

The Primacy of Paper: Recent Works from the Collection

January 15, 2010-June 20, 2010

Drawings and prints often function as key components of an artist's practice, and in recent years, works on paper have come to challenge the primacy of painting and sculpture. The works on paper in this gallery, intended to complement the exhibition *Pat Steir: Drawing Out of Line* (on view February 19 through July 3, 2010 in the Chace Center gallery), share several recurrent themes that resonate with Steir's artistic exploration, despite their varied conceptual underpinnings.

The relationship of words to images frames the work of Sol LeWitt, Edward Ruscha, and Ann Hamilton, raising questions about the difference in meaning between writing and drawing. Do words and images express substance in the same way, or do words as imagery or in combination with imagery convey something that neither could do on their own? While these works challenge conventional categories of making and knowing, other works on view question the limits of knowledge and of representation by highlighting the fine line between order and chaos. Dorothea Rockburne, Kathy Prendergast, and John Morris explore ordering systems, including mapping, geometry, and economics, both as fearful constraints and as tools that allow us to better understand the world. Finally, Jennifer Bartlett, Shahzia Sikander, Julie Mehretu and Kiki Smith assimilate the language of drawing from a variety of sources including the art-historical, infusing their works with social and personal references. To each of these artists, material concerns—whether the act and process of drawing or the special qualities of paper itself—play an essential role in the creation or open-ended expansion of meaning.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Susan Schwalb, American, b. 1944
Strata #143, 1997
Metalpoint on Video Media paper
Mary B. Jackson Fund 1997.67

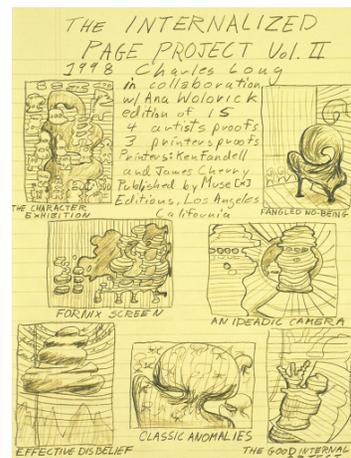
Schwalb is one of a handful of artists working in metalpoint today. She rubs thin pieces of metal across a treated paper, leaving softly toned horizontal bands. Different metals (silver, gold, brass, copper, and aluminum) obtain unusual variations of color, resulting in a work that is both layered and luminous. Although minimal in her vocabulary, Schwalb's drawings evoke nature, natural phenomena, process, and the handmade, placing her work in contrast to the cool geometry of conventional Minimalism.



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Charles Long, American, b. 1958
Ana Wolovick, Australian
The Internalized Page Project Vol. II, 1998
Portfolio of seven Iris (digital) prints
Jesse Metcalf Fund 2002.27

Charles Long is best known for his whimsical, conceptually based sculptural works, and here he and his collaborator, Ana Wolovick, push the notion of digital media in relation to form and content. Long began with several simple line drawings, essentially outlines of potential three-dimensional forms, on legal paper. Working with a rendering program and following a list of conceptual parameters, Wolovick then developed Long's drawings into mutations of gestural line and form, retaining elemental aspects of their two-dimensional origins while bringing them to life as animated renditions of themselves.



Ann Hamilton, American, b. 1956
wreathe, 2001
Embossed paper
Mary B. Jackson Fund and Prints, Drawings, and Photographs Account
2002.5

Known for her sensual installations, Ann Hamilton is as interested in verbal and written language as she is in imagery, and she sees speaking, writing and drawing as related and interchangeable. Her use of language and text is often deliberately indecipherable. Embossed on the sheet is layer upon layer of handwriting. The bumps and incisions reveal a script that is discernible but not legible, and each layer cancels out everything that was recorded before it. In this way, the physicality of the script becomes primary, and we witness a highly personal missive as she records information of significance known only to her.



