

# CALIFORNIA IN CONNECTICUT

THE JOANNE AND WILLIAM REES COLLECTION



**IRVING MARCUS (b. 1929)**

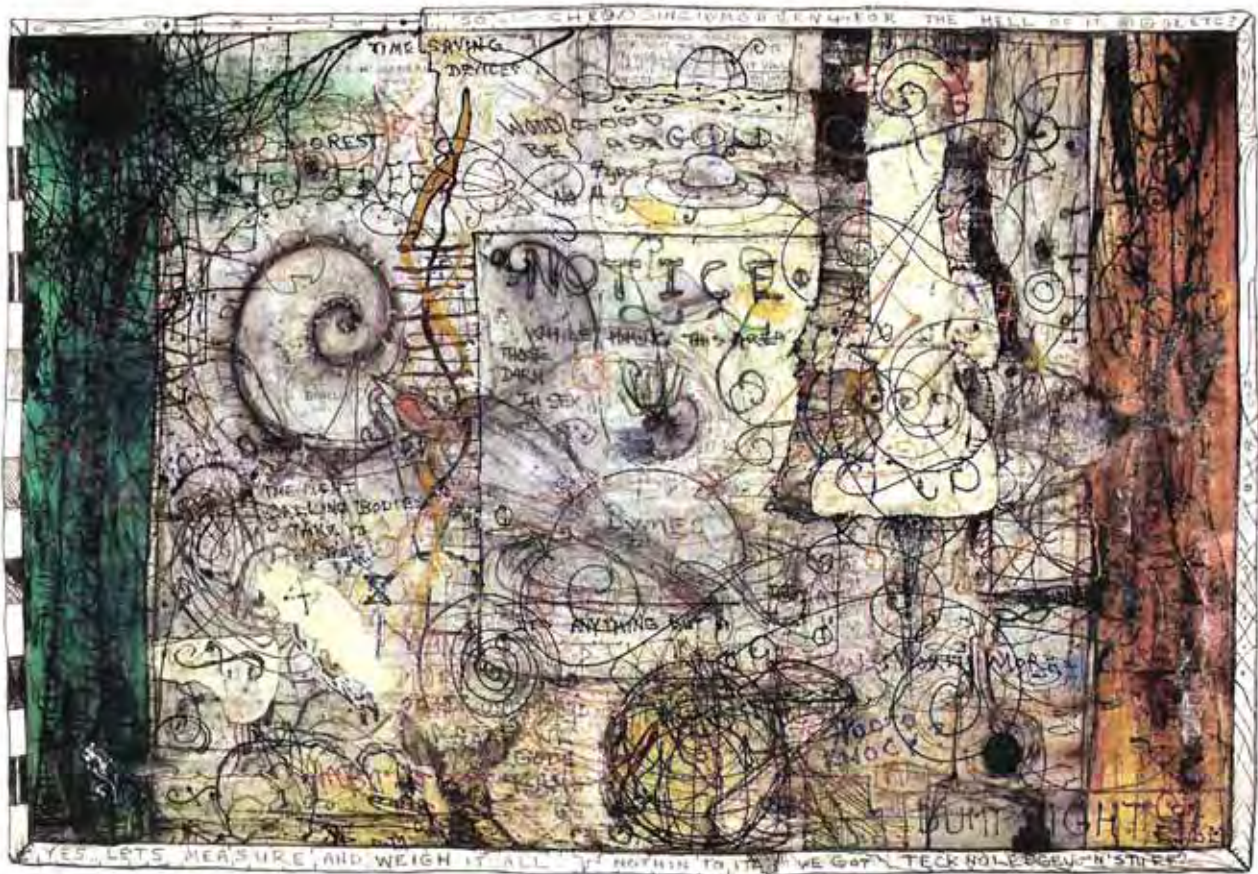
*Dance of the Snails*, 1999

Oil on canvas

42 x 56 inches

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**WILLIAM T. WILEY (b. 1937)**

*Choosing Modern for the Hell of It, 1992*

Acrylic, charcoal, and graphite on canvas

27 1/2 x 39 inches

Collection of William H. Rees

## Foreword

Sociologists and cultural anthropologists are still sorting out the significance of the 1960s and 1970s — decades of enormous change that shaped our lives today. Opposition to the Vietnam War, particularly fierce in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Northern California in general, helped precipitate this social upheaval. I vividly recall a 1971 visit to San Francisco and a walk through Haight-Ashbury, where I observed first-hand the counter-culture lifestyles of the residents.

Many of the trends that began in California spread rapidly to other parts of the country: the entire nation followed the social unrest through media coverage that described in great detail the anti-war movement and the pervasive effect of drugs and the sexual revolution on the younger generation. Among the many causes that found traction in the area were feminism and an awareness of the fragile nature of our environment. Traditional mores were set aside and college students and youth in particular embraced ways of life that were diametrically opposed to those of their parents and light-years away from those of their grandparents. California established a reputation as a pace setter, freewheeling and innovative.

Along with political protests and social experiments, there were also art happenings that represented an allied but very different form of expression. Waves of anti-establishment sentiment took hold of the population. A significant result of this experimentation and social upheaval was a fluorescence in the arts — dance, theater, music, and the visual arts — that is having an impact to this day.

*California in Connecticut: The Collection of Joanne and William Rees* provides a visual roadmap through the labyrinth that was the 1960s and 1970s in California. With only a few exceptions the artists whose works are featured in the exhibition were educated in or taught in the state, and all came of age during these two decades. Thus, their mature work owes its origins to the cultural revolution of their youth. Art historians have variously described many of them as belonging to the school of California Funk. Others link their creative expressions under the title of kitsch. *"Bad" Painting*, a significant exhibition curated by Marcia Tucker

at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, in 1978, included many of these artists and coined the term "Bad Art." Whatever name one chooses, the artists of the Bay Area and Northern California remain among the most innovative and profoundly anti-establishment.

Viewers can appreciate and enjoy the Rees Collection on a number of levels. One aspect is the extraordinary use of vivid colors that characterizes most of the oil paintings. Liberated from the more sedate, somber tones of earlier generations, many of these pictures provide a visual equivalent to the psychedelic. Similarly, the forms are jagged and staccato in many instances, thus heightening the sense of expressiveness and creating a cutting-edge awareness. Some artists, such as Roy De Forest, are almost childlike in their approach to the figure and represent a tie to the Surrealists of the 1930s and 1940s, who were fascinated by the world of the subconscious. De Forest's figures have been criticized as being grotesque and almost cartoonish, but those effects are precisely what he intended. Almost all the artists in the Rees collection have a keen sense of whimsy and humor that leaves the viewer smiling. David Gilhooly, to name a personal favorite, is immensely funny — a born satirist. William T. Wiley is one of the most intriguing artists represented because of his subtle intelligence: his commitment to drawing is sophisticated and worldly, and he constantly employs historical references and biographical details. One could study his canvases for hours and interpret them in myriad ways. While these painters share many traits, they are distinctive individuals worthy of study.

The New Britain Museum of American Art has never before presented a survey of contemporary Northern California art. *California in Connecticut* affords a unique opportunity to explore the creative impulses of many artists who generally are unfamiliar. I am most grateful to Joanne and Bill Rees for agreeing to loan a large portion of their extensive collection to the Museum this spring and summer. I also want to thank a mutual friend, Bruce Chambers, for introducing me to the Reeses. I will never forget my first visit to the Rees home, as I did not expect to see so many outstanding examples by California artists displayed in one dwelling, literally from floor to ceiling.

