Barriers & Walls

“There are things that don’t have a wall,” Robert Frost wrote, and that flows like a river to the wall of homes and ghettos to the giant concrete and brick walls of industrial complexes and oil refineries. “There are walls that are visible and those that are invisible, and those that are real and those that are made by man,” as Ursula Le Guin observed, “they are never the ones you find in your way. The worst walls are the ones you build yourself.” These invisible walls are the most vulnerable to artistic transformation.

Connection & Change

“There is no art per se, only mutual transformations of works of art and observers,” revolutionary German museum director Alexander Dorner declared in 1947. This section showcases examples of artistic transformation—experiences that take place in the mind of the viewer as well as that of the artist, with the work of art serving as catalyst.

Into the Light

In The Call of the Wild Jack London wrote: “There is an ecstasy that marks the summit of life, and beyond which life cannot rise. And such is the paradox of living, this ecstasy comes when one is most alive, and it comes as a complete forgetfulness that one is alive. This ecstasy, this forgetfulness of living, comes to the artist, caught up and out of himself in a sheet of flame.” This section comprises works that exemplify the ecstasy of creation, which can include the experiencing as well as the making of art.

Sylvia Fein: Crucial Eye, 2011; tempera on panel; 20 × 24 in.; Purchase made possible through gifts from Andrew Teufel and Judith DeVito, with additional funds provided by Glenn and April Bucksbaum. © Sylvia Fein.
René Magritte: Duo, 1928; India ink on paper; 19 ¼ × 23 ¼ in.; museum purchase.
Jay DeFeo: Origin, 1956; oil on canvas; 92 × 79 3/4 in.; gift of Mr. and Mrs. John S. Hilson.
John Baldessari: A Dab a Day Keeps the Gray Away, 1961; acrylic on canvas; 12 × 12 in.; museum purchase.
The University of California, Berkeley, began collecting art shortly after its founding in 1868, and several of the works donated to the university on this occasion form the historic heart of BAMPFA’s collection, which opened on campus in 1881 and grew in size as the interests of individual viewers: Bible Stories; Nature; Human Nature; Space, Time, Energy; and Black, White, Gray.

Nature

Arguably born on the Bay Area, the local branch of humanism and nature in strong. As beauty unfolds, cultures present nature as inspiration and as a source of spiritual connection, as well as for reflection on the functions of art. The BAMPFA collection contains no fewer than five paintings of events in the Bible. Most have been acquired as gifts from generous donors, including several notable works by Pieter de Grebber after his trip to Japan, including the result of a workshop led by the artist in 1990. The exhibition includes images from the collection, and other works can stimulate and mobilize our bodies and minds. The works are presented in eight thematic groupings, focusing on art that activates the senses to stimulate the sixth sense, or “interior worlds of individual viewers.”

▮ Bible Stories

The collection presents works from a range of time periods in an order corresponding with biblical narratives. Different versions of similar subjects provide occasion for lessons in looking, and the emphasis is often on nature in a “natural” state. Instead the emphasis is often on nature as inspiration and as a source of energy, health, and spiritual connection. Rarely, however, do artists present nature as inspiration and as a source of spiritual connection, as well as for reflection on the functions of art. The BAMPFA collection contains no fewer than five paintings of events in the Bible. Most have been acquired as gifts from generous donors, including several notable works by Pieter de Grebber after his trip to Japan, including the result of a workshop led by the artist in 1990. The exhibition includes images from the collection, and other works can stimulate and mobilize our bodies and minds. The works are presented in eight thematic groupings, focusing on art that activates the senses to stimulate the sixth sense, or “interior worlds of individual viewers.”

▮ Nature

▮ Human Nature

▮ Space, Time, Energy

▮ Black, White, Gray

Bible Stories

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