

# Checklist

**Josef Albers**

*Formulation: Articulation Folio I and II*, 1972  
Ten selected color screenprints on paper  
15 x 0 inches each  
Gift of Yves Istel

**Garò Antreasian**

*Untitled*, 1981  
Lithograph and embossment on paper  
21 7/8 x 22 1/4 inches  
Gift of Thom O'Connor

**Garò Antreasian**

*Untitled*, 1979  
Lithograph and embossment on paper  
24 3/8 x 20 5/16 inches  
Gift of Thom O'Connor

**Max Bill**

*Four Equal Colors*, 1975  
Lithograph on paper  
30 1/4 x 24 3/4 inches  
Gift of Thomas Scala

**Jack Bosson**

*Untitled*, 1966  
Color screenprint on paper  
22 x 24 inches  
Purchase of State University Student Affairs, 1974

**Jack Bosson**

*Untitled*, ca. 1966  
Acrylic on canvas  
20 x 24 1/2 inches  
Purchase of State University Student Affairs, 1972

**Andrew Brischler**

*Fake Fuck With No Fangs*, 2013  
Oil, colored pencil, and pencil on linen  
20 x 17 inches  
Gift of David Hoberman

**Chryssa**

*Gates to Times Square* portfolio, 1978  
Sixteen selected color screenprints on paper  
Approx. 40 x 30 inches each  
Gift of Mrs. Ivan Radin

**Gene Davis**

*Albatross*, 1973  
Lithograph on paper  
28 1/2 x 40 inches  
Purchase of the Selection Committee, 1974

**Richard Garrison**

*Lot Walking (July 17, 2005-January 17, 2006)*, 2005-06  
Graphite on archival color inkjet print  
36 x 36 inches  
Purchase of University at Albany, State University of New York

**Marietta Hoferer**

S6, 2012  
Graphite and tape on paper  
15 x 15 inches  
Gift of the artist

**Donald Judd**

*Untitled*, 1978  
Etching on paper  
30 x 35 inches  
Gift of Martin Shafiroff

**Ellsworth Kelly**

*Untitled* from *Portfolio 9*, 1967  
Lithograph on paper  
17 x 22 inches  
Purchase of the Art Council, University at Albany, State University of New York, 1970

**Jenny Kemp**

*Mellow Yellow*, 2013  
Gouache on paper  
29 3/4 x 22 1/2 inches  
Purchase of the University at Albany Alumni Association from *Artists of the Mohawk Hudson Region*

**Michael Kidner**

*The Elastic Membrane* portfolio, 1979  
Illustrated book with mixed media multiple, photogravures, hotolithographs, and spiral notebooks  
Approx. 17 x 13 inches each  
Gift of John A. Olsen

**Kim Lim**

*Ladder Series I*, 1972  
Etching on paper  
17 x 17 inches  
Gift of Steven and Bernice Sohacki

**Cameron Martin**

*Untitled*, 2017  
Permanent marker on paper  
6 x 4 3/4 inches  
Gift of the artist

**Kenneth Martin**

*Frankfurt II (Rotation Series)*, 1977  
Screenprint on paper  
21 1/2 x 22 inches  
Gift of Thomas Scala

**Luis Molinari Flores**

*Untitled II*, 1971  
Screenprint on paper  
30 x 40 inches  
Gift of Thomas Scala

**Shozo Nagano**

*Acheron/Cobalt Blue*, 1974  
Acrylic on canvas  
41 3/4 x 48 1/2 x 7 1/2 inches  
Gift of the artist

**Shozo Nagano**

*Rebirth*, 1970  
Oil on canvas  
60 x 57 inches  
Gift of Donald Mochon

**Eduardo Paolozzi**

*General Dynamic F.U.N.* portfolio, 1965-70  
Four selected photolithographs and screenprints on paper  
14 1/2 x 10 1/2 inches each  
Gift of Nicolo Pignatelli