Through Bill and Joanne Rees, I have had the pleasure of meeting the Fitz Gibbons. Bill's Yale University classmate John Fitz Gibbon is one of the leading authorities on and collectors of Bay Area and contemporary California art. John and his wife, Jane, were intimately involved with the art scene from the 1960s to the present, forming the Pilot Hill Collection and staging a series of extraordinary happenings at Pilot Hill. They have forged close ties with the leading painters, sculptors, ceramicists, and graphic artists, many of whom have become their lifelong

friends. Over the last six months, John Fitz Gibbon has donated to the New Britain Museum excellent examples by the California artists Julia Couzens, Don Hazlitt, Tony King, Judith Linhares, Irving Marcus, Jack Ogden, Jack Stuppin, and William Wheeler. We are most fortunate to have established this collection at the Museum because none of these artists were previously represented in our holdings. In order for us to maintain a comprehensive and representative group of American paintings, it is important that we extend our reach to the West Coast, particularly with these artists, who have been so original in their creative endeavors.

Bill and Joanne Rees have spent twenty years collecting California art and visiting many of the artists represented in the exhibition, in many instances with John Fitz Gibbon, whose guidance and recommendations have been of enormous value to them. This publication and the many programs that are scheduled in conjunction with *California in Connecticut* will allow us to explore a wide variety of topics that are closely related to the paintings on view. I am most grateful to Bill and Joanne's son William H. Rees for loaning key works by Robert Arneson, Robert Colescott, Ed Kienholz, and William Wiley. William shares his parents' passion for contemporary California art. I am also indebted to Philip Linhares, Chief Curator of Art, Oakland Museum of California, and one of the foremost authorities on California art for his insightful essay.

I wish to express my gratitude to the following staff members who contributed to this undertaking: Paula Bender, Shakkea Brister, Patrick Brown, Christine Clough-Lewko, David D'Agostino, Donna Downes, Melanie Carr-Eveleth, Robert Fidelus, Morgan Fippinger, Bernadine Franco, Daniel Fulco, Judy Gaffney, Paul Grzyb, Zbigniew Grzyb, Karen Hudkins, James Kopp, Tom Lanson, Michael Lavoie, Patricia Levandoski, Marianne McAllister, Linda Mare, Terence Schneider, Andriy Shurer, Dina Silva, Michael Smith, Sue Sullivan, Claudia Thesing, Becky Trutter, and Heather Whitehouse. Maura O'Shea has served most effectively as curator of the exhibition. The museum is also grateful to Zina Davis, Elise Kenney, Alex Nemerov, Alda and Joseph Rees, Catherine Rees, Nathaniel Rees, and Fernande Ross for their help with the exhibition.

I would like to acknowledge the operating support provided by the Greater Hartford Arts Council, the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, the Community Foundation of Greater New Britain, the American Savings Foundation, and our individual and corporate contributors whose annual donations help us meet our operating expenses.

Douglas Hyland  
Director



**LANCE RICHBOURG (b. 1938)**

*Rees Family Portrait*, 1983

Oil on canvas

44 x 57 inches



## California in Connecticut: The Joanne and William Rees Collection

### What is it about California art?

It just doesn't adhere to the mainstream, in fact, it ignores it. From the perspective of a half-century, I'd have to say that isolation has allowed California art, and especially that of Northern California, to go its own way. Not that there haven't been attempts by the eastern establishment to recognize and present work from Northern California: Jay De Feo's and Wally Hedrick's paintings were introduced alongside those of Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Frank Stella in Dorothy Miller's milestone 1959 exhibition, *Sixteen Americans*, at the Museum of Modern Art. In his *New York Times* review of that exhibition, art critic John Canaday said, "...for my money, these are the sixteen artists most slated for oblivion." Only De Feo and Hedrick fulfilled Canaday's wish.

Isolation and oblivion (the latter, the quality or condition of being completely forgotten) as lived by Northern California artists are good things. The mild weather does not impose particular hardships, and the lack of pressure by an overactive, aggressive art scene leaves time to think and work. Some artists have avoided the region's creeping urbanization by staking early claims in outlying areas: William T. Wiley lives and works over a creek in outer Marin County; Roy De Forest maintains a compound in rural Port Costa, his only neighbor, fellow artist Clayton Bailey; and the late Robert Arneson returned to his birthplace, the little town of Benicia, on the north side of the Carquinez Straits. Unlike New York, where artists live in lofts and can join a social occasion in minutes, these California artists live miles apart and stay mostly to themselves.

Such conditions encourage rugged individuality — not the isolated survivalist kind — but a kind that fosters curiosity and study. These artists are astonishingly literate and informed on many subjects including what artists in other parts of the world are doing and have done. Nearly all are, or have been, teachers and enjoy introducing their resources and enthusiasms to their students. The work of H. C. Westermann, the Reverend Howard Finster, and Simon Rodia was recognized and admired long before it was in other regions. In fact, the eccentric, self-taught, self-motivated creator of curious aesthetic objects served as a model for Northern California artists while Pollock, de Kooning, and David Smith inspired artists elsewhere.

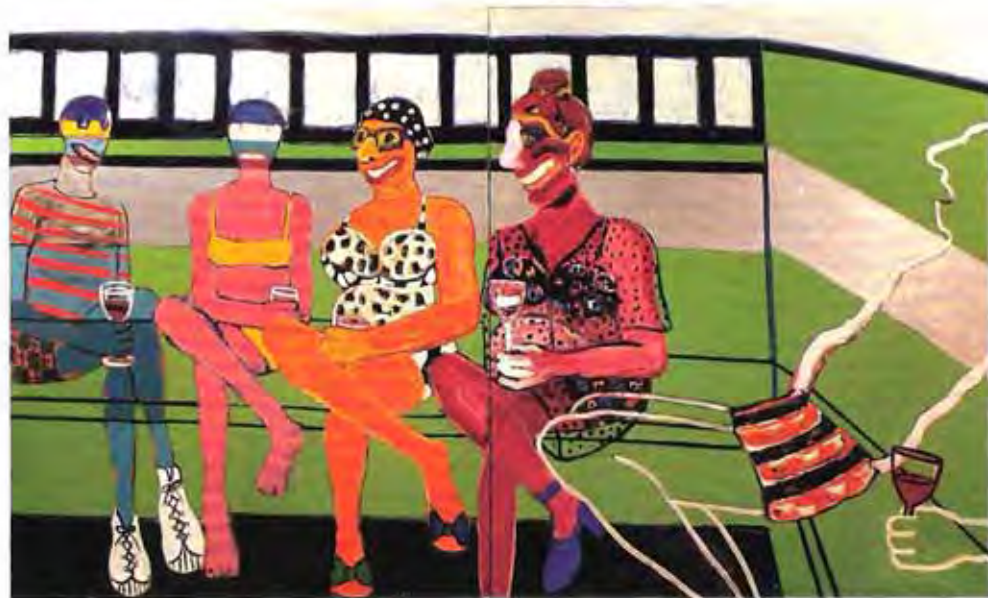
Two significant exhibitions, however, identified the Bay Area's regional artistic idiosyncrasies, bringing them to wide notice: the first, *Funk*, organized by Peter Selz at the University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, in 1967, and eleven years later, Marcia Tucker's "*Bad*" *Painting* at New York's New Museum of Contemporary Art. Selz, a recent arrival to Berkeley following curatorial service at the Museum of Modern Art, documented the diverse, entirely individualistic creations of a generation of artists raised on Abstract Expressionism but seeking liberation from its formal strictures. Selz observed the local artists' debt to Dada, and to Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg as well, and remarked on their lack of illusion regarding public morality and their sense of humor, absurdity and fun. "*Bad*" *Painting* presented a group of artists, not all Californians, who freely mixed classical and popular sources, and whose admiration of kitsch and disposition toward personal, narrative expression resulted in paintings that questioned accepted standards of taste. Critic John Perreault, in his review of the exhibition in the *Soho Weekly News*, remarked that it contained "...several works that even the most open-minded art-lover will hate with grim passion."

