Large Print Labels

Printing Abstraction
November 30, 2018—March 31, 2019
Galleries 234 and 235, Main Building
Printing Ab Abstraction
Abstract art flourished in the United States and Europe during the second half of the 20th century. For the past 60 years, artists have explored how to make images without direct references to the natural, visible world.

During the 1960s, many artists gravitated to reductive, mostly geometric forms, focusing on the potential of line, shape, and color alone. Despite such simplification, the visual results, and their conceptual implications, ranged dramatically from sparse, monochromatic compositions to images overloaded with vivid hues. Printmaking proved essential to advancing these explorations.

This gallery features printed works by artists central to defining these abstract approaches, including Anni Albers, Marcel Duchamp, Ad Reinhardt, and Stanley William Hayter. Additional sections of this gallery explore the styles of Op art, with its intense visual effects, and hard-edge abstraction, with its linear designs and bold colors. Works on view in the adjacent gallery address the impact of Pop art and its use of commercial sources, and of environment and atmosphere, revealing the inspiration of light and architecture in abstract prints. While met with both enthusiasm and skepticism, the abstract visual vocabularies seen in works from across generations demonstrate how the power of abstraction endures.
Hard-edge Approaches

In the aftermath of World War II (1939–1945), artists spent time discussing the future relevance of painting. An extremely pared-down mode of abstraction, broadly referred to as “hard-edge,” emerged from these conversations.

The hard-edge approach focuses on the work of art as a physical object with specific material properties. Resulting works often combine a few simple elements such as shape, color, and structure. The compositions tend to be linear in design, feature bold hues, and present a highly ordered composition. Often a regular grid format or square profile is incorporated.

The many painters who advance a hard-edge style also recognize printmaking can serve their goals with exceptional results. Screenprint, a technique borrowed from commercial processes in which ink is transferred to a sheet of paper through a stencil, is a particularly popular option. This method achieves crisp, mechanical contours and expanses of uniformly applied and highly saturated color. Moreover, the inks create a variety of surface effects, as seen in Frank Stella’s *Agua Caliente* with its contrasts of matte and glossy areas. In addition to screenprint, intaglio techniques, which involve incising a printing plate with fine lines to hold ink, allow for the organized geometries by artists Al Held and McArthur Binion.
Op Art

During the early 1960s, a type of abstraction regarded as “optical” or “perceptual” art attracted an outpouring of attention internationally. Artists working in the United States, Central and Eastern Europe, and South America created such works, which came to be considered Op art. The term was coined in a 1964 *Time* magazine article with the heading “Op Art: Pictures that Attack the Eye.”

Indeed, they do attack the eye with intense graphic patterns and clashing color contrasts, which seem to pulse or vibrate. Visual phenomena, including after-images (shapes or images of light that linger in one’s eye), reversible perspective, and moiré effect (overlaid patterns), dazzle the spectator.

Key Op art artists, such as Victor Vasarely and Richard Anuszkiewicz, placed a new emphasis on the physical act of seeing. This research-oriented approach to making art was fueled by theories of perceptual psychology and the science of vision emerging at the time. Beyond these analytical underpinnings, Op art had wildly popular appeal in part due to the exhibition *The Responsive Eye*, organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The exhibition, which received nearly 9,000 visitors on a single day in New York, toured the United States in 1965, including a presentation at the Saint Louis Art Museum that same year.
Pop and Abstraction

Pop art, a form of artistic expression that borrows from advertising and mass media, emerged internationally during the early 1960s. Artists working in this mode mined the wealth of images and materials circulating in popular culture as the basis for their art.

Although this reach into familiar, everyday subjects seemed to contradict the strict promoters of abstraction at the time, a blending of the two approaches attracted many artists. In fact, even critic and curator Clement Greenberg, one of abstraction’s most conservative overseers, recognized potential for crossover. He acknowledged, “There is much in Pop art that partakes of the trend to openness and clarity”—a trend he felt defined the latest abstract art.

