

VORTEXHIBITION POLYPHONICA

Opus I

vor•tex

—noun, plural *-tex•es, -ti•ces*

1. a whirling mass of water, air, or fire.
2. a state of affairs likened to a whirlpool for violent activity, irresistible force, etc.
3. something regarded as drawing into its powerful current everything that surrounds.

pol•y•phon•ic

—adjective

1. consisting of many voices or sounds.
2. In music:
 - a. having two or more voices or parts, each with an independent melody, but all harmonizing; contrapuntal.
 - b. pertaining to music of this kind.
- c. capable of producing more than one tone at a time, as an organ or a harp.

To some, the Henry Art Gallery is the place to see of-the-moment contemporary art. For others, the Henry's collection is a treasure trove of textiles or an encyclopedia of photography's history. Still others know the museum for the 19th-century French and American paintings donated by Horace C. Henry to the University of Washington. Over its nearly 85-year history, the Henry has collected an incredibly diverse range of art objects and cultural artifacts. Given that the museum's mission is to provide a direct experience of the art and ideas of our time, how do we engage our audiences with this richly varied material?

The Henry staff believes the collection can serve as a creative wellspring for students, scholars, curators, artists, and the public at large. With this transformative power in mind, we designed a new and dynamic exhibition model. *Vortexhibition Polyphonica* highlights an array of connections across the Henry's holdings. Here contemporary art mixes with textiles, historical prints, craft objects, and other works of art. The exhibition also experiments with a novel fluid structure. Over the course of its extended run, we will follow a call-and-response tactic: various members of the curatorial staff will intervene periodically to change the exhibition in both subtle and dramatic ways, interpreting, revamping and recontextualizing what came before. This strategy, rather than fixing arrangements of objects according to history, style, or subject matter, foregrounds the animated relationships and unexpected associations objects and images can have with each other.

For the first round of *Vortexhibition Polyphonica*, I sought out distinctive objects to act as "hubs." Then, motivated by curiosity, intuition, and my eye (and greatly aided by the Henry's new, more powerful collections database), I built constellations of other objects to orbit around the hub. Eventually these fluctuating groups coalesced around three action words/phrases—*Transform*, *Suspend*, and *Mixing Messages*—that function as organizing topics. While this method provided me with some anchor points, I invite you to pick your own path through the exhibition to foster an entirely different experience with these provocative objects. Many works could easily slide between groups or act as hubs in their own right.

Along the way *Vortexhibition Polyphonica* will encourage different voices—not just curators but artists, students, members of the UW community, and the general public—to respond to the art works and ideas with wit and inspiration. For instance, in the gallery, visitors will notice label texts written by several authors. At the exhibition's web page, online viewers can access extra content related to exhibiting artists. We even encourage you to chime in with questions and commentary in the resource area located at the exhibition's entrance. Check back with us often to see who is participating and how things are changing.

Sara Krajewski, Associate Curator