

Sullivan Goss

AN AMERICAN GALLERY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CALIFORNIA BAUHAUS

INFLUENCE & ADAPTATION

SEPTEMBER 27 - NOVEMBER 25, 2019

OPENING RECEPTION:

1ST THURSDAY, OCTOBER 3 | FROM 5-8pm

SANTA BARBARA, CA - In celebration of the centennial of the founding of the Bauhaus school, Sullivan Goss is proud to present an exhibition exploring the connection of a foundational German art school to the art of California.

One hundred years ago, the *Staatliches Bauhaus* was formed in the city of Weimar, Germany. More commonly referred to simply as the **Bauhaus**, it has since been written about as “the most influential art school of the twentieth century.” It was notable, even at the time, for its commitment to progressive (read: Modernist) ideas about aesthetics and the function of art in an industrialized society. In 1923, the school’s motto was “Art Into Industry!” but its focus on mass-production and machine age aesthetics would make the slogan “Industry into Art” equally valid. It was also fiercely inter-disciplinary; furniture designers, graphic designers, painters, sculptors, weavers, ceramicists, and later, architects were all intended to collaborate. It’s leaders were utopians; they hoped to abolish the distinctions between Fine Art and the Decorative Arts such that creative people could move together to design and build a better world. Moving from the post-World War I German capital of Weimar to Dessau in 1925 and later to Berlin in 1932, the Bauhaus’ inherently political agenda made it something of a soft target. In 1933, the school was shuttered by the Nazi regime who considered it an outpost for communism and intellectual elitism. In response, many of the faculty’s leading lights left for America as did any number of its students. Some of them ended up in California...

In some cases, their works were imported even if the artists themselves weren’t. Emilie Scheyer – better known as **Galka Scheyer** – was a German woman who was befriended by Russian artist Alexej von Jawlensky, who introduced her to Vasily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Lyonel Feininger at the Bauhaus in 1924. Branding them as “the Blue Four” – a combination of the famed Blue Rider group of German

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Expressionists and the Big Four railroads – Scheyer came to the U.S. determined to develop a market for their work. She started in New York, but made her way to San Francisco in 1926 before settling in the L.A. area in 1930. She soon connected with local mega-collectors Walter and Louise Arensberg and their circle of artists. Among these, **PETER KRASNOW (1886-1979)** and **ELISE SEEDS (1902-1963)** both made significant and highly individual contributions to the development of non-objective abstract painting in America. Scheyer was also in touch with other German immigrant creatives like **RUDOLPH SCHINDLER (1887-1953)** whose modern architecture seemed to suit L.A.'s emerging sense of itself as a city of the future.

When curator Jeremy Tessmer decided to mount an exhibition exploring the effects that Bauhaus ideas had on California art, he initially approached it from a genealogical perspective. Of the artists who were directly connected to the Bauhaus – either as teachers or as students – which ones were connected to the artists of California? **EMERSON WOELFFER (1914-2003)** had a direct connection. Woelffer had studied with Lazlo Moholy-Nagy at the Art Institute of Chicago and had gone on to teach at Black Mountain College while Josef and Annie Albers were there. Woelffer would later count Ed Ruscha among his students at Chouinard (now CalArts). **SIDNEY GORDIN (1918-1996)** provides another convenient example. Known as a Constructivist, Gordin came to California in 1958 to teach at U.C. Berkeley. In New York, he had studied briefly with **WERNER DREWES (1899-1985)**, a German immigrant who had studied directly with Kandinsky and Klee at the Bauhaus. **HERBERT BAYER (1900-1985)** was both a student and a professor at the Bauhaus. He relocated to Montecito in 1974, spending his last years in a home of his own design on Middle Road. His *Chromatic Gate* remains one of the mostly widely recognized works of public art in the city.

Unsatisfied with the scope and variety of art works discovered, Tessmer expanded his conception of “influence” to include indirect influence. The question became: where else could one find the ideas most associated with Bauhaus teaching in the cultural production of the Golden State? Suddenly, a rich vein of production began to glimmer and glow.

German Expressionist tendencies in California painting became fair game, inviting the inclusion of both **DAN LUTZ (1906-1978)** as well as **ANDERS ALDRIN (1889-1970)**. Interdisciplinary practice associated with “streamline” aesthetics made the inclusion of furniture by **KEM WEBER (1889-1963)** a virtual necessity, especially because of his relevance to Santa Barbara history. (He both taught at the Santa Barbara School of the Arts and later designed the Christian Science Reading Room on State Street.) An aerospace mural of marvelous geometric complexity was created by **EMIL KOSA, JR. (1903-1968)** who worked as an easel painter, a portraitist, a muralist, and as an art director for Twentieth Century Fox. Other artists associated with the movie business include **OSKAR FISCHINGER (1900-1967)** and **JULES ENGEL (1909-2003)** who were concept/consulting artists for Walt Disney's *FANTASIA* in addition to their other advanced work in animation and abstract art.

For fun and for context, works by gallery artists **ANGELA PERKO** and **KEN BORTOLAZZO** have been included. **RON ROBERTSON's** work will also be featured. Their contributions fit both visually and for other reasons too complicated to report.

Finally, an exhibition that was begun in curiosity is ready to be presented. The story it tells is a bit

complex. What *was* the influence of the Bauhaus on the art of California? The answer is hard to summarize. Modernism had a tough time establishing itself out here, but these Austrian, German, Hungarian, and Ukranian immigrants who brought their ideas and images into a place where they didn't find a ready fit in the local culture persevered. Eventually, geometric abstraction made Richard Diebenkorn an art market superstar. Ed Ruscha built his career on the synthesis of graphic design and conceptual art. In fact, many in the "L.A. School" made their mark on the world either through geometric abstraction or the use of industrial materials in fine art. Their forebears, who brought these revolutionary concepts out here, in turn owed much to that foundational school.

ARTISTS INCLUDED IN THE EXHIBITION: ANDERS ALDRIN (1889-1970) • HERBERT BAYER (1900-1985) • KEN BORTOLAZZO • WERNER DREWES (1899-1985) • JULES ENGEL (1909-2003) • OSKAR FISCHINGER (1900-1967) • SIDNEY GORDIN (1918-1996) • EMIL KOSA, JR. (1903-1968) • PETER KRASNOW (1886-1979) • DAN LUTZ (1906-1978) • ANGELA PERKO • RON ROBERTSON • RUDOLPH SCHINDLER (1887-1953) • ELISE SEEDS (1902-1963) • JUNE WAYNE (1918-2011) • KEM WEBER (1889-1963) • EMERSON WOELFFER (1914-2003)

Come to the opening. Explore, acquire, network, and celebrate!