The Joanne and William Rees Collection includes many examples of works drawn from both *Funk* and "*Bad*" *Painting*. Bill Rees was introduced to collecting by his friend and Yale 1956 classmate John Fitz Gibbon, professor of Art History at Sacramento State University and an outspoken advocate for the work of his studio-based colleagues and extended coterie of artist friends. Relying at first upon Fitz Gibbon's keen eye and good judgment, Bill and Joanne quickly grew to appreciate the power and uniqueness of the works. Eventually they set out on their own, exploring galleries, visiting studios and meeting artists, educating their eye and acquiring works to their taste and liking. Their collection today, certainly among the most comprehensive in the East, provides a rare and welcome view of a kind of expression that continues to flourish out West, and whose influence is strongly felt in the current pluralistic tendencies in American art.

Joan Brown, the only artist represented in both *Funk* and "*Bad*" *Painting*, seemingly became an artist overnight. Fresh out of Catholic high school, she took her tuition money, intended for a Catholic university, to the California School of Fine Arts (CSFA), now the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI). There, under the tutelage of Elmer Bischoff, Richard Diebenkorn, Sonia Gechtoff, and Frank Lobdell, she created Abstract Expressionist paintings and later figurative works, thick with the cheap Bay City paints and white lead that all local art students used at the time. Her circle of friends included artists and poets associated with the San Francisco "Beat" scene: Michael McClure, Bruce Conner, Jay De Feo, Wally Hedrick, and Philip Lamantia. Such was her ability that she had her first solo San Francisco exhibition at the Staempfli Gallery before graduating from CSFA, and soon after she participated

in group exhibitions with Lee Bontecou, Helen Frankenthaler, Grace Hartigan, and Georgia O'Keeffe.

A sensible, compassionate person, inspiring teacher and student of world faiths, Joan learned much from foreign travel, especially to exotic places well off the tourist-beaten paths. She was also a swimmer, one of those brave souls who swam daily in San Francisco Bay, and competed in the annual Alcatraz to Aquatic Park and Golden Gate swims. When she painted



*At the Beach* [fig. 1] in 1973, swimming was very much on her mind; she had just completed her first San Francisco Bay swim, coming in last in a field of eighty-five. Soon she began training with the well-known coach Charlie Sava with gratifying results. *At the Beach* depicts the after-swim convivialities enjoyed by the women of the Dolphin Swim and Boat Club; in "ghost" form on the right is a male figure, perhaps exhausted and sleeping while the women seem happily revived by their swim. Bay Area ceramic sculptor David Gilhooly let it be known that he thought he was the model for the ghost. The painting remains a favorite of the Rees family, evoking for Bill Rees memories of a summer beach club childhood.

Although Robert Colescott was not among the artists included in *"Bad" Painting*, his work is fully welcomed into the fold by the other artist participants. Qualifications for *"Bad" Painting* included all things loathsome to the East Coast "art establishment" at the time: figurative imagery, personally idiosyncratic rendering, narrative content, and — most abhorrent of all — humor. Colescott qualifies on all counts, and often with provocative racial content as well.

A native of Oakland, Calif., Colescott studied at the University of California, Berkeley, before moving to Paris to study with Fernand Léger. Originally a geometric abstractionist, Colescott moved to figurative work at Léger's prompting, as the French master would only critique representational work.

Fig. 1  
JOAN BROWN  
(1938–1990)  
*At the Beach*, 1973  
Enamel and  
oil on canvas  
84 x 144 inches



Fig. 2  
**ROBERT H. COLESCOTT**  
 (b. 1925)  
*Nouvelle Cuisine*, 1988  
 Oil on canvas  
 84 x 72 inches

*Painting* exhibition, she today is regarded by her peers as an artist's artist. She has survived and thrived in New York. She did not adapt her work to the prevailing style, but, rather, influenced other artists to move toward a more personal, expressive way of working, playing an important role in the emergence of a pluralistic outlook through the painterly quality and strength of her work.

Linhares moved from the surfer's world of Manhattan Beach to study at Oakland's California College of Arts and Crafts, her work there admired and encouraged by a diverse group of fellow artists, including Joan Brown, Jim Melchert, Manuel Neri, Terry Fox, and Robert Crumb. Like many Bay Area artists, she immersed herself in wide-ranging influences,

In *Nouvelle Cuisine* [fig.2], 1988, Colescott is his usual provocative self. We are apparently seeing behind-the-scenes at a trendy restaurant; silhouetted couples are otherwise occupied by candlelight, as the cook, dressed as a waiter, or a waiter wearing a chef's toque, samples the sauce. The kitchen is in disarray, with stacks of soiled tableware, spoiled food, bus boys, and trash cans engulfed in what is about to be an earsplitting cacophony. In the meantime, the self-satisfied *maitre 'd* is in what will prove to be a short-lived swoon over the quality and efficiency of his operation. As he often does, Colescott plays off racial stereotypes, guaranteeing an overturning of any smugly comfortable, politically correct postures on the part of the viewer.

Colescott was the first African American artist to represent the United States in the Venice Biennale in 1997 in a solo exhibition. Now in his early eighties and retired from teaching, he continues to create narrative works exploring racial stereotypes with humor, satire and irony.

Born and raised in southern California, Judith Linhares has lived in New York for almost three decades. One of the more provocative painters in Marcia Tucker's 1978 "Bad"



Fig. 3  
JUDITH LINHARES  
(b. 1940)  
*Eve*, 1984  
Oil on canvas  
54 x 72 inches

studying “naïve” or “outsider” art, participating in feminist critique groups and attending performances, from Janis Joplin at the Fillmore Auditorium to conceptual performance pieces conducted in dark, cold South of Market lofts. An interest in dreams, Jungian psychology and Mexican iconography informs her work as well.

The collection’s typically rich and colorful painting, *Eve* [fig. 3], 1984, suggests the Bible’s story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Emerging from the right of the canvas is a red female torso representing Eve at the moment of her encounter with the serpent. The serpent is climbing through a dense thicket, its head musing upon the figure’s pubic area, called out graphically with a thick, black triangle. The serpent is not in a tree, but scaling a complex, densely woven structure which supports cone and leaf forms in saturated open color areas of green, yellow, orange, and red. The painting is not intended as an illustration of the episode in Genesis: instead, Linhares has used the story as a starting point for making a painting, resulting in a narrative open to every viewer’s personal interpretation.



