

HOUSEGUEST

Shadows Fall Down

Monica Majoli Selects from
the Grunwald Center Collection

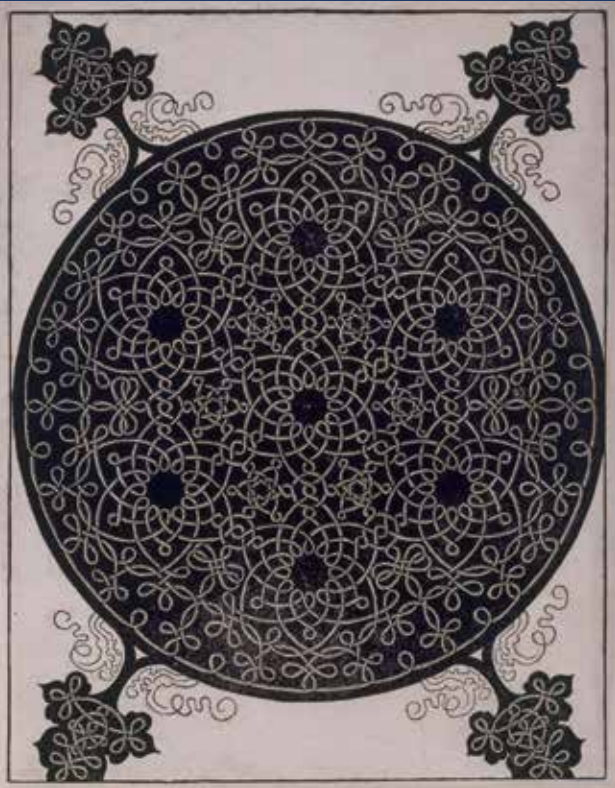
August 21, 2021–January 2, 2022

HOUSEGUEST
Shadows Fall Down
Monica Majoli Selects from
the Grunwald Center Collection

August 21, 2021–January 2, 2022

When the former associate director and senior curator of the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, Allegra Pesenti, invited me to engage with the Houseguest construct, I was most intrigued by the opportunity to initiate an emotive contingency in images from the 1500s to the 2000s. In my preliminary sweep through the collection, Albrecht Dürer’s exquisite and iconic print *Melencolia I* (1514; not in exhibition) and his lucid and emotionally compelling works *The Small Horse* (1505) and *The Sixth Knot* (ca. 1505–7) moved me to address melancholia in its full measure. I found an in-depth resource in the Grunwald Collection that fit a dark sensibility.

The works I selected display scope in tonal value and affective tenor—from Georges Rouault’s tenebrous and elegiac *Dame de haut quartier croît prendre pour le ciel place réservée* (The society lady fancies she has a reserved seat in heaven, 1922) to Kiyoshi Hasegawa’s airy and dreamlike untitled engraving (undated). The breadth—ranging from depression, hopelessness, and mourning to wistfulness, nostalgia, and memory—exists in this selection of prints; the affect conjured is suggestive of shades on a value scale. In recalling my experience handling the Grunwald Center’s vast holdings, I’ve come



Albrecht Dürer. *The Sixth Knot*, ca. 1505–7. Woodcut. Sheet: 10 15⁄16 × 8 9⁄16 in. (27.8 × 21.7 cm). UCLA Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts. Purchase

to realize that *the print as a form* is emblematic of the melancholic condition. The original plate is its lost object, the instigating factor in the melancholic cycle in this case. I believe this explains why I experienced so much in the Grunwald collection as melancholic during the protracted culling process of curating *Shadows Fall Down*.

Melancholy arrives as a sequence of linked images fixed in the mind: it’s immersive, more mood or disposition than distinct emotion. It exists seemingly in a state of internal suspension yet reflects on the bodily, the experiential; it lingers over a life’s accumulated losses or develops before loss materializes. Its contours are of a person, place, or event that we are forced to revive. Built around absence, it’s a placeholder, a yearning for hidden, elusive things. Part of the puzzle of melancholia is its unlocatable beginning or end. It’s the enigma housed within, diffused and ultimately distanced from a specific object or outcome.

Exhibiting mainly prints, not drawings or other works on paper, became a guiding principle in my decision making. The distanced quality of the print is quite unlike drawing’s directness. The print appears as a stand-in for a proliferating lost object. Its plate

is the vehicle for the image yet is never seen directly; it asserts itself as a cast shadow over the resulting thing. Incised within the plate is a reversal, a mirrored image, the negative that results in the positive impression on the paper’s surface. The physicality of a print registers as an echo, a triangulation. Its inevitable replication and the indirect transfer process of its creation present the viewer with a distance, a gap. A printed picture emerges by approximation, ultimately whole only within the artist’s mind. The artist is the first to be shocked by the outcome, as much a stranger to it as anyone after.

The Vault Gallery, with its ovoid plan and cocooning ceiling, provides enclosure, the ideal atmosphere to induce contemplative focus, a familiar stillness specific to creative involvement. The six radical abstract lithographs, subterranean and granular, by Jean Dubuffet (1958–61) installed at the midpoint of the space, at the apse, emphasize the processional quality of viewership in the gallery itself. The works are clustered to make meaning through contingencies, a situational narrative that is associative and read as actual text in places or through images. The body is the exhibition’s unifying principle, nearly always palpable through the artist’s hand, often overtly as a subject.

