

# MADE IN CHICAGO

## The Koffler Collection

During the 1950s two citizens of Chicago, Samuel and Blanche Koffler, began assembling a collection of painting and sculpture that drew the attention of the city's art scene. Their preferences ran to work by Chicago artists, many of whom they had come to know personally. The relationship led the Kofflers to form a foundation in 1971 with the purpose of buying art by local artists. A board with five members—a painter, a sculptor, a museum director, an art historian, and a critic (all with Chicago connections), was selected and granted the authority to purchase artworks. By the end of the 1970s the collection had grown large enough to be exhibited in art centers and museums throughout the United States. When questions about a permanent home for the collection arose, Joshua C. Taylor, director of the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington, D.C., proposed incorporating it into the nation's collections by acquiring it for the Smithsonian Institution. On June 20, 1979, the collection was officially made part of the holdings of the National Collection, later renamed the Smithsonian American Art Museum. It was displayed in an exhibition that earned a favorable response from the Washington press.

Number 10  
1961–62  
welded steel  
Joseph Goto  
born Hilo, HI 1916–died Pawtucket, RI 1994

Joseph Goto was born in 1920 and, while in the military during World War II, he learned to weld. The technique proved useful to him when he took up study at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. It had already been cultivated by sculptors like David Smith, whose influence on Goto is apparent in Number 10. During Goto's years as an active sculptor, abstraction was the dominant artistic language in the U.S., and this work confirms his fluency with it.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.13

Untitled  
1971  
acrylic on canvas  
Roland Ginzler  
born Lincoln, IL 1921

Though Chicago is often considered a haven for figurative artists, Roland Ginzler, who has lived there much of his life, is first, last, and always an abstractionist. Even his title—Untitled—avoids any hint of descriptive imagery. He has striven instead to set up a debate of forms, between the cool of lavender and the warmth of yellow and gold, with the geometric faceoff accented by lines that strengthen the cool-warm confrontation.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.11

Artist Unmasked  
1974  
oil on canvas  
Seymour Rosofsky  
born Chicago, IL 1924–died Chicago, IL 1981

Among the most notable aspects of Seymour Rosofsky's art is the wide-ranging, no-holdsbarred aggressiveness of his fantasies. If the images created by Salvador Dali are remote from the quotidian world, Rosofsky's work is a light year distant. Yet as a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, he consciously sought to study with the most academic faculty members, whose studios accommodated nude models and rejected anything more nearly "modern." In his paintings he achieved a jarring collision between the rational and the irrational. The artist unmasked is an accurate self-portrait.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.28

Napalm Head  
1969  
oil on canvas  
Leon Golub  
born Chicago, IL 1922–died New York City 2004

Of all the artists who matured in the years following World War II, none exceeds Leon Golub in reputation and importance. In the 1950s, he made a national name for himself as a painter of large, bold, expressionist figures. With the passage of time his work turned to subjects lifted from the news, often political, and usually with left wing implications. Napalm Head refers to one of the devastating chemical weapons used in the Vietnam war. The canvas is unsized, torn, and hanging loosely, adding to the work's unidealized, damaged look.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.12

Black Lacquered Songs

1973

acrylic on canvas

Ellen Lanyon

born Chicago, IL 1926

To anyone familiar with Ellen Lanyon's work, *Black Lacquered Songs* may appear at first to be a fantasy, an image inconsistent with the reality of the everyday world. Yet on second glance, isn't it in fact quite possible that the birds, flowers, and fabricated case could co-exist in the rational realm? Perhaps it would be better to call the painting an invention rather than a fantasy. Whatever it is, it is a prime example of Lanyon's sure technique and her gift for lyricism of mood. Her command of acrylic—fully in evidence here—was gained after working with other media: egg tempera when she was a teenager, and oils in her later adulthood until an allergy to turpentine forced her to find an alternative.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.20

Natural Bridge

1971

oil on canvas

Roger Brown

born Hamilton, AL 1941—died Atlanta, GA 1997

The history of Chicago's art cannot be written without a thorough discussion of the work of Roger Brown, which hangs in enough public and private collections to earn him an international reputation. While *Natural Bridge* does not include the cloud formations that are probably the most recognizable formal feature of his art, the painting is clearly his, as the stylized treatment of landscape features and houses confirms. Brown has set the bridge amid high-tension power lines near a golf course and some tract houses to make an ironic comment on how suburbia was invading rural America.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.5

