

# City-scapes

## *Silkscreen Prints by Photorealist Artists*

The Photorealist silkscreen prints in this 2012 exhibition explore the use of photographs in artistic production. Photorealism is a style of art that emerged in the United States in the mid-1960s as an offshoot of Pop art. Early Photorealist painters created what appeared to be an artistic replication of a photograph with no apparent comment. Artists also used different printing techniques to comment on the Photorealist reliance on photographs as source and subject.

For the prints here, artists used the medium of silkscreen, which is one of the most painterly methods of making prints. Colors can be layered and the inks can be printed thickly or thinly. The medium also permits the reproduction and enlargement of photographs. While relying on the photograph to recreate a moment in time, these prints also investigate a variety of pictorial aspects related to the photograph. Issues considered by the artists include: contrasts of light and dark, color separation, reflections, graininess, gloss and matte finishes, as well as the artistic possibilities of overexposure.

Photorealist silkscreen prints tend to feel impersonal owing to the artist's reliance on photographs, flat surfaces, and meticulous detailing. At the same time, the emphasis on particular details combined with the artist's compositional and intellectual choices creates a sense of unreality. Each of the prints in this exhibition fuses a *trompe l'oeil* style with a unique artistic investigation of issues relating to photography and art. While possessing the detached approach to subject found in Minimalist art, the concern with intellectual content links these works to Conceptual art and the modernist concern for the medium as an end in itself.

# *Silk-Screen Printing*

Silkscreen printing (also known as screenprinting and serigraphy) is a technique of printmaking based on the stencil principle. To make a screenprint, a fine woven fabric or mesh screen is tightly stretched on a frame to form the printing screen. This screen initially was made of silk and more recently of nylon and metal. A stencil is made on the screen by selectively blocking parts of the mesh with a variety of materials including glue, paper, hand-cut film, lacquer, or photosensitive emulsion. The thick printing ink is forced through the unmasked areas of screen onto the paper below with a rubber blade called a squeegee. For works with more than one color, a separate screen is needed for each color.

The use of a screen matrix for printing probably originated in Japan and was introduced to Western Europe from Asia sometime in the late eighteenth century. In the twentieth century the technique was used for commercial textile printing. Artists began exploiting the technique for its brilliant coloristic possibilities in the 1930s. During the 1960s Pop artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein enjoyed the flat impersonal surface attainable by the method and often transferred photographic imagery.

The photo-stencil appeared in the early twentieth century. In this process the mesh is filled with light-sensitive coating. Those parts of the stencil exposed to light harden while those protected from the light remain soluble and wash away leaving the mesh open for ink to pass. Several manipulative photographic procedures can be used to create a variety of artistic effects, as evidenced by the prints in this exhibition.



John Baeder (American, b. 1938)

*Market Diner*, 1979

From the series *City-Scapes*

Serigraph on paper

Gift of the Department of Art, MU (2010.19.1)

Born in Indiana in 1938, but living and working in New York City, John Baeder is one of the best known of the Photorealists. In the late 1950s, Baeder attended Auburn University. He began his professional career as an art director where he kept his technical artistic abilities honed through drawing, painting, and photography; this was especially important as part of a process leading up to Photorealism. The many aspects of art directing, including marketing, merchandising, promotions, and public relations, kept his vision focused on American material culture.

The diner paintings were always a part of Baeder's special consciousness. Like a vanishing point, they represent the convergence of a variety of interests and influences that took some time, and another career, to formulate. "A lot of people ask me why I paint diners. It's a question I've never had to ask myself. I want to preserve diners. I love them. And I express this passion in the best way I know, by painting them."

However, Baeder is much more than a painter of diners. He is a knowledgeable and deeply committed chronicler of that rapidly disappearing facet of American vernacular architecture that has played such a unique role in our social and cultural history. The diners and their settings document regional tastes and mores, the richness and variety of our expansive culture and society, our mobility and the personal freedoms that draw so many to our shores. In this, Baeder belongs to the tradition of nineteenth- and twentieth-century realist and regionalist painters and pictorial journalists, who explored with contagious humanity the character of ordinary Americans as they imprinted themselves upon the American landscape. And, as America homogenizes under the sign of the Golden Arches, the paintings are a potent reminder of the fast-disappearing character and diversity of American culture.



