

# WHITNEY

## Press Release

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## THE WHITNEY TO PRESENT A MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE OF THE ART OF RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER

October 25, 2012—February 3, 2013



*Description of Table*, 1964. Melamine laminate on plywood, 26 1/8 x 31 7/8 x 31 7/8 in. (66.4 x 81 x 81 cm).  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc. 66.48© Richard Artschwager  
Photo credit: © 2000 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph by Steven Sloman

*“Art = a step into the unknown.” -- Richard Artschwager*

**NEW YORK, August 28, 2012** – *Richard Artschwager!*, the most comprehensive retrospective to date of the artist’s work, opens on October 25 at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Organized by the Whitney in association with the Yale University Art Gallery, and curated by Jennifer Gross, Seymour H. Knox, Jr. Curator, Modern and Contemporary Art, Yale University Art Gallery, the show will be

installed in the Emily Fisher Landau Galleries on the Whitney's fourth floor through February 3, 2013; it will travel next summer to the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, June 16–September 2, 2013.

Now 88, Richard Artschwager (b. 1923) has remained steadily at the forefront of contemporary art for fifty years. He began making art in the 1950s, had his first one-person exhibition at the age of 42 at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York in 1965, and made his first appearance in a Whitney Annual in 1966. Associated with Pop, Minimalism, and Conceptual art, he has never fit neatly into any of these categories. His work has consistently explored questions regarding his own visual and physical engagement with the world; his objects straddle the line between illusion and reality. As curator Jennifer Gross notes in her catalogue essay, “Artschwager’s presence in the art world blurred all the set categories. His pictures and objects sobered up Pop, lightened up Minimalism, and made Conceptual art something other than just a thinking man’s game. How could someone remain so methodically committed to the formal values of sculpture and painting ... yet also keep his insouciant finger so firmly on the pulse of an art culture that was being thoroughly upended by media culture?”

The Whitney’s Alice Pratt Brown Director Adam D. Weinberg commented, “Richard is unquestionably one of the masters of contemporary American art. He has not had a major retrospective since the Whitney’s survey exhibition in 1988, and we think it’s high time for another. Richard’s work is highly individual, idiosyncratic, and unsettling in its resistance to categorization. One of his central themes is the unfamiliarity of the familiar—tables, chairs, windows and punctuation marks among them, including the exclamation point. The exclamation point is a complex symbol—humorous, sensuous, detached in Richard’s work from a dramatic context, and therefore dramatically, existentially, on its own. It’s part of the exhibition’s title for a number of reasons, not least of which is our enthusiasm in presenting the show.”

Artschwager’s work reveals the artist’s prescience in his career-long commitment to exploring the profound effect photography and technology have had in transforming our engagement with the world. His work has responded to and challenged how these media – and our experience of things as images rather than as things in themselves – have shifted human experience from being rooted in primary physical experience to a knowledge mediated by secondary sources such as newspapers, television, and the Internet.

Artschwager has long made use of commercial and industrial materials in his work. Having created furniture out of wood throughout much of the 1950s, he began to incorporate Formica into his art, calling it “the great ugly material, the horror of the age, which I came to like suddenly...it looked as if wood had passed through it, as if the thing only half existed...But it’s a picture of something at the same time, it’s an object.” Similarly, he began in 1962 to paint on Celotex fiberboard, an inexpensive construction material with a rough surface that gives his painted works the look of something distantly recalled.

As Jennifer Gross notes, “The works presented here both defy and affirm our aesthetic expectations, occupying the familiar spaces of sculpture and rehearsing painting’s traditional genres. Yet they hover just out of reach of our physical and visual anticipation of what they should be or reveal to us. Artschwager stated early in his career that he wanted to make ‘useless objects’ – art that would halt our absentminded engagement with the world around us and insist upon visual and physical encounters in real time and a shared space. The works presented in this exhibition attest to the originality and persistence of his vision.”

### **“Richard Artschwager *blps* the High Line and the Whitney”**

**Presented by High Line Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art**

October 25, 2012 – February 3, 2013

This fall, the Whitney Museum of American Art is partnering with High Line Art, presented by Friends of the High Line, to mount a project of *blps* by artist Richard Artschwager in conjunction with the Whitney’s Artschwager retrospective (October 25, 2012 – February 3, 2013).

Artschwager first created his *blps* in the late 1960s. He placed public interventions consisting of lozenge-shaped marks in various locations – first at UC Davis in California, then in Europe and throughout New York City, including on subways, building facades, and galleries, in order to inspire focused looking, and to draw attention to architecture, structures, and surfaces that usually go unnoticed. Artschwager’s *blps* have transformed art spaces and city streets for decades, creating an opportunity for the “useless looking” the artist has aspired to throughout his career.

As part of the upcoming retrospective at the Whitney, exhibition curator Jennifer Gross, in collaboration with High Line Art, has organized a project working with the artist that will revisit this aspect of his practice. Artschwager is installing *blps* along and on the horizon of the High Line, near the future home of the Whitney Museum, as well as on the Whitney's Breuer building uptown on Madison Avenue at 75<sup>th</sup> Street. There, part of the exhibition reviews the history of the *blp*, including Artschwager's *100 Locations*, an installation of one hundred *blps* that were placed around the Whitney Museum at the time of Artschwager's appearance in the 1968 Whitney Annual Exhibition.

