

# Spotlights

Collected by the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum

Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts

Washington University in St. Louis



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*Edited by*  
SABINE ECKMANN



Collected by  
the Mildred  
Lane Kemper  
Art Museum

*Essays by*

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Elizabeth Wyckoff  
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Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum  
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts  
Washington University in St. Louis

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Front cover:

Fernand Léger (French, 1881–1955)

Detail of *Les belles cyclistes* (*The Women Cyclists*), 1944

Oil on canvas, 29 x 36"

Gift of Charles H. Yalem, 1963



FIG. 1.  
Schoolchildren visit *Vasily Kandinsky (1866–1944)—  
A Retrospective Exhibition*, Washington University Gallery  
of Art, Steinberg Hall, 1964.

# Introduction; or, The (Re)Making of Art History

Sabine Eckmann

## Spotlights

The book at hand has an unusual format for a collection catalog, which most often comprises a selection of so-called masterpieces, those artworks in a museum collection deemed of highest quality. By contrast this catalog is an experiment, devoted to ongoing and new research rather than to canonized artworks and their established positions within the history of art. It offers a substantial variety of voices and methodological approaches to interpreting fifty artworks in the Museum's collection. Scholars both established and emerging, from campus and beyond, have investigated paintings, sculptures, prints, videos, and photographs ranging in date from the thirteenth to the twenty-first centuries.

Although the artworks explored in these essays by more than thirty authors do not constitute a selection of "masterpieces," they do represent areas of strength and depth in the collection: French and American nineteenth-century art, such as Narcisse Virgile Diaz de la Peña's *Wood Interior* (1867) and Frederic Edwin Church's *Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta* (1883); European and American modernism, such as Max Beckmann's *Les artistes mit Gemüse* (*Artists with Vegetable*, 1943) and Jackson Pollock's *Sleeping Effort* (1953); and increasingly global contemporary practices, as exemplified by the recently acquired works by Yto Barrada, *Landslip, Cromlech de Mzora* (2001) and *Tunnel—Disused Survey Site for a Morocco–Spain Connection* (2002). Also examined are artworks acquired in the last ten years by other leading contemporary artists, including Nicole Eisenman, Olafur Eliasson, Andrea Fraser, and Carrie Mae Weems. Lastly, important historical artworks such as the Native American *Repoussé Plaques* (c. 1200–1400), Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I* (1514), and Rembrandt van Rijn's *The Three Crosses* (1653) are discussed.



### Art History on Display

This discursive and collaborative engagement with collection research and interpretation is mirrored in the ways in which the artworks were exhibited over the past ten years. Guided by the mission-driven notion that a university museum should make connections between art (both contemporary and historical) and broader sociopolitical, ideological, philosophical, and phenomenological contexts, the artworks were always installed in thematic clusters. Considering the collection's strengths in nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century art, it seemed important to ask how the conditions of modernization are manifested in these artworks. It was our goal to trace shifting notions of subjectivity and self as they are addressed in modern and contemporary art in order to better understand fundamental questions that are raised by artists in the face of radical social, political, economic, and technological changes.

For example, we highlighted how landscape painting gained in popularity in the nineteenth century and became a subject for projection and interpretation. Nature was conceived as wilderness—in need of being civilized, cultured, historicized, or domesticated—yet it was also seen as providing a retreat from the alienating experiences of the modern city and served as an imprint of the unconscious imagination. The display also explored abstraction (fig. 2), the celebrated invention of the early twentieth century. We visualized how it has been interpreted as both the epitome of originality and creative subjectivity, especially in relation to Abstract Expressionism, and the complete loss thereof through an emphasis on the phenomenological nature of the painting process itself, or the use of rational systems of order (such as the grid) that suggest the subordination of artistic creativity to a technologized reality. Focusing on the everyday, we demonstrated how the modern subject collides with the world of objects. With the invention of the readymade, collage, and assemblage came the



FIG. 2.  
Installation view,  
*Abstraction* section,  
Bernoudy Permanent  
Collection Gallery,  
Mildred Lane Kemper  
Art Museum, 2006.

FIG. 3.  
Installation view,  
*Portraiture* section,  
Bernoudy Permanent  
Collection Gallery,  
Mildred Lane Kemper  
Art Museum, 2006.



integration of quotidian materials into the artwork, challenging the very foundation of the institution of art. The use of everyday objects seemed to offer a way to bridge the gap between art and life, yet it also demonstrates how the external world of things shapes human subjectivity. Looking at portraiture (fig. 3), we foregrounded how the artist's "I" and relation to the other is negotiated through the conception, questioning, and alteration of individualism. While some artworks still assume an unfettered notion of the self, others complicate such ideas through distortions and fragmentations or replace human likeness with insignia and found images. Implied in such artistic approaches is the persistent question of how (and whether) one can lay claim to subjectivity, human agency, and self-realization in an era of rapid modernization.

While this organization of the permanent collection allowed for a nonchronological and cross-cultural installation that was especially appropriate for a university museum, after

some years it appeared limited, as it lacked the possibility of probing conceived narratives of modern art. In 2010 the curatorial team reorganized the presentation of the collection in a way that would complicate well-known and often teleological conceptions of modern art, such as the progressive development from figuration (the various forms through which artists imitate and interpret the visible world) to abstraction. According to this narrative, art, especially painting, ultimately abandons all ties to reality, or the "real." In fact, throughout the era of modernism proper, the notion of art as an autonomous endeavor gained amplified attention. The thematic section of the permanent collection installation *Abstract | Real* (fig. 4) probed this trajectory by illuminating dialogical relations, even tensions, between abstraction and elements that either imitate or are derived from the real. Although some early twentieth-century artworks at first glance seem solely to visualize various abstract and geometric patterns, in the context of

the artists' writings and research they in fact can be understood as alluding to experiential reality. Playfully appropriating technological schematics and nonobjective structures that facilitated the advancements of modernization, many modern artists were inspired to create new worlds, with often utopian visions of society. In the aftermath of World War II, particularly in Europe, artists became interested in the body, rather than the intellectual mind, as a medium for shaping the creative process. Embodied painting, conceived as a move away from traditional notions of the artist as a willful and autonomous creator, typically emphasizes the physicality of the artistic process. Also manifesting the unconscious, such abstraction was an attempt to give form to the struggle over what it means to be human in an era of unprecedented violence and destruction. *Abstract | Real* brought together these and other thematic groupings that were meant to stimulate new dialogues between abstraction and figuration,

nonobjectivity and everyday materials, artistic subjectivity and the loss thereof.

