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Elvehjem Museum of Art

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The Elvehjem Museum of Art *artscene*

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Volume 7, Number 3
June/July/August 1991
Twentieth Anniversary

Art in Switzerland 1991 Opens June 15

Fifteen contemporary Swiss artists will be represented by more than 100 paintings, mixed media works, prints, and sculptures. Curators Janice and Jean-Pierre Golay and Russell Panczenko have selected artists and works that bring us a glimpse of art in Switzerland in this year that country is celebrating 700 years of democracy and the year the country joins the International Monetary Fund. This exhibition will be on view from June 15 through August 18, then will travel to the Herron Gallery, Indianapolis Center for Contemporary Art, University of Indiana, and to the International Monetary Fund Visitors' Center in Washington, D.C. A reception will be held Saturday, June 15, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. and a program of Swiss music and dance will be offered on Sunday, June 16, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. in Paige Court.

Guest curators Jean-Pierre and Janice Golay (of Madison and Lausanne) have been collecting work by Swiss artists for many years. Their selection of artists for this exhibition is thus both personal and made from a broad knowledge of contemporary Swiss artists. While these artists are well known in their country and in Europe, they are little known in the U.S. The Golays hope this traveling exhibition will help change that fact.

Jaques Berger (1902-1977) vacillated in early life between abstract and figurative painting. Berger's late work shows his love of the classical Greeks, a reduction to the essential, and a rich patina produced by making his own paints.

Few artists could be considered more "Swiss" than Albert-Edgar Yersin (1905-1984), although he lived abroad for many years. Yersin engraved plates for Swiss postage stamps with precision and skill, but in his art imagination and space are most evident. He used the sophisticated techniques of color printing to evoke feelings and experiences.

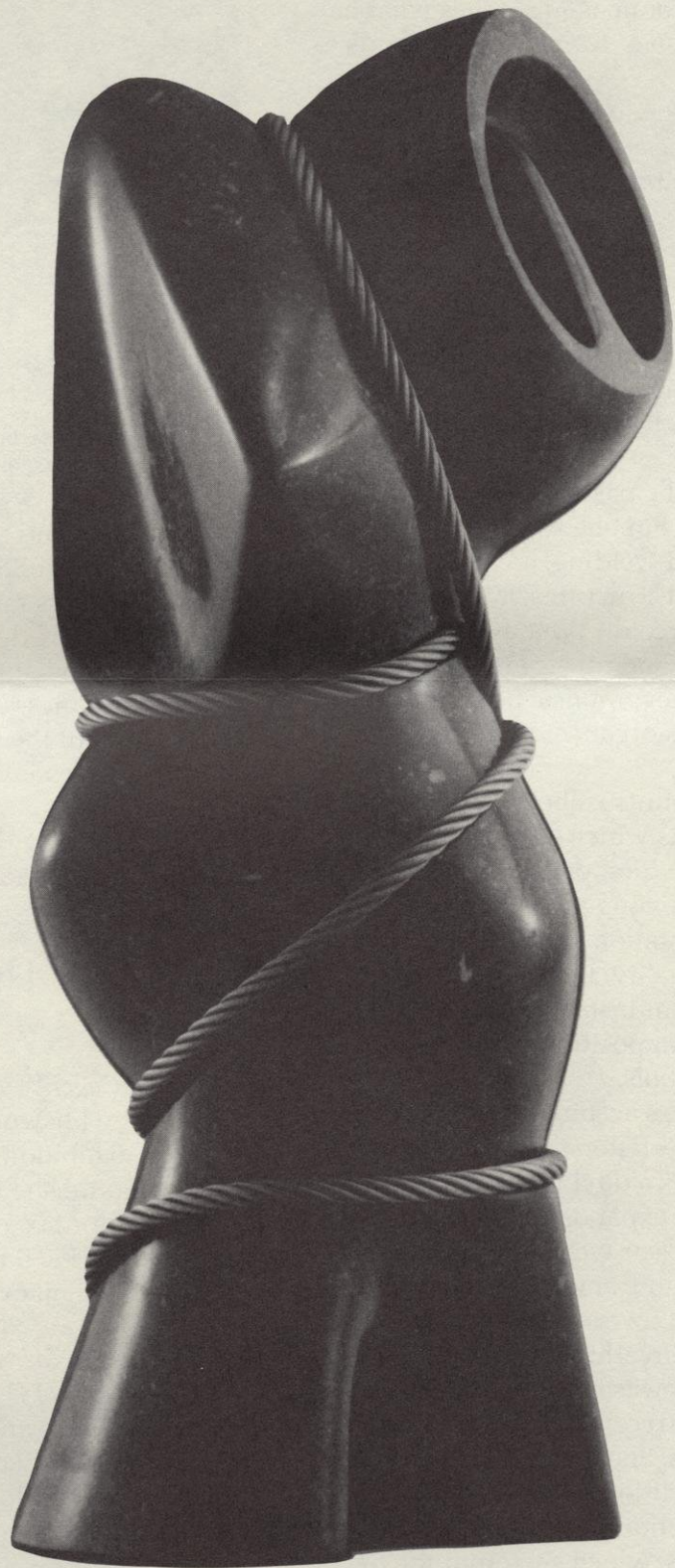
The most obvious elements of Hanspeter Kamm's work are his powerful imagination and wit. His materials might suggest casual production, but a closer look indicates patience and meticulous construction. Kamm's objects symbolize his preference for humanity and nature over design and industrial production.