Charles Bell (American, 1935-1995)

*Little Italy*, 1979

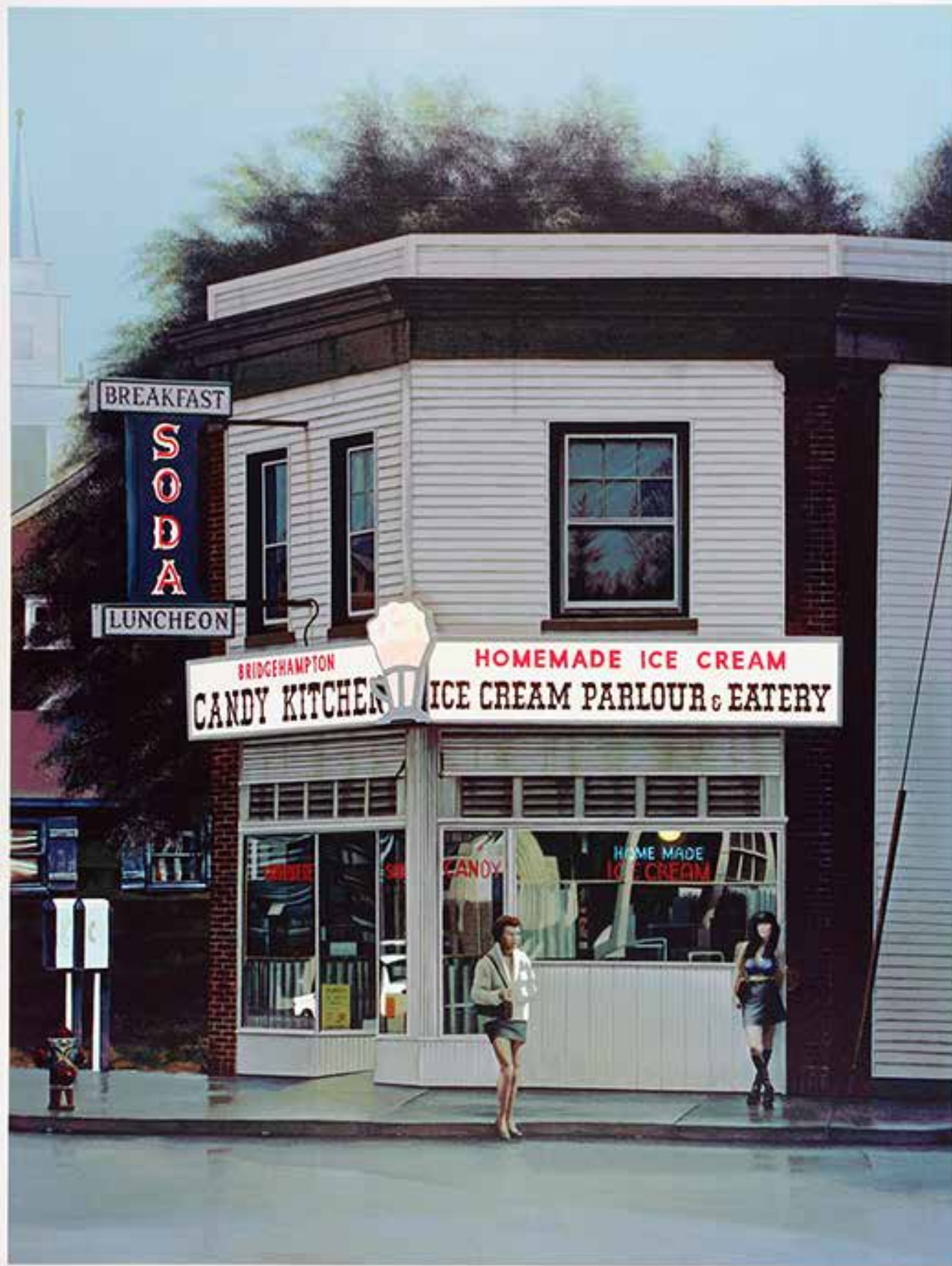
From the series *City-Scapes*

Serigraph on paper

Gift of the Department of Art, MU (2010.19.2)

Charles Bell was born in 1935 in Tulsa, OK, and received his Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of Oklahoma, Norman in 1957. He lived and worked in New York, and died there at the age of 60 in 1995. Bell was an American Photorealist and Hyperrealist artist, known primarily for his large scale still-lives and the glass-like surface of his works, done largely in oil.