The theme *Body | Self* (fig. 5) moved beyond the genre of portraiture to investigate tensions between representations of the physical body and shifting understandings and experiences of the self. *Body | Self* was divided into two categories of artworks: those that emphasize the human figure in terms of negotiations between individual subjectivity and social identity, and those that employ the body to visualize broader cultural or political aspects of the human condition. Several of the selected works engage concepts of identity and individuality through the traditional painted portrait. The genre of portraiture has historically served a key representational function, as a marker of class, rank, and social standing. It has also been employed to express a state of mind or to mediate the ways in which modernity and technology affect subjectivity. Fidelity to likeness,

FIG. 4.  
Installation view,  
*Abstract | Real* section,  
Bernoudy Permanent  
Collection Gallery,  
Mildred Lane Kemper  
Art Museum, 2011.



for instance, has often been superseded by experimentation with form and material in which the body is represented as fragmented, distorted, obscured, or abstracted, reflecting a modern understanding of selfhood as vulnerable and contingent rather than fixed and unified.

Insofar as culture is the creation of humans, nature is often considered to be outside the realm of the man-made. But while artists have long used nature as inspiration, subject, and allegory, it has never been a neutral construct. Rather, there are well-developed aesthetic codes for conveying “naturalness” and nature, at the heart of which lies the assumption that nature derives its meaning or value in opposition to notions of civilization and culture. The installation of *Nature | Culture* (fig. 6) reconsidered the genre of landscape painting and its expansion into photography and video. Throughout the modern era artists have consistently turned to landscape as a site of refuge from the onslaught of

modernization and the rise of cities. Especially in the nineteenth century the countryside was often depicted as a pastoral retreat, a wilderness imbued with spiritual elements, and a world untouched by civilization. Yet artists also embraced modern technologies and the built environment, integrating new mediums and incorporating new subject matter in ways that reflect the transformations taking place in the world around them. Still others turned to landscape to explore inner psychological states, using unconventional means to tap into what was perceived as untouched or primordial. Lastly, attention to the material conditions of art-making—to gesture, color, and texture—also became ways of likening artistic practice to natural processes.

Following these different yet related approaches to thematic installations, which focused on notions of the new and ever-changing signifiers of the modern era, we are now, for the Museum’s tenth anniversary in the current building, returning to

FIG. 5.  
Installation view,  
*Body | Self* section,  
Bernoudy Permanent  
Collection Gallery,  
Mildred Lane Kemper  
Art Museum, 2011.



