

VAN DOREN WAXTER

Richard Diebenkorn

Still Life

April 29 – June 26, 2026



Chair Outside (CR no. 2717), c. 1959, Oil on canvas, 28 x 24 in (71.1 x 61 cm) (RD 1252)

Van Doren Waxter is pleased to present *Still Life*, a show of paintings and works on paper by the venerable American artist Richard Diebenkorn. This exhibition showcases 14 works from the Diebenkorn family collection that have never been for sale, highlighting the artist's Berkeley period still lifes from 1956 to 1967.

Richard Diebenkorn's representational works during his Berkeley years demonstrate what curator and scholar Steven Nash described as the artist's "genuine allegiance to nature."¹ Even in pursuit of abstraction, the paintings of European Masters such as Bonnard, Cézanne, and Matisse remained a true source of inspiration for Diebenkorn. In his paintings, everyday objects from his home and studio— a knife slicing into a tomato, a lit match warming the fingertips of the holding hand, a pair of scissors balancing on a coffee cup— their angles and shapes collide in a particular pause, pushing against the raw atmospheric force of the paint.

The quotidian objects are made extraordinary by the artist's use of them as instruments of tension. An empty chair in solitude is not only abundant in its evocative capability and compact symbolism but also a multifaceted pictorial tool that reflects daylight and casts a shadow, adds gravity to the horizon, and fractures the balance of a rectangular picture plane. The environments that surround these objects are often spare in their description, becoming an infinite space within their intimate scale— one that offers the stage to the paint. Much like his abstract paintings, the information in the paint imbues emotion, and this collection of still lifes captures an incomplete stillness, the slow pacing of the molecules.

¹ 1. Steven Nash, "Figuring Space Representational Work 1955-1967," essay, 2016, pg. 61.

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About the artist

Richard Diebenkorn was born in Portland, Oregon in 1922. He attended Stanford University from 1940 to 1943 and was awarded his Bachelor of Arts in 1949. He studied at the University of California, Berkeley in 1943 and attended the California School of Fine Arts in 1946. He received his Master of Arts from the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque in 1951.

Diebenkorn's earliest abstractions were made while the artist lived in Sausalito, California (1946–1949), Albuquerque (1950–1952), and Urbana, Illinois (1952–1953). In 1953 he moved to Berkeley, continuing his work in abstraction and producing over 66 paintings in two years. The year 1955 marks the beginning of an 11-year period when the artist worked from direct observation, making figurative works from the model, along with still lifes, landscapes, and interiors. From 1966 to 1988 he lived in Santa Monica, taught at the University of California, Los Angeles from 1966 to 1973, and began his epic Ocean Park cycle in 1967. He moved to Healdsburg, California in 1988 where he worked exclusively on works on paper until his death in 1993.

His distinguished career has been the subject of numerous monographic museum presentations, such as *The Drawings of Richard Diebenkorn* (1988–1989), organized by the Museum of Modern Art and traveled to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Phillips Collection; ; *Richard Diebenkorn: Blue Surround; Evolution of a Print* (1994), M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, San Francisco; *The Art of Richard Diebenkorn* (1997–1998), organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art and traveled to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, the Phillips Collection, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; *Richard Diebenkorn: Clubs and Spades* (2002), California Palace of the Legion of Honor, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; *Richard Diebenkorn: The Ocean Park Series* (2011–2012), jointly organized by the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and the Orange County Museum of Art and traveled to Corcoran Gallery of Art; *Richard Diebenkorn: The Berkeley Years, 1953-1966* (2013–2014), organized by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco with the Palm Springs Art Museum; *Richard Diebenkorn* (2015), Royal Academy of Arts, London.

Recent and significant exhibitions have included *Richard Diebenkorn: The Sketchbooks Revealed* (2015–2016), Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University; *Matisse/Diebenkorn* (2016–2017), organized by the Baltimore Museum of Art and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and *Richard Diebenkorn: Beginnings, 1942-1955* (2017–2019), organized by the Richard Diebenkorn Foundation, Berkeley in conjunction with the Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, traveled to the David Owsley Museum of Art, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, Portland Art Museum, Oregon, Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art, Pepperdine University, Malibu, and Academy Art Museum, Easton, Maryland.

The artist was the recipient of many prestigious awards and honors. He was selected as the U.S. representative, along with photographer Harry Callahan, of the 38th Venice Biennale in 1978. He received the Edward MacDowell Medal from the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, in 1978; the Skowhegan Medal for Painting from the Skowhegan School of Painting in Maine in 1979; elected an honorary academician of the Royal Academy of Art, London, in 1992; received the National Medal of Arts in 1993; and received the American Academy of Arts and Letters Gold Medal for Painting, its highest honor, in 1994.

In 2016, the artist was the subject of *Richard Diebenkorn: The Catalogue Raisonné* (Yale University Press), the definitive resource of the artist's unique works, including his paintings, works on paper, and three-dimensional objects. In 2025, *Richard Diebenkorn: The Catalogue Raisonné of Prints* (Yale University Press) was the first comprehensive examination of the artist's printmaking output spanning 1946 to 1992.

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