Henry Meyer is visionary and imaginative. For example, in *Cubistine chez elle* he has carefully applied rules of cubist painting to three dimensions, but with irony. He used paper maché and egg cartons instead of brass or marble to invoke surrealism.

Gérald Goy is an example of the Swiss tradition of meticulous workmanship. Goy searches for the essence of objects; thus he dims the objects, dims the light, dims the pastel, until the pattern of essence comes forth. It is the reverse of exuberance, but as daring, as creative, as any other more exuberant-looking art work.

A similar delicate approach can be seen in Gérard de Palézieux's watercolors. Palézieux satisfies by being light without being flimsy, by seeking perfection without being mannered, by being traditional without being old-fashioned.

Raymond L'Epée is rigorous in his selection, suppression, and reinforcement. In a painting such as a baroque staircase under high noon light (*A Midi*) his flat layers of paint rub out details or accidental picturesqueness, much as overexposure would in photography.



André Tommasini (Swiss, b. 1931)
Otage VII (Hostage), 1988
Belgian granite and stainless steel cable, 21 x 8 x 7 1/2 in.
Collection of Artist

Continued on page 2

Switzerland . . .

Continued from page 1

Armande Oswald balances meticulous technique and explosive creativity. More than those of many artists, her works require the viewer to participate. Once the multitude of lead strokes reaches a certain density, a face, a body, an attitude becomes apparent to the viewer, who feels some accomplishment in cracking the artist's code to reveal the meaning.

André Tommasini needs perfection in shapes, finished surfaces, smooth passage from one form to the other. He could be considered classical, and because of his meticulous craftsmanship, very Swiss. By carefully eliminating the incidental in the raw material, Tommasini reaches what he calls the "tension of forms" and expands to the "beyond."

Henry Roulet cuts out the movements of the arms or knees toward one side of his paintings, keeping only the center of the figures. This is analogous to a photograph of a person in motion shot at very low speed: the density is strong enough only in the central part of the body to produce an image on the sensitized paper, and the rest fades. By subtracting the motion and stiffening the body, Roulet offers an image of peaceful souls.

Peter Fürst, the passionate musician, celebrates energy. First he worked on iron, hammering and welding, creating loud and meaningful structures; later he was attracted to watercolor. Whatever art Fürst makes, rhythm and music are important elements. Whatever music he plays, his musical space is organized in structured sequences.

In her mezzotints Izabel combines soft, flexible elements which suggest a caress: feathers, rich textiles, parts of the human body. By heightening ambiguity and balancing representation and fantasy, Izabel manifests sensuality. In her more recent collages and mini-installations, she further explores the juxtaposition of different materials and symbols.

Olivier Charles accumulates on the canvas small signs—letters, dots, spots—with which he creates a daybreak or twilight universe which expands like the innumerable stars on a clear winter night. Charles's canvas, filled and framed like the well-ordered mind of a Swiss man, explodes and frees itself in a breathtaking image.

Liuba Kirova was born and studied art in Bulgaria, but received Swiss citizenship in the late 1970s. She distorts ordinary perception and traditional perspective, expressing the motions she sees in structures, surfaces, shapes, which surround the figures in most of her paintings: walls or buildings run to their vanishing point, steeples swing in the sky. She also introduces symbols of movement: windmills, horses, carousels, kites, whirling colors.



Henry Meyer (Swiss, b. 1952), *En attendant les Palmes Académiques (Awaiting Academic Honors)*, 1981. Gouache, wash-tint, and collage, 6 13/16 x 5 1/2 in. Golay Collection

In Italo Valenti's perfectly balanced paintings and collages the pleasure of the senses conquers rational perception. A memory of the art, however, might cause meditation on happiness and seriousness or on the richness and the complexity of the world. But the first impact of his art is visual and sensual.

Funding for the exhibition and accompanying catalogue was provided in part by The Swiss Colony, Inc., Monroe, Wisconsin; Pro Helvetia, the Arts Council of Switzerland, Zurich; Swissair; Swiss cantons of Vaud, Jura, Neuchatel, Tessin, Valais; and Foundation Cassinelli-Vogel-Stiftung, Zurich.

New Publications from the Elvehjem

John Cage: Works on Paper 1982-90, essay by Ellsworth Snyder, checklist of the exhibition, 8 color illustrations., 16 pp., published April 1991, \$6.00. Add \$2.00 for tax and postage if sent U.S. mail or \$4.00 if sent UPS, when ordering by mail or phone.

Artists in Switzerland 1991: Celebrating 700 Years of Democracy, essays by Jean-Pierre and Janice Golay and Russell Panczenko, 13 color and 47 black-and-white illustrations, 48 pp., published June 1991, \$11.00. Add \$2.00 for tax and postage if sent U.S. mail or \$4.00 if sent UPS, when ordering by mail or phone.

