

Louise

THE ARTIST'S EYE

McCagg



Lyman Allyn Art Museum
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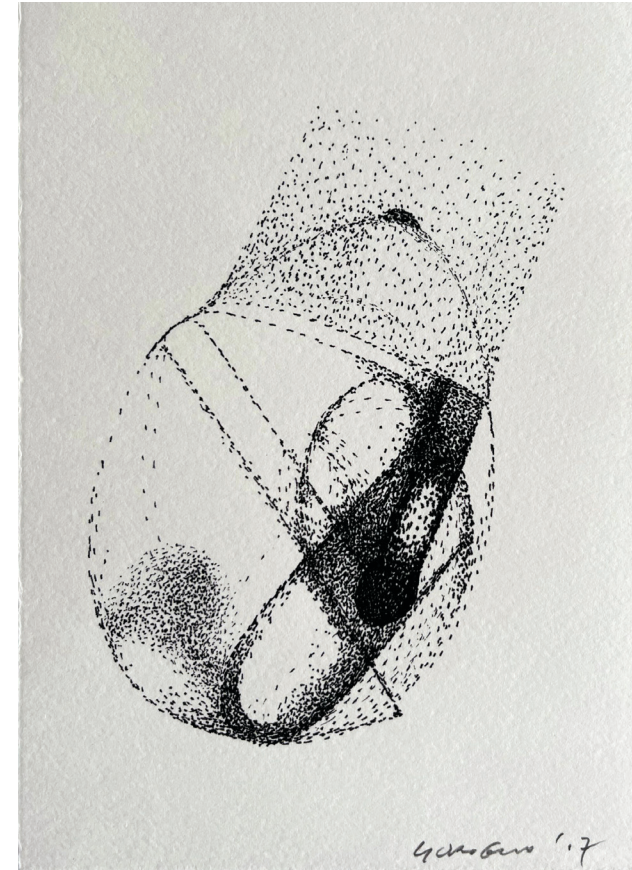
INTRODUCTION

When first invited to view artist Louise H. McCagg's personal collection, I was unaware of the breadth of the assemblage I was about to behold. Beyond the well-recognized names like Louise Bourgeois, Philip Guston, Alice Neel, Chuck Close, Cindy Sherman and others, I found inspired and varied creativity, bound together by the aesthetic sensibilities of the artist/collector's singular personality. The fruits of a lifetime of collaboration, experimentation, artistic practice and activism was what Louise wanted to preserve and share. The selection of works in this exhibition provides ample evidence as to why we are so deeply grateful to Louise McCagg for this donation of her collection to the Lyman Allyn and its visitors, and to her daughters, Alexandra O. (Xanda) and Dorothy B. (Tory) McCagg for their generous stewardship of their mother's legacy.

Exploring the richness of Louise's creative artistic community and connections – ably assisted by Xanda McCagg, a fascinating artist in her own right – I became increasingly excited and enthralled. Along with the widely eclectic, sometimes fun or quirky examples by far-flung artists, there are many works that simply stopped me in my tracks. I'm confident that as our visitors traverse the broad landscape represented by the selection found in these galleries, their experience will be a similarly eye-opening journey.

I want to extend my deep thanks to the McCagg family for their grand and purposeful generosity. It is and will be a great privilege to celebrate Louise McCagg's captivating work alongside works by her artistic influencers and collaborators.

