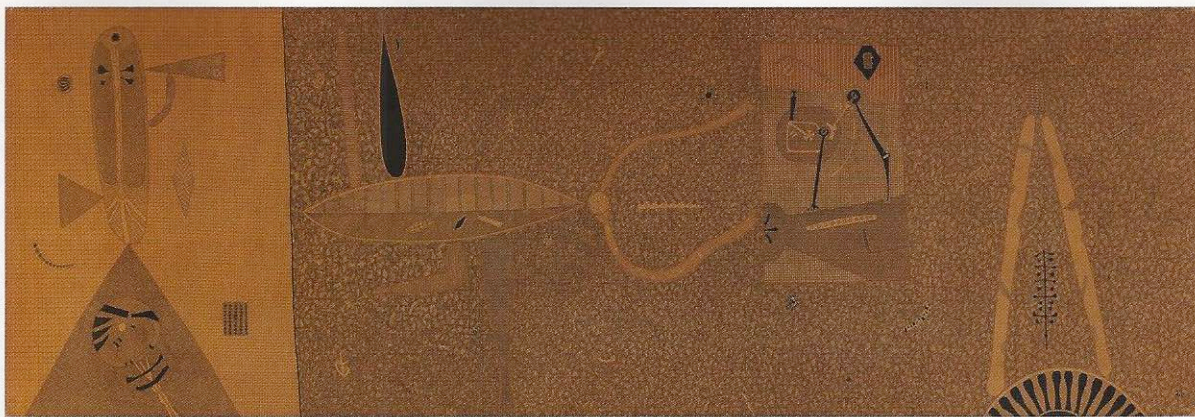


Evelyn Statsinger:
Land and Sea, 1951,
india ink, colored
ink and crayon on
light buff paper,
39½ by 109¾
inches; at Richard
Gray.



The sacks, the plastics, the irons, the tars, the woods, the monochromes: in all of the works I see disillusionment with war, the crushed mouths of a failed call to arms. Burri knew that the voice needed to be spoken not from the mouth but from the entirety of his material language. His layered sediment compresses voice, violence, disorder, freedoms, deaths and renewals into concrete composites. The terrestrial quality we see and relate to in his pieces, however, seems able to crumble without warning. This recognition that the concrete is friable forces us to reconsider our faith in the absolute. With Burri's works, we are the drugged forms lying against and within the prehistoric rock.

A little more than halfway up the Guggenheim ramp, I backed away from Burri's 1957 *Combustione legno* (Wood Combustion) and stumbled on the base of the angled hip-height wall, nearly falling 50 feet to the atrium floor. I thought to myself that such a close call would be impossible in a museum designed in 2015, in an era of maximal safeguarding. I was happy for it. I found the rush that shot through my stomach and the soles of my feet before I caught myself to be analogous to the rush of time and space contained in the works. You can't see them all up close or all at a distance. What Burri called their "unbalanced equilibrium" requires an active engagement. Looking at *Combustione legno* I pictured the entire process of the wood veneer's burning, contracting and extinguishing. The piece captures the nature of Burri's work as a whole, which was forged in the heat of his 80 years, and has been cooling and expanding in the decades since.

—Rosy Keyser

CHICAGO

EVELYN STATSINGER

Richard Gray

Scattered throughout art history are unconventional talents who don't fit easily into standard narratives and categories, and thus don't receive the recognition that they deserve. One such outlier is 88-year-old Chicago artist Evelyn Statsinger, who has had some taste of national attention during her long, still-active career but should be much better known. "A Gathering," a mini-retrospective at Richard Gray featuring 25 of her drawings, paintings and photograms (plus an assortment of tiny clay sculptures) spanning more than six decades, was a big step in that direction.

Statsinger earned her bachelor's degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1949 and is best known as a member of the Monster Roster. That group, which includes Leon Golub, Robert Barnes and Don Baum, emerged from the school in the late 1940s and early '50s and later influenced the Chicago Imagists. Its members looked to Surrealism, tribal and outsider art for inspiration, all of which can be seen in Statsinger's work. Her participation in three of the city's first artist-run Exhibition Momentum salons beginning in the late '40s, including one curated by Alfred Barr Jr. and Sidney Janis, gave her career an early boost. In 1952 and '57, probably as a result of that attention, Statsinger was featured in solo exhibitions organized by the Art Institute's prints and drawings department.

Final Burial of a Very Young Dead One (1949) is typical of her early output. Composed with pen, india ink and crayon on white paper, the work offers a primitivist look at a strange, quasi-religious ritual: two three-legged, robed individuals holding kites stand alongside a kind of altar with a presumably deceased, three-eyed figure sprawled across it.

Closely related to that piece is a group of seven untitled photograms produced between 1948 and 1949, likely inspired by the celebrated photograms of László Moholy-Nagy, who spent the last nine years of his life in Chicago. Created in the darkroom using paper cutouts, Statsinger's smiling figurative images are original contributions to the development of this photographic technique and deserve more attention in their own right.

Another early drawing—arguably the highlight of the show—is *Land and Sea* (1951), measuring approximately 3 by 9 feet. In this semiabstract, vaguely surreal composition, which combines india ink, colored ink and crayon on light buff paper, what could be figures and sea creatures are set against a background of bent, cylindrical fossils. Distinguishing this work is its dogged patterning, from the interwoven remains to grids, stripes and dotted diamonds, all with clean, meticulous draftsmanship. This unrelenting precision continues in the later, often more colorful and stylized works, where figuration largely gives way to abstracted biomorphic forms, as in *Three Memories* (1994), or overlapping podlike elements, as in an untitled drawing from 1956.

