

Vija Celmins

A Survey Exhibition



Vija Celmins, 1977
Photograph by Mimi Jacobs

Vija Celmins

A Survey Exhibition

Initiated and sponsored by the
Fellows of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles,
in cooperation with the Newport Harbor Art Museum

Organized by Betty Turnbull
Introduction by Susan C. Larsen

Newport Harbor Art Museum
Newport Beach, California
December 15, 1979 - February 3, 1980

The Arts Club of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois
May 12 - June 20, 1980

The Hudson River Museum
Yonkers, New York
July 20 - August 31, 1980

The Corcoran Gallery of Art
Washington, D.C.
September 21 - October 31, 1980

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32. *Untitled* (Big Sea #1), 1969

Lent by Chermayeff & Geismar Associates, Inc.

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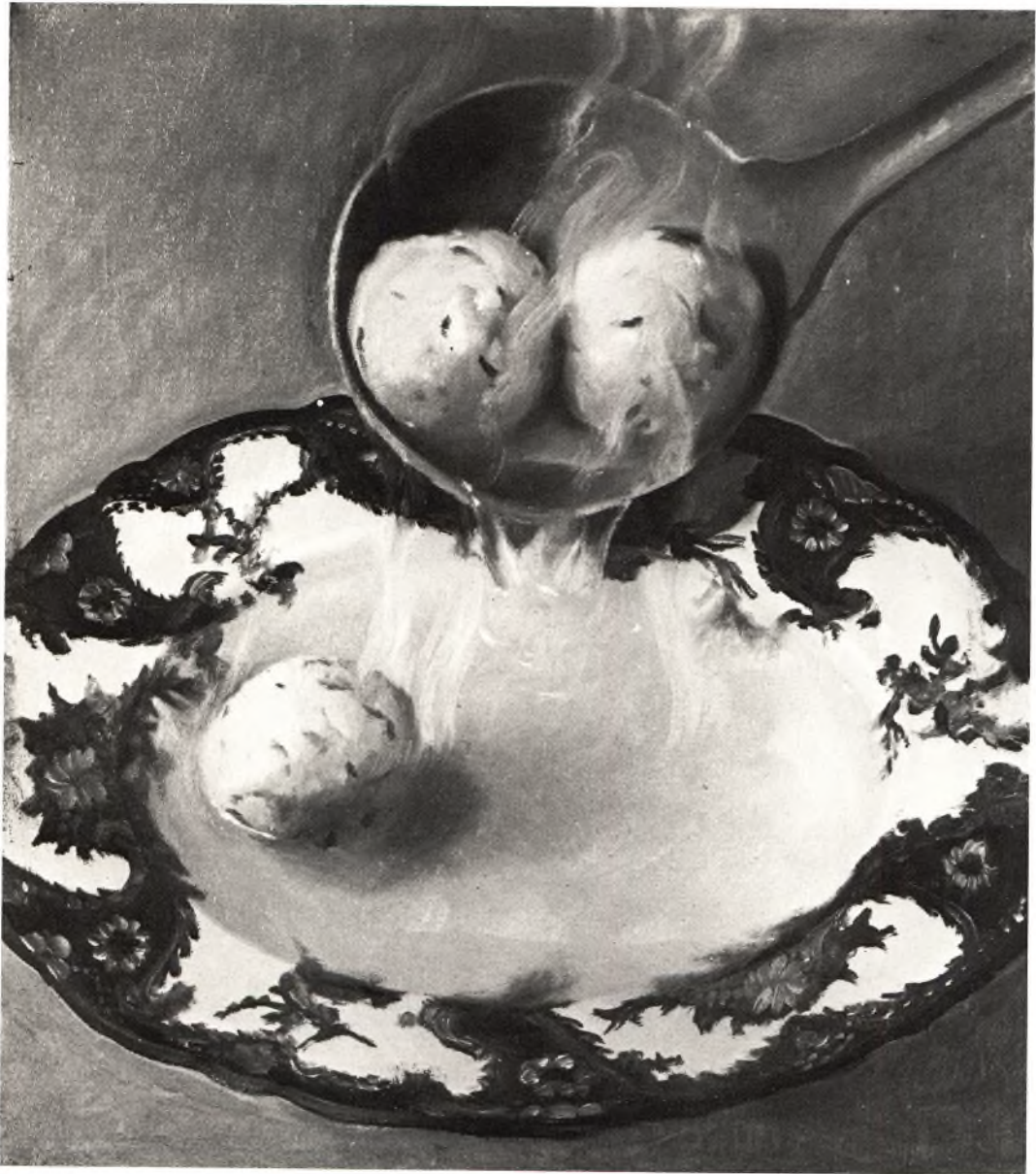
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1, *Soup*, 1964
oil on canvas
18¼ x 16¼
Lent by Noma Copley,
New York

Acknowledgements

This exhibition has been a happy combination of three ingredients: the artist, Vija Celmins, the Fellows of Contemporary Art, and the Newport Harbor Art Museum. Over a year ago, the Fellows of Contemporary Art expressed interest in sponsoring an exhibition of Celmins' work in Newport Beach. We responded positively, and I'm pleased to say that the relationship has been a rewarding one.

Murray Gribin, Chairman of the Fellows, smoothed the legal negotiations between organizations. Betty Faris not only chaired the project for the Fellows but made a significant contribution in compiling the bibliographical research for the catalogue. Kathryn Files took on the responsibility of preparing the grant application to the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C., a Federal Agency, which also responded positively to the exhibition by underwriting a substantial portion of the cost of the organization.

On behalf of the Museum, I want to thank not only those individuals named above but all the Fellows of Contemporary Art whose support of art and artists through regional museum exhibitions is a unique and exemplary program. It should remain exemplary but certainly not unique, and I hope their example will be seen and noticed in other parts of the country.

I also wish to acknowledge with great pleasure the contribution of Betty Turnbull, the Museum's Curator of Exhibitions and Collections, who organized the show. She has worked closely with the artist, Fellows of Contemporary Art, and Susan Larsen, author of the perceptive introduction to the catalogue. Betty and Vija have worked in a productive relationship, which is always a difficult one, particularly for an artist like Vija Celmins, who holds her work close to her even long after it has left the studio.

Sue Henger, the Museum's Registrar/Editor, has, as always, performed yeoman service behind the scenes. It is with regret that I must announce her departure from the Museum after ten years with us. This is the last major exhibition with which she will be involved. She will be sorely missed.



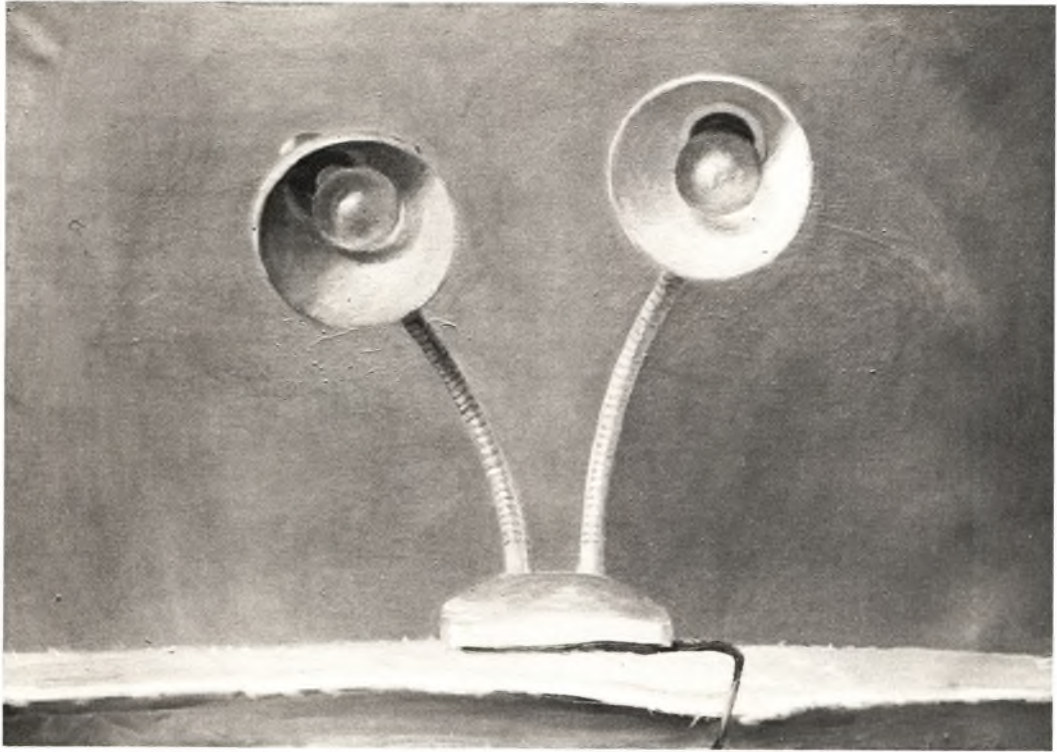
2. *Puzzle*, 1964
oil on wood
2 x 12 x 10
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Hirsh,
Beverly Hills

Rita Shakir has been very helpful in the many technical duties and responsibilities which are always attendant on the careful organization of an exhibition and preparation of the catalogue.

Luis De La Cruz, Acting Technical Services Supervisor, Mark Romay, and Bill Forrest have handled the installation of the exhibition at the Museum.

Finally, I want to thank the lenders, whose names are listed elsewhere, for their willingness to part with their works by Vija Celmins. While Celmins' work is subtle, it is profound. Its presence is strongly felt and collectors only reluctantly part with it. We are grateful for their willingness to do so. We are also pleased that this exhibition will be seen by an extended audience in venues at The Arts Club of Chicago, The Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, New York, and The Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

Thomas H. Garver,
Director



3. *Lamp #1*, 1964
oil on canvas
24½ x 35
Lent by the artist

Lenders to the Exhibition

American Telephone & Telegraph Company, New York
Mr. and Mrs. Harry W. Anderson, Atherton, California
Betty Asher, Beverly Hills
Tony Berlant, Santa Monica
Vija Celmins, Venice, California
Chermayeff & Geismar Associates, Inc., New York
Harold Cook, New York
Noma Copley, New York
Christophe de Menil, New York
The Fort Worth Art Museum
Mrs. Blair Fuller, San Francisco
Laurence Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles
Clayton Garrison, Laguna Beach, California
Joni and Monte Gordon, Los Angeles
Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Hirsh, Beverly Hills
Mr. and Mrs. Max Isaac, Honolulu
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Barry Lowen, Los Angeles
Dr. and Mrs. Judd Marmor, Los Angeles
Mr. and Mrs. Donald B. Marron, New York
James Meeker, Fort Worth
Riko Mizuno, Los Angeles
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California
Odyssea Gallery, New York
Donna O'Neill, Los Angeles
Paine, Webber, Jackson, and Curtis, Incorporated, New York
Leta and Mel Ramos, Oakland, California
Audrey Sabol, Villanova, Pennsylvania
Laura Stearns, Los Angeles
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Steinberg, Beverly Hills
Dean Stockwell, Topanga, California
Levi Strauss & Co. Corporate Collection, San Francisco
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Nicholas Wilder, Los Angeles
Ed and Melinda Wortz, Pasadena



4. *Heater*, 1964
oil on canvas
48 x 48
Lent by the artist

Foreword

As decades pass, with events overlapping and colliding, it seems to take less and less time to make history. Much of the art world has found itself caught up in this accelerated pace and can't resist the call to produce more work faster. Vija Celmins, however, is an artist who has chosen her own path and insists upon keeping her own tempo. The journey has not been comfortable. She has often been tormented by self doubts and has experienced a number of fallow periods when the work seemed to come to an end, when she would have to wait out a perplexing and indeterminate span of time before the next step was intuitively revealed.

The nature of her work has required isolation and intense concentration. Over the past ten years the process has become increasingly demanding and precise. Such methods do not lend themselves to prolific productivity; therefore Celmins' output has been relatively small. This exhibition traces these developments, beginning with the paintings of 1964-67.

One of these paintings, a bowl of steaming soup, was my introduction to Vija Celmins' work in the mid-1960's. I never forgot it, despite the fact I did not see it again until I began work on this exhibition. In 1974, when I first approached Vija with a proposal for a survey exhibition, that painting was still vivid in my mind's eye.

The imagery in these early paintings, as well as in the three-dimensional painted objects, has prompted art historians to place them in the Pop Art movement, but there are personal and historical references in this work that transcend so-called movements and art styles. For example, an overscaled pink eraser may at first evoke nostalgia and admiration for incredible replication. Seen as pure sculpture, the same object takes on the formal aspects of carved marble, contoured to reflect and absorb light through shifting surface planes. The paradoxical hard/soft quality of the finely painted surface is so seductive one cannot resist the urge to touch. These pieces exemplify a wonderful fusion of art history, childlike vision, fine craftsmanship, and esthetic integrity.

Her interest in working with sculptural form went dormant for a few years but has recently been revived in her current work.



5. *Gun with Hand #1*, 1964
oil on canvas
24½ x 34½
Lent by the artist

A major portion of this exhibition is devoted to the graphite drawings of oceans, deserts, lunar surfaces, and galaxies. This series came to completion in 1977. In order to appreciate the subtle progressions and rigorous control sustained in these drawings (comprehensively examined by Susan Larsen), it is necessary to see these works in a related situation. Only through the generous participation of collectors, both private and public, could this be possible. Therefore, on behalf of all concerned with the organization of this exhibition, I would like to thank the lenders for their shared enthusiasm for the artist's work and their contribution to the success of the exhibition.

I wish to thank Thomas H. Garver, Director of the Newport Harbor Art Museum, and the Fellows of Contemporary Art, sponsors of this exhibition, for their support and for the freedom extended to me during the organization of the show. I particularly want to thank Betty Faris, who chaired the project, for her gracious and low-keyed direction.

