

Royal Academy of Arts

Richard Diebenkorn



Large
Print

List of Works

1

Do not remove from gallery

Audio points for 1



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Introduction to the exhibition



The Disintegrating Pig, 1950
(cat. 1)



Albuquerque #7, 1951 (cat. 3)



Untitled (Albuquerque), 1951 (cat 6)

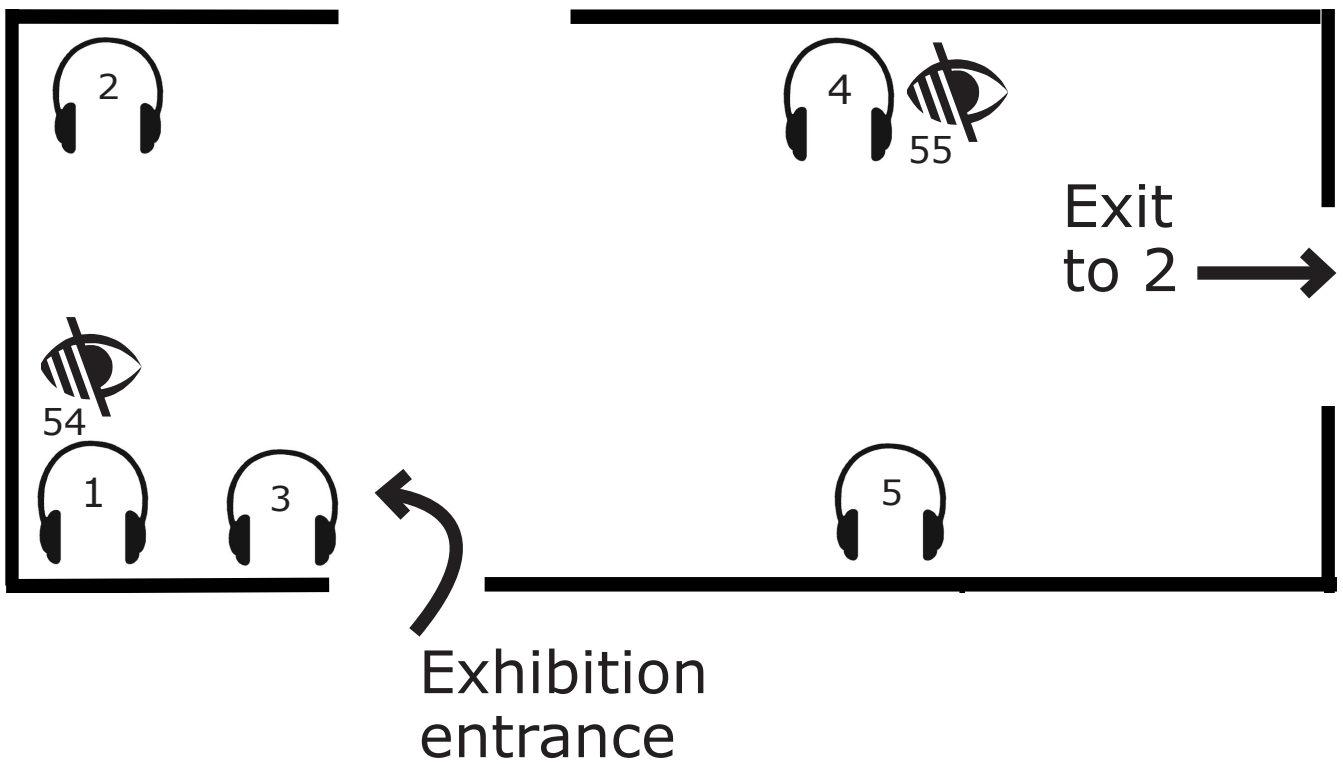
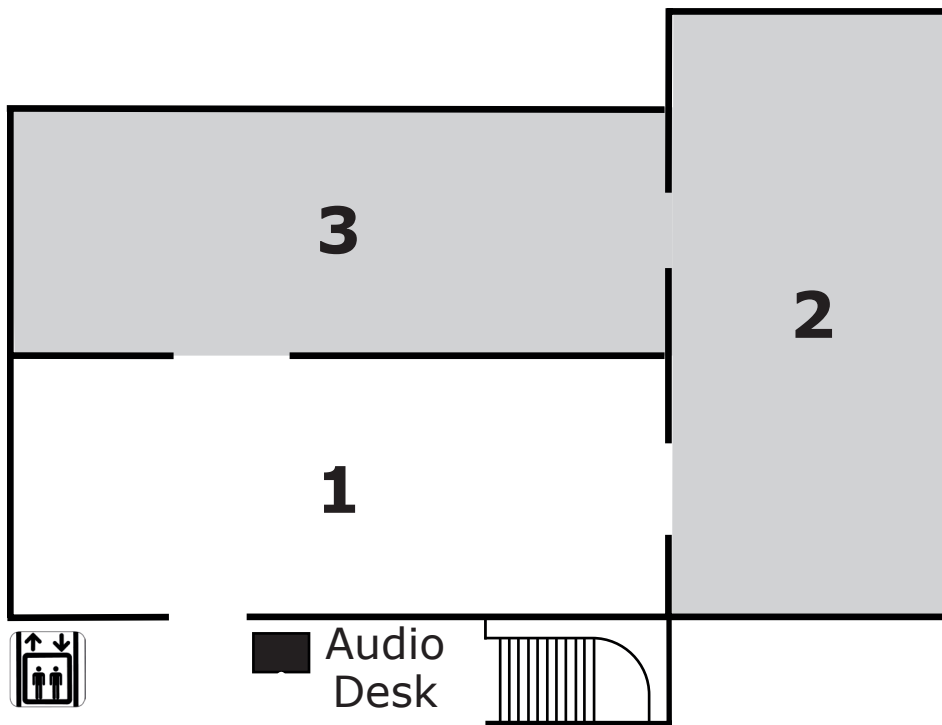


