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LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART



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AN EXHIBITION AT THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

SPONSORED BY THE CONTEMPORARY ARTS COUNCIL

**six
more**

JULY 24 – AUGUST 25 1963

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foreword

The exhibition **SIX MORE** includes paintings by artists working in California and was conceived for simultaneous presentation here with **SIX PAINTERS AND THE OBJECT**, an exhibition in which all of the paintings were done by artists working in or near New York. The two exhibitions were selected by Lawrence Alloway, Curator of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, where **SIX PAINTERS AND THE OBJECT** was shown earlier in the year. In choosing the artists to be represented in each exhibition, Mr. Alloway used the same principle of stressing pop art painting and omitting object makers for reasons he has outlined in the introduction to the catalog of the New York exhibition. The resulting combination of exhibitions provides then a sensitive and well-reasoned survey and a comparison of pop art painting on the East and West Coasts.

The Contemporary Art Council of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the sponsor of both exhibitions in Los Angeles, was organized about two years ago to encourage and help support a contemporary art program within the Museum's overall historical program. With an aim stated in its by-laws of "giving particular attention to the evolution of new forms and conceptions in the work of living artists and their immediate antecedents," the program carried out under the Contemporary Art Council's sponsorship has included six exhibitions and has made possible important advances in the Museum's educational activities and in the acquisition of works for the permanent collection.

On behalf of the Council I would like to express appreciation to the artists, collectors and galleries listed on the following page for their generous cooperation in lending works for the exhibition.

JAMES ELLIOTT

lenders to the exhibition

The Abrams Family Collection, New York; The L. M. Asher Family, Los Angeles; Leo Castelli, New York; Mr. and Mrs. Donald Factor, Beverly Hills; Mr. and Mrs. Monte Factor, Los Angeles; Phillip Hefferton, Los Angeles; Mr. and Mrs. Walter Hopps, Pasadena; Mr. and Mrs. Robert Kelly, Sacramento; Mr. and Mrs. Steven Paine, Boston; Melvin Ramos, Sacramento; Mr. and Mrs. Alan Slifka, New York; Mr. and Mrs. Allan Stone, New York; Wayne Thiebaud, Sacramento; Dr. Leopold Tuchman, Beverly Hills.

Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles; Rolf Nelson Gallery, Los Angeles; Allan Stone Gallery, New York.

six more

LAWRENCE ALLOWAY

This exhibition is devoted to painters, not object-makers, and it is as necessary to make this distinction on the West Coast as it is on the East Coast. There has been a tendency to confuse object-makers with the painters who use known signs and common objects. To summarize the differences very quickly, however, West Coast object-makers are concerned with delapidation (both of artifacts and of images of the human figure) and with the evocation of disaster. Toys are treated as the monuments of a declining civilization and dolls simulate rapes and mutilations. Twin threads of American Gothic (Poe) and of social protest are present. The family vault of the Ushers is, in this compound, blended with fall-out shelters; family curses with the human condition. Characteristically West Coast object-makers exhort the spectator while, at the same time, their works seem to subside in decay¹. The painters in this exhibition, however, work in another way, avoiding nostalgia and anger; the supermarket or Pacific Ocean Park rather than the crypt or the junk shop is their scene.

In one way or another, mass communications provide subject matter for these painters. It is not that they expect to reach a mass audience; obviously their audience is the same as the audience for art. In New York, for instance, Andy Warhol may paint Troy Donahue, but his work is not distributed like Troy's movies nor seen by the readers of the fan magazines that Troy appears in. Warhol is, like any artist, shown in a gallery, bought by art collectors, not teen-agers, and written about by art critics, and not by Hedda Hopper. What has happened is that independently and simultaneously various painters extended their choice of subject-matter to include the dimension of heroes, signs, and objects that they have in common with other Americans. Until recently, the mass media have not been accepted by artists as a usable part of their environment. The main approaches to the subject have been Marxist, Freudian, or sociological. (1) To the Marxist the mass media are intended to drug the minds of the masses (you and me) with vitiating dreams; (2) to the Freudian the mass media are receptacles of antique fantasy; and (3) to the sociologist the media are an index of hidden assumptions and shifting opinion. It is worth recording, in view of the cultural inertia which attracts art critics to the



Wayne Thiebaud

34. JAWBREAKER MACHINE. 26" x 31½".
Lent by Allan Stone Gallery, New York.

first two of these approaches, that the decision by artists to approach the mass media objectively, in a spirit of acceptance, called for originality and rigour, opposing the habits and reflexes of both American and European intellectuals.