The Edward Burr Van Vleck Collection of Japanese Prints, essay by Andrew Stevens, 3,000 black-and-white illustrations, 372 pp., published June 1991, \$49.95. Add \$5.00 for tax and postage when ordering by mail or phone.

These and other Elvehjem Museum publications can be ordered by telephone, (608) 263-2240, with a credit card or by sending to the Elvehjem Museum, 800 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53706-1479 name, address, check payable to Elvehjem Museum. They are all also available in the Museum Shop.

Japanese Print Exhibition Opens June 1



Utagawa Hiroshige (Japanese, 1797-1858), Act Eleven of the play *Chūshingura*, mid 1830s. Color woodblock print, 9 1/16 x 13 15/16. Bequest of John H. Van Vleck, 1980.2126

The Elvehjem will select works from its large collection of Japanese color woodblock prints to illustrate the famous drama *Chūshingura*. The prints depict scenes from one of the most famous plays of the kabuki stage.

The story of the play is based on events which took place in 1703, but because censorship forbade references to current political topics in the theater, the play is set in the distant past, around 1350. Several plays based on the incident, but hidden behind historical disguises were created, including a puppet version, and another kabuki version which was written the year of the actual incident, but immediately suppressed and lost. One version, however, became a classic soon after it was written and continues to be a favorite of the kabuki stage to this day. It was entitled *Chūshingura*, which can be translated as "Storehouse of Loyalty."

Written in 1748, *Chūshingura* was created by three Japanese playwrights in collaboration: Takeda Izumo, Miyoshi Shōraku, and Namiki Senryū. The play was written for the kabuki theater (which is less formal than the *nō* theater) and through various revisions and adaptations over the years continued to tell this tale of the dishonoring of a nobleman and the revenge extracted by his loyal retainers.

In the society of the play, the nobles at court support large households including samurai who may continue with that household for generations, sons of samurai loyal to sons of masters. In the first lines of the play, the narrator discloses the central theme, which makes the work a perennial favorite: when a country is at peace, as Japan was during the events of the play, "the loyalty and courage of its fine soldiers remains hidden, but the stars, though invisible by day, at night reveal themselves, scattered over the firmament." The play provides the exemplary characters which are the basis for most drama in Japan and elsewhere, and the prized characteristics of the characters, especially honor, bide their time in all ages, waiting to be called upon.

The main plot of the play—there are several subplots as well, since the whole production lasts six to eight hours—concerns Hangan, a nobleman who is continually dishonored and insulted by Moronao, another noble at court. Finally pushed to the limit, Hangan attacks his enemy, wounding him. For the offense of having offered bodily violence to another at court, Hangan is sentenced to death, given the option of committing *seppuku*, honorable suicide.

When Hangan commits *seppuku*, his retainers are cast adrift; they become *ronin*, literally translated as wave-men, wander-

ing samurai without master, home, or income. They secretly band together under the leadership of their dead master's chief retainer and carry out their vengeance on Moronao, making an offering of his head at the grave of their master.

This extremely short summary cannot capture the breadth of the plot, for it does not convey the slow buildup of the scenes towards the inevitable denouement and does not describe the strong and conflicting emotions both between and within characters which charge the play. The sheer power of these elements is an important factor in the lasting popularity of the play.

Illustrations of important scenes in the play were a staple of the Japanese print-making industry, starting with portraits of actors in the roles of characters from the play in the eighteenth century and developing into full-blown scenes from the play in the nineteenth century. Artists like Hiroshige, Utamaro, and Toyokuni all created prints of the *Chūshingura*. The Elvehjem's large collection of Japanese prints allows for the reconstruction of the story of all eleven acts of the play, giving visitors an opportunity to see not only these marvelous works of art, but to also get a sense of the importance of the theme of the *Chūshingura* in Japanese culture.

From the Director

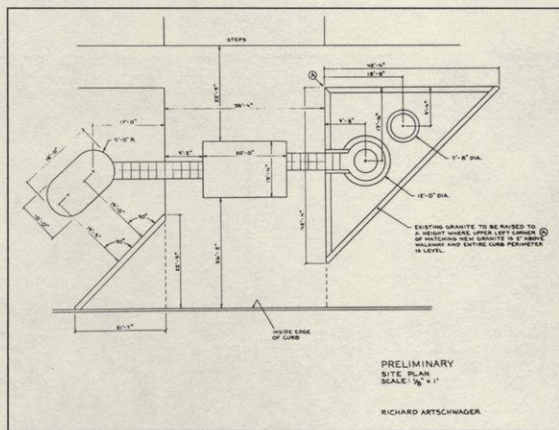
As many of our friends and members already know, in September 1990, after an intensive search, the Elvehjem commissioned Richard Artschwager to create a large site-specific outdoor sculpture to be located in front of the museum facing busy University Avenue. I am happy to present the completed drawings for the new work of art in this issue of *Artscene* and to announce that its installation is scheduled to be carried out this summer. The official inauguration of the new sculpture, however, will not take place until Saturday, September 14.