Foremost, I want to thank Vija Celmins, who made me wait six years until she agreed the time was right for a survey of past work. She is a remarkable person who cannot tolerate any form of artificiality or personal exploitation. I prize and trust the confidence that developed during the months we worked together searching out and selecting the work. It has been a most fulfilling experience and well worth the wait.

Betty Turnbull



6. T.V., 1965
oil on canvas
26¼ x 36
Lent by Betty Asher,
Beverly Hills



7. *House #1*, 1965
oil on wood with metal, fur and plastic
7 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{2}$
Lent by Betty Asher,
Beverly Hills



8. *House #2*, 1965
oil on wood with cardboard
12 x 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 7
Lent by Noma Copley,
New York

Vija Celmins

*Trace the gold sun about the whitened sky
Without evasion by a single metaphor.
Look at it in its essential barrenness
And say this, this is the centre that I seek.
Fix it in an eternal foliage*

Wallace Stevens

“Credences of Summer” (1946)

In a place where the reality of art takes unto itself and transforms the imagery of nature, Vija Celmins has created a quiet space where tension and serenity achieve a carefully fashioned accommodation with each other. Hers is an art charged with emotion held in firm, exquisite control. Self-evolving and self-questioning, Celmins probes the identity of the pictured image, its existence within the graphite surface of a drawing, as a work of sculpture in real space, as an object on a painted plane.

A vast expanse of the ocean’s surface, the half-remembered terror of a World War II airplane crashing to earth, the loud report of a revolver shot at point-blank range, find their way into her work and are caught in the gray stillness of her pictorial world. These disparate images measure the range of her emotional sphere, and in the course of her evolution during the past fifteen years they seem to have converged, to have lent their tension and steadiness to the penetrating focus of her eye, trained intently upon the borders of time, space, and her awareness of their mutability.

Hers is an eye which measures space, then recalculates it against the pictorial plane only to adjust and refocus it again so that it may exist in the real space of the viewer’s world. In Celmins’ work, space exists on a sliding scale which must be apprehended and measured with the body as well as the mind. At times, like Alice, we may walk through the looking glass to touch the tangible artifacts of a projected world. Entering the dense, acutely articulated space of her drawings, we experience an abstract realm where each stroke of graphite brings another portion of the image into existence on the picture plane, accumulating stroke by stroke until it is heavy with incident yet continuous and unified, like the firm skin of a carved and polished object.

Everywhere we sense Celmins' drive to focus the experience, draining the image of color, compressing or expanding its physical and psychological space, opening up a seemingly infinite scale of grays and an intense level of pictorial incident, keeping each aspect of presentation, each successive decision, firmly in hand. Emotion and intellect, amplifying and informing each other, establish a continuing dialogue in her work. Graphic images of violence, intimate views of the surface of the moon, the shifting, restless movements of the ocean are here in Celmins' work, but she has taken possession of them, brought them into the inward space of her own sensibility. It is this process more than any other aspect of her work, the transformative nature of it, which has made her imagery so potent, so satisfying in its self-sufficient presence.

This retrospective exhibition will amplify our understanding of the depth and continuity of her work. In it we see an artist who is firmly in control of her means, acutely aware of the otherness of the work of art. At the same time, her work and her world are grounded in real experiences, perceived and understood, rendered with a disciplined intensity which is guided by intuition and personal need. The intensity we see and feel in this work is the tenderly ordered projection of human emotion. We sense this in her near-seismographic touch of pencil to paper, in the careful polish of a sculpted surface, in the deceptive but convincing congruence of her pairs of real and painted stones. No teller of stories, no investigator of styles, she is an artist who dwells in that human awareness which erases distinctions of then and now, reality and illusion, focusing upon a transcendent present where all are held in the state of equilibrium which is the work of art.

* * *

Vija Celmins was born in Riga, Latvia, in 1939, where she and her family lived during the early days of World War II. As the war drew to a close and their city was severely threatened, her family fled from Riga into the Eastern Sector of Germany, then westward until they reached the town of Esslingen near Stuttgart. Celmins' memories of the war years are those of childhood but they are still vivid. Her family came by ship to the United States in 1949 and settled in Indianapolis, Indiana. Here she grew up and spent the period from age ten through her graduation from art school.

A talented art student, she enrolled in the John Herron Art School in Indianapolis. Her courses at the John Herron were supplemented by occasional trips to Chicago and New York with friends from school. She recalled these trips in terms of the art she experienced at this time: "Indiana was isolated, so I didn't have a sophisticated upbringing in terms

of art; it was whatever you could find for yourself. We used to go to Chicago to see contemporary art and we also went to New York several times. I got to see de Kooning's works and Kline and Johns. And I saw Jackson Pollock's work, which I hated and later came to love so much. . . I used to hate Pollock and then I just started *seeing* Pollock. I just began to see it and found the joy and control that was there. Then I began to understand some of it."¹

A turning point in her young career came in 1961 when Celmins went to the Yale University summer session in Norfolk, Connecticut. At the time, she was working in an Abstract Expressionist style full of vivid color and biomorphic, clearly drawn forms reminiscent of the late work of Gorky. At the Yale Summer School, Celmins came into contact with older artists from New York, among them Jack Tworok and also, significantly, some of the finest young artists of her own generation, Chuck Close, Brice Marden, and David Novros, who were fellow students at the Yale Summer School.



Interior of Celmins' studio on Venice Boulevard, 1964.

As she later observed, "In this kind of community I realized that it was possible to go on." She also recognized that to go on would require the stimulation of a larger environment. She decided to come to Los Angeles to study at U.C.L.A. even though she had never been to the West Coast and had little idea of its character and of the art being produced here. Arriving in Los Angeles, she found a large storefront studio on Venice Boulevard, seven blocks from the ocean, which would be hers for the next thirteen years.

After one year in Los Angeles, during which she continued to paint in a gestural abstract style, Celmins experienced a crisis in her work, a break in its continuity, during a period of extreme self-doubt. She stopped working for a time, despite the fact that she was expected to take part in the academic program at the university. "It became decorative for me, meaningless for me. I could make something that looked really nice but it was meaningless. So I quit."

Starting over, she created a controlled environment for herself and set about painting life-size images of the household objects in her studio: her T.V. set, a double gooseneck lamp, a chair, fish heads on a kitchen plate, a glowing heater, a hotplate. These intense, strange gray-toned paintings with their centered images and ambiguous backgrounds parallel the presentational attitude of Jasper Johns, who places the viewer in a problematic but compelling confrontation with familiar objects seen in a new context. Celmins admired this and other aspects of Johns, especially his ability to

“eliminate design,” as she has remarked. “I also liked the surface tension he had in relation to the object.”

Many of Celmins’ object paintings were done in two versions, each with slight variations in placement and expression. The lamp, hotplate, and heater exist in curious isolation, apart from the space which surrounds them, awkwardly positioned against an unmarked, indefinite gray plane. They owe as much to her admiration of the still life paintings of Morandi and the tonal tradition in painting from Velasquez to Johns as they do to the immediate circumstances of the middle sixties in California. However, at the time, they appeared to find their place in the context of California Pop Art and were listed in the anthology, *Pop Art*, edited by Lucy Lippard in 1966, where one writer observed: “The isolation of the object against empty background makes for comedy, in this instance, rather than Surrealist effects; most are warmly domestic pictures, and even the pistol has a fireside coziness about it.”²

At the time, perhaps, they appeared so, but these early paintings are clearly a prelude to the silent drama of Celmins’ scenes of violence and disaster which were to be created in the following year, 1965. Moreover, these switched-on hotplates and steaming coffeepots are, in their gray isolation, a direct reflection of the reality of Celmins’ situation, working far away from home in a large, virtually unheated studio space where the glow of an electric appliance had not a humorous but a very real physical meaning.

A friend left a small unloaded revolver with Celmins for safekeeping. It, too, became another object in the studio but one with different implications. She painted two versions of a hand holding the revolver as a shot is fired and smoke disperses into the gray atmosphere of the painting. Hers was not to be a detached, analytical attitude toward an object as an element in a formal arrangement but a projective, imaginative one which would add to, interpret, and relocate the object in a broader psychological and physical context. It was at this point that the work of the Surrealists, especially Magritte, began to have added meaning for her.

Alone in Los Angeles, Celmins went through several years of introspection, recalling the war years of her childhood in Germany and the disastrous aftermath of the war. She recalled, “I had been collecting clippings. I would roam around Los Angeles. I didn’t know anybody and I got little war books because it was kind of nostalgic.” In 1965 these images appeared on the walls and roofs of two small-scale wooden houses, one which was adapted from a house on the Venice Circle and another which was a replica of a salt box style farmhouse of Indiana. Carefully constructed out of wood, yet

sparing of detail, the two-story Venice house is engulfed by urban twentieth century disasters. On its roof a pistol shot is being fired by a hand barely visible through the smoking report of the revolver. On its main facade a plane crashes to earth, leaving a vapor trail in its wake. This small, fragmented plane is deftly attached to the outer face of Celmins' gray house while its shadow and small airplane parts fall across the painted surface. A steaming locomotive crosses the shorter face of the building, an image reminiscent of de Chirico but staged so as to confront the viewer directly. The roof of this house lifts off to reveal a fur-lined interior. Thus, her gray, silent, box-like structure is the controlling element for a host of violent encounters, each abstracted, clearly not illusionistic, but emotionally compelling.

Recalling her habit of the previous year of creating two related but dissimilar works on the same theme, she constructed a salt box style farmhouse, its outer walls covered by the abundant clouds of a calm midwestern summer sky. However, the ultimate disruption of this pastoral image is projected upon its roof, the eventual demise of the house in an all-consuming fire. In each of these house constructions, Celmins willfully and dramatically shifts scale, perspective, context. Her projected clouds and walls-as-windows recall the brilliant conceptual manipulations of Magritte while the specificity of her imagery, the autobiographical nature of it, adds the authentic accent of her own emotional involvement.



House on Venice Circle, 1964, model for *House #1*, (Cat. no. 7).

Other clippings provided scenes from World War II, airplanes, American, German, Japanese. Distant memories from childhood were renewed by her perusal of the old magazines for sale as collectors' items in some Los Angeles shops. Model airplanes provided a three-dimensional link with the past, even while their small, shiny forms worked inevitable changes in her sense of time and scale.

In Celmins' painting of 1965 and 1966 she translated several of these clippings onto the familiar softly painted gray plane of her earlier object paintings. The clippings offered another situation of direct confrontation with an image. Unlike the objects in her studio their immediate reality was less secure; many were printed in cloudy half-tones further blunted by the passage of time. They had, however, an intrinsic drama, almost too powerful to be contained within the blurred gray information of the printed page. Her use of the clippings fixed the image on the plane, bringing it into the realm of the controlled and the pictorial. Celmins set about creating a new equation, to find a state of focused, modulated tension between subject and form, figure and ground, the reality of the painted surface and the reality of the pictured image. Her "Flying Fortress," "German Plane," and "Suspended

Plane," an American jet aloft with severe cracks in its falling tail section, are all paintings in which her desire to confront an isolated, tangible object has been translated into a new dramatic context.

She also painted two versions of an automobile disaster, an old Ford, driver dead, the car frame riddled with bullet holes. In its terrible stillness it is an appropriate metaphor for this entire period of her work, the record of a violent incident which is now over, reverberating with the aftershock of the mind's emotional grasp of the event and its implications.

In yet another shift of context during the following year, Celmins brought her pictured world of objects into the real world with overscale three-dimensional re-creations of familiar schoolroom objects, Pink Pearl erasers and a small lead pencil. She saw these as essentially pictorial works related to painting but using the context of a real environment to complete the picture. "They are like visions. I did a Pink Pearl eraser . . . I painted all the gray spots, all the little light spots, so that when you looked at it you saw an instant vision of a certain time on a certain day, a particular eraser. I had one in my desk at grade school. It is easy to recall what it felt like, what it smelled like. And here is a pencil, one of those little yellow pencils you have in school."

Several years later she made a larger-than-life-size tortoise-colored comb. Leaning against a wall, it is approximately six feet high, a three-dimensional realization of the vision Magritte had painted in "Personal Values," a painting Celmins knew and admired.

The degree of illusion in this work is highly effective if one encounters these objects in a normal room environment. However, illusionism is not the point and quickly gives way to an awareness of the artifice involved. Still uncomfortable with the emotional suggestiveness of color, Celmins painted her yellow pencil gray. It is the magic of artifice, however, which fascinated her, the ability to materialize a vision in real space. "I think I had the feeling that I was a magician for a while . . . In retrospect they look a bit like Pop Art." Perhaps, but the worn and softened edges of Celmins' erasers, the strange reality of the enormous comb, their remarkable familiarity touch a level of semiconscious awareness of such visual and tactile experiences, particularly vivid in young children. It is to this awareness, and our memory of it, that her objects are addressed, not to the brash world of Pop consumerism.



René Magritte, *Personal Values*, 1952.
Private Collection, New York
(c) A.D.A.G.P. 1979

Still more dramatic subjects entered her work in 1966, this time in color. She painted the scene of a man escaping from the burning wreck of an automobile. In its terror and high color it is the most explicit of her paintings up to this time, a work in which the energy of the image is unleashed and allowed free rein in the painting. This was a brief episode, followed by still another period of change and introspection during which another breakthrough occurred.

By 1967 Celmins was teaching at the University of California at Irvine as an instructor of painting and drawing. Several times each week she made the long freeway drive from Venice to Irvine and became intrigued by the views of the highway she experienced across the windshield. She set up a small camera on the dashboard and began to take photographs along her regular route. The photographs were not ends in themselves but the first stage in fixing an image in order to reconstruct and recalculate it within the format of the painting.

