

# Jasper Johns and Jay DeFeo: Icons of an American Moment



Robert Rauschenberg, *Jasper-Studio N.Y.C.*, 1958; Collection SFMOMA; © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation/  
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A rare chance to consider and compare the careers of two iconic American artists arrives at SFMOMA this fall with the exhibitions *Jasper Johns: Seeing with the Mind's Eye* (p. 4) and *Jay DeFeo: A Retrospective* (p. 5). San Francisco artist DeFeo (1929–1989) and New York-based Johns (b. 1930) both came of age at a time when young painters were looking for ways forward from the abstract expressionist mode that dominated the art of the 1950s. Both were featured in the landmark 1959 exhibition *Sixteen Americans* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, which also showcased work by Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, and DeFeo's husband Wally Hedrick, among others. We asked Gary Garrels, Elise S. Haas Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA and the curator of *Jasper Johns*, and Curator of Photography Corey Keller, who organized the San Francisco presentation of the DeFeo retrospective, to talk about how the artists' careers and contexts both converged and diverged.

**Corey Keller:** Neither DeFeo nor Hedrick went to the opening of *Sixteen Americans*. This has been mythologized as some kind of political refusal of the New York art world, but in fact they just didn't have the money to go. DeFeo later very much regretted not having been there; she felt like she had missed her debutante ball. I'm not sure she realized the impact it would have on her career; her relationship to the New York art world was very different than Johns's.

**Gary Garrels:** What I think is interesting is the commonality between these two. Johns always emphasized that he was making work for himself, not for the art world. He was making art for a very few people he was close to, like Robert Rauschenberg or John Cage, who were interested in a common set of issues and ideas. For me, that's actually very similar to DeFeo and Hedrick and Bruce Conner and the other Bay Area artists.

**CK:** The small community you describe is so crucial. In San Francisco, there were the artists, poets, musicians, but also gathering spaces like the Dilexi Gallery or even DeFeo and Hedrick's Fillmore Street apartment. These physical locales became centers for discussion and artistic exchange.

**GG:** Both of these artists had an incredible impact on their respective communities.

**CK:** DeFeo's activities as a teacher were hugely important. There wasn't an art school in San Francisco she didn't teach in. She extended that notion of the San Francisco art community beyond the Beat Generation, and helped make San Francisco the kind of place it is today.

**GG:** Johns had a profound, immediate influence on other artists at the time. Artists like Frank Stella, who cites Johns as a key influence, or Andy Warhol.

**CK:** In thinking about these two, the issue of gender is also critical. The way DeFeo was photographed with her works, including the photographs that Wallace Berman took of her nude with *The Rose*, affected her reception as a woman artist, and pigeonholed her to some extent. The tenor of the critical discussion of her work is very different from what happened with Johns.

**GG:** But I would say both artists are iconic of their respective places, and they are defining figures of that moment. They were both seminal in laying out departure points from Abstract Expressionism. What happened on the West Coast took a very different course than what happened on the East Coast, but for both communities, the essential question was how to move on. It wasn't a rejection or refutation of Abstract Expressionism; it was an absorption and then a moving forward, instead of a recapitulation.



Jay DeFeo working on *The Rose*, 1960; © 2012 Burt Glinn/  
Magnum Photo

## San Francisco Stories

### Jay DeFeo: The Rose

From 1958 to 1966, DeFeo worked almost exclusively on this monumental painting, adding and chiseling away heavy layers of paint with a palette knife or trowel. When the artist was evicted from her Fillmore Street studio in 1965, *The Rose*—which by this time weighed close to a ton—had to be removed by forklift through a dismantled window. Following its debut at the Pasadena Art Museum and at SFMOMA in 1969, *The Rose* was installed in a conference room at the San Francisco Art Institute. There it languished, first covered in protective plaster and later hidden behind a wall, until it was finally restored in 1995. *The Rose* is now in the collection of the Whitney Museum; *Jay DeFeo: A Retrospective* marks its first appearance on the West Coast in 15 years.



Jay DeFeo, *The Rose*, 1958–66; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of The Jay DeFeo Trust, Berkeley, CA, and purchase with funds from the Contemporary Painting and Sculpture Committee and the Judith Rothschild Foundation 95.170; © 2012 The Jay DeFeo Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; photo: Ben Blackwell



Jasper Johns, *Souvenir*, 1964; Collection of the artist, extended loan to SFMOMA; © Jasper Johns/Licensed by VAGA, New York

### Jasper Johns: Souvenir

Made in 1964, this work is rooted in experiences Johns had on his first trip to San Francisco in the spring of that year. During a performance of compositions by his friend John Cage, Johns noticed a small circle of light appearing and disappearing, moving over the ceiling and walls in the darkened auditorium. He eventually saw that the light was reflected by a woman's compact mirror. This observation became the starting point for *Souvenir*, a painting to which Johns attached a flashlight, a mirror, and a plate with the artist's image on it. When *Souvenir* was later included in an exhibition at SFMOMA, Johns placed the painting on long-term loan to the museum. It is featured alongside a related work, *Souvenir 2*, in *Seeing with the Mind's Eye*.

