

The Swindle: Art Between Seeing and Believing
Clifton Hall Link
May 26–October 28, 2018

The mid-twentieth-century abstract artist Josef Albers celebrated art as a “swindle,” delighting in its ability to teach us about the chasm between physical facts and our visual perception of them, and to undermine our trust in the information our eyes convey. Although he was primarily focused on demonstrating the relativity of color, Albers also studied how composition and linear design could render his works both illusionistic and enigmatic. Like Albers, many other twentieth- and twenty-first-century artists worked to depose vision from its historically enshrined role as the “noblest” sense. Given the increased volume and circulation of images made possible by today’s technological advances, it is more urgent than ever to examine how images convey the information that becomes the basis of our shared perception.

The artists included in this exhibition have used many different strategies to draw attention to the act of perception and to encourage us to question the truth of our vision. From illusionistic, or *trompe l’oeil* (trick of the eye), paintings to more ephemeral and conceptual gestures, these artworks challenge what we see and prompt us to appreciate and even enjoy experiences of dissonance. Some of these artists have incorporated time or duration into their work, calling attention to the way in which perceiving takes place over time. Others lavish attention on mundane materials and subjects, provoking us to see them in new ways. This exhibition, drawn from the Albright-Knox’s collection, reminds us that although our experience and knowledge of the world often comes to us through our eyes, seeing should not always be believing.

This exhibition is organized by Curatorial Fellow Andrea Alvarez.

The Albright-Knox Art Gallery’s exhibition program is generously supported by The Seymour H. Knox Foundation, Inc.

David Adamo
American, born 1979

Untitled (orange peel), 2014
Untitled (corn), 2014

Painted bronze
Albert H. Tracy Fund, by exchange, 2015





David Adamo's sculptural practice involves contemplating small, everyday objects and the surreal patterns and organic shapes that result from natural processes. Both of his works presented here are reminders that sculpture is often an art of removal rather than accretion: the half-eaten ear of corn and castaway orange peel evoke the processes of carving and scraping from stone or wood. Adamo's hyperrealistic sculptures, which he makes by casting real objects of seemingly little importance, blur the line between reality and illusion. The uncanny resemblance between the works and their sources may cause viewers to distrust their eyes.

Josef Albers

American, born Germany, 1888–1976

ELC 2-A, 1969

Relief print on Arches paper, edition 50/100

Charles W. Goodyear Fund, 1969

Josef Albers typically worked in series, exploring how subtle variations of color, composition, and scale affect the ways people experience his artworks. In the *Embossed Linear Constructions* series, which includes this work, his artistic intervention is so subtle that the distinction between art and the real world, or illusion and reality, is almost imperceptible. The process of embossing involves pressing moistened paper between metal plates and reshaping the fibers to create a raised design. The faint design in this print comes in and out of focus as you move your body and shift your perspective. In these dynamic interactions with the work, it becomes clear that Albers intended to make viewers aware of the embodied experience of seeing—an awareness that can inform future experiences with art.

Josef Albers

American, born Germany, 1888–1976

WLS-XV from "White Line Square Series II," 1966

Color lithograph on French Arches Cover paper, edition 9/125

Evelyn Rumsey Cary and George Cary Fund, 1971

Josef Albers was fascinated with how subtle changes made by an artist can affect our entire experience of an artwork. Albers began his *White Line Square Series* in 1966 by making one seemingly minor adjustment to the composition familiar from his *Homage to the Square* series. While in the earlier series Albers was focused on the interactions that occur between directly abutting color fields, here, a white line separates neighboring areas of color. The

tiny gap between these fields in works like *WLS-XV* muffles what would otherwise be intense vibrations or contrasts.

Josef Albers
American, born Germany, 1888–1976
SK-ED, 1972
Four color lithograph, edition 21/100
Gift of Frederic P. Norton, 1999



In 1949, Josef Albers began a series he called *Homage to the Square*. In it he explored two primary aspects of color: its relativity and its subjectivity. Relativity refers to how our perception of a color changes based on other colors adjacent to it, and subjectivity is the way the experience of color is unique to every individual. Albers investigated these concerns in hundreds of paintings featuring either three or four nesting squares. This print echoes the composition and color choices he made in the *Homage to the Square* series, and similarly demonstrates the optical interactions that occur in this formula. In *SK-ED*, the three outermost squares appear to recede into the interior of the print; meanwhile, the brightest and smallest square seems to sit far in front, radiating outward toward the viewer. Albers's careful attention to color interactions turned a sequence of static squares into a dynamic illusion of floating planes.

