

Museum Publicity

Announcements News and Press Release Information

Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art Presents Major Exhibition and Publication Exploring Art of the American West in Newly Expanded Galleries

by editor · July 24, 2018

Logan, Utah – The Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art (NEHMA) at Utah State University (USU) is presenting *Collecting on the Edge*, a ground-breaking, two-part exhibition showcasing its exceptional collection that focuses on the history of art west of the Mississippi River since 1920. Featuring work by 172 artists, *Collecting on the Edge* and the publication that accompanies it provide a compelling look at NEHMA's collection and the curatorial rigor and connoisseurship evident in its development.

The exhibition will be installed in two parts—Part I: September 15–December 15, 2018 and Part II: January 17–May 4, 2019—in NEHMA's newly expanded facility (details below). Work will be switched out halfway through the presentation to enable visitors to explore more of the collection.

Collecting on the Edge offers a dynamic, multi-media overview of the range of important movements including abstract expressionism, abstract classicism, Beat art, pop, conceptual art, experimental photography, and contemporary studio ceramics. The exhibition also features lesser-known genres such as Funk assemblage, post Surrealism, Dynaton, Santa Fe transcendentalism, and conceptualism in San Francisco and southern California.

NEHMA Executive Director and Chief Curator Katie Lee-Koven said, "This exhibition and important publication fittingly celebrate the collection—one that asks viewers to consider what art tells us about our past and how history should be reexamined, in this instance with respect to the art in the West. This grouping of 172 objects demonstrates that the history of art in the American West has been even more of a force in American art and culture than one might think."

Guest curator Bolton T. Colburn, who also served as editor of the eponymous publication, said "NEHMA seeks out works for its permanent collection that represent movements that have been ignored by art history, pieces by artists now forgotten or never given their due; and exceptional examples of work by acknowledged 20th-century masters."

"As we re-open after a nearly two-year expansion and renovation project, we are deeply grateful to our community and supporters for helping us to enhance the founder's vision for the exhibition, study, and enjoyment of art of the West for students and the public alike," said Lee-Koven.

Exhibition Highlights

The exhibition is installed to reveal connections between works from different eras and genres. For example, vibrant landscape paintings by Maurice Logan and Birger Sandzen are positioned near black-and-white photographs of sculptural forms by Frederick Archer and Edward Weston. Post-surrealist studies by Ben Berlin and Helen Lundenberg are shown near work by the Santa Fe Transcendental Painting group members Emil Bisttram, Lawren Harris, and Agnes Pelton creating an unexpected dialogue. Works by Dynaton Gordon Onslow Ford, Lee Mullican, and Wolfgang Paalen lead to artists such as Bruce Conner's homage to the artist Marcel Duchamp, an abstractionist mixed-media work by Jay DeFeo, and a sculpture of found objects by George Herms.

Among the other highlights of *Collecting on the Edge* are Ruth Asawa's largest sculptural work, *Untitled, 1967*, naturally oxidized copper and brass wire; Sister Corita Kent's striking pop-art print, *in, 1964*, silkscreen on paper; Ed Ruscha's tour de force, *Lisp, 1968*, oil on canvas; and, Henrietta Shore's astronomical abstraction, *Two Worlds, c. 1921*, oil on canvas.

One section of the exhibition features works from the early 1960s to the present with conceptual artists ranging from Nancy Buchanan, Tony DeLap, Robert Irwin, and Paul Kos to the environment-inspired collage by Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison. *Berlin Wall Scored for Sound, 1981*, Terry Fox's thirty-foot-long musical score, is positioned opposite Channa Horwitz's *Expanded Eight, 1980*, a large-scale minimalist drawing on graph paper.

The exhibition also includes a work by Jack Goldstein, who, like Horwitz and several other artists on view, attended the California Institute of the Arts as students. Both he and Horwitz studied with John Baldessari, another artist featured in the exhibition. Some works reference historical paintings with very different approaches like Margaret Nielsen's *The Last of the Buffalo, 1990*. The painting appropriates and comments on Albert Bierstadt's sentimental painting of the same name, a riff on the idealization of the American West and expansionism.

Publication

Collecting on the Edge guest curator Bolton T. Colburn invited 81 art critics, curators, artists, and authors to provide authoritative views of the importance of each work and incorporated this material in the publication and exhibition. The result significantly broadens the narrative of American art history by recognizing the contributions of regional artists and collections west of the Mississippi.

The 288-page exhibition catalogue was published by Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art in conjunction with Utah State University Press and features 200 color images. The publication includes an interview with collector/donor George Wanlass by Colburn, foreword by NEHMA Executive Director and Chief Curator Katie Lee-Koven, and introduction by independent curator Michael Duncan. It is available at: <https://upcolorado.com/university-press-of-colorado/item/3290-collecting-on-the-edge>

The Collection

NEHMA's collection started with a gift in 1982 from Nora Eccles Harrison and her husband Richard Harrison of four hundred ceramics, highlighting studio ceramics of the 20th century in the American West. It quickly expanded to all media and has consistently sought out art practices and artists on the fringes of mainstream art history. NEHMA's unique collecting criteria reflects the viewpoint that the significance of a work of art is not tied to its monetary value but rather to its inherent quality as well as the context in which it was created. George Wanlass, the great-nephew of NEHMA's founder Nora Eccles Harrison, has helped guide the Museum's acquisitions program during the last three decades. "Nearly one fifth of the over 5,000 artworks at NEHMA are a result of George's efforts through the support of his family's foundations, an extraordinary and rare accomplishment" said Lee-Koven.

The Expansion Project

Designed by Sparano + Mooney Architecture, NEHMA's privately-funded \$5-million-dollar expansion and renovation adds 7,500 square feet to the 23,000-square-foot existing facility. The project includes a new lobby with a café and museum store, new gallery space, and additional collection storage. Renovations included updated flooring, the reconfiguring of interior spaces, relocating the Museum's research/study center, and a library. The new addition provides NEHMA with a prominent presence at USU and in northern Utah, making the Museum the only destination focused on modern and contemporary American art between Salt Lake City and Boise, Idaho.

The Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art

The Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art (NEHMA) is dedicated to collecting and exhibiting modern and contemporary visual art to promote dialogue about ideas fundamental to contemporary society. NEHMA provides meaningful engagement with art from the 20th and 21st centuries to support the educational mission of Utah State University, in Logan, Utah. NEHMA offers complementary public programs such as lectures, panels, tours, concerts, and symposia to serve the University and regional community. Admission is free and open to the public. Hours are Tuesday–Saturday from 10am to 5pm and by appointment.

<http://artmuseum.usu.edu/>



Rendering of building expansion project for Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art by Sparano + Mooney Architecture