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**On the front cover:** Jasper Johns, *0 through 9*, 1960; Collection of Helen and Charles Schwab, fractional gift to SFMOMA; © Jasper Johns/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

**Errata:** In our September/October issue, the title of the artwork by Naoya Hatakeyama reproduced on the cover was incorrect: the title is *Lime Hills #22916*. In the same issue, a reproduction of Henri Matisse's *La fille aux yeux verts* was inadvertently cropped; an uncropped image of the painting is available at [sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/216](http://sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/216). We regret the errors.

[sfmoma.org/socialmedia](http://sfmoma.org/socialmedia)



What's it like to work with Snøhetta, the architects of the SFMOMA expansion?

Find out on page 18. And watch for new details of the expansion design in our next issue and in SFMOMA e.news in mid-November. Not yet an e.news subscriber? Don't miss out! Sign up today at [sfmoma.org/myaccount](http://sfmoma.org/myaccount).

# Jasper Johns: Seeing with the Mind's Eye

November 3 through February 3

## Related Programs

### LECTURE

#### John Yau on Jasper Johns

Thursday, November 15, 7 p.m. (p. 12)

### CURATOR TALK

#### One on One: Jasper Johns

Julie Charles, associate curator of education, SFMOMA

Thursday, November 29, 6:30 p.m.  
(p. 12)

### SPECIAL SATURDAY FOR TEACHERS

#### Jasper Johns: Seeing with the Mind's Eye

Saturday, December 1, 10–11 a.m.  
(p. 14)

### KORET CENTER SCREENINGS

#### Jasper Johns: Ideas in Paint

Rick Tejada-Flores, 1989, 56 min.

Daily (except Wednesdays and Sundays), 2:30 p.m. (p. 12)

### FREE GALLERY TOURS

#### Jasper Johns

Beginning November 12  
Daily (except Wednesdays), 1:30 p.m.  
(p. 12)

### FREE MOBILE TOUR

#### Making Sense of Modern Art Mobile

 (p. 12)

### SFMOMA PUBLICATION

#### Jasper Johns: Seeing with the Mind's Eye

Available in the MuseumStore and at [museumstore.sfmoma.org](http://museumstore.sfmoma.org) (p. 19)

*Jasper Johns: Seeing with the Mind's Eye* is organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Presenting support is provided by the Mimi and Peter Haas Fund.

### MIMI AND PETER HAAS FUND

Premiere support is generously provided by Bank of America and the Evelyn D. Haas Exhibition Fund.



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Additional support is provided by Jean and James E. Douglas, Jr.

For nearly 60 years, Jasper Johns has found new ways to explore, as he once put it, “how we see and why we see the way we do.” This major exhibition—the artist’s first Bay Area museum survey in 35 years—represents the full range of his career, from his tremendously influential renderings of numbers, flags, and other symbols in the 1950s and 1960s to vibrant recent work. It both reveals the scope of Johns’s achievement and reflects the particular interest in his art in the Bay Area, bringing together for the first time works from SFMOMA and other local public and private collections as well as several key works lent by the artist himself. With some 90 paintings, sculptures, drawings, and prints, this is a rich overview of Johns’s art—an invitation to look closely, and look again.