Fig. 4

**JAMES ALBERTSON**

(b. 1944)

*Venus & Adonis (Children in Rubenesque Poses)*, 1984

Oil on canvas

32 x 50½ inches

arrows at Venus's feet in order to peer under Adonis's garb. The hunting dogs await their master in the background, just as the boar, who ultimately causes the death of Adonis, emerges from its cave on the right. This work is smaller than the famous Rubens painting on which it is based, and the figures are reversed: Venus and Adonis are children, and the putto is an adult.

Albertson, educated in Chicago, burst upon the scene in the early '70s with his highly accomplished, outrageous parodies, many inspired by baroque religious or historical paintings. His drawing and painting skills exceeded those of his local peers. Marcia Tucker's inclusion of his work in the "Bad" Painting exhibition brought his work to national attention, but the content of his work limited commercial prospects for all but the most adventuresome collectors. The work of both Albertson and Colescott seems jokish or at least lacking seriousness, but that sense belies their strong referencing of historical works of art.

Albertson continues to live and work in Sacramento, California, and undertakes commissioned portraits while continuing to pursue subjects of personal interest.

Charles Garabedian is among the relatively few southern California artists represented in the Rees collection. *Too Hot to Handle* [fig. 5], 1972, is an early work prescient only in its narrative content and actually is closer to a northern California style. Despite its abstraction,

James Albertson's paintings might well be the particular works in "Bad" Painting that inspired John Perreault's remarks quoted above. *Venus & Adonis (Children in Rubenesque Poses)* [fig. 4], 1984, presents a lurid version of the myth; here we see a juvenile Venus imploring the beautiful young Adonis to linger, while he is intent on parting, at least for the moment, to get on with the hunt. Cupid, depicted in miniature, has dropped his bow and quiver of

Garabedian's *Ruins IV*, 1982, and his figurative *Reclining Figure*, 1979–82, are more typical of the look and technique for which his work is easily recognized today.

Garabedian has been called a late bloomer. Born in 1923 in Detroit, he served in the US Army Air Force in the early 1940s and resumed his art education some years later, receiving a MA degree from UCLA in 1961. Like many working artists of his generation, he has undertaken occasional teaching assignments, joining faculties at several southern California institutions throughout his career. His work was selected for the Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial in 1975 and appeared in "Bad" Painting in 1978.

In *Too Hot to Handle*, we see fragments of two figures, a green-faced man in a brown suit and hat standing in a telephone booth on the right. On the left, in profile, is a portion of a man's head with a striped cap suggesting prison garb; the bars behind him reinforce that notion. He is gazing at a thermometer, hence the title. What, in this odd narrative, do these figures have to do with each other? Is Garabedian trying to turn 1940s *film noir* posters into art? The work is replete with clues to tickle the imagination...why are there stars over the "prisoner's" head, while the telephone booth denies any view of the cosmos? Garabedian's later work follows the course suggested by the prisoner and the stars, as it takes a classical, mythical turn.

Ceramic sculptor Robert Arneson was a driving force in the northern California art community. Born in Benicia, California, he studied at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, then ventured a few miles south to Oakland's Mills College for graduate studies. When he arrived, the Mills pottery shop was a bastion of traditional modernist functional ware, presided over by the noted ceramicist Antonio Prieto. Arneson eventually changed all that.

One afternoon, in the course of a pottery demonstration at the California State Fair in fall 1961, Arneson threw a sturdy, quart-sized bottle, capped and labeled it "No Deposit, No Return." While acknowledging the influence of Jasper Johns's *Painted Bronze (Ale Cans)*, 1960, Arneson's bottle proved to be a harbinger of his future mature work, beginning with the 1963 *Funk John*, a glazed ceramic toilet, later destroyed. Subsequent works, humorous



Fig. 5  
**CHARLES GARABEDIAN**  
(b. 1923)  
*Too Hot to Handle*, 1972  
Acrylic and resin  
36½ x 64½ x 1 inches



Fig. 6  
**ROBERT ARNESON**  
(1930–1992)  
*Bad Boy Bob*, 1981  
Clay  
17½ x 13 x 13 inches

and ironic objects rendered in clay, found their way into major exhibitions, including the 1967 UC Berkeley *Funk* exhibition and *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1968.

Robert Arneson began teaching at the University of California, Davis, in 1962. His studio, TB-9 (temporary building #9), a corrugated shed on the Davis campus, became a center of prolific artistic production and a gathering place for colleagues Wiley, De Forest, Manuel Neri and Wayne Thiebaud, and students David Gilhooly, Peter VandenBerg, Richard Shaw, Deborah Butterfield, John Roloff, Robert Brady, and many more now productive sculptors.

In Arneson's *Bad Boy Bob* [fig. 6], 1981, an urn is being gnawed by a rat. At one time, the urn may have contained cremated human remains, now consumed, most likely by the rat shown here working on the container itself. The title also reminds one of Arneson's adventure with his public commission to portray the assassinated San Francisco mayor, George Moscone: an oversized ceramic bust of the mayor presented a good likeness, complete with a supercilious political smile, but its pedestal contained graphic references to his death and the trial of his killer, a former city council member whose diet of fast-food was submitted in his defense. Arneson depicted, among other things, a pistol, bullet holes, and a Hostess Twinkie on the pedestal, to the great ire of Mayor Diane Feinstein, other politicians, and the local press.

At the formal viewing, the pedestal was covered; ultimately the commission was rejected. Arneson admitted to being naïve, assuming that since he was commissioned, the city fathers wanted the cutting edge treatment for which he was known. *Bad Boy Bob*, created in the same year as the ceramic bust, may express Arneson's chagrin over the episode. Certainly, the title reflects the San Francisco community's view of the artist at that moment.

A native of Nebraska, Roy De Forest found his way to San Francisco after his studies at the California School of Fine Arts and San Francisco State University. His first local exhibition was in 1953 at the King Ubu Gallery, one of the city's first alternative spaces for art exhibitions and poetry readings during the "beatnik" era. His paintings, sometimes created on wood,



often included carved figures, animals and found objects framing the piece. His work has always been populated by animals, especially dogs and horses, with whimsical titles to match. A prominent and influential member of the painting faculty at the University of California, Davis, De Forest continues to paint in his Port Costa, California, studio.

*Summer at the Seaside* [fig. 7], 1981, is a quintessential De Forest work; with whimsical, stylized figures, it initially appears to be the work of a primitive. We see a large, red nude basking in the foreground and another in black, standing on the left, surrounded by peering men, in hats and hatless. And there are the dogs, ubiquitous figures in De Forest's paintings and drawings. *Summer at the Seaside* is brightly colored and heavily textured; De Forest often applies paint from the tube, using the tube

itself as an applicator, leaving pointed dots resembling multi-colored chocolate chips. He has been known to decorate his frames rather ornately, using a variety of wooden forms generally intended for trim on a Victorian house. Although De Forest has also created a few sculptures in wood and a variety of found objects, including brushes, rope and marbles, he seems to find paint a more immediately satisfying medium. Unlike some artists whose work shows dramatic change over the years, De Forest treads a singular path, depicting people, dogs, trees, mountains, canoes, etc., in steady but always inventive ways. Early paintings included what appeared to be aerial views of landscape, but his past work of more than thirty years is concentrated on his familiar subjects.

William T. Wiley is among the San Francisco Bay Area's most respected, influential and versatile artists. In addition to creating paintings, sculpture, drawings, and prints, he conceives and takes part in performances and writes and performs music.