Valerie Arber
American, born 1949
Untitled, 2002
Paper debossing
Gift of Lisa Forman Neall and Gabrielle Forman, 2012



To create a debossed print, an artist presses wet paper between printing plates that leave the paper fibers permanently fixed in a new configuration. This work is considered a "blind debossing" because Valerie Arber did not apply any ink to these depressed areas. Her only

intervention was to introduce subtle differences in depth. In rendering a linear construction without ever applying drawn lines, Arber's work on paper is evocative of three-dimensional sculpture.

Tauba Auerbach
American, born 1981
Untitled (Fold) from the series "Fold," 2012
Acrylic paint on canvas on wooden stretcher
By exchange: Charlotte A. Watson Fund and
Gift of Miss Amelia E. White, 2012



Throughout her career, Tauba Auerbach has been interested in juxtaposing contradictory formal elements in her paintings, exploring what arises when the mind must reconcile two competing assumptions. For example, although the surface of *Untitled (Fold)* appears three-dimensional, the canvas is actually stretched flat. To create this pictorial illusion, Auerbach applied paint to a folded and creased canvas. After it dried, she stretched the canvas flat, but the painted areas record the canvas's previous three-dimensionality and folds appear to remain. This interrelationship between real and painted depth means that paintings like this one are at once representational and abstract. Auerbach's work challenges logic by holding these contradictory states—of representation and abstraction, of flatness and dimensionality—in equilibrium.

Robert Barry
American, born 1936
Art Work (It Is Always Changing . . .), 1970
Wall-based installation
The Panza Collection and by exchange:
George B. and Jenny R. Mathews Fund,
Bequest of Arthur B. Michael, Albert H. Tracy
Fund and Bequest of John Mortimer Schiff,
2015

IT IS ALWAYS CHANGING.
IT HAS CHEER.
IT DOESN'T HAVE A SPECIFIC PLACE.
ITS DIMENSIONS ARE NOT EXACT.
IT AFFECTS OTHER THINGS.
IT MAY BE ACCESSIBLE BUT GO UNNOTICED.
PART OF IT MAY ALSO BE PART OF SOMETHING ELSE.
SOME OF IT IS FAMILIAR.
SOME OF IT IS STRANGE.
KNOWING OF IT CHANGES IT.

The ten statements in *Art Work (It Is Always Changing . . .)* propose a definition of the conceptual work of art. Robert Barry's description of the artwork as a porous, unfixed entity relates closely to his own artistic practice, which has consistently challenged artistic norms. His artworks vary widely from discrete objects or texts presented in galleries to those made using invisible materials such as radio waves and inert gases. While some of Barry's contemporaries addressed language as a cultural or social construct, he used it as a material that could communicate directly with his viewers. In this work, he discounts the

idea that art should follow certain rules in order to be considered successful and, in his final statement, he highlights the viewer's central role in determining an artwork's meaning.

Erica Baum
American, born 1961

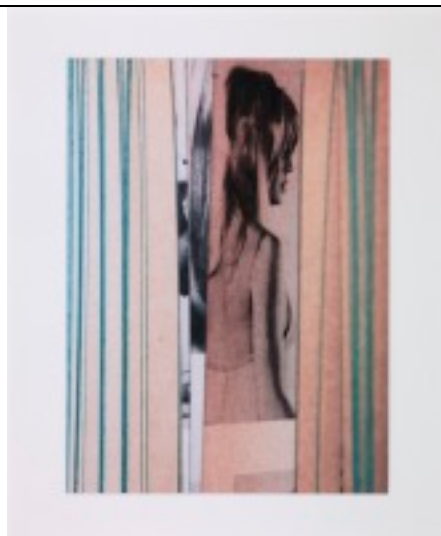
Art from the series "The Naked Eye," 2008
Color inkjet print, edition 3/6