**Henry Pearson**

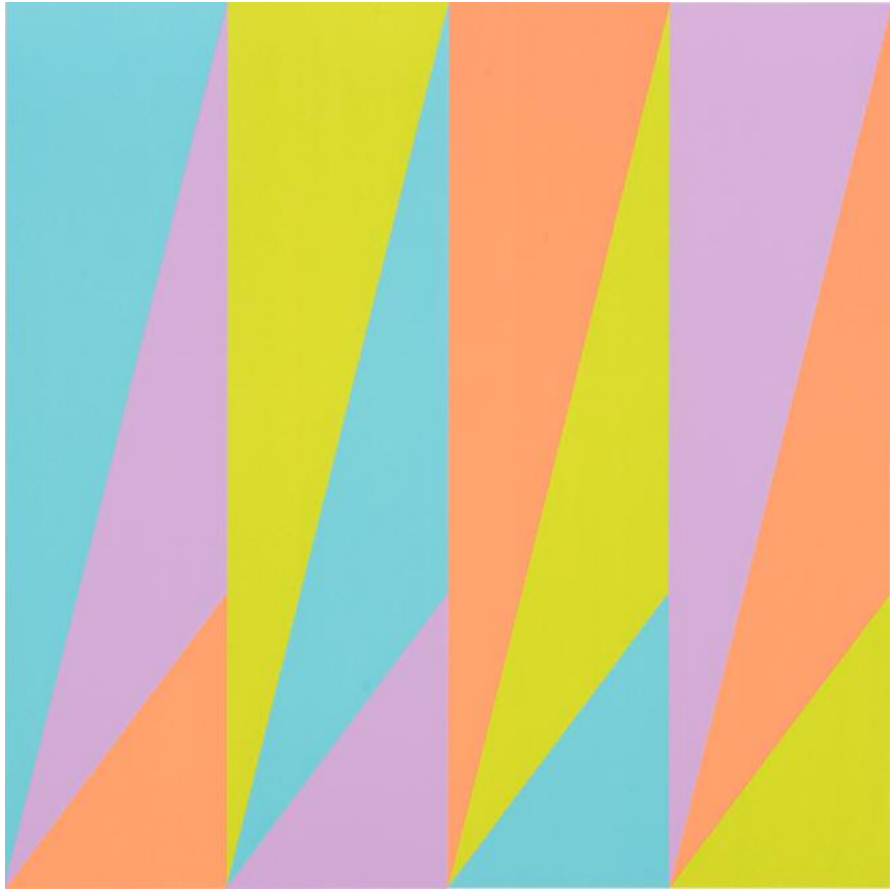
*Fall* from *Portfolio 9*, 1967  
Lithograph on paper  
17 x 22 inches  
Purchase of the Art Council, University at Albany, State University of New York, 1970

**Peter Taylor**

*Iberian Paths No. 3*, 1975  
Acrylic on canvas  
60 x 60 inches  
Purchase of the University at Albany Alumni Association from *Artists of the Mohawk Hudson Region*

When  
We  
Were  
Young

Rethinking Abstraction from the  
University at Albany Art Collections  
(1967-present)



# When We Were Young

## Rethinking Abstraction from the University at Albany Art Collections (1967-present)

Robert R. Shane

"When we were young"—the title rings with a wistful touch of nostalgia. Looking back at the past fifty years, the speaker or speakers of this phrase invite us to reminisce with them. But who exactly is this "we"? "We" can refer most literally, of course, to this institution: the University Art Museum and its present and past collection of curators, staff, donors, supporters and audiences. But we can also hear this "we" spoken by the artwork itself. In this way, the title asks us to think of the geometric abstraction in this exhibition—most of it resistant to any anthropomorphic or biological interpretation—as having its own vitality and agency. We are invited to witness the life of the forms and materials within these objects hanging on the wall. And we are asked above all to remember when these artworks were young.

It is easy to see the abstraction exhibited here, created since the turn of the millennium, as young because it speaks directly to the uncertainty and flux of our contemporary era. Jenny Kemp's abstraction, teeming with something resembling cellular life, echoes our brave new world of genetic engineering. Richard Garrison's careful documentation of the color palette of American consumer culture, rendered as radial lines, emulates the contemporary compulsion for big data collection and analytics. And Marietta Hoferer's white monochrome drawings with square bits of strapping tape recall 8-bit digital designs.

Like those recent artists, Chryssa too allowed her contemporary world to inform her art. Living in the Coentities Slip of Lower Manhattan in the 1950–1960s, along with such artists as Ellsworth Kelly and Agnes Martin, Chryssa's studio overlooked the East River and the sea. In her abstract work she drew from nature, as well as other diverse sources across time, including ancient Cycladic sculpture from her native Greece and the exhilarating neon lights of Times Square. In the 1960s she celebrated the latter in tubular neon sculptures of letter fragments from neon signs. Those forms made their way into her 1978 screen prints, exhibited here. Replaced by LEDs and stories-high television screens, neon lights no longer dominate Times Square, and Chryssa's work, once contemporary, is now a monument to a bygone vulgar but spectacular medium.

