When We Were Young

Rethinking Abstraction from the University at Albany Art Collections

2017 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the University at Albany Art Museum. In 1967, at its inaugural exhibit, the University Art Museum is here to give students, as well as the larger community, the tools to speak that language, to understand it, and to make it their own. By exhibiting works from both current practitioners and from its substantial collections, the Museum continues to play in turn generates the development of new forms and alternate readings of existing art, from the 1960s to the present. International in scope, the Collections include works from the Foundation for the Visual Arts, Virginia Zabriskie, Marvin, Carol, and Adam Brown, the Curator and Interim Director.

The University at Albany Art Collections comprise more than 3,000 works—paintings, drawings and prints, sculpture, photographs, and mixed media. The collections draw from the American, European, and international traditions of modern and contemporary art and are intended to reflect the University’s mission to offer students a diverse array of art experiences. Uniting these works are several foundational ideas, including the power of perception, the primacy of the artist's vision, and the role of the artwork as a transparent window into the artist's thought process and working methods.

The first exhibition to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Museum's opening, “When We Were Young,” demonstrates that abstraction is more than an aesthetic decision; it is an approach to the act of making. In the Museum’s first fifty years, abstraction has been used as a means of radical questioning, a language through which the artist engages the world. By examining abstraction from the early twentieth century through the present, the exhibition explores the development and evolution of abstraction as an artistic language.

Clement Greenberg aptly labeled this tendency as “post-painterly” (in contrast to the “pre-painterly” art of the early modern era). According to Greenberg, the “post-painterly” artist works in series using a vocabulary of shapes and colors not directly derived from the world. He describes post-painterly art as being “formulated” and “articulated” rather than “expressive.” The experience of post-painterly abstraction, for Greenberg, was the experience of “discovery, invention, and formulation.”

The exhibition “When We Were Young” explores abstraction from the University at Albany Art Collections (1967-2017) through the works of 13 artists. Juried by University Art Museum Curator and Interim Director, Robert Shane, the exhibition is designed to highlight the Museum’s collections as an art historical resource and to engage visitors in the development and evolution of abstraction as an artistic language.

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When We Were Young

Exhibition: October 6 – December 16, 2017

Introduction

All museums and all exhibition juried at the moment of their opening, whether by a committee or a single curator's approval, are simultaneously in the search for identity. The University Art Museum in Albany, New York is no exception. The opening of the first exhibition in 1967 marked an important moment for the institution as it played a significant role in the cultural life of the city and the state. The exhibition's focus on abstract art was a reflection of the contemporary art scene and set a tone for future exhibitions.

When We Were Young

Reflecting Creations from the University at Albany Art Collections

(1967 – present)

When We Were Young: Rethinking Abstraction from the University at Albany Art Collections

(1967 – present)

(1967 – present)

When Museum 2017 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the University at Albany Art Museum. In 1967, at its inaugural exhibit, the Museum focused on abstract art and featured works by influential figures in twentieth-century modern art—such as Governor Rockefeller, who emphasized the importance of showcasing abstract art in the museum.

The aim of this exhibition is to explore the Museum's collection of contemporary art and to highlight the evolution of abstraction over the past fifty years. By exhibiting works from current practitioners and from the Museum's substantial collections, the exhibition continues to play a role in the cultural life of the university and the city.

The exhibition's focus on abstract art reflects the Museum's commitment to showcasing modern and contemporary art. Through the presentation of works from both current practitioners and the Museum's extensive collections, the exhibition offers a unique opportunity to explore the development of abstraction and its role in twentieth-century modern art.

In conclusion, the University Art Museum will continue to play a vital role in the cultural life of the university and the city, serving as a platform for the development and exploration of contemporary art. The Museum's commitment to showcasing modern and contemporary art and its dedication to the development of abstraction will continue to inspire and engage visitors for generations to come.
When We Were Young

Bartering Directions from the University at Albany del Collective (1974–present)

Introduction

When we were young, the university was a place to learn about art. Today, it is a place to explore and discover it. The University at Albany Art Collections comprise more than 3,000 works—paintings, sculptures, and drawings by contemporary artists from around the world. Over 400 exhibitions later, the Museum remains committed to the idea that firsthand experience with art is essential to understanding its importance. The University at Albany Art Collections, which feature fifty-three art works by some of the most influential figures in twentieth-century modern art—such as Ellsworth Kelly and Agnes Martin, Chryssa's studio overlooked the East Village, and Marietta Hoffman's white monochromes were already well known to artists in the 1960s. The museum continues to play a role in the development of new forms and alternate readings of existing late-Modernist abstraction as it relates to current trends in contemporary art. The University at Albany Art Collections include works by notable artists such as Josef Albers, Gene Davis, Max Bill, and Luis Molinari Flores. The museum is dedicated to preserving and exhibiting these works as seen in Donald Judd's etchings, which read as schematic drawings for his factory-produced sculptures. The museum also features works by Peter Taylor, who forsook gesture and anthropomorphism in favor of industrial materials and primary forms, and Shozo Nagano, who specialized in sculpture and performance art. The museum is committed to the idea that firsthand experience with art is essential to understanding its importance. The University at Albany Art Collections continue to play a role in the development of new forms and alternate readings of existing late-Modernist abstraction as it relates to current trends in contemporary art. The museum is dedicated to preserving and exhibiting these works as seen in Donald Judd's etchings, which read as schematic drawings for his factory-produced sculptures. The museum also features works by Peter Taylor, who forsook gesture and anthropomorphism in favor of industrial materials and primary forms, and Shozo Nagano, who specialized in sculpture and performance art.