Urbana #6, 1953 (cat. 9)



Berkeley #57, 1955 (cat. 16)

You are in 1



Contents for 1

Page 5

Introduction to the exhibition

Page 14

Early Abstract Works, list of works:
cats 6, 7, 1, 2, 4, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 11,
13, 17, 19, 18, 15, 16, 14

Richard Diebenkorn

14 March — 7 June 2015

In the Sackler Wing of Galleries, Burlington House.

This exhibition has been organised by the
Royal Academy of Arts, London.

2009-2016 Season

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Introduction

Richard Diebenkorn (1922–1993) is celebrated as a post-war master in his native United States, and is closely associated with the West Coast, where he lived and worked for most of his career.

An accomplished colourist, his palette and compositions reveal an exquisite sensitivity to the light and space of the various locations in which he worked.

This close identification with his environment, and his progression from successful abstract artist to equally respected representational artist before an eventual return to abstraction with the celebrated Ocean Park series, are explored in this exhibition.

The selection of works, both paintings and drawings, seeks not only to represent these three key periods, but also to pay close attention to the artist's transitions between genres, illustrating how future directions are anticipated and past work referenced.

Working at a time when Abstract Expressionism was taking hold as a significant movement in America, Diebenkorn was both informed by and engaged in this artistic development and later came to know a number of the first- and second-generation Abstract Expressionist artists including Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko and Franz Kline.

Throughout his career, however, he consistently resisted any affiliations or categorisations, and steadfastly remained a follower of his own artistic impulses.

His interest in Abstract Expressionism was balanced by his enduring engagement with

European Modernism, and in particular with artists such as Cézanne, Bonnard, Matisse and Mondrian.

This exhibition, comprising nearly 60 paintings and works on paper, reveals the variety and subtlety of Diebenkorn's 'oeuvre', his ease of transition between abstraction and figuration, his practice of both referencing his influences while maintaining his own independent view, and his ability to work simultaneously across diverse media.

1922

Richard Clifford Diebenkorn is born on 22 April in Portland, Oregon.

1924

The family relocates to San Francisco.

1940

Enrols at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California. He later concentrates his studies on art, against his father's wishes.

1942

Joins the Marine Corps a few months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He is called up in 1943 and undergoes basic military training before transferring to the Photographic Department.

1943

Visits Sarah Stein's collection in Palo Alto, where he sees works by Matisse, Cézanne and Picasso for the first time.

1944

Paints his first abstract watercolours.

1945

Transferred to Hawaii to await active deployment overseas. By the autumn he

has been discharged and returns to California.

1946

Autumn: moves to the East Coast, renting a house in Woodstock. While there he visits New York regularly and meets Mark Rothko, Bradley Walker Tomlin and William Baziotis.

Starts to paint abstract canvases.

1947

Relocates to Sausalito, in the San Francisco Bay area.

Begins teaching drawing (including life drawing), painting and composition at California School of Fine Arts. Mark Rothko is a visiting professor there in the summer, and Clyfford Still is on the teaching staff, along with Elmer Bischoff, David Park and Hassel Smith.