Fig. 7  
ROY DE FOREST  
(b. 1930)

*Summer at the Seaside*, 1981  
Acrylic on canvas  
72 x 86 inches



Fig. 8

**WILLIAM T. WILEY**  
(b. 1937)

*Targets for Ms. Chief*, 1980  
Acrylic and charcoal  
on canvas  
96 x 130 inches

work could only have been produced under the unique conditions artists enjoy in California.

Drawing is among Wiley's primary strengths. Drawing and writing directly on canvas, he creates a subtle and inviting collection of images. His writings include meanderings on a variety of subjects, generously favoring gentle homilies and folksy puns. *Targets for Ms. Chief* [fig. 8], 1980, both the large work on canvas and its accompanying work on paper, are a case in point. Floating in a ground of nervous imagery is a target-form tending to look like a black and white "egg-over-easy." The yellow L shape on the lower right might prompt the viewer to ask "What's the L?," resulting in another Wiley pun, which leads to another Wiley painting in the Rees collection, *Choosing Modern for the Hell of It*, 1992. Here a loose composition of spherical forms, an igloo, a nautilus spiral and myriad ramblings, all come together to form a visual poem, an enigmatic vision that can captivate the viewer in its artful, unruly presence. One can almost imagine "Mr. Unnatural," Wiley's performing alter ego, in cloak, dunce cap and getas, noisily escaping from the room.

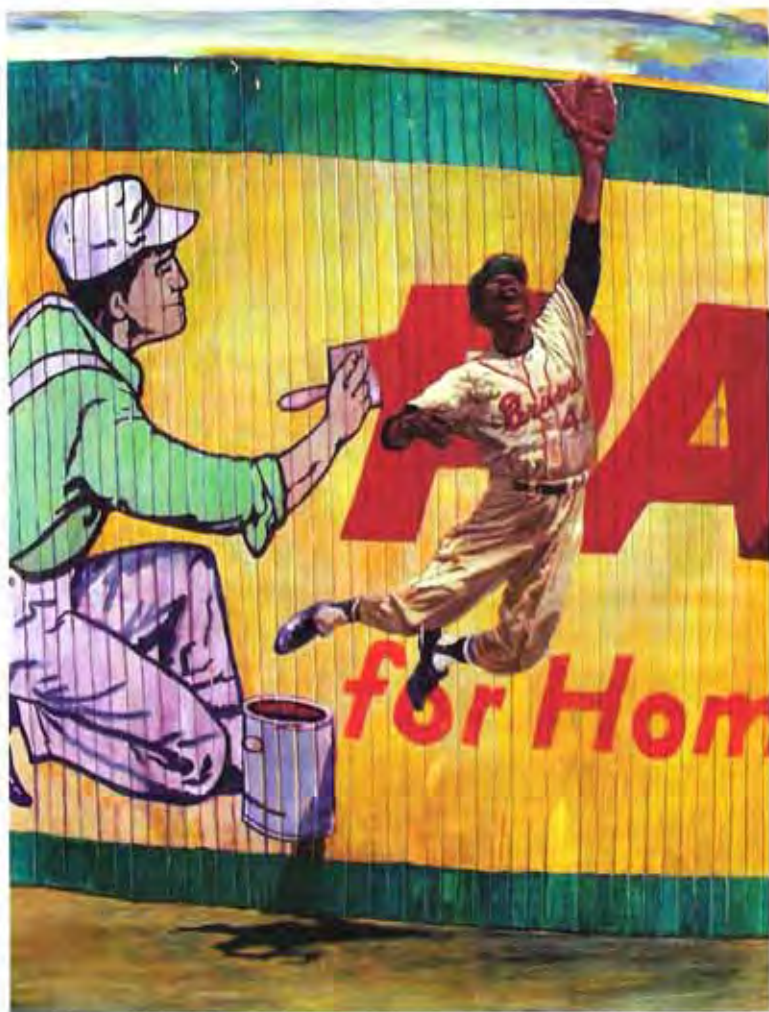
Wiley was recognized early as a superior talent by his teachers at the San Francisco Art Institute; his wide-ranging work has influenced many artists, and his work is well known among local museum visitors and collectors. Currently a major retrospective exhibition is being organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Its premiere in Washington, DC and following national tour will show the rest of the world what is already known out West: that William T. Wiley is among the world's most original and creative visual artists, and that his

## So what could “California in Connecticut” mean?

First there is the obvious: the paintings and three dimensional work have been collected here, physically, in Connecticut. Then there is the interest in the work by the New Britain Museum of American Art, the first museum in the country devoted to American art, whose mounting of this exhibition just might establish a beach head for Northern California art in this state.

But asking the question of the viewer reveals another aspect of meaning, one that comes from the learning experience of art exhibitions. Despite a high level of sophistication, Connecticut viewers may not know a great deal about what has been going on in the other side of the country in the last thirty years. This collection offers the opportunity to explore the work of a talented group of American artists who are not dominated by what's happening in New York, and whose exposure to European culture is mediated: the viewer may discover then the freshness, validity, and seriousness that underlies the playfulness of some of the pieces in the collection, and perhaps embrace this art as they have another product of the region, the wines of the Napa Valley and Sonoma, welcoming it, not for their tables, but for their imagination.

Philip Linhares  
Chief Curator of Art  
Oakland Museum of California



LANCE RICHBOURG  
(b. 1938)  
*Hank Aaron, 1986*  
Oil on paper  
55 x 72 inches



**JAMES ALBERTSON (b. 1944)**

*Walking the Dog*, 1989

Oil on canvas

39 x 31 inches



**ROBERT BRADY (b. 1946)**

*High Roller*, 1979

Clay

43 x 50 x 19 inches

## An Interview with Joanne and Bill Rees

by Maura O'Shea, Curator of Education, New Britain Museum of American Art

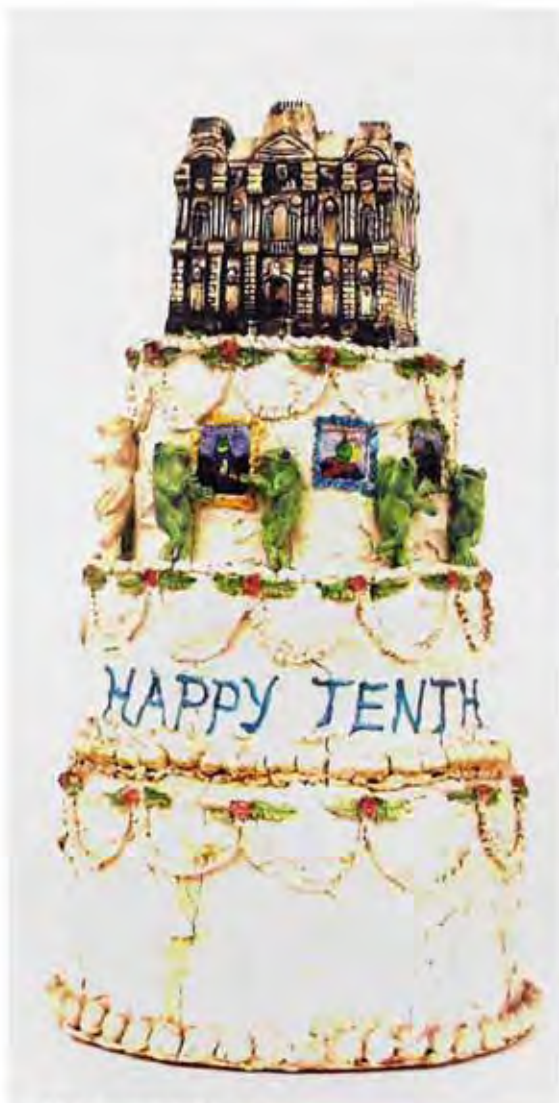
**MOS:** Why do you collect art?

