-Cola Company hired Vassos to design the dispenser after he made an innovative counter design for a New York restaurant (see the text on Vassos’ interiors). In the end, Vassos did not get the job because of problems with color application on the Bakelite container, but he included his prototype in his portfolio because he considered it one of his most innovative designs, for which he received a patent (Des. 87654). See Ross Treseder, Vice President, Coca-Cola, to Vassos, 20 May 1933, box 8, Vassos papers, AAA; and Allen Brown, Bakelite Company, to Vassos, 20 May 1933, box 8, Vassos papers, AAA.


31. For Vassos’ ideas about window design, see Vassos to R. C. Kash, Display magazine, 18 November 1935, box 8, Vassos papers, AAA. See box 25, Vassos papers, AAA, for photographs of Kaufmann’s Department Store; and “IDSA Mourns the Passing of a Design Leader, John Vassos,” IDSA Newsletter, January 1986, box 1, Vassos papers, AAA. Vassos also worked with B. Altman’s, see letter, 24 October, box 8, Vassos papers, AAA.

32. The tables were made smaller than usual, too (see Robert A. A. Stern et al., New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the World Wars [New York: Rizzoli, 1987, p. 279]). The quote is from an article Vassos wrote for Pencil Points, December 1931, p. 896; another article in Architectural Forum, October 1931, p. 460, discusses the kitchen of the restaurant.

33. Vassos also designed the interiors of private homes for psychoanalyst Harry Stack Sullivan and Isaac Levy, a co-founder of CBS.

34. “A Small Modern Apartment Designed for the Artist for His Own Use,” Pencil Points, October 1930, pp. 789–792. His own apartment was featured in the New York Times as one that successfully blended modern design with comfort so that “there was not an air of stiffness in the room” (Walter Storey, “Modernizing the Walls of Our Homes,” New York Times, 16 February 1930, box 2, p. 16fl., Vassos papers, AAA).


36. “Both Fish and Fowl,” Fortune, February 1934, pp. 40–43. I think that Norman Bel Geddes wrote this unsigned piece because its content is quite close to a letter Bel Geddes wrote to Vassos in 1932 seeking information about Vassos’ work, salary, and design philosophy (Bel Geddes to Vassos, 25 October 1932, box 7, p. 2, Vassos papers, AAA).

37. Vassos to A. L. Powell, General Electric, July 1932, box 8, Vassos papers, AAA.

38. “A Series of Lectures Given by John Vassos, W. B. Stevenson, and L. Brodton for the Training Course, Fall 1936,” in “RCA Records,” box 10, Vassos papers, AAA.

39. Vassos to Richard Bach, box 8, 3 September 1934, Vassos papers, AAA.

40. Vassos to Isaac Levy, 18 May 1933, in “Miscellaneous,” box 8, Vassos papers, AAA.


42. Letter from Vassos to Bernice Maguire, Lord & Taylor, 29 March 1941, box 8, p. 1, Vassos papers, AAA.

43. Vassos to Throckmorton, 9 February 1935, box 11, Vassos papers, AAA.

44. Speech, Syracuse University, box 12, p. 12, Vassos papers, AAA.


47. Vassos to Louise Bonney Leicester, 1 May 1940, New York World’s Fair (1939–1940) Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Section, box 363, Humanities and Social Sciences Library, New York Public Library, (hereafter World’s Fair Collection, NYPL). Vassos’ TRK-12 design won the Jury prize in 1940.

48. Vassos to Maguire, Lord & Taylor, 29 March 1941, box 8, pp. 3–4, Vassos papers, AAA.

49. For examples of how these were advertised see, for instance, the tear sheet “A New Industry is Born as RCA and NBC Present Television,” box 1, Vassos papers, AAA.

50. Walter Dorwin Teague to an unnamed person, 23 February 1940, box 363, America at Home, “Designer’s Room Files,” World’s Fair Collection, NYPL.
FIRST LIGHT:
John I. H. Baur, James Suydam, and Luminism

MARK D. MITCHELL

John I. H. Baur (1909–1987) was a leading force in American art history as the field emerged during the mid-twentieth century. As a curator at the Brooklyn Museum and later associate director and director of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Baur approached his subjects in terms of their “larger human and social relationships,” a progressive view that he hoped would establish American art’s relevancy for a broader public.¹ Over the course of his career, Baur prepared numerous influential exhibitions and publications that introduced new interpretations of American art dating from its beginnings to his own time. Especially underrecognized today are his pioneering monographic studies of lesser-known artists, publications that attracted critical attention to figures who have in many cases become central to the canon. The extensive John I. H. Baur papers housed at the Archives of American Art offer a unique resource for students and scholars interested in Baur’s methods and in the artists he rediscovered.

The exhibition “Luminist Horizons: The Art and Collection of James A. Suydam,” organized by the National Academy Museum in

New York, has provided the opportunity to revisit Baur’s contributions to American art history, including his early work on the nineteenth-century landscape aesthetic that he eventually dubbed “luminism.” Baur’s initial research on the subject coincided with his study of painter James A. Suydam (1819–1865, pronounced soo-DAM), who played a central role in Baur’s recognition during the late 1940s of a broader luminist style. In Baur’s six-year exploration of luminism from 1948 to 1954, we can distinguish two phases in his research—historical and spiritual—the first of which coincided with study of Suydam’s career. During the second phase, however, Baur largely set aside Suydam’s contributions to luminism in favor of the works of other artists. Even though he ultimately abandoned it, Baur’s first line of inquiry into luminism’s antebellum and Civil War context in fact provided the term with a more substantive foundation than subsequent definitions have enjoyed.

Baur first discerned the distinctive traits of what he called luminism—a strain of mid-nineteenth-century American landscape aesthetics that he considered separate from the prevailing Hudson River School formula—while researching the exhibition “The Coast and the Sea: A Survey of American Marine Painting” for the Brooklyn Museum in 1948. Baur noticed that several of the painters he included in the exhibition—Fitz Henry Lane, Martin Johnson Heade, and Suydam—painted in a style that emphasized atmospheric effects and poetic, emotive evocation rather than the moralizing narratives characteristic of the Hudson River School painters. He soon set about studying the literary, philosophical, historical, and religious significance of their work. Over the ensuing years, Baur’s thinking shifted gradually, but steadily. He finally codified this contemplative aesthetic in 1954 in his watershed 1954 essay “American Luminism, A Neglected Aspect of the Realist Movement in Nineteenth-Century American Painting.” In his article, Baur firmly aligned the new movement with Transcendentalism and a pantheistic spirituality—contemplating God’s universal presence in nature—that he discerned in the pervasive light of luminist landscapes, and he downplayed the importance of other historical and literary contexts that he had initially favored. Baur’s papers and research notes at the Archives of American Art document the evolution in his thinking. They record the lines of study that Baur decided not to pursue as well as those that he did and thereby provide perspective on the circuitous path that he explored as he formulated a definition of luminism.

After the publication of “American Luminism,” Baur’s term was widely embraced almost immediately. By the 1960s, luminism was a cornerstone of American art history, reaching the height of its influence in the writings of scholars John Wilmerding and Barbara Novak, who ranked it among the nation’s most important and unique artistic accomplishments. The blockbuster exhibition “American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850–1875,” which Wilmerding organized at
the National Gallery of Art in 1980, however, proved to be both an apotheosis and a turning point in luminism's study. Rather than reinforcing Baur's definition of luminism as a distinctively American movement, catalogue essayist Theodore Stebbins drew attention to the international currents in which luminist aesthetics participated, challenging its status as a uniquely American style. In her essay for the catalogue, Novak herself transformed luminism from a “movement” by a specific group of painters to a “mode” practiced intermittently by many artists. Later scholarship further eroded Baur’s term to the point that no single definition now prevails, although the term has persisted in the popular discourse, in which it is applied almost indiscriminately to works of American artists from the colonial era to the present who express even a passing interest in qualities of light and atmosphere.

A critical consensus on luminism that has gradually emerged in recent years refocuses attention on the group of artists who worked closely with Suydam during the antebellum and Civil War–eras. In 1950, while he was still grappling with the basic idea of luminism, Baur published his article “A Tonal Realist: James Suydam” in Art Quarterly, the first and only monographic study of the work of Suydam to be published before the present day. Reexamination of Baur’s initial research on luminism and Suydam demonstrates the care that Baur committed to the topic as he endeavored to synthesize wide-ranging and often contradictory documentary and visual sources. Although Baur ultimately settled on a fundamentally visual approach, his earlier published writings, research notes, and correspondence make a strong case for the revived emphasis of recent scholarship on the literary and historical bases of luminism.

One of Baur’s first interpretive accounts of the style he ultimately called luminism came in an article he wrote for ArtNews in November 1948 to accompany the Brooklyn exhibition. There, he identified the “more sober poetry” of some “less pretentious” works by Albert Bierstadt, Frederic Edwin Church, and John F. Kensett as sympathetic with works by a group of lesser-known artists who worked “outside the ranks of the Hudson River School.” Ten years ago it would have been difficult to see a clearly defined movement of this kind, for most of its leading figures had since been forgotten, while the dominance of the Hudson River School’s official productions had prevented others from achieving such recognition, even in their own lifetime. Baur’s list included Lane and Heade, and “to these, the Brooklyn exhibition adds another name, that of James Augustus Suydam.” The essay’s lead image was Paradise Rocks, Newport (1860), for which the caption read “the first of his pictures ever to be reproduced.” Baur’s recognition of the artists’ “sober poetry” remains perhaps the most resonant of his early observations regarding luminism.

In some ways, Suydam’s art was an unlikely basis for Baur’s recognition of a new aesthetic vein in American landscape painting. Suydam’s career as an artist was short, lasting only about ten years from...
the mid-1850s until his death in 1865, the first half of which time he spent as an amateur. Suydam was a student of Kensett, and although he later became a valued colleague during the 1860s, Suydam’s active involvement with and support of the National Academy of Design during the Civil War years limited his own artistic production. Despite his professional commitments, Suydam garnered distinction as a painter during his brief career and produced an exceptional body of work, including the masterful Paradise Rocks, Newport, which helped inspire Baur’s thesis. Although Suydam’s work had fallen into obscurity by the 1940s, his bequest to the National Academy of his exceptional collection of ninety-two paintings, including several of his own compositions, quietly preserved his legacy until Baur’s rediscovery of it in 1948.

Baur’s letters describe his first introduction to Suydam’s work during the preparation for the Brooklyn show, and he signaled his interest in such lesser-known artists in the catalogue’s introduction:

The length of the biographical sketches in the following catalogue is generally in inverse ratio to the fame of the artist. With limited space, it has seemed advisable to summarize only briefly the careers of such well known painters as [Winslow] Homer and [Thomas] Eakins, whereas the results of recent research on such obscure men as [James] Hamilton and Suydam have been presented as fully as possible.

As noted above, Baur took special interest in artistic rediscovery, and, in the days before image databases and the Smithsonian’s Bicentennial Inventory of American Painting and Sculpture, his particular focus was on bringing new artists and new art to light. Unlike many of his peers, however, Baur brought his subjects directly to the center of his search for a broader synthesis of American art. Suydam’s rediscovery is a prime example of this approach, as his art played a starring role in Baur’s first conceptualization of luminism.

Baur almost certainly knew Suydam’s work from textual sources before he saw the real thing. His correspondence with the National Academy of Design’s president Hobart Nichols in April 1948 indicates no previous experience with Suydam’s works in the Academy’s collection and lists Paradise Rocks among the paintings he hoped to see on a future visit. Moreover, all of Baur’s early writing on Suydam relied heavily on the appraisal by Henry T. Tuckerman in his well-known 1867 Book of the Artists and the biographical entry in Clara Erskine Clement’s and Laurence Hutton’s Artists of the Nineteenth Century of 1879.