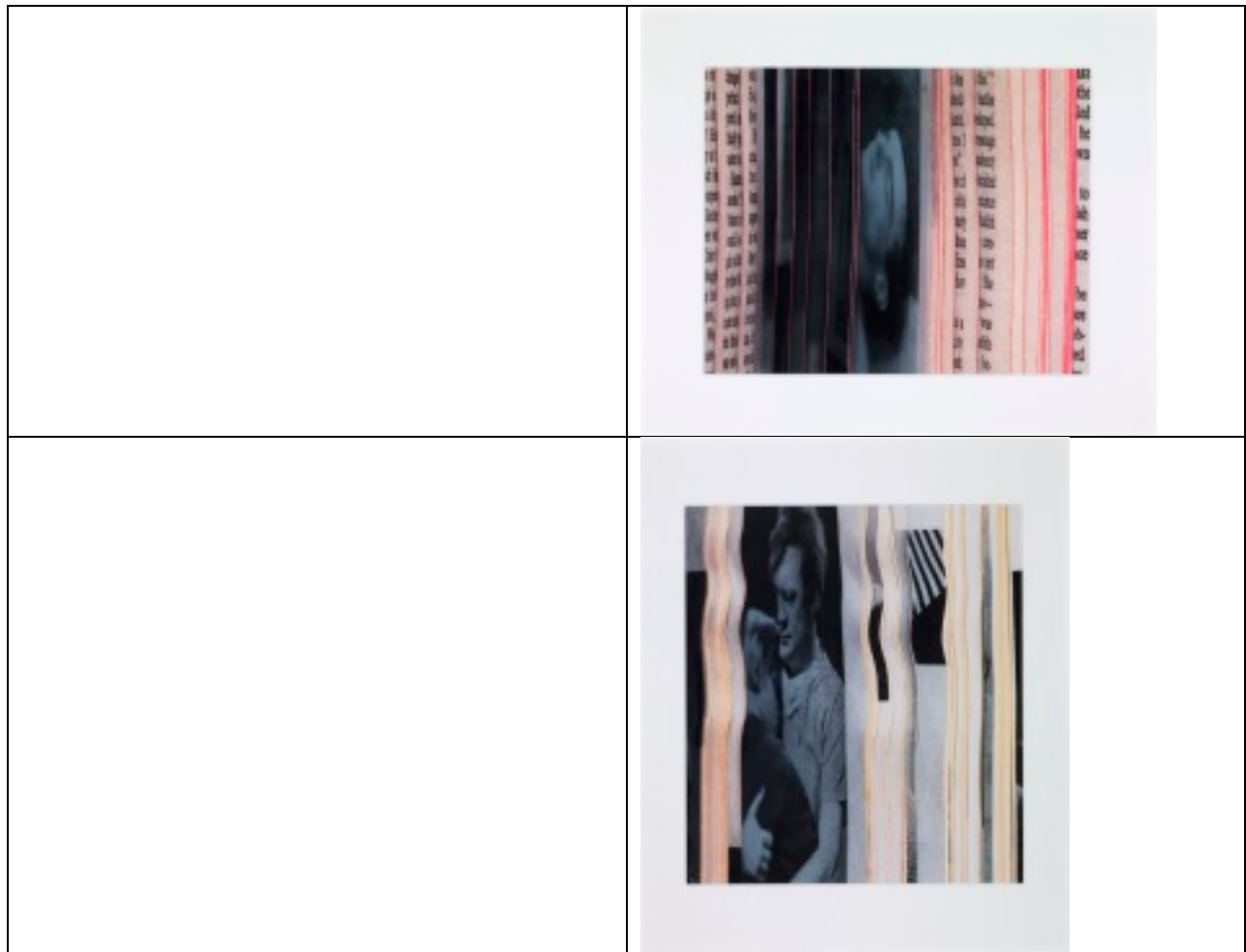
Amnesia from the series "The Naked Eye,"
2009
Color inkjet print, edition 1/6

Shampoo from the series "The Naked Eye,"
2008
Color inkjet print, edition 5/6

Slept from the series "The Naked Eye," 2008
Color inkjet print, edition 5/6

By exchange: Sherman S. Jewett Fund,
Bequest of John Mortimer
Schiff and Gift of Baroness Alphonse de
Rothschild, 2015





Unaided by digital image manipulation, Erica Baum finds the extraordinary in the most mundane materials and fixes fleeting moments for posterity. For this series, she photographed the fanned pages of mass-market paperback books, transforming text and image fragments into a chance-based visual poetry. For example, *Art* and *Shampoo* evoke enigmatic narratives related to fine art and voyeurism, but the works are derived from very literal and very mundane photographic source material: an image of Art Garfunkel and a frame from the movie *Shampoo* featuring Goldie Hawn. Baum's keen aesthetic sensibility makes it difficult to discern between expectation and reality, or between poetics and pop culture.