In contrast to Chryssa's considered abstraction of her contemporary environment, much of the late Modernism of the 1960s and 1970s in this exhibition tried to place itself outside of time through the principles of Concrete Art, formulated in the first half of the century. Rather than abstracting objects from the world, Concrete artists created pure forms that exist, like musical forms, for their own sake with no referent. Looking at the systematic compositions of Garo Antreasian, Kenneth Martin, and Max Bill, we see pulsating colors and pure geometric shapes animated before us. Reinforcing the autonomous life of their forms, these works are devoid of any mark-making that would signal the body of the artist and the time he spent creating the work. Critic

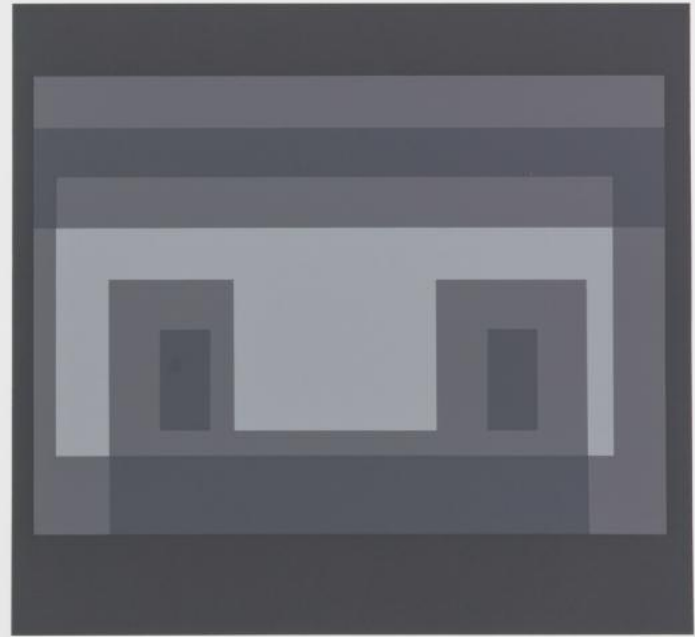
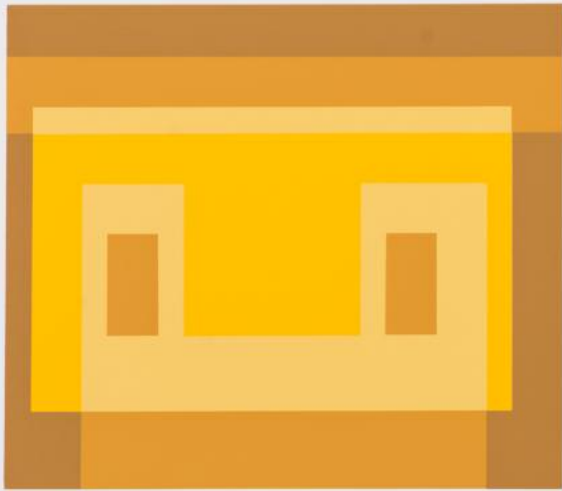
Clement Greenberg aptly labeled this tendency as "post-painterly" (in contrast to the gestural qualities of Abstract Expressionism) in a 1964 Los Angeles County Museum of Art exhibition he curated that included Gene Davis, whose work is exhibited here.

Many autonomous, anti-biological works of post-painterly abstraction are "hard-edge"—as described by critics Jules Langsner and Lawrence Alloway in the late 1950s. Such is the case with the abstraction of Jack Bosson, in which the surface is treated as a single unit, eliminating any kind of spatial figure/ground distinction. Many artists here favored screen printing, a form of printmaking that lends itself well to a hard-edge, post-painterly aesthetic. Similarly to hard-edge abstractionists, the Minimalists of the 1960s forsook gesture and anthropomorphism in favor of industrial materials and primary forms, as seen in Donald Judd's etchings, which read as schematic drawings for his factory-fabricated boxes. In this respect, Concrete art, hard-edge abstraction, and Minimalist art are not outside of time despite the purity and timelessness of their forms, for one cannot imagine their aesthetic before our age of industrial machinery and factory production.