“Freeway” of 1967 is the earliest of these paintings done from her own photographs, seen in a warm to cool modulated range of grays, yet clearly seen and vividly suggestive of the dissolving perspectives and wide peripheral spaces of highway driving. In order to come to grips with the painting one has to measure real space against the painted space of the dashboard in the foreground, to find the horizon line in one’s own field of vision, in short, to adjust the pictured reality of the highway to the dimensions of the real world. Celmins began to see that scale and the placement of the image in the format of the work were essential decisions, ones which would engage her attention in subsequent work.

Her relationship to the photograph would also be richly problematic. Celmins speaks of “re-inventing” the photograph, a process which goes far beyond adjusting or changing its subject matter. The photograph enables her to fix an image on a plane, but being deeply involved with the materials of drawing and painting she is aware that the surface emulsion of the photograph does not share the tactile, physical qualities of paint or graphite and has qualities of its own. Unlike a photorealist painter who seeks to exploit the surface shine, crispness, and focal variations of the photograph, Celmins seeks primarily to exploit the photograph’s ability to fix and hold an entire field of imagery upon a plane. She then translates or “re-invents” the photographic image in terms of the new material she is using, for example, pigment, graphite, allowing herself to explore its intrinsic qualities rather than to mimic in an illusionistic way the particular characteristics of the photographic emulsion and surface. One can sense an affinity with the disciplined severity of Chuck Close, who also re-invents his photographic

image, changing scale, restricting himself to a narrow range of grays while declaring the otherness of the painting, its own physical existence, by the obvious presence of his brushstroke and his underlying grid.³

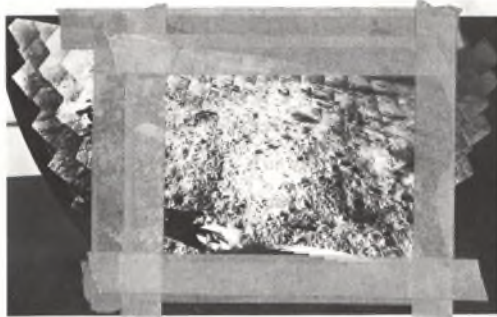
Within a group of drawings of 1968, Celmins also makes one aware of the presence of the clippings she had collected and used in her paintings of the past several years. Placed inside the borders of the composition, they exist as two-dimensional carriers of illusionistic information. Working on the fine-grained surface of a white acrylic ground, Celmins began to exploit the tactile qualities of graphite, the pencil itself, soft and luminous yet also crisp and incisive. Thus, she began her continuing dialogue between the image and its physical presence in the medium of graphite. Her subject matter in these drawings directly parallels that of her paintings, an airplane falling to earth, a devastating media photograph of the city of Hiroshima after the impact of the atomic bomb. In the midst of this imagery, full of incident and illusion, Celmins stressed her own plastic involvement with her medium, the graphite pencil on paper. “. . . The images I work with tend to form a unit. One of the reasons I used images at all was that I gave up color and I didn’t want to invent little marks. I was interested in working with space and flatness. The image has an illusionistic quality that is built into it. But it is not done by my manipulation of the image. All the manipulation I do has to do with flatness. The image implies that there is a space, but all the things I do to it have to do with the here and now of the paper, the pencil, and the flat plane.”

These drawings of 1968 are remarkable in several significant respects. In them Celmins achieves a high degree of illusionism without resorting to a drastic light-to-dark tonal range or a calligraphic shorthand. Her touch is steady and even, as she slowly places a fine-grained skin of graphite over the surface of the acrylic ground. These two surfaces meet and mesh calmly, lending a sense of stillness and order to her work.

Her method is somewhat akin to that of the nineteenth century French artist Georges Seurat, whose wonderful Conté crayon drawings seem to envelop the world of his vision in a cloud of light and tone. We are able to read his drawings as fine-grained, darkened surfaces and, quite incredibly, as three-dimensional forms in space. So, too, in Celmins’ drawing does the firm quietude of her surface simultaneously support and deny the illusion of the image.

In 1968, photographs of the lunar surface were taken by the Russian satellite

Luna 9 and published in the press. Celmins found these lunar landscapes fascinating in their texture and density; they stimulated her to make several drawings which prompted a radical reconsideration of her format. She placed one of these early lunar photographs upon another of the same image. A smaller version appeared as a clipping or an insert on top of a larger version seen as a field. It is perhaps an unresolved work and clearly an intermediate stage in her consideration of various formats, but in it she introduced important shifts of visual focus as the resolution or sharpness of her own image changed with its reduction and expansion. In a second drawing based upon the same photograph, Celmins eliminated the insert, declaring the plane of her drawing as a continuous field. As she remarked, "I went to the edges of the whole piece now, and I finally realized that I could have a single image without having something in the middle."



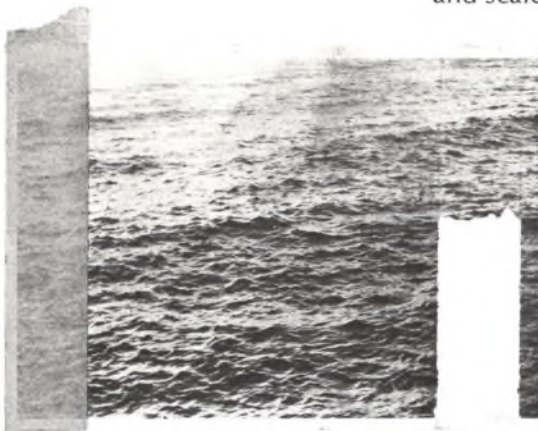
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PASADENA, CALIF.

ROBERTS 2 - PHOTO NO. 542

Details of moon surface as seen by Surveyor 1. The photograph shows a field of small rocks and boulders of various sizes scattered across the lunar surface. The terrain is highly textured and appears to be composed of a mixture of dark and light-colored material. The image is presented as a smaller, rectangular insert placed on top of a larger, slightly blurred version of the same image, creating a layered effect.

Reference photograph for *Moon Surface (Surveyor. I)* (Cat. no. 34).

Celmins also explored a more legible photograph of the lunar landscape taken by an American satellite, a vast diagonal panorama marked by elliptical craters, ridges, and valleys. Here, in a complex manipulation of the image, she doubled it, causing a radical dislocation of the picture plane. Within this drawing, Celmins achieved that balance of clarity and tone, intimacy and scale for which her work is known.



Photograph taken by Vija Celmins from Venice Pier, 1968.

Living in the seaside community of Venice, adjacent to Santa Monica and the urban continuum which makes up Los Angeles, Celmins studied the Pacific Ocean from Venice Pier, a city-owned pier used by casual fishermen and families. It offers an undisturbed view of the ocean. Venice Pier is seldom crowded and on its slender boardwalk one seems surrounded by the ocean on all sides. During the late 1960's Celmins recalled going down to Venice Pier almost every evening, frequently taking photographs out across the endless expanse of water.

Unusually sensitive to spatial experiences, she had attempted to evoke her kinesthetic perception of freeway driving within a static frame in "Freeway" of 1967. Now addressing her attention to the vast plane of the ocean, she became less obviously involved with literal movement in space and more concerned with a sense of dislocated, shifting deep space, something she had already begun to explore in her two lunar landscapes. Discovering a unique and very subtle spatial construct within her own environment, and perhaps also imposing it, she was able to register a sense

of depth and planarity, of far and near, of the specific and the inspecific, in a single image.

This spatial quality is known to those who understand the special characteristics of the landscape of the western United States where deserts present a panoramic yet finely articulated planar surface and the living presence of the Pacific Ocean indelibly alters one's sense of space and light. Speaking of this, Celmins remarked, "The one thing I got from Los Angeles is a kind of spatial interest that is not like that of a New York artist. In the work I tried to focus back into space, you read it all over, and then it solidifies, projects out. You can't just go up and read it; you have to stand back and find your relationship to the work. . . Every little mark I made was a mark that fit with the image and fit with the surface and fit with the illusion."

Late in 1968 and throughout 1969, Celmins settled down to a single format and brought her photographs of the ocean into the studio. She began to draw on a primed paper made smooth and responsive by the addition of a light acrylic ground. Her small 3½ by 5 inch photographs provided a point of reference, a way of positioning the image on the plane. When one compares Celmins' photographs to the related drawings, however, differences are more apparent than similarities. Her drawings are more vivid, closer to the plane; the tone and density of the graphite is apparent as one reads the surface. In many of the drawings she has altered and cropped the image to refocus it, to achieve a state of greater compression, of energy held in a state of tense equilibrium. There is also compression in the scale of the drawing, bringing a vast panorama closer to human scale so that it may be examined in a new, strangely intimate manner. Her own description of the experience of the western landscape might be applied to the spatial construct of these drawings. "It focuses back into space, you can read it all over, and then it solidifies and projects out."

From drawing to drawing she explored another variable, the grain of the graphite itself, changing pencils, moving all the way from the unyielding precision of 8H to the softness of 3B, each having a different texture, weight, and darkness. Using the same pencil throughout the creation of a single drawing, Celmins established a skin of graphite on the surface of the paper, working from one corner across the page and out the opposite corner. We read not individual pencil marks but light and dark tonal passages; the image seems not to be drawn but calmly and carefully laid on the surface.

The oceans, with their shifting planes, spatial rhythms, variations in tone and expression, record the variable touch and mood of their creator. Like the ocean itself, ever in flux yet soothing in its permanence, the act of drawing

became the focus of the emotional energy so vividly present in Celmins' earlier work. She did not, however, seek out unusual views of the ocean nor try to record obvious contrasts between turbulent and calm surfaces. Her images lie in that intermediate but far more believable and interesting state when the ocean is active on several levels, its surface reacting to the pull of tides and the unseen rhythms of its depths. Her drawings of this period were widely admired, although they were frequently misread as literal photorealist works despite their active surfaces.

The ocean drawings of 1968 and 1969 are fields of energy recording the activity of her hand and eye as they move across an unbroken plane. One can see an affinity to the work of Jackson Pollock, the control he was able to achieve while establishing his continuous field, his unified plane. In her own discussion of Pollock, Celmins remarked upon both the control and the joy in his work, emphasizing those aspects of the work-in-progress which registered the artist's awareness of his own activity.

Deeply conscious of the spatial shifts and varying densities of her own drawing, Celmins started to work with the problem of real space, that of the viewer in relation to the drawing. Just as one adjusts the focus of a camera lens to find the correct distance from an object, the viewer is obliged to come to a spatial accommodation with a work of art. For example, an Impressionist painting will appear crisply definite or softened and indefinite when viewed at varying distances. Some works of art, particularly those associated with architectural spaces, are created to be viewed at a distance. Others offer levels of articulation; it is possible to pick up one type of information at a distance, additional detail at closer range. Still others, some of the work of Matisse and certain hard-edge paintings, for example, remain remarkably constant; their impact is meant to be experienced at a distance; little additional information is available on the surface of the painting.

Having a photographic referent, Celmins has built a distinct spatial range into her work. Her images read as dense, sharp fields from a certain distance; they soften and lose focus at closer range, making one conscious of their material reality, of the graphite on paper. This experience is more pronounced in Celmins' work than is usual with most works of art. Again, the drawings of Seurat may serve as a useful analogue; they are barely legible at close range yet intensely sensuous and physical. They retain their sensuous qualities but gain the clarity of three-dimensional forms when viewed at a distance.

In 1969 and 1970 Celmins began another period of investigation, expanding,

stretching laterally, at times also reducing, her format. She wanted to locate the horizon line of the image with relation to the eye level of the viewer. In two drawings of 1969 she expanded the scale of her image, almost doubling it from its initial 12¼ by 17½ inches to 26 by 37 inches. This expansion made the graphite surface even more prominent, and she adjusted the density of the image in order to retain control, tightening it somewhat and keeping it very much intact.

In two unusual ocean drawings of 1971 and 1971-72, she very subtly laid fine string in the form of an X across the plane as she worked on the image. It interrupted the progress of her pencil across the page so imperceptibly that it is barely noticeable until one senses a slight spatial dislocation in each piece. This X, of course, marks the white ground of the planar surface as a subliminal reminder of its presence. At this point, also, her space began to tighten, to intensify; individual waves became smaller, their spatial intervals quicker.

Exploring the varying densities of graphite pencils, Celmins took a single view of the ocean through seven distinct tonal steps in two eight inch by eight foot drawings produced in 1972-73. She recalled her feelings at the time: "As I became involved with graphite I began to notice the pencil; the graphite was telling me a lot of things. I would pick up a pencil and work it down until it was useless. I would notice that if another day I picked up another pencil there was a difference. . . I explored this in a series of scales. . . I hit each one like a tone; the graphite itself had an expressive quality. I continued using the graphite in this way in a series of elongated oceans and then a series of galaxies."

In many respects, Celmins' exploration of varying formats appears to have been prompted by her desire to repress the illusionistic qualities of the image, to control it, to remind the viewer of its flatness, its physical presence. The next year, 1973, she produced a group of six large drawings in an elongated horizontal format. She brought the image even further in from the edge of the composition. Within this series she quite literally presented a three-dimensional spatial experience on a two-dimensional plane.

Although the limitless expanse of the ocean, its planarity and depth, offers a real image which coincides with and to some extent has informed Celmins' spatial sensibility, she is not, in the end, a painter or recorder of oceans. Instead, she has called them "a record of mindfulness," stressing the importance of the process, the dialogue between change and constancy,

those variations of hand and mind which record a moment in time and one's state of awareness of the act of drawing itself.

Finding equivalent spatial experiences in several other contexts, Celmins began to draw the floor of the desert and the even more elusive spatial realms of constellations and galaxies. In recent years she has looked for those unmarked spaces of nature which are remote from the imprint of civilization. These are the images of her recent work, the ocean, the desert, the silent space of galaxies.