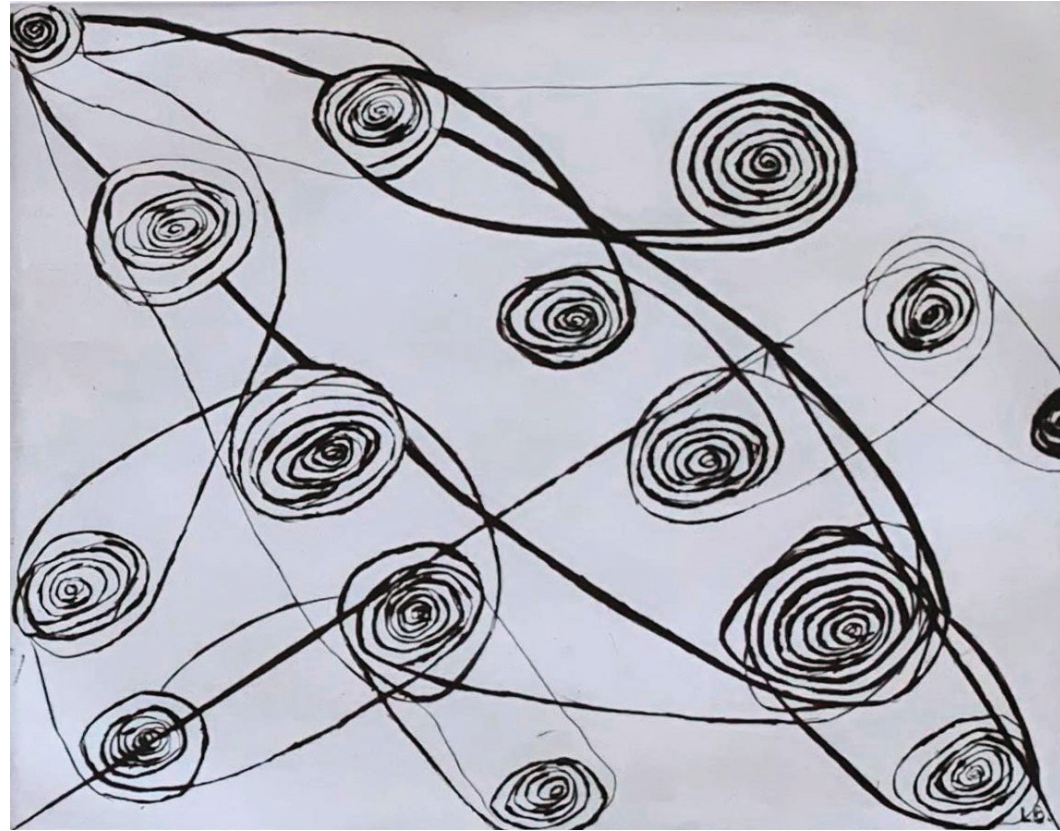
-Sam Quigley, Director



Yoko Ono (Japanese, active in America, b. 1933)
Untitled, 2007
Ink on paper
6 5/8 x 4 1/2 inches
Bequest of Louise McCagg, 2021.12.67



Paul Klee (Swiss, 1902–1940)
Die Hexe mit dem Kamm (The Witch with the Comb), 1922
Lithograph on paper
13 3/4 x 10 inches
Bequest of Louise McCagg, 2021.12.46



Louise Bourgeois (French-American, 1911-2010)
Untitled (Safety Pins), 1989-1991
Drypoint on paper
19 ¾ x 22 inches
Bequest of Louise McCagg, 2021.12.9

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by Tanya Pohrt, Ph.D., Curator

Presenting modern and contemporary art from the collection of artist Louise McCagg (American, 1936–2020), this exhibition celebrates friendship and collaboration. *The Artist's Eye* showcases McCagg's own art in conversation with the work of notable artists such as Paul Klee, Elaine de Kooning, Romare Bearden, Louise Bourgeois, Sol LeWitt, and Yoko Ono, among others.

A recent gift to the Lyman Allyn, the McCagg collection is eclectic and personal, reflecting Louise's artistic interests and friendships and her family's geographic reach. A Connecticut native, Louise McCagg was a feminist and a politically active artist and collector who cultivated artistic friendships in Connecticut, Michigan, Eastern Europe, and New York City, where she was a member of the women-run A.I.R. Gallery collective in Brooklyn.

Shaped by the women's movement and the activism of the Civil Rights era, Louise McCagg produced art that she described as "classical in method and contemporary in its political and social inquiry." Driven by curiosity, intelligence, and creative dynamism, McCagg explored a variety of themes in different media throughout her career. Using the human form—often the face and head—as a basic building block, McCagg created art that reflects on humanity, identity, life and death, form and movement, and on the ties that bind us. In **Untitled** (1985), two colorful figures float across the composition, their fractured and overlapping limbs poised to embrace.