Different from anything else on view is the wonderfully titled *Dreaming of Ocher* (ca. 1960s), a 40-by-26-inch oil on canvas rendered entirely in ocher and gray-green. The paint is loosely applied to the canvas, with traces of the underlying white gesso showing through. The partitioned composition, with its elusive, glyphlike forms—vaguely resembling those of Adolph Gottlieb—has a deliberately raw, undisciplined and distant look.

Statsinger's body of work appears especially fresh as it shifts from enigmatic figuration to nature-based abstraction. As Chicago and the rest of the country are increasingly taking stock of the city's artistic heritage (the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art, for example, is mounting a Monster Roster exhibition in February), this artist's breakout moment just might be arriving at last.

—Kyle MacMillan

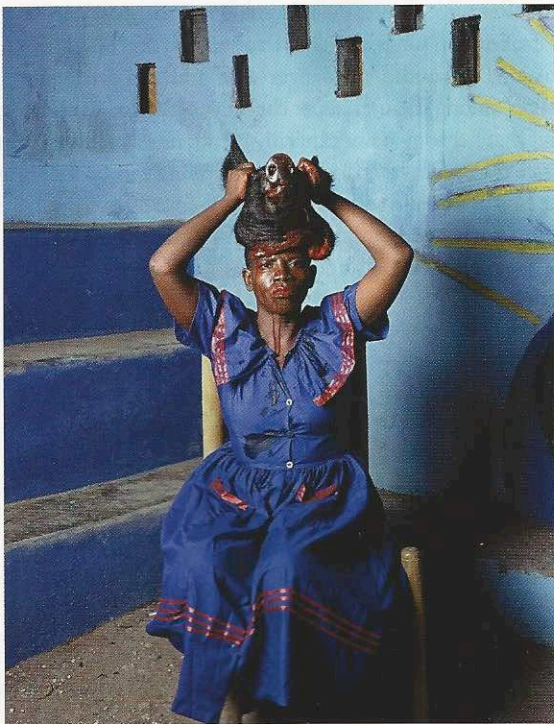
DEANA LAWSON

Art Institute of Chicago

ON VIEW THROUGH JAN. 10.

A selection of 16 ambitious works by the New York-based photographer Deana Lawson inaugurates the Ruttenberg Contemporary Photography Series, a new biennial program. Perhaps the most arresting work in this showcase is the portrait *As Above, So Below, Port-au-Prince, Haiti* (2013). The large inkjet print, like the others on view, hums with richly saturated color. Aquamarine walls surround a figure enthroned in a simple chair and draped in the folds of an indigo dress. The fabric's brilliant red piping echoes the rivulets of blood that run down the sitter's stern face; they flow from a freshly cut pig's head she holds above her own.

As an image of disconcerting beauty derived from an unlikely setting, the photograph serves as a fine representation of Lawson's gestalt. The photographer collaborates closely with her subjects over time to produce positively baroque portraits; nude or clothed, Lawson's sitters effortlessly command the viewer's reverent attention. The deliberately staged quality of their poses and the jewel tones of the prints further valorize Lawson's sitters in settings seldom associated with opulence, like Jamaica, Ethiopia, Haiti and Detroit.



Mama Goma, Gemena, DR Congo (2014) glints with incandescent ornament, from the fake fruits dangling from the ceiling of the pictured interior to Mama Goma's own shimmering blue garments. She stands in a three-quarter pose, her young face turned boldly toward the camera, her palms extended upward as if in prayer, drawing attention to the fullness of her pregnant belly, which is encircled by the cut-away midriff of an apparently hand-tailored dress.

So self-possessed are Lawson's subject-collaborators that a viewer may easily forget the fraught history of photography's relationship with black bodies, which, as Kobena Mercer notes in his 1994 book *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, feature more prominently in ethnographic, medical and sociological images than they do in fine-art portraiture. Lawson remembers this history, as she demonstrates in a number of images that subtly skewer the objectifying tropes through which black people were historically produced as objects of white ethnographic curiosity.

The Garden, Gemena, DR Congo (2014) shows a man and a woman sitting nude amid a verdant thicket of plant life. He tilts sideways to embrace her more rigid frame. Their legs are radically foreshortened by the unusually low angle of the camera. Naked black bodies posed before "natural" backdrops are no less a part of the language of primitivism than Rousseau's jungles, which the greenery of *The Garden* calls to mind. If the ethnographic gaze endows its subjects with an ahistorical quality, Lawson's subjects deflect it with the signs of contemporary culture that are inscribed on their bodies. The crimped blonde streaks of the woman's weave and her minutely detailed manicure situate her firmly in the present. The contrast highlights the significance of seemingly banal rituals of body modification as a means of expressing sexual agency for subjects so routinely denied it in the history of photography.

Lawson, who in a wall text refers to her subjects as "brothers and sisters," strategically and unapologetically wields the generalizing effects of documentary photography in the service of solidarity with global African diasporas, ultimately presenting a cautiously utopian family portrait composed of perfect strangers.

—Lauren DeLand

MINNEAPOLIS

"HIPPIE MODERNISM: THE STRUGGLE FOR UTOPIA" Walker Art Center

ON VIEW THROUGH FEB. 28.

The first two words of this exhibition's snappy title seem an unlikely pairing: one is associated with the freewheeling and populist, the other with the formal and elitist. Smartly, sensitively curated by Andrew Blauvelt (the newly appointed director of the Cranbrook Art Museum and former senior curator of design at the Walker), "Hippie Modernism" rounds up the art, architecture and design of the counterculture from 1964 to 1974. The premise is how little known most of these works are today, and Blauvelt—along with the contributors to the show's excellent, even indispensable, catalogue—determinedly addresses that oversight. He zooms in on the period

Deana Lawson:
As Above, So Below, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 2013 (printed 2015), inkjet print mounted on foam board, 55 by 44 inches; at the Art Institute of Chicago.