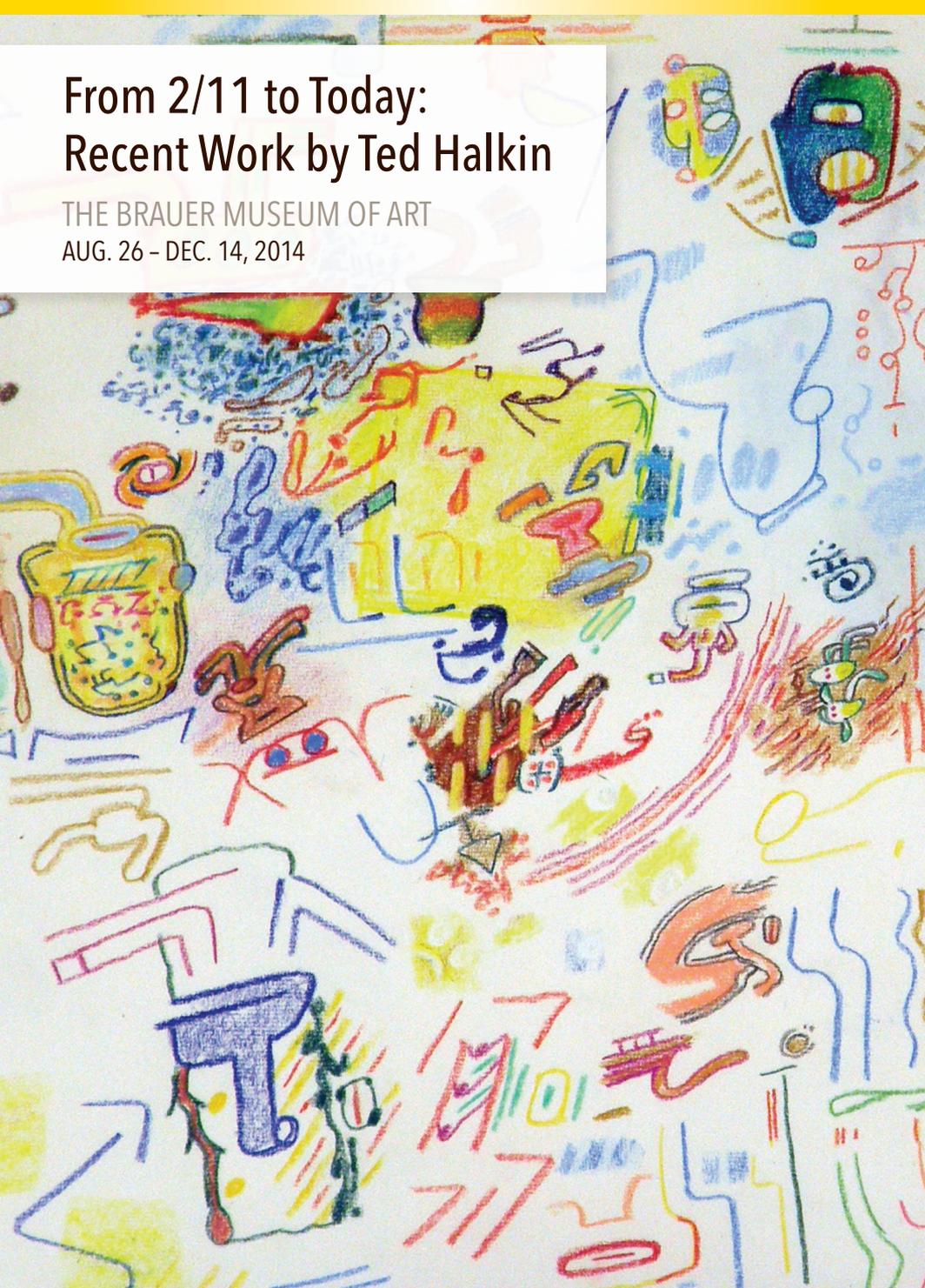


From 2/11 to Today: Recent Work by Ted Halkin

THE BRAUER MUSEUM OF ART
AUG. 26 - DEC. 14, 2014



Shown in detail on the cover:



Ted Halkin
Untitled (2/5/14)
Oil pastel on paper,
19 x 25 inches, Collection of the Artist



Ted Halkin
Untitled (11/2/13)
Mixed media on paper,
30 x 40 inches, Collection of the Artist

From 2/11 to Today is an exhibition of recent creations by the legendary Ted Halkin (b. 1924) that provides an opportunity for viewers to see the protean artist's latest themes and concerns treated in mixed media paintings and works on paper. Halkin stands as one of Chicago's premier artists and teachers, the subject of fond and appreciative recollections from generations of students. The Brauer Museum of Art is delighted to offer a selection of new and recent works that reflect Halkin's ongoing dialogue with art history and the very nature of art itself.