This project/collaboration is made possible by High Line Art, presented by Friends of the High Line, and Cecilia Alemani, the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Curator & Director of High Line Art.

## **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Richard Artschwager was born in 1923 in Washington, D.C., to a German father (an agricultural scientist with a government job and an interest in photography) and a Russian mother (an amateur painter). The family moved to Las Cruces, New Mexico, while Artschwager was still a boy, in part due to his father's poor health. Artschwager entered Cornell University in 1941, where he studied biology, chemistry, and mathematics. After being drafted into World War II military service in 1944 (he was superficially wounded in the Battle of the Bulge), he returned to the U.S. in 1947 and completed his degree in physics the following year. Moving to New York upon graduation, he pursued various trades, including working as a baby photographer, and studied with the modernist painter Amédée Ozenfant. During the 1950s Artschwager became a carpenter, designing and making furniture in New York, but he soon turned again to art, initially painting abstract pictures derived from his memories of the New Mexican desert landscape of his boyhood, while continuing to produce commissioned furniture designs.

Artschwager became increasingly interested in combining wood and Formica in his art and by the early 1960s he was using these materials to create works that hovered between painting and sculpture and frequently took furniture as a point of departure. He has since worked with a vocabulary of domestic forms in an attempt to articulate space and our perception of it.

In addition to having his first solo show at Castelli in 1965 and appearing in the *Primary Structures* show at the Jewish Museum in 1966, he began appearing in Whitney Annuals in 1966 and was shown in the 1968, 1970, and 1972 Annuals and the 1983 and 1987 Biennials. In 1988, the Whitney organized a mid-career retrospective of his work, which toured to numerous national and international venues, and in 2002 he was the subject of a solo show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami. His work has also been shown in gallery shows throughout the world and in a number of Whitney exhibitions, including *The American Century: Art and Culture 1950-2000* and most recently in *Legacy: The Emily Fisher Landau Collection*.

## **ABOUT THE CATALOGUE**

The exhibition is accompanied by a scholarly monograph, co-published by the Yale University Art Gallery and the Whitney Museum, and distributed by Yale University Press. The catalogue includes essays by Gross; Cathleen Chaffee, the Horace W. Goldsmith Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Gallery; Adam D. Weinberg; and Ingrid Schaffner, Senior Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, and consulting curator for the project. The essays illuminate previously unaddressed aspects of Artschwager's oeuvre, including his response to life in an age of mechanical reproduction, the positioning of his work in relation to mainstream art practice in the late twentieth century, and the relationship of his more recent work to Post-Impressionism. The catalogue presents a comprehensive survey of the artist's work as well as a checklist of the works included in the exhibition.

## **Exhibition Support**

This exhibition was organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in association with the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

Significant support for the Whitney's presentation is provided by the National Committee of the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Broad Art Foundation, The Andrew J. and Christine C. Hall Foundation, Allison and Warren Kanders, Norman and Melissa Selby, Alice and Tom Tisch, Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Augur, Diane and Adam E. Max, Francis H. Williams, and Ruth and William S. Ehrlich.

## About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the world's leading museum of twentieth-century and contemporary art of the United States. Focusing particularly on works by living artists, the Whitney is celebrated for presenting important exhibitions and for its renowned collection, which comprises over 19,000 works by more than 2,900 artists. With a history of exhibiting the most promising and influential artists and provoking intense debate, the Whitney Biennial, the Museum's signature exhibition, has become the most important survey of the state of contemporary art in the United States. In addition to its landmark exhibitions, the Museum is known internationally for events and educational programs of exceptional significance and as a center for research, scholarship, and conservation.

Founded by sculptor and arts patron Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1930, the Whitney was first housed on West 8th Street in Greenwich Village. The Museum relocated in 1954 to West 54th Street and, in 1966, inaugurated its present home, designed by Marcel Breuer, at 945 Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side. While its vibrant program of exhibitions and events continues uptown, the Whitney is moving forward with a new building project, designed by Renzo Piano, in downtown Manhattan. Located at the corner of Gansevoort and Washington Streets in the Meatpacking District, at the southern entrance to the High Line, the new building, which has generated immense momentum and support, will enable the Whitney to vastly increase the size and scope of its exhibition and programming space. Ground was broken on the new building in May 2011, and it is projected to open to the public in 2015.

## Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

<b>Sharon Hayes</b>	Through September 9, 2012
<b>Signs &amp; Symbols</b>	Through October 28, 2012
<b>Oskar Fischinger</b>	Through October 28, 2012
<b>Yayoi Kusama</b>	Through September 30, 2012
<b>...as apple pie</b>	Through early 2013
<b>Wade Guyton</b>	October 4, 2012-January 13, 2013
<b>Richard Artschwager!</b>	October 25, 2012-February 3, 2013
<b>Blues for Smoke</b>	February-April 2013
<b>Jay DeFeo: A Retrospective</b>	February 28-June 2, 2013

*The Whitney Museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. General admission: \$18. Full-time students and visitors ages 19–25 and 62 & over: \$14. Visitors 18 & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 6–9 p.m. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit [whitney.org](http://whitney.org).*