

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Three Landscapes: JB Blunk, Anna and Lawrence Halprin
Curated by Ruthanna Hopper and Mariah Nielson

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles
July 9–August 13, 2022
Opening reception: Saturday, July 9, 5–7pm

Saturday, July 30, 3pm:
Still dance by Daria Halprin
Followed by panel discussion with Janice Ross and Daria Halprin, moderated by Laura Whitcomb

Los Angeles, CA, June 25, 2022—Blum & Poe is pleased to present *Three Landscapes*, the first in a series of exhibitions curated by Ruthanna Hopper and Mariah Nielson intended to share the history and profound impact of the Marin County, CA creative community from the 1950s to today. The series begins with the story of Anna, Lawrence, and JB—a dancer, a landscape architect, and a sculptor—each a pioneer of their respective disciplines. Deeply engaged with each other’s practices during the 1960s and ‘70s, these three innovators sourced “spiritual and ecological sustenance” from Marin County, culling endless inspiration from the natural landscape and incorporating its raw materials into their work.

This exhibition presents key historical works created by JB Blunk in the 1960s and ‘70s. Made specifically for the Halprins’ home, these pieces have never before been displayed to the public. True to JB’s tradition, these sculptures were carved from salvaged old growth redwood burl and cypress—the artist worked with stumps often centuries old and larger than twenty feet in diameter. Known for using chainsaws and hand tools on massive, single blocks of wood, JB would study the grain and burl for days or weeks, and then—without the use of sketches or maquettes—he would work reductively on the single form. Seeking to reveal the spirit of the organic materials with which he worked, JB often left much of the natural form intact, celebrating its inherent qualities. His works were made to be used, with form and function almost indistinct. As artist Charles Ray once put it, “If you can’t see a work of JB Blunk’s, you can sit on it. Perhaps you see it by sitting on it.”

These immaculate sculptures that are also furniture—a throne, a bench, tables, and a stool—were participatory witnesses to the Halprins’ homelife during an exceedingly fertile period. The Halprins were regularly photographed on and around the seating installation and considered the sculptures to be integral parts of their interior landscape. Anna once said, “These pieces are primary figures in our home.” *Three Landscapes* teases out this intimate relationship between Blunk and the Halprins and between the creative works and credos they cultivated together during this period. Installed alongside JB’s wooden works are streaming archival footage of two of Anna Halprin’s seminal dances and Lawrence Halprin’s abstract paintings from 1960–61. Presented in two discrete spaces across the gallery campus, the viewer is guided by a dance score created for this project in tribute to Anna’s choreography and the scores Lawrence would sketch and print for her.

In 1965, Anna’s *Parades and Changes* shook the dance world by challenging conceptions of nudity, stillness, and the “ceremony of trust” (as she named it) between performers and audience. On view in the gallery, “Paper Dance” is a section from this piece in which dancers slowly, ritualistically take off their clothes while focusing on a spot far away. With “Paper Dance,” the dancers, now nude, rip up sheets of brown paper and toss them overhead. The work reveals how ordinary tasks such as dressing and undressing can become a dance

when they are done with awareness by the performer. When the piece premiered in Sweden in 1965, this revolutionary use of nudity onstage was revered, but two years later, in New York City, it led to a warrant for Anna's arrest. This piece, like so many of Anna's works, is also concerned with the form of the human body and how our gestures, whether subtle or extreme, can create a landscape of movement.

During the late 1960s and early '70s, Lawrence and Anna developed various methods of generating collective creativity. They led a series of workshops called "Experiments in the Environment," bringing dancers, architects, and other artists together to explore group creativity in relation to awareness of the environment, in both rural and urban settings. Increasingly, Anna's performances moved out of the theater and into the community, helping people address social and emotional concerns.