In particular, Tuckerman’s chapter on landscape painters provided a rich source of new and underexamined artists for Baur’s exhibition, including both Suydam and his contemporary James Hamilton. Book of the Artists was published just two years after Suydam’s death, and Tuckerman’s lengthy treatment of the painter’s life and work may be explained by Suydam’s recent bequest of his collection along with an endowment of fifty thousand dollars to the National Academy in
support of its school. Tuckerman and Suydam were also both tenants of the Tenth Street Studio Building and likely knew each another personally. Most interestingly, an anonymous eulogist cited in Tuckerman’s book describes Suydam as a landscape “poet,” the same characterization that Baur consistently applied and embellished in his early studies of the luminist painters.

In his research, Baur sought literary parallels to explain the poetic terminology often invoked by nineteenth-century critics to characterize Suydam’s work. As the contemporary sources cited in Baur’s notebooks also make clear, his survey of mid-nineteenth-century literature and criticism was in fact a search for an explanation of the poetic sentiment he saw in Suydam’s art. For example, he took extensive notes on a series of essays that appeared in the Crayon in 1855 on the theme of “The Landscape Element in American Poetry,” and he canvassed contemporary literature including the writings of Charlotte Brontë, Frances Trollope, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry James in search of insight into Suydam’s life and art. Among the articles in the
“Landscape Element” series, for example, Baur focused on one that was devoted to the work of Alfred Billings Street, a nature poet of Suydam’s generation. He remarked that unlike many of his peers, Street’s approach was not moralizing, a key aspect in Baur’s eyes that also characterized luminist painting. Street remains a relatively obscure poet in American literary history, yet to Baur his work offered a poetic correlate to Suydam’s contemplative art.

Baur sought evidence to explain the distinction he drew between luminism and the Hudson River School as well. Baur’s interpretation of one article is telling. In notes on an 1865 essay by J. M. Hoppin in The New Englander, Baur focused on Hoppin’s comparison of “Platonic” and “Ruskinian” theories of art. Hoppin’s terms offered Baur a much-needed alternative to the prevailing romantic-versus-realist duality, which aligned British critic John Ruskin with realism. Ruskin, of course, was the champion of Joseph Mallord William Turner, whose devotion to the dynamic, unconventional experience of nature Ruskin admired. In America, however, Ruskin’s name came to be
associated not with the vital forms and colors of Turner, but rather with the minutely rendered precision of the American Pre-Raphaelites active during the same period in which Suydam was painting.²¹ Suydam’s own collecting was notable for the absence of artists whose works exemplified that contemporary trend, and Baur’s research conveys that he sought to define an alternative realist mode with which to align Suydam’s work and that of the other artists he was studying. In Hoppin’s “Platonic” model, Baur found one such alternative that, like Street’s poetry, emphasized cool-headed appreciation of nature, not moral themes.

Baur also examined Suydam’s biography in his search for a fuller contextual appreciation of the artist’s work. After Suydam completed his studies at New York University (then known as the University of the City of New York) in 1842, he traveled through Europe and the Middle East for three years. On his return to the United States, he entered a business partnership with his brother John that lasted nearly a decade. Only after that, during the mid-1850s, did Suydam turn to painting in earnest. In Charlotte Brontë’s first novel, The Professor, of 1857, Baur noted down a passage that he may have thought aptly described Suydam, the artist-businessman, in his emotional engagement with art:

*Men in business are usually thought to prefer the real; on trial the idea will be often found fallacious; a passionate fondness for the wild, wonderful and thrilling—the strange, startling and harrowing—agitates diverse souls that show a calm and sheer surface.*²²

For Baur, Brontë’s passage elucidated the array of wildly dramatic compositions that Suydam acquired for his collection, including works by Andreas Achenbach and Jasper Cropsey. A “calm and sheer” surface equally well described Suydam’s demeanor and his art, though the presence of a deeper range of feeling is suggested by the tumultuous backdrop of his portrait by Daniel Huntington. Baur of course knew from a memorial by Sanford Gifford that Suydam suffered from depression, and Baur’s papers reflect his interest in the psychological aspect of Suydam’s work in the shadow of the Civil War. He also noted an observation Huntington made that along the “cultivated” shores of Rhode Island and Massachusetts, Suydam and his colleagues found a landscape of peace, order, and reassurance during perhaps the most violent and chaotic period in American history.²³

Another text that Baur transcribed included a critique of the popular operatic compositions of Church and Bierstadt. In 1874, an anonymous writer for *Appleton’s Journal* observed that the tropical brilliance, looming glaciers, and yawning chasms of Church’s most ambitious works “tire the imagination, drain off our shallow sympathies, and leave us distressed and incapable of expression.”²⁴ Baur apparently used the *Appleton’s* critique to make a clear distinction between Suydam’s contemplative art and the sublimity of many of Church’s and Bierstadt’s compositions in the same period.²⁵
In his first writings about luminism, Baur conceptualized the aesthetic as a romantic form that embraced emotional expression, and the prominent influence of Suydam’s art on his thinking was clear. In this early view, luminism’s defining characteristic was emotive “intensification,” and Baur observed that the artists “all were traveling away from strict naturalism, all were tinged with degrees of Romanticism, all were proto-impressionists of a sort.”26 Baur’s first published studies emphasized all these qualities in Suydam’s work, especially as exemplified in his *Beach at Newport, Rhode Island*, with its brilliant blue water, stark off-white sand, and abstracted geometries. Over time, romanticism inexplicably fell away from Baur’s interpretations, and realism, even “strict realism,” came to be for him luminism’s dominant paradigm.
As Baur refined his understanding of the luminists’ relationships with other prevailing styles of the period, he also sought an adequate term to describe the new aesthetic vein. After reading the draft of Baur’s 1950 article on Suydam, E. P. Richardson, who was then director of the Detroit Institute of Arts and editor of *Art Quarterly*, replied, “I like your article on James Suydam very much and would like to publish it,” but he urged Baur to give more thought to an umbrella term to encapsulate Suydam’s aesthetic.

*It seems worth while, indeed important, to find if possible a name for that group of Heade, Fitzhugh Lane, and Suydam. They do form a group and would take their place more clearly in the story of American painting if you could find a name for the phase of style they represent. Would “tonal realists” be a good name for them?* 27

He added, “if I were writing the article I would have called the[m] ‘tonal naturalists.’” In Richardson’s mind, “naturalism” reflected Suydam’s type of “absolute fidelity to nature,” whereas “realism” meant “the larger and more imaginative grasp upon nature of a man like Winslow Homer. . . . But I gather that you use the two words in a somewhat reverse sense,” he concluded. Richardson’s opinion doubt-
less carried considerable weight with Baur, and the question of a name remained unresolved for several more years, gradually evolving as his research progressed.

In his first studies of Suydam and others, Baur’s attempts at a name revolved around what he saw as the artists’ signature qualities: tonalism and poetry. Indeed, both terms found their way into the typescript draft of his 1950 article, “A Tonal Poet: James Augustus Suydam.” Richardson successfully dissuaded him from using this title, however, and he settled on the alternative “Tonal Realist,” as Richardson proposed. Baur’s reply to Richardson is revealing about his future direction:

I have struggled for several years with the problem of an adequate tag for the group and think that probably [your term] ‘tonal realists’ is as good as possible although it only describes one part of their technique (though a major one) and does not at all suggest the spirit in which they worked, which I take to have been a kind of poetic pantheism. But I can think of nothing which would embrace all this without being either unwieldy or obscure, so I accept ‘tonal realists’ with gratitude.28

As he had written two years earlier, “it has become increasingly plain . . . that the standard by which the early realists must be judged is neither the degree of their fidelity to nature nor their exploitation of formal values of composition and design (which was generally negligible).”29 In Baur’s early studies, his conclusion was that the luminists’ success was appropriately measured by their evocation of mood, a tempered form of romanticism that remained in constant tension with the “strict realism” that Richardson characterized as “absolute fidelity to nature” and that both scholars observed in the art. The relationship between emotive evocation and descriptive realism was one of Baur’s central concerns.

As his work continued, Baur’s references to mood, abstraction from nature, and poetic evocation did not distance Suydam’s work from his conception of luminism as a realist aesthetic. On the contrary, in his typescript of the Art Quarterly article on Suydam in 1950, Baur at first characterized Suydam as a “strict realist” and changed it only after Richardson remarked that it lacked clarity for the reader.30 Baur’s reasoning for his use of “strict realism” is, indeed, difficult to interpret, and the term does not appear elsewhere. He may have intended it to imply a spare order and simplicity, rather than close, detailed observation.31 Baur’s only change to the draft essay was to replace the word “strict” for “tonal” throughout the text, without explanation or modified reasoning. In the final version, though, we are left with the identical explanation for the luminists’ “poetic interpretation of nature” as something “achieved through their [the painters’] intensity of observation and feeling . . . rooted in the genuine pantheism of the time.”32 Throughout his work on luminism, Baur’s rationale remained more consistent with his earlier expressive-romantic interpretation of luminism, rather than a realist one.
During the early 1950s, Baur moved further toward the notion of pantheism as the primary basis for luminism and bound it more closely to the tenets of Transcendentalism. In 1952, Baur gave a lecture at New York University (Suydam’s alma mater) on “The Portrayal of Light in American Art,” which laid out the future direction of his work on luminism. In the lecture, for which notes are preserved among the Baur papers, he equated the type of light in Lane’s and Heade’s works (Suydam was not mentioned) with pantheism on purely formal grounds. Even though Baur consistently understood luminism to be a modified or mannered variety of realism, the title of his lecture itself underscored his increased commitment to what he saw as the art’s devotional aspect and the weakening of its affinity with contemporary nature poetry and the psychological burdens of the Civil War.

Baur abandoned the study of Suydam and Kensett almost entirely after the publication of his article on Suydam in 1950, and with them went the contextual approach to luminism. Because his article on Suydam has remained the definitive study of the artist’s work for half a century, however, appreciation of his art remains linked to Baur’s early ideas on luminism. His later, and now more criticized, conception of luminism as a “spontaneously” generated style by contrast suffered because it was based almost entirely on visual analysis. For a curator who was so eager to establish the social connection of art for museum audiences, Baur’s decontextualization of luminism during the early 1950s remains a mystery. His later work’s reliance on visual evidence alone left luminism vulnerable to the criticism that it had no real basis in history. It seems clear, however, that luminism’s earliest formulation—the one inspired by Suydam—is more enduring than Baur concluded after 1950, because its literary and historical associations during the Civil War era are substantive. As the debate over luminism continues, the Archives of American Art provides critical tools for the investigation of this pivotal period in the nation’s art history.

Mark D. Mitchell is associate curator of nineteenth-century art at the National Academy Museum in New York. He co-curated the exhibition “Luminist Horizons: The Art and Collection of James A. Suydam” (on view at the National Academy Museum through 31 December 2006) and co-authored its accompanying catalogue, which includes an introduction by Annette Blau­grund, with Katherine E. Manthorne. His other recent publications include The St. Johnsbury Athenaeum: Handbook of the Art Collection (2006) and Francis A. Silva: In His Own Light (2002).
NOTES


2. Recent criticism of luminism and its origins has concentrated on the close relationship between Baur and collector Maxim Karolik, whose collection later went to Boston's Museum of Fine Arts (see J. Gray Sweeney, "Inventing Luminism: 'Labels are the Dickens,'" Oxford Art Journal 26, no. 2 [2003]: 96–99). None of Suydam's works are in the Karolik Collection, however, and the artist's significance in Baur's early studies of luminism points to a more independent aspect of Baur's research than has previously been observed. It also reiterates the pivotal role of "The Coast and the Sea." As Baur recalled in 1950, "I first became interested in [Suydam's] work while assembling an exhibition of American marine painting, called 'The Coast and the Sea,' which we held a year ago" (John I. H. Baur to J. Carson Webster, 28 February 1950, box 8, John I. H. Baur papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. [hereafter Baur papers]).

3. On the recent change of name of the-artist-formerly-known-as-Fitz-Hugh-Lane, see Eleanor H. Gustafson, ed., "Collector's Notes: Fitz who Lane?", The Magazine Antiques 167, no. 6 (June 2005): 48.


