

Encounters I



Curated by Peter Benson Miller

Encounters I

Encounters is an exhibition in two parts marking the 125th anniversary of the founding of the American Academy in Rome and tracing the impact of its unique, interdisciplinary working environment on American culture.

Curated by Peter Benson Miller

Encounters I

Philip Guston/John Cage

Eleanor Clark/Eugene Berman

Al Held/Stephen Kieran and James Timberlake

Opening October 15, 2019

Encounters II

Julie Mehretu/J. Meejin Yoon

Opening May 28, 2020

Gallery Hours—

Saturday–Sunday, 4pm–7pm

October 19 to December 8, 2019

American Academy in Rome

Via Angelo Masina, 5

00153 Rome

www.aarome.org

The Academy's 125th anniversary programs have been generously supported by the Syde Hurdus Foundation. The Residency of J. Meejin Yoon (2006 Fellow) is made possible by the Colin Rowe Designer in Residence Fund. The Residency of Julie Mehretu is made possible by the Roy Lichtenstein Artist in Residence Fund. Support for *Encounters I & II* has also been provided by the Al Held Foundation and by Irene and Frank Salerno, remembering their dear friend, Rodolfo Rinaldi.

Exhibition Events—

Conference

*The American Academy as a Mirror of Cultural Change:
125 years of Arts and Humanities in the Eternal City*

November 11, 2019

Conversations/Conversazioni

After Charlottesville

with Julie Mehretu (2020 Resident),

J. Meejin Yoon (2006 Fellow; 2020 Resident),

and Adam Weinberg (2020 Resident)

November 21, 2019

The American Academy in Rome was founded in 1894 to enrich American artistic and intellectual life through a deep immersion in Rome's layered history. Initially, Rome Prize Fellows in architecture and the arts studied the classical canon and its echoes in the Renaissance and baroque, producing neoclassical works upon their return home. Fellows in the humanities pursued their work more independently, consulting important archives, libraries, and other resources available in Rome. As the institution evolved—most rapidly after World War II—all Rome Prize winners explored their fields with greater individual freedom, and the disciplines expanded and diversified to the eleven currently represented. As the Academy became a more outward facing institution, Rome and its history has remained a vital catalyst for its Fellows and Residents in all fields.

If the overseas institution was originally founded to train artists and architects in traditional practices, the collaborations encouraged by the Academy, particularly in the decades following World War II, generated innovative ideas in the visual arts, architecture, music, and literature that continue to resonate today. *Encounters I & II* are part of a year-long series of events commemorating the institution's 125th anniversary; the exhibitions trace only a few representative examples of the many interdisciplinary encounters fostered by the Academy from 1948 to the present and their enduring impact on American culture.

These encounters have taken many forms: from rigorous scholarly work to the everyday conversations between Fellows and Residents at the dining table or the Bass Garden, all with the eternally potent city of Rome as a backdrop. This exhibition features works from both the special collections of the Academy's Arthur and Janet C. Ross Library and Photographic Archive, as well as from private collections; including materials by a range of artists and scholars such as Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Philip Guston, Eleanor Clark, Eugene Berman, Al Held, and John Cage. For their invaluable help in the preparation of the exhibition, we extend thanks to Sebastian Hierl, the Drue Heinz Librarian, and Assistant Librarians Denise Gavio and Paolo Imperatori, and, in the Photographic Archive, Lavinia Ciuffa, Acting Curator, and her staff.

The exhibition and the Academy's 125th anniversary programs have been generously supported by the

Syde Hurdus Foundation. The Residency of J. Meejin Yoon (2006 Fellow) is made possible by the Colin Rowe Designer in Residence Fund. The Residency of Julie Mehretu is made possible by the Roy Lichtenstein Artist in Residence Fund. Support for *Encounters I & II* has also been provided by the Al Held Foundation and by Irene and Frank Salerno, remembering their dear friend, Rodolfo Rinaldi. We are very grateful for the support of these individuals and institutions.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the lenders to the exhibition: Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University; John Cage Trust; Al Held Foundation/White Cube; David and Renee McKee; Musa and Tom Mayer and the Philip Guston Foundation; Stephen Kieran and James Timberlake; New World Records; and Wesleyan University Library, Special Collections & Archives. Special thanks to Daniel Belasco, Anders Bergstrom, Gene Caprioglio, Chad Ferber, Jennifer Hadley, Victoria Hawkins, Mara Held, Paul Herzman, Nancy Kuhl, Laura Kuhn, Anne Marie Menta, Martha McGill/Open, Rob Owen, Daniel Preston, Sally Radic, Ilaria Schiaffini, Gabriel Warren, and Rosanna Warren.

