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The Orange County Museum of Art presents the largest museum exhibition ever devoted to Diebenkorn's most celebrated works.

Richard Diebenkorn: The Ocean Park Series

February 26–May 27, 2012 at the Orange County Museum of Art



Richard Diebenkorn, **Ocean Park #105** (1978)
Oil and charcoal on canvas. Modern Art
Museum of Fort Worth, Museum purchase,
Sid W. Richardson Foundation Endowment
Fund and The Burnett Foundation. © The
Estate of Richard Diebenkorn. Image courtesy
The Estate of Richard Diebenkorn

November 2011—The Orange County Museum of Art in Newport Beach, California, is pleased to announce final details for the greatly anticipated exhibition *Richard Diebenkorn: The Ocean Park Series* and accompanying catalog. On view February 26 through May 27, 2012, at the Orange County Museum of Art in Newport Beach, this exhibition is the most comprehensive show to date of Diebenkorn's highly celebrated body of work, the Ocean Park series. Co-organized by OCMA and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, the exhibition is curated by OCMA curator Sarah C. Bancroft. Presenting more than 75 Ocean Park paintings, prints, and drawings—the largest selection ever on view together—this unprecedented project offers visitors the first opportunity to explore in-depth the complexity of Diebenkorn's artistic and aesthetic achievements within this series.

On loan from prominent museums, institutions and private collections across the country, many of the works in the exhibition have rarely been on view to the public. The exhibition tour concludes at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in the summer of 2012.

“Richard Diebenkorn: The Ocean Park Series will once and for all establish Diebenkorn on equal footing with his more famous contemporaries and solidify his position among the most essential American painters of the postwar period. It is our great pleasure to co-organized this project with the Modern and

contribute to ongoing efforts to provide a more balanced view of the extraordinary diversity of American art during the second half of the twentieth century”—OCMA Director Dennis Szakacs

The Exhibition



Richard Diebenkorn, **Ocean Park #16**, (1968). Oil on canvas. Milwaukee Art Museum, Gift of Jane Bradley Pettit © The Estate of Richard Diebenkorn. Image courtesy Milwaukee Art Museum, photograph by John R. Glembin

While Diebenkorn’s work has been the subject of many exhibitions in the United States and abroad, previous projects have provided a limited introduction to the artist’s Ocean Park series or have focused on other aspects of his career. By presenting paintings, prints, and drawings—capturing his practice of working in diverse media—this exhibition presents a long-overdue opportunity to explore the breadth and depth of the series as never before possible, showing conclusively the variety, subtlety, and complexity of the artist’s practice. In addition to the well-known paintings, this presentation includes the lesser-known small oils painted on cigar box lids, which the artist gave to his family and friends; some of the most significant and ambitious prints the artist produced; and a diversity of drawings and collages (including a small selection of his Clubs and Spades works); all of which lend new insight into the artist’s

working process when shown in conjunction with the paintings. The exhibition spans two decades, beginning with some of the earliest Ocean Park abstractions Diebenkorn produced shortly after his arrival in Santa Monica, California (such as *Ocean Park #16* [1968]), and revealing the artist’s stylistic evolution and explorations over those 20 years.

"Drawn from a body of work produced more than two decades ago, *Richard Diebenkorn: The Ocean Park Series* reveals anew the complexity and subtlety of Diebenkorn’s practice and the relevancy of his work to the continuing dialogue with abstraction among contemporary artists. It is a rare and unique opportunity to bring to a broader audience such a well-known yet under-exhibited body of work, and it is my sincere hope that those who visit this exhibition will experience in some measure the riotous calm, joy and contemplation that these works can offer." —Exhibition curator Sarah C. Bancroft

Richard Diebenkorn (b. Portland, Oregon, 1922 – d. 1993, Berkeley, California)

Recognized as a leading West Coast Abstract Expressionist in the 1950s, Diebenkorn turned his attention to figurative painting in 1955 and achieved equal success in this style. Soon after his early retrospective presented at the Pavilion Gallery in Newport Beach in 1965 (now the Orange County Museum of Art), the

artist moved from the Bay Area to Southern California and set up a studio in the Ocean Park neighborhood of Santa Monica. At this time, he returned to abstract painting, and during the next two decades created one of the most compelling and masterful bodies of work in American art: The Ocean Park series.

When Diebenkorn accepted a teaching position at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1966, Southern California was rife with artistic experimentation and nascent art movements, including conceptualism, light and space, and figurative practices associated with pop art. Within this cacophony of styles and approaches, Diebenkorn's new abstract explorations would have stood apart from the vanguard. Yet, Los Angeles allowed him the space to experiment unabashed on the Ocean Park works, aware of but unaffected by these contemporaneous developments. For an artist opposed to categorization or inclusion in any "group," the relatively freewheeling environment espoused his independence.