With a subject matter primarily of vintage toys, pinball machines, gumball machines, and dolls and action figures (the latter frequently arranged in classical poses), Bell sought to bring pictorial majesty and wonder to the mundane. Bell's move to realism was inspired by Pop and he still shares that movement's love for the artifacts of popular culture. He says that his attitude to a subject is partly a matter of "dispassionately putting things together," but that he is also "concerned with the feelings we share about familiar objects . . . I'm saying, hey look, these everyday things really are terrific." By the same token he uses the conventions of photo-vision partly because "the camera allows a complexity in subject matter" and "the lens-eye view gives a special 'today' quality to visual experience, thanks to our daily media bombardment."



Arne Besser (American, b. 1935)

*Bridgehampton*, 1979

From the series *City-Scapes*

Serigraph on paper

Gift of the Department of Art, MU (2010.19.3)

Arne Besser, who was born in Hinsdale, Illinois in 1935, received training as an artist at the Art Center School, Los Angeles. Besser's approach to Photo-Realism is to draw from the urban landscape and nature a succinct "set like" image of reality. His city scenes depict New York street life alive with trading and traders, prostitutes and junkies looking for a fix. These visual images iconify the underside of urban life in a way that elevates this point of view to an almost mythic level.

The subjects of Besser's work—circus performers and prostitutes—have a pedigree in modern art from Manet to Picasso, where they have usually acted as symbols for the social outcasts and victims of an imperfect society. Yet in Besser's paintings prostitutes are treated with the same passionless gaze as a pick-up truck. Street-signs, window displays, and passers-by are accorded equal attention, while the informal composition found in many of his works stresses the visual chaos of things as they are. Pictorially important elements such as a street corner or a prominent figure are often placed off-center, giving Besser's work the casualness of an arrested moment in time.



Tom Blackwell (American, b. 1938)

*451*, 1979

From the series *City-Scapes*

Serigraph on paper

Gift of the Department of Art, MU (2010.19.4)

Born in Chicago in 1938, Blackwell is fascinated by the twisting entrails of machinery and by the manner in which we accept media imagery as equating reality. Above all, he is known for his paintings of the motorcycle: the archetypal Photorealist subject—modern, man-made, and bristling with reflective surfaces. Blackwell's ability to create paintings which have the apparent casualness of reality as captured by the lens but which on closer examination, turn out to be tightly organized compositions where as much loyalty is accorded to the traditional demands of painting as to the "truths" offered by the camera.

Seen in the original, the visual experience is quite unlike that of looking at a photograph. Blackwell's paintings are often large, so that the subject is difficult to see in its entirety unless one is far from the painting, and when viewed close-up, one is aware of the actual surface of the canvas and the quality of the brushstrokes on it. This physicality and presence of the paintings is quite unlike the thin and expendable quality its photographic source, so that the works only truly "look like photographs" when returned to this medium in reproduction.



Fran Bull (American, b. 1938)

*Lincoln Center/Dusk*, 1979

From the series *City-Scapes*

Serigraph on paper

Gift of the Department of Art, MU (2010.19.5)

Fran Bull's life was inspired and defined by her childhood study of art at the Newark Museum in New Jersey. She went on to study painting at Bennington College with Paul Feeley, and in 1980 she earned an MA in Art and Art Education from New York University.

As a Photorealist, Bull addressed an established reality, one well known and shared. As her art evolved, she felt compelled to investigate the unknown, the hidden realities of the unconscious: the imagery of the unseen.