Ceremony of Us (1969) was created in response to Los Angeles's 1965 Watts Uprising. Anna was invited to work with Studio Watts on a performance for a festival at the Mark Taper Forum. She saw this as an opportunity to explore race relations through dance. For five months she worked separately with an all-Black group in Watts and an all-white group in San Francisco, using the same scores. Then, for ten days, she brought the two groups together to develop the performance. "During those days, working and living together," Anna later said, "they collectively created their performance around the experience of becoming one group. My role was to see what the group was most ready for and what materials turned them on, then to guide them in choreographing their own responses." She then formed the first multiracial dance company in the US and thereafter increasingly focused on social justice themes in her work.

Lawrence documented Anna's dancing widely in his prolific drawing practice, dating back to early costume designs he made for her in the 1940s, and avidly sketched her workshops and performances throughout his life. He developed scoring as a way to communicate movement through the environment, which came out of his investigations of her dances, and as a language for a collaborative creative process. Their practices were a total cross-pollination. Anna once put it, "As Larry inspired me with his sensitivity to the environment, which influenced my experiments, I influenced him in my use of movement audience participation as I pioneered new forms in dance."

The abstract paintings on paper by Lawrence presented here, like Anna's output from these years, appear to derive from a very personal, experimental, and psychological space. Those who were closest to him at the time of their execution knew little or nothing about their existence. In placing these experimental works contextually into both Lawrence's life and the history of modern art, a strong connection can be made to his introduction to Jungian psychology and postwar American Abstract Expressionism in the second half of the 1950s. Joseph Henderson, Lawrence's analyst, wrote on the psychology of experience and linear design in the landscape architect's built spaces: "The linear design...always moves beyond any fixed points in the search for new and different levels of experience...for me his designs seem to depend on the creation of a moving line as an ordering principle by which people can experience nature archetypically." This delving inward, analyzing the personal and psychic experience, was as much fieldwork for Lawrence as the lessons he derived from academia or the knowledge he took in from communing with the natural environment. By understanding the human psyche on a micro level, we understand humanity and nature on a macro level: the collective unconscious and the inherited mythologies and archetypes that frame our everyday experiences.

JB, too, worked with a Jungian analyst in the 1960s and credits his introspection into dreams as a guiding principle for his practice and form-making. Like Anna and Lawrence, JB attempted to extract and distill archetypal forms from his raw materials, thereby creating new landscapes of perception. Whether in a public space or the home, raising a family or interacting with communities, confronting societal oppressions

or healing the body from disease, this approach to living creativity holistically was paramount to JB, Anna, and Lawrence. Although manifested distinctly within these three disparate practices, by no coincidence were these shared tenets born amongst the same lush ecology of Marin County.

JB Blunk (b. 1926, Ottawa, KS; d. 2002, Inverness, CA) was born in Kansas and eventually settled in the town of Inverness, CA. He studied ceramics at UCLA with Laura Andresen in the 1940s and was drafted into the Korean War in 1950. While stationed in Japan he met the artist Isamu Noguchi who helped arrange two apprenticeships for Blunk with master potters Rosanjin Kitaōji and Toyo Kaneshige. Blunk lived and worked in Japan for three years, thoroughly steeping himself in the culture. In 1954 he returned to California and eventually settled in Inverness, where he created his masterpiece: a hand-built home for his family assembled from salvaged materials. In the early 1960s he began working with wood, first carving simple pieces of furniture and eventually producing large-scale public installations. Blunk's practice included painting, jewelry, ceramics, furniture, and sculpture. It can be difficult to tell where Blunk's interventions into wood, clay, and stone begin and end. In this respect he was very much like his friend and mentor Noguchi, who said that he sought in his raw material "not what can be imposed but something closer to its being. Beneath the skin is the brilliance of matter."