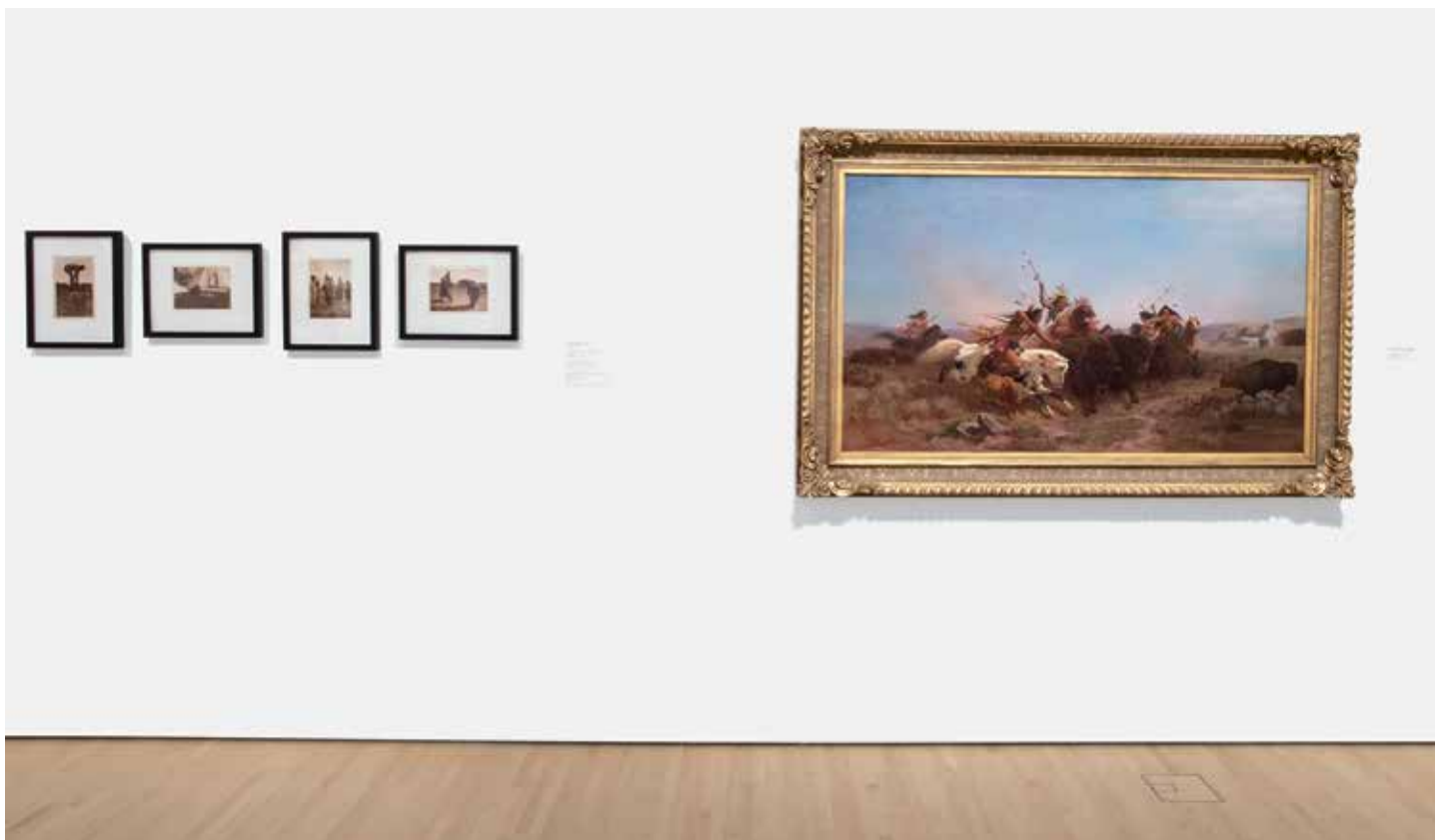


FIG. 6.  
Installation view,  
*Nature | Culture* section, Bernoudy Permanent Collection  
Gallery, Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2015.

chronology and history, albeit retaining some thematic leitmotifs. The concepts of “real,” “radical,” and “psychological” will serve for the next few years as the basis to connect artists and artworks from different cultures and centuries in their quest to understand, participate in, and visualize the worlds they inhabit.

### Historical Cornerstones

In addition to these thematic installations of the Museum’s collection over the last ten years, we have also extended our investigations into our institutional history. We presented these early and more recent findings in such exhibitions as *The Taste of*

*the Founders* (2000), *H. W. Janson and Legacy of Modern Art at Washington University* (2002–5),<sup>1</sup> *The Barbizon School and the Nature of Landscape* (2005),<sup>2</sup> *Focus on Photography* (2010),<sup>3</sup> *Frederick Hartt and American Abstraction in the 1950s* (2012),<sup>4</sup> and *From Picasso to Fontana: Collecting Modern and Postwar Art in the Eisendrath Years, 1960–1968* (2015).

The first art museum west of the Mississippi, the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum opened in 1881 as the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts (fig. 7), a department of Washington University, under the leadership of Halsey C. Ives.<sup>5</sup> Its founding—downtown at Nineteenth and



1. Sabine Eckmann, *H. W. Janson and the Legacy of Modern Art at Washington University in St. Louis* (St. Louis: Washington University Gallery of Art; New York: Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, 2002), and the expanded German edition *Exil und Moderne: H. W. Janson und die Sammlung der Washington University in St. Louis* (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum; Rüsselsheim, Germany: Stiftung Opelvillen Rüsselsheim; Erfurt, Germany: Angermuseum; Lübeck, Germany: Sankt Annen Museum; Freiburg, Germany: Museum für Neue Kunst; Heidelberg: Edition Braus im Wachter, 2004).
2. Rachel Keith, *The Barbizon School and the Nature of Landscape* (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2005).
3. Karen K. Butler, *Focus on Photography: Recent Acquisitions* (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2010).
4. Karen K. Butler, *Frederick Hartt and American Abstraction in the 1950s: Building the Collection at Washington University in St. Louis* (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2012).
5. "The St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts originated in a free evening drawing class organized ... in 1874. It was formally established as a department of Washington University in 1879, under the presidency of ... James E. Yeatman and the directorship of Halsey C. Ives. A home for the work was provided through the generosity of [university founder] Wayman Crow." *Bulletin of Washington University: Fifty-Second Annual Catalogue* (February 1909), 123.

Locust Streets—was part of a nationwide boom in the establishment of metropolitan public art museums. In 1870 the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City opened; six years later the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Philadelphia Museum of Art opened, and the Art Institute of Chicago followed in 1879. Today these cathedrals of modern urbanity may be seen as indexes of aesthetic tastes and values, revealing much about each institution's and city's cultural identity, international affinities, political positions, and educational ideals. In this sense the history of collecting reveals a history of the changing ideas of its professionals and a crossroads of private and institutional taste.

The original building of the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts was designed by Peabody and Stearns of Boston in a quasi-Renaissance style

inspired by the leading English art critic and social theorist John Ruskin. The Museum's mission was to educate and enlighten audiences in a systematic manner about world civilization. Included in the first display of the collection were more than two hundred plaster casts and bronze replicas of important examples of world culture, including copies of the Laocoön from the Vatican collection, Lorenzo Ghiberti's Baptistery doors in Florence, and Peter Vischer's shrine for Saint Sebald in Nuremberg. Works of applied arts and contemporary American art were presented as well. Featured were Harriet Hosmer's *Oenone* (1854–55; fig. 8; page 62) and Thomas Ball's *Freedom's Memorial* (1875).

Ives, who was trained as a designer, had a vision to emphasize an art education that wedded the applied with the fine arts, modeling the new museum after the South Kensington Museum



FIG. 7.  
St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts, c. 1881.



FIG. 8.  
St. Louis School and  
Museum of Fine Arts,  
1881.

(today the Victoria and Albert Museum).<sup>6</sup> In light of America's progressing industrialization, thriving middle class, vast poverty within the working class, and accelerated immigration, this approach expressed currency as it attempted to promote advantageous effects of art on economy and social life. Ives was particularly engaged in advancing contemporary American art. His early acquisitions include such important works as William Merritt Chase's *Garden of the Orphanage, Haarlem, Holland* (1883). He also gained significant support from the St. Louis collector William Van Zandt, who in 1886 bequeathed four paintings by Carl Wimar romanticizing Native American culture.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, the Boston collector Nathaniel Phillips donated in 1890 the landmark frontier painting *Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers through the Cumberland Gap* (1851–52; fig. 9) by George Caleb Bingham. That year the US government had declared the end of the Western

frontier. As articulated in this painting from forty years earlier, Bingham's vision of a powerful and unified American nation seemed, in 1890, reality.