Artschwager's sculpture, which does not yet have a title, will not be a traditional freestanding ornament to the building but rather is conceived to integrate with its surroundings. The existing lights, which were originally designed for the building by its architect Harry Weese, are reflected in the lighted globes of the sculpture; the trees of the landscape also reappear in Artschwager's sculpture implanted on the high stainless steel poles. However, the piece was not designed to surrender itself to the site, instead it will serve as a unifier of plaza's presently disparate parts and ultimately alter its function. Benches and paths are incorporated into the three main elements of the sculpture so that the entire area in front of the Elvehjem will become a friendly and attractive parklike setting where visitors can linger.

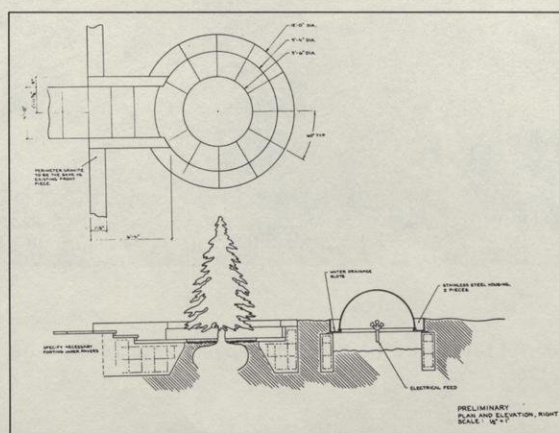
In order to introduce the new sculpture to the Madison community and to give it an artistic context, the Elvehjem is organizing a special exhibition of Richard Artschwager's work. Entitled *Richard Artschwager: PUBLIC/public*, the exhibition is intended to serve as an educational vehicle which will promote discussion and understanding of the new sculpture as well as inspire further interest in public art and its related issues.

Richard Artschwager: PUBLIC/public will be articulated into two parts. The first, selected by the artist himself, will include nine sculptures, ten paintings, and several drawings and multiples borrowed from various collectors and institutions and ranging in date from 1962 to 1988. The second focuses on Artschwager's large-scale public projects which have been a principle focus of his creative activities since 1988 and culminates in the Elvehjem commission. This section will include models, drawings, and photo blow-ups from his personal collection of each of the artist's five public projects.

The exhibition will be accompanied by an illustrated catalogue which will document the Elvehjem commission and include essays by Germano Celant, curator of twentieth-century art at the Guggen-



Richard Artschwager (American, b. 1924) Preliminary Site Plan, 1990

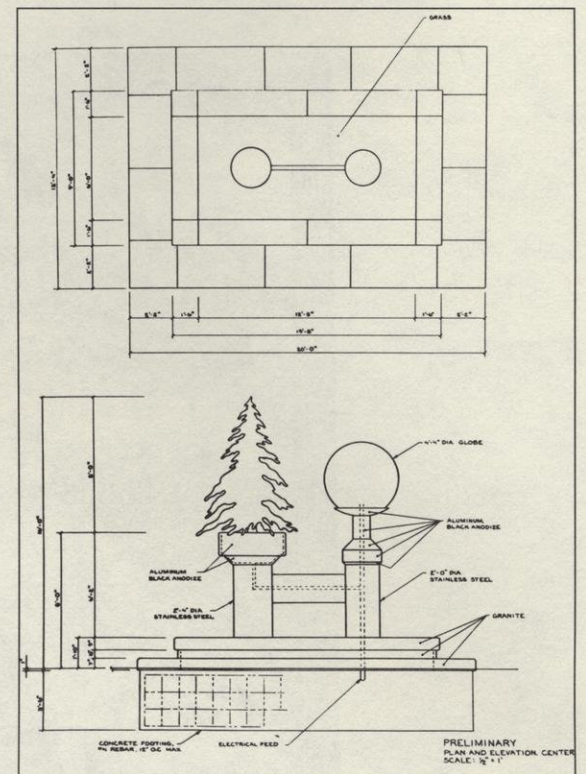


Preliminary Plan and Elevation, Right, 1990

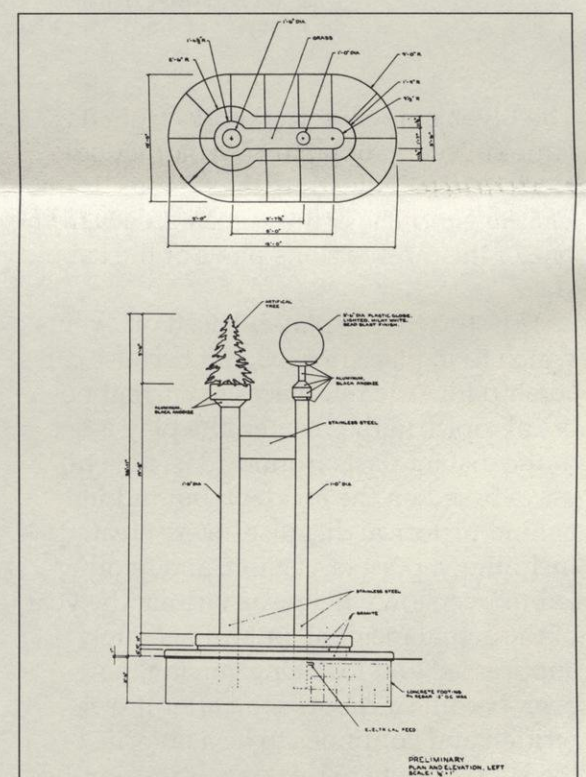
heim Museum in New York and Herbert Muschamp, who is head of the department of architectural criticism at the Parsons School of Design.