Pop art, as the tendency looks like being called for a while, has been consistently misunderstood by its critics and, maybe, by those who like it. It is often represented as antithetical to abstract art, and sometimes as its heir. It is true that connections that can be made, for instance, between the large single color fields of Barnett Newman and those of Joe Goode and Edward Ruscha in this exhibition (and with Jim Dine in New York, of course). This does not mean, however, that the strength of pop art derives simply from one preceding style. A common error is involved here, which consists in assuming that there is one main, correct, proper style at any one historical moment. If you think that only abstract or expressionistic art has the sanction of history, pop art seems to be an invader or a distraction. In fact, this monolithic view is untenable in historical terms. The fact is, modern artists exist in a situation of multiple choice; each artist is faced with various possibilities, of equal historical availability. The spectrum of choice includes abstract art, of various kinds, and pop art, of various kinds, and everything else. At least since 1870, multiple styles have co-existed in European and American art and, apart from giving comfort to obsessively tidy critics and historians, there is no reason to reduce the choice. Artists who are hermits and artists who are propagandists co-exist; downtown and uptown, are equally possible places.

By using signs and objects from the man-made environment, pop artists are evoking that part of the culture that we all share, and have all grown up with. It is our only universal culture and, as such, it is likely to be attached to personal and compelling experiences. At the same time, the mass media offer a huge vocabulary of visual communications that are vivid in color and spatially flat. It is formally convenient as well as humanly rich. Thus, the media offer artists a way of handling a rich subject matter, rooted in our experience of the urban environment², but without loss of the autonomy of the flat picture plane.

Looking back at WAYNE THIEBAUD'S early work, it is possible to detect elements in which his later development, as a laureate of lunch counters and diners, is implicit. In the early 50's, his still-lives of trophies bunched very similar objects together. Around 1954 he painted a cigar counter frontally, the display of regular forms identified with the format of the painting; probably in the following year he painted the portrait of a one-armed bandit and a close-up of a jewelry tree display-stand. His forms were ornate and spiky, the surface metallic and corrugated; the ornamental excitement obscured the emerging subject matter. Throughout the 50's he progressively soothed the paint surface and curbed his quirky linearism until, in 1961, he achieved, in the first of his pie paintings, simplicity and, to quote the artist, the "isolation of the objects."

Still-life painting has, traditionally, celebrated unique works of craftsmanship, as in Chardin's copper pans and china bowls, or the personal arrangement of plates and food, as in Bonnard's domestic table settings. Thiebaud, though basically a still-life painter, extends the genre to include slices of cake, in assembly line rows, or sandwiches like cars in a parking lot. It is the impersonality and repetition of objects that Thiebaud paints, samples of the anonymous, continuous highway culture that crosses the United States. The reassurance of standardization, its stability in a mobile environment, is his theme and not, as socially-minded gourmet art critics have suggested, the decline of American food.

The familiarity of the objects he paints—it is the same as the food *we* eat, at least some of the time—should not obscure recognition of the formal properties of Thiebaud's work. The formal elements do not act as a grid, within which his objects are arranged, like chessmen; nor are the objects merely the pretext (as Roger Fry proposed of Cezanne's skulls) for an exercise in design. On the contrary, Thiebaud fuses the subject matter with the formal means. He has written of his interest in "what happens when the relationship between paint and subject matter comes as close as I can get it—white, gooey, shiny, sticky oil paint spread out on the top of a painted cake to 'become' frosting. It is playing with reality—making an illusion which grows out of an exploration of the propensities of mate-