McCagg's powerful large-scale **Congregation** (1991-1998), represents the artist's own community, commenting on the role of the individual and the collective. The installation comprises 122 paper heads originally cast from life and then reduced in scale using a unique alginate mold process. McCagg noted that as these portrait heads decrease in size, they become less lifelike, yet "they could not exist without the original life mask." Thus, the work "maintains the unique qualities and emotional depth of the individual, while showing the commonality among diverse cultures."

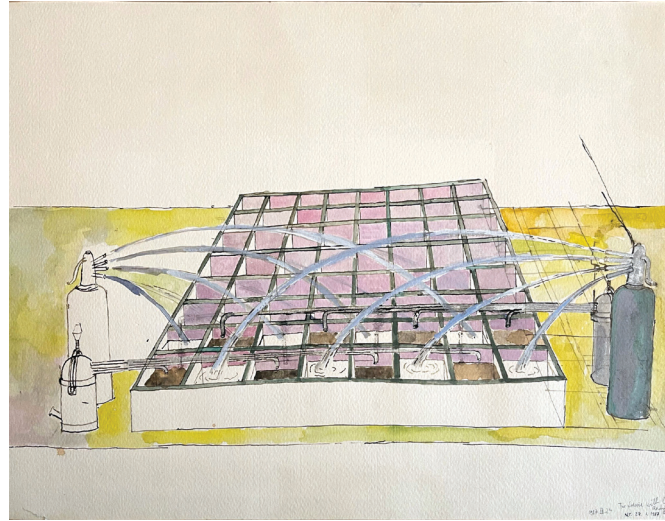


Louise McCagg (American, 1936–2020)
Untitled, 1985
Acrylic and ink on paper
42 ¼ x 60 ½ inches
Loan from the family of Louise McCagg

< Louise McCagg (American, 1936–2020)
Congregation, 1991–1998
Pigmented cast paper
60 x 132 inches
Bequest of Louise McCagg, 2021.12.102



James Adley (British, active in America, 1931–2015)
Untitled, ca. late 1990s
Acrylic on canvas
11 x 14 inches
Bequest of Louise McCagg, 2021.12.1



András Böröcz (Hungarian, b. 1956)
Untitled, 1987
Mixed media on paper
15 x 20 inches
Bequest of Louise McCagg, 2021.12.17

Various Michigan artists are represented in **Congregation**, reflecting the nearly 20 years that Louise and William (Bill) McCagg spent in East Lansing, Michigan. Bill taught Eastern European History at Michigan State University, and Louise studied fine art there, receiving her MFA in sculpture in 1971, then pursuing her work as an artist while raising two children. With the aid of friends, Louise built two geodesic domes, creating a studio and a metal foundry where she cast bronze and aluminum sculptures. Among her circle of artist friends were the esteemed British abstract painter James Adley, who taught painting at Michigan State, and his wife, Australian painter Alison McMaugh.

Bill's scholarly work in Eastern European history brought the family on numerous trips abroad, with several sabbaticals in Hungary, where they became friends with Hungarian intellectuals and artists, including the artist and poet Miklós Erdély. Erdély later introduced Louise to his protégé, András Böröcz, who had relocated to New York, and Böröcz became Louise's studio assistant and a close family friend. Böröcz's watercolor, **Untitled** (1987), shows the idea for a chess board with squares made of black coffee and white soda water, reflecting the artist's humor, his use of unusual items as sculpture, and an interest in conceptual art shared by many Eastern European artists.

