

Art at Vassar



A publication for the members of
The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center
Fall/Winter 2012/13



Sustainability and the Art Museum

The concept of sustainability is a very popular topic of conversation nowadays. Therefore, its definition has become somewhat elastic, adjusting to the context of the discourse at hand. In this month's issue of *Art at Vassar*, we focus on exhibitions, such as *Sawdust Mountain*, that concentrate on the ecological aspects of the definition—how industries such as logging or fishing that are difficult to sustain perpetually affect communities. There is also an article on our newly renovated sculpture garden, named for Hildegard Krause Baker, class of 1911, and given by her daughter Jane Baker Nord, class of 1942, and her husband Eric Nord. The garden is now redesigned in order to make room for more sculptural works and to be more sustainable regarding its plantings, making use of greenery that requires less maintenance and is more suited to the vicissitudes of our climate. In other words, it is a plan to make the garden both beautiful *and* efficient.

Sustainability in art museum terms is something quite different. The works in our charge are, I suppose, almost endlessly recyclable (although it is possible to extinguish such things as watercolors by too much exposure to light) and many have passed through numerous cycles of ownership before arriving here. While to some extent the museum is a kind of final stop for most works of art, our occasional deaccessioning efforts return certain works of art to the possibility of private ownership and, perhaps, the eventual return to a gallery or museum environment. However, in terms of our infrastructure and the environment, works of art require more intensive environmental maintenance. Keeping art's climate steady at 70 degrees Fahrenheit with a relative humidity of 50% through summer and winter in upper New York State takes a lot of (presently) non-renewable energy. When the campus is on intercession in late December and early January and the heat is turned down in most campus buildings, the art collection requires a constant environment.

The art collection at Vassar helps sustain the teaching mission and evolves as the curriculum evolves, creating, we hope, a symbiosis between the classroom and the constantly evolving learning environment on campus. Our program, however, does not come without a cost. In other words, our capacity to help sustain the intellectual climate on campus requires sustenance of its own. We have worked as hard as we can over the past twenty-five years to be as self-sufficient as possible by raising endowments that fuel our exhibition and acquisitions programs and even a number of staff salaries. But there is still much else that requires annual maintenance. This is where our membership program comes into play. At the end of this issue is the roll of our annual members, some well into their third decade of support, others fairly fresh on the scene. Most are Vassar alumnae/i but many others are regional friends who recognize that an active cultural life is also part of what sustains a community. Since one of the benefits of membership is the semi-annual receipt of *Art at Vassar*, there is a strong likelihood that if you are reading this, you are also a member and, therefore, part of the choir to whom I am presently preaching. So, rather than make yet another appeal for financial support (you get enough of those directly in the mail from us), I can use this space to say thank you for providing us with the extra means that allow a good program to be an outstanding one. That is the essence of Vassar College and its Art Center.

James Mundy
The Anne Hendricks Bass Director

P.S. And why not recycle this issue of *Art at Vassar* by sharing it with a friend who is not a member?



A Melancholy Love Letter

Eirik Johnson: Sawdust Mountain September 7–December 9, 2012

ON VIEW

Eirik Johnson: Sawdust Mountain, an exhibition of thirty-six large-scale color photographs, is the product of Seattle-born artist Eirik Johnson's three-year project photographing Washington, Oregon, and Northern California, focusing on the region's tenuous relationship between industries reliant upon natural resources and the communities they support. Johnson describes his photographs as "a melancholy love letter of sorts, my own personal ramblings about a region with which I still very much identify." Despite his personal, artistic approach, the pictures serve the documentary mission to record a specific time and place, a particular set of conditions endemic to the fraught relationship we have with the environment today, and the way communities are affected by these historic economic complexities. Johnson's exploration of the contemporary Pacific Northwest uncovers a landscape imbued with an uncertain future, no longer the region of boomtowns built upon riches of massive old-growth forests.

In response to dwindling natural resources and disappearing natural beauty in the landscape, environmental photography has emerged as an important force within the rapidly evolving field of photography.

