

New York School's Richard Pousette-Dart as 1960s Innovator in Exhibition at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art this Spring

Rarely seen paintings and drawings from the 1960s and early 1970s bring into view Pousette-Dart's explorations of color, light, and modes of communication

Brunswick, Maine, March 1, 2018—On view April 19 through September 16, the Bowdoin College Museum of Art (BCMA) will present *Richard Pousette-Dart: Painting/ Light/ Space*, an exhibition that offers new considerations of Pousette-Dart's large, non-representational paintings from the 1960s and early 1970s. During this highly-prolific period in the artist's career his work was widely exhibited, championed by critics, and influenced younger generations of artists. *Painting/Light/Space* draws together nine large-scale atmospheric paintings, several drawings, and archival materials into a timely reconsideration of Pousette-Dart's contribution to American art and history.

While Richard Pousette-Dart (1916–1992) is best known as one of the youngest members of the New York School, his later work marked a departure from Abstract Expressionism as he expanded into new methods of painting, informed by his interest in photography, radio technology, and the universe itself. By dissolving brushstrokes into dabs of paint, Pousette-Dart alludes to light in all of its manifestations, as light on a garden or in the landscape, cosmic light from the sky, and spiritual enlightenment. His paintings sensitively respond to varying light conditions, reflecting and transforming their environment. Pousette-Dart defined his paintings in spiritual terms, thinking of the canvases as vessels for energies.

“Pousette-Dart's painting practice seems in sync with advanced thinking in arts and sciences of the time,” says Curator Joachim Homann. “He participated in a paradigm shift in 1960s art in which the investigation of modes and systems of communication became a primary concern. Pousette-Dart's activity was guided not by a single creative act, but rather by intuitive exploration that resulted in manifold interpretive possibilities. For me, it is fascinating to study Pousette-Dart's facture in correlation to digital aesthetics at the dawn of the computer age.”

“Developed during the 60's and 70's, the paintings and drawings gathered together here anticipate and embrace achievements in science and visual mapping of the skies that would break ground in the international space race,” said Bowdoin College Museum of Art Co-Director Anne Collins Goodyear. “We are delighted to be able to bring together these rarely seen works in order to examine Pousette-Dart's fascination with space and the universe and how his approach impacted generations of artists to come.”

“Pousette-Dart never wavered in his commitment to painting, but transformed this art form and thereby helped to launch a new generation of artists, such as Ai Weiwei, who fluidly move between media,” Homann continues. “In retrospect, one might see parallels between Pousette-Dart's work and tendencies among his younger contemporaries to stress immaterial and performative qualities of art, highlight the creative process, and provide immersive environments.”

Overall, *Painting/Light/Space* shifts the conversation around Pousette-Dart away from his canonization as major figure of the New York School towards an investigation of his role as a maverick and a mentor for new generations of artists. To this end, the exhibition will highlight Pousette-Dart's intellectual curiosity and open-minded engagement with a broad range of cultural, intellectual, and even technological stimuli as he continued to push his practice as a visual artist forward in ever-ambitious new directions.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Bowdoin College Museum of Art will publish an illustrated gallery guide that features new contributions by Charles Duncan, Anne Collins Goodyear, Joachim Homann, Chris Pousette-Dart, and Martica Sawin.

BCMA will also host a series of exhibition-related public programs, including a lecture by art historian Meredith Hoy who discusses Pousette-Dart in the context of the rise of digital aesthetics, in addition to events with family and friends of the artists, student-led tours, concerts, and family programs.

The exhibition is organized in close cooperation with the family of the artist and the Richard Pousette-Dart Foundation. The Richard Pousette-Dart Estate is the principal lender of the exhibition.

About the Artist

Richard Pousette-Dart (June 8, 1916–October 25, 1992) enjoyed early success as a member of the New York School. The son of the painter and writer Nathaniel Pousette-Dart and the poet Flora Louise Dart, Richard studied only briefly at Bard College before making a name for himself in New York art circles. He became widely known for creating one of the first mural-sized canvases of the New York School, *Symphony Number 1*, in 1941 - 42. While in his early work Pousette-Dart explored totemic and symbolic forms that were derived from non-Western and Medieval art, he turned later towards geometric shapes and covered canvases with short brushstrokes of pulsating color. Pousette-Dart received solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art (1963, 1974), the Indianapolis Museum of Art (1990–92), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1997–98), the Museum of Fine Art, Houston (2001–02), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2006–07) and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice (2007–08), among others. He taught at the Art Students League, the New York School for Social Research, Columbia University, and Sarah Lawrence College.

About the Bowdoin College Museum of Art

The holdings of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art are among the most comprehensive of any college museum in the United States. Collecting began over 200 years ago with a bequest from the College's first benefactor James Bowdoin III that included Gilbert Stuart's magnificent portraits of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

The Museum is housed in the landmark Walker Art Building, designed in 1894 by Charles Follen McKim. Located on the historic quadrangle of Bowdoin College, the building is graced by murals by John La Farge, Kenyon Cox, Elihu Vedder, and Abbott Thayer. A \$20.8-million renovation and expansion in 2007 provided a stunning setting for objects as diverse as monumental Assyrian reliefs from Nimrud, Iraq; European Old Master paintings; and works by American modernists. The Museum is the centerpiece of Bowdoin's vibrant arts and culture community and offers a wealth of academic and educational programs. The Museum is also a prominent summer venue for major exhibitions such as *Edward Hopper's Maine* (2011); *William Wegman: Hello Nature* (2012); *Maurice Prendergast: By the Sea* (2013); *Richard Tuttle: A Print Retrospective* (2014); *Night Vision: Nocturnes in American Art, 1860 – 1960* (2015); *This Is a Portrait If I Say So: Identity in American Art, 1912 to Today* (2016); *The Ivory Mirror: The Art of Mortality in Renaissance Europe* (2017); and *Why Draw? 500 Years of Drawings and Watercolors* (2017).

Fully accessible, the Bowdoin College Museum of Art is open to the public free of charge from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday through Saturday; 10:00 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Thursday; and from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sunday.

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