**BR:** I think I have always been a collector: as a child, buffalo nickels, stamps, even matchbook covers. I loved to find a matchbook from some exotic place, like Idaho. As a teenager, I collected Boy Scout merit badges. In my 1960s short-lived political career, I collected votes. Much of my professional life involved sales, so I guess you might say I collected clients.

I have had an appreciation of painting since childhood, when my parents bought both the home of Mr. J. Hannah, a local artist, and several of his oil paintings, which I saw daily; his studio became my playroom. Also, in those early days, we lived two houses away from Charlotte Joan Sternberg, a highly regarded illustrator whose work appeared on the cover of *Collier's Weekly*, a magazine popular in the 1940s. Although I never met her, I was aware of her reputation. Then there was my seventh grade artwork that decorated our summer home. So, it was natural for me to hang something on walls, and to hang original paintings was infinitely more exciting than to hang copies of them, and more walls kept appearing.

**JR:** I guess I'll have to be honest here and 'fess up to the truth that in this exhibition I am flying under false colors. I am not the collector. In the '80s, when this adventure began, I was in what you might call my organizational mode, trying to bring order to the chaos of family life. When my head finally cleared at the end of the decade, I bought one piece in the collection: Robert Colescott's *Nonvelle Cuisine*, which I obviously like a great deal. Colescott intrigues me because of his personal history, the irony and humor of the work, and, of course, what I believe to be his gifts as an artist.

As far as collecting is concerned, I admit to a deep ambivalence. I love art, and I love museums. I have actually come to love having the space I inhabit as well as my own life and the lives of my family and friends enriched by these works. But I do have difficulties with the private, somewhat self-absorbed aspect of a personal collection. And of course there is the issue of maintenance (more on this later).



DAVID J. GILHOOLY (b. 1943)  
*Renwick 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Cake*, 1981  
Clay  
30 x 15 x 15 inches

MOS: Why are you interested in California art of this period?

BR: I respond to its nearly universal vibrant color, which appeals to me in the work of Renoir and Bonnard. Color is joyful to me. Also, many of the California artists draw exquisite figures, to which I relate. Finally, they are masters of satire. I love Molière and the Irish playwrights, Sheridan, Goldsmith, Wilde, Shaw, O'Casey, and Synge, for their portrayals of us with our loose psychic screws. For me, painting and sculpture seemed devoid of this quality until these Californians put it in. And why should it not be there?

Admittedly, there is another side to the work from California, the opposite side, which is not well represented in our collection, but is very present in two pieces lent by my son, William: rage, rage at human shallowness.

MOS: How did you go about collecting?

BR: My good college friend, John Fitz Gibbon, "Fitz," later a Professor of Art History in Sacramento, visited us in the early '80s. Fitz was sitting in our living room, across from an oil painting by a local artist that I had given to Joanne when we moved into our present home. At one point in our conversation, he took off his shoe, pretended to throw it at the painting, and lectured me about it with several quite disparaging remarks. Then he instructed me to start buying "real" art. I mumbled something about our not knowing where to begin. Fitz challenged me to send him \$25 monthly, with the promise to buy for us museum-quality art work from a "starving artist." And so we began. We sent him small amounts of money periodically over the next few years and received back that which is "...a joy forever."

We soon realized we could own work that was affordable by artists about our age, some of whom were just gaining recognition. Unlike the older generation of California artists, Diebenkorn, Bischoff, Sam Francis, Thiebaud, who created extraordinarily beautiful but mostly abstract work (and that

was well beyond our means), the younger generation was more figurative, satirical, and emotional. Their work was original and refreshing.

After getting to know the artists, I commissioned pieces directly from them and bought other work from their respective galleries. Fitz was our first and only advisor. With almost every purchase I made, I asked for his advice and almost always followed it.

**JR:** I'd like to jump in here. Bill collected from a variety of sources, but thanks to the good works of our beloved friend, Fitz, and a couple of serendipitous events, we formed personal relationships with many of the artists whose work we collected. At the heart of both Fitz's and Bill's collecting was commitment: in our case, the act of purchasing became a commitment that led to friendships between us and the artists — formed on what I would call a symbiosis of financial interplay: with the demands of our large family, outright purchases of the works from the artists were not always possible, so we sometimes entered into irregular financial arrangements. On the other hand, when we were able, and if the need arose, Bill would sometimes open his checkbook for modest levels of support. The result? A much more personal relationship than might have existed between collector and artist.

**MOS:** Did the two of you always agree on what to purchase?

**BR:** Oh, no, unfortunately. Beauty is often in the eye of the beholder. At first, Joanne did not like some of the "Bad" painting pieces, and she had no difficulty in expressing herself. And I was very reluctant to buy a Colescott despite the fact that Fitz had been after me for years to do so. Joanne made the decision to buy *Nouvelle Cuisine* on the strong advice of our son William. It was a wise decision, and I have come to like the piece very much. Then there was the issue of accommodating new purchases and moving existing works around the house — we ultimately filled three floors. And Joanne doesn't like nail holes in the walls.



**EDUARDO CARRILLO**  
(1937–1997)  
*Sheila*, 1971  
Oil on linen  
48 x 36 inches



**PETER VANDENBERG (b. 1935)**  
*Woman with a Smile*, 1986  
Clay  
32 x 16 x 9 inches

**JR:** I don't want to say that we never agreed, because that is not true. Often, I loved the work — after it arrived. Not only was my background bourgeois, but also my knowledge of the history of art was conventional for the time. I loved the work when I could make connections with what I knew — viz "Mannerist" works like Ed Carrillo's 1971 *Sheila* and Peter Vandenberg's 1986 *Woman with a Smile*; Roy De Forest's paintings and drawings with their apparent primitiveness and joy filled, Matisse-like use of color; Joan Brown's rich figuration in *At the Beach* with its nod to German Expressionism.

Please remember that my world in that fraught decade was filled with hockey sticks, tennis rackets, violins, cellos, guitars, laundry loads and infinite bags of groceries. The addition to the household of more physical objects was bound to cause a certain consternation.

But "agreement" seems quite a moot point from this vantage point. What happened over time, and a short time at that, is that I came to love the work, all the aspects of gathering it together, and the relationships that formed because of it.

**MOS:** *What is the significance of this body of work?*

**BR:** In their plasticity and permanence, painting and sculpture have brought beauty to our home in a way that music and literature cannot. They can educate better than a garden or a tree. And at their best they can elevate almost as well as prayer.

California work has a special characteristic: humor. Why is there not more of this essential human quality in art museums? Why does one have to leave MOMA and go across the street to the American Craft Museum to find ceramic sculpture, which makes us laugh at our human foibles? The Lincoln Center does not hesitate to put on "The Importance of Being Ernest."

Only time will tell if this collection has significance, but I hope it has, and will make the work of this group of artists better known and appreciated in Connecticut and in New York, and will encourage them to continue to extend our aesthetic edges.