Special educational programs will include lectures by the artist and the contributors to the catalogue as well as panel discussions on issues pertaining to public art. Guided tours of the exhibition and the new sculpture will be regularly provided for area school groups and the public at large throughout the course of the exhibition.

The Artschwager project is a particularly suitable beginning for the museum's third decade. In addition to the acquisition of a major work by one of America's most important artists, Richard Artschwager, the Elvehjem is venturing into a entirely new area, namely that of site-specific public art. The presence of this monumental sculpture on the grounds facing University Avenue should effectively signal the museum's special function and encourage more students, Madisonians, and outside visitors to come in and explore the rest of the collection.



Preliminary Plan and Elevation, Center, 1990



Preliminary Plan and Elevation, Left, 1990

The statue *Mother and Child* by William Zorach now on the south side of the museum will be moved to the Class of 1920 Memorial Plaza at the north entrance. This move will give the statue, which was itself presented by the Class of 1927, more visibility and a more intimate setting.

JUNE

1 Saturday

Exhibition of prints illustrating scenes from the play, *Chūshingura: Storehouse of Loyalty*, from the Van Vleck Collection of Japanese Prints in Mayer Gallery through August 11

2 Sunday

Docent Peg Stiles gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 1:30 p.m., Paige Court

4 Tuesday

Docent talks on the Artwork of the Month, (10 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

6 Thursday

Docent Virginia Dymond gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

8 Saturday

Lecture in honor of Frank Lloyd Wright's Birthday Celebration. Katherine Jacobs, "Building with Wright: Frank Lloyd Wright's Jacobs House, 1937," 2:30-4:30 p.m., room 160

9 Sunday

Docent gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 1:30 p.m., Paige Court

11 Tuesday

Docent Helene Byrns talks on the Artwork of the Month, (10 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

13 Thursday

Docent Nancy Webster gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

15 Saturday

Opening reception for *Art in Switzerland 1991: Celebrating 700 Years of Democracy*, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Fifteen contemporary Swiss artists show paintings, prints, and sculpture through August 18

16 Sunday

Program of Swiss music and dance from New Glarus, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

16 Sunday

Docent Mary Berthold gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 1:30 p.m., Paige Court

18 Tuesday

Artists' gallery talk and musical performance. Artists Liuba Kirova, Armande Oswald, and Peter Fürst will discuss their work in *Art in Switzerland 1991*; Mr. Fürst, a jazz flutist, will perform. Gallery VII, 12:00 noon

18 Tuesday

Docent Irmgard Carpenter talks on the Artwork of the Month, (10 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

20 Thursday

Docent Mary Berthold gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

23 Sunday

Docent Irmgard Carpenter gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 1:30 p.m., Paige Court

25 Tuesday

Docent talks on the Artwork of the Month, (10 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

27 Thursday

Docent gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

30 Sunday

Docent gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 1:30 p.m., Paige Court

JULY

2 Tuesday

Docent talks on the Artwork of the Month, (10 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

Thursday collections overview tours will not be offered in July and August. Visitors may rent the audio tour of the permanent collection from the Museum Shop or call the museum three weeks in advance for an appointment for a group tour.

7 Sunday

Docent gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 1:30 p.m., Paige Court

9 Tuesday

Docent talks on the Artwork of the Month, (10 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

14 Sunday

Docent Peg Stiles gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 1:30 p.m., Paige Court

16 Tuesday

Docent talks on the Artwork of the Month, (10 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

21 Sunday

Docent gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 1:30 p.m., Paige Court

23 Tuesday

Docent talks on the Artwork of the Month, (10 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

28 Sunday

Docent gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 1:30 p.m., Paige Court

30 Tuesday

Docent talks on the Artwork of the Month, (10 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

AUGUST

4 Sunday

Docent gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 1:30 p.m., Paige Court

6 Tuesday

Docent talks on the Artwork of the Month, (10 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

11 Sunday

Docent gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 1:30 p.m., Paige Court

11 Sunday

Last day of Japanese print exhibition: *Chūshingura*

13 Tuesday

Docent talks on the Artwork of the Month, (10 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

18 Sunday

Docent gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 1:30 p.m., Paige Court

18 Sunday

Last day of *Art in Switzerland 1991* exhibition

20 Tuesday

Docent Mary Berthold talks on the Artwork of the Month, (10 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

