

# SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART

## SAN JOSÉ MUSEUM OF ART PRESENTS *JEAN CONNER: COLLAGE*, THE ARTIST'S FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION MAY 6–SEPTEMBER 25, 2022

For Immediate Release

**San José, California** (December 6, 2021) — From May 6 through September 25, 2022, the San José Museum of Art (SJMA) will present the first museum solo exhibition of San Francisco-based artist Jean Conner (born 1933, Lincoln, Nebraska), bringing long-overdue recognition to the 88-year-old artist's extraordinary work. *Jean Conner: Collage* will feature collages from the 1950s to the present and will highlight Conner's whimsical imagination and clever critiques of mass media representations of women, war, and the environment. It will include rarely seen materials from the Conner Family Trust, new acquisitions by SJMA, and works from public museums and private collections.



“Although Jean Conner spent most of her six-decades long career, alongside an avant-garde circle of artists in San Francisco, like her husband Bruce Conner and Joan Brown, Jay DeFeo, Wally Hedrick, George Herms, and others, her art practice was largely unrecognized. It is unlikely that she could have ever imagined that her reputation would grow so much in recent years,” said S. Sayre Batton, Oshman Executive Director, San José Museum of Art. “It is a privilege to share Conner's life and artistic practices with audiences and show how her signature style was inspired by the world around her. This exhibition reinforces the Museum's commitment to showcase the remarkable artistic achievements of women artists.”

Paper collage represented the majority of her output since she moved to San Francisco in 1957. Conner's early collages include newsprint and paint in abstract compositions, and her more figurative works of that decade, such as *Nixon* (1959), were made from black-and-white images. Her approach to making art from everyday objects and images was echoed in the culture around her: the Beat Generation artists in San Francisco who embraced an ethos of experimentation and rebelled against traditional art practices and economic materialism. Resourceful and unconventional, these artists practiced assemblage through various mediums such as photography and sculpture.

By 1960, she was using color magazines almost exclusively. She would create seductive and humorous scenes from images cut out of large-format magazines, exploring the aspirations and fears of postwar modern life as they were reflected in publications such as *Life Magazine* and *Ladies' Home Journal*. Conner reveled in color and figuration, depicting flamboyant scenes as excessive and strange as the era's advertisements, as in *TOMATO SOUP* (1960), a bold, crimson collage in which a spoonful of tomato soup doubles as a looking glass for a manicured finger applying matching ruby lipstick.

Her observations of technological advancements can also be read in such works as *ADDING MACHINE* (1969), in which synchronized dancers spring from a computer's numbered keys in an orchestrated explosion superimposed over a scene of war-wrought destruction. Strange ecologies emerge in *OCTOPUS* (1982), which shows a reef diver overcome by a giant octopus rising from a swamp, as a blue shark swims across a blue sky.

"Conner constructs fantastical, lurid compositions in her collages. Her vivid, pictorial worlds feature animals and nature, religious rituals, dancers, divers, and food with a keen eye to art history. She draws on surrealism and a history of collage that predates the twentieth-century avant-garde—used as both a subversive tactic and a domestic pursuit—to create uncanny pictures that render the incredible believable and unsettle the mind," said Rory Padeken, curator and manager of publications, San José Museum of Art.

## **PUBLICATION**

Published by San Jose Museum of Art, a full-color catalog titled *Jean Conner: Collage* (2021), accompanies the exhibition. It is the first monograph Jean Conner and presents new scholarship on the artist. Edited with an introduction by Rory Padeken, curator and manager of publications, San José Museum of Art, the catalog features contributions by Rachel Federman, Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Drawings at The Morgan Library & Museum; and Kathryn Wade, former assistant curator, San José Museum of Art. Their essays will situate Conner's work among her artistic peers and within the pre-modern histories of collage. The book will also feature lush color reproductions of Conner's collages, many previously unpublished, and an illustrated biography with photographs of the artist throughout her life compiled by Robert Conway, the Conner Family Trust.

## **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Born in 1933 in Lincoln, Nebraska, Jean Conner has worked as an artist in the Bay Area for more than sixty years. Her work has gained a following in recent years through inclusion in group exhibitions at American University, Washington, DC (2015); Sonoma State University (2016); Karma Gallery, New York (2017); and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco (2021), and representation in the collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; San José Museum of Art; Sheldon Museum of Art, Lincoln; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. She holds a BFA from the University of Nebraska and an MFA from the University of Colorado.

## **SUPPORT**

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## **SAN JOSÉ MUSEUM OF ART**

The San José Museum of Art (SJMA) is a modern and contemporary art museum dedicated to inclusivity, new thinking, and visionary ideas. Founded in 1969 by artists and community leaders, its dynamic exhibitions, collection, and programs resonate with defining characteristics of San José and the Silicon Valley—from its rich diversity to its hallmark innovative ethos. The Museum offers lifelong learning for school children and their educators, multigenerational families, creative adults, university students and faculty, and community groups. SJMA is committed to being a borderless museum, essential to creative life throughout the diverse communities of San José and beyond.

SJMA is located at 110 South Market Street in downtown San José, California. The Museum is open Friday through Sunday, 11am to 6pm and until 8pm or later on the first Friday of each month. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors, and free to members, college students, youth and children ages 17 and under, and school teachers (with valid ID). For more information, call 408.271.6840 or visit [SanJoseMuseumofArt.org](http://SanJoseMuseumofArt.org).

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### **Press Images:**

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### **Image Credit:**

Jean Conner, BLUE PYRAMID, 1970. Cut and pasted printed paper, 10 ¾ x 9 ⅜ inches. Collection San José Museum of Art. Museum purchase with funds provided by the Lipman Family Foundation, 2018.09.01.