I want to recognize the acumen and curatorial eye of Peter Benson Miller, our 125th Anniversary Curator-at-Large, for his expertise and insight in curating these exhibitions and related programming. I also acknowledge the ongoing work of John Ochsendorf, Director; Kathleen Heins, Vice President of Development; Jenni Kim, Vice President for Finance and Administration; Lynne Lancaster, Mellon Professor in Charge of the Humanities; and Elizabeth Rodini, Andrew Heiskell Arts Director. Also, Marques McClary, Director of Communications, who expertly supervised this publication, assisted by Christopher Howard, Communications Manager. Lexi Eberspacher, Programs Associate for the Arts, managed all logistical aspects of the exhibition from start to finish with remarkable equanimity and professionalism. We are very grateful to Anne Coulson, Senior Programs Officer, who helped oversee the project in all of its phases, and Stefano Silvia, who oversaw the installation of the exhibition, as well as the rest of the AAR staff for their support of this project. Finally, we are grateful to the Academy's Board of Trustees for their dedication to all of our diverse programs and everything they do to make endeavors such as this exhibition possible.



Philip Guston, *Untitled*
(*Forio Cityscape*), 1949, ink on
paper, 21.5 × 39.5 cm. McKee
Gallery, New York.

In celebration of the Academy's 125th anniversary, *Encounters* investigates the enduring impact of the city of Rome as a dynamic creative laboratory via a series of interdisciplinary exchanges. Spanning the immediate post-World War II period to the present day, the results of these collaborations were not always immediately apparent, but their impact continues to resonate throughout the arts and the humanities in the United States and around the world. This exhibition, articulated in two parts, highlights specific examples of this central aspect of the Academy's mission, demonstrating the interplay between visual art, musical composition, literature, and architecture set against, interpreting, and engaging monuments and urban space in Rome and elsewhere in Italy.

The exhibition traces, in particular, how these encounters have contributed to the development of several distinct strains of abstraction. Emerging from conceptions of city, space, society, and history, and employing differing perspectives and techniques such as collage and the imaginary interpretation of architecture, these strains, expressed in a range of separate but interconnected media, owe a great deal to the unique intellectual and creative atmosphere at the American Academy in Rome.

The first part of the exhibition identifies the abstracting techniques resulting from three historic encounters; the second part traces how those techniques are employed in recent contemporary works responding to pressing social and political issues in the United States.

John Cage

During his Fellowship year at the Academy, Philip Guston (1949 Fellow, 1971 Resident) struggled as he moved toward abstraction, leaving behind the politically engaged figurative language that had made him one of America's most admired painters in the 1940s. In Rome, he worked fitfully on a single painting between numerous pilgrimages to see works by Piero della Francesca, Luca Signorelli, Giotto, and other Italian masters he admired.¹ In May 1949, toward the end of his stay in Rome—a period Guston later recalled as one in which “things were changing for me”—the composer John Cage performed excerpts from his *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano* (1946–48) at the American Academy.² A cycle of twenty short pieces played on a piano modified by the insertion of nuts and bolts, as well as pieces of rubber and plastic, between the piano strings, Cage's meditative work demonstrated the composer's fascination with the “dramatic power of the pause—the intent void as a point of arrival, of climax in a texture of sounds designed to set silence as a jewel.”³ Following the concert, Cage conversed with Guston about Zen Buddhism.