Eduardo Paolozzi, Gerhard Richter, and Allan D’Arcangelo are among some of the most recognized international artists who merged abstraction with Pop art strategies. Paolozzi, who lived and worked in Britain, and Richter, who is based in Germany, plucked elements from commercial and industrial sources, which are arranged and juxtaposed using methods of chance and collage. D’Arcangelo, a New Yorker, turned to the road signs of American highways as inspiration for his artworks.
Environment and Atmosphere

Many artists use abstraction to address the ways individuals experience a range of ambient conditions. For example, immersive sensory episodes prompted by engulfing, ethereal installations of color and shape were central to artists involved with the Light and Space movement. This loosely affiliated group of artists originating in Southern California in the 1960s included James Turrell, whose *First Light* series is displayed here.

As is evident with Turrell’s work and that of Ron Davis, printmaking also provided a means to achieve these sensory phenomena. Both intaglio and lithographic techniques, which involve carving into a metal plate or drawing on stone, allow for varied densities of pigment and subtle tonal nuances to convey atmospheric shifts on paper.

Abstraction can also serve as a visual response to the characteristics of a built environment. Observations or “flashes,” as artist Ellsworth Kelly refers to fragments of vision, can be gathered and clarified into basic units of form to generate compositions. The works included in this section represent artists’ reactions to a range of architectural settings, from historical buildings in Europe to the sprawling developments shaping suburban geography in the United States today.
Anni Albers
American (born Germany), 1899–1994

C, D, E, and F, 1969
four screenprints
published by the artist
printed by Sirocco Screenprints,
North Haven, Connecticut
edition: 60 (except C, which is 65)

These screenprints, which belong to Anni Albers’ Triadic series, utilize a single geometric shape—the triangle—as the basis for the compositions. Albers wanted to find ways to build complex artworks using as few variables as possible. At first glance her prints may appear to be systematically organized arrangements of triangles; however, Albers often introduced internal inconsistencies and irregularities. Her goal was to create “…order in a not too obvious way, an order puzzling to the onlooker, so that he will return again and again.”

Marcel Duchamp, American (born France), 1887–1968

**Rotoreliefs (Optical Disks), 1965**
six double-sided offset lithographs and wall-mounted turntable unit published by Galleria Schwarz, Milan
edition: 150

In case, clockwise from top left:

*Éclipse totale* (Total Eclipse)
*Corolles* (Corollas), displayed on the turntable unit
*Lanterne chinoise* (Chinese Lantern)
*Poisson japonais* (Japanese Fish)
*Cerceaux* (Hoops)
*Montgolfière* (Hot Air Balloon)

Marcel Duchamp intended this series of printed, double-sided disks to be experienced in motion, revolving on an electric wall-mounted turntable. Composed primarily of circular designs, the flat disks generate the impression of three-dimensional depth as they spin, which can be observed in the video nearby. Duchamp began experimenting with visual perception in the early 1900s, seeking to create “purely optical things.” First displayed at a technology fair in Paris, his Rotoreliefs are extensions of this pursuit and anticipate the scientifically-minded approaches to abstraction by artists to come.

Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Nancy Singer Gallery 245:1980a–g
Helen Phillips  
American, 1913–1995  

Flux, 1976  
etching and aquatint  
edition: 25  

Saint Louis Art Museum,  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Malcolm W. Bick  116:1982
Stanley William Hayter
English, 1901–1988

**Gemini**, 1970
engraving, etching, and aquatint
published by A.B. Lublin, New York
printed by Atelier 17, Paris
edition: 100

Throughout this image, thin green lines appear in pairs and create wider serpentine bands that intersect and overlap. To achieve the paired contours, Stanley William Hayter developed an experimental method: He used a plastic tape on the plate to assist cutting into the surface. Hayter thought deeply about the possibilities for line in intaglio printing—a type of printmaking where incisions are made into a plate to hold ink. This work is a striking example. A pioneering printmaker, Hayter demonstrated the medium’s capacity for abstraction to countless artists in Europe and the United States during the mid-20th century.

Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert A. Bernhard
497:1979
Ad Reinhardt
American, 1913–1967

Untitled, 1967
screenprint
printed by Rolf-Gunter Dienst,
Baden-Baden, Germany
dition: 100

The last decade of Ad Reinhardt’s life was spent producing exclusively black paintings and prints, including this screenprint. Comprised of a single black square, this work demonstrates a rigorously reductive approach to abstraction in which dark, inky pigment is applied in a flat unmodulated manner onto the surface. For Reinhardt, such extreme simplicity and uniformity, which he described as “timeless, spaceless, changeless,” can be profound. By eliminating naturalistic associations and visual variety, the work rests at the edge of perception, concentrating a viewer’s attention solely on the subtleties of sensation.

Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Edward Okun
2056:1981
Gene Davis  
American, 1920–1985

Graf Zeppelin, from the portfolio  
Series I, 1969  
screenprint  
published by Petersburg Press, London  
printed by Hans-Peter Haas, Stuttgart  
edition: 150

Saint Louis Art Museum, Anonymous Gift  
521:1982
Al Held
American, 1928–2005

Straits of Magellan, 1986
etching
published and printed by
Crown Point Press, San Francisco
edition: 50

Saint Louis Art Museum, Funds given by
Mr. Philip J. Samuels and Museum Purchase
103:1988
Frank Stella
American, born 1936

**Agua Caliente**, from the **Race Track Series**, 1972
screenprint
published and printed by Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles
edition: 75

Frank Stella’s *Agua Caliente*, reaching nearly seven feet
from end to end, is a prime example of how printmaking after
1960 achieved great physical scale. Taking advantage of an
elongated format, Stella presented bands of strong color
separated by thin stripes in an oval shape. The bands circle
back on themselves, creating a panoramic, oblong ellipse.
Titled after a horse racing track in Tijuana, Mexico, the slick,
uninterrupted rounds of color evoke a sense of speed.

Saint Louis Art Museum,
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. George S. Rosborough Jr. 145:1982
Jerald Leans
American, born 1970

On Being Blue, 2003–4
three monoprints
published by Wildwood Press and Schmidt Contemporary Art, St. Louis
printed by Wildwood Press, St. Louis
edition: 30

Vivid blue tones create biomorphic forms in this print series by Jerald Leans. While the forms appear fluid, their embossed edges provide sharp definition in the layers of blue ink, giving the prints a three-dimensional quality. The shades of blue and the forms they create vary from impression to impression, with no two series alike in the edition.

Ieans based this project on an essay by the St. Louis writer William Gass (1924–2017), also titled On Being Blue. This influential text examined the meanings, moods, and feelings associated with the color.

Saint Louis Art Museum, Funds given by Emily Rauh Pulitzer 51:2005.1–3
Doug Ohlson  
American, 1936–2010  

Untitled, 1968  
screenprint  
edition: 50  

Stephen Porter
American, born 1944

Untitled K 6953, 1968
screenprint
edition: 75

McArthur Binion  
American, born 1946  

DNA Etching II, 2015  
aquatint and drypoint  
published and printed by Paulson Fontaine Press, Berkeley, California  
edition: 35  

In this print, the uniformity of the grid fades into a rugged terrain of scratchy black ink and semi-legible inscriptions. The words are fragments of the artist’s address book and birth certificate. Upon moving to New York in the 1970s, McArthur Binion, an African American artist, was pressured to choose between then-dominant reductive abstraction and more identity-driven work. By using the grid, a fundamental format of 20th-century abstraction, Binion achieved a balance between the line, shape, and arrangement of the work and his personal narrative as a Black artist born in the rural south.  