Celmins' deserts are created from her own photographs taken on numerous trips to the Mojave Desert near Death Valley, which lies northeast of Los Angeles. Walking on the desert floor, looking downward, she has recorded a continuous plane marked by the fine grain of the earth's texture, many stones, and the intense light of the sun across its surface. Celmins' photographs of the desert are so completely the record of her own sensibility that in them it is obvious how her photography is integrated into the process of image-making, how her control extends to each step, every decision.

Scanning the surface of Celmins' photographs and drawings of the desert, one is inevitably drawn into them. Having little idea of scale or distance, but being totally aware of the scale and size of the drawing, one begins to read the macrocosm in the microcosm of these intense fragments of earth. It is often said that Celmins conditions our experience of her imagery, invests it with an unsettling power, a sense of being at one with the limitlessness of nature. Her spaces are far from the cozy corners of normal experience and yet they are believable, allowing access to similar real and imagined spatial experiences.

Celmins' unique qualities have to do with the manner of her seeing, the obsessiveness of it and also its abstraction. An examination of her drawings of the desert, stone by stone, mark by mark, reveals the dense interior of the drawings. One can, upon entering them, erase normal perceptions of time and place. This must have also been so in their making, hence Celmins' personal fascination with the processes of drawing itself. Our eyes seem to stumble on the larger stones; although they are intimate in scale they abruptly interrupt the surface, pulling it forward into three dimensions. Discovering detail upon detail, we are also aware of the uniqueness of each grain, each stone, its angle of placement, brittleness or softness, all suggested but not completely described in the textures of Celmins' graphite.

Within her constellations and galaxies we have a somewhat different

experience. It is not one of specificity, a gathering of detail, but more completely one of abstraction. Here the textural qualities of the graphite are given freer rein, are compelled to carry far more information. These are tonal drawings, soft-edged, dense, indefinite. Celmins' graphite marks are so fine as to blend together. They lack directional emphasis, appearing to move as random particles colliding and clinging to one another. In 1974 she took a single image, that of the Coma Bernices galaxy, through many variations until they became, at their darkest, in Celmins' words, "so solid, like black tablets. . . ."

Finding the initial image for this group of galaxies and constellations in a media photograph, Celmins began to seek out books and magazines on astronomy. During a trip to the observatory at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena she discovered that there were other sources providing deeper photographic views into distant galaxies. These black and white photographs taken of star clusters many millions of light years from earth had a spatial dimension and a surface density which paralleled but extended the spatial experiences she had explored in the ocean and desert images.

The profound darkness of these planes interrupted by glowing pinpoints of light presented an extraordinarily complex problem of translation into graphite. The surface must be dense yet alive, the sharp breaks of light and dark achieved with a calm but rapid transition from black through many grays to white. The image must remain whole despite the existence of numerous scattered points of light across the plane. Once again, the "skin" of the graphite, its continuous texture, its unbroken steady surface, tense, hovering on the plane, brought a level of abstraction to the image. Celmins' transitions from black through gray to white are so deftly and tenderly drawn that they seem to equal the delicate filtering properties of light itself.

In Celmins' most recent work her concerns and unique strengths have become more apparent, more clearly defined. We can see important differences between the initial roughness of her early ocean drawings, the softened textures of the desert floors, and the fine-as-vapor graphite of the galaxies. The simple intentions of the trompe l'oeil illusionist pale in comparison with Celmins' profound awareness of the inevitable otherness, the separateness of art from life. Speaking of this relationship of the image to the work of art, she remarked, "You want to keep it still. Everything else is moving. I think art ought to be still."

In this world of stillness she has created, there are many marvels. Celmins has conceptualized the act of drawing while evolving for it a most beautiful

physical state. She has grown slowly, intelligently, into an artist of remarkable independence and maturity. Her work is of this time, this place, this generation, yet somehow out of the continuous flux of style and the imperatives of change. Perhaps a crucial distinction, one which distinguishes a major artist, is her emphasis upon evolution, building through time, at certain junctures undergoing radical change but inevitably picking up and extending the path of her own vision. The sense of timelessness in Celmins' work, in her processes of growth, in her imagery, is the ultimate source of its authenticity and power.

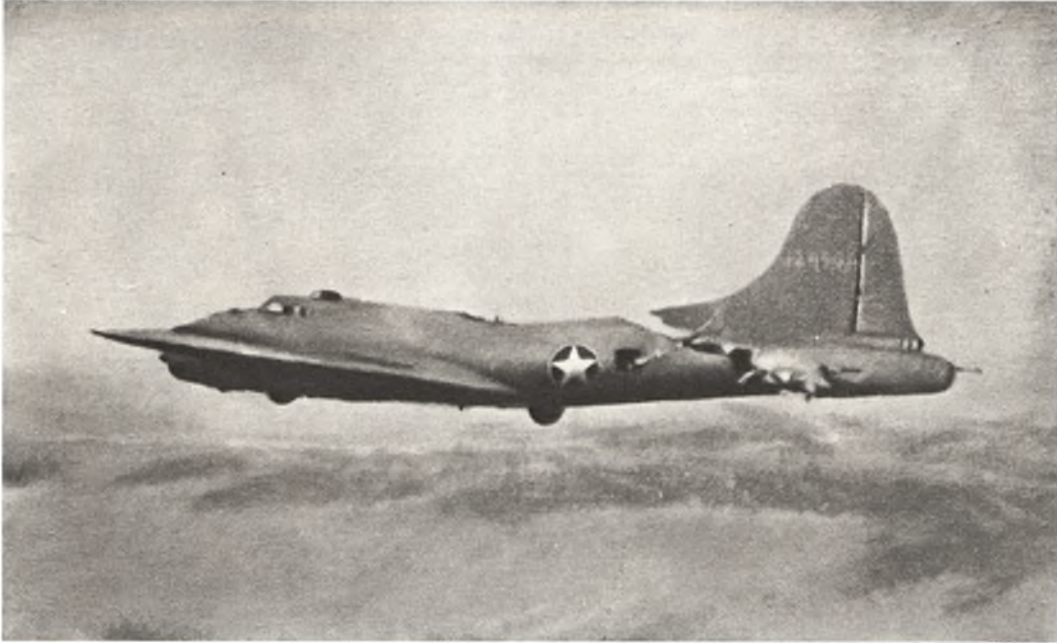
Susan C. Larsen
Los Angeles, California
10/18/79

Footnotes

¹All statements by Vija Celmins are from Vija Celmins/Susan C. Larsen, "A Conversation With Vija Celmins," *Journal*, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (Number 20, October-November, 1978), pp. 36-40.

²Nancy Marmer, "Pop Art in California," in *Pop Art*, Lucy Lippard, Editor (New York, Praeger, 1996), p. 158.

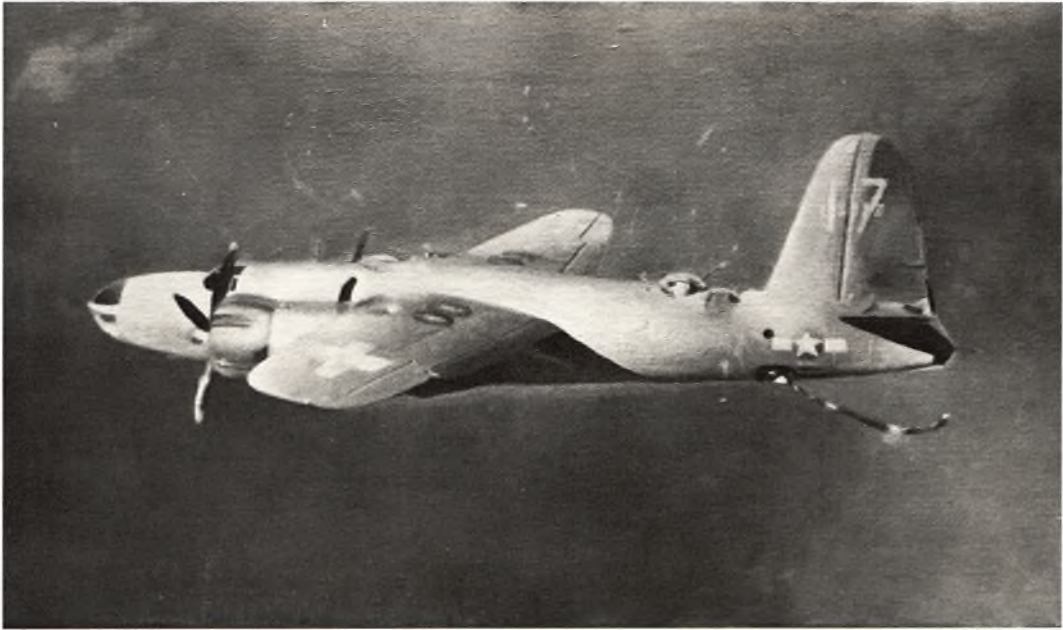
³See Kim Levin, "Chuck Close: Decoding the Image," *Arts Magazine* (Volume 52, Number 10, June, 1978), pp. 146-149.



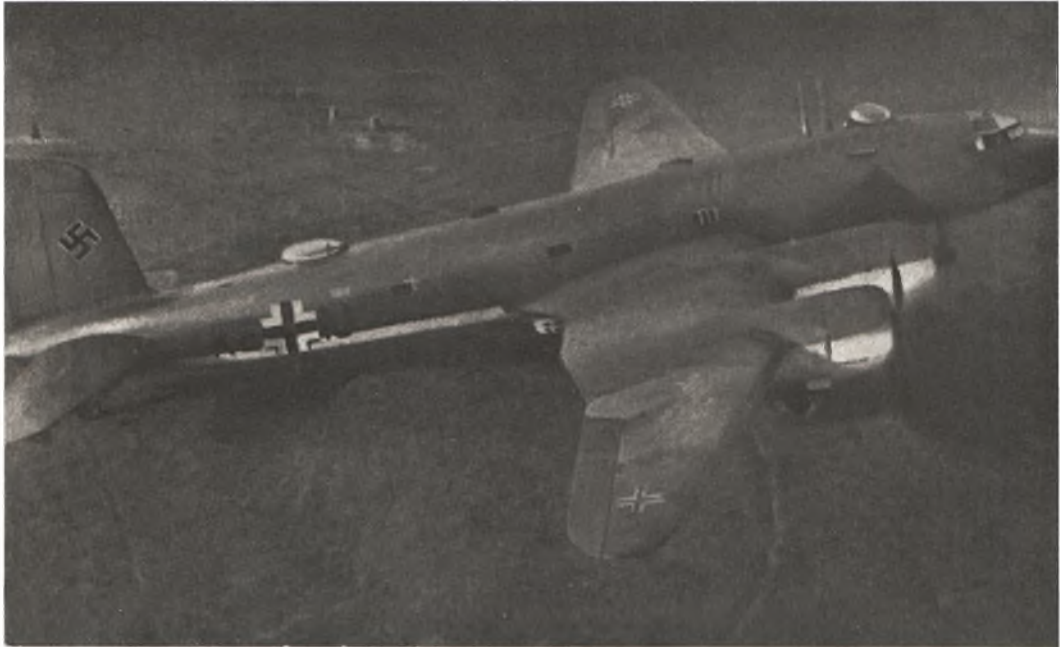
9. *Flying Fortress*, 1966
oil on canvas
16 x 26
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Max Isaac,
Honolulu



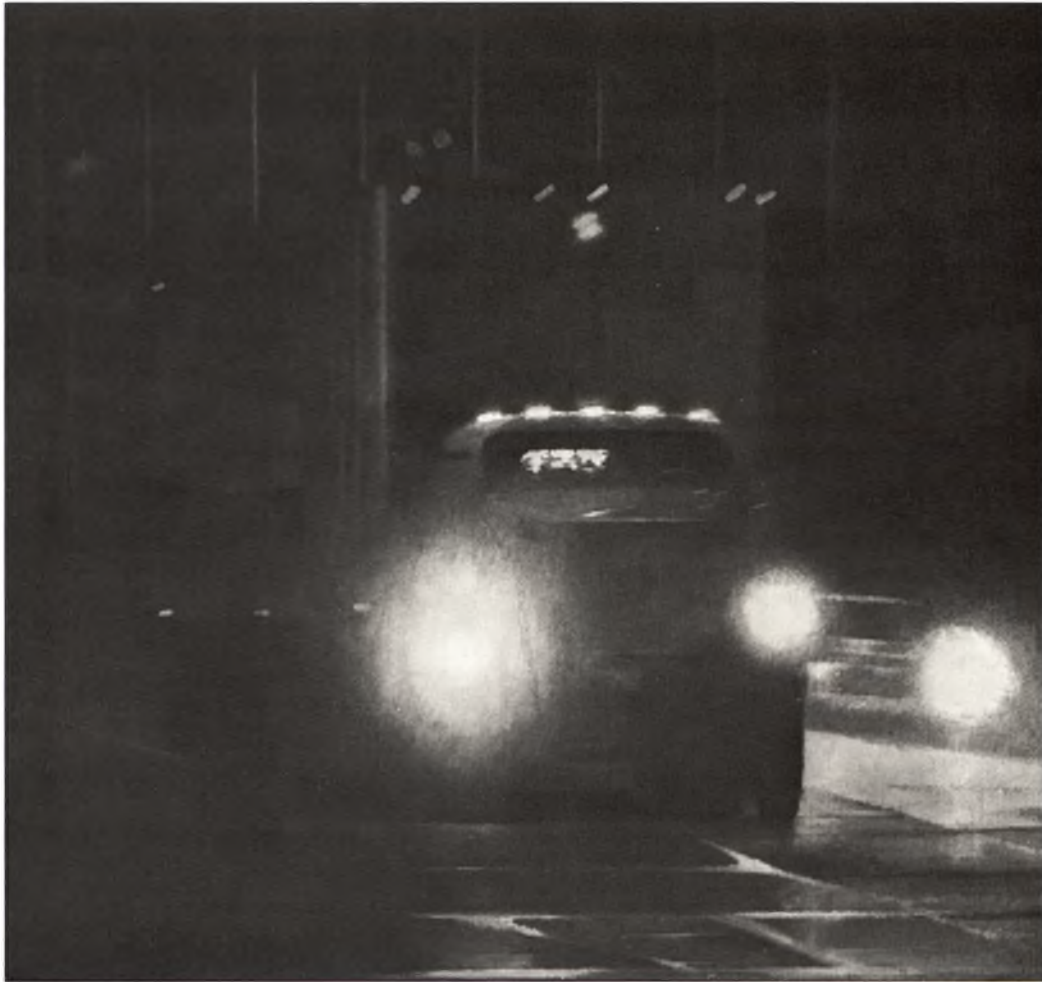
10. *Tulip Car #1*, 1966
oil on canvas
16 x 27
Lent by Audrey Sabol,
Villanova, Pennsylvania