Anna Halprin (b. 1920, Winnetka, IL; d. 2021, Kentfield, CA) was born into a Jewish family and was exposed to dance from a very early age via her grandfather's involvement in religious dancing. By the age of fifteen, Halprin began studying the techniques of Ruth St. Denis and Isadora Duncan. She later pursued her studies at the University of Wisconsin, where she met and soon after married Lawrence. After World War II, the couple settled in San Francisco, a move that reoriented Halprin away from the tight modernist circles of her former home, New York City, and towards different modalities. In 1955, Halprin founded the groundbreaking San Francisco Dancers' Workshop, where her students included Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, and Meredith Monk. She collaborated there with composers John Cage, Terry Riley, and La Monte Young, among other creative forces. Halprin created more than 150 dance pieces and wrote three books in her 100 years, pioneering the experimental art form known as postmodern dance. She defied traditional notions of dance, extending its boundaries to address social issues, build community, foster both physical and emotional healing, and connect people to nature. When she was diagnosed with cancer in the early 1970s, she used dance as part of her healing process and subsequently created innovative dance programs for cancer and AIDS patients. In 1978, Halprin started the Tamalpa Institute with her daughter Daria, featuring movement-based arts therapy, which remains active in Marin County.

Lawrence Halprin (b. 1916, Brooklyn, NY; d. 2009, Kentfield, CA) was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. After time spent in Israel and at Cornell University, Halprin pursued a Master of Science in horticulture in 1941 at the University of Wisconsin. After his marriage to Anna, he entered the Bachelor of Landscape Architecture program at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1942. Halprin's career as a landscape architect was delayed by two years as he, like many of his peers, enlisted in the US Navy during World War II. In the spring of 1945, he returned to California and opened his own firm in San Francisco. By the mid-1960s, Lawrence Halprin and Associates gained recognition for their urban landscape redevelopment projects and continued to receive major commissions for another three decades. Halprin was awarded numerous honors such as the American Institute of Architects Medal for Allied Professions (1964), the Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects ASLA Design Medal (2003), the Fellow of American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1978), the University of Virginia Thomas Jefferson Medal in Architecture (1979), and the National Medal of Arts (2002), the nation's highest artistic honor. Halprin published several books including *RSVP Cycles*, *Taking Part*, *Cities*, *Freeways*, and *Notebooks*.

About Blum & Poe

Blum & Poe was founded by Tim Blum and Jeff Poe in Santa Monica in September of 1994 as a space to show local and international contemporary art in all media. Blum's extensive experience in the Japanese art world combined with Poe's keen knowledge of emerging artists in Los Angeles resulted in an international program of influential artists. Throughout a twenty-seven-year history, Blum & Poe has shaped the trajectory of contemporary art by championing artists at all stages of their careers—cultivating the lineages that run between emerging and established practices and working with artist estates to generate new discourse surrounding historical work. Currently, Blum & Poe represents fifty artists and nine estates from sixteen countries worldwide.

In 2003 the gallery moved to a larger space in Culver City, and in 2009 Blum & Poe purchased and renovated its current 22,000-square-foot complex on La Cienega Boulevard. In this location the gallery has since staged museum-caliber surveys, examining the historical work of such movements as the Japanese Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of 1980s and '90s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); and a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020). To produce these exhibitions, Blum & Poe has worked with celebrated curators such as Alison M. Gingeras, Sofia Gotti, Joan Kee, and Mika Yoshitake.

In 2014, Blum & Poe opened galleries in New York and Tokyo to focus on intimately scaled projects in new contexts. These expansions tie into the gallery's wide-reaching program that includes exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. Blum & Poe's publishing division democratically circulates its program through original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, to artists' books. In 2020, the gallery launched Blum & Poe Broadcasts, an online platform showcasing artists' projects in conjunction with physical installations or as standalone digital endeavors.

Across the three global locations, Blum & Poe prioritizes environmental and community stewardship in all operations. In 2015, Blum & Poe was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery in Los Angeles and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. The gallery is also a member of the Gallery Climate Coalition, which works to facilitate a more sustainable commercial art world and reduce the industry's collective carbon footprint. Blum & Poe is committed to fostering inclusive and equitable communities both in their physical and online spaces and believes that everybody should have equal access to creating and engaging with contemporary art.

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