

LIFE MASK

A CELEBRATION OF GIFTS FROM THE DALE JANSEN ESTATE

APRIL 25 – AUGUST 31, 2025
JOHN BRADY PRINT GALLERY
DES MOINES ART CENTER

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ASHTON COOPER



Bruce Nauman's 1981 lithograph *Life Mask* stretches three feet wide, an expanse of black kinetic swoops, scribbles, and scratches amongst which floats the titular phrase — "LIFE MASK" — all caps, declarative, and stretching nearly to the edges of the paper. The letters L-I-F-E sit in the upper half of the composition, right side up, but M, A, S, and K stretch upside down below, as if hanging by their toes. This inversion doesn't so much obscure our ability to read the message—it is still perfectly legible—so much as draw attention to the conventions by which we turn letters into words, likewise the way those letters sit on a page in a certain configuration. With a spirit of meta-analysis, Nauman's print explores the ways that meaning is communicated or, better yet, impressed. *Life Mask* is a kaleidoscopic interrogation of impressions—the impression made by a lithographic plate pressed against a wet sheet of paper; the impression of a human face into wax or plaster to create a replica, or life mask; and the impression that a person can leave after death, their legacy.

Life Mask is one of 65 artworks donated to the Art Center by the late philanthropist, collector, and longtime museum supporter Dale Jansen through his estate. Nauman's print, too, is an apt emblem for this selection of works drawn from Jansen's collection. The exhibition itself functions as a kind of life mask, an



enduring record of Jansen and his enthusiasm for the print medium as well as his deep-rooted investment in the Art Center, where he generously contributed to our community for nearly 50 years. Jansen became a member of the museum in the mid-1970s, was a founding member of the Art Center's Print Club in 1981, served on the Board of Trustees from 2009 to 2017, was a regular and enthusiastic volunteer at many Art Center events, and was an Honorary Trustee as well as a member of the Acquisitions Committee at the time of his death.

Beginning in the late 1970s, Jansen also began to build a significant collection of prints. In a 2011 interview he explained, "The Art Center helped me to become a print collector. In the early 70s, Art Center Director Jim Demetron brought in a number of prints from galleries. The whole main gallery was lined with pieces from all over the country. That opened my eyes and really got the world spinning for me in terms of collecting." Like those early, trans-American print displays at the museum, Jansen's collection includes work made in famed print studios from Gemini G.E.L. in Los Angeles to Parasol Press in New York, and everywhere in between.

When building his collection, Jansen foregrounded American artists who came to prominence after World War II, a majority of whom were born in the 1920s and 1930s and significantly shaped the trajectory of American art in the subsequent decades, including Richard Diebenkorn, Jim Dine, Jasper Johns,

Ellsworth Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, Ed Ruscha, Pat Steir, and many others. In prints from the 1960s, 70s, 80s, and 90s, these artists experimented with new approaches to portraiture, distillations of shape and color, collage and found objects, the meanings of signs and systems, and the use of pop culture aesthetics—all defining issues in the postwar art world.

This selection of nearly three dozen pieces explores the myriad formal relationships that exist among the works in Jansen's collection without regard for the confines of periods, isms, or geographic ties. Instead, the artworks on view are organized into a series of open-ended vignettes that could easily be reframed and reshuffled, mimicking the freewheeling and intuitive spirit of the collector and the pleasures of private display. Jim Dine's print *The Woodcut Bathrobe*, 1975, hangs aside Rodney Carswell's sculptural painting *Untitled Multi-Colored Cross*, 1988, a pair of artworks that uses color blocking to transcend the abstract-figurative binary. An empty, floating water glass in Ed Ruscha's *Sunlines VII*, 1996, sits next to the outsized hovering zero of Jasper Johns's *Figure 0*, 1968—both murky explorations of the twin conditions of emptiness and plenitude. A little further down the wall, Nauman's *Life Mask* rubs up against a suite of Richard Diebenkorn's early, agile sketches of fleeting faces, bodies, and interiors—other quiet records of lives lived. Together, these works are a lasting testament to the care, intellect, and altruism with which Jansen approached both art and life.





