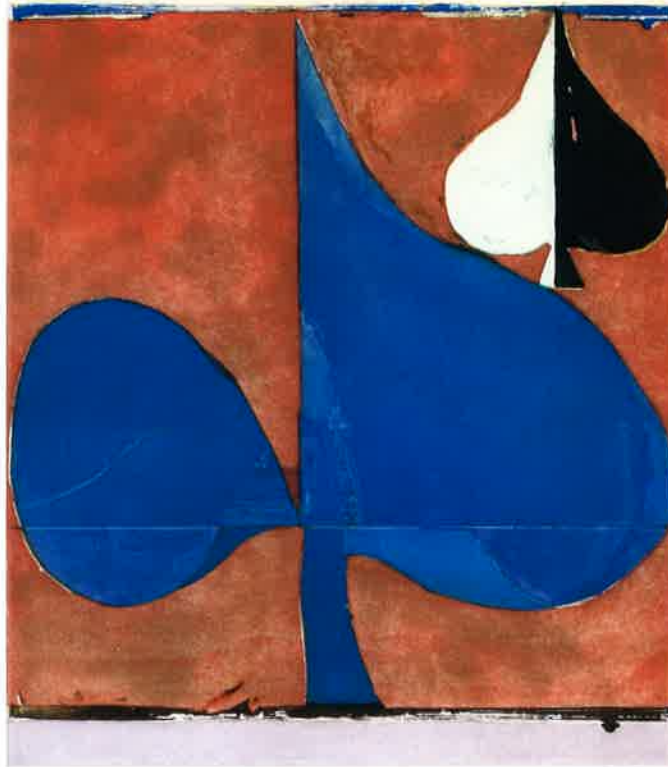


Anderson Gallery of Contemporary Graphic Art

Richard Diebenkorn Clubs and Spades



Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco **California Palace of the Legion of Honor**

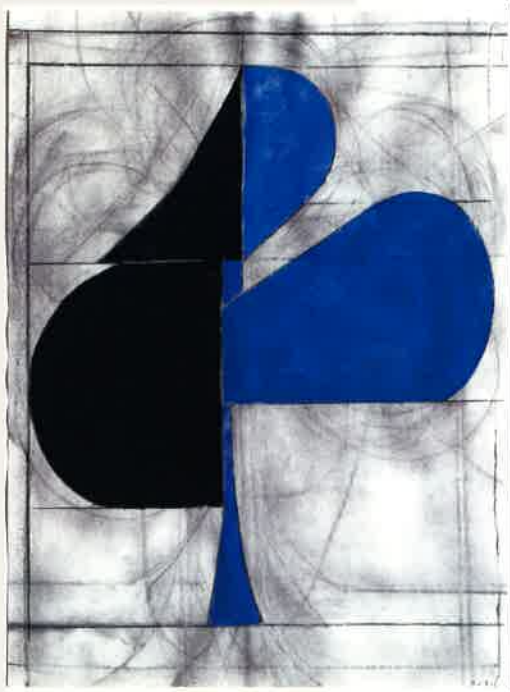
**Anderson Gallery of
Contemporary Graphic Art**
California Palace of the Legion of Honor
January 19–April 28, 2002

Richard Diebenkorn: Clubs and Spades

Karin Breuer
Curator, Anderson Graphic Arts Collection

Richard Diebenkorn (1922–1993) was fascinated with the figures of clubs and spades from the time of his childhood, when he painted them as emblems and heraldic devices on homemade shields. Occasionally he included them in his early abstract paintings and drawings of the 1950s and 1960s. Diebenkorn also featured clubs and spades in two small, untitled etchings (nos. 1, 2) that were made at Crown Point Press in 1977 and 1980.

“I had always used these signs in my work almost from my beginnings, but always peripherally, incidentally, and perhaps whimsically,” he said to explain their reappearance as more important forms in his work beginning in late 1980.¹ An untitled drawing (no. 20), one of four made in December 1980, may be his announcement of a new artistic preoccupation with the forms.² In the drawing, clubs and spades in various colors and sizes are scattered in a complex arrangement that also includes numbers, circles, triangles, and crosses. Over the course of the next two years (1981 and 1982) in a break from the rectilinear geometry of his large Ocean Park canvases, Diebenkorn dealt directly with clubs and spades, as theme and variation, in a sizable group of drawings and prints.³



24. Untitled No. 9, 1981



10. Spreading Spade, 1981

In two printmaking sessions at Crown Point's Oakland studio, April 13–21, 1981, and May 5–20, 1982, Diebenkorn produced fifteen prints with clubs and spades as singular motifs. The forms are iconic in these prints, enlarged to a monumental scale within the printing plate, often crowding the image space. Clubs and spades mutate into trees (*Green Tree Spade*, no. 16), towers (*Eiffel Spade*, no. 14), or merge to form hybrids (*Combination*, no. 9). *Blue Club*, *Tri-Color II*, and *White Club* (nos. 6, 7, and 8) depict spades that are bloated and bulbous, each containing a flowerlike club form. In the prints *Black Club*, *Tri-Color*, and *Clubs Blue Ground* (no. 4, 5, and 11) the shape of a club is manipulated into a clover leaf, flower, or tree with rounded petals or leaves and an elongated stem/trunk that emerges from the ground. These prints find a strong correspondence in emphasis and format with Diebenkorn's drawings from this time, but some drawings such as two untitled works from 1980 and 1981 (nos. 21 and 23) display forms that are so distorted as to be un-recognizable, non-objective fragments.