In the first decade of the twentieth century the university museum's collecting pattern turned more and more toward contemporary fine arts, a nationwide trend exemplified by such institutions as the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. William K. Bixby—an industrialist, rare book collector, prominent supporter of Washington University, and head of the University's art school—established in 1906 the Bixby Fund for acquisitions of American art. Significant early purchases include Thomas Wilmer Dewing's *Brocart de Venise* (*Venetian Brocade*, c. 1904–5) and George Inness's *Storm on the Delaware* (1891; fig. 10), a pastoral landscape of the American countryside underscoring a spiritual dimension of nature, in contrast to the hectic bustle of contemporary

6. Ives's view on this was presented in a public lecture in 1880. "Professor Halsey C. Ives's lecture on the British Museum and the South Kensington Museum was heard by a large audience in the hall of Washington University. The speaker described the two museums, and said that America should learn a lesson from England." "Art in the Cities," *Art Journal*, n.s., 6 (1880): 192.
7. A native of Germany, Carl Wimar immigrated to St. Louis with his family in 1843, at the age of fifteen.
8. In addition to contemporary genre and landscape paintings, Charles Parsons's eclectic collection included mummies and antiquities purchased

on his extensive world-wide travels, such as “curios, bric-a-brac, bronzes, pottery, porcelain, weapons, carvings, and lacquer-ware,” as his last will attests. *Charles Parsons Collection of Paintings* (St. Louis: Washington University in St. Louis, 1977), 12.

9. In addition, the previous year Parsons and Robert S. Brookings, the influential civic leader and head of the University's Board of Trustees from 1895 to

urban life. The largest donation of artworks during the first decade of the twentieth century was made by the pioneering St. Louis collector Charles Parsons.<sup>8</sup> In 1905 he bequeathed approximately four hundred works of art to the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>9</sup> His art collection is representative of nineteenth-century American aesthetic taste and was included in Edward Strahan's 1879–80 publication *The Art Treasures of America, Being the Choicest Works of Art in the Public and Private Collections of North America*.<sup>10</sup> Parsons's collection offers an impressive array of contemporary paintings executed with technical

perfection. Genre paintings such as Gustave Brion's *Paysans des Vosges fuyant l'invasion de 1814* (*Vosges Peasants Fleeing before the Invasion of 1814*, 1867), which stresses patriotism, and Adolf Schreyer's *Arab Warriors* (c. 1870s; fig. 11), which conveys historical subject matter, cover some characteristic motifs. Parsons was especially captivated by landscape painting, as his correspondence with the American painter Frederic Edwin Church reveals.<sup>11</sup> Paintings such as Church's *Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta* (1883), Narcisse Virgile Diaz de la Peña's *Wood Interior* (1867), Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot's *Le chemin*



FIG. 9. George Caleb Bingham (American, 1811–1879), *Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers through the Cumberland Gap*, 1851–52. Oil on canvas, 36 1/2 × 50 1/4". Gift of Nathaniel Phillips, 1890.

*des vieux, Luzancy, Seine-et-Marne (The Path of the Old People, 1871–72), and Sanford Robinson Gifford's luminist Rheinsteine (1872–74) (pages 86, 74, 78, 69, respectively) bespeak Parsons's taste for tonal and delicate landscapes, modernist in their subjectivity yet providing an alternative to Impressionist depictions of nature's materiality.*

Beginning in 1909 Washington University's art collection was housed at the newly established City Art Museum (today the Saint Louis Art Museum). Although the collection enjoyed support within the University community, it somewhat disappeared from the public consciousness. A 1915 publication featuring the City Art Museum shows Washington University's collection as an integral part of the new museum.<sup>12</sup> The gifts and purchases made during the 1910s, 1920s, and

1930s, while Edmund Wuerpel was director of the University's art school, show parallels to nationwide collecting tastes. Especially during the 1930s many American collectors turned to old masters, perhaps an index of disappointment with contemporary politics and economics. In the 1930s Malvern B. Clopton, then president of Washington University, donated more than 130 prints, among them many old master works by such artists as Albrecht Dürer and Rembrandt van Rijn (page 56). Furthermore, the nationwide fascination with Native American art is evidenced by the 1937 acquisition of eight important Native American repoussé plaques donated by John Max Wulfing (page 34). In addition many portraits entered the collection, such as Franz Seraph von Lenbach's *Portrait of Prince Otto von Bismarck* (1884–90; page 90), first exhibited at the 1904 World's Fair in

1928, had donated twenty-two Greek vases to the collection.

10. Edward Strahan [pseud.], ed., *The Art Treasures of America, Being the Choicest Works of Art in the Public and Private Collections of North America*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: George Barrie, 1880), 64–65.
11. See J. Gray Sweeney's analysis in Joseph D. Ketner et al., *A Gallery of Modern Art at Washington University* (St. Louis: Washington University Gallery of Art, 1994), 42.
12. The January 1915 *Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis* listed Childe Hassam's painting



FIG. 10.  
George Inness (American, 1825–1894), *Storm on the Delaware*, 1891. Oil on canvas, 30 1/8 × 45 3/8".  
University purchase, Bixby Fund, 1910.





FIG. 11.  
Adolf Schreyer (German, 1828–1899), *Arab Warriors*,  
c. 1870s. Oil on canvas, 18 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 32 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>". Bequest of  
Charles Parsons, 1905.

*Diamond Cove, Isles of Shoals* (1908), acquired through the University's Bixby Fund, under the City Art Museum's 1914 acquisitions. This is just one example of how intertwined the City Art Museum and the Washington University collection it housed had become. "Acquisitions Made by the City Art Museum in 1914," *Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis* (January 1915): 29.