Claudio Bravo
Chilean, 1936–2011
Red Paper, 1969
Oil on canvas
Gift of Mrs. Nell E. Wendler and James S. Ely, Jr., in memory of our Mother, Nell Schoellkopf Ely Miller, 1995



Claudio Bravo's work is characterized by richly saturated colors and striking likenesses inspired by the paintings of Old Masters including Diego Velázquez (Spanish, 1599–1660) and Caravaggio (Italian, 1571–1610), and he enjoyed great success as a portraitist in Madrid, where he moved in 1961 from his native Valparaiso, Chile. His paintings of high society gave him financial stability, but it was his so-called package paintings from the late 1960s that earned him international acclaim. He was drawn to the abstract qualities of real objects and elevated the everyday—such as disposable packaging paper—to the realm of fine art. In *Red Paper*, he convincingly evokes three-dimensionality in a closely cropped detail of a folded sheet of bright crimson paper. Demonstrating a skillful mastery of light and shadow and a delicate treatment of textiles, Bravo's work toes the line between representation and abstraction.

Vija Celmins
American, born Latvia, 1938
Untitled (Desert), 1971
Lithograph, edition 36/65
Gift of Frederic P. Norton, 1999



Over the course of her long and productive career, Vija Celmins has translated the surfaces of oceans, skies, spiderwebs, desert floors, and other subjects into meticulously drawn images. Her goal in making these works is not to create photorealistic illusions, however, and she always reveals the edges of her works on paper. Instead, Celmins primarily sees her art as the result of contemplative engagement with the natural world. *Untitled (Desert)* appears vast and expansive, inviting us to consider the sublimity of the landscape, while Celmins's loving attention to minuscule details also pulls us closer into the present moment.

Gianfranco Foschino
Chilean, born 1983
La Fenêtre, 2008
HDV video, edition 1/5
Running time: 14 minutes
Gift of Mrs. Georgia M. G. Forman, by
exchange, 2010



Although Gianfranco Foschino's *La Fenêtre* seems to be a still photograph at first glance, it is really a segment of video cut from hours of footage. To create a work like *La Fenêtre*, the artist installs an unmanned camera in a discrete location with the hope that its presence will go unnoticed and not shape the behavior of those caught on tape. His artfully framed domestic window reveals a series of quiet, unremarkable actions; the building's inhabitants spend their time gazing outward while cars and passersby traverse the bottom edge of the frame. Foschino's prolonged observation of such non-events prompts us to consider the way the artist has captured our time and somewhat voyeuristic attention.

Benedict S. Gibson
American, born 1946
Untitled, 1974
Ink on paper
Evelyn Rumsey Cary Fund, 1975



Mark Innerst
American, born 1957
A Greater Distraction, 1981
Spray paint and charcoal on paper
Sherman S. Jewett Fund, 1982