(continued over)

1950

Enrols in the Master of Arts Programme at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

Begins the Albuquerque series of artworks.

1952

Sees the Henri Matisse retrospective at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery.

Moves to Urbana, Illinois, where he takes an academic post at the Art Department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Begins the Urbana series.

1953

Spends the summer in New York, where he meets Clement Greenberg and the artists Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline.

Autumn: returns to Berkeley where he continues to draw and paint abstract work.

Begins the Berkeley abstract series.

1954

Begins experimenting with figuration.

1956

Participates in regular drawing sessions from the live model.

Paints final abstract Berkeley series painting and transitions completely to figurative work.

1958

Winter: begins working at the Triangle studio in Berkeley near the Oakland border.

1959

Spends the summer teaching at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

1964

Autumn: travels to the Soviet Union via Paris as part of the US State Department's Cultural Exchange Programme.

There, he sees the Matisse works in both the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts and the State Hermitage Museum.

1966

January: visits the Matisse exhibition at the University of California Art Gallery, Los Angeles, which includes 'View of Notre Dame' (1914) and 'Open Window, Collioure' (1905).

September – October: takes up a professorship at UCLA art department. He rents a small studio in Ocean Park, Santa Monica.

1967

Spring: moves into a larger studio with a window in the same building, vacated by the artist Sam Francis.

Begins the Ocean Park series.

1975

May: begins construction on a new studio, which he moves into in February 1976.

1978

February – May: lives and works in the South of France.

1980

Works exclusively in drawing, not completing any paintings until 1984.

1988

Spring: moves from Santa Monica to the rural setting of Healdsburg, California.

1992

Elected an Honorary Academician by the Royal Academy of Arts.

1993

Dies following a long illness on 30 March.

Early Abstract Works

Representing Diebenkorn's first mature body of work, this gallery traces the development of his early period of abstraction in Albuquerque, Urbana and Berkeley between 1950 and 1956.

The paintings and drawings executed in each location have been grouped together here, highlighting the extent to which each new studio environment resulted in a distinct shift in output.

Although Diebenkorn stressed that these works were not representational, traces of the atmosphere and light of his surroundings can be found in many of the paintings.

The palette of 'Albuquerque #7' (1951), for example, alludes to the dusty, sun-baked

colours of the New Mexico landscape, as well as to the saturated hues of the clear, open sky. By contrast, 'Berkeley #57' (1955) reveals a much softer palette and looser structure of line, reflecting the more temperate and verdant environment of Northern California.

Drawing and works on paper were central to Diebenkorn's practice throughout his career and he frequently worked on paintings and drawings simultaneously.

He did not, however, employ drawings to determine the configuration and development of his paintings – his works on paper are works in their own right, and give equally important insights into Diebenkorn's artistic development.

List of works

(clockwise in order of hang)

6

Untitled (Albuquerque),
1951



Gouache and oil on paper

Private collection

7

Untitled (Albuquerque), 1951

Gouache, ink and graphite on paper

Private collection, courtesy of The Greenberg
Gallery, St Louis, Missouri

1



54



Disintegrating Pig, 1950

Oil on canvas

Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University. Gift of Gretchen Diebenkorn Grant and Richard Grant

This work was painted when Diebenkorn was a graduate student in Albuquerque, concentrating on abstraction. The title provides an aid to deciphering a porcine form in what at first appears to be a wholly abstract work, foreshadowing Diebenkorn's personal exploration of abstraction and figuration.

This relationship between the two genres can also be seen in the suggestion of the human form in 'Urbana #2 (The Archer)' (1953), also in this gallery.

2

Albuquerque #4, 1951

Oil on canvas

Saint Louis Art Museum. Gift of Joseph Pulitzer Jr,
117:1969

This painting demonstrates Diebenkorn's elaborate and refined visual language, which includes subtle figurative insignia associated with heraldry, such as the Maltese Cross near the top of the image, that interrupt the overall abstraction.

Diebenkorn's interest in heraldic lettering and insignia stemmed from a childhood fascination with European chivalry and the Bayeux Tapestry.