Guston had only recently returned from the island of Ischia, near Naples, where he made a series of drawings reducing the architectural framework of the town of Forio to a tangle of abstract shapes and interconnected lines. These Ischia drawings, one of which is shown on page 4, represented a key breakthrough as Guston worked his way out of his creative impasse. The encounter with Cage further propelled the development of the distinctive form of gestural abstraction Guston pioneered in the 1950s.

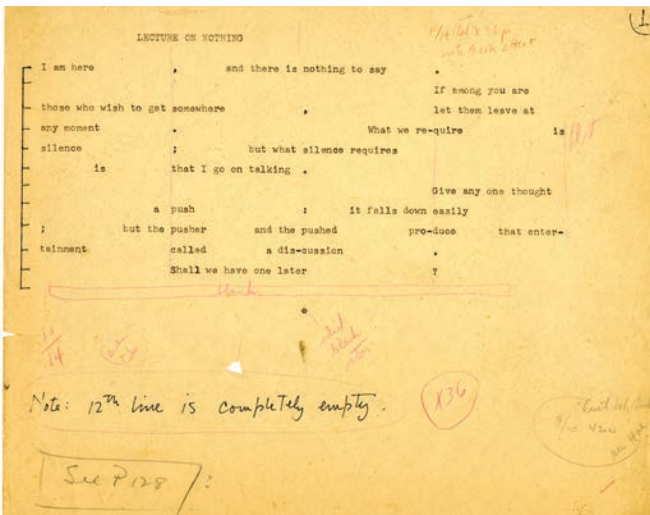
Renewing their acquaintance in New York, Guston went several times with Cage to hear the Japanese Zen philosopher Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki at Columbia University. In Cage's avant-garde circle, Guston met the composer Morton Feldman; in turn, their close friendship, conditioned by Cage's ideas, nurtured both Guston's trembling abstractions, with their dialectic irresolution and delicate chromatic rhythms, and Feldman's experimental approach to musical notation. Feldman's *Extensions for Orchestra* (1951) was dedicated to Guston “for himself, his painting, and his friendship.”

Guston's *White Painting I* (1951), which he called “one of his sparest pictures of all,” has often been discussed in relation to a conversation that took place

Philip Guston

in Guston's Tenth Street Studio in New York. Upon seeing the painting Cage exclaimed, “My God! Isn't it marvelous that one can paint a picture about nothing!”⁴ Cage evidently saw in Guston's *White Painting I*, whose linear composition is closely related to the *Untitled* drawing in the exhibition, a visual complement to ideas that he explored in his “Lecture on Nothing” (1949), among other works.

Cage's *4'33"*, conceived in 1947–48 and also deeply indebted to the composer's study of Zen Buddhism, premiered in August 1952 at the Maverick Concert Hall in Woodstock, where Guston had a studio. In these works by Cage, as Douglas Dreishpoon noted, “the nothingness that surrounds silence assumes dynamic form and character depending on its context.”⁵ *Drawing No. 19 (Related to Zone)*, made with a bamboo-tipped quill pen, also reveals the pared-down aesthetic, meaningful voids, calligraphic lines, and improvisational, gestural drawing technique that Guston developed after meeting Cage. In paintings such as *Attar* (1953), which Feldman once owned, *Zone* (1953–54), and *Painting* (1954), Guston translated this technique into haunting, meditative works on canvas.



John Cage, "Lecture on Nothing (Silence)," 1949, corrected transcript, 21.6 × 27.9 cm. Box 10 Folder 21, John Cage Papers, Wesleyan University Library, Special Collections & Archives.

Philip Guston, *White Painting I*, 1951, oil on canvas, 147 × 157.16 cm. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, T. B. Walker Foundation Fund Purchase.

Philip Guston, *Drawing No. 19 (Related to Zone)*, 1954, ink brush on paper, 45.4 × 61 cm. McKee Gallery, New York.