**JR:** Significance is a big word. I can only comment on how the art work has affected us and our family by enriching us and helping us to expand our horizons. All of our children have gained from living with art: Our daughter went on to major in art history in college; two of our sons and our daughter-in-law collect the works of some of the same California artists as we (see the pieces on loan from our son William). Our children also enjoy the friendships that we have made and have had their own creative and intellectual development stimulated. Many of our friends seem to share our enthusiasm.

It is true that at first encounter, casual visitors have expressed shock and confusion: "Did you do all these paintings?" "Who's the painter in the family?" I've always liked these questions because they afford a great opportunity for me to shift into didactic gear! What I have found is that people need art in their lives and that the surprise of finding work in a private home always seems to elicit a response of delight.

**MOS:** *Do you collect anything other than paintings?*

**BR:** In college Joanne majored in English, and I majored in history. Now, she reads history, and we buy history books. I love poetry, and we buy books of poems. We have a considerable number of books.

**MOS:** *Which work has the best story to tell?*

**BR:** Maybe Jim Albertson's portrait of Joanne. A New Haven neighbor was impressed with Jim's work, especially with his pencil drawings of Joanne and of me, and wanted to have



*Arneson*

**ROBERT ARNESON**  
(1930–1992)

*The Palace at 9 a.m., 1974*  
Watercolor on paper  
16½ x 24½ inches



**CLAYTON BAILEY (b. 1939)**  
*Worker Robot*, 1982  
Metal  
5 x 18 x 14 inches

him do a portrait of her family. Believing that her expressed wish was "contractual," and at a great personal expense, Jim flew from Sacramento to execute the portrait. Immediately after he arrived, Joanne walked him down to the neighbor's home, where he learned that her friend's husband had vetoed the project. Jim was crushed. So, I asked him to paint a portrait of Joanne for about the same fee as the other. He agreed and stayed with us for over a week, working hard in his make-shift studio on our screened porch. We were and continue to be delighted with the result.

**MOS:** *What has the collection meant to you?*

**BR:** Many of the pieces have become like old friends. And we have become friendly with many of the artists, whose intelligent and imaginative company we enjoy.

**JR:** We have discussed the genesis of the collection. For me, it originally meant challenge: how to incorporate individual, eclectic, sometimes confrontational works in our physical lives: how to hang or display these often large, sometimes wild, and almost always unconventional works harmoniously in a Colonial Revival house with traditional furnishings. How to maintain and protect art work from hockey pucks, frisbees, footballs and four young children, their many friends, pets, and our own out-of-town guests! And how to absorb boisterous, undomesticated work into a home so that Grandma, seated at her customary place at the dining room table across from Roy De Forest's overtly mammalian mountains, was not offended!

Gradually, the challenge dissipated. I accustomed myself to nail holes in the plaster, as we accommodated new work. An atmosphere was created. Of course, there were and are issues of maintenance — after all, these are physical works: sun is an enemy, not to speak of dreaded accidental water leakage — and we are left with the gift of the effect on our lives: if collecting has any real value to the collector, it is what it brings to him or her: insight, beauty, joy, the elements that elevate our spirits and add to what we know about the world. And most of all, the specific benefits of California art: incongruity, quirkiness, those "dappled things" that keep us from being bored.

On the deepest level, however, the meaning of the collection is found in the friendships formed: friendship with one artist often led to that with another, and Fitz introduced us to several folks who have become very dear to us. And so our world was enlarged.

**MOS:** What advice would you give to novice collectors?

**BR:** First, understand that adorning your walls with original paintings is the best you could do for your walls and for yourselves. Second, train yourself by going often to museums and to art shows and exhibitions. Third, don't buy art as an investment or in the expectation of selling it for a profit. Certainly, a wonderful painting has value, and it is comforting to know that it can be sold if need be, but novice collectors should not buy with the intent to "flip" paintings. Nor I might add should art be bought to impress people or as an entrée into an avant-garde coterie. Fourth, you should trust your eyes and instincts, as you are the ones who will have to live with the work you buy. So, it is important to buy the art you love and not pay attention to what others think. Fifth, unless you have a great deal of money, in which case go to galleries in Chelsea or in mid-town New York, buy the work of unknown artists or of those who have fallen out of favor, the work nobody wants, which is available at reasonable prices. The unknown artists tend to be students in art schools, like the Yale School of Art, one of the best in the world, just a few miles down the road. Many fine artists teach in colleges. Collectors can get to know them and their work easily and be led to their artistic friends, many of whom would be delighted to sell work directly or to create a piece on a commission basis. Lastly, always allow your imagination and taste to grow, by investigating other forms and styles, which will reinforce your own values and help broaden them. A modest painting like William P. Morehouse's *Hog Island* would be an example of a good purchase for a novice collector.



**WILLIAM P. MOREHOUSE**  
(1929–1993)

*Hog Island*, 1992  
Oil on canvas  
22 x 22 inches



## Checklist

Height precedes width; width precedes depth. Unless otherwise indicated, all objects are from the Joanne and William Rees Collection.

**James Albertson (b. 1944)**

*Rubens' Venus & Adonis*, 1980  
Pencil on paper  
14 x 17 inches

**James Albertson (b. 1944)**

*Venus & Adonis  
(Children in Rubenesque Poses)*,  
1984  
Oil on canvas  
32 x 50½ inches

**James Albertson (b. 1944)**

*Walking the Dog*, 1989  
Oil on canvas  
39 x 31 inches

**James Albertson (b. 1944)**

*W. H. H. (Bill) Rees*, 1989  
Oil on canvas  
23 x 17½ inches

**James Albertson (b. 1944)**

*Joanne T. Rees*, 1990  
Oil on canvas  
30 x 24 inches

**William Allan (b. 1936)**

*Midnight Sky*, 1985  
Oil on canvas  
52½ x 62½ inches

**William Allan (b. 1936)**

*Tuna*, 1985  
Watercolor on paper  
23 x 33 inches

**Robert Arneson  
(1930–1992)**

*The Palace at 9 a.m.*, 1974  
Watercolor on paper  
16½ x 24½ inches

**Robert Arneson  
(1930–1992)**

*Stolen from Room TB9*, 1976  
Clay  
7 x 4 x 4 inches

**Robert Arneson  
(1930–1992)**

*Bad Boy Bob*, 1981  
Clay  
17½ x 13 x 13 inches

**Robert Arneson  
(1930–1992)**

*George at War*, 1991  
Acrylic, oil stick, felt-tipped  
pen and ink, and pencil on  
paper  
47½ x 31½ inches  
Collection of William H. Rees

**Clayton Bailey (b. 1939)**

*Worker Robot*, 1982  
Metal  
5 x 18 x 14 inches

**Robert Brady (b. 1946)**

*High Roller*, 1979  
Clay  
43 x 50 x 19 inches

**Joan Brown (1938–1990)**

*At the Beach*, 1973  
Enamel and oil on canvas  
84 x 144 inches

**Eduardo Carrillo  
(1937–1997)**

*Sheila*, ca. 1968–69  
Oil on fiberboard  
48 x 48 inches

**Eduardo Carrillo  
(1937–1997)**

*Juliette Reading*, ca. 1971  
Watercolor on paper  
17½ x 23½ inches

**Eduardo Carrillo  
(1937–1997)**

*Sheila*, 1971  
Oil on linen  
48 x 36 inches

**Eduardo Carrillo  
(1937–1997)**

*La Otría*, 1984  
Oil on canvas  
45 x 72 inches

**Robert H. Colescott  
(b. 1925)**

*The Media: Mixed Medium*, 1981  
Acrylic on canvas  
25 x 25 inches  
Collection of William H. Rees