Clubs and spades were not an exclusive theme for the artist during 1981–1982. In fact, he also created several Ocean Park–style drawings and the print *Blue Surround* at this time. Diebenkorn's intense concentration on the theme was exhausted by 1983 and he claimed that he had returned to a "relational mode" that was dependent on no theme or motif.⁴ The prints and drawings that follow, however, indicate that he continued to explore the forms of clubs and spades within the abstract, geometric framework of Ocean Park works. In the 1983 woodcut *Oebre* (no. 17), for example, there is no doubt that the profile of *Spreading Spade* (no. 10) is the origin of the peaked curve at the lower right of the composition. Soft, sensuous curves of spade forms appear in three areas of the print *Touched Red*, 1991 (no. 18); and in many other prints, drawings, and paintings specific shapes of clubs and spades enter the vocabulary of elements that define Ocean Park compositions.



6. *Blue Club*, 1981



Richard Diebenkorn working in the studio at Crown Point Press, Oakland, in May 1982. © 2002 Colin McRae Photography

It is not surprising then that Diebenkorn described the clubs and spades as having “a much greater emotional charge than I realized,”⁵ a statement that suggests they had a strong personal significance. Diebenkorn never discussed the meaning of the symbols within his work, however, and allowed them to remain enigmatic. Their inclusion in the late print *Flotsam* (no. 19), published in 1991, provides at least a clue that they had some special meaning. Clubs and spades are featured within the jumbled composition as discarded odds and ends, along with other “discarded” images of scissors, arrows, numbers, and circles that also figured importantly in Diebenkorn’s pictorial repertoire. The print, with its eccentric appearance, strongly resembles the December 1980 drawing that introduced clubs and spades to his oeuvre. At the end of his life, it served to identify them as personal symbols and elements even as they were being jettisoned for something new, or gathered together as a summation of past work.



4. *Black Club*, 1981



14. *Eiffelspade*, 1982



19. *Flotsam*, 1991

- 1 Richard Diebenkorn, quoted in John Elderfield, “Leaving Ocean Park,” in *The Art of Richard Diebenkorn*, ed. Jane Livingston et al. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1997), 112.
- 2 John Elderfield, *The Drawings of Richard Diebenkorn* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art; Houston: Houston Fine Art Press, 1988), 57.
- 3 It was only on paper, not canvas, that Diebenkorn investigated clubs and spades as subjects. He produced approximately fifty drawings and twenty prints.
- 4 Richard Diebenkorn, quoted in Richard Newlin, “The Ocean Park Drawings,” in *Richard Diebenkorn Works on Paper*, ed. Richard Newlin (Houston: Houston Fine Art Press, 1987), 12–13.
- 5 Diebenkorn quoted in Elderfield, in *The Art of Richard Diebenkorn*, 112.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

All works in the exhibition are by Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993). Prints are in the collection of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; drawings are generous loans from California collections, as noted. Measurements for prints and drawings are in inches, height before width. All prints were published by Crown Point Press in Oakland and San Francisco.

PRINTS

1. **Untitled (Club and Spade) or Untitled (abstract)**, 1977
Drypoint and aquatint
8 x 11 in. (image); 22 3/8 x 15 in. (sheet)
Edition: 5
Printed by John Slivon
Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Kathan Brown
1991.28.385
2. **Untitled trial proof (walking figures with spade)**, unpublished, 1980
Spit-bite aquatint
6 15/16 x 5 in. (image)
Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown Point Press
1991.28.605
3. **Card Game**, 1981
Soft-ground etching
11 x 13 in. (image); 22 x 30 in. (sheet)
Edition: 35
Printed by Nancy Anello
Anderson Graphic Arts Collection, gift of the Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson Charitable Foundation
1996.74.88
4. **Black Club**, 1981
Etching, drypoint, and aquatint printed in black and brown-black
13 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. (image); 30 x 22 in. (sheet)
Edition: 35
Printed by Nancy Anello
Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown Point Press
1991.28.634
5. **Tri-Color**, 1981
Color aquatint, etching, and drypoint with color applied *à la poupée*
13 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. (image); 30 x 22 in. (sheet)
Edition: 35
Printed by Nancy Anello
Anderson Graphic Arts Collection, gift of the Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson Charitable Foundation
1996.74.91
6. **Blue Club**, 1981
Color aquatint, spit-bite aquatint, and soft-ground etching
18 3/4 x 17 3/4 in. (image); 37 1/4 x 30 in. (sheet)
Edition: 35
Printed by Nancy Anello
Anderson Graphic Arts Collection, gift of the Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson Charitable Foundation
1996.74.86
7. **Tri-Color II**, 1981
Color aquatint, spit-bite aquatint, and soft-ground etching
18 3/4 x 17 3/4 in. (image); 37 1/4 x 30 in. (sheet)
Edition: 35
Printed by Nancy Anello
Anderson Graphic Arts Collection, gift of the Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson Charitable Foundation
1996.74.69
8. **White Club**, 1981
Ink transfer etching
18 3/4 x 17 3/4 in. (image); 37 1/4 x 30 in. (sheet)
Edition: 22
Printed by Nancy Anello
Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown Point Press
1991.28.670
9. **Combination**, 1981
Color aquatint and spit-bite aquatint
15 1/2 x 13 1/2 in. (image); 31 x 24 in. (sheet)
Edition: 40
Printed by Nancy Anello
Anderson Graphic Arts Collection, gift of the Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson Charitable Foundation
1996.74.89
10. **Spreading Spade**, 1981
Color aquatint, spit-bite aquatint, and drypoint
18 x 19 in. (image); 36 3/4 x 31 in. (sheet)
Edition: 35
Printed by Nancy Anello
Anderson Graphic Arts Collection, gift of the Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson Charitable Foundation
1996.74.87