12. Preface to The Professor, transcribed in Baur research notes, box 6, Baur papers.


16. Baur to Hobart Nichols, 14 April 1948, box 6, Baur papers.

17. Baur, "A Tonal Realist," p. 221. Both books are familiar to historians of American art, but the latter is a biographical dictionary rather than a narrative such as Tuckerman's book, which is easily read cover to cover.


22. Preface to The Professor, transcribed in Baur research notes, box 6, Baur papers.


27. E. P. Richardson to John I. H. Baur, 9 June 1950, box 8, Baur papers.

28. Baur to Richardson, 14 June 1950, box 8, Baur papers.


31. His earlier use of "polished" and "meticulously finished" implies the latter, however. Baur, "Early Studies," p. 9.


33. More specifically, Baur tied luminism to Ralph Waldo Emerson's call to portray an idealized, "fairer creation" in art than the one that nature presented to the eye.

34. In recent years, one writer has gone so far as to insinuate that Baur's motives were market-driven and even McCarthyist (Sweeney, "Inventing Luminism," p. 101).
ART AND SPACE:
Park Place and the Beginning of the Paula Cooper Gallery

LIZA KIRWIN

The Park Place group coalesced in New York in 1963. The original members—Anthony Magar, Mark di Suvero, Forrest Myers, Tamara Melcher, Robert Grosvenor, Leo Valledor, Dean Fleming, Peter Forakis, and Edwin Ruda—were mostly from the West Coast, only Grosvenor and Ruda were easterners.¹ The name came from cheap studios Dean Fleming found at 79 Park Place, in downtown Manhattan on the West Side. Valledor explained the arrangement, “Frosty [Forrest Myers] took the bottom floor and Dean took the floor in between . . . I had the lease on the top floor and we decided to turn that into a gallery space or a place to show.”²

It was informal. No schedules. No openings. As Ruda recalled, “Whenever someone had finished a piece, or a few of us had finished a piece, we would borrow a truck from a mutual friend, help each

The Park Place group, ca. 1966. From left to right: David Novros, Robert Grosvenor, Peter Forakis, Ed Ruda (in white, on step), Anthony Magar, Tamara Melcher, Forrest Myers, Dean Fleming, and Leo Valledor. Park Place Gallery Art Research Records and the Paula Cooper Gallery Records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
other very cooperatively. . . . So we had an ongoing little show there, so you could see [how] the mutual influence just grows.”

While there was no common denominator for every member of the group, all the work was non-figurative and geometric, with smooth surfaces and hard edges. They also shared a passion for large-scale sculptures and paintings, a kind of mind-blowing bigness that had never been seen before. Grosvenor’s gravity-defying sculptures—painted steel and fiberglass structures suspended from the ceilings—were twenty to thirty feet long.

Fleming spoke about the dislocating, disorienting, and ultimately transformative power of these big pieces, which made humans realize, he said, that there was “a transcendent nature and a multiplicity, and that they themselves [were] capable of this change inside their own psyches.” For Ruda, the works were “not illustrations of ideas,” they were “part of the emotional content of the sixties”: new technology and materials, “far-out” optical play, and the science-fiction-like investigation of new spatial dimensions in the cosmos. Clearly, the tiny interiors of the established uptown galleries could not accommodate this work.

When the lease at Park Place expired in the spring of 1964, Fleming, with the help of di Suvero and Myers, spearheaded a plan to underwrite a new space for the group. They asked five collectors, Vera and Albert List, John D. Murchison, Allen Guiberson, Virginia Dwan Kondratief, and the Lannan Foundation, to pay a set sum regularly to the new Park Place Gallery in exchange for one work by each of the artists each year. They made a two-year arrangement, and the works were chosen through agreement between the artists and the patrons. Because sculpture materials and fabrication were so expensive, the collectors were also asked to pay these costs.

The new gallery at 542 West Broadway was incorporated on 10 October 1965 as Park Place, The Gallery of Art Research, Inc., a
name that underscored a spirit of experimentation and discovery. John Gibson was the first director, Paula Cooper served as the president of the corporation, and Jane Umanoff was vice president. Then in May 1966, when Gibson’s services were terminated, Cooper became the director and president. The gallery closed on 31 July 1967.

Though it was a good plan, the backers’ money never fully covered the costs of running the gallery, and in the end, as Ruda observed, the artists “all grew reluctant to give away five pieces annually in exchange for gallery expenses.”

Despite the financial shortfall, Park Place succeeded on other levels. The exhibitions were groundbreaking, the artists got big commissions, and they were invited to show as a group at MIT, the Lannan Foundation in Palm Beach, and elsewhere. As a nonprofit co-op, the gallery also sponsored other activities. They held invitational shows with Carl Andre, Robert Smithson, Sol LeWitt, and others, and they sponsored musical performances and screened experimental films. But the artists had bigger dreams. They wanted a four- or five-story building that was a communal center—a studio space where artists could pool materials, share expensive equipment, organize exhibitions, and have meetings, poetry readings, and other performances. For instance, Valledor envisioned a place that had a paint shop, complete with a color lab, spray booth, and baking oven. He wanted a film shop for experimental...
filmmaking, a sound studio for recording sessions, as well as an electronics shop, a tool shop, a plastic shop, and a centrally located room “in which total environmental conditions could be controlled and projected upon.” Others wanted “idea exchange seminars” with architects, engineers, builders, mathematicians, and physicists; or forums to explore the possibilities of public art, including “visual events” in parks, artist-designed billboards for cities and highways, and nonobjective posters in the subways.

Park Place could not be all things to all artists. When it closed, Paula Cooper took some of the best ideas from the co-op and opened the Paula Cooper Gallery at 96 Prince Street. Cooper’s was the first gallery in SoHo, then an industrial slum foreign to the art trade and known as “Hell’s Hundred Acres.” Her spacious five-thousand-square-foot loft space allowed for art with a public orientation to be shown in a gallery context. Like Park Place, exhibits evolved as individual works entered and left, not on a strict monthly basis, and Cooper also opened her space to special events by artists in other media, such as new music, poetry, and film.

Some of the original Park Place group came to the Paula Cooper Gallery including Forakis and Ruda, as well as Grosvenor and di Suvero (who are both currently represented by Paula Cooper). The opening of her gallery marked a new space for art and a new kind of art dealer, who lived and worked with artists. In 1969, Peter
Schjeldahl noted, “The Cooper is, if you will, an ‘activist’ gallery, aiming to reflect and influence the actual production of new art as much as its acceptance by critics and collectors. It makes available a fuller experience of art as it is evolving than do any number of gleaming uptown emporiums.”

This year, Paula Cooper turned over to the Archives of American Art the extant records of Park Place Gallery, dating from 1964 to 1967, and donated the early records of the Paula Cooper Gallery in its first location at 96 Prince Street. Included are proposed plans and suggested projects for the Park Place group, a certificate of incorporation for the gallery, lease agreements and other legal records, artists files, correspondence, financial records, newspaper clippings, photographs of artists and Paula Cooper, photographs and slides of works of art, and exhibition announcements and other printed material.

The records illuminate some of the ideas that are central to the history of art in the 1960s—unconventional materials, new ways of experiencing art, and the space-age embrace of science and technology.

Liza Kirwin is the curator of manuscripts at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

NOTES

The author wishes to thank Ona Novina-Sapinski, William McNaught, Joan Lord, Laura Orgon MacCarthy, and Emily Taub for their assistance with this essay.


2. Interview with Leo Valledor, 14 November [1965], p. 1, Park Place Gallery Art Research Records and the Paula Cooper Gallery records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter Park Place Gallery records).


4. Ibid., p. 4.

5. They wanted to call it “The Center for New Art, Inc.,” but found that similarly named corporations already existed and settled on the more scientific sounding “Art Research, Inc.”

6. Paula Cooper organized and installed exhibitions at World House Galleries, in New York, from 1959 to 1961, and was a private dealer from 1962 to 1963, before owning and operating her own gallery, the Paula Johnson Gallery in New York, from 1964 to 1965.


Walt Whitman (1819–1892) did not associate, either personally or intellectually, with the leading writers of his day. Biographically, his education was not at a university but came out of the rough-and-tumble world of New York’s newspapers and the street culture of the city; his salon was the beer garden at Pfaff’s, not a genteel literary gathering at Longfellow’s house in Cambridge. Aside from a personality that was “unclubable,” Whitman’s poetic celebration of his all-encompassing vision of the American individual required that he isolate himself from the mainstream of literary culture. While he was happy to receive Ralph Waldo Emerson’s full-fledged celebration of Leaves of Grass when it was published in 1855, Whitman used the endorsement as an advertising blurb, not as an acknowledgement of any intellectual debt to the New Englander; indeed, he later complained that Emerson was too soft and intellectual for his more robust and sensual tastes. Whitman intentionally cut himself off from influence, both personal and literary. When he was writing Leaves of Grass, he wrote a memorandum to himself to “Make no quotation and no references to other writers” and extended this ban to include all of literary history: “Take no illustrations whatsoever from the ancients or classics . . . nor from the royal and aristocratic institutions and forms of Europe.”¹ Whitman’s personal egoism merged with an artistic conviction that his subject was to be found within himself and his encounter, embodied in free verse, with America. If Whitman had no need for other writers, they reciprocated his self-distancing by largely ignoring the bombastic vulgarian from New York City, an act that only further widened the gap between the poet and his peers. The American public, for whom Leaves of Grass was intended since it was the book’s subject, was simply indifferent; the eight editions of the book that Whitman published during his lifetime never sold many copies.

In contrast to his distance from literary culture, Whitman had a lively, lifelong interest in and involvement with American artists who worked in all types of media. Part of Whitman’s interest in the visual arts was derived, again, from his egoism. In particular, Whitman realized that pictures could be used to advertise himself to the American public. Whitman meant advertisement in the widest sense. A portrait of himself would provide a visual analogue to the poet’s encounter with the world as documented in the free-flowing lines of Leaves of Grass. For the reader, a portrait would give some sense of the man who had created the poem; this visual announcement of the writer’s presence confirmed the writer’s authority, a necessity for Whitman, who argued that his poetic vision was a whole new way of seeing. What Whitman also realized, perhaps because he was schooled in the volatile theatre of the ever-changing streets of Jacksonian America, was that portrait images need not be fixed or inviolate: identities could be represented according to circumstances. And, Whitman saw, images could be manipulated by their subject to make an artistic, intellectual, and biographical point; the sitter was no longer a passive object of representation but a participant in the creation of his or her likeness. The malleability of the image became even more possible with the advent of new methods of mechanical

reproduction, especially photography. For instance, the frontispiece of the first edition *Leaves of Grass* presents to the reader the image of the poet in working class clothes as “one of the roughs,” a man of the people out on the road, master of all he sees. Yet at roughly the same time, Whitman portrayed himself in a photograph by Gabriel Harrison as so sensitive and ethereal that the picture became known as the “Christ likeness” for its spirituality. On the one hand, this pair of photographs perfectly captures the two sides of Whitman’s artistic personality, the quotidian and the exalted. Yet it also shows his mastery of self-presentation in an era in which the protean American individual was continually showing different faces to the world. Most of Whitman’s contemporaries adopted one pose and stuck to it, convinced that the public would be confused if they changed the way that they appeared. The iconoclastic Whitman reveled in adapting his pose and appearance to suit his purposes as circumstances warranted.

Ruth Bohan’s book is a fascinating compendium of how Whitman had himself represented throughout his lifetime by artists working in every medium except photography; she acknowledges that Whitman’s involvement in photography has been extensively covered. One of the many remarkable things about Whitman is that for a comparative failure he had his picture taken an incredible number of times! Whitman’s sense of his poetic mission was such that he drove *Leaves of Grass* through eight editions because his certainty that he was a singular genius led him to celebrate himself through continual acts of portrayal. Bohan argues that focusing on Whitman and photography distorts Whitman’s artistic purposes by closing off an examination of the poet’s exploitation of every aspect of the visual and the verbal in his self-portrayal. In particular, previous scholars have seen the relationship between Whitman and photography as going in only one direction or another: either Whitman privileged photography because it was democratic art, excluding the older arts of painting and sculpture, or, for those scholars who treated painting, unsubstantiated connections are applied between Whitman’s verse and the American vistas depicted by mid-nineteenth century landscapists and genre painting. Bohan

argues that Whitman was a more astute student of the “sister arts” of poetry and painting than his scholars suggest. Whitman’s socialization with New York’s artists and his observation of the visual in his work as an editor attuned him to a sophisticated sense of the interconnection of the visual and the verbal. As Bohan summarizes, “Whitman paired his verse with carefully fashioned and judiciously placed portraits of himself. I investigate how these portraits mediate the dynamic interface of the poet, his audience, and the poetic text” (p. 8).