11. *Suspended Plane*, 1966
oil on canvas
16 x 27
Lent by the artist



12. *German Plane*, 1966
oil on canvas
16 x 26
Lent by Chermayeff & Geismar Associates, Inc.,
New York



13. *Truck*, 1966
oil on canvas
16 x 26
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Steinberg,
Beverly Hills



14. *Freeway*, 1966
oil on canvas
17½ x 26½
Lent by Harold Cook,
New York



15. *Burning Man*, 1966
oil on canvas
20 x 22½
Lent by Harold Cook,
New York



16. *Pencil*, 1966
oil on canvas on wood with graphite
4 1/2 x 33 1/2 x 4 1/2
Lent by Betty Asher,
Beverly Hills



17. *Pink Pearl Eraser*, 1967
acrylic on balsa wood
6 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 3 $\frac{1}{8}$
Collection Newport Harbor Art Museum,
Gift of Avco Financial Services, Inc.,
Newport Beach, by exchange
18. *Pink Pearl Eraser*, 1966-67
acrylic on balsa wood
6 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 18 x 3 $\frac{1}{8}$
Lent by Noma Copley,
New York
19. *Pink Pearl Eraser*, 1966-67
acrylic on balsa wood
6 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 3 $\frac{1}{8}$
Lent by Joni and Monte Gordon,
Los Angeles



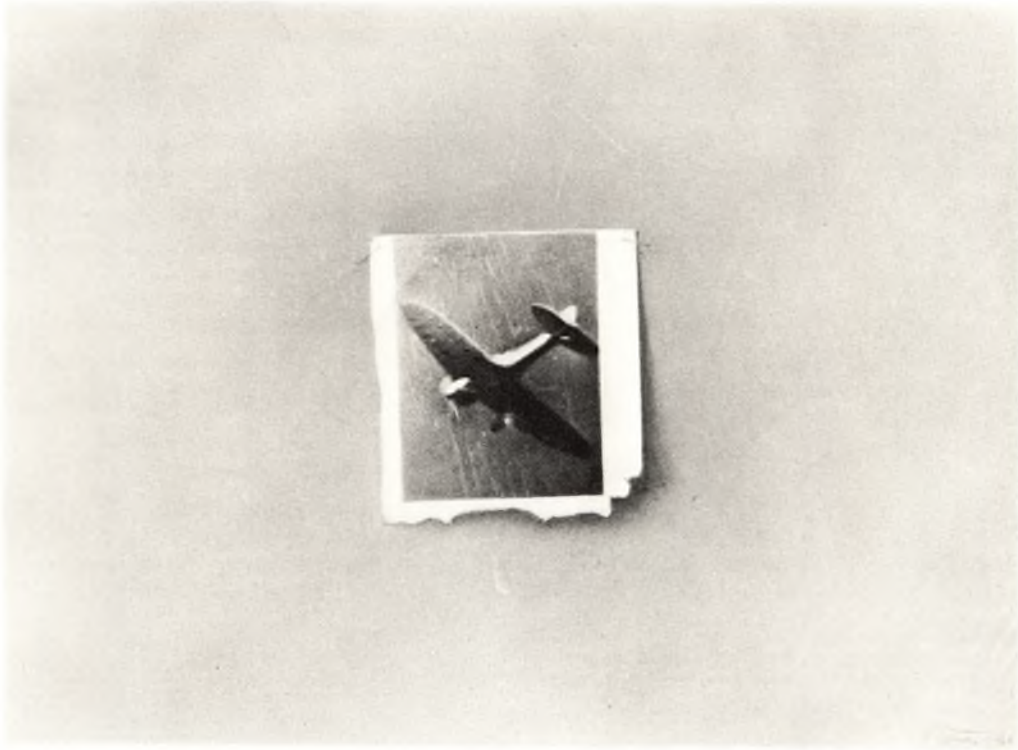
20. *Letter*, 1968
collage and graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13 1/4 x 18 1/4
Lent by Donna O'Neill,
Los Angeles



21. *Revolver*, 1968
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 18½
Lent by Odyssea Gallery,
New York



22. *Zeppelin*, 1968
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13¼ x 18½
Lent by Dr. and Mrs. Judd Marmor,
Los Angeles



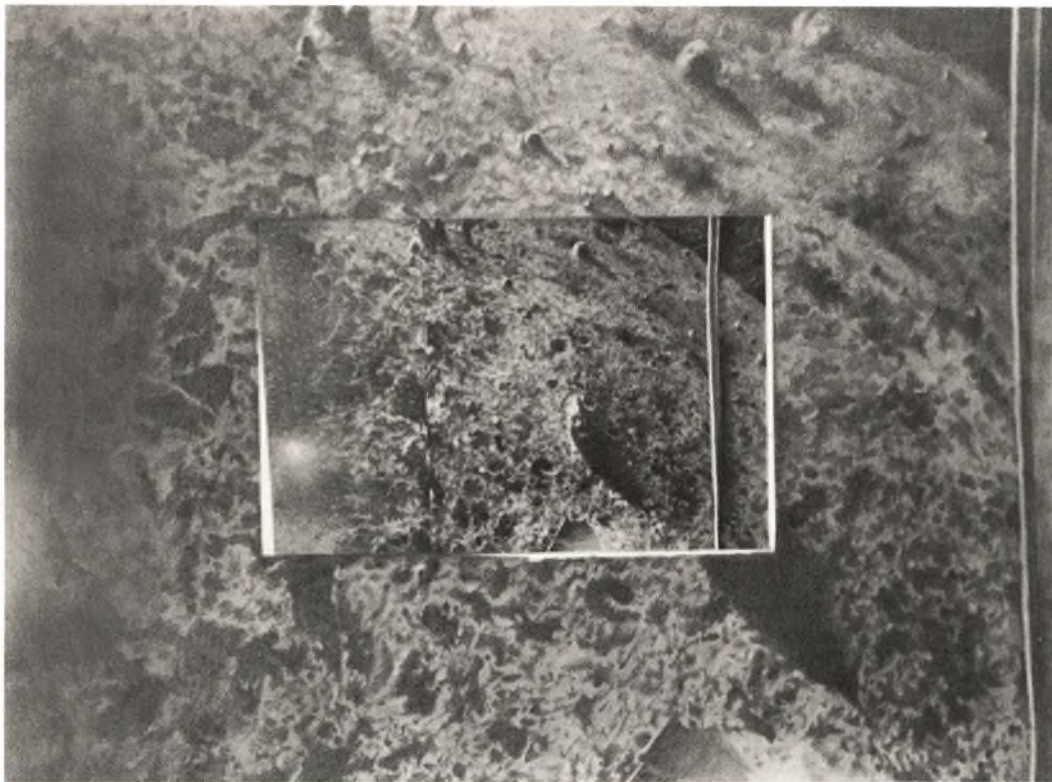
23. *Plane*, 1968
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13¼ x 18
Lent by Clayton Garrison,
Laguna Beach, California



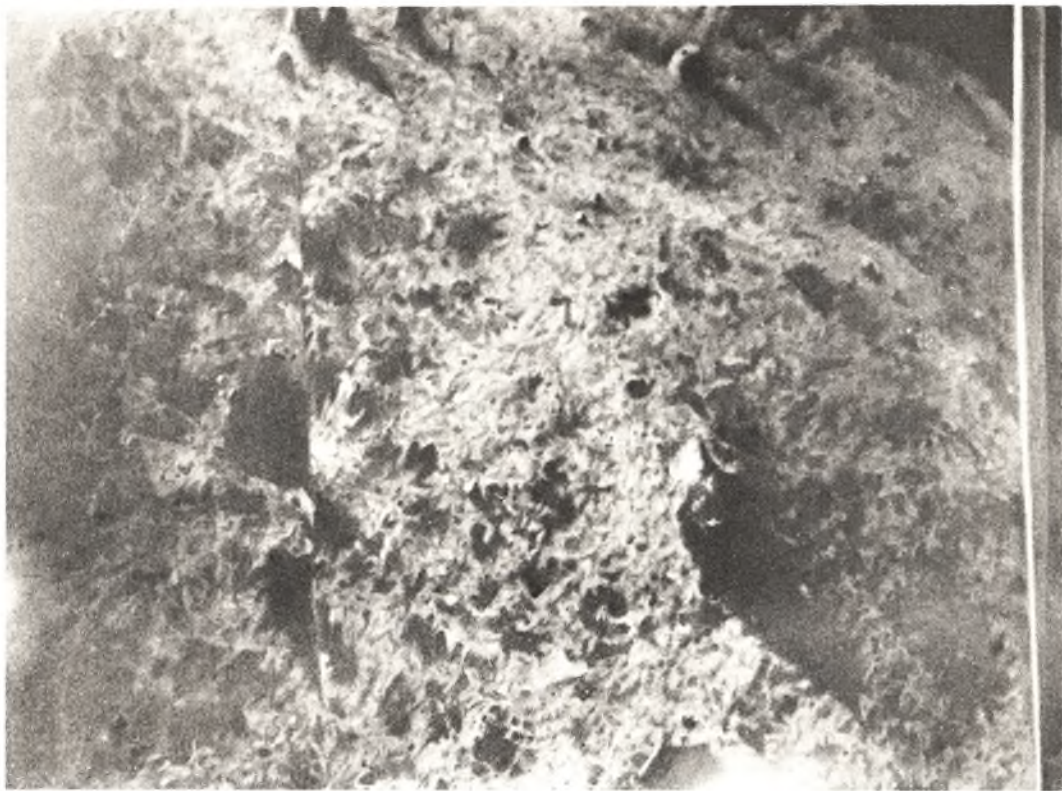
24. *Hiroshima*, 1968
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13¼ x 18
Lent by Leta and Mel Ramos,
Oakland



25. *Untitled (Ocean)*, 1968
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13¼ x 18½
Lent by Tony Berlant,
Santa Monica



26. *Moon Surface (Luna 9) #1, 1969*
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13⁷/₈ x 18¹/₂
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art,
New York, Mrs. Florene M. Schoenborn Fund



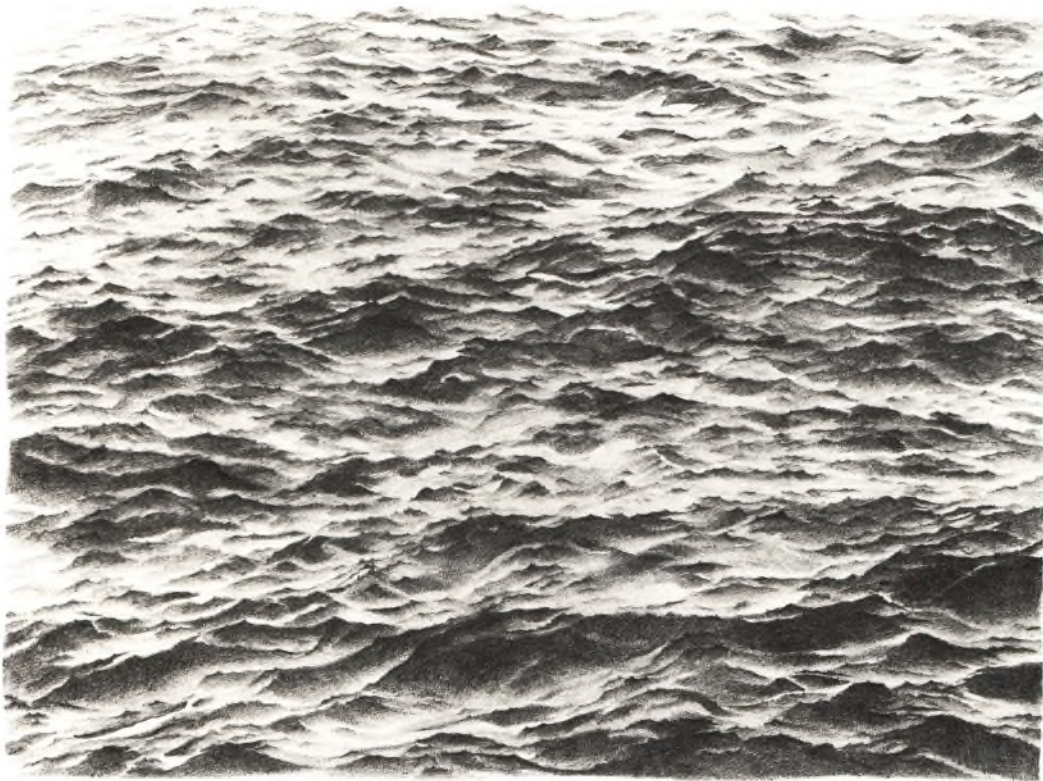
27. *Moon Surface (Luna 9) #2*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 18 $\frac{3}{4}$
Lent by the artist



28. *Untitled (Moon Surface #1)*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 18 1/4
Lent by Laura Stearns,
Los Angeles



