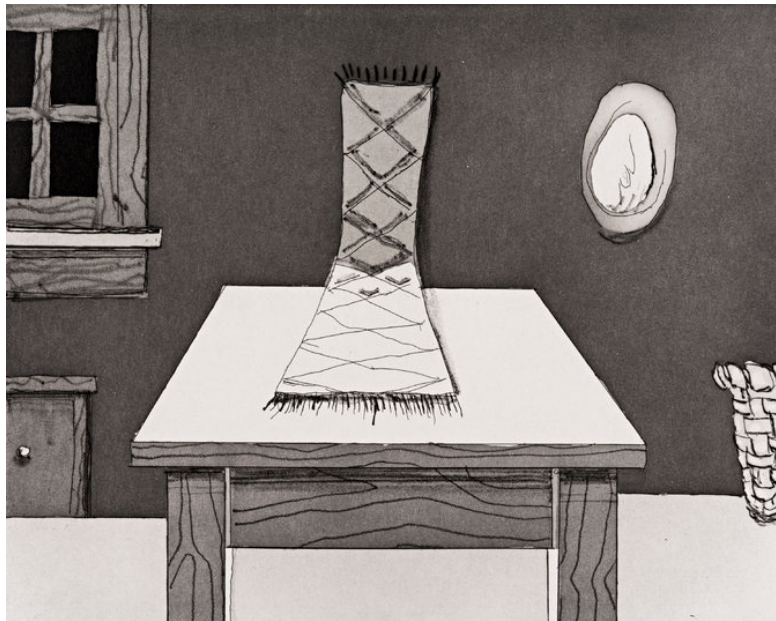


## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

### The New York Times

#### A Review of 'Punctuating Space: The Prints and Multiples of Richard Artschwager' at Vassar College

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*"T,w,m,d,r,b #3" (2003), aquatint, drypoint and etching. Collection of Harlan & Weaver, Inc., New York*

Richard Artschwager made ordinary things extraordinary. In fact, much of his remarkable career soared on an unremarkable black dot. Artschwager, who died in 2013, elongated it into a lozenge shape, called it a “blp” (pronounced blip), then stenciled or attached his sundry creatures throughout a city or in oddball museum locations.

What he did for the dot he did for Formica, elevating the much-slighted mid-20th-century laminate to high art with his furniture-inspired cubes and small multiples. He flirted with Pop Art, minimalism and conceptualism, but married no one genre, happier to flit among them. “Punctuating Space: The Prints and Multiples of Richard Artschwager,” curated by Wendy Weitman for the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College, connects Artschwager’s dots through his lesser-known prints and multiples to where elitist art takes a democratic bow.

Artschwager began as a chemistry and mathematics student at Cornell before turning to art. He studied in Paris with Amédée Ozenfant, a painter who with the architect Le Corbusier developed purism, a Cubism offshoot reflecting machine-age precision. Early on he supported his young family by working as a photographer and as a furniture maker who made Formica altars for ship chapels.

Minimal art, multiple-art processes, handmade objects and manufactured materials set Artschwager's subversive sense of humor going in the direction of art without pretension. Printmaking became a precision tool for his sculpture, the unique surfaces derived from etching, lithography and screen prints offering myriad textural effects and, as this exhibition emphasizes, multiple opportunities to explore the visual and psychic dislocations between two- and three-dimensional space.

"Interior" (1972), a predominantly black-and-white screen print based on a photograph, is a stunning example of this mix. In it, Artschwager juxtaposes different perspectives of a stately old parlor as he exploits the room's sumptuous textures — a carved wooden chair, a deep-pile rug — to viscerally animate space.

Then he turns minimalist: "Interior #2" (1977), a drypoint etching scratched directly onto a plastic plate, radically strips a generic room down to a tableau of the six objects — table, window, mirror, door, rug and basket — that defined his large-scale sculpture and multiple editions.

These mercurial weaves of texture, form and spatial relationships are most notably documented in a never-before-exhibited series of drawings and working proofs for "t,w,m,d,r,b #3" (2003). It begins with a small yellow sticky-note drawing. Subsequent proofs — etchings embellished with charcoal, pencil, pastel or ink details — provide insight into Artschwager's deliberate choices and the way he made art happen.

Why did this painter and sculptor spend so much time with prints? "They are multiples, repeatable, less precious, collectible, so democracy is inherent in them," Ms. Weitman said. Her curatorial choices make explicit Artschwager's serial collisions of the ordinary with the fine-art object.

"Untitled" (1971), for example, a jewelry-box-like container made from oak with a Formica top, acknowledges the inexpensive laminate as a manufactured material replicating authentic wood. Of five drawers, one is empty. The others contain Formica, glass, a mirror and a bed of rubberized horsehair, favorite materials for Artschwager, but strange for a viewer expecting to find more traditional treasures.

Other multiples, such as "Chair/Chair" (1987-90), "Bookends" (1990) and "Time Piece" (1989), similarly smudge the lines between faux and real, handmade and manufactured, functional and useless, ordinary thing and conceptually high art.

Enter the blp, a singular form with multiple iterations. "What is this?" people ask of the lozenge-shaped black blobs the artist posted on unexpected sites. Like the gravitational pull of black holes in the universe, Artschwager's enigmatic blps forcibly pull the viewer's eye to where he stuffed them into corners or painted them on buildings as visual inflections. Giving the banal a pop, they call attention to forms, spaces and light — the stuff of art proliferating everywhere, free for the looking.

"Locations" (1969), a multiple consisting of a Formica-sheathed wood box, contains a set of five blps, each made from one of Artschwager's favorite materials. The set provides no instructions

for their placement, just a democratic tip of the hat to collectors, who may put them wherever they choose.

Artschwager considered his blps analogous to punctuation marks with their merge of sign, symbol, form, object, image and word. They have their say in yet another related group of multiples that, along with unexpectedly positioned blps, further enliven this exhibition: A six-foot, orange-bristled “Exclamation” (1995-2012) hangs from the ceiling; “Pregunta I” (1983), an imperious-looking question mark dressed in steel hardware, greets visitors entering the gallery; and “Untitled (Quotation Marks)” (1980), set on a wall, stirs viewers to imaginatively author the blank space between them.

What we glimpse of Artschwager in this exhibition of small works is writ large at the Whitney Museum of American Art in Manhattan. The interiors of the museum’s four immense elevators contain his last major art work, “Six in Four,” a permanent installation incorporating his iconic window, door, chair, table, mirror and rug. Adam D. Weinberg, the director of the Whitney, reaffirmed the essence of Ms. Weitman’s Vassar exhibition:

“We chose Richard because we wanted an artist who had a sense of humor, whose work was accessible, durable and could stand up to wear and tear. He turns Formica into something beautiful, taking something familiar and making it strange. The work is about activity and everyday function. We’re in an elevator where people usually look down at their shoes. The Whitney elevators make them look up. They begin the art experience here, in the elevators, where the questioning begins. It’s all as delightful to the 3-year-old as it is to the art scholar.”

And incidentally, if you happen to be on West 31st Street and 10th Avenue in Manhattan, you can spot a blp on a smokestack rising above the din of West Side construction. Look up and wink.

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“Punctuating Space: The Prints and Multiples of Richard Artschwager,” at the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, 124 Raymond Avenue, Poughkeepsie, June 26 to Sept. 6, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursdays, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Sundays, 1 to 5 p.m. For more information: 845-437-5632; [flac.vassar.edu](http://flac.vassar.edu).