Richard Tuttle, American, b.1941
Portland Works, Group II (No. 4), 1976
Watercolor and graphite on airmail writing block paper, mounted on
Rugg Road handmade paper in artist-made frames
Helen M. Danfoth Acquisition Fund 2002.8A

Like all 78 of the identically sized pieces in the Portland Works series, these three drawings began with a small faint circle in graphite precisely one and one quarter inch in diameter. Tuttle then added other concentric circles around or inside, perhaps erasing the first, and completing each with a geometric shape. The circles govern the relationship of these blocks of paint to the single dot at the center of



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each page, suggesting the elements and workings of a miniature universe—"the a priori," in Tuttle's words. He originally instructed that the drawings be mounted directly onto the upper corners of a white wall using glue, displaying calculated ambivalence to their long-term survival. In 1987, however, he revised the entire series by constructing wooden frames, so that the bold green borders and the mottled fibers of the backing paper now accentuate the subtlety and fragility of each tiny system of shape and color.

Richard Tuttle, American, b.1941

Portland Works, Group II (No. 15), 1976

Watercolor and graphite on airmail writing block paper, mounted on Rugg Road handmade paper in artist-made frames

Helen M. Danfoth Acquisition Fund 2002.8B

Like all 78 of the identically sized pieces in the Portland Works series, these three drawings began with a small faint circle in graphite precisely one and one quarter inch in diameter. Tuttle then added other concentric circles around or inside, perhaps erasing the first, and completing each with a geometric shape. The circles govern the relationship of these blocks of paint to the single dot at the center of each page, suggesting the elements and workings of a miniature universe—"the a priori," in Tuttle's words. He originally instructed that the drawings be mounted directly onto the upper corners of a white wall using glue, displaying calculated ambivalence to their long-term survival. In 1987, however, he revised the entire series by constructing wooden frames, so that the bold green borders and the mottled fibers of the backing paper now accentuate the subtlety and fragility of each tiny system of shape and color.



Richard Tuttle, American, b.1941

Portland Works, Group II (No. 16), 1976

Watercolor and graphite on airmail writing block paper, mounted on Rugg Road handmade paper in artist-made frames

Helen M. Danfoth Acquisition Fund 2002.8C

Like all 78 of the identically sized pieces in the Portland Works series, these three drawings began with a small faint circle in graphite precisely one and one quarter inch in diameter. Tuttle then added other concentric circles around or inside, perhaps erasing the first, and completing each with a geometric shape. The circles govern the relationship of these blocks of paint to the single dot at the center of each page, suggesting the elements and workings of a miniature universe—"the a priori," in Tuttle's words. He originally instructed that the drawings be mounted directly onto the upper corners of a white wall using glue, displaying calculated ambivalence to their long-term survival. In 1987, however, he revised the entire series by



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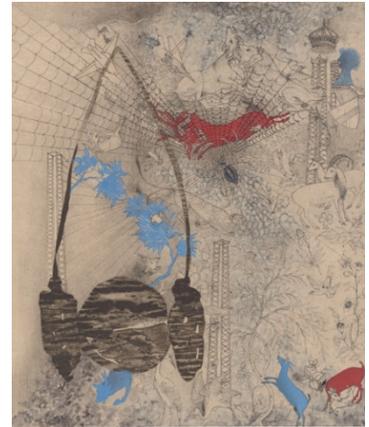
Shahzia Sikander, Pakistani-American, b.1969, (RISD MFA 1995)

Web, 2002

Opaque watercolor and tea on Wasili paper

Paula and Leonard Granoff Fund 2003.46

Shahzia Sikander's works reflect the shifting nature of boundaries—geographical, cultural, and psychological—experienced by anyone who has left their country of origin to live in another. Combining the tradition of Indo-Persian miniatures with her own frequently expressive and abstract manner of painting, Sikander builds formal and metaphorical layers of meaning in *Web*. The abstracted purse, or box, itself implies a narrative, while the somewhat violent hunting scenes reference imagery in Persian miniature paintings. These figures are layered with a spider's web and other references to contact or communication, such as planes and communication towers. The drawing seems to reference the instability of a post-9/11 world.