4

Untitled (Albuquerque), c. 1951

Oil on canvas

Private collection, courtesy of Van Doren Waxter

3

Albuquerque #7, 1951

Oil on canvas

Private collection



5

Untitled (Albuquerque), 1950

Oil, ink and gouache on paper

Private collection

8

Urbana #2, 1953

Oil on canvas

Private collection

9

Urbana #6, 1953

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.
Museum Purchase, Sid W. Richardson Foundation
Endowment Fund



10

A Day at the Race, 1953

Oil on canvas

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. Patrons Art
Fund, 53.23

12

Untitled, 1952–53

Watercolour and ink on paper

Richard Diebenkorn Foundation

11

Untitled, 1952

Gouache and ink on paper

Collection of Todd and Jill Cohen

13

Untitled, 1953

Ink and charcoal on paper

Richard Diebenkorn Foundation

17

Untitled, 1954

Ink and gouache on paper

Private collection

19

Untitled, 1955

Ink on paper

JPMorgan Chase Art Collection

18

Untitled, 1954

Graphite, coloured pencil, crayon and watercolour on paper

Collection of Ellie Blankfort and Peter Clothier

15

Berkeley #41, 1955

Oil on canvas

Private collection

16

Berkeley #57, 1955

Oil on canvas

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Bequest of Joseph M. Bransten in memory of Ellen Hart Bransten



14

Berkeley #5, 1953

Oil on canvas

Thomas L. Kempner Jr and Katheryn C. Patterson

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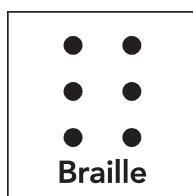
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Molly Bretton, Access Officer



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Richard Diebenkorn



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List of Works

2

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Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Life drawing, overview, (cats 35, 40, 36, 42, 39, 43, 33, 44, 41)



57

Cityscape #1, 1963 (cat. 32)



Ashtray and Doors, 1962 (cat. 30)



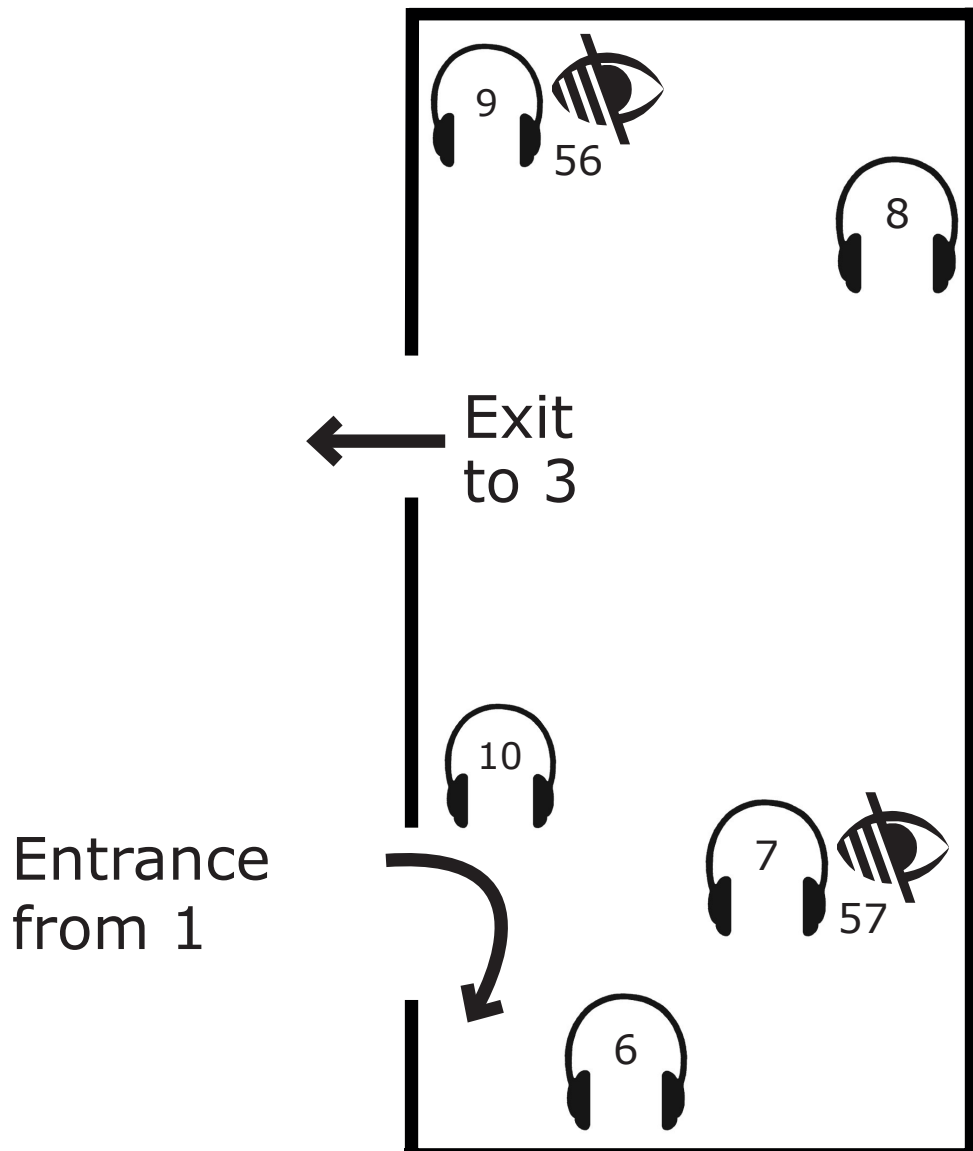
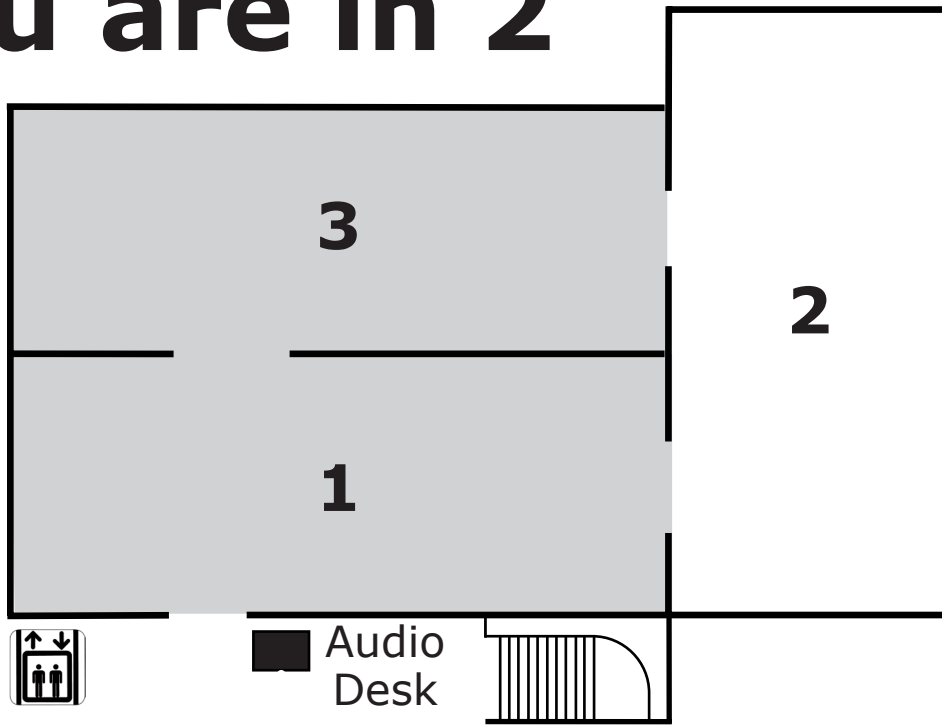
56