**Robert H. Colescott  
(b. 1925)**

*Nouvelle Cuisine*, 1988  
Oil on canvas  
84 x 72 inches

**Roy De Forest (b. 1930)**

*Untitled*, 1969  
Pastel, watercolor and ink  
on paper  
21½ x 29½ inches

**Roy De Forest (b. 1930)**

*Summer at the Seaside*, 1981  
Acrylic on canvas  
72 x 86 inches

**Roy De Forest (b. 1930)**

*Untitled*, 1981  
Pastel and watercolor on paper  
29½ x 41 inches

**Charles Garabedian  
(b. 1923)**

*Too Hot to Handle*, 1972  
Acrylic and resin  
36½ x 64¼ x 1 inches

**Charles Garabedian  
(b. 1923)**

*Reclining Figure*, 1979–82  
Acrylic on canvas  
22 x 30½ inches

**Charles Garabedian  
(b. 1923)**

*Rains IV*, 1982  
Acrylic on canvas  
72 x 72 inches

**David J. Gilhooly  
(b. 1943)**

*Ronwick 10th Anniversary  
Cake*, 1981  
Clay  
30 x 15 x 15 inches

**David J. Gilhooly  
(b. 1943)**

*Hot Frog Sundae*, 1986  
Clay  
9½ x 7 x 7 inches  
Collection of Catherine M. Rees

**David J. Gilhooly  
(b. 1943)**

*Pharaoh Frogs Bringing Treasures  
from the Valley of the Dead*, 1986  
Clay  
15½ x 10½ x 12 inches



**MICHAEL C. TODD (b. 1935)**

*Shiva's Dance IX*, 1983, Steel, 42 x 42 x 12 inches

**Irving Marcus (b. 1929)**

*Young Guide and Restless Light*,  
1993  
Oil on canvas  
50 x 88 inches

**Irving Marcus (b. 1929)**

*Dance of the Snails*, 1999  
Oil on canvas  
42 x 56 inches

**Melissa Wren Miller  
(b. 1951)**

*The Studio Building*, 1980  
Oil on canvas  
52 x 44 inches

**William P. Morehouse  
(1929–1993)**

*Hog Island*, 1992  
Oil on canvas  
22 x 22 inches

**Gladys Nilsson (b. 1940)**

*Wriggling Figures*, ca. 1987  
Watercolor on paper  
13½ x 20 inches

**Joseph Raffael (b. 1933)**

*Mystic Lily*, 1980  
Watercolor on paper  
10 x 10 inches

**Lance Richbourg (b. 1938)**

*Rees Family Portrait*, 1983  
Oil on canvas  
44 x 57 inches

**Lance Richbourg (b. 1938)**

*Mickey Mantle*, 1985  
Watercolor on paper  
29 x 26 inches

**Lance Richbourg (b. 1938)**

*Bob Feller*, 1986  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 17 inches  
Collection of Nathaniel F. Rees

**Lance Richbourg (b. 1938)**

*Hank Aaron*, 1986  
Oil on paper  
55 x 72 inches

**P. Walter Siler (b. 1939)**

*Café #1*, 1975  
India ink and brush on paper  
19 x 25 inches

**Michael C. Todd (b. 1935)**

*Shiva's Dance IX*, 1983  
Steel  
42 x 42 x 12 inches

**Leo Valledor (1936–1989)**

*Umanifestiva*, 1979–80  
Acrylic on canvas  
25 x 24 in

**Peter Vandenberg  
(b. 1935)**

*Baseball Player*, 1986  
Clay  
34 x 18 x 10 inches

**Peter Vandenberg  
(b. 1935)**

*Woman with a Smile*, 1986  
Clay  
32 x 16 x 9 inches

**Peter Vandenberg  
(b. 1935)**

*Man with Hat*, ca. 1988  
Clay  
50 x 14½ x 20 inches

**Peter Vandenberg  
(b. 1935)**

*Standing Woman*, 1988  
Clay  
68 x 28 x 24 inches

**Carlos Villa (b. 1936)**

*Untitled*, ca. 1981  
Bone, hair, fabric, and acrylic  
on paper  
52½ x 40 inches

**William Wheeler (b. 1940)**

*Walker Creek*, 1992  
Oil on canvas  
26 x 37½ inches

**William T. Wiley (b. 1937)**

*Targets for Ms. Chief*, 1980  
Acrylic and charcoal on canvas  
96 x 130 inches

**William T. Wiley (b. 1937)**

*Targets for Ms. Chief*, 1980  
Charcoal on paper  
24 x 18 inches

**William T. Wiley (b. 1937)**

*Mike's Rays*, 1986  
Watercolor on paper  
30½ x 22½ inches  
Collection of William H. Rees

**William T. Wiley (b. 1937)**

*Choosing Modern for the Hell of  
It*, 1992  
Acrylic, charcoal, and graphite  
on canvas  
27½ x 39 inches

**David J. Gilhooly (b. 1943)**

*Yule Frog*, 1986  
Clay  
15 x 24 x 22 inches

**Donald Hazlitt (b. 1948)**

*Untitled*, #40, 1979  
Papier-mâché, cardboard, and oil  
6½ x 6½ x 2 inches

**Donald Hazlitt (b. 1948)**

*Untitled*, #63, 1980  
Papier-mâché, cardboard, and oil  
6 x 6 x 2 inches

**Robert Chambless  
Hendon (b. 1936)**

*December Concert*, 1982  
Acrylic and rhyplex on canvas  
43½ x 63½ inches

**Stephen J. Kaltenbach  
(b. 1940)**

*Return*, ca. 1980  
Oil on paper  
20 x 25 inches

**Stephen J. Kaltenbach  
(b. 1940)**

*Same Time, Same Place*, ca. 1980  
Oil on paper  
20 x 26 inches

**Edward Kienholz  
(1927–1994) and Nancy  
Reddin Kienholz (b. 1943)**

*The Black Fandango*, 1986  
Bull horns, car hood ornament,  
wooden box, knife, crucifix,  
wire, American eagle, blood,  
and oil on wood  
56 x 14 x 10 inches  
Collection of William H. Rees

**Tony King (b. 1944)**

*Walker Creek*, 1992  
Oil on canvas  
8 x 12 inches

**Judith Linhares (b. 1940)**

*Cars in San Francisco*, 1979  
Oil on canvas  
11 x 28½ inches

**Judith Linhares (b. 1940)**

*Bedtime*, 1980  
Oil on canvas  
14½ x 22 inches

**Judith Linhares (b. 1940)**

*Erre*, 1984  
Oil on canvas  
54 x 72 inches

**Judith Linhares (b. 1940)**

*Peace*, 1984  
Oil on canvas  
80 x 98 inches

**Irving Marcus (b. 1929)**

*Praise of Folly*, 1993  
Oil on canvas  
60 x 60 inches



**WILLIAM ALLAN (b. 1936)**

*Tuna*, 1985  
Watercolor on paper  
23 x 33 inches



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