

# The New York Times



Some of the 987 squares in Jennifer Bartlett's "Rhapsody," in "Against the Grain" at MoMA. Keith Redford for The New York Times

## Art Review | 'Against the Grain'

### One Collection, Many Stories From the Land of Mavericks

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Published: May 12, 2006

THE Museum of Modern Art's latest exhibition, "Against the Grain: Contemporary Art From the Edward R. Broida Collection," starts with a bang. Not an actual noise, mind you, just the startling sight of Jennifer Bartlett's rogue mural painting, "Rhapsody," a watershed of 1970's art, fitting the museum's dwarfing, space-eating atrium to an absolute tailor-made T.

Painted on 987 12-inch squares of white-enamel steel, Ms. Bartlett's grandiose, slightly mad tour de force has a tilelike flexibility. Just look at the way it wraps around the atrium's three long walls. But it is so ungainly and so rarely seen that it might as well be an earthwork in the Nevada desert.

Until now "Rhapsody" has been shown in New York three times: in 1976 — the year of its completion — 1978 and 1999. At 30 it exudes a disconcerting made-yesterday freshness (and even perks up Barnett

Newman's giant, brooding spike-in-the-heart sculpture at the atrium's center). Its mix of Minimalism, Conceptualism, Photo Realism and faux-Expressionism was considered apostasy by orthodox Conceptualists at its debut. It presages quite a bit of art since 1980, especially in its freewheeling exploration of the slippery slope from representation to abstraction. Its temporary union with the MoMA atrium proves that all sorts of clouds, architectural and otherwise, can have silver linings.

"Rhapsody" itself is one of several silver linings in "Against the Grain," a show of 104 of the 175 works that constitute the latest collection collected by the museum. It is the gift of Edward R. Broida, a Los Angeles real estate developer and architect who died last month at 72.

The collection's other silver linings are substantial caches of work by the lapsed Abstract Expressionist Philip Guston and the poetic Minimalist-realist Vija Celmins, and clusters of sculptures by Ken Price, Joel Shapiro, Mark di Suvero and to some extent Christopher Wilmarth, a middling Post-Minimalist to whom Mr. Broida was overly devoted.

In an interview in the exhibition's catalog, Mr. Broida describes himself as a collector who operated by his gut. The collection he assembled veers between exhilarating highs and sleepy plateaus, and seems to encapsulate some of the contradictions of the man behind it. Mainly it reflects someone who liked to collect artists in depth but also had a wandering eye and often moved on too quickly. It also indicates a man repeatedly attracted to mavericks who were working outside the white-hot center of the art world yet who rarely ventured into truly unknown territory.

It differs markedly from both the imperious blue-chip Beuys-to-Gober collection that Elaine Dannheisser donated to the Modern in 1997 and the more corporate usual-suspects roundup of the UBS gift that, to much dismay, inaugurated the Modern's sixth-floor galleries last year. Mr. Broida's gift neither tries resolutely to extend the canon, à la Dannheisser, nor affirms the high-end market, like UBS.

The Broida gift feels alternately personal, confused and at many points decidedly un-MoMAish. Selected by the museum from 700 works that Mr. Broida offered, the works on view tell parts of the untold stories of 1970's and 80's art. The concentration is on artists who were for the most part not at the forefront of Post-Minimalism — with its forays into video, performance, language and politics — or the waves of photo appropriation and Neo-Expressionism that followed.

Mr. Broida may have taken his greatest risks at the beginning, with Guston, the first artist whose work he purchased. The time was 1978, the place was the 63rd Street gallery of David McKee, Guston's longtime dealer and advocate, and late Gustons were not exactly in high demand. Mr. Broida had been nudged toward collecting by an uncle; it became such a passion that in the early 1980's he tried to build a museum for his collection in SoHo, until red tape got the better of him. As he noted, he was an art world outsider, known for many years as a collector who had only Gustons.

Spread through two galleries, Mr. Broida's Gustons are quite a sight. Eight large paintings trundle effectively through the twitchy, self-involved motifs of late Guston: Klan hoods in a toylike car (the wonderful "Edge of Town," from 1969); woolly legs cantilevered over a woolly rug; scattered cherries almost the size of soccer balls; the head of the artist's wife, rendered as a dopey Madonna but also doubling as

the sun cresting a watery blue horizon; and the artist himself, with a head shaped like a lima bean, contemplating his canvases from the safety of bed.