Bohan is to be congratulated for her thorough work in digging through the evidence and unearthing so many portraits of Whitman in so many guises. The simple cataloguing of these images goes a long way to enhance our consideration of the poet as a
shape-shifter who rivaled Melville’s “Confidence Man.” For instance, Bohan discovers Whitman standing in the chow line in a Union encampment (Edwin Forbes, *Fall in for Soup*, p. 43). In 1899, he appeared leaning on the balcony in Thomas Eakins’ fight scene, *Between Rounds*. Bohan also found numerous casual sketches and caricatures of Whitman as he was caught off-guard by artists and amateurs who found themselves in the poet’s company; one sketch shows him with an enormous phallus, simultaneously burlesquing and acknowledging the poet’s sexuality.

But Bohan’s main focus is on the poet himself and his visual-verbal celebration of himself as the quintessentially versatile American individual. She begins by setting the scene with a survey of the art world in Whitman’s New York and suggests how what he saw was transferred, both literally and metaphorically, into his poems. At its most basic level, Bohan claims that Whitman’s poem “Pictures” is a catalogue of the art displayed at New York’s Crystal Palace exhibition hall. Indeed, she insists that Whitman was the great descriptive cataloguer of America’s visual scene; it is not a surprise that Whitman was especially interested in genre painting as done by everyone from naïve American artists to Jean-François Millet, whom the poet admired immensely. Whitman’s cataloguing was not indiscriminate, however. The ultimate point was always the spirituality of the art work: “That is its soul, its animose, and makes live art. The rest is but the matter, necessary to give embodiment to the life; but what is matter without life?” (p. 29)

Bohan does a good job with Whitman’s manipulation of his images, as in the dueling portraits done circa 1855 (discussed above), but she is better at deciphering Whitman’s more conflicted images of himself. She does a nice job with the more formal portrait of the poet which introduced the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. The engraving was done from a very formal oil painting of Whitman by the New York artist Charles Hine. The poet is shown in ruddy and powerful good health, his voluptuous hair and beard neatly groomed. The openness of his collar and the exposed flesh beneath contrast with the crisp whiteness of the shirt and the flamboyant elegance of the neck piece. On the one hand, Bohan argues, this is Whitman as he has arrived, at least in his own eyes, as a substantial figure in the world of American letters. Yet, Bohan finds, the solidity of this public image plays off against new poems written for the volume in which Whitman expressed his sense of the dichotomy between the public and private selves as well as how the true self could be masked in public appearance; “the real me,” he wrote, “stands untouched, untold, altogether unreached” (p. 42).

Bohan traces Whitman’s portraits through the war years and outlines how he became sanctified by artists who admired and wanted to associate themselves with the poet. She shows how the artist’s purpose was aided, paradoxically, by Whitman’s increasingly fragile health, a fragility that made the assertion of his identity even more fraught with conflict than it had been hitherto. At times this work verged on idolatry, and Whitman disparaged his image. For instance, he disliked the monumental portrait done in 1889 by John White Alexander as having “Bostonized” him, by which Whitman meant its conventionality reduced him to the level to the group of genteel writers whose company he had always eschewed! Fortunately, Whitman rebounded from his
association with artists he found less than proficient by forging an incredibly fruitful relationship with Thomas Eakins.

Artist and poet were temperamentally suited to each other, both finding in the other the qualities of robustness and frank directness that they admired. Among other things, as Bohan points out, they shared a common interest in rhetoric and the physical act of speaking. Eakins’ 1888 portrait of Whitman positions the poet’s mouth exactly in the center of the picture, and builds outward from that mouth to depict the poet as an aging but still powerful bard; the ancients sang their poetry, and Eakins reached back into the prehistory of literature to create the poet as a transcendent voice. As Whitman himself suggested, the picture made him part of nature. The strength of the painting, he summarized, is that the subject is “not ratified, not ‘improved’—but given simply as in nature” (p.121). Despite the oil painting’s power over him, Whitman suggested that he actually preferred Eakins’ photographs of him as perhaps more mechanical but yet more accurate. Eakins responded not by making his art more literal or empirical but, Bohan argues, by creating a symbolic representation of Whitman in his portrait of Weda Cook as The Concert Singer (1890–1892). In the portrait of the performer well known to and admired by Whitman and Eakins, the painter sublimated a message of consolation to the aging poet by using song as the metaphor through which all conflicts would disappear. Cook is shown singing Mendelssohn’s Elijah (the notes are inscribed on the frame), and Bohan identifies Elijah as Whitman in his role both as an outcast and as a prophetic voice singing a message of healing unity. Bohan identifies the conductor’s hand as Whitman’s and interprets the intrusion of the masculine into female space as part and parcel of Whitman’s polymorphic nature. The painting was completed after Whitman’s death, and Bohan suggests that the flowers Eakins added at the singer’s feet have a funereal and memorial function. They also are an explicit reference in Whitman’s verse to his great cause of union: “Lay on the graves of all dead soldiers, North or South, / (Nor for the past alone—for meanings to the future,) / Wreaths of roses and branches of palm.”

Bohan concludes that The Concert Singer marks a critical transition in American modernism, pioneering the way for art forms that carried on Whitman’s insistence on the spirituality of life as lived but divested of its physical or corporeal trappings. She concludes Looking into Walt Whitman with chapters on three American modernists, painters Marsden Hartley and Joseph Stella, and the writer and polemicist Robert Coady, who published the journal The Soil. These final chapters are fine studies of Whitman’s influence on American culture but they give the book a bifurcated aspect. The main problem is that the question of Whitman’s influence—and the equally important question, raised in verse by Ezra Pound, of resistance to him—can only be hinted at in a coda of three chapters. If Bohan wants to deal with this question in as comprehensive fashion as she has with Whitman’s portraits she needs to go beyond the survey that she presents here. Furthermore, the question of Whitman’s influence cannot just be assumed in the work of artists who paid tribute to him; Whitman as a general artistic inspiration is a far different thing from Whitman as a specific influence. For instance, there is no question that Walt Whitman played a major

Thomas Eakins, Walt Whitman, 1891. Platinum print. Photograph courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.
role in the career of Marsden Hartley, both as an artist and as a gay man. However, Hartley’s fastidiousness, both personal and artistic, is antithetical to Whitman’s ebullience; one simply cannot imagine Whitman ever expressing his love for another man as Hartley did in his symbolic and geometrical paintings for his German aviator. I would argue that Hartley’s didacticism—even the fact that he self-consciously knew too much—is the direct opposite of Whitman’s acceptance of uncertainty and his reveling in Keats’ state of “negative capability.” Hartley, instead, seems to exemplify the strain of reactionary modernism that typified artists as diverse as F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Regionalists. The question of Whitman’s artistic influence needs as detailed an examination as Bohan’s exemplary discussion of Whitman’s portraits.

David C. Ward is a historian at the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. He is the curator of the exhibition “One Life: Walt Whitman, a kosmos.”

NOTES

Nota Bene: At a time when publishing houses seem less and less interested in producing well-made and attractive books, the Pennsylvania State University Press is to be congratulated for how well they have served Ruth Bohan in the appearance of her book.


JENNIFER N. THOMPSON

Mark Kingwell, Nearest Thing to Heaven: The Empire State Building and American Dreams.
256 pp., illus., bibl. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006. $26.

The Department of Homeland Security’s determination in June 2006 that Manhattan has no remaining landmarks or icons following the destruction of the World Trade Center towers came as an amusing outrage to New Yorkers who orient themselves by the mast at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-Fourth Street. The pronouncement would also baffle the millions of annual visitors to the Empire State Building, and it must have been especially astonishing to the

small group of scholars who make this most quintessential of skyscrapers the subject of their study and who add to a steady stream of scholarship about the building, of which Mark Kingwell’s *The Nearest Thing to Heaven* is the latest, and most welcome, contribution.

Unlike most histories of the Empire State Building, such as Neal Bascomb’s *Higher: A Historic Race to the Sky and the Making of a City* (2003), which regard its construction as an act of egotistical building, Kingwell sees it instead as an act of cultural creation. Indeed, he claims that the Empire State Building “was constructed to be consumed as a cultural property, an image” (p. 46). His is the story of the creation of a skyscraper’s myth, both iconic and monumental; it is “the purest example anywhere of a building that enfolds an entire culture within itself,” Kingwell declares, and sets out to unravel the culture it encloses at the hands of filmmakers, writers, architects, tourists, souvenir makers, and, above all, the media. Icons are made, Kingwell reminds us, just as surely as buildings are built: such work is “the business of storytellers and their audience,” and it is this business with which Kingwell particularly occupies himself in *The Nearest Thing to Heaven*.

Kingwell recaps quickly the oft-told story of how, from the “forces of economic depression, cheap materials, and desperate labor” an unprecedented building project emerged (p. 3). Spearheaded by the charismatic politician Al Smith and the clever financier John Jakob Raskob, with the design inspiration of architect William Lamb, an against-all-odds tale of derring-do and *Fountainhead*-like ambition and vision, emerged a real-life parable of *citius, altius, fortius*—faster, higher, stronger. Kingwell reminds us, though, that a skyscraper rarely makes economic sense, so its meaning is not purely practical. For him, the Empire State Building is an expression of ideas more than a business venture, or the only possible formal outcome based on a set of real-estate and zoning determinants (as Carol Willis argues in her history of the building, *Form Follows Finance* [1995]).

A professor of philosophy at the University of Toronto, Kingwell writes eloquently, at times poetically, and draws on a breathtaking range of materials. He knows his sources and is as comfortable pulling from architectural theorists Robert Venturi, Aldo Rossi, and Rem Koolhaas, as he is from philosophers Ferdinand de Saussure, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Roland Barthes, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, and Paul Virilio.

Following Panofsky, Kingwell distin-
guishes between iconography, the reading of subsigns within an icon, and iconology, the reading of iconic meanings, sometimes hidden or encoded, against a cultural and political background. It is this latter kind of interpretation that Kingwell tasks himself. Iconology is, he reminds us, a diachronic process: icons can only be understood as “constantly shifting node[s] in a system of cultural self-regard and self-understanding” (p. 145). “We cannot even experience a building except over the course of time, and in this sense, too, it is invisible to us as a totality.” The Empire State itself is “a giddy simulacrum of time travel,” Kingwell concludes after visiting many of its back-in-time tenants (p. 123).

To understand the iconology of the Empire State Building, Kingwell mines film, philosophy, picture postcards (over a billion postcards featuring its image are produced every year, a number even Kingwell admits “invites doubt”), and countless other representations of the building, including models made of playing cards (135 decks required) and matchboxes (it took 3,212). More than one hundred films featuring the building have been made, but Kingwell focuses on the obvious King Kong and An Affair to Remember; Andy Warhol’s unknown eight-hour-long single-shot Empire (which, Kingwell reports, allegedly drove Valerie Solanas to try and take Warhol’s life); and the not-at-all obvious Elf. Kingwell similarly plumbs novels—Michael Chabon’s Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay and Don DeLillo’s White Noise appear—for differing perspectives on the building, New York, and the nature of city life.

Along the way, Kingwell muses on elites, technology, politics (democratic and fascist), power, sports, model making, nostalgia, terrorism, and, above all, the nature of icons (including pop figures and movie stars) to create a book that he himself describes as “peripatetic, maybe kaleidoscopic” (p. 22). Kingwell even reflects on the nature of boredom, something readers of this book simply will not feel: Nearest Thing to Heaven is an unfailingly interesting meditation on the world’s best-known, and, in Kingwell’s hands, its most interesting, building.