Bull lives and works in Brandon, Vermont where in 2005 she established Gallery in-the-Field, a fine art gallery and performance space, whose mission is to present the work of provocative, innovative living artists.



Hilo Chen (Taiwanese, b. 1942)

***Roof-Top Sunbather***, 1981

From the series *City-Scapes*

Serigraph on paper

2010.19.6

Gift of the Department of Art, MU (2010.19.6)

Hilo Chen was born in 1942 in Yilan, Taiwan. He immigrated to New York City in 1968 and continues to live and work there. His work is in major museum collections throughout the world including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum. He is best known for his photorealistic paintings of the female figure.

Female nudes and the modern city are not new subjects to art, but Chen's paintings do not seem to deal with the subjects as much as the trite manner in which they are portrayed in non-art imagery. Although his interest in the nude stems from a desire to depict the minutiae of detail he finds in skin tones, particularly as they are transformed by water, his choice of pose and setting is reminiscent of the modern pin-up.



Han Hsiang-Ning (American, b. China, 1939)

*N.Y. Skyline*, 1980

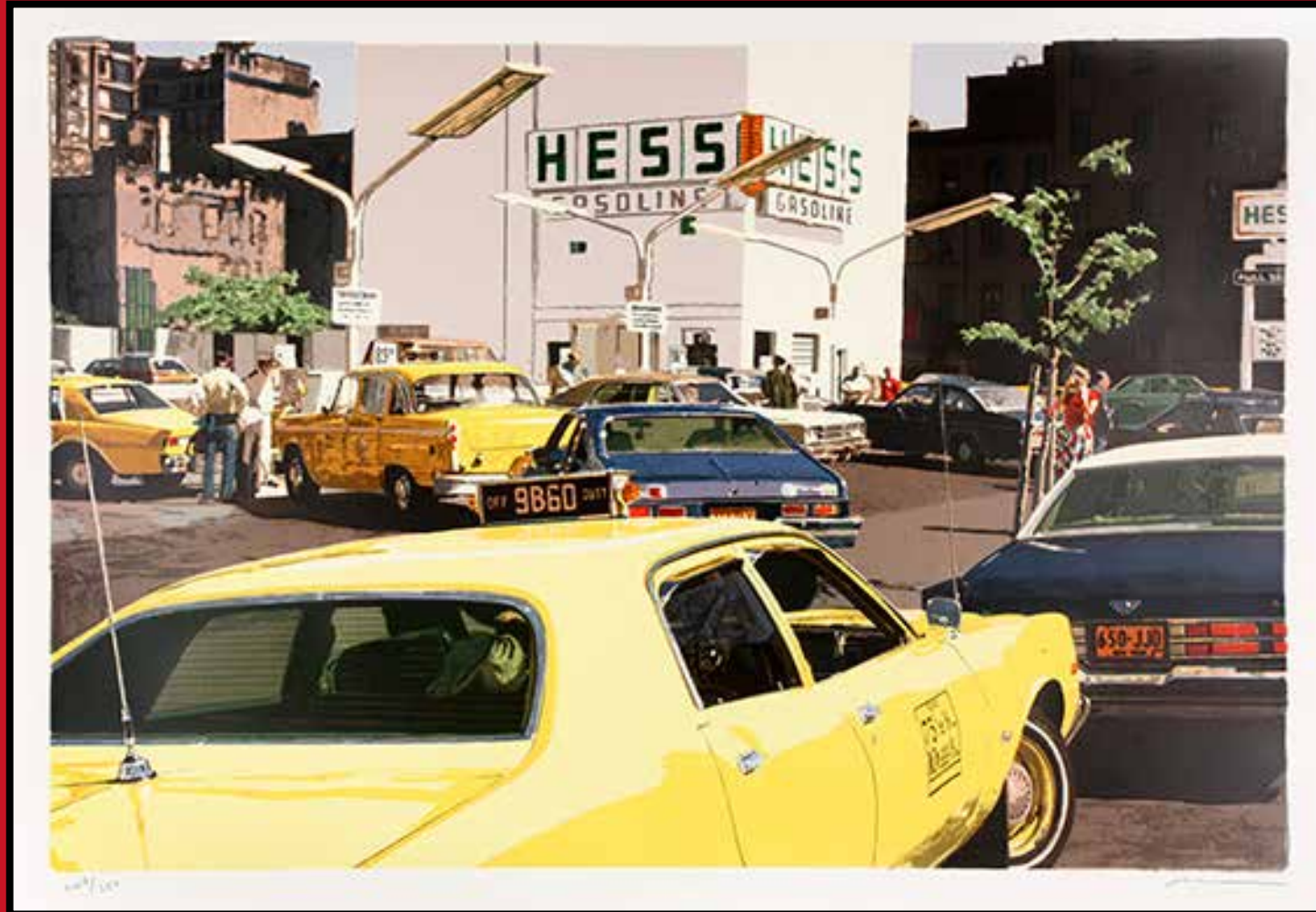
From the series *City-Scapes*

Serigraph on paper

Gift of the Department of Art, MU (2010.19.7)

Han Hsiang-Ning was born in China in 1939. After graduating from the Department of Fine Arts of the National Taiwan Normal University in 1960, he became a member of the "Fifth Moon Group." He began painting abstracts in oil and in 1963 began working with roller and stencils on rice paper, emphasizing the abstract form and space structure. In 1966 the artist was introduced to Pop art by Tehjin Shi and a year later Han immigrated to New York City. In 1969 he began spray painting works using acrylic paint on canvas and discovered how to create different combinations of sprayed color dots, a form of pointillism. In 1971 he began working in the Photorealist style, using New York city-scenes as a subject and his camera as sketching tool.





Ron Kleemann (American, b. 1937)