Partial Evidences II

1973

acrylic on canvas

Ray Yoshida

born Kapaa, HI 1930—died Kauai, HI 2009

The title of Ray Yoshida's *Partial Evidences II* suggests that something is missing. Eight rows of "things," organic or fabricated abstract forms, perch (or are set) on a line, perhaps on the edge of a wall or a fence. Within each row there is nothing above the "things," but possibly—with the help of Yoshida's title—we understand that there is something below that we cannot see. The Koffler Foundation painting shares, with many of

Yoshida's works at mid-career, the compositional device of rows. In many of his other efforts the objects shown are often recognizable, often found objects. The organization is informal, whereas in the case of *Partial Evidences II*, a strict vertical symmetry rules.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.34

Untitled

1975

oil on canvas

Vera Klement

born Danzig, Poland 1929

Vera Klement is the only artist in the Koffler Foundation collection who was born abroad— in 1929, in the free city of Danzig (now Gdansk) located on the Baltic Sea. She sees a connection between Danzig and her art: From the beginning I experienced a sense of duality [in] the bright light and rhythmic pounding of the sea, and there, rising behind it, the dark forest that held in its silence the northern European legends of evil spirits.... Light and dark—good and evil—life and death—that juxtaposition that eventually became the underpinning of my painting. The Koffler Foundation painting expresses this idea, moving in sharp contrast from white to black.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1980.103.2

Redwood Creek—Roots

1975

oil on canvas

Peter Holbrook

born New York City 1940

Any visitor to the Koffler Foundation collection is quick to see that most of the work is typical of the well-known Chicago taste for figurative art, of an often fantastic variety. Among the few artists who cannot be so characterized is Peter Holbrook, whose work is figurative without figures. Specializing in large-scale landscapes with an aerial perspective, he takes the visible world at its word. If fantasy is not called for, however, command of the paint medium is, and appropriately, *Redwood Creek—Roots* is a virtuoso exercise in naturalism. Holbrook's inclusion in the collection signals that he spent some time in Chicago, where he served on the art faculty of the University of Illinois in Chicago between 1968 and 1970 and became a familiar figure on the local art scene.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.17

Homage to Archimboldo

1970

oil on canvas

Theodore Halkin

born Chicago, IL 1924

Of all the artists represented in the Koffler Foundation collection, none has matched Theodore Halkin as an explorer of the stylistic landscape. He has been an abstractionist and a sharp-focus naturalist; he has made low level reliefs and fully three-dimensional images; and he has worked effectively with found objects. In a career of more than six decades he has tried, and taken command of, whatever small notion or large concept he

has fancied. Homage to Arcimboldo is in perfect keeping with his adventurous mind. The sixteenth-century Italian who painted fruits and vegetables, turning them into bizarre human likenesses, has served as a model for Halkin, who here treats the head organically, the shoulders geometrically. No portion is identifiable by itself, by the whole image is as legible as anything Arcimboldo ever did.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.15

#### Lunar Phase

1967

oil on canvas with paper

Dominick Di Meo

born Niagara Falls, NY 1927

The first Chicago artists with whom Dominick Di Meo is associated were students who attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago at the turn of the 1950s and tended to favor expressionism in their work. Di Meo was a central figure among them, notable for paintings of skulls and disjointed skeletons. During the 1960s he traveled, spending a good deal of time in Italy. After his return to Chicago his manner grew more light-hearted, with a sense of humor absent in his earlier, darker efforts. *Lunar Phase*, a collage, is typical of the later period. Its anatomical elements derive from paint, as in the legs, and a cunning use of paper décor that produces a face, with eyes, nose, and mouth. The photograph of a facial profile, upper left, adds a surreal effect to the mix.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.8

#### It's a Long Way Down

1971

acrylic on wood

Jim Nutt

born Pittsfield, MA 1938

The Hairy Who was a group of six Chicago artists who debuted at the city's famous Hyde Park Art Center in 1966. They were inclined toward a consciously ragtag form of pop art that attracted the attention of the rest of the nation (read New York). Jim Nutt is arguably the most original of the group. *It's a Long Way Down*, a prime example of the work he did at the time the Hairy Who surfaced, typifies his way of redesigning, or more precisely, deconstructing the human anatomy.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.24

