

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

press release

IMAGES AVAILABLE

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Group of more than 40 photographs by Ray Metzker gifted to the Saint Louis Art Museum

Spanning three decades, from the 1950s to the 1980s, this gift from collectors and dealers Ronald and Jan Greenberg strengthens SLAM's 20th century American photography collection

ST. LOUIS, Jan. 11, 2023—The Saint Louis Art Museum (SLAM) announced today that it has received a gift of 43 vintage photographs by American artist Ray K. Metzker (1931-2014). One of the most important American photographers of his generation, Metzker is recognized for his extensive exploration of the formal qualities of black and white photography. His technical precision and interest in contrasts of light and shadow yielded compelling images that blended crisp description with abstraction. This group of works spans a range of his visual interests, from pedestrians to beach goers to the architectural elements of street scenes in cities like Chicago and Philadelphia, from the 1950s through 1980. Selected works from the gift will be on view at SLAM in the exhibition “First Look: Prints, Drawings and Photographs” from April 7 through July 9.

These photographs are a gift from St. Louis-based collectors and dealers Ronald and Jan Greenberg. Known for their commitment to modern American art and photography, the Greenbergs have previously donated more than 100 works to SLAM, including 20 works by photographers Arnold Newman and Bruce Davidson in 2012, and 50 works by Aaron Siskind in 2020. They have also donated or provided funds to support the acquisition of numerous works of modern and contemporary art in different media over the years, from major American artists such as Lee



Ray K. Metzker, American, 1931–2014; “71 IX-38”, 1971; gelatin silver print; 8 x 10 inches; Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald K. Greenberg 151:2022; © Estate of Ray K. Metzker, Courtesy Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York



Ray K. Metzker, American, 1931–2014; “64 IK-7”, 1964; vintage gelatin silver print; 8 x 10 inches; Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald K. Greenberg 129:2022; © Estate of Ray K. Metzker, Courtesy Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York

continued



Left

Ray K. Metzker, American, 1931–2014; “58 AH-18”, 1958; gelatin silver print; 10 x 8 inches; Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald K. Greenberg 166:2022; © Estate of Ray K. Metzker, Courtesy Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York

Right

Ray K. Metzker, American, 1931–2014; “81 HK-31”, 1981; gelatin silver print; 8 x 10 inches; Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald K. Greenberg 146:2022; © Estate of Ray K. Metzker, Courtesy Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York

Bontecou, Robert Rauschenberg, and Richard Serra, to European artists such as Joseph Beuys, Chris Ofili, and Gerhard Richter.

“We are so grateful to Ronnie and Jan Greenberg for their sustained commitment to the museum, demonstrated again with this gift of outstanding photographs by Ray Metzker,” said Min Jung Kim, the Barbara B. Taylor Director of the Saint Louis Art Museum. “Metzker’s work is important for its complex compositions, and adding these to our collection deepens our ability to present essential American photography to our audiences. This gift also underscores the importance of donors such as the Greenbergs, whose gifts enliven our museum for the benefit of our community.”

“Ray Metzker is a photographer that I’ve followed for a long time. He has a different way of looking at people and capturing that look with his camera. Jan and I have watched his work closely in the past, and I thought the museum would be a great location for this portfolio,” said Ronald K. Greenberg.

Ray K. Metzker was born in Milwaukee, Wis. in 1931. He studied photography at the Institute of Design in Chicago, where he was a student of Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind, two of America’s leading photographers of the period—and his work is deeply influenced by the Institute’s emphasis on the exploration of the formal qualities of black and white photography. After he graduated in 1960, Metzker toured Europe, where he began to bring his own interests to bear on his work, seeking out complex compositions that often imbue humble everyday elements with a unique graphic and poetic sensibility. From the mid-1960s on, he lived and worked principally in Philadelphia, where he also taught at the Philadelphia College of Art, as well as teaching at the University of New Mexico.

The gift from the Greenbergs covers a broad range of Metzker’s work over a three-decade period, with many photographs taken in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Atlantic City, and with particular concentration of his series “Sand Creatures” from the 1970s and “Pictus Interruptus” from the late 1970s. These works complement four other works by Metzker that SLAM already owns—from 1965, 1977, 1992, and 1996—as well as work by other graduates and teachers at the Institute of Design, such as Aaron Siskind, Harry Callahan, Linda Connor, Gyorgy Kepes, and Arthur Siegel.

The Saint Louis Art Museum is one of the nation’s leading comprehensive art museums with collections that include works of art of exceptional quality from virtually every culture and time period. Areas of notable depth include Oceanic art, ancient American art, ancient Chinese bronzes and European and American art of the late 19th and 20th centuries, with particular strength in 20th-century German art. Admission to the Saint Louis Art Museum is free to all every day. For more information, call 314.721.0072 or visit slam.org.