

Willard Boepple (b. 1945)



For Rhum #2, 1990-2012



Maple One, 1990

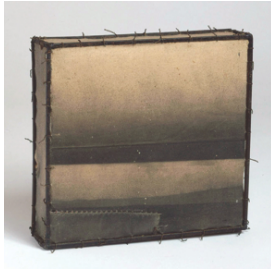
A native of Bennington, Vermont, Willard Boepple came to his artistic maturity in the midst of this center of modernist art, especially Color Field Painting and welded metal sculpture.

A traditional, as well as a modernist material, 20th century sculptors in wood as diverse as Constantine Brancusi, Jean Arp, and Henry Moore come to mind. Boepple's constructions carry on the vocabulary of cubism, here using a three-legged structure to suggest an artist's easel, a composition found in Picasso's *Harlequin* of 1915 and later in Motherwell's *Easel Collage* of 1952. This effects the sense of a three-dimensional composition within a pictorial convention.

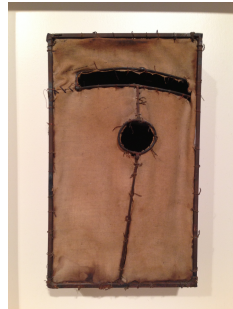
For Rhum, with its wooden planes belongs to the synthetic paper collages of Braque and Picasso, which employ printed wood grain papers; Boepple's title - echoing the word "Rhum" found printed in their cubist collages, acknowledges this connection.

The piling-up of blocks in *Maple One* recalls both the "cubes" found in early cubist pictures as well as the one-atop-another cylinders of F. Leger's *Contrast of Forms*.

Lee Bontecou (b. 1931)



Untitled, 1959



Untitled, 1959

Bontecou's welded metal-and-canvas boxes gained in complexity, scale, and suggestiveness. Their manner of construction a series of concentric elements that appear simultaneously to advance and retreat in succession of outward and inward movements, suggesting an endless exchange of absorption and expulsion. The work also increasingly incorporated a range of found materials scavenged from the street or the laundry below the artist's studio (such as heavy-duty canvas from mailbags and conveyor belts) or purchased on Canal Street (grommets, bolts, washers, spools, tarpaulins, saw blades, helmets, army-surplus items). Bontecou seemed to be attracted to these readymade utilitarian objects' rough materiality and the layers of meaning they carried. 'I started finding all kinds of nice materials. Old mailbags-I found them under the mail-boxes... I started cutting up the canvas. And I would get wonderful values with it. I could get depth that was not possible in the regular piece of canvas. If I did it all in steel or metal, I wouldn't get the kind of illusion that you have in painting.'

Excerpted from *Lee Bontecou: A Retrospective*, MoMA brochure. Essay by Lilian Tone, with quote from Bontecou, lecture at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.

Alexander Calder (1898-1976)



Samba Rattle, c. 1948

Alexander Calder's joyful personality can be said to have infused his moving mobiles and his standing stabiles in their (often) bright primary colors and biomorphic vocabulary. But Calder was also a "tinkerer" - as the wired together mobiles attest - and his whimsy found its first expression in his extraordinary "Circus" made of a rich variety of material. So too the joie de vivre of this noisemaker - with its Ballantine Beer can an odd precursor of Jasper John's later sculpture of the same beverage container.

Anthony Caro (1924-2013)



Writing Piece "Say," 1979

Taking up the welded metal construction technique of David Smith, Anthony Caro's early sculpture in this material were principally horizontal compositions, seen as more abstract than the vertical orientation, which tends to be seen as "figural." So too the artist's smaller tabletop works, which often "fell" over the edge of the table (to deny reading them as models). With maturity, Caro's art took on the vertical, often realized in massing of forms; his smaller vertical sculpture, including this sculpture from his "Writing Series" were more "pictorial," here the curving linear element serving as a kind of sculptural equivalent of writing. This composition also holds affinities to Smith's earlier sculpture *The Letter* of 1950.