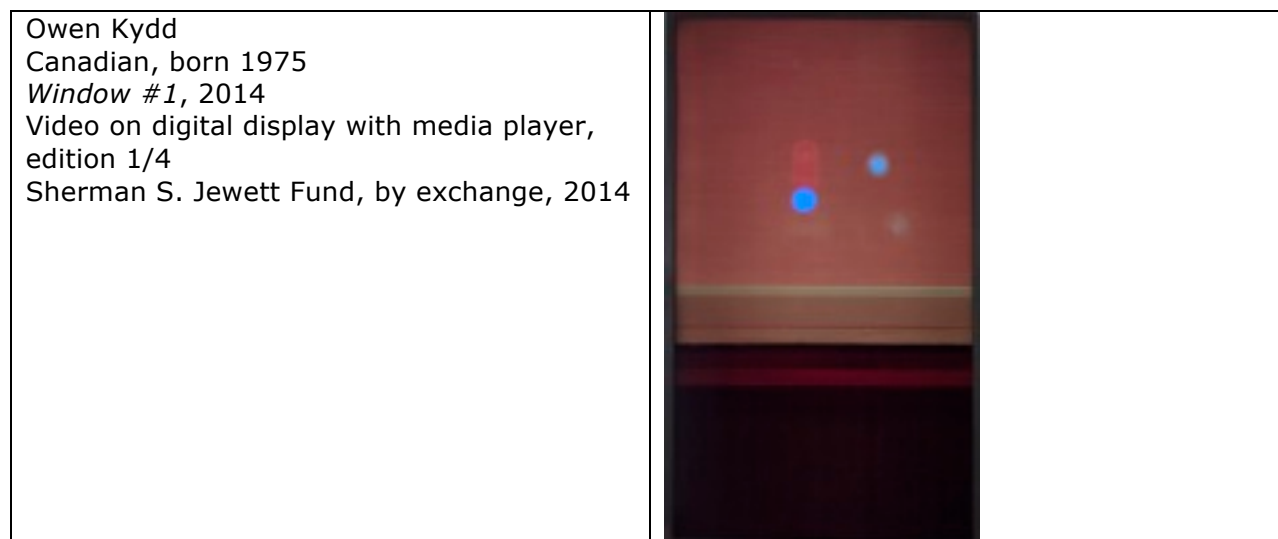


Jasper Johns
American, born 1930
False Start II, 1962
Color lithograph, edition 25/30
Charles W. Goodyear Fund, 1962



Throughout his career, and especially in the 1960s and 1970s, Jasper Johns printed, painted, and even sculpted words as elements in his art. His *False Start* series of paintings and prints, to which this work belongs, is exemplary of Johns's linguistic play. Here, he threatens to empty color names of their customary meanings by rendering them "incorrectly," in incongruous ink colors (for example, "red" is stenciled in a dark blue-gray). The "mistakes" do not undermine the power of language or of color, but they do remind us as viewers that we are the creators of meaning in front of a work of art.

For Joseph Kosuth, the work of art is the idea behind it—the physical manifestation of the idea is of secondary importance. The ideas most interesting to Kosuth are often terms that relate to art itself, ranging from “image” to “red” and “value.” These two works are from a set of six panels that each feature the dictionary definition of the word “nothing” in a different language. Here, the dramatic variation between the English and German panels may prompt consideration of how different cultures wrestle with the difficult task of defining nothingness, a concept that is revealed to be socially constructed rather than universal. They also provocatively suggest the logical trap into which language so often falls. For example, if “nothing” is defined, does “nothing” actually become something?



Artist Owen Kydd thinks of his durational photographs, like *Window #1*, as belonging to the realm of photography as opposed to time-based media. Kydd often focuses on archetypal photographic subjects like windows and draws from his surroundings in Los Angeles to make videos that push beyond our expectations for photography. Very little happens in Kydd’s video, but its subtly moving images draw us in for a closer reading. Here, the window of a store with its colored shades drawn reflects and refracts the dancing glow of passing car headlights. The ambiguous images on screen conjure short-lived sunrises and sunsets, themselves markers of the passage of time.



Between 2007 and 2009, Tom LaDuke created a series of paintings by pairing two gray scale airbrushed layers; one layer depicts a view of his studio and the other a scene from a classic film—here, Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980). In this horror movie—especially

during its final chapter, entitled "4 PM"—the snowed-in Overlook Hotel becomes a threatening antagonist, apparently determined to kill its inhabitants. This somewhat menacing image vies for attention with the view of LaDuke's studio, including overhead industrial fluorescent lighting and plastic containers visible at the bottom edge of the canvas, which appears as if reflected on the canvas surface. Throughout the history of art, the artist's studio has been represented as a space of production, but also confinement and isolation. In forcing these two image registers to vie for primacy within the same painting, LaDuke prompts us to consider the way that people are shaped by the spaces they inhabit and how our eyes and minds can simultaneously receive and interpret competing data.

Sol LeWitt

American, 1928–2007

A sphere lit from the top, four sides, and all their combinations, 2004

Pigment print, edition 9/19

Gift of Deborah Ronnen in memory of Sol LeWitt, 2008



Sherrie Levine

American, born 1947

Equivalents: After Stieglitz 1–18, 2006

Set of eighteen black-and-white inkjet prints, edition 6/12

By exchange: Bequest of John Mortimer Schiff and Albert H. Tracy Fund, 2009



Since the late 1970s, Sherrie Levine has appropriated works by male modern masters—here, American photographer Alfred Stieglitz's series "Equivalents," 1922–35—as a means to comment on issues of originality, authorship, and authenticity. Stieglitz made his images of clouds to advance his argument that photography was as capable as painting of producing abstract art. Levine pushes Stieglitz's images fully into the realm of abstraction by digitizing and pixelating the photographs almost beyond recognition, opening up the works for viewers to make their own interpretations.

