

MEDIA CONTACT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 31, 2014

An Opening of the Field: Jess, Robert Duncan, and Their Circle

September 14, 2014 – January 11, 2015



Jess, *The Enamored Mage: Translation #6*, 1965. Oil on canvas over wood, 24 ½ x 30 in. Collection of The M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

Pasadena, CA – The Pasadena Museum of California Art (PMCA) is proud to present *An Opening of the Field: Jess, Robert Duncan, and Their Circle*, the first exhibition to focus on the artistic production and relationship between the artist Jess, his partner Robert Duncan, and their remarkable circle of friends. The exhibition draws its name, “An Opening of the Field,” from the title from one of Duncan’s key books and features approximately 130 artworks—many of which have never before been shown in public—as well as numerous documents, books, and intimate ephemera.

Jess Collins, known simply as Jess, and his partner, the poet Robert Duncan, were one of the most fascinating artistic couples of the 20th century. Jess, a progenitor of postmodernism, retrieved images from a culture overflowing with them. Trained at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute), he quickly shifted from abstraction into a unique style of painting that reflected his interests in literature and mythology. In his collages—or, as he called them, “paste-ups”—he created mind-bending and fantastic juxtapositions, employing images lifted from sources ranging from *Dick Tracy* to Albrecht Dürer. Jess filtered these far-flung references through a self-described Romantic sensibility, one that valued the transformative power of the imagination above all else.

Known as one of the most erudite poets of his time, Robert Duncan appreciated all forms of poetic imagination. He was a voracious reader of everything from Paracelsus to L. Frank Baum, and published over forty volumes. His method, inspired by Ezra Pound, combines motifs and themes from diverse sources. Although not widely known, Duncan’s crayon drawings and set designs provide a fascinating backdrop to his writing. Recalling works by Picasso, Matisse, and Cocteau, Duncan’s colorful abstract compositions confirm his belief in the protean nature of form.

Soon after meeting in San Francisco in the early 1950’s, the two began both a romantic and professional partnership that lasted until Duncan’s death. The domesticity that came with their relationship helped focus their creative process and they



Left:
Robert Duncan, *Untitled*, 1947. Wax crayon on paper, 29 x 23 in. The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York.

Right:
George Herms, *The Zodiac Behind Glass: Box #5 Leo*, 1965. Mixed media, 25 x 25 x 4 in. Collection of Margaret Nielsen, Las Vegas, NV.

ultimately merged their personal and artistic lives by exploring their mutual interest in cultural mythologies, transformative narrative, and the appropriation of images. Jess's collages and drawings were often published to accompany Duncan's poems and essays. Duncan's writings and ideas in turn made their way into Jess's dense and allusive works. Visionaries in their own right, the couple heavily influenced an entire generation of poets and painters who would gather at their San Francisco home, which served as a salon and gallery space for their artist friends.

This exhibition looks at Jess and Duncan's influence and unique position as precursors of Postmodernism. Featuring a rich cross-section of Jess's paintings and collages, Duncan's colorful abstract drawings, the exhibition includes approximately 85 works by members of their coterie, including R. B. Kitaj, Edward Corbett, Wallace Berman, Lawrence Jordan, and George Herms, as well as the poets Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser, and Michael McClure. The exhibition will also include a group of posters Jess made for the Berkeley Cinema Guild run in the late 1950's and early 1960's by the young Pauline Kael.

Co-curated by Michael Duncan and Christopher Wagstaff for Sacramento's Crocker Art Museum, the exhibition is accompanied by a 250-page catalogue, which includes essays by the two curators, as well as James Maynard, associate curator of the Poetry Collection at the University of Buffalo, and William Breazeale, Ph.D., coordinating curator for the exhibition and curator at the Crocker Art Museum. The International Associations of Art Critics-United States (AICA-US) honored *An Opening of the Field: Jess, Robert Duncan, and Their Circle* with an award in Excellence in Art Criticism and Curatorial Achievement for Best Thematic Show Nationally.

The exhibition comes to Pasadena Museum of California Art after being at the Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento and the Grey Art Gallery at New York University and will travel to the Katzen Arts Center at American University after being on view at the PMCA.

Programs

OPENING RECEPTION*

Saturday, September 13, 2014 | 7–9pm
\$5 admission | Free for PMCA members

*Complimentary parking is available in our Kosmic Krylon Garage. For our reception only, additional parking is available in the adjacent lot at Union Street and Oakland Avenue (entrance on Oakland).