Without a more traditional chronological narrative, there is no complete or finished story here, no more than there is, in Kingwell’s mind, such a thing as a “complete” building. We can only understand the Empire State Building from a series of frames or viewpoints of the kind that Kingwell so skillfully and entertainingly lays out here. Readers who like their histories tied-up in a nice neat bundle by book’s end may find Kingwell’s peripatetic itinerary too rambling, possibly even disjointed. But no matter: like the steel girders that provide the framework to hang marble and brick, the Empire State Building, in Nearest Thing to Heaven, serves as the framework for an entertaining and enlightening journey with an original thinker and writer, proving Kingwell’s conclusion: “The function of this building is simply to exist, to be there.”

Jennifer N. Thompson is the editorial director at Princeton Architectural Press.


There is a painting1 illustrated in Lindsay Pollock’s *The Girl with the Gallery* which shows Edith Gregor Halpert selling a painting to an anonymous (male) client. They are seated in a pair of Donald Deskey brown leather swivel chairs on either side of a Deskey occasional table. It might be a domestic setting, but the client is still wearing a heavy overcoat. Halpert, by contrast, is wearing a light blue dress, showing a bit of white petticoat and leaning forward to the client, directing his eye and hers to the small painting, which he holds. Halpert is young, and, it seems to me, flirtatious. They are in the Daylight Gallery of her Downtown Gallery. A painting (possibly a Sheeler) hangs on the wall. It is an ideal setting for an art deal.

The commercial art world (and probably the noncommercial art world too) is all about the art of the deal and about possession. The literature of art is principally given over to surveys of artists, movements, collectors, museums, curators, criticism, and art auctions, but the role of the dealer is a little overlooked. There are dynastic dealerships (Agnew’s, Wildenstein, Knoedler), which have made their mark. Individual trailblazers (Vollard, Levy) who anticipated movements and or market trend are the subjects of careful monographs. I can think of no comprehensive survey of the art dealer as a discrete phenomenon. Edith Halpert, who is almost the first woman art dealer in America, was an obsessive keeper of records now securely preserved in the Archives of American Art. Her collections and her stock-in-trade (which may have amounted to the same thing) were dispersed by sale or auction, (which may have amounted to the same thing) were dispersed by sale or auction, not so much by design, but by mishap. The brain tumor which ultimately killed her could have been responsible for her otherwise inexplicable decision to revoke her existing will, without drafting any other. Collections, which might have been given to the Corcoran Gallery of Art or the Israel Museum, fell back into her general estate, to benefit only her heirs. But the Archives of American Art, which received her voluminous papers, and the public it serves are her real beneficiaries. Her biographer, Lindsay Pollock, is singularly fortunate and deals well with an overwhelming mass of documentation.

Edith Halpert (born around 1900 as Ginda Fivoosiovitch) was a Russian Jewish immigrant whose once-affluent parents had experienced hardship and prejudice in their native Russia and further hardship in their adopted country. Pollock stresses this as part of Halpert’s formation even though Halpert herself in an interview in later life discounted its effect: “The Odessa business . . . there’s nothing there” (p. 1). The immigrant experience may often be tough, but it is in no way exceptional. Her learning curve took in the early education that daily commercial life (dull and practical) ordinarily offers and which people “in the arts” usually avoid. It stood her in good stead, for art dealing is a strict discipline, if it is to be successful, with diligent (if occasionally creative) book- and record-keeping.

Halpert’s interest in art may well have been initially escapist. Escape from a home in which art had no place was first provided by the National Academy of Design (interrupted by the First World War) and second by the Art Students League, places she found more congenial. In both environ-
ments she appreciated the social life that opened up for her. It also closed another world, when her strait-laced, orthodox family discovered drawings by her from life class at the league. Effectively, they threw her out. (Moreover, her art was of no especial merit, as she was later to discover.) By day she pursued the regular existence of a more than competent businesswoman . . . at Bloomingdale’s, Macy’s, a furrier’s, and other outfits in the rag trade. Later still, she joined an investment bank (wearing work-appropriate tortoiseshell spectacles). She had become an organizational genius and efficiency consultant and by 1926, aged perhaps 26, she was earning $6,000 a year with a $10,000 bonus.

Parallel to this was her developing life in art. It provided her with a society and eventually a husband, Samuel Halpert, a mid-range artist who moved in the society of the New York avant-garde, although a deal of his formation had taken place in Paris. Importantly, she became an observer of the circle around Alfred Steiglitz and his Gallery 291, the very locus of modernism in America and, in terms of style and appearance, a sharp contrast with the staid red velvet of the conventional New York gallery. But Halpert also saw through the pretensions of Steiglitz—notably his contempt for the “commerce” of art and his failure to appreciate (as a trust fund beneficiary) the struggles of the poor artists he chose to represent. Only in later years when he saw her bring in her client Abby Aldrich Rockefeller did he grasp Halpert’s potential.

Before Halpert made the decision to open an art gallery in 1926 she had already immersed herself in the New York art world for some ten years and at the very end of that period she had spent time in Paris, further expanding her art horizons. (In Paris the problems in her marriage with Samuel Halpert perhaps came to a head.) Her business skills were well honed. She remained young and attractive (never a hindrance in the art trade), and she had ready cash. She had, particularly through her husband, come to know the important artists of the day—Abraham Walkowitz, Max Weber, John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, Stuart Davis, Yasuo Kunioshi, Walt Kuhn, Leon Kroll, and Marguerite and William Zorach. She was well connected to the new art institutions springing up in New York, notably the Whitney Studio Club (1918) founded by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Juliana Force, which was to develop by 1931 into the Whitney Museum of American Art. Perhaps most important of all, Halpert had developed a critical and analytical view of the art market.

The gallery, first called Our Gallery, was a partnership (with the shadowy Berthe Goldsmith, sister of Leon Kroll), which opened in November 1926, and a year later changed its name to the Downtown Gallery. From the beginning it was marketed. A mailing list in 1926 was an expensive rarity. Halpert created her own. The gallery announcement reads like a manifesto but with subtly gemütlich overtones: “a wide choice of paintings, sculptures. . . . all of dimensions proper
to the modern home. . . . Coffee Room will be open . . . evenings, after dinner” (p. 65).

Despite Halpert’s best efforts to avoid the aura of the polished urban gallery, she managed to appeal to affluent and well-heeled clients. It is as likely as not that the gallery might have failed had she not, more by chance than anything, encountered a patroness in the form of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, whose unexpected taste was roughly compatible with that of the gallery. Rockefeller’s budget (always carefully controlled and almost entirely free of impulse spending) made the difference. Beyond her interest in modern art, particularly American modern, she collected the folk art that Halpert had chosen to decorate the gallery. The collecting of folk art was in its infancy, promoted by Elie Nadelman in the early years of the century and taken up by Force at the Whitney Studio Club. Halpert saw the potential of folk art. Setting up with a curator, Eddie Cahill, who became a “runner” for her, she scoured the auctions and rural countryside of Pennsylvania for suitable works of forgotten art. (Cahill also became her lover.) Profits from the sales of folk art materially supported the gallery in the leanest of times.

Pollock also outlines the role a dynamic gallery has outside the strict confines of art dealing. Through the Rockefellers she came to be closely involved in the art projects required for the Radio City Music Hall and promoted additionally many of the artists she represented. This was to lead to the Rockefeller Center project with its abortive scheme for the notorious mural by Diego Rivera, and also to the controversial “Municipal Art Exhibition” that followed it. The Federal Art Project involved her as director of exhibitions on what might seem to any contemporary curator an unimaginable scale. By 1936, some 5,200 artists had been engaged, countrywide, on the project.

All this had the indirect result of supporting her gallery, and more importantly, her artists, many of whom had been seriously affected by the Depression. Only the Rockefellers and a handful of devotees kept the gallery together in the most difficult times when the income of the gallery was halved. Such stressful circumstances resulted in awkward exchanges with many of Edith’s own artists who had come to rely on her for a steady income. By the mid 1930s her dealings with one of the jewels in her crown, Stuart Davis, had caused him to leave the gallery; the two Zorachs followed soon after. Pollock’s pursuit of these fairly sordid tales of financial difficulty, which Halpert’s meticulous records so precisely adumbrate, comes over easily enough. Even her dealings with the difficult Stieglitz and his wary wife, Georgia O’Keeffe, teem with frustrations. Those occasional fits of depression to which the mercurial Halpert fell victim are so much more easily understood in the light of these challenges.

It is never particularly clear what kind of an “eye” Halpert possessed. She was certainly no connoisseur in the strict sense of the word. For example, her dealings in the work of the nineteenth-century realist William Harnett, whom she effectively rediscovered, transformed the finances of the gallery. She was mortified to discover later, however, that many of the paintings she had marketed as by Harnett were in reality painted by John F. Peto and perhaps others. Alfred Barr, the director of the
Museum of Modern Art (also taken in by the lure of Harnett) questioned the quality of some of the folk art pieces Halpert had sold Mrs. Rockefeller, who later donated them to the museum. By contrast, some of the greatest American paintings passed through Halpert’s hands: she acquired Raphaelle Peale’s *After the Bath* for $75, having discerned its quality through layers of grime. But she didn’t know who Peale was when the signature was exposed. With contemporary artists the matters were easier, and she adopted the practice of reserving the best paintings for her best collectors or institutions. Nor did her commercial instincts lead her to shy away from “difficult” paintings. Peter Blume’s controversial *South of Scranton* remained unsold on her walls for many years.

Halpert’s own sense of being an outsider induced her to support the African American community. She employed an African American member of staff from the beginning and in the 1940s launched an ambitious series of exhibitions including Jacob Lawrence’s first one-man show and a major exhibition “American Negro Art: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” (the impact of which was diminished by the attack on Pearl Harbor the day before the opening). Her support of social radicalism (Ben Shahn, Jack Levine) is powerful evidence of her own social independence.

The years after the Second World War perhaps marked the heyday of the Downtown Gallery. By then Halpert’s reputation was made. The gallery had already moved uptown, keeping its name. Its function in the 1950s was primarily to foster its relations with museums and collectors. Edith’s business acumen never let up. Thematic exhibitions constantly explored the ways in which art made its claims on society. “Art for the Office” (1953) reflected her interest in building up corporate art collections and making deals with businessmen, most notably Joseph Hirshhorn.

Success, and the power that came with it, did not make Halpert an easier person to deal with. Always controlling, she became more so. Her physical health deteriorated and she became dependent on others. She felt the threat of newer movements in art. She admired Pollock and de Kooning but did not attempt to deal in their works. She seemed to despise Andy Warhol. Lindsay Pollock puts it succinctly: “Edith’s gallery roster had become the establishment” (p. 358). The bitter irony was that she had become what once she had herself rebelled against.

Halpert’s decline and death makes sad, if salutary, reading. By contrast the fate of her collections, “the stuff,” rather like Andy Warhol’s “stuff,” revives interest in this almost tragic figure. Both she and Warhol come to life in their archives, although both of them might have been surprised as to the extent to which their possessions authenticate their existences.

Graham Shearing is a Pittsburgh-based writer and critic. He once owned a gallery.

NOTES
Recent Acquisitions

Laura Orgon MacCarthy

Miriam Beerman Papers addition, 1945–2006
Donor: Miriam Beerman (b. 1923)
Biographical material, letters, writings, photographs, newspaper clippings, exhibition announcements, catalogues, and DVDs.
(1.0 linear ft.)
These materials are related to Beerman’s career as a painter and printmaker. Included are two DVDs of artist books by Beerman: Three Sentences Beginning with the Letter S (2006), which features poems by Halvard Johnson and others; and Washing the Corpse (2006), which is based on a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke and narrated by Beerman.