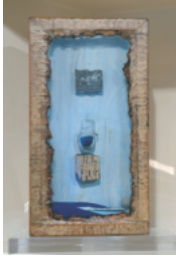
John Chamberlain (1927-2011)



Scratched Echo, 1991

In the middle 1950s so many young painters adopted Willem deKooning's painterly, cubist-like, multi-colored folded planes vocabulary that this style earned a nickname, "the 10th Touch." John Chamberlain would become the one truly major sculptor to work directly in this style. Ironically, the material for his looser three-dimensional form of this painterly, praised as "traces of the artist's hand," was removed from the artist's touch, initially by using crushed pieces of junked automobiles. Here too, deKooning's color, and "light" with passages of white, is translated into sculpture by Chamberlain's choice of chromatic colors.

Joseph Cornell (1903-1972)



Sandsifter Box, 1952



Untitled (Sun Box), 1958

The boxes and "objects" of Joseph Cornell are usually, and correctly, viewed as the assembling of different two and three-dimensional elements in their "found" or given form into a particular setting. In the artist's famous boxes, initial viewing sees these constructions as combining the sculptural, "things," with the pictorial, the pasted element found on the box's interior surfaces. But even here, Cornell touched on the sculptural in his collaged element, which were photocopies made on a thicker paper so to also have a slight relief effect.

Mark di Suvero (b. 1933)



Untitled (Unique Piece), 1962



Gorse, 2004

Mark di Suvero's most recognized constructions are large scale compositions made from I-beams and other industrial elements, sometimes with other, smaller forms and materials added. This particularly modern, urban material and vocabulary lead to early critics of the artist's sculpture seeing them as expressions of contemporary, industrial life.

In contrast to this association, di Suvero also worked in a far more modest scale, as seen in these two sculptures. Interestingly, if the artist's thrusting beams suggest the bold, sweeping brushstrokes of Kline, or late 1950s deKooning, these more intimate sculpture enjoy the quick markings and short strokes we associate with small scale traditional drawing.

Herbert Ferber (1906-1991)

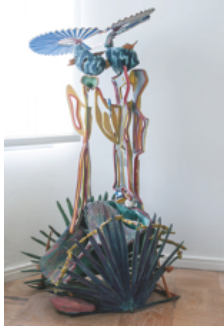


Calligraph Gee I, 1963-64

Abstract Expressionism, the major American art direction of the mid-1950s, was largely a painters' movement; although David Smith, and later, Mark di Suvero would have their sculpture associated with that of their New York School colleagues, it was still a tangential relationship.

Herbert Ferber, a sculptor who was not only active at this same time, but also a colleague of such painters as Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko, elected to work in shaped and twisted metal conjoined into abstract constructions. As in *Calligraph Gee I*, Ferber was attentive to the more fluid character of the Abstract Expressionist painting, and chose to work in copper, whose more malleable nature would allow Ferber to create more rapidly and freely. This part of Ferber's work comes closest to the broad, sweeping "calligraphic" brushstrokes of Franz Kline.

Nancy Graves (1939-1995)



Fanne Figura, 1982



Tanç (Glass Series), 1984

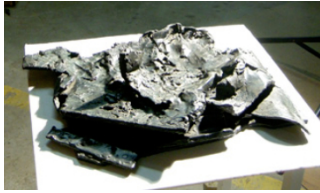


Five Eggs, 1986

As with the story of Pygmalion, sculpture has long faced the distinction between creating illusions and mimicking realism. The traditional making of lost-wax bronze casting, pouring molten bronze into a wax model encased in plaster, so as to burn away ("lost") the wax, replacing it with bronze, has a long history, becoming most popularized in Europe during the 18th Century.

Nancy Graves' mature sculpture draws from this particular tradition, casting all sorts of consumable material, from bananas to paper fans. However, these become abstracted in the part-to-part construction of her welded sculpture, further transformed by her rich, inventive polychromes.

Jules Olitski (1922-2007)



K, 1983



Metal Plopper, 1987-91

Often unnoticed is the tradition of artists who are major painters also making significant sculpture. In modern art we can surely include the sculpture of Edgar Degas, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso. More recently, both Barnett Newman and Willem deKooning made significant additions to this medium.