The McCaggs moved to New York City in the early/mid 1980s, offering an artistic homecoming for Louise, who had attended Barnard College as an undergraduate and studied at the Art Students League of New York. Back in New York as a mature artist, Louise immersed herself in the City's ever-changing art scene, exploring galleries, meeting artists, and continuing her own work. She soon met artist and Barnard faculty member Joan Snitzer, who encouraged McCagg to join the pioneering women's A.I.R. gallery (Artists in Residence, Inc.), a non-profit founded in 1972 as the first artist-directed and maintained gallery for women artists in the U.S. McCagg became a dedicated member of A.I.R., exhibiting her work, supporting colleagues, and co-organizing an international exchange exhibition in Budapest in 2006. McCagg acquired art by a number of A.I.R. colleagues, including Snitzer, whose **Untitled** (2002), shows her interest in abstraction, texture, and fluidity.

Louise McCagg's own artwork has an ageless quality, with imagery and themes evoking historic and ancient art while remaining firmly contemporary. In some pieces, heads and body parts are cast from life, referencing death masks and early Greek and Etruscan sculpture. McCagg's drawings also explore timeless themes of death and rebirth, with a figure wrapped in bandages as though mummified, and another figure emerging from a chrysalis-like form.



Joan Snitzer
Untitled, 2002
Mixed media on canvas
12 x 12 inches
Bequest of Louise McCagg, 2021.12.77



Louise McCagg in her New York studio, 1992. Photo: Tibor Huszár.



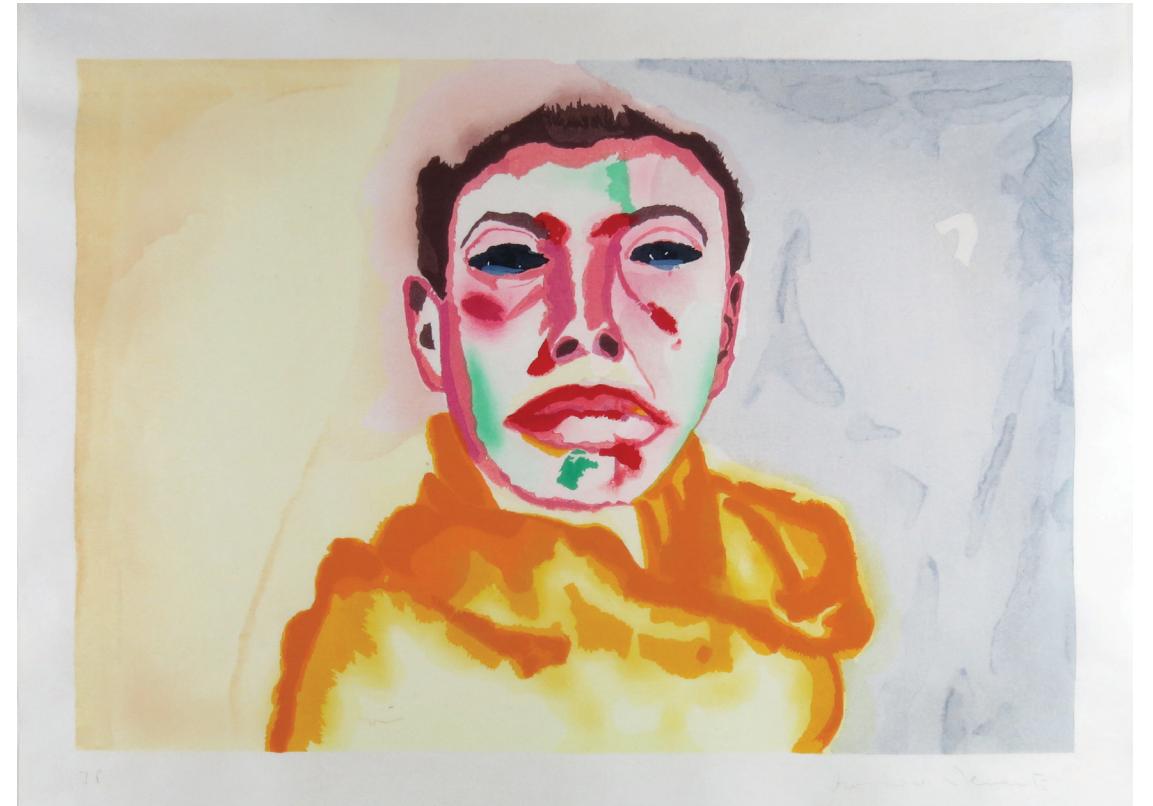
Elaine de Kooning (American, 1918–1989)
After Lascaux, 1984
Lithograph on paper
30 x 43 ½ inches
Bequest of Louise McCagg, 2021.12.23