Girl on a Terrace, 1956 (cat. 21)



Untitled 1964, (cat. 34)

You are in 2



Contents for 2

Page 5

Figurative work, Berkeley, list of works:
cats 35, 40, 36, 42, 39, 43, 33, 44, 41,
32, 24, 29, 27, 30, 26, 28, 21, 20, 23, 38,
37, 25, 31, 22, 34

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Figurative Work, Berkeley

Some time after moving back to Berkeley in 1953, Diebenkorn began to take part in life-drawing sessions with his friends and fellow artists David Park and Elmer Bischoff.

Although he was drawing figuratively once a week with them, Diebenkorn continued to paint and draw in an abstract manner in his own studio, and became established as one of the West Coast's leading Abstract Expressionists.

By the end of 1956, however, he had moved completely from abstraction to figuration. In his own account of the transition he noted that he had the sense that something was missing; that the process of abstract painting had become too automatic, too habitual.

(continued over)

This shift, given that Diebenkorn had already achieved considerable success as an abstract painter, was seen as surprising and somewhat unfashionable at the time, but it was not long before he became equally celebrated for his figurative work.

The works here have been arranged to reflect the variety of figurative work that Diebenkorn produced. During this extraordinarily prolific period, his body of work grew to include large figure and interior paintings, landscapes and cityscapes, small still-life paintings and works on paper, and a continuation of his life drawing.

The large landscapes and cityscapes were a natural if not an inevitable extension from the abstract compositions that had preceded them, with an emphasis on colour, line, shape and form.

The palette and atmosphere of these landscapes are clear, crystalline and bright, quite distinct from the darker environments captured in the interior, figure and still-life paintings and drawings.