Saint Louis Art Museum, Funds given by Adrienne D. Davis  
429:2018
Richard J. Anuszkiewicz
American, born 1930

Untitled, from 6 Seritypien
(A Portfolio of Six Works), 1965
screenprint
published by Galerie der Spiegel, Cologne
printed by Edition Domberger, Stuttgart
dition: 125

Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Nancy Singer
211:1966
Gordon Gilkey  
American, 1912–2000

**Unclassified Reflections**, 1994  
seven waterless lithographs printed by Mahaffey Fine Arts, Portland, Oregon  
edition: 15

Using a restrained, high-contrast palette of white, gray, and black, Gordon Gilkey achieves intense sensory effects. The stark transitions create visual vibrations and the foreground and background of these prints seem to blend into each other, creating an illusion of camouflage. This is most evident in the image furthest to the left, where the artist’s signature, in cursive, hides within the overall design.

Beginning in the 1980s, Gilkey advocated the application and teaching of new technologies in printmaking, and he used computers to generate his compositions, including these. Familiar digital graphic symbols in the images provide evidence of these origins and echo Op art’s technological affiliations.

Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of the artist  E9966.1–7
Henry C. Pearson
American, born 1914–2006

Blue on Red, 1964
lithograph
published and printed by Tamarind Lithography Workshop, Los Angeles
dition: 20

Peter Sedgley
English, born 1930

**Manifestation, 1965**
screenprint
dition: 30

Peter Sedgley’s concentric color bands of different widths create tension between one another. The bands appear to expand and contract, like rhythmically pulsating waves. Sedgley was a leading figure in London’s Op art scene in the 1960s and began to create paintings and prints comprised of color bands, such as *Manifestation*, at that time. In 1965, one critic observed that the virtual movement in Sedgley’s work “has a measure and rhythm, a variation in apparent tempo, which is analogous to music.” In later projects, actual sound became a major element of Sedgley’s art.

Richard J. Anuszkiewicz  
American, born 1930

*System*, from the portfolio  
*Inward Eye*, 1970  
screenprint  
published by Aquarius Press, Baltimore  
printed by Edition Domberger, Stuttgart  
edition: 500

Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Jeannie Reese  
in honor of Megan and Allison Reese  518:1982
Victor Vasarely
French (born Hungary), 1908–1997

Untitled, 1969
screenprint
edition: 300

Saint Louis Art Museum,
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Edward Okun  223:1975
Allan D’Arcangelo
American, 1930–1998

Untitled, 1968
screenprint
edition: 100

Saint Louis Art Museum,
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Edward Okun  2057:1981
Eduardo Paolozzi, British, 1924–2005

As Is When, 1965
five from a series of twelve screenprints
published by Editions Alecto, London
printed by Kelpra Studios, London
dition: 65

from left to right:
Parrot
Assembling Reminders for a Particular Purpose
The Spirit of the Snake
He Must, So To Speak, Throw Away the Ladder
Wittgenstein at the Cinema Admires Betty Grable

For his series As Is When, Eduardo Paolozzi turned to the life and writings of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose words and excerpts from his biography appear in the prints. The texts frame the central composition or are incorporated within it. Both author and artist, who lived in post-World War II Europe, were drawn to exported American images, and Paolozzi borrowed heavily from U.S. magazines and advertising for his work. The Mickey Mouse-esque profile at the top of Wittgenstein at the Cinema Admires Betty Grable provides an example. Less directly, Paolozzi’s dazzling layouts combining bold shapes and brilliant hues evoke the eye-catching designs of 1960s commercial culture.

Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Nancy Singer
Gerhard Richter  
German, born 1932

right:

**9 of 180 Colors**, 1971  
screenprint  
published by Kabinett für aktuelle Kunst, Bremerhaven  
printed by Jürgen Wesseler, Bremerhaven  
edition: 90


left:

**Color Fields: An Arrangement of 1200 Colors**, 1974  
offset lithograph  
published by Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich  
printed by Kirschbaum KG, Düsseldorf  
edition: 75

Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Shop Fund 176:1990
For these prints, Gerhard Richter distributed rectangles of color, identical in form and size, in precise rows and columns across the sheet. This approach presents a nonhierarchical inventory of different hues, and not surprisingly, Richter based these works on sample cards from a paint store. He selected randomly from this found industrial palette, literally pulling from a hat, to build his grids. For him, “the unartistic, tasteful, and secular illustration of the different tones” was directed, somewhat irreverently, against established traditions of abstraction that had preceded him.
James Turrell, American, born 1941

**First Light, 1989–90**
seven from a series of twenty aquatints
published by Peter Blum Edition, New York
printed by Peter Kneubühler, Zurich

from left to right:
*Catso
Squat
Raethro
Ondoe
Juke
Decker
Tollyn*
By using paper and ink alone, James Turrell evokes brilliant luminosity in *First Light*. With these materials, he suggests the presence of glowing shapes—cubes, a triangle, rectangles, and a vertical shaft—set in space. During the 1960s, Turrell, who tapped light as his medium, illuminated geometric shapes on walls using a projector. This set of aquatint etchings utilizes forms derived from those early projections. Seeking to work “with light on a smaller scale,” Turrell gravitated to translucent tones of the aquatint technique, which he considers “the purest, most light-catching form of etching.”

Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Shop Fund
Ellsworth Kelly
American, 1923–2015

Untitled (Red)
Untitled (Green)
Untitled (Blue)
Untitled (Black)

four lithographs, 1992
published by The Limited Edition Club, New York
printed by Trestle Editions, New York
dition: 40

These four lithographs appear sparse on first viewing, with a contrast between the solitary blocks of color and the stark white paper. However, viewed together as a unified work of art as Ellsworth Kelly intended, they become dynamic. Kelly insisted the prints be displayed this way, allowing the contours of the colorful blocks to guide the viewer’s eye from red to green to blue to black.

The slightly curved, austere forms in this suite highlight Kelly’s longstanding interest in architecture, particularly the shapes he observed in the cathedrals that he encountered in France in the 1950s.

Ron Davis
American, born 1937

Four Circle, from the series Rectangle, 1971
lithograph and screenprint
published and printed by Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles
edition: 70

Saint Louis Art Museum,
Gift of Nancy Singer Gallery  101:1976
Carmon Colangelo  
Canadian, born 1957

**O Land O**, 2011  
letterpress, relief print, digital print, and color pencil  
published and printed by Flying Horse Editions, Orlando  
edition: 15

from left to right, top to bottom:  
*Highway I-4*  
*Sputnik*  
*Green Jetty*  
*Painting Storage*  
*Good Design*  
*O’Lando Twins*  
*Orange Fever: Lost*

The colors and forms visible in this series are the result of Carmon Colangelo’s experience of a particular place, specifically the city of Orlando, Florida. Orlando is known primarily for its amusement parks and aerospace facilities. In many of the compositions, letters and words appear, some suggesting the name of the city while also doubling as visual elements. In addition, the rows of box-like units and the clusters of swirling orbitals suggest aspects of the region’s physical geography defined by hotel floorplans, highway interchanges, and rocket launches.

Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Purchase with funds given by John and Anabeth Weil 11:2012.1–7
Richard Deacon
English (born Wales), born 1949

from left to right, top to bottom:

Muzot #1
Muzot #2
Muzot #3
Muzot #4

two aquatints and two etchings, 1987
published by Margarete Roeder Editions, New York
printed by Peter Kneubühler, Zurich
edition: 25
Richard Deacon dedicates each print composition to a single curvilinear form, emphasizing shape and material surface. For the first two prints in this series, displayed in the top row, the artist drew on the plate to establish the main outline. On the bottom row, the third and fourth prints follow a less traditional approach. The artist trimmed these plates to create their shapes.

To produce the series, Deacon, who lives and works in London, traveled to Switzerland. There, he was inspired by Château de Muzot, referenced in the work’s title. The castle had been home to poet Rainer Maria Rilke, whose texts greatly informed Deacon’s art.

Saint Louis Art Museum, Friends Fund  90:1990.1–4