J. B. Blunk Interview
Interview of J. B. Blunk conducted by Glenn Adamson for the Archives of American Art’s Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at the artist’s home in Inverness, California, on 16 March 2002. (2 audio cassettes, 2 hrs.; transcript, 61 pp. at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/blunk02htm)
J. B. Blunk was a California woodworker who made monumental sculptures. This interview was completed with the help of the artist’s daughter Mariah Nielsen before the artist’s death in 2003. Blunk speaks about taking classes with ceramic artist Laura Andreson at the University of California, Los Angeles; meeting Isamu Noguchi at a Mingei ceramic shop; apprenticing to potter Kitaoji Rosanjin; and working in Japan with potter Toyo Kaneshige. The artist discusses his bench entitled Seating Sculpture (1968–1969) and his sculpture Six Stones (1993), and talks about his use of shoe dye to blacken his works.

Alson Skinner Clark Papers addition, 1870–1971
Donor: Deborah Lee Clark
Alson Skinner Clark (1876–1947)
Letters, photographs, and a card file inventory.
(6.7 linear ft.)
This addition to the Archives’ sizeable collection of the papers of painter Alson Skinner Clark contains letters from Clark to Amelia [Mela] Baker, Clark’s brothers Mancel Talcott

Clark and Edwin Hill Clark (who worked for Wadsworth-Howland, a paint company in Chicago), and others; five photographs; and a card file inventory detailing the title, date, size, canvas, varnish, and exhibition history of works Clark painted between 1903 and 1911.

Robert Cremean Photographs, ca. 1960
Donor: Robert D. Ehrlich
Robert Cremean (b. 1932)
Photographs. (12 items)
Of the twelve photographs in this collection, eleven document a Robert Cremean sculpture exhibition held around 1960 at the Esther-Robles Gallery in Los Angeles; two of these photographs show Cremean. Another photograph by an unknown photographer shows Cremean’s sculpture Three Figures.

Leonard Creo Papers, 1951–2003
Donor: Leonard Creo (b. 1923)
Correspondence, writings, photographs, two sketchbooks, a transcript of an audio recording, financial material, exhibition announcements, clippings, and other printed material. (1.0 linear ft.)
Painter Leonard Creo studied mural painting for three years in Mexico City with José Gutierrez and David Alfaro Siqueiros and then for one year in Italy with Pietro Annigoni. Correspondents in Creo’s papers are the ACA galleries, the Carter Gallery, the Shayne Gallery, Rooksmoor Gallery, and the Portal Gallery. Writings in the collection include “My Friend,” a typescript by Richard E. Heller about Creo; and notes entitled “Media Developed by Gutierrez for David Siqueiros and Diego Rivera,” ca. 1951. The photographs are of Creo and his works, and the financial materials include price lists of paintings, sales receipts, and receipts from the Morris Singer Foundry, Ltd., London. The radio transcript contains Creo’s recollections of Mexico City, where he studied under the GI Bill.

Patricia Faure Interview
Patricia Faure (b. 1928)
Interview of Patricia Faure conducted by Susan Ehrlich for the Archives of American Art, at the artist’s home in Beverly Hills, California, on 17, 22, and 24 November 2004. (6 digital recording discs, 5 hrs., 20 min.; transcript, 104 pp. at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/faure04.htm)
Art dealer Patricia Faure speaks about her early childhood in Wisconsin and her family’s move to California. She talks about attending Hollywood High School, meeting young stars, taking classes later at the New School of Social Research in New York City, meeting Joseph Cornell, and opening the Asher-Faure Gallery with Betty Asher. Faure talks about the growth of galleries and art museums in Southern California; art writers Christopher Knight, Suzanne Muchnic, David Pagel, Leah Ollman, Holly Myers, and others; and discusses how the art market is independent of the stock market. Faure recalls Jo Baer, Billy Al Bengston, Irving Blum, Sam Francis, Rico Lebrun, Man Ray, Ed Moses, Larry Rivers, and Frank Sinatra.

Rosamund Felsen Interview
Rosamund Felsen (b. 1934)
Interview of Rosamund Felsen conducted by Anne Ayres for the Archives of American Art, at the dealer’s home in the Loz Feliz Heights section of Los Angeles, California, on 10 and 11 October 2004. (5 digital recording discs, 5 hrs.; transcript, 93 pp. at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/felsen04.htm).
Art dealer Rosamund Felsen discusses her involvement with such “political” artists as Jeffrey Vallance, her thoughts on other Los Angeles galleries of the 1970s, the influence of the Beatnik movement on L.A. art, the financial ramifications of exhibiting Conceptual art, and the importance of art schools in forming a regional art scene. Felsen describes her ambivalence about feminist art, the differences between high art and design, her relationships with various collectors, and her definitions of the terms “art world” and “taste.” Felsen talks about her marriages to Vern Hinderer and Sidney Felsen, and recalls Virginia Dwan, Tim Ebner, Tom Hanks, Patrick Hogan, Man Ray, Lari Pittman, and others.

Fiberworks, Center for the Textile Arts Records, 1973–1987
Donor: Gyöngy Laky (b. 1944)
Minutes of the Board of Trustees meetings, statements of purpose, brochures, exhibition announcements, newsletters, miscellaneous printed material, photographs, slides, and audio and video tapes. (3.3 linear ft.)
Fiberworks, Center for the Textile Arts in
Berkeley, California, was founded in 1973 by sculptor Gyöngy Laky and offered undergraduate and graduate programs in the fiber arts. The center fostered growth and experimentation in the field of textile arts and influenced many designer-craftsmen. Among the printed material in this collection is a copy of Fiberfinder, a guide to Bay Area fiber sources, and photographs of artists Trude Guermontprez, Sheila Hicks, David Ireland, Jan Janeiro, Laurie Kovak, Laky, Tina Martin, Nance O’Banion, Maureen O’Hara, Sheila O’Hara, Sylvia Seventy, Weldon Smith, Katherine Westphal, and others. Audio and video material includes one video tape entitled Fiberworks: Symposium on Contemporary Textile Art 1978, and thirty-four audio cassette tapes of interviews, lectures, panel discussions, symposia, and Fiberworks events featuring such artists as Neda Al-Hilali, Joanne Brandford, Daniel Grafkin, Ferne Jacobs, Ina Kozel, Chere Mah, and Sylvia Seventy.

Donor: Noel Frackman (b. 1930)
John Henry Bradley Storrs (1885–1956)
Correspondence, writings, photographs, slides, and printed material. (2.0 linear ft.)

Art historian Noel Frackman conducted research on modernist sculptor John Henry Bradley Storrs. This collection includes chronologies of Storrs’ life; correspondence with Edgar Miller about a 1952 exhibition of the sculptor’s work; Frackman’s published and unpublished writings on Storrs; photographs of Storrs, his daughter Monique, and his home Château de Chantecaille in Mer, France; and photographs and slides of sculptures, paintings, graphics, and other objects by Storrs. Printed material includes exhibition catalogues, invitations, reviews, published articles regarding Frackman, and material concerning the Storrs exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art (1986–1987).

E. C. Goossen Papers addition, 1931–1988
Donor: Patricia Johanson
E. C. Goossen (d. 1997)
Lecture notes, exhibition announcements, clippings, photographs, negatives, one interview transcript, and four audio cassettes. (4.4 linear ft.)

E. C. Goossen was an art critic and a professor of art history who taught at Bennington College and Hunter College of the City University of New York. This collection contains Goossen’s lecture notes; exhibition announcements and clippings; photographs (including negatives) of Goossen, his friends, family, and works; an undated transcript of an interview with Ellsworth Kelly; and an interview on audio cassettes with Robert Morris conducted 6 and 13 December 1969.
Vincent Grimaldi Papers, 1967–2004
Donor: Vincent Grimaldi (b. 1929)

Correspondence, writings, printed material, lists of works of art, artist’s statements, and miscellany. (0.2 linear ft.)

Vincent Grimaldi’s career as an assemblage artist, painter, and photographer is documented in this collection. The papers include Grimaldi’s brief recollections of Paul Cadmus, Ray Johnson, William H. Littlefield, and Reginald Marsh. Correspondents include David Bourdon, Cadmus, and Johnson. Also included are exhibition announcements, newspaper clippings, and postcards about Grimaldi and Johnson (most of them photocopies).

Henry Halem Interview
Henry Halem (b. 1938)

Interview of Henry Halem conducted by William Warmus for the Archives of American Art’s Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at the artist’s home in Kent, Ohio, on 14 May 2005. (3 digital recording discs, 5 hrs., 10 min.; transcript, 81 pp. at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/halem05.htm)

Glass artist and educator Henry Halem speaks of his family background and growing up in the Bronx, New York; attending the Rhode Island School of Design and studying ceramics; working as resident craftsman at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; and opening a gallery and studio in Alexandria, Virginia. He talks about transferring to the University of Wisconsin, Madison, for his graduate degree, and describes working as Harvey Littleton’s glass studio assistant. Halem describes Littleton’s teaching methods and talks about making “political” pieces, selling his work to the Corning Museum of Glass, and writing his book GlassNotes. He talks about founding the Glass Art Society and how it has changed throughout the years. Halem recalls Jaroslava Brychtova, Dale Chihuly, Fritz Dreisbach, Erwin Eisch, Audrey Handler, Dominick Labino, Stanislav Libensky, Marvin Lipolsky, Mark Peiser, Don Reitz, Peter Voulkos, and others.

Murray Hantman Papers, 1940–2006
Donor: Portland Museum of Art

Correspondence, sketchbooks, color studies, lists of works sold, photographs, biographical material, research notes, and miscellany. (1.3 linear ft.)

Muralist and painter Murray Hantman summered on Monhegan Island in Maine for more than thirty years. The papers in this collection contain research material on Murray Hantman compiled by Jessica Nicoll, curator at the Portland Museum of Art, for the exhibition Murray Hantman, sketch of an ice cream and lemonade vendor, 1928. Pencil on paper. Murray Hantman Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

“Murray Hantman: From Image to Abstraction.” Photographs in the collection are of Hantman, his wife Jo Levy, and works of art.

Hans Hofmann Papers addition, 1904–1978
Donor: Hans Hofmann Trust
Hans Hofmann (1880–1966)

Typescripts and notes for “Das Malerbuch: Form und Farbe in der Gestaltung” by Hofmann. (1.0 linear ft.)

“Das Malerbuch: Form und Farbe in der Gestaltung” is about Hofmann’s theories on form, color, and space. Based on notes begun in Paris circa 1904, Hofmann wrote this while he was teaching a summer session at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1931. Although Hofmann produced additional notes and revisions over the next two decades, the manuscript remains unpublished.

Wilhelmina Cole Holladay Interview
Wilhelmina Cole Holladay (b. 1922)

Interview of Wilhelmina Cole Holladay conducted by Krystyna Wasserma for the Archives of American Art, at the collector’s home in Washington, D.C., on 17 and 24 August and 16 and 23 September 2005. (4 digital recording discs, 3 hrs., 51 min.; transcript, 57 pp. at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/hollad05.htm)

Founder of the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Wilhelmina Cole Holladay speaks of her first exposure to the work of women artists Rosa Bonheur and Louise-Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun; working as a social secretary for Madame Chiang Kai-shek; and beginning her collection of work by women artists.
while living in McLean, Virginia. She talks about her favorite exhibitions at the museum, including those on Grandma Moses, Berthe Morisot, Georgia O’Keeffe, Frida Kahlo, Emily Carr, and Julie Taymor; and her hopes for the museum’s future. She recalls Marion Campbell, Helga Carter, Claire Getty, Cynthia Helms, Gwen John, Joel Macy, Louise Nevelson, Linda Nochlin, Hester Beall Provensen, and others.

**Carl Holty Papers addition, 1860–1965**  
*Donor: Virginia Liles*  
*Carl Holty (1900–1973)*  
Photographic prints, tintypes, *cartes de visite*, and cabinet prints. (1.0 linear ft.)  
Carl Holty lived in New York and is best known for his abstract canvases of pure geometric forms. This collection, which was given to the Archives of American Art by Holty’s biographer, Virginia Liles, contains images of Holty’s family members, friends, works of art, and studios.