FAMILY DAY

Saturday, September 27, 2014 | 2–5pm

Participate in fun art projects for the whole family based on our current exhibitions. All ages welcome!

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ARTNIGHT PASADENA

Friday, October 10, 2014 | 6–10pm

Enjoy free admission, extended hours, and complimentary shuttle transportation at the PMCA and other cultural destinations around Pasadena.

IN DIALOGUE | WE HAVE NO ART**

Saturday, October 11, 2014 | 3pm

Writer Alissa Walker, graphic designers Juliette Bellocq and Louise Sandhaus, and former student Jan Steward consider Corita Kent's influence and legacy within the Los Angeles design community.

**A series of events leading up to the exhibition *Someday is Now: The Art of Corita Kent*—a full-scale survey of work by the innovative artist, activist, and teacher—opening in June 2015

IN DIALOGUE

Sunday, October 26, 2014 | 1pm

Moderated by curator Michael Duncan, this panel will discuss Jess and Robert Duncan's circle in relation to the development of the art and literature scenes of the 1950s and 60s, as well as touching on the group's use of collage as a formative concept in their writings and art works. Panelists include artist Richard Kraft, writer and curator Kristine McKenna, and publisher and designer Lisa Pearson.

KOSMIC KRYLON CARNIVAL

Saturday, November 8, 2014 | 7–10pm

Join us for a carnival-themed benefit event celebrating the 10th anniversary of our Kosmic Krylon Garage, which features spray-paint murals by street artist Kenny Scharf. Don't miss the opportunity to see him paint his famous KARBOMBZ!

More info: PMCA.EVENTBRITE.COM

INSIGHT TALK

Saturday, November 15, 2014 | 3pm

Michael Duncan, co-curator of *An Opening of the Field: Jess, Robert Duncan, and Their Circle*, leads an exhibition walkthrough, providing context and stories about the complex interactions of these Bay Area artists and poets of the 1950s and 60s.

MLK DAY CELEBRATION | WE HAVE NO ART**

Saturday, January 17, 2015 | 10am–2pm

In the spirit of 1960s "Mary's Days," All Saints Episcopal Church teams up with the PMCA and Day One to host a festive banner-making project focused on public/world health, culminating with a procession to the Museum, City Hall, and Day One, before returning to enjoy food trucks in the All Saints courtyard.

**A series of events leading up to the exhibition *Someday is Now: The Art of Corita Kent*—a full-scale survey of work by the innovative artist, activist, and teacher—opening in June 2015

PMCA 123

- 1) Free the first Friday of every month (12–5pm)
- 2) Docent tour the second Saturday of every month (2pm, starting in October)
- 3) Free the third Thursday of every month (5–8pm)

All programs are free with admission and free for PMCA members unless otherwise noted.

Please visit pmcaonline.org/calendar for additional programs and events.

Museum Information

MISSION

The mission of the Pasadena Museum of California Art (PMCA) is to present the breadth of California art and design through

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exhibitions that explore the cultural dynamics and influences that are unique to California.

HOURS

Open Wednesday–Sunday, 12–5pm; third Thursday of every month, 5–8pm; closed Mondays, Tuesdays, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s Day.

ADMISSION

\$7 for adults, \$5 for seniors and students; free for PMCA members and children under 12; free the first Friday of every month (12–5pm); free the third Thursday of every month (5–8pm). Access for people with disabilities is provided.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

The museum is located at 490 East Union Street. From the 210 Freeway, take the Lake Avenue exit. Go south and take a right on Union Street. From the 110 Freeway/Downtown Los Angeles, follow the freeway until its end, then take Arroyo Parkway and turn right at Colorado, then left at Oakland to get to Union Street. Parking is available at the Museum.

DOCENT TOURS AND GROUP RATES

The museum offers docent tours on the second Saturday of each month (2pm; free with admission). Docent tours are also available Wednesday–Friday, 12–5pm, to private groups for a fee of \$75. A non-refundable deposit of \$40 is due two weeks prior to the scheduled date. Self-guided tours for K–12 students are offered for free. We regret that we are unable to accommodate docent tours for groups larger than 35 people. Before requesting a tour, please check the exhibition calendar to see which exhibitions will be available during your visit.

A discounted group rate of \$3 per person is available for groups of 20 or more (K–12 student groups are free). Please call to notify us at least one week in advance for these special admission rates.

For any questions or to make reservations for a tour or group rate, please call our Bookstore and Membership Associate, Susan Wang, at 626.568.3665 x14 or email swang@pmcaonline.org.

For more information, please call 626.568.3665 or visit pmcaonline.org.