The Ocean Park Series

Richard Diebenkorn turned forty-five in 1967, the year he began the Ocean Park series. He dedicated the following twenty years to the series, which would be the largest body of work that he produced. The series represented not only a break with the artist's preceding representational work in Berkeley, where he was identified with Bay Area figurative work, but also a divergence from contemporaneous artistic developments in Southern California. Although the Ocean Park works would become Diebenkorn's most celebrated, some of the most basic facts about this series are not well known: Diebenkorn made no fewer than 145 Ocean Park paintings, including the small cigar box lids paintings from the mid-to late 1970s. His works on paper (drawings, collages, and paintings on paper) would number nearly five hundred, and his prints—often overlooked and rarely shown in conjunction with the paintings—represent another significant body of work.



Early Ocean Park paintings evoke the translucency and radiance of stained-glass windows, with thick white bands articulating planes of jewel-toned colors. By the mid-1970s, these bands had given way to the architectonic geometry of thinner black and colored lines that girded the paintings. Right angles, strips of color, and diagonal and straight-edge markings along the top and one side of the canvas

Richard Diebenkorn, **Ocean Park #79** (1975); oil on canvas. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Purchased with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and with funds contributed by private donors, 1977. © The Estate of Richard Diebenkorn. Image courtesy The Estate of Richard Diebenkorn

were counterpoised with expanses of canvas at the center that together revealed a palimpsest of mediums and hues that would converge into a single composition of many planes, exemplified in *Ocean Park #79* (1975).

A cluster of darkly-hued compositions—dominated by black, dark blue, or grisaille—appear in the very last years of the series, around the death of the artist’s mother in 1984, as evidenced in *Ocean Park #138* (1985). The last large-scale painting, *Ocean Park #140*, was completed in 1985; although Diebenkorn continued to make smaller works on paper in his Ocean Park studio until 1988, when he and his wife Phyllis moved to Healdsburg in the wine country of Northern California.



Richard Diebenkorn, **Ocean Park #138** (1985); oil on canvas
Private collection
©The Estate of Richard Diebenkorn
Image courtesy The Estate of Richard Diebenkorn

Each work was for Diebenkorn an exploration for “rightness”: an attempt to solve complex and often self-imposed compositional and special problems, welcome mistakes, push through objections and self-doubt to come to a balanced resolution. The compositions were built-up through periods of activity in which erasures, revisions, accretions, and ultimately hard won resolutions would coalesce into nuanced compositions. The artist worked and reworked the canvas, scraping and repainting, building up layers and abstract geometric relationships, atmospheric fields and planes, finally arriving at a resolution. Anger, frustration, hesitation, despair, relief—all came to bear on the paintings, a combination of intention, intuition, and improvisation. Diebenkorn was certainly affected by his environment, the light and colors and atmosphere, but the Ocean Park works were not abstract landscapes of his surroundings. And if Diebenkorn was not attempting to capture the light and atmosphere of a place, his works were still very much grounded in and influenced by the landscape in which he created them. “I arrive at the light only after painting it, not by aiming for it.”¹

Drawings, collages and prints were a significant part of Diebenkorn’s practice, works of art in their own right that also served as catalysts in his painting practice, springboards between works and across media. Notably, the drawings were almost never studies for the paintings. Rather, they were explorations of concerns that the artist wanted to pursue (he would often switch back and forth as he worked in the studio, focusing on a drawing when hitting a wall with a painting.) Diebenkorn employed an “important

¹ Richard Diebenkorn, quoted in Michael Kimmelman, “A Life Outside,” *New York Times Magazine*, September 13, 1992, 58.

principle” that the paintings and drawings developed within a certain period of time should be exhibited together. The array of works produced during the Ocean Park era are exceptional expressions of Diebenkorn’s sensibility and nuanced sensitivity to color and line in diverse media.

Exhibition Catalog

Richard Diebenkorn: The Ocean Park Series is accompanied by a 256-page exhibition catalog that is a timely re-examination of a major body of work. The publication includes full-color reproductions of more than 150 works of art and is copublished by the Orange County Museum of Art and DelMonico Books • Prestel. Included are essays by Sarah C. Bancroft, curator at the Orange County Museum of Art; Susan Landauer, an art historian and scholar who is an expert on postwar art in California; and Peter Levitt, a recipient of the Lannan Foundation Award in Poetry, as well as published author of journalism, fiction, and translations. The catalog also includes a chronology and select bibliography. The catalog is available for \$65 (hardcover) through the museum Web sites, www.ocma.net and www.themodern.org.

Exhibition Credit

Richard Diebenkorn: The Ocean Park Series is co-organized by the Orange County Museum of Art and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. The exhibition is curated by OCMA curator Sarah C. Bancroft.

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ABOUT THE ORANGE COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

The Orange County Museum of Art is the premier visual arts museum in Orange County, California. The museum's program of dynamic solo exhibitions and landmark group shows links historical and contemporary art and ideas, bridges local and global perspectives, and embraces a diverse array of cultural activities and media. The museum is dedicated to engaging diverse audiences by providing creative commentary and illuminating dialogue on issues in our society through the arts.

MUSEUM INFORMATION

Orange County Museum of Art in Newport Beach is located at 850 San Clemente Drive. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday, with extended hours Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Admission is \$12/adults; \$10/seniors and students; children under twelve and OCMA members are free. OCMA is open free to the public every second Sunday of the month. All facilities are handicapped accessible. For more information call (949) 759-1122 or visit www.ocma.net