Eleanor Clark

Dedicated to Isabel and Laurance Roberts, the charismatic and cosmopolitan couple at the helm of the Academy from 1946 to 1959, Eleanor Clark's *Rome and a Villa*, first published in 1952, explores the Eternal City in a collection of spirited essays. A classic of its genre, *Rome and a Villa* emerged out of Clark's deep immersion in the Academy community. After coming to Italy on a Guggenheim grant in order to write a novel, Clark found Rome a more compelling subject. Informed by excursions around the city in the company of Academy Fellows using a 1748 map by Giambattista Nolli as a guide, Clark's account also benefited from the close counsel of Frank Brown (1933 Fellow, 1954 and 1955 Resident), professor in charge of classical studies and an archaeologist known for his work on the Regia in the Roman Forum. In his memoir of life at the Academy immediately after the war, Lawrence Richardson Jr. (1950 Fellow), a classicist, remembered that "for a while [Brown and Clark] were thick as thieves, much of which comes through in her book *Rome and a Villa*."⁶

For Clark, Rome was a collage: "an impossible compounding of time, in which no century has respect for any other and all hit you in a jumble at every turn."⁷ Her writing reinforced this analogy; the opening chapter juxtaposes a series of provisional views from a succession of perspectives of the Campidoglio. But, as William Vance observes, "each of these provides at best a momentary and fragmenting frame. . . . Rome is a Dada collage, and to move through it is a surreal experience."⁸ In fact, Clark's notes for the first chapter indicate that she initially titled the section "The Great Collage." "The center," she writes, "you start here, among the incongruities and mad juxtapositions."⁹ Throughout the book, as her outline demonstrates, she views the city through oblique angles, including through the vantage point of the keyhole of the Knights of Malta on the Aventine: "a trompe l'œil."

Fittingly, Eugene Berman (1959 Resident) provided the book's illustrations, which meld his neoromantic, surrealist aesthetic with references to Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Johann Heinrich Füssli to convey the kaleidoscopic vision of the city described in Clark's prose. A Russian émigré trained in Paris, Berman was affiliated with the Surrealist movement. In the United States, where he moved in 1935, he showed his work with Julien

Eugene Berman

Levy Gallery, a crucial venue where the Surrealists encountered the American avant-garde. In numerous paintings and set designs, Berman created imaginary landscapes reminiscent of Giorgio de Chirico's in which classical architecture, fountains, and desolate ruins frame deserted vistas. Italy remained an important source for Berman's brand of melancholic sublime. In 1951, Berman contributed illustrations, including five color lithographs, to *Viaggio in Italia* by writer and critic Raffaele Carrieri, who championed Surrealist and Metaphysical artists.¹⁰ The following year, a drawing by Berman, *Souvenir d'Italie*, appeared on the cover of the brochure accompanying the exhibition, also titled *Viaggio in Italia*, held at L'Obelisco gallery in Rome.¹¹ Photography, too, played an important part in his artistic research; the albums that Berman donated to the Academy's Photographic Archive conserve the countless photographs he took of Roman markets, fountains, buildings, and public squares, including the Campidoglio.