13. For a more detailed history of this, see

St. Louis and donated by the German expatriate beer magnate August A. Busch in 1929, and Thomas Eakins's *Portrait of Professor W. D. Marks* (1886) purchased with University funds in 1936. While the painting by Eakins of Marks demonstrates belief in modernization, particularly the significance of science and rationality, the Bismarck portrait clearly appealed to the German immigrant community. Bismarck—known as the Iron Chancellor—became the first chancellor of the new German nation in 1871, at a time when Germans, already well established in St. Louis, were continuing to immigrate to the United States; the painting certainly played to their collective memory, embracing issues of acculturation and

assimilation. By 1929 many Germans hoped for a unifying and authoritarian political figure, such as Bismarck, to solve the massive ideological, economic, and social problems facing Germany's new democracy—problems that must have resonated all too closely for the immigrants with the Great Depression besieging their new homeland.<sup>13</sup>

Tellingly it was the German émigré H. W. Janson (fig. 12), curator of the collection from 1944 to 1948, who effected a significant institutional change focusing on international contemporary art. It all happened in a matter of months during the 1945–46 academic year, at a time when modern art was still highly contested, not only in the



Midwest but also throughout the United States.<sup>14</sup> In that year Washington University purchased approximately forty twentieth-century artworks by European and American modernists. Although the collection was modest in size, the purchases amounted to the largest and most focused acquisition project the University had ever undertaken. Artworks such as Georges Braque's *Nature morte et verre* (*Still Life with Glass*, 1930; page 136), Pablo Picasso's *La bouteille de Suze* (*Bottle of Suze*, 1912; fig. 14), Fernand Léger's *Les grands plongeurs* (*The Divers*, 1941; fig. 17), and Joan Miró's *Peinture* (*Painting*, 1933) still form the core of the modern art collection. This initial acquisition campaign stimulated subsequent acquisitions as well as important donations of modern art. In the 1950s and 1960s curators Frederick Hartt and William N. Eisendrath Jr.—along with St. Louis art collectors Joseph Pulitzer Jr., Morton D. May, Nancy Singer, Etta Steinberg, Sidney M. Shoenberg, and Florence and Richard Weil—added key artworks to the collection.<sup>15</sup> Postwar artworks by Jackson Pollock (page 172), Willem de Kooning (page 178), and Pierre Soulages (page 188) were acquired, as was an expressionistic painting, *Brücke I* (*Bridge I*, 1913) by Lyonel Feininger (fig. 13), and *The Iron Cross* (1915; page 114), a key early American modernist canvas by Marsden Hartley.

The majority of artworks acquired by Janson in 1945 and 1946 date from the 1930s and 1940s, a period of twentieth-century art that is still marginalized within the established narrative of modernism. Janson's selection of modern art demonstrates a strong emphasis on Cubism, Constructivism, and exile art, complemented by an array of contemporary modernist American art. Surprising in Janson's selection is the lack of modern German Expressionism. He also rejected the latest American expressionistic abstractions—as exemplified by works by Jackson Pollock and Arshile Gorky acquired after his tenure here. Janson's ventures into the American art world led to purchases of primarily figurative and metaphysical works—such as Philip Guston's *If This Be Not I* (1945; page 160)—and ones that reveal ties to modern French art, such as Alexander Calder's organic and surrealist sculpture *Bayonets Menacing a Flower* (1945; fig. 15). Janson's focus on Cubism, the art of Paris, and rational aesthetic tendencies drew on the concepts of enormously influential American art historians



FIG. 12.  
H. W. Janson, 1935.

Sally Bixby Defty,  
*The First Hundred Years,  
1879–1979: Washington  
University School  
of Fine Arts* (St. Louis:  
Washington University in  
St. Louis, 1979).

14. For more on this history and Janson's notion of modernism, see my essay "Exilic Vision: H. W. Janson and the Legacy of Modern Art at Washington



and institutions such as Alfred H. Barr Jr. and the Museum of Modern Art. Many of Janson's acquisitions in the area of exile art, in particular works by the émigré Surrealists, exemplify the engagement of modern art with processes of creation that involve the unconscious. With the acquisition of Max Ernst's *L'oeil du silence* (*The Eye of Silence*, 1943–44; page 148) and Yves Tanguy's *La tour marine* (*Tower of the Sea*, 1944), examples of exile art representing the most advanced contemporary voices were added to the Washington University collection. Janson also purchased two paintings by German exile artists: Max Beckmann's *Les artistes mit Gemüse* (1943; page 144) and Karl Zerbe's *Armory* (1943; fig. 16). While the Beckmann canvas

FIG. 13.  
Lyonel Feininger  
(American, 1871–1956),  
*Brücke I* (*Bridge I*), 1913. Oil  
on canvas, 31 1/2 × 39 1/2".  
University purchase, Bixby  
Fund, 1950.



FIG. 14.  
 Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881-1973), *La bouteille de Suze*  
 (*Bottle of Suze*), 1912. Pasted papers, gouache, and charcoal,  
 25 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 19 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>". University purchase, Kende Sale Fund, 1946.

was executed during the artist's Amsterdam exile in 1943 and emphasizes the spiritual life among materially deprived modern artists in exile, Zerbe's *Armory* alludes to the persecution of modern art in Nazi Germany and the United States' entry into World War II. Relative to German Expressionist works, these paintings rely on a less emotional mode of depiction realized through a static pictorial structure that includes a reduction of gestural elements and a heightened naturalism.

Frederick Hartt, a respected scholar of Italian Renaissance art, succeeded Janson as curator of the collection from 1949 to 1960.<sup>16</sup> Hartt's slate of acquisitions in the 1950s, like Janson's in the previous decade, significantly shaped the University's collection. His focus on seminal works of American abstraction came at a critical moment when American avant-garde practices began to dominate the world of art. Hartt's farsighted acquisitions—paintings by de Kooning, Gorky, Guston, and Pollock—were among the first American Abstract Expressionist artworks to be purchased in St. Louis. For Hartt, who as a Monuments and Fine Arts officer with the Allied Military Government during World War II saw the violence and destruction of the war firsthand, large-scale gestural abstraction best captured the qualities of the postwar human condition. The spontaneous painterly gesture that marks so many of these works was often understood as a direct translation of the feelings of the artist onto the canvas. Like many critics and curators of his day, Hartt associated this expression of radical aesthetic freedom with the values of American democracy, which were instrumental in the victory over fascist regimes during World War II and in the Cold War battle against Soviet communism. Hartt also acquired works by artists he considered pioneers—American artists such as Stuart Davis, Arthur Dove, and Marsden Hartley, who emerged in the 1910s or 1920s and were among the first to work in abstract modes. These acquisitions complemented the works of European modernism acquired by Janson.

