

# AERIAL PERSPECTIVES

## Grounded in an Infinite Landscape



Jean Dubuffet, *Topography with a Nest of Stones*, 1958, oil and collage on canvas.  
Gift of Joachim Jean Aberbach; P.975.99.

The works of art in this exhibition are all abstracted depictions of landscapes from an aerial perspective, a point of view that draws us into the work through an intensified experience of the entire composition. They all share the same basic focus, evoking some geographical construct or another, and a sense of place. While they have a visually abstract quality, this does not mean that we become lost. Rather, the means through which the artists masterfully render their subjects (including line, color, light, shadow, volume, and depth) encourage us to take an active role in these works’ realization. They ground us, ironically, as we examine them from every angle, following the symphony of marks along the surface and subconsciously constructing the imagined landscape both within and beyond the edges of the frame.

The artists represented in this exhibition come from around the world, and from different eras—modern-day Aboriginal Australia, post-World War II France, and mid-twentieth-century America. Though they approach the subject of landscape from an aerial perspective for different reasons and through different techniques, the ultimate experience of their work is remarkably consistent. We are asked to become part of this art as we

take in the scene and couple it with our own assumptions, interpretations, and previous experiences to derive an original emotive meaning from it. These works are relatively formless, timeless, and lineless, divided vaguely into zones. Each one is a fragment of an abstract landscape that could be continuously repeated into infinity. From the vibrating character of the visual surface, these works derive their unique ability to connect with the audience.

For Australian Aboriginal artists Dorothy Napangardi and Raymond Tjapaltjarri, this audience engagement with the work is directly linked to the purpose of painting in the first place. Aboriginal artists paint not merely for pleasure but to serve their culture and people, present and past, by perpetuating the “Dreaming.” The term refers to stories concerning the creation of the world by ancestral spirits who traveled across the Australian continent shaping the physical geography. The Dreamings are all unique and serve to explain how the universe was created, how its inhabitants came to be, and how the land was shaped. Aboriginal people refer to the Dreaming as “the Law”—the universal principle that transcends time and space to unify all people, places, and things. “Dreaming evokes the lived landscape, a spiritual and lived experience” (Manning 2009, p. 157). The cycle of roaming and return continues throughout history, and Dreamings exist to represent this continuity of past and future, regardless of the particular era. They are meant to be retold through singing, stories, paintings, and dance, and to live on forever.

All Aboriginal people share these Dreamings, much as they share the land, but certain clans are responsible for the continuation of the Dreamings centered upon specific sacred sites. Painting serves to represent this “collective memory” of the Dreamings—to visually map the memories of Aboriginal peoples. By painting Dreamings, Napangardi and Tjapaltjarri take part in a tradition of representation meant not merely to recall their ancestors’ pathways but to both relive and preserve them. This type of connection with the landscape is more than just a depiction of the physical ground, it is an exploration or charting of the essence of being alive. These paintings are thus much more than art as well: “To criticize a painting on aesthetic grounds is to criticize the artist’s Dreaming—the artist’s very becoming” (Manning 2009, p. 241). As these images make clear, the Western ideas of time and space do not exist in the Aboriginal mindset, which favors the internal essence of a work over issues of perspective, horizon, or realism. Napangardi and Tjapaltjarri’s paintings are not representations of specific places but rather the representation of a mental encounter with a notion of a place.

Similarly, Jean Dubuffet paints an idea of a place with his ambiguous portion of unlocated space. His primary goal was to celebrate the ground

in *Topography with a Nest of Stones*. This work is part of his *Topologies* series, which lies within the overarching *Celebration du Sol* (or *Celebrations of the Ground*). Like the Aboriginal paintings, Dubuffet’s work pays respect to the earth, something we encounter every day but too often take for granted: “For what is more important is not reaching objects of reputed beauty after long days of travel, but learning that, without having to move an inch, no matter where you are, all that first seemed most sterile and mute is swarming with facts which can entrance you even more” (*Dubuffet, 1943–1963*, p. 120). While Napangardi and Tjapaltjarri use geometric patterning, Dubuffet employs a more organic splattering of shimmering marks, layering old canvases upon each other and building his luminescent surface from the ground up. The resulting “microtexture” is so alive that the perspective is difficult to pinpoint, leading us to question whether the viewpoint is upon a landscape from far above in the celestial sphere, or upon a dot of the ground through the lens of a microscope. This induces a state of immersion like that created by the Aboriginal artists that asks us to dismiss our physical distance from the work and enter it through the associations we might put upon it.