Scratching, rubbing, incising, pressing—many of the exhibition’s images are haptic and appear hard-won, activating the curious phenomenon

of imagining the physical act of production. The woodblock or copper or zinc plate is a thing to contend with, and in the exhibition the negotiation between artist, materials, and process is foregrounded. The images are as much a recording as they are a visual encounter. In Lorna Simpson’s 1998 diptych *Backdrops circa 1940s*, the cinematic and time-based gives way to a muted halt in silvery screen prints on felt. Removal and the plate itself are emphasized in the visual wiping away of an image from the world in Silke Otto-Knapp’s poignant and austere *Lilac Garden (rehearsal) #D03* (2011).

Contemplation by way of sight is a reoccurring subject throughout the exhibition. In Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot’s *Le petit cavalier sous bois* (The small rider in the woods, 1854), the mass of scribbled gesture evaporates before our eyes. The diminishing rider’s small scale in the woods and the suggestive tangled line become a way to feel or imagine a fleeting memory, something past and seen from afar. In Jasper Johns’s unsettling untitled etching (1998), two overlaid dripping black spots act like eyeholes in a mask or mimic our gaze; the underlying forms are cryptic yet maplike. An inward spiral of absorption through viewership takes the form of a nesting doll in Pablo Picasso’s uncanny *Sculptor and Model Admiring a Sculpted Head* (1933). The artist and his muse attend to the larger-than-life head just as we concentrate on the complex scene of art and fiction, eventually recognizing ourselves. In Charles White’s lithographic diptych *Wanted Poster Series #11* and *Wanted Poster Series #11a* (1970),



Lorna Simpson. *Backdrops circa 1940s*, 1998. Screen print on two felt panels. Overall: 26 3⁄16 × 33 3⁄4 in. (66.5 × 85.7 cm). Each panel: 26 3⁄16 × 16 7⁄8 in. (66.5 × 42.9 cm). UCLA Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts. Purchased with funds provided by Newton and Gloria Werner. © Lorna Simpson. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

the artist doubles a young boy’s image in a positive/negative duality, causing the image to ceaselessly undo itself and rest uncomfortably in a state of extreme ambiguity. Richard Hawkins’s *House of the Mad Professor* (2008) admits inquisitors into the miniature garrisoned interiors of its absent central character by way of the keyhole’s flickering historical imaginary. It invokes abiding transgressions of privacy over centuries.

The exhibition is known in two parts: the wall-based works and the show within a show presented to curious spectators “live” by an attendant. *Sex Box* was designed as a real encounter with the Grunwald Center’s research or study center element. One of the center’s rarest and most beautiful features is the prospect of viewing prints and works on paper unobstructed and in their original form, without the hindrance of framing. I wanted to extend that direct experience into the gallery itself. In my durational parsing through many boxes of prints, I put aside works that could become shows within a show that would be seen only in real time. The box that ultimately filled due to my interest was what I referred to as sexy pictures or images that are a turn-on, evident in imagery, suggestive, or obscure. The twenty-four unframed works that constitute *Sex Box* are intended to interrupt the melancholic trance and ruminative wall-based exhibition. Bodily experience through viewership, particularly in public, prompts feelings of voyeurism. Once again, the act of looking is underscored and made actively tricky, even taxing, in this interactive iteration. Critical to the psychological dynamic at play in the exhibition construct, *Shadows Fall Down* and *Sex Box* together are conceived of as a cohesive interior, rather than exterior, experience.

Monica Majoli

Note “Shadows fall down” is a phrase from “The Mountain,” a poem by Elizabeth Bishop. The text captures the ambiguity of affective states and the concept of lightness and darkness that were an organizing factor in selecting works.

Front cover: Natori Shunsen. *Actor Ichimura Uzaemon XV as Naozamura* (detail), from *Collection of Portraits by Shunsen*, 1923–26. Color woodcut. Sheet: 15 7⁄8 × 10 3⁄4 in. (40.4 × 27.3 cm). UCLA Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts. Helen and Felix Juda Collection

Inside flap: Ed Ruscha. *You Know the Old Story*, 1975 (detail). Lithograph. Sheet: 30 × 22 in. (76.2 × 55.9 cm). UCLA Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts. Gift of Mr. Lloyd E. Rigler and Mr. Lawrence Deutsch. © Ed Ruscha

Back cover: Vija Celmins. *Web Ladder*, 2010 (detail). Mezzotint. Sheet: 16 1⁄2 × 11 3⁄4 in. (41.9 × 29.8 cm). UCLA Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts. Purchased with funds provided by the Helga K. and Walter Oppenheimer Acquisition Fund. © Vija Celmins



Romare Bearden. *Before the First Whistle*, 1973. Lithograph. Sheet: 23 1⁄16 × 18 1⁄16 in. (60.2 × 45.9 cm). UCLA Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts. Purchase. © 2021 Romare Bearden Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Biography
Monica Majoli, born in 1963, is a Los Angeles–based artist whose practice examines the relationship between physicality and consciousness through the documentary sexual image, primarily through painting. Shifts in materiality mark bodies of work that investigate intimacy and power within the larger context of queer culture and history. Majoli received her MFA from UCLA in 1992 and is a professor of art at UC Irvine.

© 2021 by the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, Inc. All rights reserved.

The Hammer has made every reasonable effort to identify, contact, and acknowledge rights holders. If there are errors or omissions, please contact the Hammer at info@hammer.ucla.edu

HAMMER MUSEUM
10899 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90024
310-443-7000 | hammer.ucla.edu