#### Shoe Sack

1972

oil on canvas

Ed Paschke

born Chicago, IL 1939–died Chicago, IL 2004

Ed Paschke's death at sixty-four in 2004 robbed Chicago of one of its most brilliant native sons, a painter who at the turn of the twenty-first century had won an international following. Like a number of his generational colleagues, he began his exhibition career at the Hyde Park Art Center in the 1960s as a member of a group called the Non-Plussed Some. At the time, the figures in Paschke's canvases were pictorial metaphors of urban alienation: deformed men, grotesque females. *Shoe Sack* is more neutral in tone than some of these freaks, but its implication of fetishism earns it a fitting place alongside them.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.25

Classical Still Life

1960

oil on canvas

Kerig Pope

born Waukesha, WI 1935

The famous definition of surrealism as “the chance encounter of a sewing machine with a carving knife and an umbrella on an operating table” comes to mind when we see the objects Kerig Pope has painted in *Classical Still Life*: the grouping seems to be organic but its components are unknown to science. The fabricated box, its unfabricated contents, and the fantastic foreground are overseen by the painting in the background with a couple reminiscent of Picasso’s classical period. Pope negotiates all this with relish, defeating doubt and replacing it with charm and wit.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.26

Chinatown

1980

mixed media: wood, crushed metal cans, rulers

Don Baum

born Escanaba, MI 1922–died Evanston, IL 2008

Don Baum’s place in the history of Chicago’s art derives mostly from the exhibitions he organized at the Hyde Park Art Center on the city’s south side during the 1960s— shows that captured the attention of the national art world. Artists like Ed Paschke, Jim Nutt, Roger Brown, Gladys Nilsson, Kerig Pope, and more than a few others owe their reputations to Baum’s efforts on their behalf. He was the undisputed impresario of post-war Chicago art. An accomplished artist in his own right, he made effigies of houses a personal genre. While walking one day through Chicago’s Chinatown with fellow artist Miyoko Ito, he picked up abandoned items such as crushed metal cans and rulers. He then attached them to a simple house form, with the intention to celebrate the traces of the community.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. S. W. Koffler, 1984.157.1

Katchina

1973

oil on canvas

Miyoko Ito

born Berkeley, CA 1918–died Chicago, IL 1983

There is noteworthy agreement among many of us who are familiar with the work of Miyoko Ito. While it contains no recognizable forms—so it must be abstract—it somehow doesn’t feel abstract. This perception is constant in her work. Elements that do not replicate but that do resemble body parts, perhaps, or invertebrate sea creatures, or furniture, or landscapes, or something from the visible world, yearn to be identified. Yet that very double meaning is gratifying, as in *Katchina*, where the two large forms are not quite effigies but not “fully” abstract, either.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.18

Arytystic Pairanoiya

1978

watercolor and pencil on paper

Gladys Nilsson

born Chicago, IL 1940

Among her Chicago contemporaries, Gladys Nilsson stands out both for the content and form of her work. She paints with transparent watercolor and she prefers the humorous anecdote to the serious narrative customary among many of the other artists in the Koffler Foundation collection. While the lightness of her medium is appropriate to the lightness of her message, it is important to note her mastery of craft and the charm and originality of her stories. Roaming through Arytystic Pairanoiya is a crowd of zany, loosely parading figures dominated by a grinning female. The message is fantastic, the mood casual and droll. And like several others of the Hairy Who, Nilsson delights in word play—as the fractured English of the title indicates.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.23

Rooms of the Storm, Hall of the Night

1973

oil on canvas

Philip Hanson

born Chicago, IL 1943

For a painter of accomplishment, Philip Hanson looks back to an unusually complicated personal history, which includes a B.A. degree from the University of Chicago, a year studying architecture at the University of Illinois in Chicago, and B.F.A and M.F.A. degrees from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His work reflects this complexity. The subject matter of his Koffler Foundation painting is architectural. In the center is a stage, with steps flanked by columns leading to it. This is the Hall of the Night. It is surrounded by rooms, adjacent to pavements and bodies of water. These are the Rooms of the Storm. The entire image is impressively fantastic but the title refers to its components in a fully rational way.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the S. W. and B. M. Koffler Foundation, 1979.53.16