29. *Untitled (Double Moon Surface)*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 18 1/4
Lent by Dean Stockwell,
Topanga, California



30. *Untitled (Ocean)*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13¾ x 18½
Lent by Dr. and Mrs. Judd Marmor,
Los Angeles



31. *Untitled (Ocean)*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 18 3/4
Lent by the artist



32. *Untitled (Big Sea #1)*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
34 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 45 $\frac{1}{4}$
Lent by Chermayeff & Geismar Associates, Inc.,
New York



33. *Untitled (Big Sea #2)*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
34 x 45
Lent by American Telephone & Telegraph
Company, New York



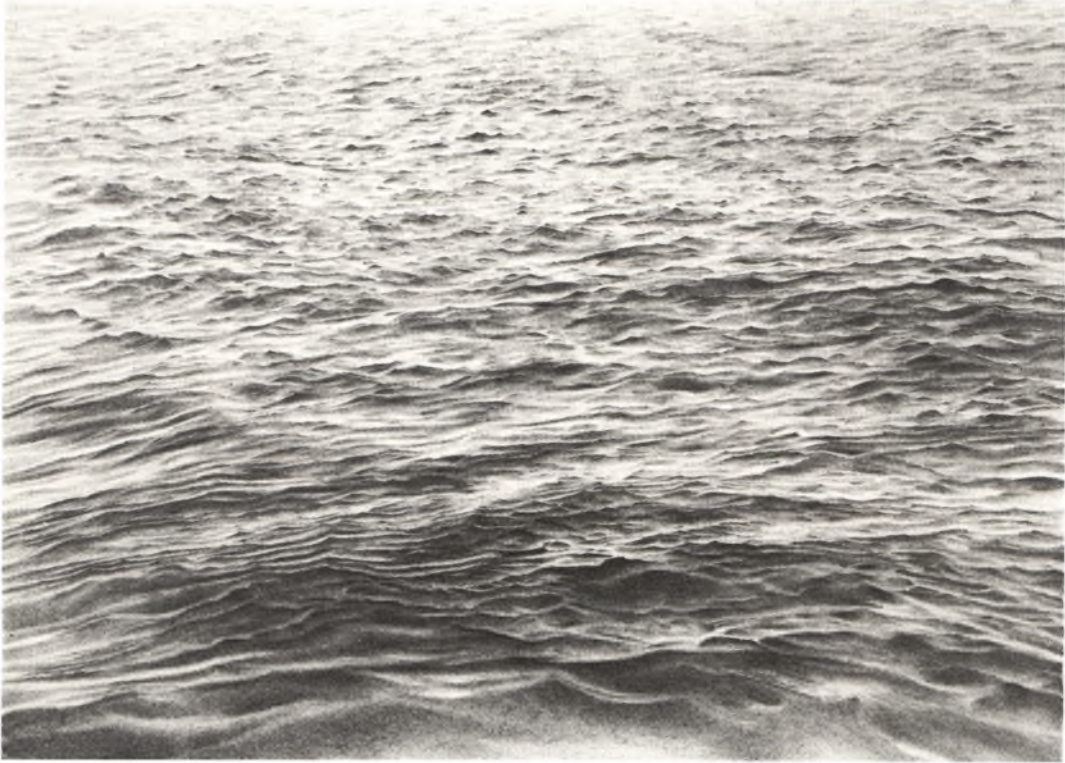
34. *Moon Surface (Surveyor I)*, 1971-72
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 18½
Lent by James Meeker,
Fort Worth



35. Comb, 1969-70
enamel on wood
77 x 24 x 3
Collection Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
Museum Purchase,
Contemporary Art Council Funds



36. *Untitled (Ocean)*, 1970
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14¼ x 18⅞
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art,
New York, Mrs. Florene M. Schoenborn Fund



37. *Untitled (Ocean)*, 1971
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 19
Collection The Fort Worth Art Museum,
The Benjamin J. Tillar Memorial Trust Fund



38. *Long Ocean #1*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
30 x 44
Lent by Odyssea Gallery,
New York



39. *Long Ocean #3*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
31 x 45
Lent by Laurence Gagosian Gallery,
Los Angeles



40. *Long Ocean #5*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
29½ x 43½
Lent by Donna O'Neill,
Los Angeles



41. *Untitled (Ocean with Cross #1)*, 1971
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
17¼ x 22¼
lent by Laurence Gagosian Gallery,
Los Angeles



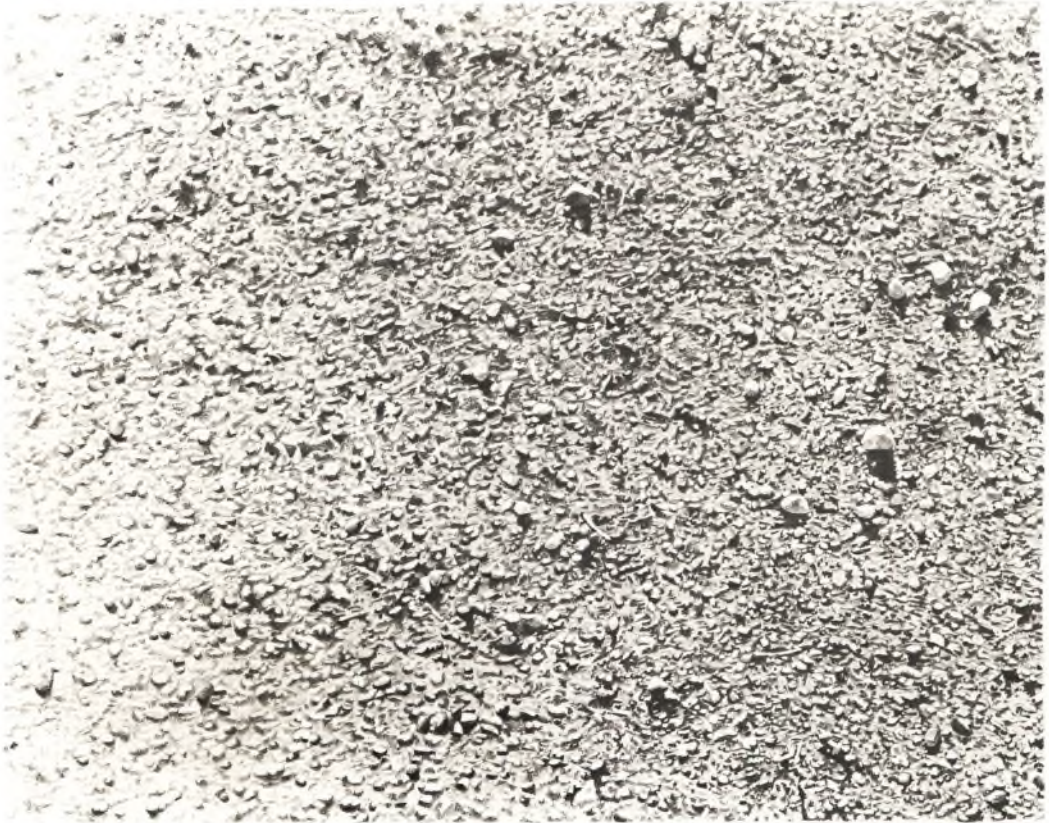
42. *Untitled (Ocean with Cross #2)*, 1972
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
18½ x 23½
Collection of Barry Lowen,
Los Angeles



43. *Ocean: 7 Steps #1*, 1972-73
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
11½ x 98
Lent by the Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joshua A. Gollin



44. *Ocean: 7 Steps #2*, 1972-73
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
11½ x 98
Lent by Riko Mizuno,
Los Angeles



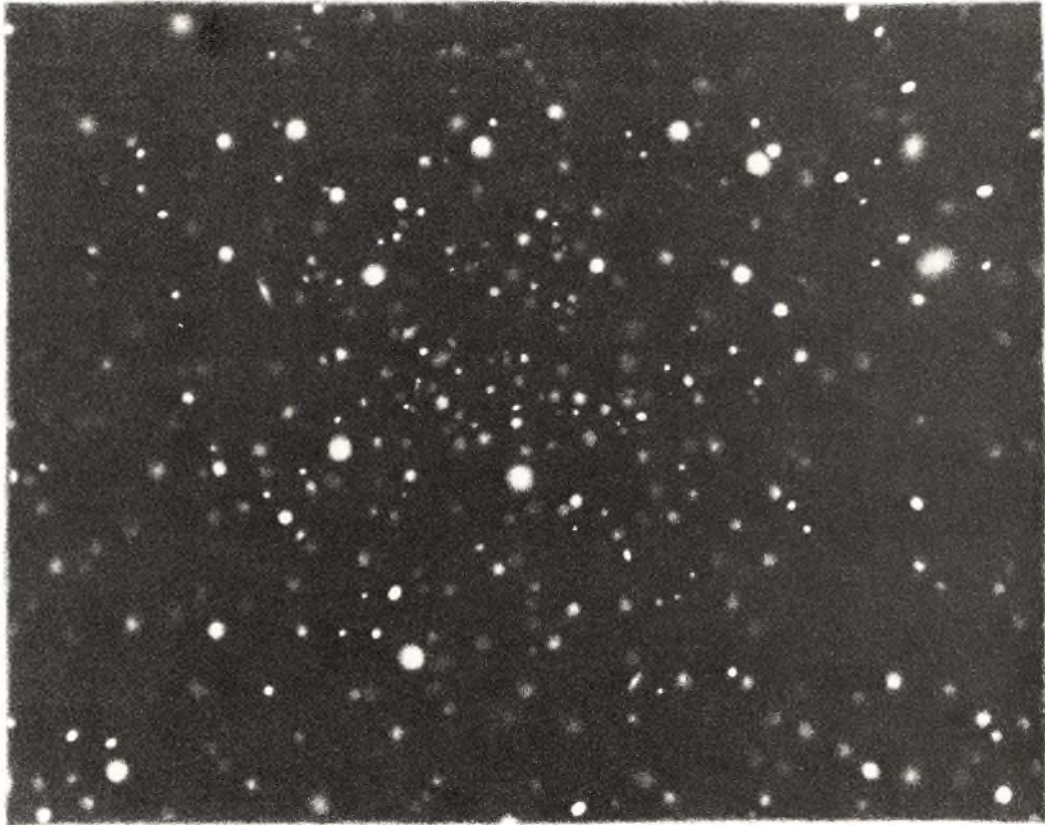
45. *Untitled (Desert)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
11 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 14 $\frac{3}{4}$
Courtesy the collection of Mrs. Blair Fuller,
San Francisco



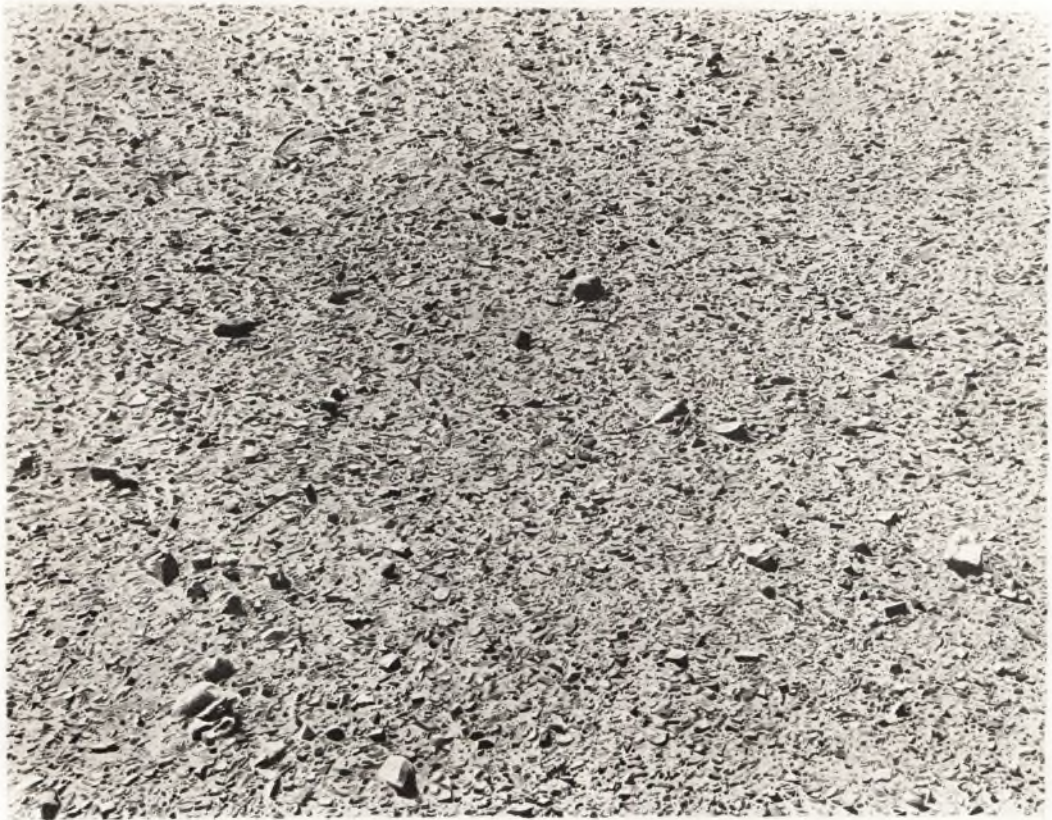
46. *Untitled (Irregular Desert)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12 x 15
Collection of Barry Lowen,
Los Angeles



47. *Galaxy (Cassiopeia)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12 x 15
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Donald B. Marron,
New York