24 Saturday

Visions and Revisions: Robert Cumming's Works on Paper opens in Mayer Gallery

25 Sunday

Docent gives collections overview tour (40 minutes), 1:30 p.m., Paige Court

27 Tuesday

Docent Mary Berthold talks on the Artwork of the Month, (10 minutes), 12:20 p.m., Paige Court

Fall exhibition

Artful Deception: The Craft of the Forger

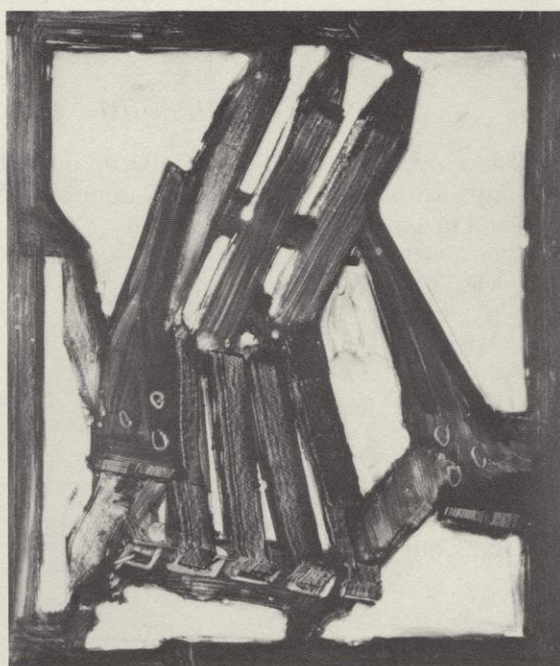
With this exhibition the curators and conservation specialists of The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, reveal the fascinating stories behind two dozen fakes from that museum's permanent collection, some of which had been exhibited as genuine for years. The objects are scrutinized for what they reveal of the forger's tricks and methods. This exhibition, with tests for the viewer to decide which is real and which is fake, opens September 14 and runs through November 10.

EXHIBITIONS

Robert Cumming's Works on Paper

The Elvehjem Museum will host the premier of the exhibition *Visions and Revisions: Robert Cumming's Works on Paper*. Cumming's great skill as a draftsman, his talent for design, and his continual inquiry into the interplay between image, word, and meaning are the basis for this exhibition of prints and drawings from 1985 to the 1991.

Cumming has created a considerable body of work in various media, and over the last decade he has often used drawing, monotype, and other print media in an exploration that returned again and again to the nuances of elemental forms. He experiments with basic shapes which often equivocate; one may be a comma or a whirling blade; another may alternate between light bulb, death's-head, and painter's palette. These variations on motif form a continuing thread of inquiry that runs through these works. For example, the *Burning Box* motif appears in prints, and watercolors, and fire as a subject crops up repeatedly in the artist's work.



Robert Cumming (American, b. 1943)
Adirondack Chair, 1988
Monotype, 27 9/16 x 21 14/16
Elvehjem Museum of Art General Endowment Fund purchase, 1988.69

The exhibition will examine Cumming's development of specific works through preparatory drawings as well as trace specific shapes through several incarnations in completed works, illustrating the artist's transformation of the image and approach to the various print and drawing media. For instance, the exhibition will offer the opportunity for the viewer to see the subtle differentiation between a drawing and a print of the same subject. In addition, there will be examples from monotype series which stem from specific images, but transform the image from one pass through the printing press to the next, much as a musical composition might play out variations on a theme.

The exhibition was organized at the Elvehjem by Andrew Stevens, curator of prints, and will tour to other venues in 1992. Accompanied by an illustrated catalog, the print show opens in Mayer Gallery on August 24 and closes November 3.

Donors Provide Collection of Lalique Glass

The Elvehjem owes its impressive collection of Lalique glassware to the continued support of Dean and Mrs. Ira T. Baldwin. Through two major gifts in 1976 and 1990 and smaller gifts in 1977 and 1978, Dr. and Mrs. Baldwin presented to the museum the large collection of Lalique objects that they assembled over several decades, from the time they acquired their first pieces as gifts of Mrs. Baldwin's mother, Ineva T. Reilly, an enthusiastic Lalique collector. Mrs. Baldwin's life-long interest in Lalique glass, instilled by her mother, is responsible for the great breadth of the collection, which ranges from some of the earliest Art