Johnson was driven to create this body of work by his concern not just for the environment but for the plight of communities in the Pacific Northwest where he grew up, communities that, since they were founded in the 1880s, have relied on two industries now in jeopardy of extinction: timber and salmon. The ecological impact of the traditional logging industry is often at odds with the modern ideal of a sustainable timber harvest. As the industry declines and mills shut down, the surrounding communities must adapt and turn to improvised means of support. Alongside the demise of the logging industry, the Northwest has also seen the collapse of the West Coast's biggest wild salmon runs, which has called for something close to a shutdown of salmon fishing in the region. "The future is not entirely bleak," says Johnson, "but there has to be a balance between finding new ways of getting by and protecting the environment that exists."

Through Johnson's lens, the romance of lumberjacks and fishermen taming the wilderness and living off the land has been replaced by the hardscrabble reality of those now trying to eke out a living and by the ethos of conservationists and ecologists trying to save and restore the landscape. Johnson presents a well-rounded portrait of a local community struggling to find solutions to these conflicting demands that mirrors many communities across the United States. His photographs capture the history and legacy of the industries, the landscape at the center of the vortex, and the changes undertaken to offset the economic and ecological declines so all can survive. As photography critic Claire Holland states in *FT Magazine*, "Although the images are unsentimental, many exert a strangely emotive tug—part nostalgia for an optimistic past, part sadness that a natural environment, indelibly marked and altered by mankind, is dissolving before our eyes."

In one stunning example of this, a photograph entitled *Weyerhaeuser sorting yard along the Chehalis River, Cosmopolis, Washington* from 2007, Johnson captures the evening light shimmering across a glassy bay. The scene is eerily calm, belying a recent industrial past when a continual supply of logs from throughout the Olympic Peninsula were loaded onto trucks and barges at Weyerhaeuser's "Bay City" sort yard. Farther upriver sits the company's closed pulp mill where until 2006, thousands of logs were once turned into a chemical pulp destined to become everything from toothbrush handles to cigarette filters and photographic paper. The mill had employed



Eirik Johnson (American, b. 1974)
Weyerhaeuser sorting yard along the Chehalis River, Cosmopolis, Washington, 2007
Archival pigment print
©Eirik Johnson, from the book *Sawdust Mountain* (Aperture, 2009)

more than three hundred local workers. While Weyerhaeuser remains one of the largest forest products companies in the world, corporate restructuring and expanded global operations in eighteen countries has meant the closure of numerous mills throughout the Northwest.

Johnson moves easily among landscape, portraiture, and architectural views, both interior and exterior. He represents the multiplicity of this troubled region in the diversity of his imagery and by highlighting ordinary people; he subtly alludes to the fact that similar scenarios are playing out in many regions across the country. By populating his photographs with faces of residents and details of their lives and workplaces alongside broad views of the land, he illustrates the region's challenges without resorting to oversimplification of the issues at hand. The curator of the exhibition, Elizabeth A. Brown, imagines the artist "shifting roles with grace and empathy: anthropologist, researcher, formalist, hiker, storyteller, tracker, each facet of his formation establishing a connection to the topic at hand." She sums up his work in this statement: "Alternating pictorial beauty with surprising juxtapositions, Johnson found a vast array of subjects and moods under the Northwest's overcast skies, and developed personal connections with people at all points of the spectrum.... Along the way he has established a new relationship with the land, the place of his origins, and has suggested ways for any viewer to begin to take in its complexities and its joys" (from *Sawdust Mountain*, Aperture 2009).



Eirik Johnson's work has been exhibited across the United States in such places as the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; and the Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco. In recent years he has received awards including the Neddy Award in 2012, a Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship in 2009, the Santa Fe Prize in 2005, and a Fulbright Grant in 2000. His work is in such public collections as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and the George Eastman House, Rochester. Johnson is based in Seattle and graduated with a BFA from the University of Washington, Seattle, and an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute. Other monographic books of Johnson's photographs include *Borderlands* (Twin Palms Press, 2005) and *Snow Star* (Cavallo Point Press, 2009).