Melvin Ramos

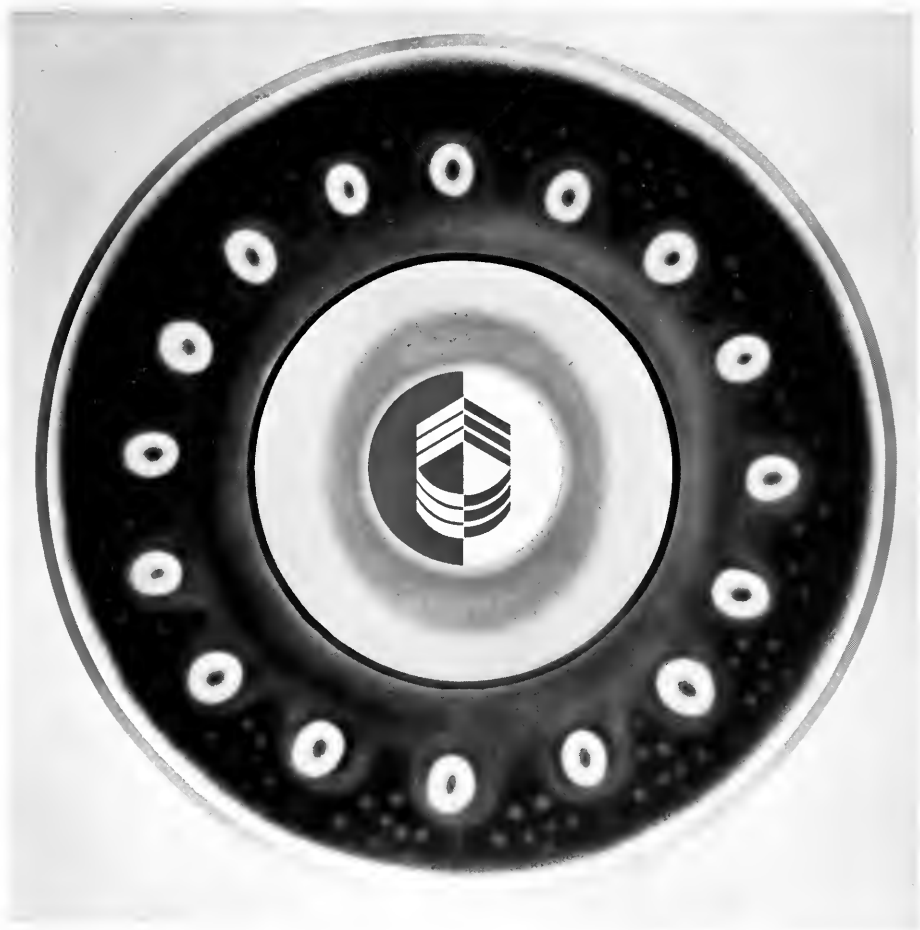
16. CRIME BUSTER. 30" x 26".

Lent by the Abrams Family Collection, New York

rials.”³ He uses paint, too, in such a way as to suggest the clear light of a store or lunch counter, with the color of the goods spreading and leaking into the background.

MEL RAMOS, like Roy Lichtenstein, uses comic book sources, but where Lichtenstein paints episodes, as evocative as thematic apperception tests when isolated from the narrative flow, Ramos paints portraits. In 1962 he painted a series of heroes from costume comics (Batman, Superman, the Atom), and, in 1963, he turned from male to female figures to paint a series of sex queens. These athletic and erotic girls (Fantomah, Camilla, and Glory Forbes-Vigilante), are taken from pre-Code comic books, which are now collectors' items. In a statement dated April, 1963, Ramos writes: “I paint portraits of romantic heroes. There is no mystery about these heroes—they are a tradition. American folk heroes are imbued with a nostalgic romance that makes it difficult for us not to identify with them... When they are taken out of context the symbolic reference becomes submerged and the image asserts itself. I try to celebrate folk heroes and sex queens in a straight-forward manner... While their likeness is not faithful, their character is obvious. The ‘clever handling’ is deliberate, not because I particularly like technical virtuosity but to reinforce the image, sustain the formal structure, or to instill a quality of heraldic elegance.”

His figures combine elements of the plastic (rounded three-dimensional forms) with the heraldic (inscriptions, frames, flat color). The result is figures that are plastically real but, at the same time, locked in the popular conventions in which they originated. Whereas Thiebaud makes paint a metaphor of substance and light, Ramos raises problems about the process of representation itself. Prior to using comic book sources, Ramos' works were thickly-painted figures in daily clothes or in striped bathing costumes, bulky and emphatically three-dimensional. When he quit painting Clark Kent and turned to Superman, he was forced to incorporate, into the dense medium of paint, the streamlined drawing of the comics, with their summary foreshortenings and diagrammatic anatomies. The streamlined drawing of linear originals intermeshes with the modelling in light and shade; painterly handling ripples through the heraldic schema.