But whether or not art tries to place itself in touch with the contemporary or the timeless, it is always engaged in a temporal relationship with the viewer. When Museum of Modern Art curator William Seitz canonized Op Art in the 1965 exhibition "The Responsive Eye," he selected artwork that created spatial ambiguities through color and drawing, or elicited perceptual movement with line and pattern that caused surfaces to appear to shift before our eyes. In this exhibition, the shapes in the works of Luis Molinari Flores, Henry Pearson, and Shozo Nagano extend out from the picture plane one moment and recede behind it the next, creating a tension between our intellectual understanding of the art object as flat and immutable and our illusory perception of its changing dimensionality over the duration of our experience.

Similarly, our capricious perceptions of color were the focus of Josef Albers's work. Since our perception of a color changes based on the colors adjacent to it—a phenomenon called "simultaneous contrast"—he believed that like light itself, colors are continually changing. The aim of his art was to reveal this fact to viewers. In 1933, when the Nazis shut down the influential modern art school The Bauhaus, Albers, one of its principal professors, was invited to the United States to teach at Black Mountain College and then in 1950 at Yale University, where he published his book *The Interaction of Color* (1963). His tremendous influence as a teacher, artist, and writer resonates throughout this exhibition, particularly in the color relationships, optical effects, and isometric drawings among the works of Concrete art, hard-edge abstraction, Op Art, and Minimalism. (While dated 1972, the pieces from Albers's *Formulation: Articulation* portfolio exhibited here belong to a lifelong series he began decades earlier—"Graphic Tectonics," "Homage to the Square"—and were already well known to artists in the 1960s.)

For Albers, the content of art was the "visual formulation of our reaction to life." But art, even in its most abstract geometric form, has its own life to which we react. Though some of these immutable objects have lived here at the University Art Museum for half a century, their colors and forms still perform for us with the vibrancy they have always had since they were young.



## When We Were Young

Rethinking Abstraction from the  
University at Albany Art Collections  
(1967–present)

**October 6 – December 16, 2017**

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### PLATES ON REVERSE SIDE:

**Max Bill**

*Four Equal Colors*, 1975  
Lithograph on paper  
30 ¼ x 24 ¾ inches

**Jenny Kemp**

*Mellow Yellow*, 2013  
Gouache on paper  
29 ¾ x 22 ½ inches

**Josef Albers**

*Formulation: Articulation Folio I/ Folder 30*, 1972  
Color screenprint on paper  
15 x 40 inches

**Chryssa**

*Gates to Times Square*, 1978  
Color screenprint on paper  
40 x 30 inches

**Gene Davis**

*Albatross*, 1973  
Lithograph on paper  
28 ½ x 40 inches



## Introduction

2017 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the University at Albany Art Museum. In 1967, at its inaugural exhibit, *Painting and Sculpture from the Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection*—which featured fifty-three artworks by some of the most influential figures in twentieth-century modern art—Governor Rockefeller stressed the importance of a public university museum that “presents new ideas through art and culture.”

Over 400 exhibitions later, the Museum remains committed to the idea that firsthand acquaintance with contemporary art provides a gateway to a larger world. A baseline familiarity with the language of art can open doors and bridge gaps, and the University Art Museum is here to give students, as well as the larger community, the tools to speak that language, to understand it, and to make it their own. By exhibiting works from both current practitioners and from its substantial collections, the Museum continues to play an important role in contextualizing how contemporary art evolves into art history and in turn generates the development of new forms and alternate readings of existing knowledge. Thus the impetus for the Museum’s newest exhibit, *When We Were Young: Rethinking Abstraction from the University at Albany Art Collections (1967–present)*, which presents signature works from the earliest years of the Collections and illuminates late-Modernist abstraction as it relates to current trends in contemporary art.

The University at Albany Art Collections comprise more than 3,000 works—paintings, photographs, and works on paper—and span over forty-five years of contemporary art, from the 1960s to the present. International in scope, the Collections include notable examples of some of the foremost movements in late modern and contemporary art: Abstract Expressionism, Pop, Minimalism, Arte Povera, Conceptual Art, Neo-Expressionism. Some works have been given to the University by notable collectors and foundations: the Peter Norton Family Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Virginia Zabriskie, Marvin, Carol, and Adam Brown, the Estate of Gertrud Feininger, and David Hoberman among others. The University at Albany Alumni Association supports the acquisition of significant works by alumni artists through the Arthur N. Collins ’48 Purchase Award.

*When We Were Young* aims to highlight the Museum’s collections as an art historical resource for scholarship and new knowledge, while at the same time exhibiting earlier abstract works and placing them against the perspective of the twenty-first century’s “new ideas of art and culture.”

Corinna Ripps Scharming  
Curator and Interim Director  
University Art Museum