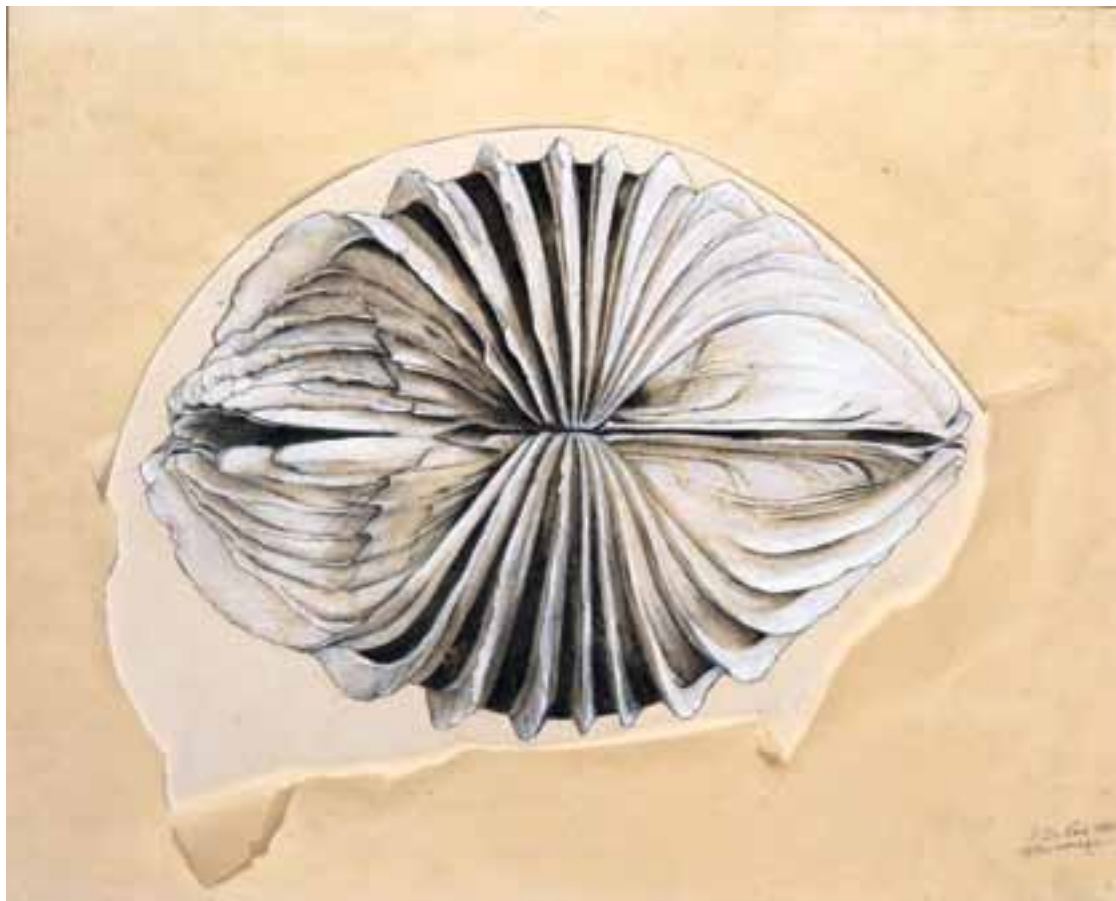


Jasper Johns, *Flags*, 1967–70; Published by ULAE; Private collection; © Jasper Johns AND ULAE/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY



# Jay DeFeo: A Retrospective

November 3 through February 3



Jay DeFeo, *After Image*, 1970; The Menil Collection, Houston; gift of Glenn Fukushima; © 2012 The Jay DeFeo Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; photo: Paul Hester

This retrospective offers a revelatory, in-depth encounter with the work of Jay DeFeo (1929–1989), one of the most important and innovative artists of her generation, but one who still has not been given her due. A quintessential San Francisco artist who rose to national prominence, DeFeo was at the center of a vibrant community of Bay Area artists, poets, and musicians in the 1950s. Although she is best known for her massive, visionary masterpiece *The Rose* (1958–66; pictured on p. 3), DeFeo created an astonishingly diverse range of works; her unconventional approach to materials and her intensive, physical process make her a unique figure in postwar American art. Presenting close to 150 works, including collages, drawings, paintings, photographs, small sculptures, and jewelry, this definitive exhibition traces DeFeo’s distinctive vision across more than four decades of art making.

## Related Programs

### PERFORMANCE

#### Kevin Killian and Poets’ Theater Present *Wet Paint*

Thursday, November 8, 7 p.m. (p. 14)

### TEACHER INSTITUTE

#### Jay DeFeo: A Retrospective

Saturday, November 17, 9:30 a.m.–1 p.m. (p. 14)

### CURATOR TALK

#### One on One: Jay DeFeo

Jessica Brier, photography curatorial assistant, SFMOMA

Thursday, December 6, 6:30 p.m. (p. 12)

### KORET CENTER SCREENINGS

#### The White Rose

Bruce Conner, 1967, 7 min.

Daily (except Wednesdays and Sundays), 2:15 and 3:30 p.m. (p. 12)

### FREE MOBILE TOUR

#### Making Sense of Modern Art Mobile (p. 12)

### PUBLICATION

#### Jay DeFeo: A Retrospective

Available in the MuseumStore and at [museumstore.sfmoma.org](http://museumstore.sfmoma.org) (p. 19)

This exhibition was organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Major support for this exhibition is provided by the National Committee of the Whitney Museum of American Art and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Generous support is provided by the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, the Lannan Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional support is provided by Louisa Stude Sarofim, Susan Weeks and David Coulter, Francis H. Williams, M. Bernadette Castor and David R. Packard, the Clinton Hill/Allen Tran Foundation, Sarah Peter, and the Elizabeth A. Sackler Museum Educational Trust.

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