Our research into institutional history also included an exploration of the tenure of William N. Eisendrath Jr., who, from 1960 to 1968, like his predecessors, continued to focus on significant examples of contemporary art. Under Eisendrath's leadership the Museum—then called the Washington

University Gallery of Art—acquired an important collection of European and American post-World War II abstraction.<sup>17</sup> These works were attained largely through donation. Artworks by Karel Appel, Alberto Burri, Richard Diebenkorn, Jean Dubuffet, Sam Francis, Lucio Fontana, Pierre Soulages, and Antoni Tàpies entered the collection. What is rare is the fact that an American art museum and community embraced European postwar art to such an extent. Among the few other institutions with a similar emphasis at the time are the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Menil Collection in Houston. Capitalizing on the newly opened galleries in Mark C. Steinberg Memorial Hall

University," in *H. W. Janson*, 10–42.

15. For more on Etta Steinberg, see Elizabeth C. Childs, "St. Louis and Arts Philanthropy at Midcentury: The Case of Etta E. Steinberg," [kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu/files/The\\_Case\\_of\\_Etta\\_Steinberg.pdf](http://kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu/files/The_Case_of_Etta_Steinberg.pdf).
16. For a discussion of Frederick Hartt's impact on the collection, see Butler, *Frederick Hartt and American Abstraction*.
17. Eisendrath also acquired a number of historical



FIG. 15. Alexander Calder (American, 1898–1976), *Bayonets Menacing a Flower*, 1945. Painted sheet metal and wire, 45 × 51 × 18 1/2". University purchase, McMillan Fund, 1946.





FIG. 16.  
Karl Zerbe (American, b. Germany, 1903-1972), *Armory*,  
1943. Encaustic on canvas, 62 1/2 × 40". University  
purchase, Kende Sale Fund, 1946.

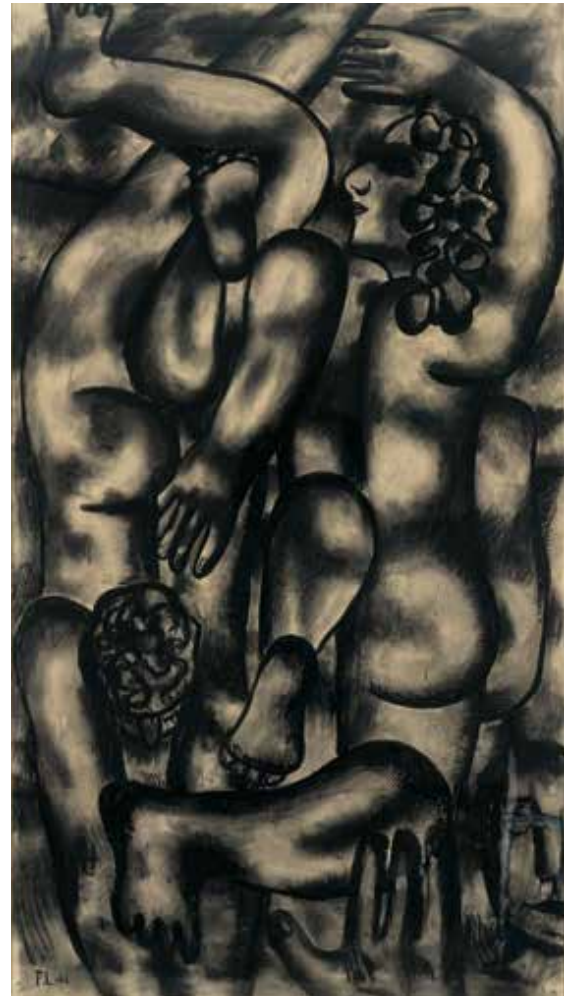


FIG. 17.  
Fernand Léger (French, 1881-1955), *Les grands plongeurs*  
(*The Divers*), 1941. Charcoal and ink wash with gouache  
on paper, 75 3/8 × 41 7/8". University purchase, Kende Sale  
Fund, 1946.

(1960), Eisendrath also initiated the Museum's first robust exhibition program. Between 1960 and 1968 he presented a dynamic series of major international loan exhibitions. These included *New Spanish Painting and Sculpture* (1961), a circulating exhibition organized by the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and *Paintings from the Fifties* (1965), an exhibition of forty paintings from the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, organized by the American Federation of the Arts, which explored international postwar abstraction and its modern precursors. Traveling exhibitions such as these established Washington University's museum as a center for the study of abstract art in the United States. Produced during the height of Cold War politics, a number of these exhibitions were specifically conceived to associate postwar abstraction with the cultural values of American democracy, including artistic

freedom, individual creativity, and uncensored communication. Other exhibitions—such as *Jean Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp*, organized by the Galerie Chalette, New York, in 1961, and *Vasily Kandinsky (1866–1944)—A Retrospective Exhibition* (fig. 1), jointly organized in 1963–64 by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Pasadena Art Museum—examined influential early twentieth-century European abstract art and its relevance to contemporary practices. Toward the end of the 1960s the work of a new generation of contemporary artists constituting the so-called neo-avant-garde, including Pop and assemblage art, was introduced. Eisendrath's ambitious exhibition program created an environment of intellectual excitement and artistic vibrancy that illuminates a vital moment in the development of the collection and in the history of the Museum and still serves as a guiding principle today.

works, among them etchings by Giovanni Battista Piranesi from the series *Le Carceri* (*The Prisons*, c. 1760s) and James Ensor's *Le Christ tourmenté* (*Christ Tormented*, 1888).

18. Sabine Eckmann, ed., *Reality Bites: Making Avant-garde Art in Post-Wall Germany* (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum; Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2007).
19. Meredith Malone, *Chance Aesthetics* (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2009).
20. Karen K. Butler and Renée Maurer, *Georges Braque and the Cubist Still Life, 1928–1945* (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum; Washington, DC: Phillips Collection;



FIG. 18.  
Installation view, *Reality Bites: Making Avant-garde Art in Post-Wall Germany*, Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis, 2007.