If I may, I would like my essay to be in part a first person account. I am a former student of Halkin's from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and as an appreciative viewer over the years I have seen first hand a stylistic evolution occurring in his work. As an artist in addition, I have felt myself evolve in my sensibilities and understandings related to art and my position along a continuum. In a recent conversation, Halkin explained to me that his educational approach, whether as an Art Institute of Chicago docent or veteran School of the Art Institute professor, is to first of all try to understand the particular human beings you are teaching in order to effectively meet them at their levels of experience or comfort. Growth, evolution, metamorphosis: such themes or concepts are central to Halkin's work and speak to the viewer's experience of it.

Initially in Halkin's painting class, I planned on working on meticulous small-scale paintings of subjects drawn from my imagination. He quickly persuaded me to expand my boundaries by working representationally and expressively, on varied surfaces and with media unfamiliar to me. I continue to see benefit in such a perspective and see this notion manifested in Halkin's own work. Each stylistic decision, each technique possesses its own reward and has substantial and remarkable precedent, as well as capacity for meaning. A thorough familiarity, perhaps mastery, of the diversity of mark making and paint application approaches affords the artist a stunning multitude of options for personal commentary, or for commentary on the world and aforementioned continuum on which the artist finds himself.

Halkin's breadth of mastery was for me effectively demonstrated in his 1999 retrospective exhibition at the Illinois State Museum in Chicago. Most of the time that I studied under Halkin I was unaware of what his own work was like, and so exploring this retrospective was exciting for me in giving me greater insight into the career of a respected former instructor. I found myself fascinated as I saw his early mixed media figurative reliefs and sculptures evoke the work of Leon Golub and Leonard Baskin, medieval sculptural reliefs and carvings from early antiquity. Such pieces then gave way to whimsical, imaginative assemblages and lush observation-based still life

paintings and drawings, with the subjects as much within as upon the surfaces and existing back and forth between illusion and the reality of the artifice of art.

Next in the exhibition was a sampling of lovely landscapes in dusty greens, many representing the artist's garden; these works too transported me in their visual richness but also kept me simultaneously grounded in their acknowledgement of their materiality. The exhibition concluded with transcendent abstractions astounding in their inventiveness and technical means, perhaps pointing to the fruits of a gradual distillation or focus on the language of painting or art making that continues to be developed in his recent efforts, featured here.

Years passed after the retrospective, and I occasionally saw Halkin exhibitions at Printworks and Corbett vs. Dempsey Galleries, both displaying increasingly analytical, geometric pieces that seemed to probe and test concepts related to shape, pattern, and color. Such works loosened in configuration with each exhibition until pictorial surfaces began to become fields or arenas, where shapes found themselves released into greater expanses in which glyphs, grids, and colorful schematics also drifted. Impressed by these paradoxical stream of consciousness summary statements, we at the Brauer Museum purchased a major work on paper for our permanent collection from Halkin's 2007 exhibition at Corbett vs. Dempsey.

The works on paper in this exhibition relate strongly to the Halkin piece in our collection. These paintings/drawings are abstract expressionist in style, with the artist's gestural approach suggesting a state of mind in nonobjective terms. Considering that the historical movement of Abstract Expressionism arose from and connected strongly to Surrealism, we see the glyphs and symbols gliding through Halkin's scumbled fields and feel a vague and persistent recognition, as if the animated marks become hieroglyphics speaking in their configurations and near legibility to their own history. Halkin has reached a point in his art where he is able to wield artistic styles and techniques like implements, with a pictorial surface functioning as a cave wall, a fresh fresco surface, or a modern/postmodern blank sheet that records marks as Halkin, an author and conduit, both orchestrates the picture and allows symbols of his lifetime of experiences to land unfiltered.

Halkin has described his process as a "messy" one, where a measured chaos eventually suggests routes and strategies for greater shape and clarity in the picture. His embrace of chance and trust in its revelation of something greater than consciousness of intent is surrealist in its nature, and the activity in general of subconscious discovery has an aspect of play or gamesmanship that too speaks to a surrealist mindset or appreciation. A balance of chance and intent, accident and structure seems to rhyme nicely with the contrast of transient and

frozen that too seems to lie at the heart of his work.

Imagism as a style in Chicago owes much to Halkin's example, and many of the particular abstract marks populating his pieces succinctly summarize key aspects of the movement or school. Especially lively graphic passages that suggest cartoons impart narrative dimensions to the nonobjective forms. Biomorphic characters resembling those in abstract expressionist paintings by, say, William Baziotas (1912-1963) jostle with colorful linework that resembles sketches Picasso made in planning his 1967 sculpture in Chicago's Daley Plaza. These lines in turn seem to continue to morph independently in a fanciful, playful realm. While the artist has mentioned that his pieces that seem to manifest key imagist stylistic traits were products of the times, of a certain context, they surprisingly seem to operate as powerful distillations of the style but without direct popular culture references, almost classical in their stateliness yet still spirited.