Clubs Blue Ground, 1982

11. **Clubs Blue Ground**, 1982
Color etching, spit-bite aquatint, and drypoint
20 x 19 in. (image); 33 x 26 1/2 in. (sheet)
Edition: 35
Printed by Lilah Toland
Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown Point Press
1991.28.77
12. **Tri-Color Spade**, 1982
Color drypoint, aquatint, and spit-bite aquatint
9 x 10 in. (image); 26 1/4 x 19 3/4 in. (sheet)
Edition: 50
Printed by Lilah Toland
Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown Point Press
1991.28.68
13. **Sugarlift Spade**, 1982
Sugarlift aquatint
16 x 14 3/4 in. (image); 32 7/8 x 26 1/2 in. (sheet)
Edition: 35
Printed by Lilah Toland
Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown Point Press
1991.28.73

14. **Eiffelspade**, 1982

Aquatint
8 3/4 x 6 7/8 in. (image); 23 1/2 x 18 1/2 in.
(sheet)
Edition: 50
Printed by Lilah Toland
Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown
Point Press
1991.28.69

15. **Spade Drypoint**, 1982

Drypoint
10 1/4 x 9 in. (image); 23 1/4 x 18 1/2 in.
(sheet)
Edition: 50
Printed by Lilah Toland
Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown
Point Press
1991.28.59

16. **Green Tree Spade**, 1982

Color aquatint and spit-bite aquatint
12 x 9 in. (image); 23 1/4 x 18 3/8 in. (sheet)
Edition: 35
Printed by Lilah Toland
Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown
Point Press
1991.28.58

A working drawing and a selection of work-
ing proofs for **Green Tree Spade** are
included in the exhibition.

17. **Ochre**, 1983

Color woodcut
35 3/4 x 24 7/8 in. (image); 38 1/8 x
27 1/4 in. (sheet)
Edition: 200
Printed by Tadashi Toda at the Shi-un-do
Print Shop, Kyoto
Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown
Point Press
1991.28.675

18. **Touched Red**, 1991

Color aquatint, spit-bite aquatint, aquatint,
soft-ground etching, and drypoint with
scraping and burnishing
24 x 16 1/16 in. (image); 35 13/16 x
26 5/8 in. (sheet)
Edition: 85
Printed by Renée Bott
Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown
Point Press
1993.51.204

19. **Flotsam**, 1991

Aquatint and drypoint with scraping and
burnishing
23 15/16 x 18 in. (image); 34 x 26 5/8 in.
(sheet)
Edition: 85
Printed by Renée Bott
Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown
Point Press
1993.51.205

DRAWINGS

20. **Untitled**, 1980

Opaque watercolor, pastel, ink, and
cut-and-pasted paper
25 1/8 x 19 in. (sheet)
Collection of Christopher Diebenkorn

21. **Untitled**, undated, ca. 1980

Opaque watercolor
19 x 25 in. (sheet)
Private collection

22. **Untitled**, 1980

Acrylic and charcoal
22 1/4 x 17 3/8 in. (sheet)
Private collection

23. **Untitled**, 1981

Opaque watercolor
13 x 12 1/2 in. (sheet)
Private collection

24. **Untitled, No. 9**, 1981

Opaque watercolor and charcoal
30 x 22 1/8 in. (sheet)
Collection of Harry W. and Mary
Margaret Anderson

25. **Untitled, No. 46**, 1981

Opaque watercolor and crayon
27 1/2 x 25 in. (sheet)
Courtesy of Gretchen and John
Berggruen

26. **Untitled** (spade drawing on an
eggshell), ca. 1981

Opaque watercolor; 2 1/4 in. (length)
Collection of the Richard Grant
Family