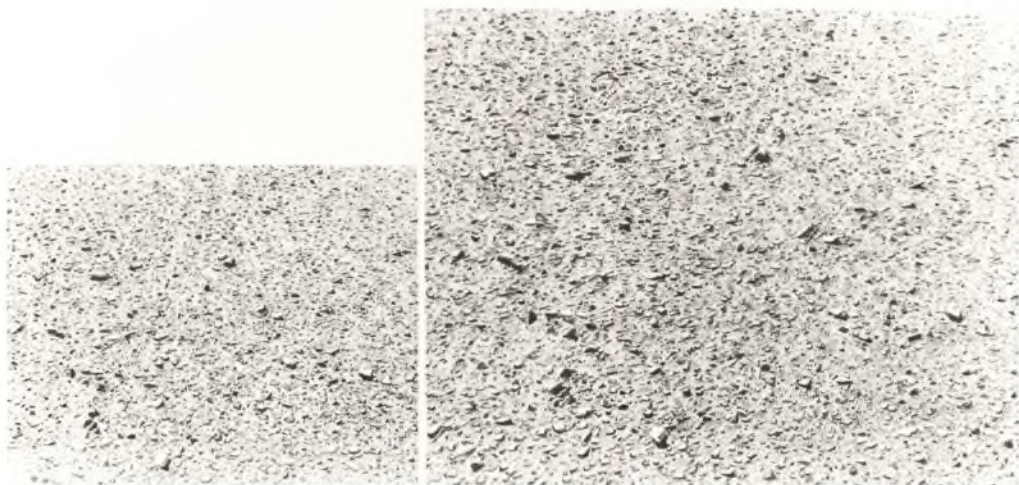
48. *Galaxy (Hydra)*, 1974
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12 x 15
Lent by Ed and Melinda Wortz,
Pasadena



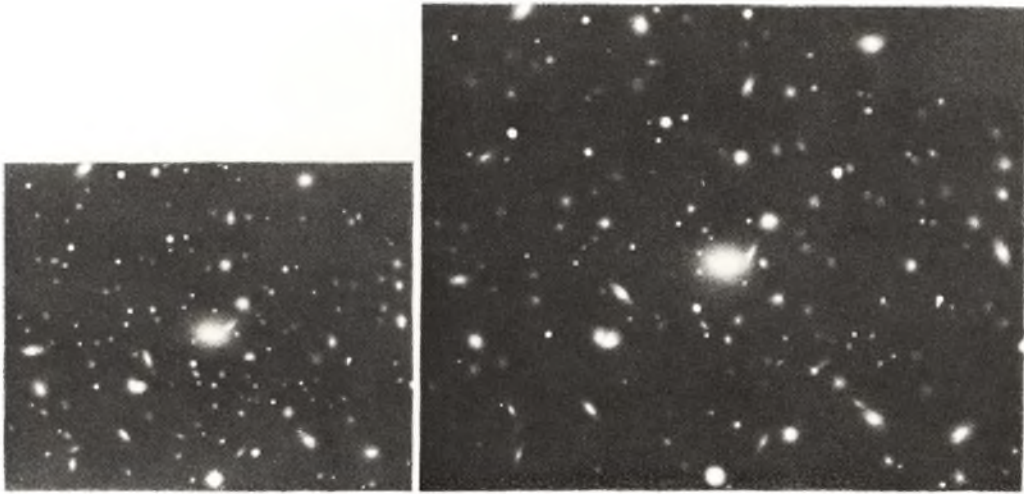
49. *Untitled (Large Desert)*, 1974-75
graphite on acrylic ground on canvas
19 x 24¼
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Donald B. Marron,
New York



50. *Untitled (Medium Desert)*, 1974
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
15¼ x 19½
Lent by Christophe de Menil,
New York



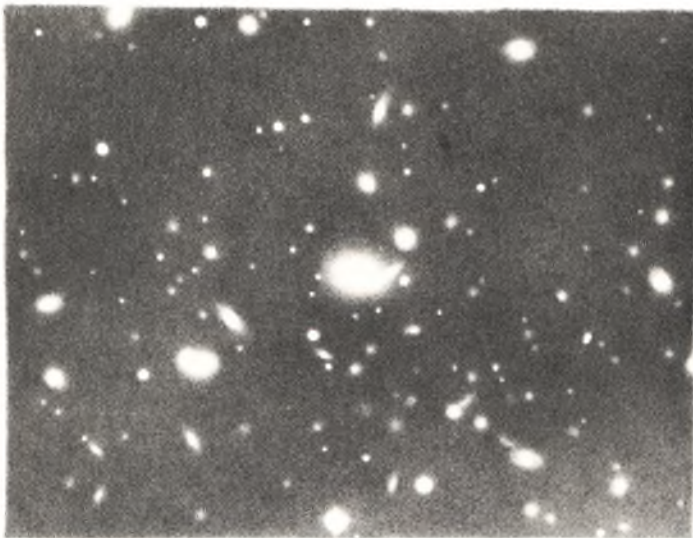
51. *Untitled (Double Desert)*, 1974
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12¼ x 24
Lent by Nicholas Wilder,
Los Angeles



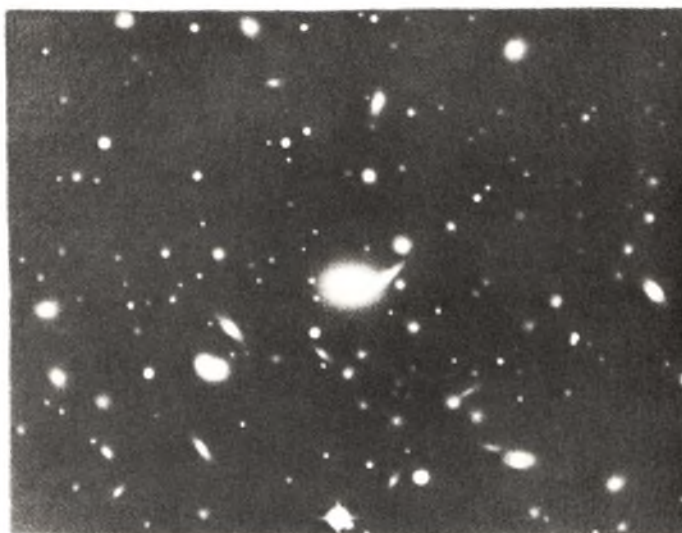
52. *Double Galaxy (Coma Berenices)*, 1974
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12 1/4 x 24
Lent by Donna O'Neill,
Los Angeles



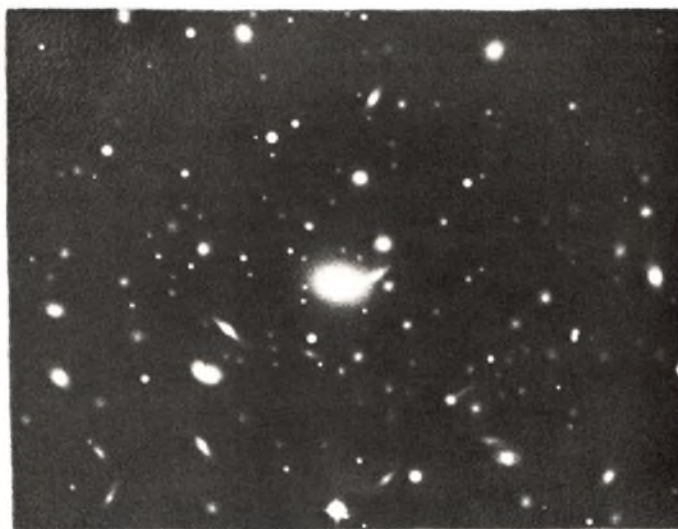
53. *Galaxy #1 (Coma Bernices)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12¼ x 15¼
Collection of Paine, Webber, Jackson,
and Curtis, Inc., New York



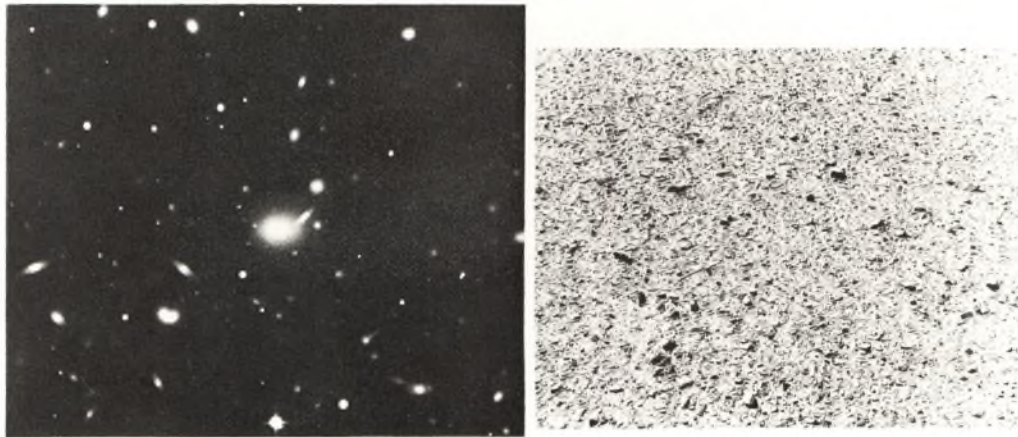
54. *Galaxy #2 (Coma Bernices)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12¼ x 15¼
Collection of Paine, Webber, Jackson,
and Curtis, Inc., New York



55. *Galaxy #3 (Coma Bernices)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12½ x 15
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Anderson,
Atherton, California



56. *Galaxy #4 (Coma Bernices)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12¼ x 15¼
Collection of Paine, Webber, Jackson,
and Curtis, Inc., New York



57. *Desert—Galaxy*, 1974
graphite on acrylic ground on canvas
17½ x 38
Lent by the artist



58. *Untitled (Large Galaxy, Coma Bernices)*, 1975
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
19 x 24
Levi Strauss & Company Corporate Collection,
San Francisco



59. *Untitled (Snow Surface)*, 1977
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12 x 15
Lent by the artist



60. *Untitled (Ocean)*, 1977
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12 x 15
Lent by the artist

Catalogue List

Dimensions are given in inches; height precedes width, width precedes depth.
All works are illustrated.

1. *Soup*, 1964
oil on canvas
18¼ x 16⅞
Lent by Noma Copley,
New York
2. *Puzzle*, 1964
oil on wood
2 x 12 x 10
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Hirsh,
Beverly Hills
3. *Lamp #1*, 1964
oil on canvas
24½ x 35
Lent by the artist
4. *Heater*, 1964
oil on canvas
48 x 48
Lent by the artist
5. *Gun with Hand #1*, 1964
oil on canvas
24½ x 34½
Lent by the artist
6. *T.V.*, 1965
oil on canvas
26¼ x 36
Lent by Betty Asher,
Beverly Hills
7. *House #1*, 1965
oil on wood with metal, fur and plastic
7¼ x 10½ x 9½
Lent by Betty Asher,
Beverly Hills
8. *House #2*, 1965
oil on wood with cardboard
12 x 9¾ x 7
Lent by Noma Copley,
New York
9. *Flying Fortress*, 1966
oil on canvas
16 x 26
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Max Isaac,
Honolulu
10. *Tulip Car #1*, 1966
oil on canvas
16 x 27
Lent by Audrey Sabol,
Villanova, Pennsylvania
11. *Suspended Plane*, 1966
oil on canvas
16 x 27
Lent by the artist
12. *German Plane*, 1966
oil on canvas
16 x 26
Lent by Chermayeff & Geismar Associates, Inc.,
New York
13. *Truck*, 1966
oil on canvas
16 x 26
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Steinberg,
Beverly Hills
14. *Freeway*, 1966
oil on canvas
17½ x 26½
Lent by Harold Cook,
New York
15. *Burning Man*, 1966
oil on canvas
20 x 22½
Lent by Harold Cook,
New York

16. *Pencil*, 1966
oil on canvas on wood with graphite
4 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 33 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$
Lent by Betty Asher,
Beverly Hills
17. *Pink Pearl Eraser*, 1967
acrylic on balsa wood
6 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 3 $\frac{1}{8}$
Collection Newport Harbor Art Museum,
Gift of Avco Financial Services, Inc.,
Newport Beach, by exchange
18. *Pink Pearl Eraser*, 1966-67
acrylic on balsa wood
6 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 18 x 3 $\frac{1}{8}$
Lent by Noma Copley,
New York
19. *Pink Pearl Eraser*, 1966-67
acrylic on balsa wood
6 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 3 $\frac{1}{8}$
Lent by Joni and Monte Gordon,
Los Angeles
20. *Letter*, 1968
collage and graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{8}$
Lent by Donna O'Neill,
Los Angeles
21. *Revolver*, 1968
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$
Lent by Odyssea Gallery,
New York
22. *Zeppelin*, 1968
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$
Lent by Dr. and Mrs. Judd Marmor,
Los Angeles
23. *Plane*, 1968
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 18
Lent by Clayton Garrison,
Laguna Beach, California
24. *Hiroshima*, 1968
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 18
Lent by Leta and Mel Ramos,
Oakland
25. *Untitled (Ocean)*, 1968
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$
Lent by Tony Berlant,
Santa Monica
26. *Moon Surface (Luna 9) #1*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art,
New York, Mrs. Florene M. Schoenborn Fund
27. *Moon Surface (Luna 9) #2*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 18 $\frac{3}{4}$
Lent by the artist
28. *Untitled (Moon Surface #1)*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 18 $\frac{3}{4}$
Lent by Laura Stearns,
Los Angeles
29. *Untitled (Double Moon Surface)*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 18 $\frac{3}{4}$
Lent by Dean Stockwell,
Topanga, California
30. *Untitled (Ocean)*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
13 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$
Lent by Dr. and Mrs. Judd Marmor,
Los Angeles
31. *Untitled (Ocean)*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 18 $\frac{3}{4}$
Lent by the artist

