

Additive and Reductive Abstraction: Reflections in the Virginia Steele Scott Galleries of American Art
Monday, December 7, 2009

Outline

This presentation explores various approaches to abstraction from both a formal and a process-oriented perspective. Work in diverse media from painting, sculpture, and collage to silver, clay, glass, and wood will be discussed in relation to reductive or additive processes, concepts, or forms. In this presentation we hope to compare the concept of building and/or reducing form as a spontaneous outgrowth of artistic process to the concept of intentionally conceiving form in advance the artist beginning work. We'll also address processes that combine or fall somewhere between these two approaches.

- To Every Thing ...Turn, Turn, Turn, There is a Season...Turn, Turn, Turn (Room 6)
 - o Discuss Bob Stocksdale and the woodturning process
 - o Discuss Harrison McIntosh, Gertrud and Otto Natzler, and Peter Voulkos and their use of the potter's wheel
 - o Review each artist in relation to reductive vs. additive processes
- Other Voices ... Other Rooms (Room 6)
 - o Discuss Glen Lukens (glass and clay) in relation to building form
 - o Explore Sam Maloof and Allan Adler in relation to their process
- Discuss the mid 20th-century decorative arts objects in relation to the overarching concepts we have been exploring over the past several meetings: keeping, sharing, preserving, protecting, displaying, contemplating, hiding, communicating, consolidating
- Apply additive vs. reductive concepts to examples of earlier period of the decorative arts

Bob Stocksdale (1913 – 2003)

Footed Bowl, 1973

Black walnut from California

- Lived in Berkeley with his wife, the weaver and fiber artist Kay Sekimachi
- Was one of the earliest artists to explore turned wood as an art form
- Created spare, simple vessels that are reminiscent of forms found in Asian ceramics
- Like Sam Maloof, used both native and exotic woods, exploiting the beauty of the wood grain
- His work extended venerable woodworking traditions dating back to the early years of this country

Harrison McIntosh (Born 1914)

Covered Jar, 1954

Stoneware

- Raised in California and has lived throughout his life in Claremont
- Studied ceramics in the 1940s with the Bauhaus-trained artist Marguerite Wildenhain at her school Pond Farm in Guerneville, CA
- Developed a great range of classic forms and vessels which he has refined over the past 50 years
- This covered jar is a very early example of a covered vessel form he repeated and refined throughout his career

- In its loosely applied slip decoration, it is freer and perhaps more expressive than some of his later more controlled forms

Gertrud (1908 – 1971) and Otto (1908 – 2007) Natzler

Yellow Plate, ca. 1960

Porcelain

- Born in Vienna and came to this country in 1938 to escape Nazi persecution
- Gertrud threw the remarkably thin-walled vessels and Otto invented and applied the glazes
- Known for their constantly inventive forms, colors, glazes and surface effects
- In most of their work they departed from the functional foundations of pottery and created objects for contemplation rather than use

Peter Voulkos (1904 – 2002)

Vase, 1954

Stoneware with glazes

- Born in Montana and trained in the traditions of functional pottery at the University of Montana
- Could masterfully throw a pot on a potter's wheel
- While he took ceramics from its foundations in functional form to new, more sculptural level, his work almost always bore some relationship to the vessel or the plate
- Taught at the Los Angeles County Art Institute (now known as Otis College of Art & Design) where he introduced a young generation of potters to a new approach to ceramic form, revolutionizing how we see and experience clay sculpture
- His loose, gestural approach to clay reflects the artist's interest in Abstract Expressionism
- This work is of interest because it is both solidly grounded in the vessel tradition and, in its surface decoration, it suggests Voulkos's increasing interest in expressive gesture

Glenn Lukens (1887 – 1967)

Three pieces, ca. 1950 – 1960

Earthenware and glass

- One of the ceramics field's early leaders
- Taught at the University of Southern California from 1933 to 1952
- Lukens's work in clay consisted primarily of coiled, slab-built and mold-made forms
- He had a very experimental approach to glazes, exploring how the combination of various minerals and chemicals would produce unusual glaze effects
- The resulting forms have somewhat massive bodies and wonderfully flowing glazes
- He also used a slumping and pressing technique to create inventive forms in glass