Eirik Johnson (American, b. 1974)
Hoquiam, Washington, 2006
 Archival pigment print
 ©Eirik Johnson, from the book
Sawdust Mountain (Aperture, 2009)

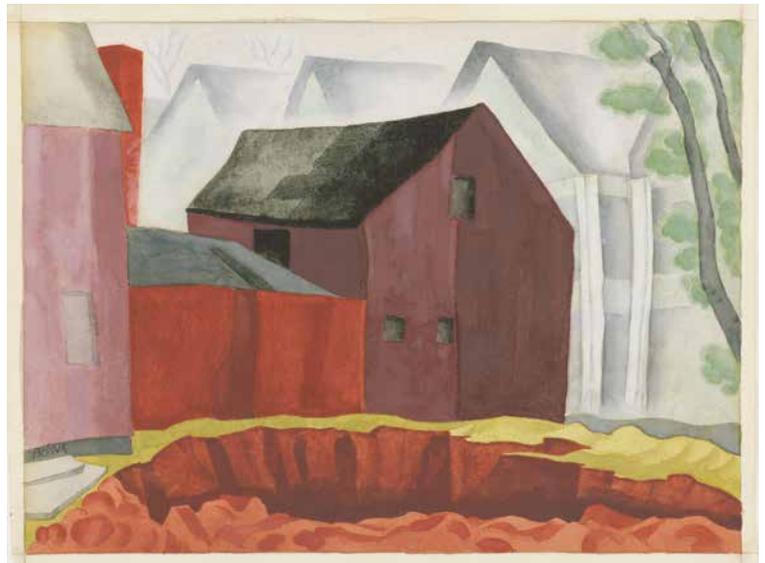
Aperture Foundation has organized this traveling exhibition and produced the accompanying publication. *Sawdust Mountain* was curated by Elizabeth A. Brown, formerly Chief Curator, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle. The exhibition is made possible, in part, by the generous support of The Turner Foundation, Inc. and supported by ArtsFund, PONCHO, the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, and Patrons of the Henry Art Gallery. The presentation at Vassar College is sponsored by the Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center Exhibition Fund.

Mary-Kay Lombino
The Emily Hargroves Fisher '57 and Richard B. Fisher Curator and Assistant Director for Strategic Planning

Critic Paul Rosenfeld (1890–1946), who owned *Red Soil* before it came to Vassar, appraised Oscar Bluemner's "sanguine scale from cinnamon to scarlet" as this modernist painter's main artistic concern.¹ These colors especially engaged Bluemner, and they shimmer in our work, painted in 1924 at his home in Elizabeth, New Jersey, the state to which he had moved from New York City eight years before. From the coppery trench in the foreground—he reveled in cutting the spade into the dirt—to the autumn-leaf barn and sheds in the middle, this watercolor projects brawny color. The artist identified with the color range so deeply that he called himself a "vermillionaire."²

In his essay "The Vermilionaire," published in *The University Review* in 1938, Rosenfeld eulogized the destitute painter, who had disregarded his architectural work most of the time and instead pursued art passionately in several different residences, moving out just ahead of creditors. Rosenfeld relayed Bluemner's recent suicide and the art world's neglect, and called for a re-evaluation of his work, saturated as it was with studies in reds. Rosenfeld also commented on the freshly dug earth beside Bluemner's barns in some of his works and how it seemed to foretell the artist's death, as if it were a grave.

A grave-like furrow does indeed gape front and center in *Red Soil*. A glowing yellow strip of earth lies between the hole and the trio of opaque red structures, while a tree hugs the right and hides the first of a group of loosely painted, ghostly houses in silvery gray. Belonging to a series of small watercolor landscapes made in 1924, ours is inscribed with the work's title. Ideas and thoughts for it are set in Bluemner's painting diary from 1924–25, housed in the Archives of American Art in Washington, D.C.³ Dated November 13, the two



Oscar Bluemner (American, b. Prussia 1867–1938)
Red Soil (also known as *Barns*), 1924
 Watercolor on cream wove paper
 Gift of Paul Rosenfeld
 1950.1.9

pages of notes taken from a sketch for *Red Soil* are neatly lined with penciled drawings and text, and quickly punctuated with blue pencil. Surprisingly, in these notes he equates the shapes of the barn and sheds with "Coffins, Tombs, sarcophagi," drawing them accordingly in simple outlines. He calls the ditch an "excavation of Jersey red soil" and labels it an entombment. One could imagine the barn slowly being lifted down into the waiting pit, like a coffin into an open grave.

What follows in the diary are frequently impenetrable descriptions of specific color choices for each area of the work, sprinkled with abbreviations for pigments and with comparisons such as "Fire vs Snow." He writes down various kinds of lines, full of expression, to be used: "girl curves, fat man curves," bone lines (like a "chicken bone"), and "serrated spade lines" for the excavation. He reiterates on the second page that the houses are coffins and the excavation is a tomb. At the end, he adds a paragraph on blocking out much of the light ("air spaces eliminated").