32. *Untitled (Big Sea #1)*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
34 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 45 $\frac{1}{4}$
Lent by Chermayeff & Geismar Associates, Inc.,
New York
33. *Untitled (Big Sea #2)*, 1969
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
34 x 45
Lent by American Telephone & Telegraph
Company, New York
34. *Moon Surface (Surveyor I)*, 1971-72
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$
Lent by James Meeker,
Fort Worth
35. *Comb*, 1969-70
enamel on wood
77 x 24 x 3
Collection Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
Museum Purchase,
Contemporary Art Council Funds
36. *Untitled (Ocean)*, 1970
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{3}{8}$
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art,
New York, Mrs. Florene M. Schoenborn Fund
37. *Untitled (Ocean)*, 1971
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
14 x 19
Collection The Fort Worth Art Museum,
The Benjamin J. Tillar Memorial Trust Fund
38. *Long Ocean #1*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
30 x 44
Lent by Odyssia Gallery,
New York
39. *Long Ocean #3*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
31 x 45
Lent by Laurence Gagosian Gallery,
Los Angeles
40. *Long Ocean #5*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
29 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 43 $\frac{1}{2}$
Lent by Donna O'Neill,
Los Angeles
41. *Untitled (Ocean with Cross #1)*, 1971
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
17 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 22 $\frac{3}{4}$
Lent by Laurence Gagosian Gallery,
Los Angeles
42. *Untitled (Ocean with Cross #2)*, 1972
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
18 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{2}$
Collection of Barry Lowen,
Los Angeles
43. *Ocean: 7 Steps #1*, 1972-73
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
11 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 98
Lent by the Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joshua A. Gollin
44. *Ocean: 7 Steps #2*, 1972-73
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
11 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 98
Lent by Riko Mizuno,
Los Angeles
45. *Untitled (Desert)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
11 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 14 $\frac{3}{4}$
Courtesy the collection of Mrs. Blair Fuller,
San Francisco
46. *Untitled (Irregular Desert)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12 x 15
Collection of Barry Lowen,
Los Angeles
47. *Galaxy (Cassiopeia)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12 x 15
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Donald B. Marron,
New York

48. *Galaxy (Hydra)*, 1974
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12 x 15
Lent by Ed and Melinda Wortz,
Pasadena
49. *Untitled (Large Desert)*, 1974-75
graphite on acrylic ground on canvas
19 x 24¼
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Donald B. Marron,
New York
50. *Untitled (Medium Desert)*, 1974
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
15¼ x 19½
Lent by Christophe de Menil,
New York
51. *Untitled (Double Desert)*, 1974
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12¼ x 24
Lent by Nicholas Wilder,
Los Angeles
52. *Double Galaxy (Coma Bernices)*, 1974
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12¼ x 24
Lent by Donna O'Neill,
Los Angeles
53. *Galaxy #1 (Coma Bernices)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12¼ x 15¼
Collection of Paine, Webber, Jackson,
and Curtis, Inc., New York
54. *Galaxy #2 (Coma Bernices)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12¼ x 15¼
Collection of Paine, Webber, Jackson,
and Curtis, Inc., New York
55. *Galaxy #3 (Coma Bernices)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12½ x 15
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Anderson,
Atherton, California
56. *Galaxy #4 (Coma Bernices)*, 1973
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12¼ x 15¼
Collection of Paine, Webber, Jackson,
and Curtis, Inc., New York
57. *Desert—Galaxy*, 1974
graphite on acrylic ground on canvas
17½ x 38
Lent by the artist
58. *Untitled (Large Galaxy, Coma Bernices)*, 1975
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
19 x 24
Levi Strauss & Company Corporate Collection,
San Francisco
59. *Untitled (Snow Surface)*, 1977
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12 x 15
Lent by the artist
60. *Untitled (Ocean)*, 1977
graphite on acrylic ground on paper
12 x 15
Lent by the artist

Chronology

- 1939 Born in Riga, Latvia.
- 1944 Family flees to eastern Germany and later settles in Esslingen near Stuttgart in West Germany.
- 1949 Comes to the United States and settles in Indianapolis, Indiana, where she lives for the next thirteen years. At age seventeen is assisting her architect father who is now working as a contractor in the Indianapolis area.
- 1958 Graduates from high school and enrolls at the John Herron Art Institute in Indianapolis.
- 1961 Accepts fellowship to the Yale University summer session.
- 1962 Receives BFA, John Herron Art Institute; receives Wolcott Award for travel in Europe. Offered scholarships to Yale University and Boston School of Fine Arts; accepts fellowship at the University of California at Los Angeles, where she continues her studies for the next three years.
Settles in storefront studio on Venice Boulevard, Venice, California, where she works for the next thirteen years.
- 1964 First group exhibition, David Stuart Galleries, Los Angeles.
- 1965 Receives MFA from the University of California at Los Angeles.
- 1965- Instructor of painting and drawing at California State College
1966 at Los Angeles.
- 1966 First solo exhibition, David Stuart Galleries, Los Angeles.
- 1967- Instructor of painting and drawing, University of California
1972 at Irvine.
- 1968 Receives Cassandra Foundation Award.
- 1971 Receives artist's fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.
- 1975 Receives commission from the United States Department of the Interior. Works alone on site at Glacier Bay, Alaska, on project for the Bicentennial Exhibition, *America 1976*. Moves to larger studio in Venice, California.
- 1976 Instructor of painting and drawing at California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, California.
Receives second artist's fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.
- 1978 Exhibits first pieces from new body of work, Security Pacific National Bank, Los Angeles.

Exhibitions

Solo

David Stuart Galleries, Los Angeles, February 28-March 26, 1966.

Riko Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, December 1969-January 1970.

Riko Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, May 2-May 26, 1973.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, October 4-November 4, 1973.
Brochure with text by Elke M. Solomon.

Felicity Samuel Gallery, London, England, April 21-May 30, 1975.

Broxton Gallery, Los Angeles, *Complete Lithographic Works 1970-1975*, November 11-December 11, 1975.

Security Pacific National Bank, Los Angeles, October 1978.

Group

David Stuart Galleries, Los Angeles, September 1-30, 1964.

California State College at Hayward, *Four Painters*, February 20-March 16, 1966.

Philadelphia Arts Council, *Thirteen Views of the West*, March 9-31, 1966.

University of Colorado, Boulder, N.Y.-L.A. *Drawings of the 60's*, June 7-August 15, 1967.
University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, September 10-October 8, 1967. Catalogue with foreword by Professor Jan von Adlmann.

University of California at Irvine, *Faculty '68*, April 16-May 5, 1968. Catalogue with text by Fidel A. Danieli.

The Tampa Bay Art Center, Tampa, Florida, *NOW, 40 California Painters*, April 8-May 14, 1968. Catalogue.

David Stuart Galleries, Los Angeles, *Summer Show 1969*, July 1-August 31, 1969.

The Fort Worth Art Museum, Texas, *Contemporary American Drawing*, October 28-November 30, 1969. Catalogue with essay by Peter Plagens.

University of California at Santa Barbara, *The Drawing Society: California, Arizona, Nevada and Utah*, March 31-April 26, 1970. Catalogue.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *1970 Annual of Contemporary American Sculpture*, December 12, 1970-February 7, 1971. Catalogue.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Art Lending Service, *Paperworks*, November 24, 1970-January 10, 1971.

Riko Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, Summer, 1970.

La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, California, *Continuing Surrealism*, January 15-March 21, 1971. Catalogue.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *24 Young Los Angeles Artists*, May 11-July 4, 1971.

International Exhibitions Foundation, Washington, D.C., *Tamarind: a Renaissance of Lithography*, a loan exhibition from the Tamarind Lithography Workshop, circulated nationally to 26 art institutions, 1971-1976. Catalogue with preface by Dr. E. Maurice Bloch.

La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, California, *Earth, Animal, Vegetable and Mineral*, October 9-December 5, 1971.

Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, *The Topography of Nature: The Microcosm and Macrocosm*, March 22-April 27, 1972. Catalogue with text by Suzanne Delehanty.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, *California Prints*, March 1- May 29, 1972.

Janie C. Lee Gallery, Dallas, Texas, *Drawings*, May 20-June 30, 1972.

Pasadena Art Museum, *A Survey of West Coast Art from the Permanent Collection and Loan Collections*, June 20-September 3, 1972.

San Francisco Art Institute, L.A., November 10-December 17, 1972.

The Brooklyn Museum, New York, *Eighteenth National Print Exhibition*, November 22, 1972-February 4, 1973. California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, March 24-June 17, 1973. Catalogue.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Ten Years of Contemporary Art Council Acquisitions*, December 19, 1972-March 4, 1973. Catalogue.

Pasadena Museum of Modern Art, *Prints from the Permanent Collection*, February 13-April 22, 1973.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *American Drawings 1963-1973*, May 25-July 22, 1973. Catalogue.

Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Barnsdall Park, *Separate Realities*, September 19-October 21, 1973. Catalogue.

Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, *Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture 1974*, March 10-April 21, 1974.

University of California at Riverside, *Earth, Sea and Sky*, March 1974.

Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois, *Seventy-first American Exhibition*, June 15-August 11, 1974. Catalogue.

Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, *Drawings*, April 11-May 4, 1974.

Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York, *Drawings*, May 11-June 30, 1974. Catalogue.

Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California, *A Drawing Show*, January 26-March 9, 1975. Catalogue.

The Huntsville Museum of Art, University of Alabama, Von Braun Civic Center, Huntsville, Alabama, *Recent Drawings*, June 15-July 20, 1975. The Art Museum, Princeton University, New Jersey, October 11-December 7, 1975. The Cummer Gallery of Art, Jacksonville, Florida, January 25-February 29, 1976. State University of New York, Stony Brook, September 5-October 10, 1976. Catalogue with text by Elke M. Solomon.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Contemporary Graphics Center, California, *Cirrus Editions Ltd. Prints*, October 8-November 5, 1975.

The Art Galleries, California State University at Long Beach, *The Lyon Collection: Modern and Contemporary Works on Paper*, March 29-May 2, 1976. Catalogue.

Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., *America 1976*, a Bicentennial Exhibition Sponsored by the United States Department of the Interior, April 27-June 6, 1976.

Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, July 4-September 12, 1976. Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts and Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts, October 19-December 7, 1976. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minnesota, January 16-February 27, 1977. Milwaukee Art Center, Wisconsin, March 19-May 15, 1977. The Fort Worth Art Museum, Texas, June 18-August 14, 1977. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art,

California, September 10-November 13, 1977. The High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, December 10, 1977-February 5, 1978. The Brooklyn Museum, New York, March 11- May 21, 1978. Catalogue.

Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, *Matrix 19*, May-June 1976.

The Detroit Institute of the Arts, *American Artists: A New Decade*, July 30-September 19, 1976. The Fort Worth Art Museum, Texas, November 14, 1976-January 2, 1977. Grand Rapids Art Museum, Michigan, March 12-April 17, 1977. Catalogue with text by Jay Belloli and essay by Barbara Haskell.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, *Painting and Sculpture in California, the Modern Era*, September 3-November 21, 1976. National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., May 20-September 11, 1977. Catalogue.

The Brooklyn Museum, New York, *30 Years of American Printmaking*, November 20, 1976-January 30, 1977. Catalogue.

Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery, University of California at Los Angeles, *The Early Sixties at UCLA*, January 8-February 19, 1977. Catalogue.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *1977 Biennial Exhibition*, February 19-April 3, 1977. Catalogue.

Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, *Three Generations: Studies in Collage*, January 26-March 4, 1978.

Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, *Works on Paper*, May 25-June 24, 1978.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *The Decade in Review: Selection of the 1970's*, June 19-September 3, 1979.

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Fellows of Contemporary Art

The concept of the Fellows of Contemporary Art as developed by its founding members is unique. We are an independent organization, established and incorporated in 1975. We do not raise funds. All monies received from dues are used to underwrite our annual exhibition and to support tax-exempt educational institutions active in the field of contemporary art. We maintain no permanent facility and no permanent collection but rather utilize alternative spaces.

The following is a list of exhibitions initiated and sponsored by the Fellows of Contemporary Art, 1976-1979:

- 1976 *Ed Moses Drawings 1958-1976*
Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery
University of California, Los Angeles
July 13 - August 15, 1976
Catalogue with essay by Joseph Masheck
- 1977 *Unstretched Surfaces/Surfaces Libres*
Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art
November 5 - December 16, 1977
Catalogue with essays by Jean-Luc Bordeaux and Alfred Pacquement

First major cultural exchange between Centre National d'Art de Culture Georges Pompidou and Los Angeles

Catalogue received Graphic Arts Award from Printing Institute of America
- 1978 *Wallace Berman Retrospective*
Otis Art Institute Gallery
October 24 - November 25, 1978
Catalogue with essays by Robert Duncan and David Meltzer

Assisted by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C., a Federal Agency
- 1979 Exhibition traveled to:
The Fort Worth Art Museum
January 10 - February 18, 1979

University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley
September 21 - November 11, 1979

Seattle Art Museum
December 13, 1979 - January 27, 1980

This year the Fellows are pleased to initiate and sponsor, together with the Newport Harbor Art Museum and assisted by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a survey of the work of Vija Celmins.

On behalf of the Fellows of Contemporary Art, I wish to thank Tom Garver, Director, Betty Turnbull, Curator, and the entire staff of the Newport Harbor Art Museum for their cooperation and enthusiasm, and Susan Larsen for her accomplished essay.

I express my gratitude to Betty Faris, Fellows' 1979 Exhibition Chairman, for her sensitivity to others while exercising all the responsibilities inherent in coordinating this exhibition; to Gordon Hampton, member, Board of Directors, for his sound advice and legal counsel; and in particular to Kathryn Files, Chairman, Research and Fund Development, for acting as liaison between the National Endowment for the Arts, the Newport Harbor Art Museum, and the Fellows of Contemporary Art. Mrs. Files, in the most professional manner, has been instrumental in setting the highest of standards for the Fellows. Finally, I am grateful to our members for their encouragement and support.

Murray A. Gribin

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