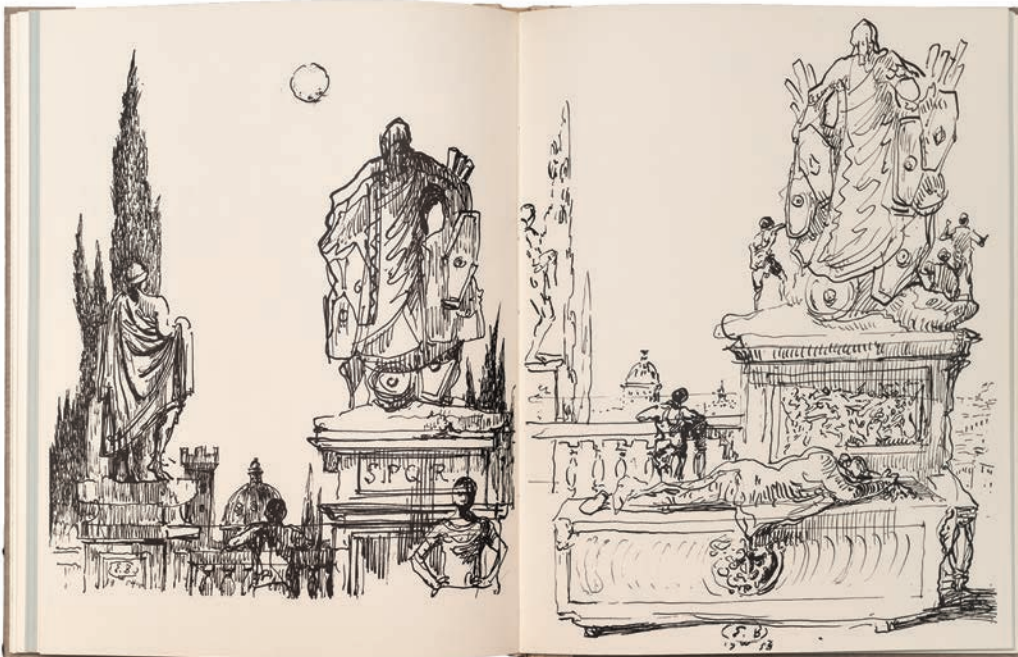
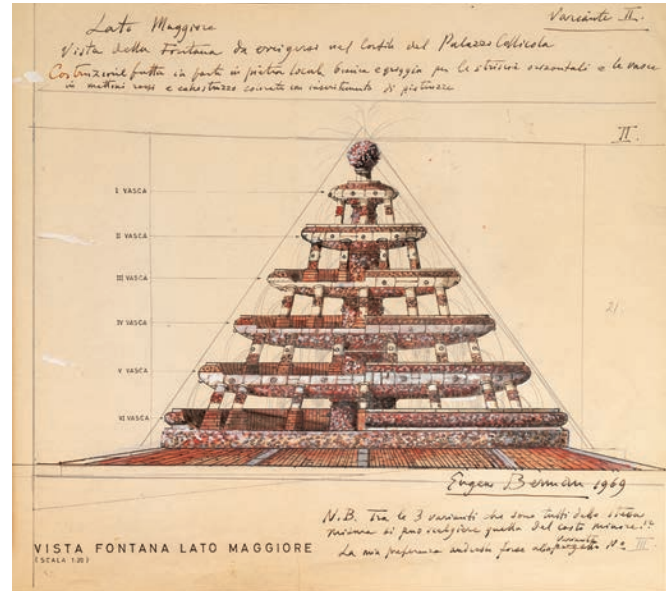
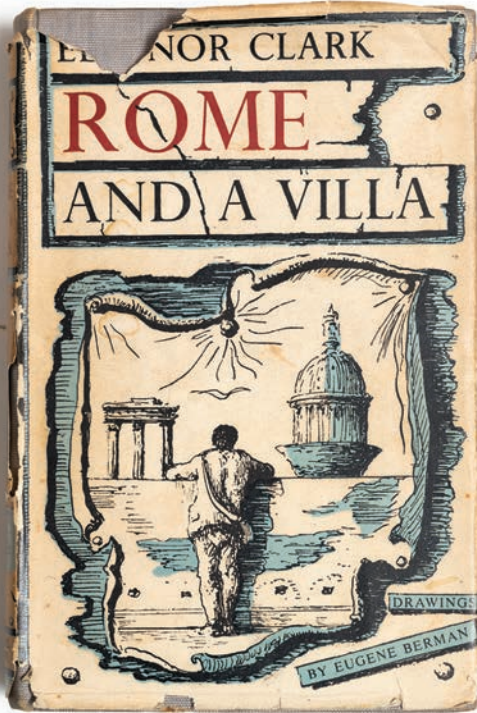
In the second chapter of *Rome and a Villa*, "Fountains," Clark explored the irrational, dreamlike effect of the city via its network of fountains: "an endless revelation and immersion; this is the vocabulary of our sleep; and the key image is always water."¹² In the late 1960s, Berman designed a circular, tiered fountain for the courtyard of Palazzo Collicola in Spoleto, Umbria. The final proposal, which remained unbuilt, was preceded by a series of fantastic drawings of fountains in which Berman experimented with a variety of designs, including complex forms resembling abstract biomorphic sculpture.

