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Chicago Artists: Continuity and Change

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## Chicago Artists: Continuity and Change

May – June 1983

Co-sponsored by the South Loop Planning Board

# INTRODUCTION

## **Chicago Artists: Continuity and Change**

is an exhibit of nearly 150 works by twenty-five Chicago artists who first distinguished themselves professionally in the 1950s and 1960s and who have remained active to the present day. Also included are a small number of prominent artists who have recently died or no longer reside in Chicago. The show has been limited to painters and sculptors, primarily to minimize the difficulty of organizing and installing such a large exhibit within an extremely short period of time. Artists were invited by the exhibit organizers to participate in the show and were asked to select their own works. The exhibit emphasizes the artist's current or most recent activity, though each artist is also represented by at least one early work.

The works were created over a period of nearly three decades and display diverse and highly individual styles. Both figurative and abstract modes of expression are represented, reflecting the enduring character of these opposite traditions in Chicago. Currents of surrealism and expressionism evident in the exhibit can be traced back to early postwar interest by Chicagoans in these movements. In the 1950s, Chicago collectors, notably Edwin Bergman, Morton Neumann, and Joseph Shapiro, allowed artists to privately view their significant holdings of such noted European surrealist artists as Max Ernst, Matta, and Joan Miro. Also at this time, surrealist works were exhibited at the Arts Club and the Art Institute of Chicago. In addition, surrealist artists sometimes visited the city in conjunction with their shows. Postwar students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) who studied with Kathleen Blackshear

were encouraged to explore German expressionist prints as well as primitive, archaic, and ethnographic artifacts in local museums. Furthermore, Paul Wiegardt, Blackshear's colleague, encouraged his SAIC students to explore their own dreams and elemental impulses as sources of visual imagery.

Abstract tendencies, which are highly visible in the exhibit, were nurtured in postwar Chicago by the Bauhaus structural formalist approach to design. This tradition was transmitted by the Institute of Design (ID), founded in Chicago in 1937 by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, whose artistic and teaching philosophies were perpetuated after his death in 1946 by both ID faculty and graduates. Also discernible in the work of Chicago abstract artists are currents of major postwar American art movements, notably abstract expressionism, color-field abstraction, and minimal art.

With few exceptions, postwar Chicago sculptors worked in small scale, following diverse stylistic paths. In the late 1960s, local interest developed in large-scale sculpture created by artists working directly with their materials, as opposed to designing works for fabrication elsewhere. The installation in 1967 of Picasso's five-story sculpture in Daley Center Plaza stimulated public interest in monumental outdoor sculpture. However, Chicago artists were more directly encouraged by patrons such as Edwin Bergman, Lewis Manilow, and Robert B. Mayer, who gave moral support. They, among others, also contributed materials, sponsored visiting sculptors, and opened their collections of modern European sculpture to viewing by artists. The sculptors in the exhibit are characterized by

their highly individual styles. These range from organic to geometric tendencies, and some involve the interplay of mixed media, including unconventional materials or found objects.

The purpose of **Chicago Artists: Continuity and Change** is to affirm in a major exhibit the continuing vitality and increasing strength of the Chicago art community. The exhibit recognizes artists who, in their ongoing work, have remained steadfast to their individual artistic visions regardless of shifts of fashion, publicity, or patronage. The presentation of both early and recent works allows the opportunity to view the stylistic changes of individual artists within the larger framework of concurrent artistic activity. By scheduling the exhibit to coincide with the fourth annual Chicago International Art Exposition at Navy Pier, the organizers intended to heighten the exposure of Chicago art and artists on local, national, and international levels.

There are many more distinguished Chicago artists who should and ideally would be included in the exhibit but for the limitations of time, space, and finance. Thus, **Chicago Artists: Continuity and Change** cannot and is in no way meant to give a totally comprehensive survey of recent Chicago art history. However, it is the hope and vision of the organizers that the exhibit serves as a prototype for expanded future shows of this kind.

Randi Sherman

Randi Sherman is a Chicago art historian and free-lance writer specializing in the visual arts.

## Richard Loving

Born	1924 Vienna, Austria
Education	1943-44 Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York 1945 New York Medical School, Cornell University, 1946 The New School for Social Research, New York
Selected Exhibitions	1959 Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York 1963 * Lawrence College, Appleton, Wisconsin 1965 Scripps College Invitational, Claremont, California 1969 Kovler Gallery, Chicago 1969 "Chicago and Vicinity," Art Institute of Chicago 1973 * Gallery Bernard, Chicago 1977 N.A.M.E. Gallery, Chicago 1979 Exhibition in Karlsruhe, Germany, curated by Franz Schulze 1979, 81 * Jan Cicero Gallery, Chicago 1982 * Lerner Heller Gallery, New York 1983 "Chicago Abstract Painting," Sonoma State University, California
Selected Collections	Borg-Warner Corporation, Chicago Kemper Group, Chicago First National Bank of Chicago Art Institute of Chicago Illinois State Museum, Springfield  Represented by Jan Cicero Gallery, Chicago

*Astral Collision*, 1983, oil on canvas, 60"x50". Lent by the artist. Photograph by M. Tropea.

*Closing the Gap*, 1973, oil on canvas, 76''x56''. Private collection.