List of works

(Anti-clockwise in order of hang)

Life drawing, overview



35

Untitled, 1964

Ink on paper

Artsquare, Schilde, Belgium

40

Untitled (Striped Blouse), 1966

Ink and graphite on paper

The Grant Family Collection

36

Woman Seated in Armchair, 1964

Ink, crayon and charcoal on paper

Collection of Gretchen and John Berggruen, San
Francisco

42

Untitled (Reclining Woman), 1967

Ink and Conté crayon on paper

John and Sally Van Doren, courtesy of Van Doren
Waxter

39

Seated Woman, 1966

Synthetic polymer paint and charcoal on board

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist, 1990. Accession number: 253.1990

43

Untitled, 1967

Ballpoint pen on paper

Richard Diebenkorn Foundation

33

Untitled (Reclining Nude), 1962

Ink on paper

Private collection

44

Untitled, 1967

Ink wash on paper

Thomas Gibson Fine Art Ltd

41

Untitled, c. 1966

Charcoal and ink on joined paper

Richard Diebenkorn Foundation

32

Cityscape #1, 1963



Oil on canvas

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Purchase with funds from Trustees and friends in memory of Hector Escobosa, Brayton Wilbur and J. D. Zellerbach

While this work was painted ten years after the abstract painting 'Berkeley #5' (Gallery 1), similarities can be seen between the two in the palette and application of colour, as well as in the planes of colour depicting fields on the right side of the work.

Diebenkorn employed the compositional device of a road dividing a suburban landscape into buildings and undeveloped land in a number of figurative works. This structure, coupled with the high horizon line, is suggestive of the later Ocean Park paintings.

24

Seawall, 1957

Oil on canvas

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Gift of Phyllis G. Diebenkorn

29

Interior with View of Buildings, 1962

Oil on canvas

Cincinnati Art Museum, The Edwin and Virginia Irwin Memorial, 1964.68

This painting's composition reflects both the artist's avoidance of identifiable portraits of the human face and his study of ways of showing interior and exterior within the same work.

These elements of tension are balanced by large areas of textured colour, a suggestion of the Ocean Park series that was yet to come. The magnifying glass, placed in close proximity to the painting of a head, reflects key compositional colour.

27

Interior with Flowers, 1961

Oil on canvas

Collection of Gretchen and John Berggruen,
San Francisco

30

Ashtray and Doors, 1962

Oil on canvas

Private collection



26

Woman with Newspaper, 1960

Oil on canvas

Private collection

28

Head, 1961

Oil on canvas

Private collection

21



Girl on a Terrace, 1956

Oil on canvas

Collection Neuberger Museum of Art. Purchase
College, State University of New York. Gift of Roy R.
Neuberger

20

Woman by the Ocean, 1956

Oil on canvas

The Lisa and Douglas E. Goldman Family

23

Seated Man, 1956

Oil on canvas

Collection of Gretchen and John Berggruen, San
Francisco

38

Untitled (Seated Nude, Outside),
1966

Gouache and graphite on paper

Bryan and Aileen Cooke

37

Untitled (Invented Landscape),
1966

Acrylic on paper

Collection of the Oakland Museum of California. Gift
of the Estate of Howard E. Johnson

25

Scissors, 1959

Oil on canvas

The Grant Family Collection

31

Knife in a Glass, 1963

Oil on hardboard

Collection of Nancy and Roger Boas

22

Untitled (Still-life with Orange), 1957

Oil on canvas

Private collection

34

Untitled, 1964

Graphite and ink on paper

Leslie Feely



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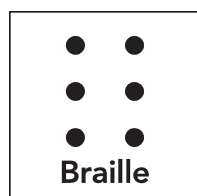
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Richard Diebenkorn



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List of Works

3

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Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Cigar Box Lid #4, 1976 (cat. 54)

59



Untitled, 1969 (cat. 51)



Untitled (Ocean Park), 1971 (cat. 53)