**Daniel Jacobs and Derek Mason Papers, 1970–1993**  
*Donor: Derek Mason (b. 1927)*  
*Daniel Jacobs (1940–2004)*  
Correspondence, résumés, exhibition files, slides, photographs, exhibition announcements, catalogues, financial records, and other printed material. (8.0 linear ft.)  
Daniel Jacobs and Derek Mason began collecting ceramics in 1979 and within five years they had amassed a collection of more than eight hundred objects. The intimacy, honesty, and thoughtfulness conveyed in spirited, handwritten letters in this collection testify to the close relationships both Jacobs and Mason formed with artists. The collection includes correspondence with dealers Charles Cowles, Helen Drutt, Leslie Ferrin, and Nicolas Rodriguez, and correspondence with artists Laura Andreson, Rudy Autio, Clayton Bailey, Mary Jo Bole, Arthur Gonzalez, Michael Lucero, Ken Little, and Patti Warashina.

**Ferne Jacobs Interview**  
*Ferne Jacobs (b. 1942)*  
Interview of Ferne Jacobs conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art’s Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at the artist’s home in Los Angeles, California, on 30 and 31 August 2005. (4 digital recording discs, 5 hrs., 6 min.; transcript, 84 pp. at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/jacobs05.htm)  
Ferne Jacobs is a fiber artist who uses ancient basket weaving techniques to create fiber works of unusual shapes and colors. In this interview, the artist discusses her first art classes with Ron Blumberg during her senior year of high school; meeting Dominic di Mare in San Francisco and Lenore Tawney in New York; her first foray “off the loom” at the suggestion of Arline M. Fisch; and her second show at the Fairtree Gallery in New York, where Paul J. Smith, curator of the Museum of Contemporary Craft, first saw her work. Jacobs talks about her artworks, including *Container for a Wind* (1974), *Wind* (2004), and *Tide* (2005), and the various fiber techniques, including twining, coiling, and knotting, she used to make them. Jacobs also recalls Magdalena Abakanowicz, Neda Al-Hilali, Kate Anderson, Gabriel Laderman, Jack Lenor Larsen, Nancy Margolis, Agnes Martin, Francis Sumner Merritt, Marilyn Pappas, Joanne Rapp, Kay Sekimachi, and others.

**Anthony F. Janson Research Material on Worthington Whittredge addition, 1969–2003**  
*Donor: Anthony F. Janson (b. 1943)*  
*Worthington Whittredge (1820–1910)*  
Letters. (0.2 linear ft.)  
This addition to the Anthony F. Janson research material on Worthington Whittredge consists of correspondence with auction houses and individuals about Janson’s appraisal of paintings and sketches attributed to Whittredge.

**Michael John Jerry Interview**  
*Michael John Jerry (b. 1937)*  
Interview of Michael John Jerry conducted by Jan Yager for the Archives of American Art’s
Karen Karnes (b. 1925) has been making functional salt-glazed pottery pieces in the United States and Europe for more than fifty years. In this interview she talks about attending the High School of Music and Art in New York City, taking a class with Serge Chermayoff at Brooklyn College, attending a summer session at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, taking a class with Josef Albers, and starting Gatehill Community in Stony Point, New York. She discusses her techniques for making pottery, including the first time she used a salt kiln in 1967. Karnes recalls Paulus Berensohn, John Cage, Garth Clark, Shoji Hamada, Goren Holmquist, Jack Lenor Larsen, Bernard Leach, Warren MacKenzie, Mary Caroline Richards, Marguerite Wildenhain, Paul and Vera B. Williams, Soetsu Yanagi, and Mikhail Zakin.

Kennedy Galleries Miscellaneous Records addition, 1864–1980
Donor: Martha Fleischman
Photographs, glass slides, glass plate negatives, a business card, letters of introduction, financial records, and printed material. (1.3 linear ft.)

Among the five hundred photographs in this collection are pictures of Walt Kuhn and of his works of art, painter John Steuart Curry and of his works of art, painter William Holbrook Beard in his studio, and painter Thomas Bigelow Craig in his studio. Also included are papers concerning painter Vincent Colyer, including his business card, letters of introduction from Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman, receipts and other financial accounts, and printed material including “Report of the Hon. Vincent Colyer, United States Special Indian Commissioner, on the Indian Tribes and their surroundings in Alaska Territory, from personal observation and inspection in 1869” and “Brief Report of the Services Rendered by the Freed People to the United States Army in North Carolina, in the Spring of 1862, after the Battle of Newbern, by Vincent Colyer.”

William King Papers addition, 1910–2005
Donor: William King (b. 1925)
Biographical material, correspondence, photographs, business files, writings, exhibition catalogues, invitations, announcements, clippings, awards, works of art, a sketchbook, and a blueprint. (3.3 linear ft.)

This addition to the papers of New York artist and art educator William King includes business and personal correspondence as well as printed material related to his career as a sculptor.

Silas Kopf Interview
Silas Kopf (b. 1949)
Interview of Silas Kopf conducted by Edward Cooke for the Archives of American Art’s Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at the artist’s studio in Easthampton, Massachusetts, on 1 October 2001. (3 digital recording discs, 3 hrs.; transcript, 60 pp. at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/kopf04.htm)
Known for the marquetry in his furniture pieces, Kopf speaks of growing up in Pennsylvania, getting a degree in architecture at Princeton University, working at Wendell Castle’s studio and at the Leeds Design Workshop, traveling to Italy to examine Renaissance intarsia panels, exploring portraiture and trompe l’oeil styles, choosing furniture designs, participating in exhibitions, pricing his work, working on commission, and teaching workshops. Kopf also talks about his favorite furniture pieces and how the market for and general interest in studio furniture has changed. He recalls James Krenov, George Nakashima, Stephen Proctor, and others.

Brenda Kuhn Notes Concerning Walt Kuhn, 1974–1985

Walt Kuhn (1877–1949)

Notebook. (1 item)

Brenda Kuhn was the daughter of Walt Kuhn, a painter and one of the organizers of the 1913 Armory Show. Her notebook contains material written by Kuhn about her father. In the form of recollections of conversations she had with individuals, Kuhn reflects on her father’s legacy. She recounts conversations with Juliana Force and Eloise Spaeth, and writes her recollections of Alfred Barr, Arthur B. Davies, and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, among others. Also included are notes regarding a meeting in October 1974 with Garnett McCoy, then deputy director of the Archives of American Art.

Golda Lewis Papers, 1961–2003

Donor: Golda Lewis (d. 2005)

Résumés, letters, exhibition catalogues, announcements, printed material, two videotapes, and photographs. (1.5 linear ft.)

New York assemblage artist and papermaker Golda Lewis was an innovator in the use of handmade paper as an expressive medium. She invented “compages,” a cross between collage and assemblage, by embedding fiber, metal, wood, glass, and other materials in paper pulp that she colored and molded. The videotapes are “Golda Lewis: A Life’s Work” (2003) and “Golda Lewis Art Tape” (1974). Photographs are of Lewis, her works of art, her papermaking process, and exhibition installations.

Abraham Manievich Papers, 1883–1973

Donor: Alan Pensler

Abraham Manievich (1881–1973)

Correspondence, newspaper clippings, one scrapbook, and printed material. (2.6 linear ft.)

Post-Impressionist painter Abraham Manievich was born in Russia and immigrated to the United States in 1922, when he was in his early forties. His subjects were village and country scenes of Ukrainia and Lithuania, and street scenes of Moscow, Kiev, and Petrograd (present-day St. Petersburg). Letters in this collection are from David Burliuk, Boris Grigoriev, Sam Ostrowsky, Joseph Stern, and others. The scrapbook contains articles in Hebrew, Russian, and English.

Judy Kensley McKie Interview

Judy Kensley McKie (b. 1944)

Interview of Judy Kensley McKie conducted by Ned Cooke for the Archives of American Art’s Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at the artist’s studio in Medford, Massachusetts, on 22 November 2004. (3 digital recording discs, 4 hrs.; transcript, 88 pp. at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/mckie04.htm)

Woodworker Judy McKie describes struggling to make ends meet while living in Boston in the 1960s, and making furniture, even a tricycle for her son, out of need. Today she is known worldwide for her innovative and spirited furniture designs. In this interview the artist talks about growing up in Massachusetts, making wall hangings and other early projects with her husband Todd McKie, exhibiting her work at Design Research in Boston, joining New Hamburger Cabinetworks, being a self-taught furniture maker, using animal imagery in her work, making small-scale objects out of resin, and working on public art projects. In addition to discussing the future of furniture.
making, McKie recalls Garry Knox Bennett, Wendell Castle, Ted Dodd, Mary Gregory, James Krenov, Alphonse Mattia, and others.

**Letters from George McNeil to Adele Travisano, 1972–1993**  
**Donor:** Adele Travisano (b. 1944)  
George McNeil (1908–1995)  
Letters and postcards. (10 items)  
In these ten letters and two postcards to Adele Travisano, his former student, McNeil wrote about exhibitions, books, painting materials, his health, and other topics.

**Francis Davis Millet and Millet Family Papers, 1987**  
**Donor:** Frank D. Millet  
Francis Davis Millet (1846–1912)  
Letters. (2 items)  
This collection consists of two handwritten letters from John Singer Sargent to Francis Davis Millet written 20 October [1887] and “Monday” [ca. August 1887].

**Papers Regarding the Restructuring of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1997–1999**  
**Donor:** Patricia Hills  
Correspondence, clippings, diaries, printed material, and miscellany. (1.0 linear ft.)  
These papers are about the 1999 restructuring of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), when Jonathan L. Fairbanks, curator of American decorative arts and sculpture, was dismissed and the decorative arts department at the MFA was dissolved. Included in this collection is a bound volume of the MFA’s strategic plan entitled *One Museum, New Museum, Great Museum: The Plan to Transform the MFA* [Boston] (1997), correspondence regarding the MFA Museum School, Hills’ notes and a diary (4 July–15 December 1999), newspaper clippings and other printed material about the MFA’s restructuring, and miscellany. Also in the collection is a typescript of a lecture, “Active and Passive Voices,” delivered at the Sterling and Francis Clark Art Institute, 9 April 1999, by William Truettner, a senior curator of painting and sculpture, Smithsonian American Art Museum.

**Park Place Gallery Art Research Records and the Paula Cooper Gallery Records, 1964–1973**  
**Donor:** Paula Cooper (b. 1938)  
Project files, artists’ files, correspondence, financial and legal records, newspaper clippings, exhibition announcements, photographs, and slides of works of art, artists, and art installations. (6.0 linear ft.)  
Park Place Gallery was one of the first artist-run cooperatives. Members of this group were later represented by the Paula Cooper Gallery, the first art gallery to open in New York’s SoHo district.

**Poindecker Gallery Records, 1956–1999**  
**Donor:** Christie Poindecker Dennis  
Files, photographs, negatives, printed material, and miscellany. (3.0 linear ft.)  
Among the papers of New York collectors and gallery owners Elinor and George Poindecker are files on Willem de Kooning, Richard Diebenkorn, Robert De Niro, Earl Kerkam, Franz Kline, Milton Resnick, and Giorgio Spaventa. Also included are photographs, negatives, and slides of works of art; and legal records regarding Spaventa’s estate.

**Viktor Schreckengost Papers, addition, 1933–1947**  
**Donor:** Viktor Schreckengost Foundation  
Viktor Schreckengost (b. 1906)  
Correspondence, photographs, sketches, newspaper and magazine clippings, and miscellany. (60 items)  
Industrial designer and educator Viktor Schreckengost designed mass-produced dinnerware for the American Limoges China Company. The correspondence in this addition to his papers includes letters from the artist to the manufacturer. Photographs are of his dinnerware production lines, and eight color renderings are of his “refrigerator ware.” The clippings from various publications feature Schreckengost’s designs.

**Honoré Sharrer Papers, 1927–2002**  
**Donor:** Perez Zagorin  
Honoré Sharrer (b. 1920)  
Résumés, biographical statements, letters, sketchbooks, drawings, and photographs. (10.0 linear ft.)  
Influenced by Ben Shahn and George Tooker, Honoré Sharrer in the late 1940s...
became a well-known magic realist painter who juxtaposed ordinary objects with outlandish animals. The correspondence in this collection includes letters from Peter Blume, Lincoln Kirstein, M. Knoedler and Company, Madeleine Ellen Poland (Sharrer’s mother), May Stevens, Honoré Sachs (Sharrer’s grandmother), George Tooker, and others. The photographs and negatives are of Sharrer, her family, friends, houses, and works of art.