Anton Würth, German, b. 1957

16.07.2001, 2002

Bound book with engraving and letterpress

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2004.31.2

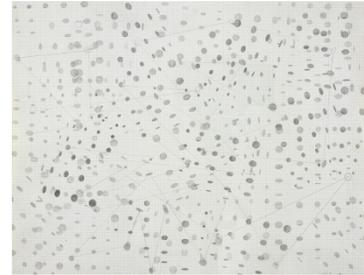
Anton Würth is interested in semantics, and in particular the problems of understanding that arise through language and symbols. In this handmade book, he refers to the rules of graphic design in order to subvert them. By presenting a schematic outline of a vase, or perhaps a clock, he retains a formal reference to a decorative object. But as one thumbs through the pages, only portions of the outline are revealed; Würth instead focuses our attention on the importance of the fold in book design. Both the work's title, which is non-referential but nonetheless begs the viewer to make specific associations, and the text, which Würth asserts is entirely independent from the images, mark the structure of a book without creating definitive meaning. In the end, we are forced to vacillate between meaning and meaninglessness.



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Howardena Pindell, American, b. 1943
Space Frame, 1968
Graphite on graph paper
Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 2004.56

Pindell, like many artists of the late 1960s, turned to disciplines outside of painting for her artistic language. Referencing mathematics, and especially geometry, she infused gridded drawings—containing drawn and often punched-out dots—with spatial illusions and personal meaning. Her father was a mathematician and her memories of watching him record numbers influenced the use of systems in her work. The dots of *Space Frame* also allude to early memories of segregation and racism. As her family stopped to eat during car trips to visit relatives, they were served with dishware marked with red circles to keep them separate from those used by whites.



Julie Mehretu, American, b. Ethiopia, b.1970, (RISD MFA 1997, Painting)
Local Calm, 2005
Sugar-lift aquatint with color aquatint, spit-bite aquatint, soft and hard-ground etching and engraving on Gampi chine collé on paper
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2006.17



Julie Mehretu has recently received wide acclaim for her huge canvases and wall drawings, which incorporate layers of dynamic line work. Sources for Mehretu's vocabulary are wide ranging, and include architectural plans, comics, graffiti, Renaissance engravings, and Eastern calligraphy. This print, which is small relative to her usual scale, conveys immense illusionistic expanse; within this expanse, a drama takes place that belies the "calm" of the title. In a 2003 interview, Mehretu stated:

My initial impulse and investigation was to try and develop, through drawing, a language that could communicate different types of narratives and build a cityscape, each mark having its own character, a modus operandi of social behavior. As they continued to grow and develop in drawing I wanted to see them layered; to build a different kind of dimension of space and time into the narratives.

("A Conversation with Julie Mehretu," recorded on the website of the exhibition *Ethiopian Passages: Dialogues in the Diaspora*, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; May 2–December 7, 2003; www.nmfa.si.edu/exhibits/passages/mehretu-conversation.html)

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John Morris, American, b.1964
Untitled, 1992-2000
Ink on paper
Paula and Leonard Granoff Fund 2006.49

Morris's obsessive and seductive drawings have been described as the "poetics of the ad infinitum" by the critic Alan Weiss. One of Morris's underlying interests is systematization, and he has been inspired by the economic theory of Joseph Schumpeter (1883–1950), whose "creative economic destruction" sought to explain paradigm shifts in the business world. The artist's exploration of the cellular, mathematical, and perhaps verbal patterns of the universe and the human need for order within chaos may be evident in this work. But Morris's vision is also radically self expressive and full of an urgency known only to the artist.