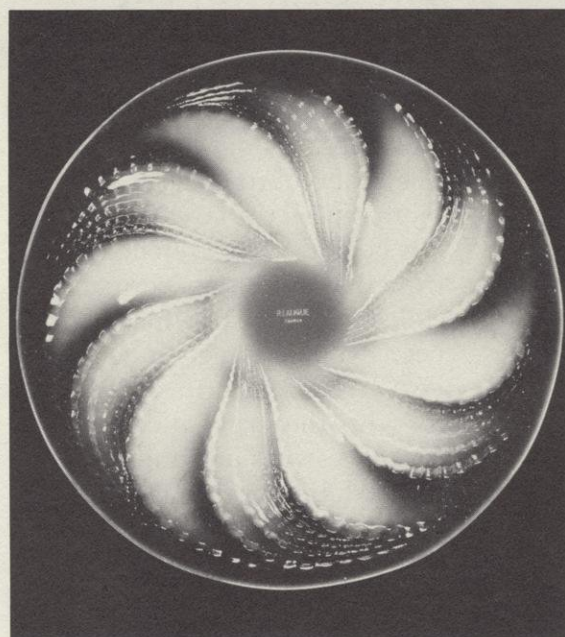
Deco pieces to recent examples produced by René Lalique's heirs. The collection now numbers about seventy pieces and includes vases, bowls, candlesticks, plates, perfume and toilet bottles, and serving pieces. In addition, the Baldwins have established a purchase fund on behalf of the Lalique collection, thus enabling the museum to continue to add important works. Appropriately, the Baldwins have made their gifts of Lalique glass as a tribute to the late Mrs. Reilly.

Frenchman René Lalique was one of the most successful glassmakers of the twentieth century. Throughout the 1920s and

1930s his work was widely hailed as representing the highest qualities of French decorative art, combining elegance of design and execution with the artist's distinct taste for the streamlined and fluid forms that have come to represent the essence of Art Deco style.

Lalique elevated the manufacture of pressed or molded glass to a fine art form. His secret in mass-producing high quality, luxury glassware lay in the nature of the glass itself. Lalique perfected "demi-crystal," a low-lead glass that was extremely malleable and required very little finishing upon removal from the mold. His hallmark frosted glass was made through the application of an acid. Additional patinas, approximating the opalescent look of antique glass, were created by exposing the acid glass to a mixture of gases. Lalique was also skilled at staining his glass with color through subtle enameling.

With German occupation of Alsace in 1940, Lalique was forced to close his war-damaged factory at Wingen-sur-Moder. The artist died in 1945, but his son, Marc Lalique, reconstructed the factory in 1951, and glass forms are produced in the René Lalique tradition today.



The Lalique glass is displayed in niche case H between the ancient art in Gallery I and the temporary exhibition space in Gallery VIII: Shown here is (left) plate with opalescent whirlpool pattern produced before 1945, Ineva T. Reilly Collection, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ira Baldwin, 1990.64 and (right) bonbon dish in opalescent glass with naiads, ca. 1925, Ineva T. Reilly Purchase Fund, 1977.113.

June Artwork of the Month



Sanford Robinson Gifford (American, 1823-1880), *Landscape with Lake*, 1852. Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in. Lent by Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc., New York

June's Artwork of the Month is *Landscape with Lake*, an early work by Sanford Robinson Gifford, one of America's foremost landscape painters. Although executed at the beginning of his painting career, the canvas exhibits several of the qualities that Gifford was to bring so illustriously to the landscape genre: poetic interpretation of a favorite locale, creation of an expansive air-filled vista, and evocative use of light. This example may have been one of Gifford's entries in the National Academy of Design annual exhibition for 1852. As a work intended for public display, therefore, it is a revealing document of what the then-fledgling artist and his countrymen valued in their art at the middle of the nineteenth century.

Like most artists of his day, Gifford aspired to become a portrait or history painter, and his initial efforts were focused on anatomical and figure studies. Eventually, as befits an artist at home in the upper Hudson River Valley of New York, he found his metier in the expansive views unfolding to his generation of peripatetic nature admirers. As Gifford recalled of his conversion to landscape painting:

During the summer of 1846 I made several pedestrian tours among the Catskill Mts. and the Berkshire hills, and made a good many sketches from nature. These studies, together with the great admiration I felt for the works of [Thomas] Cole developed a strong interest in Landscape Art, and I opened my eyes to keener perception and more intelligent en-

joyment of Nature. Having once enjoyed the absolute freedom of the landscape painter's life, I was unable to return to portrait painting. From this time my direction in art was determined.

In this, one of his earliest known major works, Gifford pays homage to the inspiration he found both in American scenery and the art of Thomas Cole. Although the view is undoubtedly inspired by Gifford's treks in the Catskills and his visit to the Adirondacks with fellow painters Eliphalet Terry and Richard Hubbard in the summer of 1851, the specific scene is unidentifiable and may in fact be an imaginary, albeit distinctly American, view. His formulaic landscape has been created from a rich vocabulary of forms with which the artist and his contemporaries were easily conversant. In laying out his composition, Gifford has included many of the components that his mentor Cole regarded as essential to translating the most beautiful and significant aspects of American landscape to art. In prescribed elements, Cole wrote in an influential open letter to fellow painters published in the art journal *The Crayon* in 1836, one could apprehend beauty and perfection at their most profound source, as delineated by the hand of God. Mountains, for example, which dominate this work, were an essential feature of the transcendent view, according to Cole; they were American scenery's most conspicuous and expressive features, conveying, in their form and meaning, the essence of the picturesque, the sublime, and the magnificent. While their peaks, Cole

said, were seen to "cradle the clouds" their "vallies and broad bases . . . rest under the shadow of noble and varied forests," providing a scene of "the sublime melting into the beautiful, the savage tempered by the magnificent." Gifford's middle ground includes a mirrorlike lake which adds to the sweeping space of the panorama and enhances, through reflection, the effulgent light. In such a feature, Cole wrote, "we have the expression of tranquility and peace . . ." a symbol of repose which he found peculiar to American landscape and uniquely beautiful. In the foreground of the painting, Gifford gives us Cole's celebrated primeval forest with newly felled trees, a benign, idyllic scene suggesting the promise of American nature to mankind. And in the seated figures at left, Gifford represents the travelers, the poet or the outdoor painter, right-minded contemplative souls open to all that American scenery might offer.

