

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
November 1988

THE DRAWINGS OF RICHARD DIEBENKORN

November 17, 1988 - January 10, 1989

The first comprehensive overview of the drawings of Richard Diebenkorn, offering a rich and intimate view of forty years of his art, opens at The Museum of Modern Art on November 17, 1988. Organized by John Elderfield, director, Department of Drawings, THE DRAWINGS OF RICHARD DIEBENKORN reveals the importance of drawing to Diebenkorn's achievement as an artist.

On view through January 10, 1989, the exhibition is supported in part by grants from The Bohen Foundation and the New York State Council on the Arts.

The retrospective includes approximately 180 works, including drawings in the traditional mediums of ink, pencil, and charcoal, as well as more complex and colored works that are as fully developed as any of the artist's paintings. Dating from 1948 to the present, the drawings are organized in three groups: the early abstract period of 1948-55; the representational period of 1956-67; and the later abstract, Ocean Park period of 1967 to the present. Unlike Diebenkorn's paintings, his drawings--especially the pre-Ocean Park works--are not well known. Over a third of the works to be shown have never before been publicly exhibited.

Mr. Elderfield writes in the exhibition catalogue, "...drawing is what sustains Diebenkorn's subjects in the process of painting....The works on paper are generally less aloof than the paintings, speaking to us with greater intimacy about the artist's emotive concerns. They confide in us more."

Richard Diebenkorn came to artistic maturity in the late forties. He first attracted notice for the highly personal form of Abstract Expressionism

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that he developed in the early fifties while working in the San Francisco Bay Area and in New Mexico. These works--including numerous small, spontaneous ink drawings and some larger, freely painted gouaches and oils on paper--often include subjects abstracted from the landscape, but some allude to animal motifs, heraldry, and cartoons.

By 1956 Diebenkorn's search for a new direction in his work had led him to representation, and over the next decade he gained increasing acclaim, along with Elmer Bischoff and David Park, as one of the leaders of Bay Area figurative painting. During the sixties, he produced a broad range of extremely sophisticated, complex works on paper. Figure subjects dominate, but there are notable groups of still lifes and architectural and landscape subjects. This period reached its climax in an important series of charcoal figure drawings of 1966-67.

In 1966 Diebenkorn moved to Santa Monica in southern California and, a year later, began the Ocean Park series of abstract paintings that have established him among the finest contemporary artists. The earliest Ocean Park drawings are usually spare and schematic. By the mid-seventies, the work becomes more complex and colorful and as fully realized as the paintings. In the late seventies, the drawings increase in sophistication and variety. In 1980-81, the iconic clubs and spades series appears. The works of 1980 that follow seem tougher and bolder than the traceried works of the previous decade. In the spring of 1988, Diebenkorn moved to the Northern California town of Healdsburg, where he has begun a new series of works, examples of which are exhibited here for the first time.

Despite the seemingly radical shifts in Diebenkorn's art, Mr. Elderfield notes, all of the artist's work depends on the relationship between abstraction and representation, and, more basically, of imagination and reality. His early

abstract work comes close at times to pure automatism, particularly in some of the spontaneous ink drawings. These seem purely invented, but actually condense memories of the external world. Conversely, in his figurative work, the artist's absorption in his subject matter is inseparable from his absorption in his formal means. Finally, in returning to abstraction, Diebenkorn does not abandon reference to the external world.

In conjunction with the exhibition, John Elderfield will deliver a lecture, Pentimenti: The Art of Richard Diebenkorn, on Thursday, December 1, at 8:30 p.m. in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1. Tickets are \$8, members \$7, students \$5, and are available at the lobby information desk or by sending payment with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Department of Education, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019.

The exhibition has been organized in cooperation with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, where it will next be shown (March 9 - May 7, 1989). Thereafter it will travel to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (June 22 - August 27, 1989) and The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. (September 30 - December 3, 1989)

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