Kiki Smith, American, b. Germany, b. 1954
Kneeling Woman with Large Owl, 2004
Collage and ink on Nepal paper
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2006.52

Throughout her career, Kiki Smith has emphasized both the shared vulnerability and the formal and metaphorical relationships between animals, children, and women. Here, Smith presents two figures of comparable innocence and seeming fragility, stressing their similarities with delicate line work. Contributing to this vulnerability is the woman's broken form, achieved by piecing together several sheets of wrinkled handmade paper (a paper that is, in fact, very strong, despite its appearance). Smith's work also incorporates storytelling. The pairing of the woman and owl brings to mind the traditional Catholic iconography of a female saint with her attribute.



Kathy Prendergast, Irish, b. 1958
Multitudinous Canadian Lakes No. 1, 2003
Graphite on paper
Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2007.12.2

Irish artist Kathy Prendergast transforms commonplace items such as maps, bits of clothing, human hair, and household objects in order to draw our attention to issues of identity, political power, and individual experience. In this work, Prendergast used aeronautical maps of Canadian lakes, weaving them together in a way not related to actual locations, but in reference to her own process. She deliberately rejected systematized orientation and classification, divesting the original maps of their coded information and merely transcribing the network of lines that convey the shape of the lakes.



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In this way the map no longer acts as an informational tool, but instead plots the artist's imagination.

Robert Barry, American, b. 1936

Study for Wallpiece, 1983

Blue acrylic paint and graphite on paper

The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection: Fifty Works for Fifty States, a joint initiative of the Trustees of the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection and the National Gallery of Art, with generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Institute for Museum and Library Services 2009.59.1

The wall piece in this study was among several blue walls realized full-scale in a 1983 exhibition at Leo Castelli Gallery in New York and subsequently painted over. In all of these works, Barry used a carefully orchestrated presentation of words, shapes, colors, and images to build a conceptual artwork which is nonetheless boldly visual. The core of this design is a drawing of a tree, almost fully obscured under a blinding layer of bright blue paint. Against this backdrop, words and phrases radiate out in a circle like roots or branches, suggesting the fundamental role of language in art. These ambiguous and poetic fragments—"allowed to," "then," "seems"—resemble a cluster of incomplete thoughts or ideas. As viewers slowly read the phrases and perceive the subtle under-drawing, the words generate an endless variety of new associations and interpretations, leading to multiple open-ended conversations with the artist.



Edda Renouf, American, b. 1943

Air-2, 1991

Pastel chalk with incised lines on Arches paper

The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection: Fifty Works for Fifty States, a joint initiative of the Trustees of the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection and the National Gallery of Art, with generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Institute for Museum and Library Services 2009.59.30

"There is a life hidden in the weave of the canvas, and also in the structure and fiber of the paper, the paint or oil pastel, and in the creative process itself," artist Edna Renouf writes. To reveal the inner essences of her materials, she begins each work by carefully altering its ground in minute ways, perhaps by removing a thread from a canvas, or, in this case, delicately scratching very fine vertical marks



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with an engraver's tool. These almost imperceptible incisions further accentuate the rough surface of the paper, ultimately serving as a template for an array of black lines against a hazy field of powdery blue pastels. Through pattern and repetition, such simple marks form a comfortable, natural rhythm within a universe whose primal elements—even air—are made visible and palpable.

Edda Renouf, American, b. 1943

Desert Rhythms, 1991

Pastel chalk with incised lines on Arches paper with fixative

The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection: Fifty Works for Fifty States, a joint initiative of the Trustees of the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection and the National Gallery of Art, with generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Institute for Museum and Library Services 2009.59.31



Edward Ruscha, American, b. 1937, designer

Serge Lozingot, printer

Tamarind Lithography Workshop, publisher

Anchovy, 1969

Color lithograph

Twentieth Century Graphics Fund 72.075



Ed Ruscha's fascination with words and the function of language has spanned his career. In his prints of the late 1960s, he toyed with words as both subject and object, choosing to highlight single words based on their phonetic qualities and evocative power. The word "anchovy," placed against a monochromatic background with letters

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seemingly composed from spilled liquid, makes a humorous allusion to a fish swimming in water. By evoking a strange sort of familiarity, Ruscha creates an aura of the surreal that further accentuates the word as a physical entity.