FIG. 19.  
Installation view, *Georges Braque and the Cubist Still Life, 1928-1945*, Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis, 2013.

- New York: DelMonico • Prestel, 2013).
21. Carmon Colangelo, *On the Margins* (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2007).
22. Sabine Eckmann, *In the Aftermath of Trauma: Contemporary Video Installations* (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2014).
23. Svea Bräunert and Meredith Malone, *To See Without Being Seen: Contemporary Art and Drone Warfare* (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2016).

### Endnote

In addition to presenting exhibitions that explored our history through the leadership of H. W. Janson, Frederick Hartt, and William Eisendrath, the Museum has also over the past ten years mounted a rigorous exhibition program that tried to balance display of holdings in the collection with timely modern and contemporary exhibitions, some thematic, others monographic in nature. Major research exhibitions included *Reality Bites: Making Avant-garde Art in Post-Wall Germany* (2007; fig. 18),<sup>18</sup> *Chance Aesthetics* (2009),<sup>19</sup> and *Georges Braque and the Cubist Still Life, 1928-1945* (2013; fig. 19),<sup>20</sup> all of which explored how artists have

employed advanced art forms that are reflexive of specific sociopolitical moments in history, including World War II, German unification, and the 1950s and 1960s with their increased consumerism and commodification of culture. These explorations also connect to such thematic exhibitions as *The Political Eye: Nineteenth-Century Caricature and the Mass Media* (2009), *On the Margins* (2008),<sup>21</sup> *In the Aftermath of Trauma: Contemporary Video Installations* (2014),<sup>22</sup> and most recently, *To See Without Being Seen: Contemporary Art and Drone Warfare* (2016),<sup>23</sup> all of which were dedicated to examining the relation between art and politics then and now. While in the museum field art more often than not is framed within a context set



FIG. 20.  
Renée Cox (American, b. Jamaica, 1960), *It Shall Be Named*, 1994.  
11 gelatin silver prints in mahogany frame, 105 × 104 1/2 × 4 3/4".  
Gift of Peter Norton, 2015.

FIG. 21.  
Sharon Lockhart  
(American, b. 1964), *Outside  
AB Tool Crib: Matt, Mike,  
Carey, Steven, John, Mel  
and Karl*, 2008. C-print,  
6/6, 48 × 67 1/2". University  
purchase, Bixby Fund, and  
with funds from Helen  
Kornblum, 2009.



24. Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen and Donald Albrecht, eds., *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

25. Elizabeth Armstrong, ed., *Birth of the Cool: California Art, Design, and Culture at Midcentury* (Newport Beach, CA: Orange County Museum of Art; New York: Prestel, 2007).

26. Heather Wooster, *Metabolic City* (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2009).

27. Igor Marjanović and Jan Howard, *Drawing Ambience: Alvin Boyarsky and the Architectural Association* (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum; Providence: Rhode Island School of Design Museum, 2014).

apart from everyday realities, these investigations intentionally focused on the role and significance of artist practices in understanding and responding to contemporary life.

In partnership with the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts, founded in 2005 to join the University's graduate and undergraduate schools of art and architecture with the Kemper Art Museum, the Museum has also aspired to present some of the most daring and relevant voices in contemporary art. Monographic exhibitions have featured the work of Cosima von Bonin, Luis Camnitzer, Sam Durant, Andrea Fraser (page 226), Tom Friedman, Rashid Johnson, Balázs Kicsiny, Sharon Lockhart, Rivane Neuenschwander, Elizabeth Peyton, Julian Rosefeldt, Tomás Saraceno, Allison Smith, John Stezaker, Thaddeus Strode, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, among others. As part of the interdisciplinary Sam Fox School, the Museum has deemed it important to undertake an exhibition program devoted to

architecture and design. Significant exhibitions over the last decade include *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future* (2009),<sup>24</sup> *Birth of the Cool: California Art, Design, and Culture at Midcentury* (2009),<sup>25</sup> *Metabolic City* (2010),<sup>26</sup> *On the Thresholds of Space-Making: Shinohara Kazuo and His Legacy* (2014), and *Drawing Ambience: Alvin Boyarsky and the Architectural Association* (2014).<sup>27</sup> What distinguished these exhibitions is that they all in a variety of ways explored the intersection between architecture, design, and the visual arts. While *Drawing Ambience* considered the genre of contemporary drawing as it pertains to both architecture and art, *On the Thresholds of Space-Making* illustrated close links between architectural practice and advanced installation art. These and other exhibitions demonstrated how the two fields often intersect to generate new forms of museum experiences and installations that are more architectural than sculptural in nature, at the same time broadening the scope of medium-specific considerations.



The Museum's focus on art and politics in its exhibition programs is mirrored in several recent acquisitions that foreground critical projects by an international array of artists, such as Renée Cox (fig. 20), Willie Doherty, Mike Kelley, Valeska Soares, Kara Walker, and Carrie Mae Weems (page 258), whose work addresses issues of race, nationalism, and violence.<sup>28</sup> Another of the Museum's commitments has been to collect the work of artists presented in exhibitions to create a permanent presence for them in the collection. This resulted in the acquisition of works by Rashid Johnson, Sharon Lockhart (fig. 21), and Rivane Neuenschwander, among many others, quite often of sociopolitical relevance as well as being rigorously reflexive of the artistic mediums employed. Other newly added important artworks—by Arman, Robert Breer, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Dieter Roth, and Jacques Villeglé—complement the existing painting and sculpture collection through experimental art forms such as assemblages, kinetic art, multiples, and fabricated everyday objects. The Museum has also been fortunate to be able to add significant examples of contemporary German art to its holdings, including paintings,

sculptures, fabric objects, and photographs by Franz Ackermann (fig. 22), Thomas Bayrle, Cosima von Bonin, Thomas Demand, Isa Genzken (pages 242, 245), Andreas Gursky (fig. 23), Charline von Heyl, Wolfgang Tillmans, and Corinne Wasmuht.<sup>29</sup> Along with the strength of German pre- and postwar art in the Saint Louis Art Museum, the Kemper Art Museum's German post-Wall collection underscores the importance of German art to the St. Louis art world.<sup>30</sup>

Drawing on this distinguished history of collecting and interpreting modern and contemporary art within the context of a major research university, the Museum's intention is to demonstrate that art matters. As we seek to understand and to meaningfully contribute to an ever more complex and fundamentally changing contemporaneity, we turn to artworks, past and present, to evince how visualizations of the world, as idiosyncratic as they may look, produce lasting impressions of the significance of individual and collective creativity. It is with this in mind that the Museum intends to carry its legacy of exhibiting and collecting relevant art into an increasingly globalized and diverse future.