Billy Al Bengston

4. TROY. 60" x 60".

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donald Factor, Beverly Hills

Clearly, all the artists in this exhibition are distinct individuals, with styles of their own, and belonging to several milieus that do not overlap. The use of the mass media that they have in common, however, is sufficiently general to allow them to be grouped together, without implying any united movement. There is, perhaps, a formal characteristic shared by most of the artists, though one which is wide open to personal variation. The combination of flatness with signs indicating things in the world (words, trademarks, objects, currency) leads to a kind of pictorial structure that might be called emblematic. In the emblem traditionally words and a visual image mutually re-enforced each other to make an amalgam of moral point. The emblems of these painters combine references to the world, by means of pre-existing signs, with new formal layouts of great density and vigour. The flat and the significative are fused. (The "heraldic" elements in Ramos' work are analogous to this definition of the emblem.)

BILLY AL BENGSTON'S paintings are symmetrical, concentric displays which expand, in subtle pictorial activity, around central signs. He has used in his paintings, to quote the *Motorcyclist*, "such items as the license plate, the BSA nameplate in several different interpretations and the cylinder head, complete right down to the pink spark plug insulator (a Lodge exclusive feature)."⁴ Bengston's paintings are not restricted to references of this kind, but the catching of common signs and objects in webs of systematic formality and of glowing color is constant in his work. It can be seen in his big heart series of 1961, like exuberant Valentines of a hot-rod coach painter, and in his paintings of a centrally silhouetted iris surrounded by checkerboard patterns. The painting partly carries a familiar image and partly subdues it, as the new form of the painting takes precedence over the pre-existing image. Recognition and unfamiliarity oscillate in the painting. The work, however, is never wholly non-figurative, which is why the term emblem may be appropriate.

EDWARD RUSCHA has anticipated and dismissed one of the explanations for using the man-made environment as subject-matter. "Most important, I do not paint to prove that 'there is no poor subject'," he wrote in a journal. A book of photographs by Ruscha, *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*⁵, and