*Gas Line*, 1979

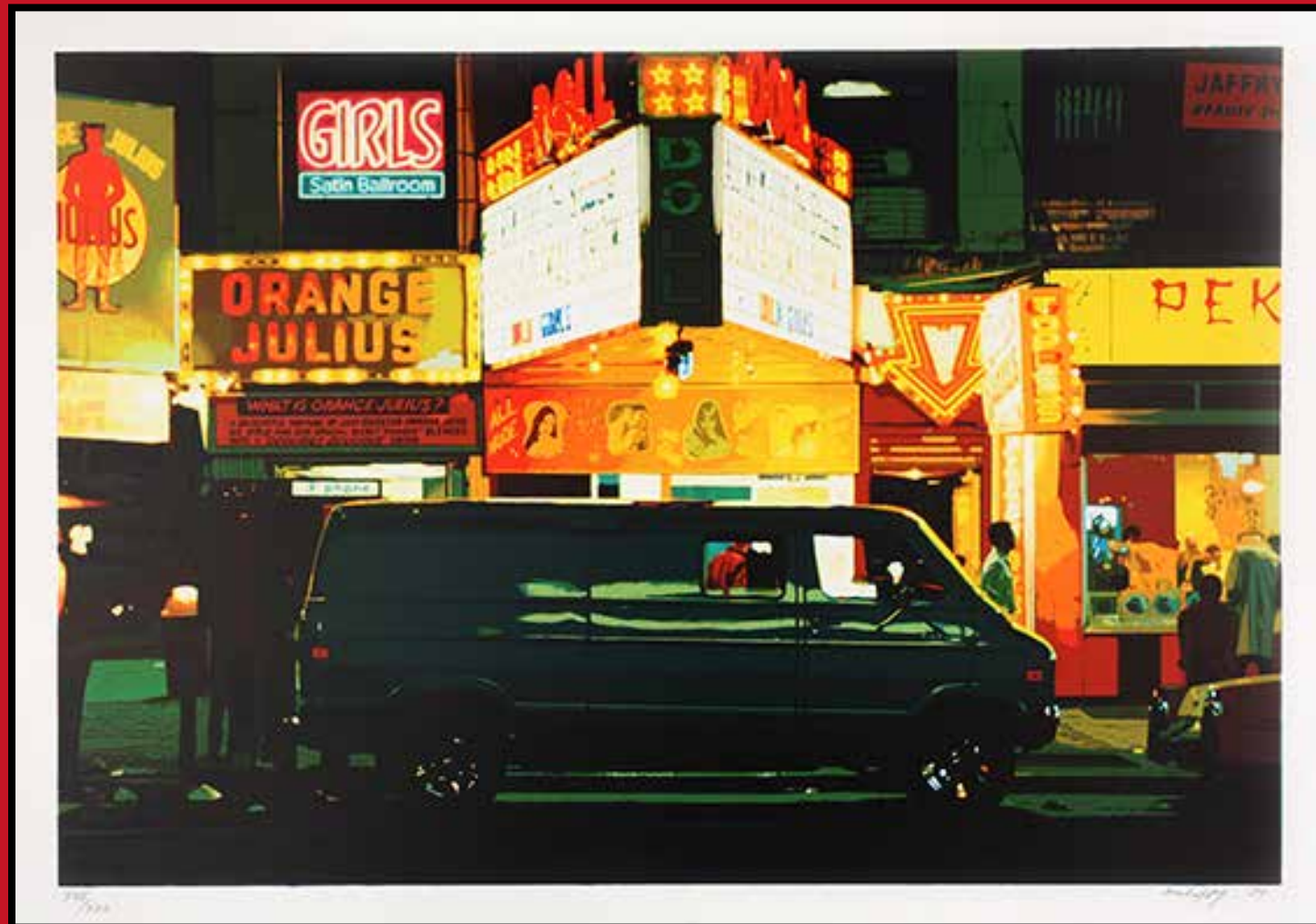
From the series *City-Scapes*

Serigraph on paper

Gift of the Department of Art, MU (2010.19.8)

Ron Kleemann was born in 1937 in Bay City, Michigan. He graduated from the University of Michigan's College of Architecture and Design in 1961 with a BS in Design. He began his professional career as an abstract sculptor in the early 1960s, but turned to painting and the Photorealist style by the latter half of the decade. Much of Kleemann's time is spent titling his paintings. Unlike the other Photorealists, he is very concerned with titles, all of which have cryptic meanings and are very much a part of his work. They often include humor and double entendre.

Kleemann uses cropped, dramatic close-ups in his work, but without seeking to explore the strangeness of associations which this gives his subjects. Shiny red fire-engines, powerful trucks, and gleaming racing-cars are his subjects; redolent of speed and adventure, they are invariably new and unharmed, the very stuff of little boys' dreams. Yet his work goes beyond the technical virtuosity with which he makes these subjects credible. His brushwork is loose and painterly so that close-to, the illusions of transparent glass or of hard metallic surfaces dissolve into fluid shapes and colors, sensuous and lively in themselves. In many of his paintings the close-up acts as a means of showing just how abstract "photographic reality" can be. This desire to combine abstraction and realism runs throughout the work of this Michigan-born artist.