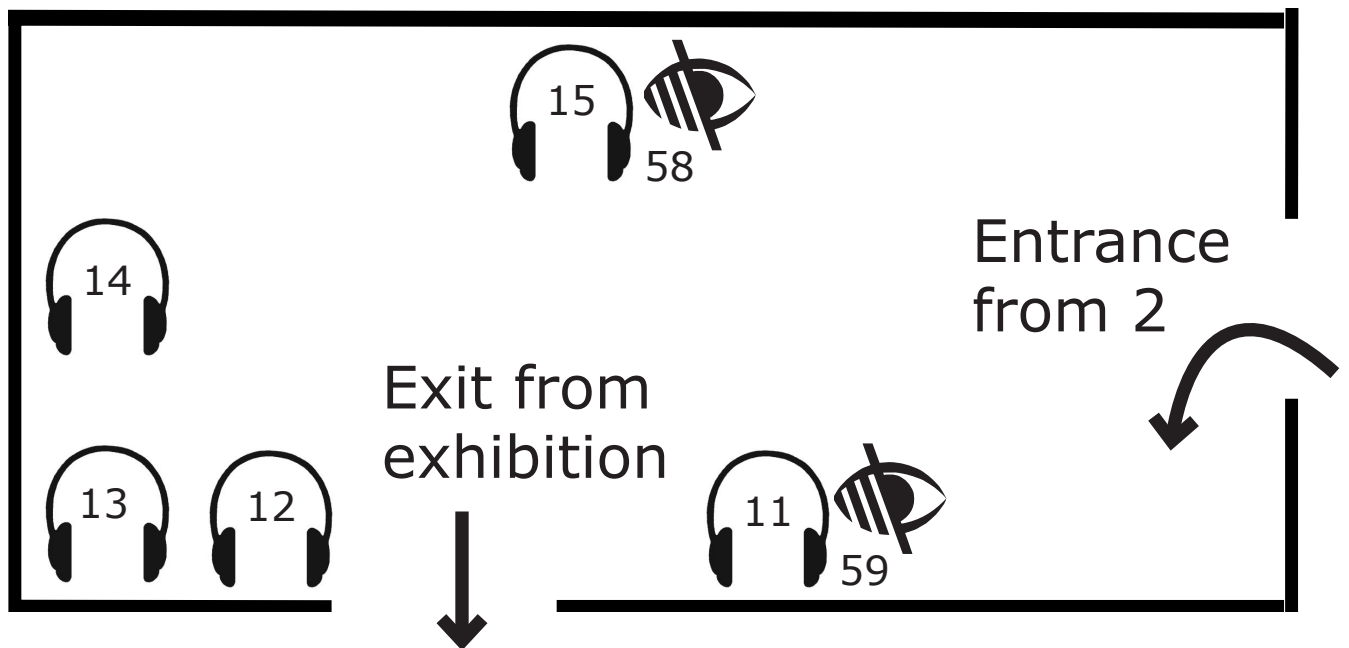
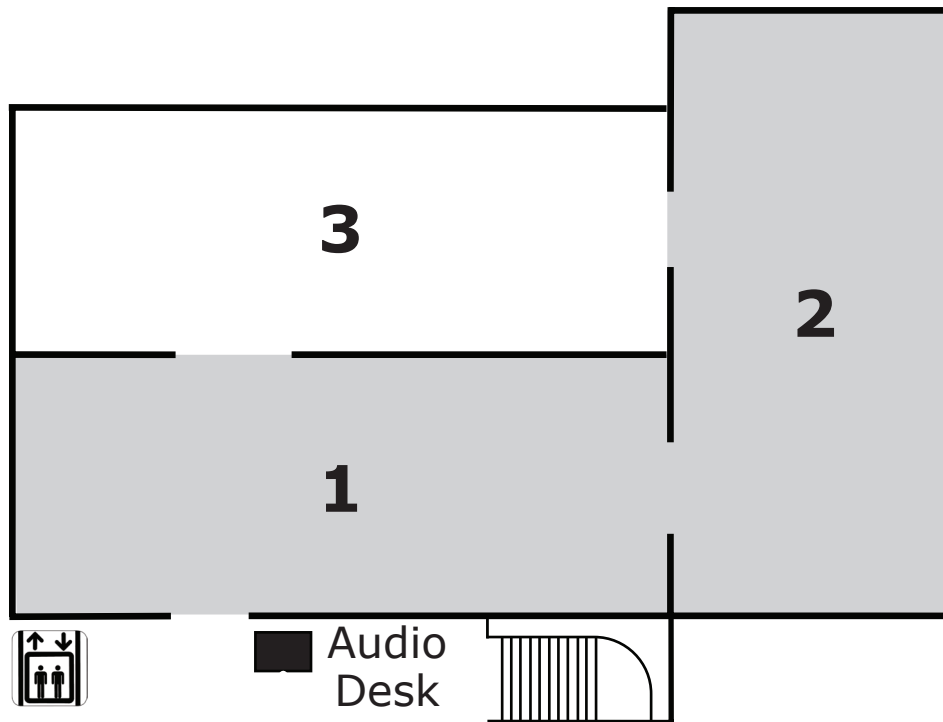
Ocean Park #79, 1975 (cat. 47)



Ocean Park #27, 1970 (cat. 45)

58

You are in 3



Contents for 3

Page 5

Ocean Park, list of works: cats 59, 46, 56, 54, 55, 50, 51, 53, 57, 52, 60, 47, 49, 48, 45, 58

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Ocean Park

In 1966 Diebenkorn moved from Berkeley to the more freewheeling artistic environment of Southern California, taking up a professorship at UCLA.