Many of the drawings Berman created for *Rome and a Villa* reappear in his own book, *Imaginary Promenades in Italy* (1956). In both, instead of creating a faithful record, Berman gave free reign to his imagination and formal invention. "I must study, analyze, dissect, discard, re-assemble, re-invent, and rebuild what I have taken apart," he wrote, "until I have remade the demolished cities and edifices in a way completely new."¹³

Eleanor Clark, *Rome and a Villa* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1952), cover of 1st edition with illustration by Eugene Berman. American Academy in Rome, Arthur & Janet C. Ross Library.

Eugene Berman, *Vista Fontana Lato Maggiore da erigersi nel Cortile del Palazzo Collicola, Spoleto, Variante II*, 1966-69, hand-colored architectural drawing, 42 x 55 cm. Eugene Berman Archive, American Academy in Rome, Photographic Archive.

Eugene Berman, *Imaginary Promenades in Italy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956). 28.5 x 44.5 cm. American Academy in Rome, Barbara Goldsmith Rare Book Room.



Al Held

In their 2002 book *Manual*, the architects Stephen Kieran (1981 Fellow) and James Timberlake (1983 Fellow)—who recently designed the new United States Embassy in London—declare that “all paths open from Rome.” They explain: “In countless conversations at Rome’s American Academy bar, the painter Al Held opened the spatial terrain of modernism to our then backward looking eyes. His work suggested endless fields, space that you could climb into and be forever lost.”¹⁴

A photograph of Held in his studio during his Residency at the Academy in 1981 testifies to his interest in the interplay between Italian Renaissance architecture and pictorial abstraction. The installation in the current exhibition re-creates the scene captured in the photograph (with the exception of the large drawing above Held’s left shoulder, which is related to *Padua II*). Held’s drawings in progress hang alongside and clearly respond to a reproduction of *La Città Ideale*, a panel painting attributed to various artists and architects active in Urbino, a center of lively encounter and exchange in the second half of the quattrocento. Herbert Damisch has noted that the uncertain attribution of this work has led modern scholars to privilege its “architectural content” over its “pictorial form.”¹⁵

Held’s paintings and drawings revel in the dialogue between these two registers, which has had lasting effects on the built environment in the United States. Held himself received several important commissions to create public murals, including a 15 by 55 foot composition for the Southland Center in Dallas, Texas. Kieran, who met Held at the Academy in 1981, and Timberlake used the hard-edged color architectural abstractions by Held as the visual and conceptual model for a three-dimensional ceiling with rectilinear and curved elements at the Student Center at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia.¹⁶ This small interior was one of Kieran and Timberlake’s earliest projects after returning from Rome and founding their practice, in 1984. Held took architectural and urban space as a starting point for pictorial abstractions expressed in two dimensions; at Chestnut Hill College—here represented by the reflected ceiling plan rendered in cut-out colored paper collage—Kieran and Timberlake translated those abstract forms back into three-dimensional space.

Stephen Kieran and James Timberlake

These collaborations took place in the context of a broader exchange between architecture and the visual arts. In a 1984 monograph dedicated to Held, art historian Irving Sandler remarks that the painter’s shift to postmodern “complexity and illusionism” in 1967 coincided with the publication of Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), a manifesto informed by Venturi’s study of architecture in Italy.¹⁷ While Kieran and Timberlake worked at Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates prior to their Fellowships at the Academy, they make a distinction between Venturi’s and Held’s respective use of Italian precedents. If Venturi (1956 Fellow, 1966 and 1981 Resident) used historical examples in a rhetorical manner, maintaining a recognizable form of the original, Held took prior models as a starting point, identifying their underlying logic before transforming them completely into his own abstract idiom.

Beyond the specific case of the Chestnut Hill College project, Held’s abstractions provided the impetus for what has become a signature aspect of many of Kieran and Timberlake’s buildings: the integration of didactically exposed systems (including structure, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, plumbing, lighting, electrical, partition, envelope, etc.) as a legible framework for the formation and depiction of architectural space.

Al Held in his studio at the American Academy in Rome, 1981. Courtesy Al Held Foundation.