Sam Maloof (1916 – 2009)

Double Music Stand and Chair, 1972

Brazilian rosewood

- One of the leading figures in the postwar American studio furniture movement
- Small shop where he employed three assistants ("the boys") provided alternative to industrial, manufacturing environment
- Continuing venerable workshop traditions and reinvigorated tradition of making furniture by hand
- This stand, chair and a music cabinet (not included here) were all made for Jan Hlinka, the principal violist for the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra

- Designed for maximum flexibility of arm motion and lower back support
- Maloof used grain of wood to enhance the attenuated curves of his highly sculptural forms
- Maloof's work embodied a set of relationships between the maker and his friend/client

Allan Adler (1916 – 2002)

Various Objects, 1950s and 1960s

Silver

- One of the most innovative silversmiths working in Southern California in the period following World War II
- Trained in the workshop of his father-in-law Porter Blanchard (also represented in the Huntington collection)
- His sleek, spare organic forms were influenced by innovations in postwar Scandinavian silver
- He described his own work as having "clean lines with a bent toward the unconventional"
- Because of his client list which included prominent political leaders and Hollywood celebrities, he was called "the silversmith to the stars"
- His work ranged from functional objects (tea and coffee pots) to wearable art (jewelry); some of his forms were highly versatile and inventive such as the reversible compote

Sam Francis (1923 – 1994)

Free Floating Clouds, 1980

Acrylic on canvas

Gift of the Sam Francis Foundation

- A California born and based artist who spent time in Switzerland, France, and Japan
- Francis served as a pilot in World War II, and some feel his work reflects the perspective of an aviator
- *Free Floating Clouds* is characterized by freely applied paint with underlying structure; a grid provides an armature for biomorphic shapes
- Francis, as with Bay Area abstractionists with whom he associated, explored the emotional qualities of color
- The contrast between light and dark of *Free Floating Clouds* is characteristic of Francis's paintings

Helen Frankenthaler (born 1928)

Adriatic, 1968

Acrylic on canvas

Norton Simon Museum, Gift of the Artist

- Since the early 1950s, Frankenthaler has been best known for "stain painting," a technique in which paint is poured directly onto unprimed canvas, allowing the color to soak into the canvas and create its own shapes and edges
- Her technique created lyrical and luminous abstractions where color provided the expressive power
- Her work shares with Abstract Expressionism an emphasis on the inherent flatness of painting as a medium
- Her innovative staining technique influenced artists, including Clyfford Still and Morris Louis, who along with Frankenthaler became part of a style known as post-Painterly Abstraction

Louise Nevelson (1899-1988)

Vertical Zag 1, 1969

Painted wood and Formica

Norton Simon Museum, Gift of the Artist

- Studied with Kenneth Hayes Miller and Hans Hoffman.
- Began making wood assemblages in the 1940s.
- Uses found objects, in this case Playskool building blocks for children.
- Grid structure of her work demonstrates her interest in Cubism.
- Light and shadow become part of work. Here, the shadows created are evocative of skyscrapers in an urban environment.
- Painted her works one color: black, white or gold. For her painting the sculptures removed the found objects from their original context. She also believed black was a neutral color with little emotional resonance.

Joseph Cornell (1903-1972)

Group of three collages from a set of 11.

Mixed media collages, often including photographs and cut-out pages from magazines or books.

Gift of the Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation

- Cornell known for creating shadowboxes and collages.
- Like Nevelson, his works are assembled from found objects.
- Work is related to Surrealism, he often juxtaposes unlikely combinations of objects. Often works have a dream-like quality to them and are divorced from reality.
- The works usually contain a complicated iconography (symbolism) that relate to Cornell's life and his interests in art, literature, music, ballet, astronomy and history.