Jed Lind
Canadian, born 1978

Seeps: Reversed Palms, 2007/2010
Chromogenic color print, edition 1/3
By exchange: James G. Forsyth Fund and
Charles W. Goodyear Fund, 2011

Seeps: Reversed Eucalyptus, 2007/2010
Chromogenic color print, edition 1/3
By exchange: Gift of Mrs. George A. Forman
and James G. Forsyth Fund, 2011



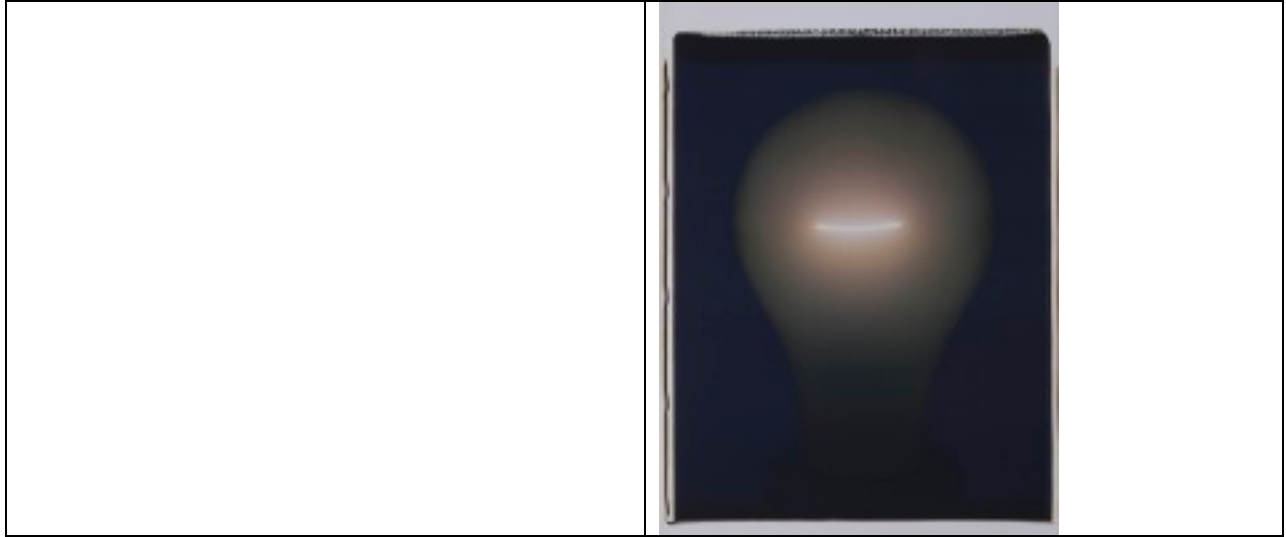
Amanda Means
American, born 1945

Light Bulb 00050C, 2001
Diffusion transfer print, edition 4/5

Light Bulb 00010C, 2001
Diffusion transfer print, edition 2/5

Sarah Norton Goodyear Fund, 2003





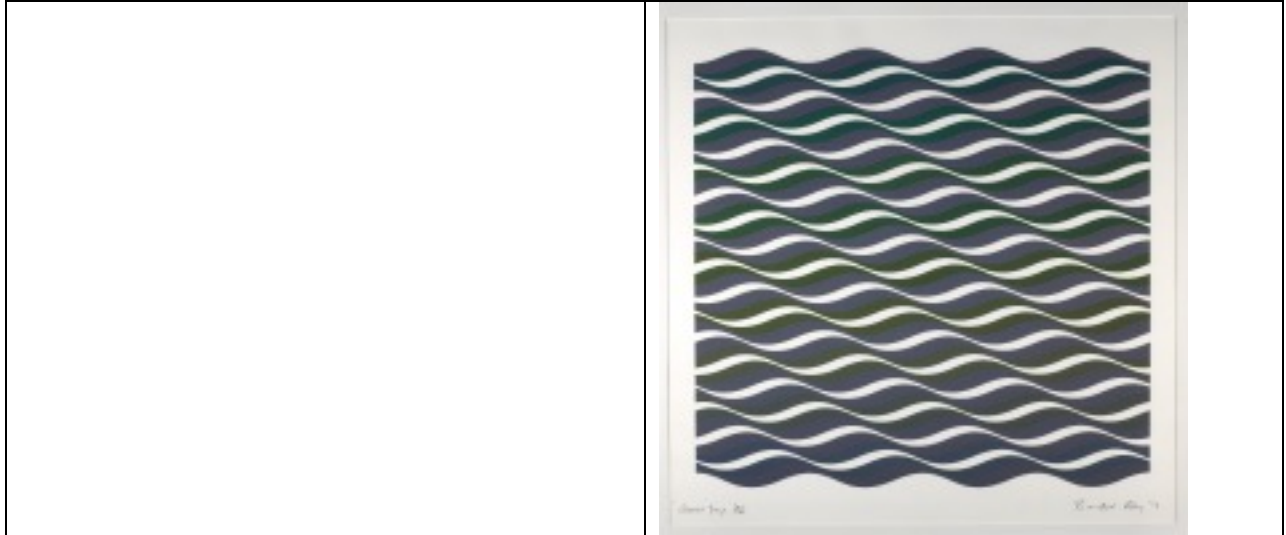
The recurring focus of Amanda Means’s artistic practice has been an attempt to capture the light and energy inherent to her subjects, from flowers and leaves to light bulbs. Means shot each light bulb in her “Color Polaroid” series, to which these two photographs belong, with a 20 x 24-inch large-format Polaroid camera, one of only five the company produced. By turning her camera on industrial light bulbs, she renders metaphysical subjects of light and energy conventional and accessible, while retaining the ethereal and self-generative aesthetic that characterized her early work with natural materials.

Bridget Riley
British, born 1931

Coloured Greys I, 1971
Coloured Greys II, 1972
Coloured Greys III, 1972

Serigraphs, edition 34/125
Gift of The Seymour H. Knox Foundation,
Inc., 1975

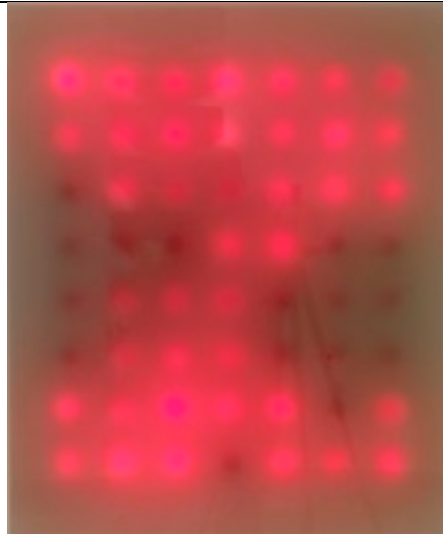




Edward Ruscha
American, born 1937
Drops, 1971
Color lithograph, edition 39/90