Annie



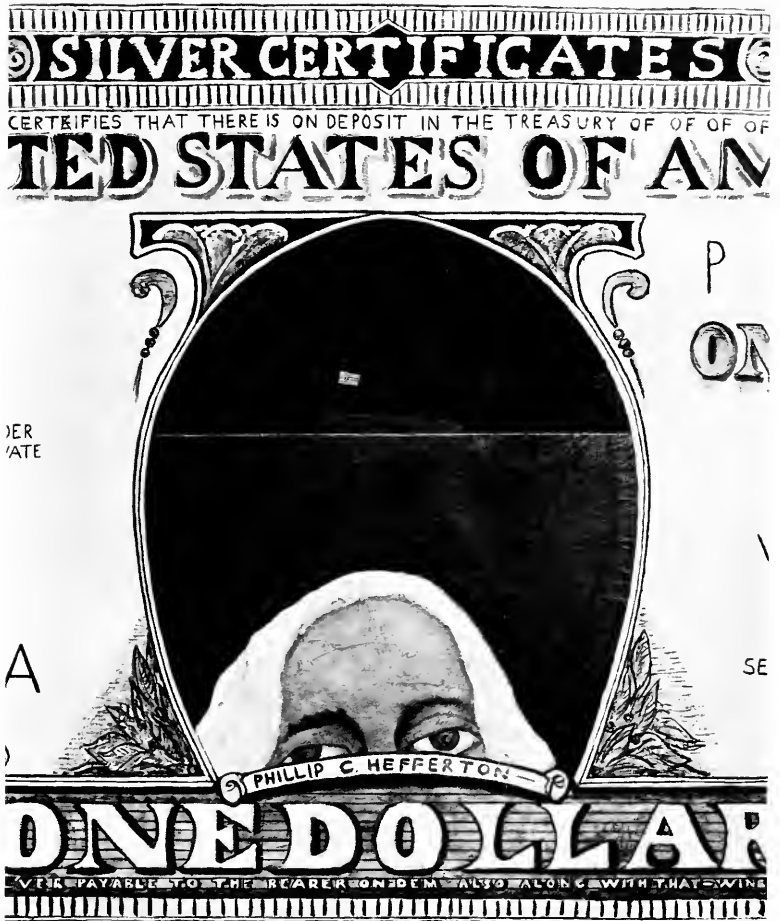
Edward Ruscha

24. ANNIE. 71" x 66½".

Lent by the L. M. Asher Family, Los Angeles

consisting exactly of that, records the subject without sociological interest (no generalizations in store) and without the melancholy of Edward Hopper (whose gas station is as fraught with morality as a Charles Dickens' house). Ruscha, in his painting, uses typography to create massive images of words: "Boss," "Noise," "Annie," "Honk." It is as if a billboard designer were to work with the chaste reticence of a funerary mason. Each word that Ruscha uses is known to us, and connects with knowledge that we have; at the same time, the word is denied the syntax or the context that confers meaning. An isolated word is a unit of language, but denied any instructions we do not know how to take it. *Annie*: a girl-friend, little Orphan Annie, Annie Laurie, Annie Get Your Gun? In *Honk*, the letters are differentiated by progressive textural change, but we cannot, finally, pretend, that it not a word and just an abstract sequence of forms. Ruscha's paintings are emblems, with verbal and pictorial meanings jointly suspended. They refer, as much pop art painting does, to the process of communication itself; common words become cryptic in the clear light of day and without any mystification.

In the nineteenth century *trompe l'oeil* artists who painted facsimilies of dollar bills were investigated as potential forgers by the federal authorities. This should not happen to PHILLIP HEFFERTON however, for though his subject is the currency, he enlarges it to a vast scale, often painting only details, and radically transforms it even while he is quoting. With American bills of various amounts he knows that money talks, that money can be everything. He takes Washington's, or Jackson's, or Hamilton's, or Lincoln's likeness, which he distends or otherwise changes. Money is the root of all images: portrait heads, baroque ornament, and landscapes, like the view of the U.S. Treasury with the stately automobile in the foreground on the back of the \$10 bill. In his mad money the signature of the treasurer suddenly becomes "Hefferton." Personal reference and exuberant jokes riddle the paper money. The residual Baroque features of the bills, blown up by Hefferton, reveal a ripe full rhythm which the free brushwork increases. The surface of the paintings is rugged and negligent, with the rough, loose brushwork approximating to the original line



Phillip Hefferton 11. SINKING GEORGE. 90" x 67½".
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Monte Factor, Los Angeles

engraving of the bills.

JOE GOODE, alone of the artists in this exhibition, uses objects in addition to his painted canvases. The canvas, always one color, painted rather ripely, is responsive, as large areas of single color must be, to color changes in the spectator's eye and to light changes that produce gradations of light and shadow. The object, painted the same color as the canvas, with an assigned place on a shelf built at the base of the canvas is always a milk bottle. It is inevitable that we read the canvas as a wall; on the other hand, it is possible to read the bottle as a kind of knot of color, projected forward, out in space, but in color and texture bound to the canvas surface. Thus the object is and is not a milk bottle and the canvas is and is not, a canvas.

Paradoxes of representation, the play of levels of signification, are at the heart of this kind of painting. The artist is engaged both in making legible references to external objects and in achieving satisfactory internal formality. The issue of this double impulse is signs that are problematic and complex, as subtle, for all their references to mass communications, as art that refers to more respected sources.

FOOTNOTES

1. For West Coast object-makers, see: Arthur Secunda on Edward Keinholz, *Artforum* I, No. 5, 1962; Philip Leider on Bruce Connor: "A New Sensibility," *Artforum* I, No. 6, 1962. For George Herms see William Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage*, Museum of Modern Art, 1961. For a painter analogous to the object-makers, see John Coplans on Llyn Foulkes, "3 Los Angeles Artists," *Artforum* I, No. 10, 1963.
2. There is a covert bias in a great deal of twentieth century art opinion against urban subject-matter. The timeless or the eternal, and the prestige that goes along with the transcendence of topicality, underlies much current formal art criticism. Pop art, though it has a sufficient formality, makes no secret of its temporal existence. In this respect it is in line with Italian Futurism (townscape as hectic simultaneity), Dada (communication as fragmented profusion), and French Purism (mass produced articles used as still-life objects), as pro-urban and anti-idealist.
3. Wayne Thiebaud; "Is a Lollypop Tree Worth Painting?", *San Francisco Sunday Chronicle*, July 15, 1962.
4. "Brush-Stroke of a 4-Stroke," *Motorcyclist*, 772, February, 1962.
5. Edward Ruscha; *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*, Alhambra, California, 1963.