The tomb-like interpretation of this work took me aback when I read Bluemner's painting diary for the first time recently. I had assumed that the strong colors and solid shapes of this watercolor belonged to his reducing the forms of nature and objects in the landscape. Yet, interpreting the ditch and structures as tomb-like, as Bluemner did, brings a fresh perspective to the watercolor and suggests the artist's fragile hold on his present.

Patricia Phagan

The Philip and Lynn Straus Curator of Prints and Drawings

¹ Paul Rosenfeld, "The Vermilionaire," *The University Review* 5, no. 1 (1938): 249–252.

² "Vermillionaire," *Time*, 14 January 1935, 47.

³ Oscar Bluemner Papers, Archives of American Art, Box 1, Folders 49–50.

The Call of the Garden

The Hildegarde Krause Baker, class of 1911, Sculpture Garden, a memorial gift by Eric and Jane Baker Nord, class of 1942, opened in 1993 as an integral part of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center. In recent years, the 10,000-square-foot enclosed garden, while cherished by those familiar with it, was underutilized and attendance to the area had dwindled. In 2011, the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, in order to highlight the garden's unique characteristics and maximize its benefit to our visitors, appointed Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc. (MVVA) to rethink its design and advise us on its renovation. Based in Brooklyn, MVVA creates environmentally sustainable and experientially rich places across a wide range of landscape scales, from city to campus to garden. It is also the firm that has recently completed a master plan for the entire campus. We asked them to turn their attention to our small, intimate space and bring some of their ideas of sustainability to the garden.

As a result of this partnership, the garden has been transformed by new pathways, plantings, and seating areas. Plants were chosen for their slow growth over the long term and their ability to provide contour and color year-round. Grass was replaced with low-maintenance ground cover and new planting beds were added to the paved area to allow for more shade in the warmer months when the garden has the highest attendance.

Also transformative of the space is the number of sculptures in the garden—nearly double that of the previous installation. The newly designed garden provides a striking and lush environment in which to appreciate works from Vassar's stellar collection of twentieth-century sculpture. Joining old favorites by artists such as Frank Stella, Gaston Lachaise, and Anthony Caro are several sculptures that are on view for the first time since entering the collection, including bronzes by Pietro Consagra, Dimitri Hadzi, and Harriet Whitney Frishmuth. Many of the new works were bequeathed to Vassar in 2009 by Virginia Herrick Deknatel, class of 1929. The current renovation, which was made possible through a gift by the late Ralph Connor, Vassar Trustee from 1963 through 1971, enlivens the garden and brings renewed attention to these important works. Sculptures are advantageously placed along a gravel path where they each can be viewed individually and from several viewpoints. The new design highlights the intimate scale of the space, the slender windows that look out to the western edge of campus, and the elegant brick courtyard, appointed with patio tables and perfect for a lively garden party or a quiet lunch for two.

One of the most enticing new works in the garden is a small bronze fountain tucked in the back of the garden under a Japanese maple tree. Cast in 1924, *The Call of the Sea* by Harriet Whitney Frishmuth depicts a young woman, one of the many dance students the artist used as models, riding astride a fish. One arm reaches up above her head, with her expression frozen in joy. Her other hand grasps the fish's mouth, out of



which water spouts. Frishmuth's consideration of the model's silhouette can be read in the work's strong lines. They accentuate the feeling of a movement captured, which she learned from her mentor Auguste Rodin who taught that movement should be thought of as "a transition from one attitude to another." Unlike her teacher, Frishmuth does not use impressionist texture to express movement but rather, more in line with her classical style, smooth surfaces and curving lines.

In the spring of 2012, the Sculpture Garden reopened with an exciting ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by numerous members of the local community including leaders of the Poughkeepsie Chamber of Commerce and many residents of the town and city of Poughkeepsie, as well as of the greater Hudson Valley. Since then, the garden has hosted events for Vassar's Department of French and Francophone Studies, the College President's Advisory Committee, the Art Center's Advisory Council on Photography, and most recently the Garden Club of Poughkeepsie. The markedly well-attended opening reception for our summer exhibition *Nature in America: Taming the Landscape* appropriately took place in the garden, and many more visitors to the Art Center—especially during our Thursday Late Night events—have been enjoying the splendor of renowned modern sculpture among greenery at its peak in the warm summer weather. Autumn, the ever popular season for visitors to the Hudson Valley, will bring many opportunities for new visitors and old friends to appreciate all of the garden's delights.