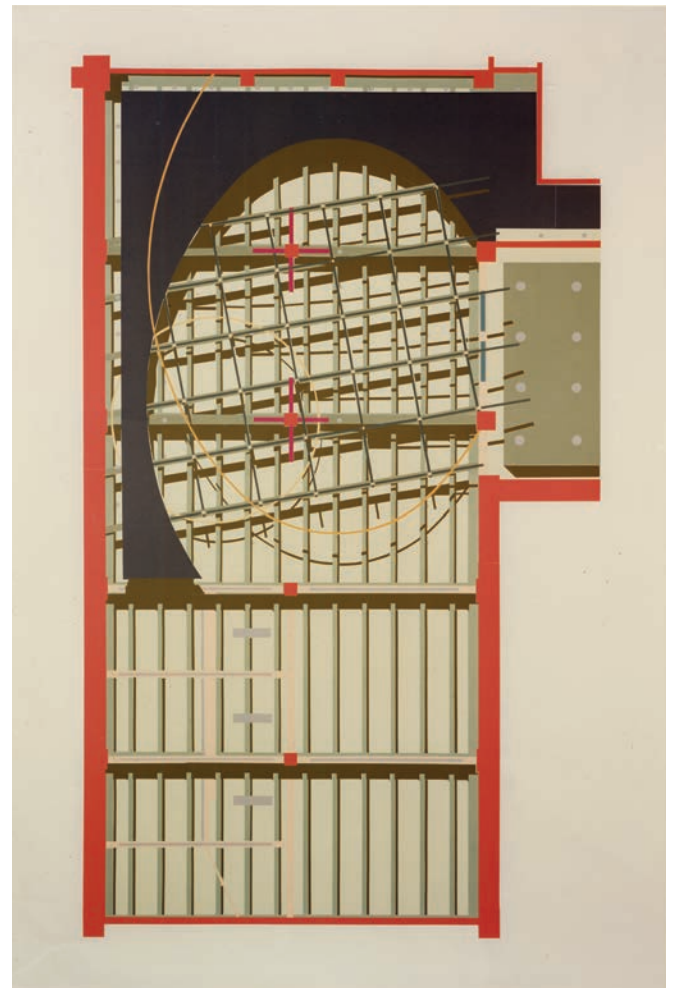
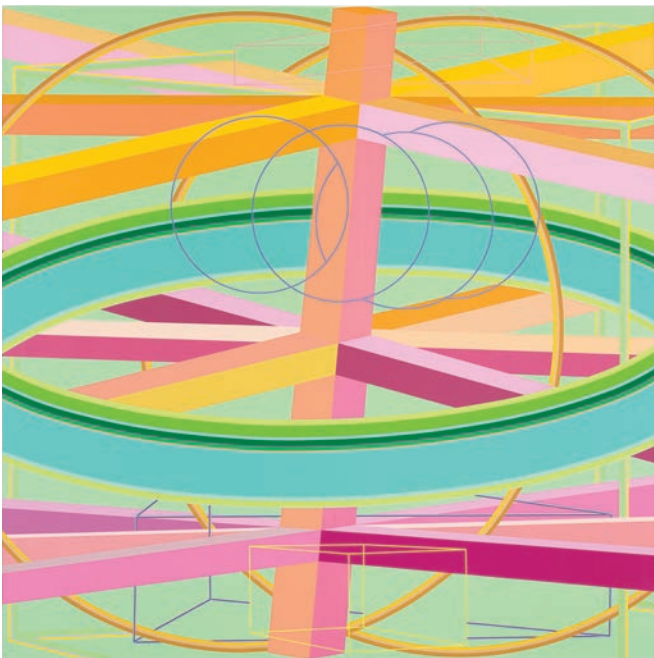


Central Italian Painter (prev. attributed to Luciano Laurana), *La Città Ideale*, c. 1480–90, oil on panel, 67.7 × 239.4 cm. Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.

Al Held, *Padua II*, 1981, acrylic on canvas, 213.36 × 213.36 cm. Courtesy Al Held Foundation and White Cube.



