

Bowdoin College Museum of Art

A Gift of Knowing: The Art of Dorothea Rockburne

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March 14 – April 26, 2015

Since studying under Max Dehn at Black Mountain College in the early 1950s, artist Dorothea Rockburne (b. 1932) has grounded her artistic practice in a profound interest in mathematics and astronomy, with particular emphasis on geometry and topology. *A Gift of Knowing: The Art of Dorothea Rockburne* presented this spring at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art (BCMA) explores the significant and enduring impact of mathematics on Rockburne's work throughout her career—from her early groundbreaking work in drawing to her most recent drawings, watercolors, and collages. Initiated by Bowdoin professor of mathematics Jennifer Taback, and curated by BCMA curator Joachim Homann in collaboration with the artist, the exhibition features 25 works in a range of media, including two works from Rockburne's seminal *Conservation Class* series (1973), as well as several pieces the artist completed especially for the exhibition, which will be on public view of the first time.

In her most recent works, Rockburne relates mathematical theories to the movements of the planets and the light captured by deep space telescopes. Prime examples include her *Geometry of Stardust* painting series (2009-2010), the colored pencil drawings of her *Watermill Series* (2013-2015), which have never been on public view, as well as the drawing *The Mathematical Edges of Maine* (2014), inspired by Rockburne's travels in Maine last summer—all of which will be on view at Bowdoin. Characterized by spherical movements, these works are based on mathematical equations, and their proportions correlate to harmonious patterns found in nature.

A Gift of Knowing will be installed across two galleries at the BCMA, under supervision of the artist. The first gallery invites viewers to contemplate Rockburne's work in an immersive installation focused on her early pieces and artistic development. The second gallery, organized in collaboration with members of Bowdoin's department of physics, brings together Rockburne's recent drawings related to astronomical observation with sky charts and NASA photographs. Also included will be a selection of Rockburne's notebooks and diaries, enabling visitors to trace her creative process.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Rockburne will visit Bowdoin College on April 20 and 21, 2015 to deliver the semi-annual Santagata lecture, entitled *Materializing Mathematical Concepts into Art*. During her visit, she will address the legacy of Black Mountain College and the impact of mathematical theories on her work in a public conversation with Dave Peifer, chair and professor of the department of mathematics at the University of North Carolina-Asheville, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center.

For more information on *A Gift of Knowing* and associated programming, visit the BCMA website at www.bowdoin.edu/art-museum.

About the Artist

Canadian artist Dorothea Rockburne studied drawing, painting, and sculpture at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Montreal (1942–1946), as well as fine art at Black Mountain College, NC (1950–1956). Rockburne first exhibited at the Bykert Gallery, New York, in 1970, and her early work is characterized as Minimalist and process-orientated. Influenced by mathematics, in particular geometry and topology; and, later in her career, by 16th-century Mannerism, Rockburne is renowned for her paintings of interrelated shapes, as well as her sketches, drawings, watercolors and folded-paper constructions. In 2013, the Museum of Modern Art presented *Dorothea Rockburne: Drawing Which Makes Itself*, and in 2011-2012, the retrospective *Dorothea*

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Rockburne: In My Mind's Eye was on view at the Parrish Art Museum, New York, and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Rockburne lives and works in New York City.

Interviews with Dorothea Rockburne and additional information can be found on the artist's website at www.dorothea-rockburne.com.

About the Bowdoin College Museum of Art

The collections of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art are among the most comprehensive of any college museum in the United States. Collecting commenced over 200 years ago with a major gift from the College's founder James Bowdoin and his family 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), and *Night Vision: Nocturnes in American Art, 1860-1960* (2015).

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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