Mary-Kay Lombino
The Emily Hargroves Fisher '57 and Richard B. Fisher Curator and Assistant Director for Strategic Planning



History Painting in the Hudson River Valley

One of the greatest pleasures of last academic year (my first as Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in American Art at Vassar College) was teaching Hudson River School painting in the Hudson River Valley. As I told my students in *Encounter and Exchange: American Art from 1565 to 1865* and *Introduction to the History of Art*, they were living in the heart of American art history—in the very valley that generated the great age of American landscape painting ca. 1825–1875.

One of the finest Hudson River School paintings at Vassar is Thomas Cole's *Prometheus Bound* (ca. 1847), on loan to the Art Center for six months of every year. The painting tells the story of the eponymous Titan of Greek mythology who stole fire from Zeus to give to mortals. As punishment for giving humans the god-like power of making fire and hence of developing civilization, Prometheus was bound to a rock at the summit of Mount Caucasus and sentenced to eternal torment by having his liver eaten anew each day by a vulture. The subject was meant to exhibit Cole's talent for history painting: grand narrative depictions with didactic value treating religious, mythological, ancient, or allegorical themes. It is possible that *Prometheus Bound* was a study for a larger version of the same subject that the artist submitted to a competition of history paintings to show in the Houses of Parliament in London.¹

If this narrative painting takes as its subject Prometheus's Christ-like sacrifice for the sake of humankind, why does Prometheus himself—the ostensible protagonist of the narrative—occupy so little space in the composition? The answer, of course, is that Prometheus is not ultimately diminished. Instead, he extends into and is amplified by the terrain that surrounds him. *Prometheus Bound* is exemplary of Cole's major achievement as a landscape painter: namely, the manner in which he pushed



Thomas Cole (American, b. England 1801–1848)
Prometheus Bound, ca. 1847

Oil on canvas

On loan from the Catskill Public Library, Catskill, NY, gift of Florence Cole Vincent as a memorial to her grandfather, the artist. Displayed annually from May to October at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Catskill, NY

landscape to become itself an agent of narrative. Notice the emerging morning light, which effectively pushes away the night sky to unveil the victim and evoke both his physical exposure and the recurring, daily renewal of his punishment. Notice also the fleshy quality of the beige and pink tones in the sky and mountains. The large void that cuts into the exposed rock face to which Prometheus is bound betokens the Titan's impending punishment as the vulture swoops toward his torso. Prometheus's gory fate seems presaged by the intestinal quality of the ripped tree branches in the foreground.

Prometheus Bound does not feature the Hudson River Valley per se, but it does feature the work of the Hudson River School, and especially of its founder, Cole, to imbue landscape with the seriousness and grandeur of history painting. In its elevation of landscape from setting to actor, this painting

is in every way a product of the Hudson River Valley and the art movement that it generated.

For me, living in the heart of this history has been more enriching than I could have imagined. The Thomas Cole Historic Site was one of the first places I visited upon my arrival in Poughkeepsie. I have taken one of my classes to Olana, the home of Cole's only student, Frederic Church. I have visited the Samuel Morse House. I have hiked in the Catskills in the footsteps of the Hudson River School painters, and I encourage my students to do the same. Like eating locally grown produce or cultivating indigenous plants, knowing the art of the area I live and study and work in is important to me. It's one of the reasons I enjoy teaching the Hudson River School in the Hudson River Valley, and more broadly one of the reasons I specialize in American art. To quote one of my favorite lines from one of my favorite films (John Sayles's 1996 *Lone Star*): "You live in a place, you should learn something about it. Explore."

Wendy Ikemoto
Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Art

¹Patricia Junker, "Thomas Cole's *Prometheus Bound*: An Allegory for the 1840s," *American Art Journal* 31, no. 1/2 (2000): 37

A Choice Sampler

Recent Acquisitions: Works on Paper January 18–March 31, 2013

EXHIBITION FEATURE

Teaching with the permanent art collection has been central to Vassar College since its founding. Just as Matthew Vassar purchased paintings, drawings, and prints for the young women of the 1860s to see and study, staff since then have cared for the original collection, and added to it through purchases and generous gifts and bequests. Directors, curators, and faculty have engaged generations of Vassar students in a laboratory-like atmosphere through direct experience and inquiry of these works. Though emphases in the curriculum have changed throughout the years, works under consideration for acquisition have traditionally been weighed for their teaching value, for filling gaps in particular areas, and for conveying an aesthetic and conceptual boldness.