Of the Color Field painters, many of whom were close to David Smith, one of to America's greatest modern sculptors, only Jules Olitski has an sculpture oeuvre of a significant body of works made over an extended period of time. *K*, from 1983, is as radically inventive as Olitski's paintings of the same period. Here the thick layers and shapes of gel paint build up on his pictorial surface is translated into irregular surfaces of cast bronze, stacked atop one another. The viewer's position, essentially looking down onto the composition enjoys a precedent in Degas small bronze of a woman in a bathtub.

Olitski's pictures of this time, the early to mid-1980s, often deployed passages of colored and transparent gel in thick layers, setting one into another within the enclosing rectangle of the picture's frame. *Metal Plopper* represents Olitski's sculptural extension of this concept; here over layering and stacking planes of steel which are both open to "interior views" and formally restricted by the sculptures overall "circular" orientation. *Metal Plopper* belongs with a series of large scale sculptures in this same vocabulary, that relates to a monumental sculpture, "Ur Original" of 1976, presently installed at Tower 49 in Midtown Manhattan (12 East 49th Street).

David Smith (1906-1965)



Sewing Machine, 1943



Spectre, 1953

Although Pablo Picasso and Julio Gonzalez had each made a handful of sculptures using the modern technique of welding metals together, it was David Smith who would become the first artist to create a significant body of sculpture in this method and material. While his earlier sculpture was tentative, by the early 1950s, as with *Spectre*, he had mastered his techniques to create abstracted figural compositions, works which would grow increasingly abstract over the next decade.

Smith was a multiple-media man, his oeuvre including not only paintings, prints and drawings, but sculpture in a variety of materials and concurrent techniques. He turned to the most "classical" material, marble, only twice, when World War II made metal scarce. In his *Sewing Machine* of 1943, Smith also drew on pre-Columbian art, but here, and ironically, the artist carves a modern (metal) machine from an antique material. Further, *Sewing Machine* presents a rare subject; it's a still life object, which is virtually unknown before cubist relief tabletop constructions of 1911-13.

Rebecca Smith (b. 1954)



Venice, 1984

Although explored by such major artists as Jean Arp and Kurt Schwitters, the idea of the abstract painted wooden sculpture had very few followers. Interestingly, the potential for invention with this material is abundant, in wood's abilities to be shaped and colored in individual parts, either in single hue or patterns, and using its own inherent grain patterns. Rebecca Smith's *Venice* brings many of these potentials into force, in this horizontal, "marching" blocks composition, like an abstract polyptych with a juxtaposition of boldly painted separate panels; although made at some formal distance, *Venice* does share certain affinities with the visual energies of the contemporaneous "Pattern Painting" movement. Rebecca Smith is the daughter of David Smith, who is also in this exhibition.

Richard Stankiewicz (1922-1983)



Untitled (Bird), c. 1960

In their search for art history "ancestors," the Surrealists were fascinated with the paintings of Giuseppe Arcimboldo, where the artist painted simple still life ingredients, fruit and flowers, but composed them in such a way that their overall imagery suggested portraits of imaginary people. Pablo Picasso used this "trick of the eye" to create several sculpture, the most famous being his *Bull's Head*, formed from a bicycle seat and handlebar.

This "transforming" composition would be a focus of some of the welded metal construction of Richard Stankiewicz; he would also make abstract welded works as well. Indeed, even his "image" constructions, as in this *Untitled (bird)* maintain the formal coherence of abstract works.

Frank Stella (b. 1936)



k.161b, 2011

Modernism has proven to be both an embrace of previously non-art or newly invented material as well as the creation of unprecedented form. At the same time, certain traditional "ingredients and fundamental composition" have proven to remain vital. Over his now-long and fulsome career, Frank Stella has made major abstract works using classic modernism's materials, collage and metal construction, as well as such timeless formulations as sculpture in wood. With his explorations into the spaces of both relief sculpture and freestanding constructions, Stella has used laser cut elements as well as sculptural components formed by the newer technique of 3-D printing. In *k.161b* the spatial definitions afford these shapes, along with geometric-drawn enclosing structure create a work of turning, Baroque-like character.