Landscape with Lake adds to the museum's limited holdings in nineteenth century American landscape painting. It is one of three American paintings on extended loan to the Elvehjem through the generosity of Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc., of New York.

July Artwork of the Month

The Elvehjem will feature a piece by Peter Gourfain, *Finnegan's Wake*. Gourfain once said of himself, "When People ask me what I do, I tell them, I tell stories," and the story of *Finnegan's Wake* is told not only in the scenes played out in the print, but by the song whose lyrics frame the top and bottom of the image.

Like Joyce's tome by the same title, Gourfain's *Finnegan's Wake* revels in the everyday, working-class life and mythos. The song "Finnegan's Wake" tells the tale of a laborer killed on the job who is brought back to life at his own wake when a bottle of whisky is accidentally spilled on him. The vitality of this heretical tale is mirrored in Gourfain's crowded composition, whose fighting and dancing figures have as little to do with a lugubrious funeral as the song has to do with a dirge.

Readers of the *Artscene* may remember another work by the artist in the collection; the carved ox yoke homage to the New York artist Michael Stewart. The same sort of interest in the actual lives of his time is reflected in both works, and both tell stories, but they are stories with a purpose; they remind the viewer that art, whatever flights it may achieve, is the product of mundane existence.

August Artwork of the Month

In eulogizing John Frederick Kensett, George W. Curtis, editor of *Harper's Magazine* recalled, "There was no wall in New York so beautiful as that of his old studio . . . upon which [his sketches] were hung in a solid mass." And according to nineteenth-century critic Henry Tuckerman, from 1848 onward "all lovers of art and native scenery" regularly visited Kensett's quarters in Waverly House, at Broadway and Fourth Street, and delighted in the room's array of nature studies. From his sketches and oil studies, Kensett worked up large, finished views of America's most popular locales for an enthusiastic art-buying public. *Rocks at Narragansett* is one such oil study.

A painter who preferred the accessible landscapes of this country's well-known nineteenth-century vacation spots to the wilder scenery depicted by the first generation of American landscape painters, Kensett made frequent sketching trips throughout his career to the Berkshires, the Catskills, the White Mountains, the Adirondacks, and the Rhode Island shore, where this view was taken.

Kensett began his career as an engraver but resolved by 1842 to devote himself

"exclusively to the art of painting, especially in the department of landscape." By 1849 he was well established in New York art circles and a member of the National Academy of Design. His skills as a draftsman contributed to the development of his mature painting style, which is characterized by an unusually spare and precise delineation of observed forms and surface textures. In this example, for instance, the distant point of shore is rendered clearly but briefly through variations in the density of thinly applied browns and greens. The rough wet surfaces of foreground rocks are fully described through distinct and bold strokes of black and brown, while the gentle rollers are delineated by deft touches of white impasto. The painting of the sky is so thin as to reveal the white ground of the canvas beneath, which helps to enhance a feeling of palpable light and air. The painting is a simple composition reduced to expressive essentials and reveals the facility and refinement that are Kensett's hallmarks. "His love of nature was as simple as it was deep," declared Kensett's friend Curtis, "and his interpretation was pure and reverend and beautiful."

Rocks at Narragansett is on loan to the Elvehjem from Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc., New York and is featured as August's Artwork of the Month.

Membership

Join the Elvehjem staff and friends at the reception for *Art in Switzerland 1991: Celebrating 700 Years of Democracy* on Saturday, June 15 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. The public is cordially invited to all Elvehjem receptions; bring along friends who are not members and people new to the community.

Sunday, June 16, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. the Elvehjem will host a special program presented by residents of New Glarus, Wisconsin's premier community of Swiss emigrants and their descendants. Featured that afternoon will be the New Glarus Yodel Club; Clayton Streif and other performers on the alpenhorn; and Ernie and Theresa Jaggi, popular regional performers who also sing and yodel in the traditional Swiss style. The New Glarus Hotel will provide authentic Swiss hors d'oeuvres and pastries. Come and feast all your senses—sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.

Elvehjem Museum of Art
800 University Avenue
Madison, Wisconsin 53706-1479



Gallery Hours:
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Museum Shop Hours:
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Kohler Art Library Hours:
Monday–Thursday 8 a.m.–9:45 p.m.
Friday 8 a.m.–4:45 p.m.
Saturday–Sunday 1–4:45 p.m.

For library hours during UW–Madison holiday periods call (608) 263-2258

Information: (608) 263-2246

Admission is free

artscene

June/July/August 1991

Important Dated Information!