Manny Silverman Interview

Manny Silverman (b. 1941)

Interview of Manny Silverman conducted by Anne Ayres for the Archives of American Art, at the Manny Silverman Gallery in Los Angeles, California, on 10 and 11 December 2004. (2 digital recording discs, 2 hrs., 30 min.; transcript, 47 pp. at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/silver04.htm)

Los Angeles gallery owner Silverman discusses his Russo-Jewish parents and his childhood in Los Angeles, working as a social worker before starting at the Ernest Raboff Gallery as a research assistant, opening Art Services with Jerry Solomon, and establishing his own gallery on La Cienega Boulevard. He discusses his ideas on how artists are influenced by other artists, the political aspects of museums, and operating a gallery with a narrow focus on Abstract Expressionism. Silverman recalls Edward Dugmore, Rudi Gernreich, Philip Guston, Paul Kantor, Klaus Kertess, Joan Mitchell, Shaun Regen, Gerhard Richter, Paul Schimmel, David Stuart, and others.

Michael Simon Interview

Michael Simon (b. 1947)

Interview of Michael Simon conducted by Mark Shapiro for the Archives of American Art’s Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at the artist’s home and studio in Colbert, Georgia, on 27 and 28 September 2005. (3 digital recording discs, 3 hrs., 10 min.; transcript, 52 pp. at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/simon05.htm)

Potter Michael Simon is best known for the serene yet playful designs he paints on his pieces. The artist discusses studying at the University of Minnesota with Warren MacKenzie, obtaining conscientious objector status, and working at a hospital in Athens, Georgia. He talks about using various materials for his pots, including Georgia kaolin and English grolleg; experimenting with images such as fish and bamboo; and getting a large commission for dinner plates from the Nakato Restaurant in Atlanta. Simon describes being inspired by Chinese Yangshao pottery from the Neolithic period; going to Cortona, Italy, where he taught pottery for the University of Georgia; and visiting Santiago, Chile, where he taught, traveled, and learned Chilean pottery techniques. He discusses the writing of Michael Cardew and its influence on his work and career, and recalls Cynthia Bringle, Wayne Branum, Shoji Hamada, Gib Krohn, Angel Lillo, Earl McCutcheon, Ron Myers, Andy Nasisse, Mark Pharis, and others.


Donor: Paul J. Smith (b. 1931)

Copyprints. (5 items)

The five digital copyprints of photographs taken by arts administrator and curator Paul J. Smith are of fiber artist Alice Kagawa Parrott in and around her home in Santa Fe, New Mexico (16 July 2004); and of artist and gallery owner Jane Sauer in her home studio in St. Louis, Missouri (1985), and in her gallery (11 July 2005). These prints were collected as part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

George Sugarman Papers addition, 1975–1990

Donor: George Sugarman Foundation

George Sugarman (1912–1999)

Audio and video recordings. (1.0 linear ft.)

George Sugarman made collages, prints, paintings, and large- and small-scale pedestal-free works of abstract shapes, which are painted in vivid colors.


These audio and video recordings complement the Sugarman collection, which documents the sculptor’s career primarily through correspondence, project files, exhibition files, writings, and photographs.

Toshiko Takaezu Interview
Toshiko Takaezu (b. 1922)
Interview of Toshiko Takaezu conducted by Gerry Williams for the Archives of American Art’s Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at the artist’s home in Quakertown, New Jersey, on 16 June 2003. (2 audio cassettes, 1 hr., 40 min.; transcript, 33 pp., available only at the Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.).

Known for her closed-form ceramic pots, Toshiko Takaezu has been working with clay for more than forty years. Moving from functional works to ornamental pots, Takaezu has made many innovations in size, color, and form. In this interview the artist describes growing up in a large family in Hawaii, working with Claude Horan, studying ceramics at Cranbrook Academy of Art with Maija Grotell, visiting artists in Japan, and setting up a studio in Clinton, New Jersey. She talks about how religion factors into her work, and describes her career highlights, the inspiration she finds in nature, her role in political and social activities, her teaching philosophy, the role of universities and apprenticeships in the craft movement, the changing face of the American craft movement, and her relationship with galleries, including Perimeter and the Charles Cowles Gallery. She also recalls Claude Horan, Otagaki Rengetsu, Kitaoji Rosanjin, Jeff Schlanger, Kaneshige Toyo, and others.

Bob Thompson Papers, 1955–2000
Donor: Elaine Plenda
Bob Thompson (1937–1966)
Biographical material, business and personal correspondence, writings, photographs, printed material, inventories, checklists, price lists, questionnaires, and miscellany. (1.2 linear ft.)

African American painter Bob Thompson used bright colors and flattened perspectives. The artist became well known as a painter in the 1960s, which was unusual for an African American artist at the time, but his life was unexpectedly cut short in 1966 just before his twenty-ninth birthday. Photographs in this collection are of Thompson, his family, his studio, and his friends Christopher Lane, Ornette Coleman, Robert Beauchamp, and others. Questionnaires entitled “Comments and information regarding Bob Thompson” were completed by Margaret Bridwell, Dario A. Covi, Carl Crodel, Allen Ginsberg, LeRoi Jones, Mary Spencer Nay, and Meyer Schapiro. Also included are memorial poems by A. B. Spellman and Jones.

Robert Trotman Interview
Robert Trotman (b. 1947)
Interview of Robert Trotman conducted by Carla Hanzal for the Archives of American Art’s Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at the artist’s home and studio in Casar, North Carolina, on 14 September 2005. (4 digital recording discs, 3 hrs., 20 min.; transcript, 51 pp. at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/trotma05.htm)

North Carolina sculptor Robert Trotman’s carved wooden sculptures are inspired by regional woodworking traditions. The artist discusses his first interest in woodworking, his involvement with the Penland School of Crafts and its influence on his work, his first visits to galleries in New York, his thoughts on the difference between art and craft, and why he stopped making furniture in 1997. He talks about his major artistic influences, including Martin Puryear, Judith Shea, and James Surls; his academic background in philosophy and his attraction to existentialism; and his view of America as a puritanical country and of upper-class Americans as “wooden” and lacking feeling and soul. He describes his fascination with his grandmother’s collection of four- and five-inch-tall wooden figures of European peasants. He discusses the influence and support of his wife Jane Trotman, and recalls Stephan Balkenhol, John Currin, Julie Heffernan, Stuart Kestenbaum, Robert Lazzarini, Sam Maloof, Robert Morris, Ron Mueck, Evan Penny, Tom Spleth, and others.

Rengetsu, Kitaoji Rosanjin, Jeff Schlanger, Kaneshige Toyo, and others.
Jock Truman Papers, 1949–2004

Donor: Jock Truman (b. 1920)

Correspondence and a curriculum vitae. (38 items)

Jock Truman is the former director of the Betty Parsons Gallery and the Jock Truman Gallery, both in New York. The collection contains correspondence, including personal letters and postcards to Truman from friends and artists. Among the correspondents are Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Helen Feeley, Helen Frankenthaler, Miriam Gabo, Naum Gabo, Henri Ghent, Grace Glueck, Adele Lovett, Albert Maysles, Sam Miller, Eliza Moore, Louise Nevelson, Betty Parsons, Lucio Pozzi, Saul Steinberg, Marsha Tucker, Ruth Washburn, Nancy Wolfe, and Ruth Vollmer.

John Weber Interview

John Weber (b. 1932)

Interview of John Weber conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, at the art dealer’s home in Chatham, New York, on 21 March and 4 April 2006. (2 digital recording discs, 3 hrs., 25 min.; transcript, 62 pp. at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/weber06.htm)

Art dealer John Weber discusses his education at St. Catherine’s Military School in California, and the Admiral Farragut Academy in St. Petersburg, Florida. He describes working at the Dayton Art Institute, the Martha Jackson Gallery, and the Dwan Gallery; and getting involved with land artists Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, and Walter De Maria. He talks about the John Weber Gallery, his involve-

Paul Wonner Papers, 1956–2005

Donor: Paul Wonner (b. 1920)

Photographs, exhibition announcements, catalogues, printed material, a scrapbook, and miscellany. (1.0 linear ft.)

San Francisco painter Paul Wonner studied at the Art Students League in New York and is now best known for his still lifes. The scrapbook contains clippings about Wonner, photographs of him and his friends, and approximately three hundred works of art by Wonner. The printed material is related to painter William Theophilus Brown, one of Wonner’s longtime friends and colleagues.

In 1948, critic and philanthropist Lincoln Kirstein published an essay titled “The State of Modern Painting” in Harper’s Bazaar. Kirstein was concerned that the abstract and nonobjective painting becoming prevalent at that time were tending dangerously toward “irivolity” and “dilettantism,” and he wanted to assert the primacy of “technique” over “trend.” Kirstein preferred representational work, and this piece lauded both historical and contemporary painters whom he admired, among them Antoine Watteau, Gustave Courbet, Georges Seurat, and postwar realists Ben Shahn, George Tooker, and Paul Cadmus. He viewed these modern painters, he said, as contemporary heroes.

The painter Honoré Sharrer was another favorite of Kirstein. Sharrer was a Yale-trained artist whose work was resolutely figurative and drew on a broad array of sources, from fifteenth-century Flemish paintings to Farm Security Administration photographs to images from the popular press, especially Life magazine. Two years before Kirstein wrote his article, Sharrer had exhibited Workers and Paintings (1943) in the Museum of Modern Art’s “Fourteen Americans” exhibition, and by 1946 she was at work on her masterpiece, the polyptych Tribute to the American Working People (1946–1951). Both treated themes common for Sharrer at the time, and both were rendered, to paraphrase George Tooker, with sharp observation, sympathy, and jewel-like tones.

Sharrer was born in 1920 to painter Madeleine Sharrer and army officer Robert Allen Sharrer, and she took up painting at an early age. At 16 she became an artist-member of the San Diego Fine Arts Society, and after graduating from the Bishop’s School in La Jolla, California, she attended Yale and the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. In 1947, she married historian Perez Zagorin and gave birth to a son, Adam Desmond, in 1953. Thereafter the family lived in various cities in the United States and Europe.
The Archives of American Art has recently been given a group of Sharrer’s papers. Documents cover all aspects of her career, but they are particularly helpful in placing Sharrer’s work in context. To take one example, materials offer scholars an opportunity to recapture the battle between realist and nonobjective painting at mid-century. In a letter dated 17 May 1953, typical of many in the collection, Kirstein commented on Reality: A Journal of Artists’ Opinions, a magazine Sharrer and forty-five other artists had produced that spring. Though only published three times, Reality provided a forum for realist art at a time when the supremacy of nonobjective painting was being proclaimed in such influential journals as the Nation and the Partisan Review. The Sharrer papers are full of such documentation, including many letters from Kirstein and numerous artists statements and musings on painting.

The collection is also rich in sketches, drawings, and painting studies that give a vivid sense of why Kirstein so admired Sharrer’s work. Colorful and beautifully painted, the tempera painting studies showcase Sharrer’s talent in depicting figures and objects, as do a series of ink drawings from the early 1940s. Favorite themes and motifs abound. The study for Two Dogs in a Still Life, a finished work by Sharrer dated 1997, shows dogs, which Sharrer loved to paint, and the recurring motif of bent forks and spoons through which Sharrer depicts the “outcome” of telekinesis or psychokinesis, a mind trick of illusionists and magicians.

Just as Sharrer’s paintings are the outward display of her lifelong and extraordinarily intense focus on the world around her, this rich accumulation of documents—letters, photographs, sketchbooks, drawings, and abundant source materials among them—reveals the inner workings of the life and career of an artist whom critic Aline Loucheim dubbed “an American sort of surrealist.” They are a magnificent addition to the Archives of American Art’s collections and will help to fill out the biography of a painter who is too little known.

Laura Orgon MacCarthy is an archives specialist at the Archives of American Art.

NOTES

Letter from Honoré Sharrer to Honoré Sachs, 14 April 1950.
Honoré Sharrer Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.