Gift of Frederic P. Norton, 2000



Leo Villareal
American, born 1967
Red Life, 1999
Plexiglas, plywood, incandescent light bulbs,
and circuitry
Gift of Zoë and Joel Dictrow, 2007



In his light-based art practice, Leo Villareal explores the relationship between algorithmically determined systems and chance-based operations. His works range from large-scale public art installations to panels like *Red Life* that operate on the scale of easel painting. Here, he has written a program that illuminates incandescent bulbs at random; although at times viewers may feel as though they have spotted a pattern, this eureka moment vanishes

when that pattern is undermined. Villareal began working with light in 1997 in order to make art all individuals could relate and respond to. In his view, light is both universal and seductive, rendering it the perfect medium with which to address a wide range of audiences.

David von Schlegell
American, 1920–1992
Untitled Grey, 1991
Oil and polyurethane on panel
Sherman S. Jewett Fund, 1991



David von Schlegell was best known as a sculptor of abstract, streamlined forms that revealed his interest in marine and aircraft design. This work, *Untitled Grey*, is typical of the art he made in his final years by mixing oil paint and polyurethane and then pouring the mixture onto sanded wooden panels. The ambiguous surface suggests three-dimensionality and recession into a tunnel or room, while the uneven edges and floating specks of dust draw our attention to the flatness of the painting.