Stephen Kieran and James Timberlake, *Reflected Ceiling Plan, Student Activity Center, Chestnut Hill College, Philadelphia, PA*, 1986, cut paper, 205 × 137 cm. Courtesy KieranTimberlake.



- ¹ Musa Mayer, *Night Studio* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 39.
- ² Clark Coolidge, ed. *Philip Guston: Collected Writings, Lectures, and Conversations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 293. It is unclear exactly which work was performed on this occasion. Academy director Laurance P. Roberts mentions “a concert, for a specially invited audience, by John Cage on his ‘prepared’ piano,” in Laurance P. Roberts, *American Academy in Rome Annual Report 1943–1951* (New York: American Academy in Rome, 1951), 16. Cage describes the concert but does not name the specific composition in a letter to his parents dated May 14, in John Cage, *The Selected Letters of John Cage*, ed. Laura Kuhn (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2016), 96. I thank Laura Kuhn, director of the John Cage Trust, for her help.
- ³ James Pritchett, in his 1995 essay “Six Views of the Sonatas and Interludes” (published at <http://rosewhitemusic.com/piano/writings/six-views-sonatas-interludes/>), cites Peggy Glanville-Hicks, “John Cage ... ‘A Ping, Qualified by a Thud,’” *Musical America* 68, no. 10 (September 1948).
- ⁴ Coolidge, 294.
- ⁵ Douglas Dreishpoon, *Nothing and Everything: Seven Artists, 1947–1962* (New York: Hauser & Wirth, 2017), 9. See also Robert Storr, *Guston* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 31–34.
- ⁶ Lawrence Richardson Jr., *The American Academy 1947–54, Reopening and Reorientation: A Personal Reminiscence*, ed. Harry B. Evans (New York: American Academy in Rome, 2012), 71.
- ⁷ Eleanor Clark, *Rome and a Villa* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1952), 17.
- ⁸ William L. Vance, *America’s Rome*, vol. 2, *Catholic and Contemporary Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 406.
- ⁹ Eleanor Clark, “Rome Notes,” Eleanor Clark Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.
- ¹⁰ Raffaele Carrieri, *Viaggio in Italia* (Milan: Piero Fornasetti, 1951).
- ¹¹ Ilaria Schiaffini, “It’s Roman Holiday: American Artists at L’Obelisco,” paper presented at Winter Study Day, “Methodologies of Exchange: MoMA’s Twentieth-century Italian Art,” organized by Raffaele Bedarida, Silvia Bignami, and Davide Colombo, Center for Italian Modern Art (CIMA), New York, February 12, 2019.
- ¹² Clark, *Rome and a Villa*, 35.
- ¹³ Eugene Berman, preface to *Imaginary Promenades in Italy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), n.p.
- ¹⁴ Stephen Kieran and James Timberlake, *Manual* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), 164. Held exhibited a large painting, titled *D-G*, also known as *Double Gate* (1979), at the Annual Exhibition of work by Fellows and Residents at the American Academy in Rome, May 21–June 12, 1981.
- ¹⁵ Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 174.
- ¹⁶ George Dodds, “Architecture as Instauration,” *arg: Architectural Research Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (June 2001): 131.
- ¹⁷ Irving Sandler, *Al Held* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1984), 134.

Cover

Eugene Berman, *Imaginary Promenades in Italy* (detail) (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956). American Academy in Rome, Barbara Goldsmith Rare Book Room.

Back cover

Philip Guston, *Drawing No. 19 (Related to Zone)* (detail), 1954, ink brush on paper, 45.4 × 61 cm. Private Collection, New York. © The Estate of Philip Guston.

Photo credits

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Top: © The Estate of Philip Guston. Photograph: Ben Blackwell. *Middle*: © John Cage Trust. *Bottom*: © The Estate of Philip Guston.

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American Academy in Rome/Giorgio Benni

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Bottom left: Courtesy Al Held Foundation and White Cube. Photograph by Christopher Burke. *Top left*: Courtesy Al Held Foundation. *Top right*: Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino, Archivio fotografico. *Bottom right*: Courtesy KieranTimberlake.

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