

RISD MUSEUM

Raid the Icebox Now with Sebastian Ruth: Witnessing

September 13, 2019–July 26, 2020

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

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

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

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CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Gallery 1

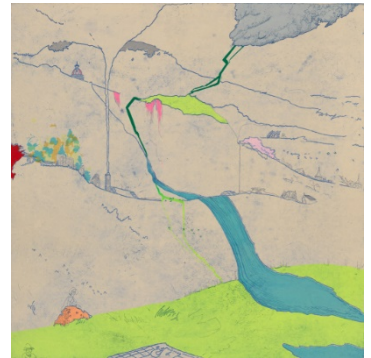
Sebastian Ruth
American, b. 1975
Smokestacks, 2019
Single-channel color video with sound
Courtesy of the artist TL131.2019.1

RISD MUSEUM

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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



RISD MUSEUM

Utagawa Kunitaru II
Japanese, 1830–1874

Prospering Tokyo: Steam Engine, Horse and Carriages, and Rickshaw
(Tokyo jōkisha basha jinriki hanei zu), 1870s

Polychrome woodblock print

Anonymous gift 85.195.11



Ma Da

Chinese, 1903–1978

The Foundry, 1944

Woodblock print

Gift of Colonel Marcellus and Emily Duffy 1994.097.1



Gallery 2

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

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

Sebastian Ruth

American, b. 1975

Jessie Montgomery

American, b. 1981

Story Circle, 2019

Sound installation

Courtesy of the artist TL131.2019.2

RISD MUSEUM

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

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

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

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

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

RISD MUSEUM

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



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



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



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



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



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



RISD MUSEUM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

