

Benjamin, Maloof & McIntosh

October 30, 2021 – January 8, 2022

Los Angeles, CA. Louis Stern Fine Arts is pleased to present *Benjamin, Maloof & McIntosh*. This exhibition, celebrating the mid-century modern aesthetic in its many expressions, marries paintings and sculpture by Karl Benjamin, Sam Maloof's furniture designs, and ceramic sculpture by Harrison McIntosh. The three men were friends as well as members of the blossoming art scene centered around Claremont, California, which grew into a hub of artistic innovation and cross-pollination during the postwar era. Characterized by minimal lines, synthesis of organic and geometric forms, and restrained decoration, these works are unified by the streamlined sensibility that flourished in art, design, and architecture in mid-century America.

A venerated professor at Pomona College and Claremont Graduate University, Karl Benjamin (1925-2012) was a founding member of the Hard Edge painting movement. Benjamin began working in this geometric abstract mode while a graduate student taking classes at CGU and Scripps College in the 1950s. A vocabulary of repeating geometries allowed the artist to play with color relationships and manipulate the response of the viewer's eye. With their economy of form and clean lines, his paintings mirror the pared-down architecture which became popular during the postwar housing boom. Benjamin's effortlessly cool paintings are shown with rare examples of wall sculpture by the artist, including a dynamic wood construction which pulls the lines of his iconic *Tape Grid* series into three-dimensional space.

Sam Maloof (1916-2009) was drawn to Claremont in the mid-late 1940s when he was personally invited to become studio assistant to Millard Sheets during Sheets' tenure as head of the Scripps College art department. A pioneer of the studio crafts movement, Maloof is renowned for his exquisite hand-crafted furniture infused with warmth, elegance, and character. Constructed entirely with skillful joinery, Maloof furniture has sculptural quality which is nonetheless simple and purposeful. The undulating curves of his creations are designed with the comfort and needs of the user in mind, but make no sacrifices of form for the sake of function. Several tables and chairs on display are contemporary pieces, faithfully executed using Maloof's designs by Sam Maloof Woodworker, Inc. under the auspices of his longtime studio assistant in the original woodshop. They are accompanied by two vintage pieces made by Maloof himself, including a 1960s cabinet custom-built for architect Edward H. Fickett.

Harrison McIntosh (1914-2016), maintained a quiet, consistent aesthetic throughout his career. At a time when many of his contemporaries and colleagues such as Peter Voulkos were creating large, abstract expressionist works in clay, McIntosh was a champion of the mid-century modern style of ceramics, featuring simple symmetrical forms and inspired by European modern design and Japanese pottery and aesthetics. McIntosh began to produce the graceful, wheel-thrown stoneware vessels which would become his trademark while studying at CGU with Richard Petterson from 1948 through 1952. Subtle, elegant, and concerned with purity of form, the pieces are simply adorned with delicate surface decoration and often have a weightless quality; orbs and ovoids appear to float on small, trimmed feet or hover on wood block bases and chrome mounts.

These works are natural and harmonious companions. McIntosh's serene, egglike forms are reflected in the neat parabolic slashes of green and red that seem to hover in space in a 1957 painting by Benjamin. Benjamin's *Interlocking Forms*, 1959, with its jagged, tightly-fitting ochre and umber color forms, echoes the visible mortise and tenon joints of a Maloof chair. The sweeping curves of Maloof's famous rocking chair design give the impression of a graceful, purposeful paint stroke in wood. Conversing in a common tongue across mediums, these works by Benjamin, Maloof, and McIntosh tell a story of artists in community and the creative influences of their shared time and place.