28. Many of these were part of a donation of more than fifty contemporary artworks gifted to the Museum by Peter Norton, selections of which were on view in the exhibitions *Rotation 1: Contemporary Art from the Peter Norton Gift* (summer 2015) and *Rotation 2: Contemporary Art from the Peter Norton Gift* (fall 2015).

29. An exhibition of many of these acquisitions was on view in fall 2011, made possible in part by a major gift from the David Woods Kemper Memorial Foundation, accompanied by the publication *Precarious Worlds: Contemporary Art from Germany*, by Sabine Eckmann (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2011).

30. Notable additions to the collection over the last decade also include prints executed at the Sam Fox School's Island Press, video art from



FIG. 22.  
Franz Ackermann (German, b. 1963), *Untitled (yet)*,  
2008–9. Oil on canvas, 109 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 216 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>". University  
purchase with funds from the David Woods Kemper  
Memorial Foundation, 2011.

the 1960s and 1970s, photographs by prominent women artists, thanks in large part to the ongoing support of Helen Kornblum, and a collection of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs donated by Robert Frerck and Laurie Wilson.

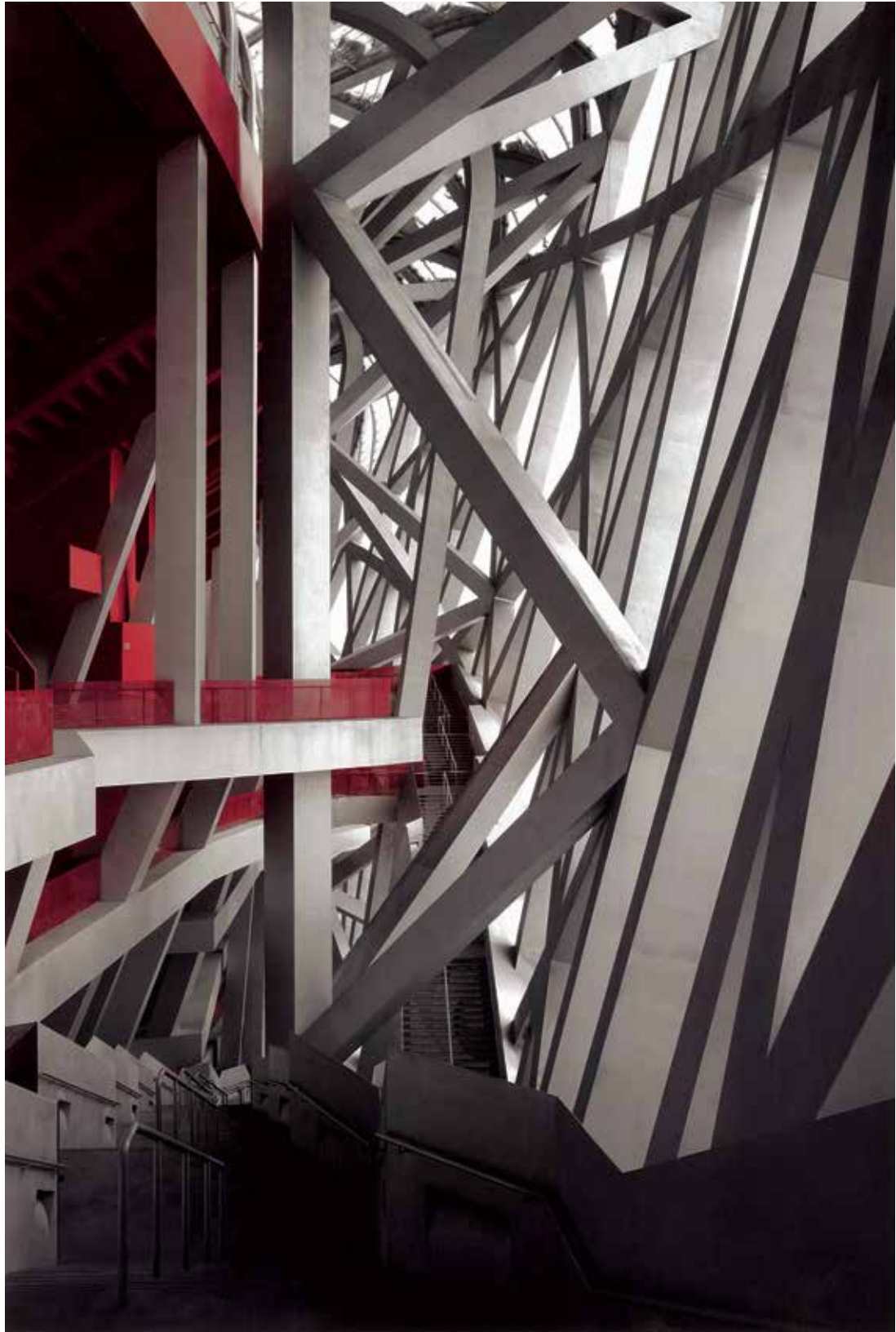


FIG. 23.  
Andreas Gursky (German, b. 1955), *Beijing*, 2010. Inkjet print, 4 / 4, 120 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 83 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 2 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" (framed). University purchase with funds from the David Woods Kemper Memorial Foundation, 2012.