Holiday Closure

IMCA will be closed December 23, 2021 through January 3, 2022 for the university winter break. We look forward to welcoming visitors back to our interim museum location at 18881 Von Karman Avenue on Tuesday, January 4, 2022. The Resonant Surface: Movement, Image, and Sound in California Painting remains on view through February 12, 2022. IMCA is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm.

In Remembrance: Manuel Neri (1930 – 2021)

Manuel Neri, son of Mexican immigrants, was born in Sanger, CA, a small city east of Fresno. After the death of his father, he moved to Oakland with his mother and two sisters and came of age in the San Francisco Bay Area during the 1940s and early 50s. Neri attended San Francisco City College, where he initially planned to study electrical engineering. A course with ceramist and sculptor Peter Voulkos (1924 – 2002) proved influential and was among the factors that impelled him to become an artist instead. After completing military service with the US Army in Korea, he returned to the Bay Area and enrolled at the California School of Fine Arts (CSFA, renamed San Francisco Art Institute in 1961) under the G.I. Bill. At CSFA, Neri studied alongside Billy Al Bengston (b. 1934), Joan Brown (1938 – 1990), Jay DeFeo (1929 – 1989), Wally Hedrick (1928 – 2003), Fred Martin (b. 1927), and Henry Villierme (1928 – 2013), among others. He was a member of the Six Gallery artist collective and was the gallery’s director in October 1955 when Allen...

"Manuel Neri was a leading member of the Bay Area Figurative movement along with David Park, Richard Diebenkorn, and Elmer Bischoff. The climate of the Post-War era encouraged bold artistic searches for new expression and Neri led the way in the Bay Area through a sculptural practice rooted in the desire to explore and manipulate material, beginning with cardboard and junk material and later oscillating between plaster, bronze, and marble (hackettmill.com)."

"During the 1990s, Neri focused on the figure in relief, first in a series of small plaster maquettes, and then in an ambitious series of life-sized figural sculptures in plaster, bronze, and marble, in which figures seem to emerge from, or into, a flat wall, a spectacular revival of an ancient sculptural form that addresses modern ideas of appearance and disappearance, hiddenness and disclosure. Further, the relief extended his ideas regarding the use of the partial or fragmented form as a means of expressing complex emotional states in figures whose identities are otherwise buried by their fragmented condition (The Trustees of The Manuel Neri Trust)."

In 2019, The Manuel Neri Trust gifted 48 works by the artist to IMCA, including Mujer Pegada Series No. 5 (1985/2005) and Window Series Sculpture I (1968), pictured above. This significant acquisition will enhance visitors’ understanding of Neri’s body of work and artistic practice, augment IMCA’s holdings of works by notable Bay Area artists, including several of Neri’s contemporaries, and strengthen the museum’s role as a center for the study and appreciation of California Art. Neri died at his home in Sacramento, CA on October 18, 2021 at the age of 91. A memorial is planned for spring 2022 at the Manetti Shrem Museum of Art at UC Davis.
Visual Music

IMCA’s current exhibition, *The Resonant Surface: Movement, Image, and Sound in California Painting*, examines the sensory experience in painting via four thematic sections. In the fourth section on visual music, exhibition curator Erin Stout considers how one’s senses register space and time. In the first half of the 20th century, many painters began emulating musical structures in their work, hoping to evoke sensations in the same way music does—by directly acting on the senses rather than merely suggesting them with imagery.

Founders of the Synchromist movement, Stanton Macdonald-Wright (1890 – 1973) and Morgan Russell (1886 – 1953) believed that the sensation of time and motion could be conveyed using systematic color arrangements. They met as students in 1911 while studying in Paris under the Canadian painter Percyval Tudor-Hart (1873 – 1954). Tudor-Hart’s color theory connected qualities of color to qualities of music and was based on the idea that the 12 colors of the spectrum corresponded to the 12 semitones of the chromatic musical scale. Influenced by their teacher, Macdonald-Wright and Russell also utilized musical metaphor in their approach to painting. Applying the color scale similarly to how notes might be arranged in a musical piece, they called...
their resulting abstract works Synchromies and explained, “Synchromism simply means ‘with color’ as symphony means ‘with sound’ (theartstory.org).”

In Le Comble (1955), pictured above right, Macdonald-Wright produced color rhythms by pairing both complementary colors (those opposite each other on the color wheel) and analogous colors (those adjacent to or near each other on the color wheel) across the composition to create a number of alternating harmonies. “The artist employs planar forms with hard edges, solid areas of color, and soft gradations between lighter and darker areas. There is a clear emphasis on sinuous curvature and swooping motion,” says Stout.