Vija Celmins, American, b. 1939, designer

Cirrus Editions, Ltd., printer

Untitled (Desert), 1971

Lithograph

Museum purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.101

In the early 1970s, Celmins began creating highly detailed images of small patches of a rock-strewn desert floor. These joined a repertoire of subjects from the natural world which remain central to her work to this day, including ocean waves, clouds, the night sky, and the surface of the moon. Based on black-and-white photographs, these pencil drawings and lithographs emphasize both the individuality of each closely scrutinized bit of terrain, seen in the unique shapes of each rock and shadow, as well as a vast abstract pattern of texture, stretching beyond the page in every direction.



Jasper Johns, American, b. 1930, designer

Takeshi Shimada, printer

Kenjiro Nonaka, printer

Hiroshi Kawanishi, printer

Simca Print Artists, Inc., publisher

The Dutch Wives (I), 1977

Color silkscreen on handmade Japanese paper

Museum purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 78.175

Jasper Johns has turned to printmaking throughout his career as part of a rich investigation into the distinctive properties of different media. Printmaking uniquely suits his interest in repetition and the idea that when something is done once, it can be done again differently. In the 1970s, Johns was engaged with mirror images and duplication. This work is composed of two distinct halves. If we are tempted to see in one a copy of the other, the relationship between the two in fact remains one of endlessly fascinating disjunction. The elusive title (which may refer to a sexual aid used by sailors while at sea) provokes the desire, though unfulfilled, for a narrative or concrete representation.



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Jennifer Losch Bartlett, American, b. 1941

Day and Night, 1978

Color drypoint on paper

Museum purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 78.178

Bartlett's *Day and Night* presents two adjacent depictions of an "essential" house, a simple geometric form used often in her work from the 1970s as a platform for stylistic exploration and self expression. Her visual language presents a catalog of art-historical styles, from Impressionism and Pointillism to De Stijl and Minimalism. Her rigid layers of line, built up with velvety colors of drypoint, exist in constant dialogue with the overall image. This and Bartlett's other "house" pictures refer to the homes of family and friends (in this case, a building near her SoHo studio in New York City), and her choices of color, style, and format create a private conceptual portrait of the person who resides there.



Sol LeWitt, American, 1928-2007

The Location of a Blue Arc, A Red Parallelogram, A Black Triangle, and a Yellow Trapezoid, 1976

Graphite and colored ink on paper

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert C. Lee 78.222

Sol LeWitt's works on paper, particularly his wall drawings, have had a profound impact on contemporary drawing by redefining what a drawing can look like and, in doing so, promoting the medium to a status equal to that of painting and sculpture. His many independent drawings were the only works he executed himself. This work forms a part of his "Location" series, executed on walls and on paper, which suggest equivalence between word and object. The handwritten words both describe and define the position of the shapes on the page, while the shapes themselves delineate where the words rest. Just as the shapes overlap and intermingle, so too do the descriptions contained within them merge and flow in and around each other.



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Dorothea Rockburne, Canadian, b. 1921

Implicit Structure, 1979

Colored pencil and ink on paper

Museum purchase with the aid of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Mary B. Jackson Fund 79.090

Coming of age in the mid 1960s, many artists of Dorothea Rockburne's generation were returning to fundamentals, including geometry and drawing. Rockburne's art-making is based partly on topological geometry, behavioral and perceptual psychology, and classical models (such as the golden section). Her folded drawings suggest that structure and gesture are one and the same, and her materials yield the forms inherent to their own structure. The structure in this drawing develops seemingly logically, but as it opens out and extends itself, it teeters on the brink of chaos. Drawings such as this, made as a study for a painting in her Egyptian Paintings series, use geometry to simultaneously suggest, and deny, order.