Noel Mahaffey (American, b. 1944)

*Night—Times Square*, 1979

From the series *City-Scapes*

Serigraph on paper

Gift of the Department of Art, MU (2010.19.9)

Noel Mahaffey's panoramic views of American cities, done in the early 1970s, have little concern for the opposing realities that Richard Estes and Don Eddy deal with. In the long tradition of topographical views of American scenery, they read like *National Geographic* photographs intent on broad, descriptive narration. But in Mahaffey's works, the narration is non-celebratory and non-referential – an attitude of “one city is just as good as another.”



Ching-Jang Yao (Taiwanese, 1941–2001)

*Building Reflection*, 1979

From the series *City-Scapes*

Serigraph on paper

Gift of the Department of Art, MU (2010.19.10)

Ching-Jang Yao was born in Taichung, Taiwan in 1941. In 1964 he graduated from the art department of Nation Taiwan Normal University, and immigrated to the US in 1970. He was one of the preeminent Taiwanese painters working in the 1970s and is best known for his photorealist images of reflections of urban scenes in the manner of Richard Estes. Working primarily in New York, he exhibited in over 100 shows in over a dozen countries during his life, including the 1970 Sao Paulo Biennale. He was the first overseas artist to become a permanent professor in Mainland China. He died in New York City in 2001.