The past several years of collecting activity among the staff has resulted in a number of significant acquisitions of works on paper, one of the strongest areas in the permanent collection. This exhibition samples many of those drawings, prints, photographs, and artists' books acquired since 2007 and ranges in time from the Italian Renaissance in the sixteenth century to Manhattan in the twenty-first.

Our recently acquired prints and drawings number 328 works over the past five years. They add significantly to the collection's 10,000 prints and drawings, boosting key holdings, enhancing teaching, and strengthening diverse collecting areas. For instance, our Italian Renaissance prints, anchored by Marcantonio Raimondi and his school of engravers, received a potent addition with the purchase of Giorgio Ghisi's exotic and inscrutable *Allegory of Life (The Dream of Raphael)*. Ghisi's most famous work, it is a mysterious *tour de force* of engraving and the first print by him to enter the permanent collection. Likewise, the purchase of a few Dutch seventeenth-century works on paper bolsters our rich holdings in that area, layered as it is with delicate landscape and narrative drawings and a rich selection of etchings. The newly added sketches by Jan van Goyen and Govaert Flinck, as well as a small exquisite etching by Rembrandt, *The Goldsmith*, benefit Professor Susan Kuretsky's course on seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish painting and her seminar on prints by Rembrandt and Dürer.



Giorgio Ghisi (Italian, 1520–1582)
Allegory of Life (The Dream of Raphael), 1561
Engraving on dark cream laid paper
Purchase, Suzette Morton Davidson, class of 1934, Fund
2011.3

In terms of teaching, the recent acquisition of François Pascal Simon Gérard's elegant neo-classical chalk drawing, *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, provides a timely case in point about ownership of a work of art and issues raised by Nazi looting. Thus, the work will be very helpful in director James Mundy's museum studies course. In 1939 the Nazis took this eighteenth-century sheet, drawn by a student of Jacques Louis David, from the collector Michael Berolzheimer of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, in the mountains of southern Germany. Subsequently sold to the Albertina Museum in Vienna, it appeared on the market in 2011 after being restituted to its original owner's heirs.

The German modernist Otto Dix, whose prints, paintings, and drawings proved anathema to the conservative tastes of the Nazi regime, is now represented in the Art Center by his *Nächtliche Erscheinung (Nocturnal Apparition)* of 1923. The first work by the artist to become a part of Vassar's collection, it broadens the Art Center's holdings of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and joins prints by George Grosz, another key member of that group. This lithograph is a sterling example of Dix's work from the 1920s, where he pictures in deep black ink and scratchy white highlights a creature—a mix of woman, rat, and skeleton—smiling at the viewer and wearing the plumed hat and furry stole of the prostitute, a favorite subject for German modernists of the 1920s and a familiar presence in German life during that harsh economic decade.

We have continued to add to our growing collection of post-war American prints and drawings. Contemporary prints by Andy Warhol, Terry Winters, and others, and a drawing by Don Nice, strengthened our holdings of these artists' works. At the same

time, prints by Keith Haring, Jennifer Bartlett, Julian Opie, and Laylah Ali entered the permanent collection for the first time. We also had the opportunity to strengthen our small collection of contemporary artists' books with important publications by Chuck Close, Bruce Naumann, Chris Burden, Allan Kaprow, and Gordon Matta-Clark, among others.

In recent years the photography collection has grown a great deal in number with more than 320 works added in five years, and broadened its horizons in terms of the diversity of photographs we have acquired, moving beyond the traditional gelatin silver print to include bolder, more experimental works. Thanks in part to the Advisory Council on Photography, an advocacy group founded in 1998 by Vassar College friends and alumnae/i with a passion for photography, we have had the opportunity to make key photography purchases over the last fourteen years. Members of the council have donated several significant works and each year they underwrite a number of purchases.