Dorothy Dehner celebrates a “lived landscape” of a more literal sort in her finely drafted engraving *Aerial to Infinity*. She interweaves graphic lines and sharp angles to blend perspectives and scale into a teeming mass of crisp marks. Her geometric shapes suggest an aerial view of suburbia during an era when television antennas were innovations on the horizon. *Aerial to Infinity* displays Dehner’s pictorial clarity, beauty, and balance, but most of all her wry wit.

The works in this exhibition concentrate on grounding the viewer in the landscape, in many senses. They accomplish this first by abandoning a set horizon line in favor of variations upon an aerial perspective that almost literally kicks our feet out from under us. The resulting images encompass us with their energy, encouraging us to take part in the experience and read between the lines, thereby forging a unique and personal relationship with the art itself.

Natalia Wrobel ’11, Class of 1954 Intern



Dorothy Napangardi, *Dreaming at Mina Mina*, 2001, acrylic on linen. Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.76.



FRESH PERSPECTIVES *on the Permanent Collection from* DARTMOUTH'S STUDENTS

A SPACE *for* DIALOGUE

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cotter, Holland. "Still Conquering Metal at a Dauntless 91." *New York Times*, Nov. 20, 1993.

Demetrian, James T., Susan J. Cooke, Jean Planque, and Peter Schjeldahl. *Jean Dubuffet, 1943–1963: Paintings, Sculptures, Assemblages*. Exhib. cat. Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, in association with the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993.

"Dorothy Dehner: Sixty Years of Art." *The Hyde: Connection* 3, no. 5 (September/October 1993).

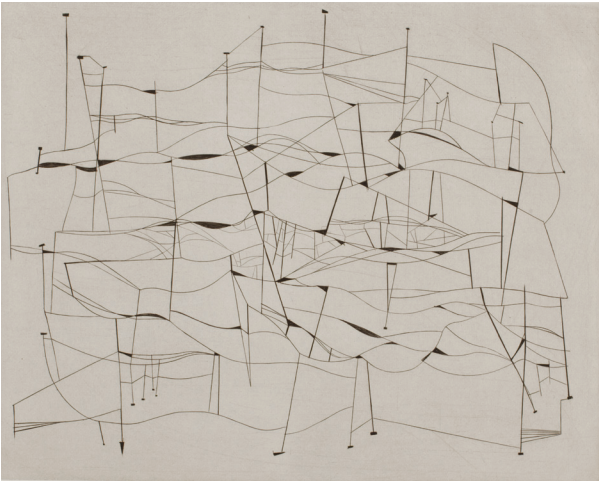
Franzke, Andreas. *Dubuffet*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1981.

Manning, Erin. *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009.

Marter, Joan. *Dorothy Dehner and David Smith: Their Decades of Search and Fulfillment*. Exhib. cat. New Brunswick, N.J.: The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, 1983.

Van der Marck, Jan, et al. *In Quest of Excellence: Civic Pride, Patronage, Connoisseurship*. Exhib. cat. Miami: The Center for the Fine Arts, 1984.

White, Dorothy Keane. *Dorothy Dehner, Sculpture and Works on Paper*. New York: Twining Gallery, 1988.



Dorothy Dehner, *Aerial to Infinity*, 1955, engraving on wove paper. Purchased through the Hood Museum of Art Acquisitions Fund; PR.993.40.1.

CHECKLIST

Dorothy Dehner, American, 1901–1994  
*Aerial to Infinity*, 1955  
Engraving on wove paper  
*Purchased through the Hood Museum of Art Acquisitions Fund; PR.993.40.1*

Jean Dubuffet, French, 1901–1985  
*Topography with a Nest of Stones (Topographie au nid de pierres)*, 1958  
Oil and collage on canvas  
*Gift of Joachim Jean Aberbach; P.975.99*

Dorothy Napangardi, Australian (Pikilyi region), born about 1952  
*Women's Dreaming at Mina Mina (Mina Mina Karntakurlangu Tjukurrpa)*, 2001  
Acrylic on linen  
*Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.76*

Raymond Tjapaltjarri, Australian, born 20th century  
*Litjardi*, 2005  
Acrylic on canvas  
*Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.274*

A Space for Dialogue, founded with support from the Class of 1948, is made possible with generous endowments from the Class of 1967, Bonnie and Richard Reiss Jr. '66, and Pamela J. Joyner '79.

HOOD  
MUSEUM OF ART  
[www.hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu](http://www.hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu)

Designed by Christina Nadeau  
© 2011 by the Trustees of Dartmouth College



Raymond Tjapaltjarri, *Litjardi*, 2005, acrylic on canvas.  
*Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.274.*