In Synchromie en orange [Synchromy in Orange] (1922), pictured above left, Russell establishes a sense of vertical movement through brushwork and composition. As described by Stout, “The dramatic arcing forms at the center and the upturned curves on the right-hand side of the canvas pull and point the eye upwards, while their sinuous and elongated curvature give this movement a flowing quality. This fluidity emulates the temporal experience of hearing a piece of music unfold as a continuous stream of sound. In addition to the sense of motion established by the central undulating ‘S’ curve, Russell’s arrangement of complementary and analogous colors is meant to create rhythmic variation that holds the viewer’s attention over time.” In 1976, art critic Hilton Kramer reviewed the Museum of Modern Art exhibition Morgan Russell: Synchromist Studies 1910 – 1922 for The New York Times.
Conrad Buff was born in 1886 in Speicher, Switzerland and attended the School of Arts and Crafts in St. Gallen where he studied embroidery design. In 1905, he arrived in the United States and quickly made his way west, landing in San Francisco shortly after the city suffered the devastating 1906 earthquake. It wasn’t long before he made the decision to head south in search of new opportunities in Los Angeles. Settling into his new city, Buff supported himself primarily as a house painter. Between 1910 and 1913, he studied at the Art Students League in Los Angeles, cofounded in 1906 by landscape painter Hanson Puthuff (1875 – 1972) and Los Angeles Times art critic Antony Anderson.

“California Impressionism was the dominant style during Buff’s early years in the Golden State and thus influenced his work. It was not a formal school or movement but a regional variant of American Impressionism, which was derived from the innovations made in late 19th century France with outdoor light and color. Among the best-known painters working in Southern California were William Wendt, Guy Rose, and Granville Redmond, all of whom specialized in outdoor landscape painting characterized by high-keyed palettes and relatively loose (though not form-dissolving) brushwork. Their primary subject matter was the landscape as an emblem of plenty, grandeur, sensual richness, and the essential goodness of nature; it would become Buff’s primary subject matter, too (Will Smith, *Southwest Art*, 2000).”

While Buff shared the impressionist painters’ interest in direct observation of the landscape, he did not strictly adhere to the tenets of Impressionism. “By blending elements of California Impressionism with Modernist structure and composition, the artist created striking imagery that was unconstrained by the conventions of his time (conradbuff.com).” Buff welcomed and embraced new influences on his work; in 1925, he joined a contemporary artists’ organization led by Stanton MacDonald-Wright called The Modern Art Workers. In his later years, Buff “continued to genuinely convey nature’s grandeur, weight, and intensity. The magnificent blue sky juxtaposed with its complementary color orange consistently fascinated him. At the same time, his work evolved. Buff eliminated details and instead painted with thicker brush strokes creating broad color bands and basic interlocking shapes. Buff’s later work brings to mind his early oil experiments where he explored various color and area arrangements [seen in *California Orange Grove* (20th century) pictured above]. For Buff, a shape’s visual strength and a color’s emotional and intellectual energy took precedence over all other concerns (conradbuff.com).” Buff maintained his painting practice until his death in 1975.
I felt a sense of nostalgia and comfort the first time I saw Joseph Kleitsch’s *Red and Green* (1923)—a name that is fitting due to the colors that are prominent in the painting. The work evokes memories of visiting flower fields with my aunt and helping my mother tend our small garden during springtime. I’ve always had, as my grandmother often said, “green fingers”—nurturing flowers into bloom in summer and caring for them as they go dormant in winter. The building in the background of Kleitsch’s painting reminds me of the architecture I explored during family trips to Mexico and parts of Southern California. The warm colors of the shadowed arches convey the time of day and hint at California’s subtle seasonal changes in temperature. For me, *Red and Green* embodies the duality of light and shadow that makes me appreciate the way that color can both conjure and leave an impression on our memories.
Tanya Guadalupe Garcia, '21, BA (Art)
Intern and UCI Student Museum Educator, IMCA

*Red and Green* was recently included in the 2021 – 2022 exhibition *America’s Impressionism: Echoes of a Revolution*, organized by the San Antonio Museum of Art (San Antonio, TX).