This sequence culminates in the gesturing hand thrust into the center of "Talking" from 1979, extending from a paint-splattered shirt sleeve and holding a cigarette billowing red smoke. Mr. Broida then bolstered late Guston with early: 14 drawings and paintings on paper that reach back to 1947, plus "Gladiators," an important 1940 painting whose wrestling forms and cheerful colors — and suave amalgam of Social Realism, de Chirico and Renaissance art — contain the seed of the late work.

Guston's commanding fusion of abstraction and representation fomented by a muscular involvement with his medium seems to have been a touchstone for Mr. Broida. Nearly all the artists in the show attempt some kind of balance among these elements.

You can see it in the work of Susan Rothenberg and Neil Jenney, who, like Ms. Bartlett, were associated with a tendency called New Image Painting before Neo-Expressionism steamrolled over it. It is played out in three dimensions by the suggestive forms of Mr. Shapiro, John Duff and Martin Puryear and later arrivals like Judith Shea, Daisy Youngblood and Jeanne Silverthorne.

It has a wonderfully quirky moment in an imposing painted steel sculpture by the erstwhile Minimalist Robert Grosvenor that evokes a giant pot sitting on a fire. Along with John Lees, Susana Solano and the French postwar painter Jules Bissier, Mr. Grosvenor is one of several artists in the Broida gift not previously represented in the museum's collection.

Wolfgang Laib's marble house shape dusted with rice and pollen negotiates a meeting of representation, abstraction and material with exquisite refinement, as do Ms. Celmins's impeccable expanses of ocean waves, starry skies and desert floors, which reiterate the Modernist monochrome as accumulations of natural fact. (The 15 Celmins works Mr. Broida acquired form a mini-survey of her career and is one of the show's best passages.) And the balancing act may reach its apogee in the painted ceramic sculptures of Mr. Price, an artist Mr. Broida began to collect in the late 90's.

Their biomorphic forms and jewel colors seamlessly merge painting and sculpture, the strangely beautiful and the decidedly erotic. For all their elegance they have more than a touch of Robert Crumb's keep-on-trucking raunch, which makes them possibly the most slyly sexual great art being made today.

There are exceptions to the collection's main tendency: the purist abstraction of the painter Harvey Quaytman; the rather pat cerebrality of a sculpture by Bruce Nauman that looks slightly out of place here; and Jake Berthot's "Greenpoint," which proves that Brice Marden wasn't the only artist dedicated to moody monochromes in 1971.

Take note as well of "Three Women," a 1963 painting by Richard Artschwager that should hang next to a Gerhard Richter painting of similar vintage, and "Eatherly's Lamp," a 1961 mobilelike sculpture by Mr. di Suvero that pinpoints the influence of Robert Rauschenberg on his work.

Also in the gift but not the show are works by Richard Tuttle, Richard Serra and Carl Andre, paintings by Elizabeth Murray, Sue Coe and Bissier, and additional pieces by nearly every artist on view.

As seen here, Mr. Broida's gift seems personified by the flawed, restless talents of Guston and Ms. Bartlett, whose "Rhapsody," like Mr. Price's work, was a late acquisition. Guston turned his back on the Abstract Expressionist aristocracy to become a beacon for artists who believed in the future of a deeply personal art. Ms. Bartlett reinterpreted the innovations of Conceptualism and Minimalism with an anything-goes abandon and started tilting them back toward art objects, a process that remains very much in force.

It will be extremely interesting to watch the Modern integrate the Broida art into its collection. Some of it may disappear into storage, but quite a bit of it will shake up the museum's conception of the complicated course of art since 1970. In the meantime this show is also to be enjoyed for its layout, which devotes seven of its galleries to the work of individual artists. It is great to take advantage of the concentrated viewing such an installation affords and stunning to see the Modern give this kind of space to art from the last 40 years. It makes the museum's future seem brighter.

"Against the Grain: Contemporary Art From the Edward R. Broida Collection" is at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, through Sept. 18. (212) 708-9400.