12 Robert Rauschenberg (American, 1925 – 2008) **Test Stone #6 (Blue Cloud)**, from "Booster and 7 Studies" 1967



Pat Steir (American, born 1938) **Waterfall Night** 1988

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

All works Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Gift of the Estate of Dale Jansen

Stephan Balkenhol (German, born 1957)
Standing Man 2003
Paper pulp print, aquatint with hand painting
2024.28

Squeak Carnwath (American, born 1947)
A Room This Colour 1996
Oil and alkyd on wood
2024.29

Rodney Carswell (American, born 1946)
Untitled (Multi-Colored Cross) 1988
Oil and wax on canvas and wood
2024.30

Robert Cottingham (American, born 1935)
Nite 1991
Woodcut on paper
2024.33

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#2, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1964
Etching and drypoint on paper
2024.34

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#6, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1964
Etching and drypoint on paper
2024.35

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#7, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1965
Etching and drypoint on paper
2024.36

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#8, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1965
Etching and drypoint on paper
2024.37

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#12, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1965
Etching and drypoint on paper
2024.38

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#13, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1965
Etching and drypoint on paper
2024.39

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#15, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1965
Etching and drypoint on paper
2024.40

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#17, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1964
Etching and drypoint on paper
2024.41

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#20, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1965
Etching and drypoint on paper
2024.43

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#21, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1965
Softground etching on paper
2024.44

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#22, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1965
Hardground etching on paper
2024.45

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#23, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1965
Etching and drypoint on paper
2024.46

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#25, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1965
Etching and drypoint on paper
2024.47

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#31, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1965
Aquatint and etching
2024.48

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993)
#40, from the portfolio "41 Etchings Drypoints" 1965
Drypoint on paper
2024.49

Jim Dine (American, born 1935)
The Woodcut Bathrobe 1975
Woodcut and lithograph
2024.50

Jasper Johns (American, born 1930)
Evian 1972
Lithograph, 10 colors on Arjomari paper
2024.58

Jasper Johns (American, born 1930)
Figure 0, from the series "Black and White Numerals" 1968
Lithograph on paper
2024.59

Ellsworth Kelly (American, 1923–2015)
Green Curve with a Radius of 20', from portfolio
"For Meyer Schapiro" 1974
Lithograph with embossing on Special Arjomari paper
2024.61

Roy Lichtenstein (American, 1923–1997)
Haystack #2 1969
3-color lithograph/screenprint (red litho, black litho
and white screen)
2024.64

Robert Mangold (American, born 1937)
X, from "Attic Series", 1991
Aquatint and etching
2024.65

Bruce Nauman (American, born 1941)
Life Mask 1981
Lithograph in black on Arches cover wove paper
2024.73

Philip Pearlstein (American, 1924–2022)
Nude on Eames Stool with Mirror 1977
Lithograph on paper
2024.76

Robert Rauschenberg (American, 1925–2008)
Test Stone #6 (Blue Cloud), from "Booster and 7 Studies"
1967
Lithograph
2024.78

Robert Rauschenberg (American, 1925–2008)
Why You Can't Tell #II 1979
Collage and offset lithograph in colors on paper
2024.77

James Rosenquist (American, 1933–2017)
Sight-Seeing 1972
Eight color Lithograph and screenprint on German
etching paper
2024.79

Ed Ruscha (American, born 1937)
Drops 1971
Lithograph
2024.81

Ed Ruscha (American, born 1937)
Sunlines VII 1996
Etching and aquatint on paper
2024.82

Pat Steir (American, born 1938)
Waterfall Night 1988
Aquatint, spitbite, softground etching, etching and
drypoint on paper
2024.86

Richard Tuttle (American, born 1941)
D 2003
Color spit bite aquatint with ink-dripped tarlatan,
chine collé
2024.92

The Dale Jansen estate gift in its
entirety can be viewed at this QR code:



This gallery guide is published in conjunction with the exhibition

LIFE MASK: A CELEBRATION OF GIFTS FROM THE DALE JANSEN ESTATE

April 25 – August 31, 2025

John Brady Print Gallery

Des Moines Art Center

ORGANIZED BY

Associate Curator Ashton Cooper, Ph.D.

DESIGN

Connie Wilson

PHOTOGRAPHY

Rich Sanders, Des Moines

EXHIBITION RELATED PROGRAMS

Sunday June 1, 1:30 pm

Lecture by Amy N. Worthen, Curator of Prints and Drawings Emerita,
Des Moines Art Center, and good friend of Dale Jansen.

Public reception follows lecture hosted by Des Moines Art Center Print Club
Reservations required at desmoinesartcenter.org.

Thursday, June 26, 5:30 pm

Gallery Talk with Ashton Cooper, Ph.D., Associate Curator

Reservations are not required.

Support for this exhibition and gallery guide is provided
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