In 2008 for instance, the Advisory Council on Photography acquired a stunning contemporary view of thousands of starlings migrating over the outskirts of Rome taken by Richard Barnes during his Rome Prize year and a portfolio of seven surprisingly



Richard Barnes (American, b. 1953)
Murmur #23, Dec. 6, 2006, 2006
 Archival pigment print
 Purchase, Advisory Council on Photography,
 in memory of Phyllis Landes, class of 1950
 2008.9

intimate portraits of well-known artists by Dutch photographer Ari Marcopoulos. One of these, depicting Jean-Michel Basquiat in his studio the year he died in 1988, is included in the exhibition. In another work by Marcopoulos in the show, Andy Warhol is seen in full makeup and wig but wearing only a sheet wrapped loosely around his torso. In 2009, the council selected a cityscape taken in Tokyo from a bird's-eye view by Japanese artist Naoki Honjo. Honjo's work will be juxtaposed by an aerial photograph of Wall Street by New York-based contemporary artist Susan Wides. Both artists use techniques that involve selective focus resulting in the peculiar effect of transforming real-life subjects into tiny replicas that look as unreal as scale-model toys.

Even more recently, the Art Center has acquired works by young African-American artists who incorporate or critique contemporary culture in their work. One example is Hank Willis Thomas, born in 1976, whose large-scale color photograph *So Glad You've Made It* entered the collection last year. In this work Thomas photographed a 1979 McDonald's advertisement from *Ebony* magazine and eliminated all references to the original product, thus highlighting the racially

loaded content of the original ad and in turn exposing the commodification of African Americans by the corporate world.

The exhibition is generously sponsored by the Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center Exhibition Fund.

Patricia Phagan

The Philip and Lynn Straus Curator of Prints and Drawings

Mary-Kay Lombino

The Emily Hargroves Fisher '57 and Richard B. Fisher Curator and Assistant Director for Strategic Planning

It is easy to understand how museum staff members pursue their duty to maintain the art collection. It begins with a charge similar to the physician's Hippocratic notion to "first do no harm." Yet those of us who work at a college art museum know that our mission extends far beyond mere *maintenance* into the realm of *sustenance*; we seek to sustain the academic community by offering opportunities for close encounters with works in the collection. Time and again, Vassar faculty and students find that coming in contact with the actual work of art stimulates new thinking and inspires questions that would not have arisen out of an encounter with a PowerPoint image.

Objects in the permanent collection help to sustain creative and innovative approaches to teaching. Recently, for example, students enrolled in Tyrone Simpson's class on modern American literature gained insight into the social and artistic endeavors of Gertrude Stein by first viewing the exhibition *The Steins Collect* at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, then applying their knowledge of her and her tastes to a selection of works by Picasso and Matisse on view at the Art Center. Likewise, works on paper in the collection inspired students enrolled in an education class taught by Colette Cann. In preparation for their assignment to represent their racial experience at Vassar, the students examined works by artists of color—Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, and Kara Walker—who each offer imaginative and distinctive ways of presenting a narrative. Professor of political science Peter Stillman has built a seminar course around this fall's *Sawdust Mountain* exhibition, posing to his students the challenge of bringing together threads of environmental studies, political science, and the art of photography.

It is particularly gratifying when professors collaborate and together study works of art. With an X-ray fluorescence spectrometer in hand, chemistry professor Joe Tanski has enthusiastically investigated a great number of objects in the permanent collection. With Greek and Roman Studies professor Bert Lott, he analyzed ancient coins; with medieval art historian Andrew Tallon, he determined the inorganic elements in stones and pigments present on a thirteenth-century sculpture; and together with ancient art historian Eve D'Ambra, he supervised the work of Julie MacDonald (class of 2012) who analyzed and researched the likely source of the pigments on the cartonnage that covers the Ptolemaic-era mummy in the permanent collection.

But art also sustains the academic community in many ways that go beyond pedagogy. Sociology professor Light Carruyo discussed Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* in the Artful Dodger lunchtime speaker series and later reflected on her own use of photography in field research. Another participant in the Artful Dodger series, Brian Mann, a Renaissance music historian and a Francophile, delighted his audience when he connected the worlds of French popular music and visual culture in his discussion of several nineteenth-century lithographs of cabaret singer Yvette Guilbert by Toulouse-Lautrec.

Professors invest a great deal of their persons in their profession, and when art becomes the focus of their attention, their intellectual and emotional passions can be ignited. Students, colleagues, community members, and we at the Art Center are, in turn, sustained by that enthusiasm.