He found studio space in the Ocean Park neighbourhood of Santa Monica, and by the end of 1967 had returned to working in an abstract style, embarking on what was to become his most sustained and celebrated body of work. Produced between 1967 and 1988, the Ocean Park series comprises at least 145 paintings and nearly 500 works on paper.

In these paintings and drawings Diebenkorn created a new visual language distinct from his previous abstract expressionist work, but which continued to reflect the influence of Mondrian, Hopper and Cézanne, and in particular those works by Matisse that hover close to the point of abstraction.

The series can also, in part, be viewed as a response to the qualities of the light and the landscape of Southern California, and Diebenkorn's studio window (depicted in several of his figurative drawings) has been suggested as a direct source for the diagonal lines and trapezoidal shapes of the early Ocean Park paintings.

For Diebenkorn, however, these works were abstract compositions, never intended as landscapes, and he stated that he was relatively unaware of his surroundings while he was making the series.

Diebenkorn's journey from abstraction to representation and back again reveals a deep understanding of the language of painting and drawing, both of which exist here in harmonious expression.

For Diebenkorn, each work was a search for 'rightness', an attempt to solve complex

and often self-imposed compositional and spatial problems in order to create a perfectly balanced resolution.

List of works

(Anti-clockwise in order of hang)

59

Untitled, 1988/1992

Acrylic, graphite and pasted paper
on joined paper

John and Sally Van Doren, courtesy of Van Doren
Waxter

46

Ocean Park #43, 1971

Oil and charcoal on canvas

Collection of Gretchen and John Berggruen, San
Francisco

56

Cigar Box Lid #8, 1979

Oil and graphite on wood (cigar box lid)

Private collection

54

Cigar Box Lid #4, 1976

Oil and graphite on wood (cigar box lid)

The Grant Family Collection



55

Cigar Box Lid #3, 1976

Oil, watercolour and graphite on paper mounted on wood (cigar box lid)

Lent by the Santa Cruz Island Foundation, California

50

Untitled, 1967

Gouache on paper

Private collection

51

Untitled, 1969

Ink on paper

Richard Diebenkorn Foundation



53



Untitled (Ocean Park), 1971

Charcoal on paper

Private collection

In 1976 and 1979 Diebenkorn painted several small oils on wood and cardboard cigar box lids. The paintings were given as gifts to family and friends.

Despite their size they retain all of the same compositional concerns and integrity of Diebenkorn's larger works, and demonstrate skill in achieving a diminution of scale without compromising intensity.

57

Untitled, c. 1980–88

Acrylic, gouache, pasted paper and
graphite on paper

Private collection

52

Untitled (Collage), 1975

Acrylic, gouache and pasted paper
on paper

The Grant Family Collection

60

Untitled, 1986

Acrylic, gouache and pasted paper
on paper

Private collection

47

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



49

Ocean Park #130, 1985

Oil, oil stick and charcoal on canvas

The Lisa and Douglas E. Goldman Family

48

Ocean Park #116, 1979

Oil and charcoal on canvas

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Museum
Purchase, gift of Mrs Paul L. Wattis

45



58



15

Ocean Park #27, 1970

Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum. Gift of The Roebling Society and Mr and Mrs Charles H. Blatt and Mr and Mrs William K. Jacobs Jr. 72.4

The works in this room illustrate the extent to which the Ocean Park series developed in the first few years, before crystallising into a recognisable format in the mid-1970s.

'Ocean Park #27', which suggests the jewel-toned panes of a stained-glass window, is the earliest work shown, and the panels of strong colour defined by wide, white bands distinguish it from later works in the series, in which a play of right angles, diagonals and strips of colour are counterpoised along the top and one side, with layered expanses of paint at the centre.

58

Untitled, 1984

Gouache, acrylic and crayon

on joined paper

Private collection, Washington DC. Courtesy of Kim
Heirston Art Advisory, New York

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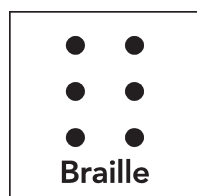
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