



EXERCISING THE EYE

THE GERTRUDE KASLE COLLECTION

In 1965, the Gertrude Kasle Gallery opened in the landmark Fisher Building on Detroit's West Grand Boulevard. It was one of the first galleries in the Midwest devoted to contemporary art and with it Kasle hoped to awaken in local communities an interest in the kind of avant-garde art she had experienced growing up in New York City. She was particularly interested in promoting artists engaging with the legacy of Abstract Expressionism and Pop art. Kasle succeeded in bringing to Detroit some of New York's most cutting-edge artists, including Larry Rivers, Grace Hartigan, Adolph Gottlieb, Philip Guston, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg, and was equally committed to presenting pioneering regional artists.

Kasle considered her gallery to be a site for new visual experiences with an educational mission, so she offered programs of lectures and conversations with artists—a progressive approach that set her apart from other commercial galleries in Detroit at that time. Kasle also worked closely with renowned New York-based Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE) to bring prints by important contemporary artists to Detroit. She appreciated the experimental nature of these prints, and that their affordability made the work of prominent artists available to new markets. After closing the gallery in 1976, she became an art consultant and continued to encourage individuals and companies to build their collections of contemporary art. In 1992, Kasle retired to Sarasota, Florida, where she embraced new local artists.

Drawing on Gertrude Kasle's generous bequest to UMMA, and supplemented by important loans from her family, *Exercising the Eye* showcases a selection of works by the artists she spent five decades championing. Together they are a testament to the vision of a groundbreaking gallerist who sought to foster new visual and cultural ideas in the Midwest. Kasle's dedication to contemporary art had a lasting influence on Detroit's artists, collectors, and institutions and her philosophy still resonates: "the art of today demands an educated eye. ... If you bring something of yourself to this art, if you are willing to grow with it, exchange old values and concepts for new ones, the rewards will be great."

Jennifer M. Friess
Assistant Curator of Photography

Lehti Mairike Keelmann
Assistant Curator of Western Art

Lead support for *Exercising the Eye: The Gertrude Kasle Collection* is provided by the University of Michigan Office of the Provost, Michigan Medicine, and the University of Michigan CEW Frances and Sydney Lewis Visiting Leaders Fund.

Image: Bill Rauhauser, Gertrude Kasle, 1972
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