As an artist living through major art historical movements and participating through his own work in the evolution of pictorial expression, Halkin shows that while personal influences and interests motivate the selection of subject matter and accompanying point of view, still a paramount personal contribution is synthesizing the whole of art history with the individual sensibility. That is, influences whether recognized or acknowledged

drive the hand, and to not explore those or allow them to fully relate to that which is depicted limits a full development of the work. The artist reflects to varying degrees based on subjective factors a sum total of references, and Halkin at this stage in his career explores this concept that unfolds something like a journal. The personal is universal because the person is a product of and is shaped lifelong by the universe. His gestures across painted grounds are cosmic events, and the cosmos in this instance happens to be composed of galaxies of marks made by humans trying to comprehend and represent, with such efforts seducing away from earnest metaphysical struggles because the resulting designs are pleasing, rich in associations, truthful.

Halkin's latest paintings hearken back in some ways to his very early works from the 1950s. At the same time, they expand on the works on paper that seem like tableaux of the artist's mind, laid bare for the building blocks of art to have chance encounters, combine and recombine, become things and then fly apart to transport viewers to early and late steps and stages along a grand timeline. The sculptural elements appearing in newer paintings resemble stone fragments, perhaps indicating that the artist's deep familiarity with a field key to his life has enabled him to give even more existence to his metaphorical gestures, to the point where they have become "concrete." Halkin reaches back further and further in time in the fertile fields of

his mind to reach the visual products of early civilizations where designs communicate and speak to urgent messages about both the immediate and transcendent worlds; constructed paper mache passages (the paper mache, incidentally is a type used by taxidermists; Halkin first encountered this material when working at the Field Museum of Natural History) begin to assume specificity and link the primary painting surface with a greater tablet that has been designed upon by countless artists before with whom Halkin communes as he allows his informed subconscious to find and invent. Aztec-like patterned relief elements refer to or remind one of traditions but also interact with the gestural backgrounds that are born of Halkin's delight in the skillful manipulation of pigments, itself a tradition that seems to extend back into prehistory.

While change is a constant for Halkin, what is also constant is his need to transcribe a visual richness that

impresses and claims him. I believe that what we see in these new and recent works are the products of someone who can speak any language, and so then creates a new language that blends all of them until the diversity of sounds becomes music, familiar from note to note, confident and all encompassing in its goals, yet human in its scale. I believe in the work and am moved by it because it tells me a life story.

I am grateful to the artist himself, Associate Curator Gloria Ruff, Rudolf Adamczyk, the Valparaiso University Cultural Arts Committee, the Partners for the Brauer Museum of Art, and the Brauer Museum of Art's Brauer Endowment for making this exhibition possible.

Gregg Hertzlieb
Director/Curator
Brauer Museum of Art
Valparaiso University

Ted Halkin
Untitled (11/8/2013)
Acrylic and oil pastel on wood,
30 x 40 inches, Collection of the Artist



TED HALKIN BIOGRAPHY

Courtesy of Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago, Illinois

Chicago native Theodore Halkin (b. 1924) received his BFA from the School of the Art Institute in 1949, and an MS from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale in 1952. His early paintings and reliefs, inspired by cave paintings he saw while traveling in Europe, were often exhibited with the group of Chicago artists who were nicknamed the "Monster Roster" because of their fascination with morbid or mythological imagery.

Since the 1960s, as part of the initial group referred to as the Imagists, Halkin has pursued his own ideas wherever they've taken him, vehemently avoiding stagnation, hungry for new experiences. He has worked in many different ways, with different means. Painting, drawing, sculpting; figurative, abstract; flat, relief, 3-D; narrative, non-objective, observational.

Throughout his career Halkin has been the subject of multiple solo exhibitions at Jan Cicero Gallery, Chicago; Phyllis Kind Gallery, Chicago; and Allan Frumkin Gallery, New York. His work has been included in group shows at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Museum of Modern art, and the Davenport Museum of Art, Iowa. He taught at Purdue University, Northwestern University, Elmhurst College, and for almost forty years at the School of the Art Institute.



Ted Halkin
Untitled (12/25/2011)
Acrylic and paper mache on wood,
30 x 40 inches, Collection of the Artist



Ted Halkin
Untitled (5/12/14)
Colored pencil on paper,
22 x 30 inches, Collection of the Artist



Ted Halkin
Untitled (6/6/14)
Mixed media on paper
23 x 35½ inches, Collection of the Artist



Ted Halkin
Untitled (Sept. 4, 2011)
Acrylic on wood, 30 x 40 inches,
Collection of the Artist



Ted Halkin
Untitled, undated
Acrylic on wood,
30 x 40 inches, Collection of the Artist

BRAUER MUSEUM OF ART

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MUSEUM HOURS:

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Wednesday: 10 a.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Saturday, Sunday: noon – 5 p.m.
Closed Monday

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