Diane Butler
Andrew W. Mellon Coordinator of Academic Programs



Student Julie MacDonald, class of 2012, uses an XRF spectrometer to analyze pigments on a mummy cartonnage.

Going to the Source

Vassar was the first college or university in the country to include an art museum as part of its original plan. The collection of art now housed in the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center began to be assembled in 1864. Known in its earliest incarnation as the Vassar College Art Gallery, and located in James Renwick's Main Building, the collection was designed as a teaching resource for the first students at Vassar and has been in demand as such ever since.

Beyond studying our own collection on campus, members of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center often have the opportunity to go to the source, and were recently invited to take a journey through the printmaking process. In May, twenty-five members visited Burnet Editions on West 29th Street in New York City for a behind-the-scenes tour. The event was called "Start to Finish: How Julie Mehretu Makes Her Prints." Mehretu is one of the most prominent artists working today and printmaking is a vital part of her creative process.

This spring, *Excavations: The Prints of Julie Mehretu* captured the hearts and imaginations of all those who viewed this exhibition of her paintings, drawings, and prints at the Art Center. Gregory Burnet, one of America's leading master printers, opened his studio to our members to talk about making prints with Mehretu. Members were able to see dozens of captivating "in progress" plates and prints of *Refuge* (2007) and compare them to the finished product that hung proudly on the wall of Burnet Editions. Greg's pride of workmanship, as well as his hospitality, charmed our members and they left with a greater knowledge of printmaking and appreciation for the creative process.

As this event suggests, Art Center membership offers an insider's look at the art world. We continue to organize events throughout the year for our members here in the Hudson Valley and beyond. We hope you will be able to participate in some of these events, as well as to experience the many exhibitions and programs at the Art Center itself.

Members of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center allow us to carry on an artistic legacy that was established more than 150 years ago. Thank you for your involvement.

Danna O'Connell
Membership Coordinator



Members viewing the many steps of the printmaking process.



Master printer Greg Burnet talks about the techniques of Julie Mehretu's printmaking process.

Membership

JULY 1, 2011 – JUNE 30, 2012

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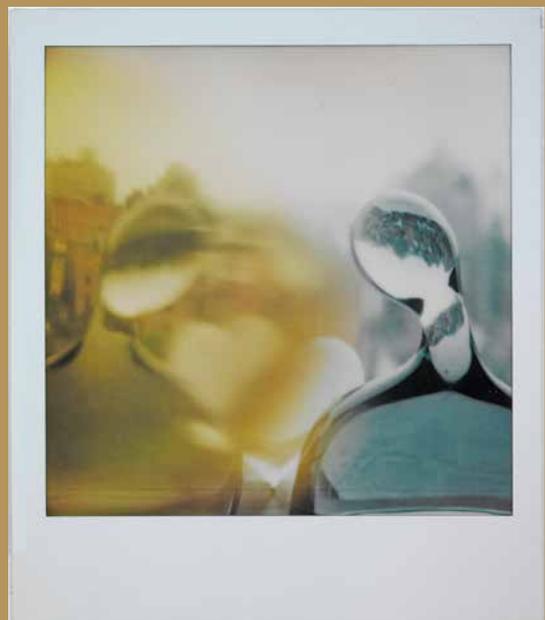
CURRENT AND UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS:

Eirik Johnson: Sawdust Mountain
September 7–December 9, 2012

Recent Acquisitions: Works on Paper
January 18–March 30, 2013

The Polaroid Years: Instant Photography and Experimentation
April 12–June 30, 2013

The Art Center is open Tuesday/Wednesday/
Friday/Saturday from 10am to 5pm,
Thursday from 10am to 9pm, and
Sunday from 1pm to 5pm.



André Kertész (American, b. Hungary 1894–1985)
July 2, 1979, 1979
SX-70 Polaroid print
Purchase, Advisory Council on Photography
2009.9.2

On the cover:
Eirik Johnson (American, b. 1974)
Stacked logs in Weyerhaeuser sort yard, Cosmopolis,
Washington, 2007 (detail)
Archival pigment print
©Eirik Johnson, from the book *Sawdust Mountain* (Aperture, 2009)

Art
at Vassar

A publication for the members of
The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center
Fall/Winter 2012/13