Joseph Goode

6. HAPPY BIRTHDAY. 76" x 66½".
Lent by Rolf Nelson Gallery, Los Angeles

six more: works in the exhibition

billy al bengston

1. BIG HOLLYWOOD. 1960. Oil on canvas, 78" x 90".
Lent by Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles.
2. GAS TANK AND TACHOMETER 2. 1961. Oil on canvas, 42" x 40". *Lent by Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles.*
3. BUSTER. 1962. Oil and oil lacquer on masonite, 60" x 60".
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Walter Hopps, Pasadena.
4. TROY*. 1962. Oil and oil lacquer on masonite, 60" x 60".
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donald Factor, Beverly Hills,
5. STERLING. 1963. Oil and oil lacquer on masonite, 60" x 60". *Lent by the L. M. Asher Family, Los Angeles.*

joseph goode

6. HAPPY BIRTHDAY*. 1962. Oil on canvas and milk bottle, 76" x 66½". *Lent by Rolf Nelson Gallery, Los Angeles.*
7. ONE YEAR OLD. 1962. Oil on canvas and milk bottle, 66¾" x 67". *Lent by Rolf Nelson Gallery, Los Angeles.*
8. PURPLE. 1962. Oil on canvas and milk bottle, 68" x 66".
Lent by Rolf Nelson Gallery, Los Angeles.
9. LEROY. 1963. Oil on canvas and milk bottles, 84" x 132".
Lent by Rolf Nelson Gallery, Los Angeles.

phillip hefferton

10. HEFFERTON. 1962. Oil on canvas, 48" x 96".
Lent by the artist.
11. SINKING GEORGE*. 1962. Oil on canvas, 90" x 67½".
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Monte Factor, Los Angeles.
12. WINKIN' LINCOLN. 1962. Oil on canvas, 96" x 66".
Lent by the artist.
13. LINCOLN MEMORIAL. 1963. Oil on canvas, 68" diameter.
Lent by the artist.
14. TREASURY BUILDING. 1963. Oil on canvas, 67¾" diameter.
Lent by the artist.

melvin ramos

15. THE ATOM. 1962. Oil on canvas, 50" x 44".
Lent by Wayne Thiebaud, Sacramento.
16. CRIME BUSTER*. 1962. Oil on canvas, 30" x 26".
Lent by the Abrams Family Collection, New York.
17. THE JOKER. 1962. Oil on canvas, 11" x 10".
Lent anonymously.
18. CAMILLA, QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE. 1963. Oil on canvas, 30" x 26". *Lent by Leo Castelli, New York.*

19. FANTOMAH. 1963. Oil on canvas, 40" x 36".
Lent by Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.
20. FUTURA. 1963. Oil on canvas, 58" x 44".
Lent by the artist.
21. GLORY FORBES VIGILANTE. 1963. Oil on canvas, 40" x 40".
Lent by the artist.

edward ruscha

22. UNTITLED. 1961. Oil on canvas, 72" x 67".
Lent by Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles.
23. UNTITLED. 1961-62. Oil on canvas, 72" x 67".
Lent by Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles.
24. ANNIE*. 1962. Oil on canvas, 71" x 66½".
Lent by the L. M. Asher Family, Los Angeles.
25. UNTITLED. 1962. Oil on canvas, 72" x 67".
Lent by Dr. Leopold Tuchman, Beverly Hills.
26. TALK ABOUT SPACE. 1963. Oil on canvas, 72" x 67".
Lent by Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles.
27. UNTITLED. 1963. Oil on canvas, 72" x 67".
Lent by Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles.

wayne thiebaud

28. COLD CEREAL. 1960-61. Oil on canvas, 24" x 30".
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Allan Stone, New York.
29. DELICATESSEN COUNTER. 1962. Oil on canvas, 60" x 72".
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Stephen D. Paine, Boston.
30. RIDE, RIDE, RIDE. 1962. Oil on canvas, 40" x 50".
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Alan Slifka, New York.
31. YO-YOS. 1962. Oil on canvas, 12" x 12".
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Kelly, Sacramento
32. CAKE COUNTER. 1962-63. Oil on canvas, 60" x 72".
Lent by the Abrams Family Collection, New York.
33. CREAM SOUPS. 1963. Oil on canvas, 30" x 36".
Lent by Allan Stone Gallery, New York.
34. JAWBREAKER MACHINE*. 1963. Oil on canvas, 26" x 31½".
Lent by Allan Stone Gallery, New York.

Works marked by an asterisk are illustrated.

In dimensions, height precedes width.

acknowledgements

I am indebted to Mrs. Eugenie Klix for her curatorial work on the exhibition, and to Mrs. Leonard Asher for advice and hospitality; and to Irving Blum and Rolf Nelson for their cooperation.

L. A.

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