**Collection Artists: Margaret, Helen, and Esther Bruton**

Margaret, Helen, and Esther Bruton—known collectively as “the Bruton sisters”—made an indelible mark on the California art scene during the first half of the 20th century. Devout modernists, their contributions to interwar and mid-century art and design span the 1920s to the 1960s and a diverse range of media, from paintings, prints, and commercial illustrations to decorative furniture and public murals. While each sister maintained an independent practice—Margaret was lauded for her lush oil paintings, Helen for her modern mosaics, and Esther for her etchings and lavish decorative murals—they often worked synergistically side by side, supporting and assisting one another in their projects. They also moved in the same social circles and together became fixtures on the vibrant West Coast art scene, bonding with modernist innovators like Imogen Cunningham, Ansel Adams, Frida Kahlo, and Diego Rivera.

The first-ever biography on the Bruton sisters, *Sisters in Art*, was released in October of this year by West Margin Press. Written by historian and archivist Wendy Van Wyck Good, the book recounts the sisters’ fascinating lives and careers. It traces their evolution as artist-siblings, detailing their close-knit childhood growing up in the city of Alameda, their progressive bi-coastal arts education, and their imprint on California modernism. Good’s book demonstrates the ways in which the work of these important but long-overlooked artists encapsulates a modernist utopian ethos that aspired to fully integrate art into the design of everyday life. It also tells the story of lifelong artistic collaboration in which camaraderie, cooperation, and community were forged and sustained through creative practice.

IMCA is pleased to include several works by the Bruton sisters in its collection that represent an array of media, a love of material and craft, and a modernist style.
Out & About: Collection Works on Loan

Multiple works by Jessie Arms Botke (including *Peacocks and Hollyhocks*, pictured above left, and a magnificent 29-foot mural once displayed at the The Oaks at Ojai, CA) are currently on view in *A Fanciful World: Jessie Arms Botke* at the Laguna Art Museum (Laguna Beach, CA) from November 4, 2021 to January 19, 2022.

*Plant and Animal Analogies* (1934 – 1935) by Helen Lundeberg, pictured above right, is included in the exhibition *Surrealism Beyond Borders*. Currently on view through January 30, 2022 at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (NY), the exhibition travels to the Tate Modern (London, UK) from February 25 to August 29, 2022.

*Alchemy* (1937 – 1939) by Agnes Pelton is included in *Another World: The Transcendental Painting Group* and currently on view through February 20, 2022 at Philbrook Museum of Art (Tulsa, OK). The exhibition is scheduled to travel to California and will be on view at Crocker Art Museum (Sacramento) from August 28 to November 20, 2022 and Los Angeles County Museum of Art from December 18, 2022 to April 16, 2023.

Image Credits


Manuel Neri in his studio. Photograph by Babbette Eddleston. Courtesy of The Manuel Neri Trust and Hackett Millt


Stanton Macdonald-Wright, *Le Comble*, 1955, Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 in. The Buck Collection at UCI Institute and Museum of California Art
Morgan Russell, *Synchromie en orange [Synchromy in Orange]*, 1922, Oil on canvas on board. 18 x 11 in. The Buck Collection at UCI Institute and Museum of California Art

Conrad Buff, *California Orange Grove*, 20th century, Oil on board, 22 x 35 in. UC Irvine Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum

Joseph Kleitsch, *Red and Green*, 1923, Oil on canvas, 36 x 40 in. UC Irvine Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum

Margaret Bruton, *Helen at Sargent House Studio*, probably 1922/1923, Oil on canvas, 40 x 34 in. The Buck Collection at UCI Institute and Museum of California Art

Helen Bruton, *Three Faces on Gold*, circa 1940, Ceramic mosaic, 16 x 20 in. The Buck Collection at UCI Institute and Museum of California Art

Esther Bruton, *Top of the Tent*, 1930, Etching, 11 x 7 in. The Buck Collection at UCI Institute and Museum of California Art

Jessie Arms Botke, *Peacock and Hollyhocks*, 1926, Oil on linen mounted on board, 30 x 25 in. UC Irvine Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum

Helen Lundeberg, *Plant and Animal Analogies*, 1934 – 1935, Oil on Celotex, 24 x 30 in. The Buck Collection at UCI Institute and Museum of California Art © The Feitelson / Lundeberg Art Foundation

IMCA’s ongoing collections research continues to provide new information, which will result in updates, revisions, and enhancements to object records. At the time of publication, image credits are reviewed by IMCA’s curatorial staff and reflect the most current information the museum has in its database but may be incomplete.