McCagg's interest in ancient art was shared by artists she collected. Elaine de Kooning's lithograph **After Lascaux** (1984), shows a gestural interpretation of paleolithic art, which de Kooning saw on a visit to the Lascaux caves in Southwest France in 1983. Inspired by the power and mystery of these cave paintings, de Kooning rendered overlapping animal forms, dots, drips, and streaks in dynamic paintings and works on paper.

Other thematic ties link McCagg's art and the art she collected. Masks were an important element throughout McCagg's career and she was drawn to their use in the work of other artists. Romare Bearden's **Farm Interior** collage, (ca. 1966-'67) features figures with faces that resemble African masks, while other figures have mismatched and collaged body parts. Reflecting on issues of race and identity, Bearden's deft use of masks and collage comments on the fractured and complex layers of history that inform African American identity. Artist Francesco Clemente (Italian, born 1952) also shares an interest in masks. Part of the Italian Transavanguardia movement, Clemente created **Self-Portrait** in 1982, the year he moved from India to New York City. With his mask-like visage, this piece suggests Clemente's struggle with the notion of a true self, alluding to the layers and masks in our personae.



Romare Bearden (American, 1911–1988)
Collage, *Farm Interior*, ca. 1966–1967
Mixed media
11 ¾ x 9 inches
Gift of Louise McCagg, 2018.10.1



Francesco Clemente, (Italian, born 1952)
I (Self-Portrait), 1982
Color woodcut on paper
14 ½ x 20 inches
Gift of Louise McCagg, 2018.10.2



Mary Ann Unger (American, 1945–1998)
Fragments no. 1 (Judith Jamison/Cry series), 1990
Bronze
3 ½ x 7 ½ x 3 ¼ inches
Bequest of Louise McCagg, 2021.12.90

Louise McCagg was drawn to the physicality of sculpture, and her collection includes three-dimensional work by various artists, including Mary Ann Unger, who shared McCagg's interest in expressive figures and feminism. Unger's small bronze, **Fragments no. 1 (Judith Jamison/Cry series)** (1990), offers a response to Alvin Ailey's powerful dance piece **Cry**, first performed by Judith Jamison in 1971.

Women artists are well represented in Louise McCagg's collection, with artwork by friends and colleagues, as well as by artists she admired. McCagg painted portraits of several distinguished women artists and sought out their work for her collection. She painted the gifted portraitist Alice Neel in 1981 and purchased Neel's silkscreen print **Olivia in Armchair** (1980) the same year.

Much of McCagg's collection features the work of New York artists from the early-1980s onward, when she was living and working in the city. Artist and gallerist Rich Timperio ran the alternative Sideshow Gallery in Williamsburg, showing an eclectic mix of Brooklyn locals and more established New York abstract artists. Timperio exhibited Louise McCagg's work, featuring Louise and her daughter Xanda McCagg in one of his group exhibitions in 2006. In his vibrant **Untitled** (2011), Timperio combined energetic swirling ribbons of color with zones of bright base color and geometric forms.

With a keen eye, McCagg was drawn to compelling art in a variety of styles and modes by both well-established figures and artists she knew and exhibited with, forming a collection that reflects her own creative work and ideas.



Alice Neel (American, 1900–1984)
Olivia in Armchair, 1980
Silkscreen on paper
29 5/8 x 23 1/2 inches
Bequest of Louise McCagg, 2021.12.58



Richard Timperio (American, 1946–2018)
Untitled, 2011
Acrylic on paper
22 x 30 inches
Bequest of Louise McCagg, 2021.12.88

Cover image:

Louise McCagg (American, 1936–2020)

Congregation, 1991–1998

Pigmented cast paper

60 x 132 inches

Bequest of Louise McCagg, 2021.12.102



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