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THE CLICK OF AUTHENTICITY OFFERS RARE GLIMPSE OF MID-CENTURY ARTIST ADALINE KENT

An artist fascinated by the natural world, this is the first retrospective of Adaline Kent’s work to occur in sixty years. In conjunction with the exhibition, the Museum has produced the first scholarly publication on the artist to date.

Reno, NV (July, 2022) - The Nevada Museum of Art will host the first retrospective exhibition of one of midcentury America’s most innovative and underrecognized artists to occur in nearly sixty years in *Adaline Kent: The Click of Authenticity*. The exhibition features approximately 120 works that span Kent’s entire career, and will be on display at the Museum from January 28, 2023 – September 10, 2023. The exhibition will occupy the entire second floor, charting major thematic developments in the artist’s work, which progressed from figuration to abstraction. Encompassing a diverse range of media, the exhibition includes drawings, original pictures incised on Hydrocal (a plaster mixture), sculptures both large and small, and a collection of terracottas — many of which have not been seen by the public in over half a century.

Kent (1900-1957) often wrote down many of her ideas on art, filling notebooks with her thoughts. In one poetic note entitled *Classic Romantic Mystic*, dated April 17, 1956, Kent mused, “I want to hear the click of authenticity.” The title for the exhibition takes its inspiration from this quote, underscoring the drive that propelled her forward in her work and life: to create art that expressed a unique approach to timeless subjects.

The expression of infinity emerges as an overarching theme in her work. In fact, Kent symbolically employed the the looping symbol for infinity in many of her compositions. According to Apsara DiQuinzio, senior curator of contemporary art and organizer of the exhibition “...the infinity symbol, which she aligned with waterfalls and ski slopes, can be understood as a fusion of her interests in time, space, and nature. For Kent, the infinite was the wellspring of the growth and knowledge that led her to the discovery of *her* truth. It was what she experienced in the mountains, and it was what she hoped to express in her art.”

Although Kent’s work is not widely known today, she was featured in key 1940s and 1950s exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Bienal de São Paulo, and she exhibited with the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York. She was a peer of artists such as Ruth Asawa, Isamu Noguchi, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still. Kent was also a member of the San Francisco Bay Area’s most productive mid-century artistic clan, which included Charles H. Howard, Madge Knight, John Langley Howard, Robert Boardman Howard, Henry Temple Howard, and Jane Berlandina. As a young Vassar graduate, she studied with Ralph Stackpole in San Francisco and with Emile-Antoine Bourdelle in Paris, where she lived for several years before finally settling in the Bay Area in 1929.

Bourdelle, who was known for his dynamic sculptures, would spark Kent’s interest in movement and balance. This influence can be seen in the sculptures she made for the Court of Pacifica at the Golden Gate International Exposition in 1939-40, a moment in her development when Kent’s distinct style began to emerge. Movement was something Kent appreciated in sculpture and realizing the rhythms of her own body in space was likewise an important dimension of her own artistic practice. She kept gymnastic rings hanging in her studio, and her family reports that she utilized them regularly and with skill. Physical movement, whether skiing or hiking in the mountains, dancing, or practicing on her rings, was something she thought about in relation to her art.

“To me, skiers, dancers, trapeze artist provide pleasure comparable to that of sculpture — an idea of form in space, space in form,” she said. “Control in space, free yet disciplined in composition. The feeling of space and movement seem to be of the essence of our time.”

A Legacy of Advocacy and Art

Kent grew up in the shadow of Mount Tampais, and into a family devoted to public service and environmentalism. Her mother, Elizabeth Thacher Kent, was an outspoken Suffragette who advocated for women’s right to vote. In 1911, thanks in part to her activism, California passed the Suffrage Amendment. William Kent, her father, was a member of the U.S. Congress and a champion of land conservation. When Kent was eight years old, her parents donated land they had purchased to the U.S. Government in order to protect redwood forests from the logging industry, and worked with President Theodore Roosevelt to create Muir Woods National Monument.

Kent grew up with a love for the natural world, which she shared with her husband Robert B. Howard. They often spent their summers exploring the High Sierra. Kent and Howard also spent winters skiing in the Tahoe region, often staying with close friend and fellow artist Jeanne Reynal, who had a house at nearby Soda Springs. They were among the first investors of Sugar Bowl Ski Resort, and Kent’s brother-in-law, Henry Temple Howard, would design the first chairlift in California. Kent was a self-admitted “addict of the High Sierra,” and the landscape infused her work as she translated her experience of time and space in the mountains into aesthetic form. This makes the Nevada Museum of Art and the surrounding region an ideal context to showcase Kent’s work.

“The Museum is honored to host the first retrospective exhibition of Kent’s work that demonstrates her unique contribution to figuration, abstraction and surrealism on the West Coast in the United States,” said David Walker, CEO of the Nevada Museum of Art. “Her work is a vital part of our regional history and has been overlooked for far too long. The exhibition and the catalog it inspired will be a remarkable contribution to the scholarship and recognition of this exceptional, mid-century artist.”

In conjunction with the exhibition, DiQuinzio has edited the first scholarly publication on the artist to date, which will provide additional context on Adaline Kent’s work and life. The 224-page, fully illustrated catalog will include

essays by DiQuinzio, Stanford University Professor Alexander Nemerov, archivist and librarian for the San Francisco Art Institute Jeff Gunderson, and associate curator for the UC Berkeley Art Museum Elaine Yau, PhD. The book is published by Rizzoli Electa and designed by Purtill Family Business. With an extensive chronology and a wide selection of sculptures, photographs, and rarely seen works on paper and paintings on Hyrdocal, the book substantiates Kent's achievement as one of mid-century's most singular, inventive sculptors, re-excavating her work for younger generations.

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Image captions (from left to right): *Lighthouse for Birds*, 1956. Terracotta (two pieces), 31 ¼ x 8 x 7 ½ in. (79 x 20 x 18 cm). Collection of Adaline J. Hilgard; *Song*, 1945. Tempera on incised hydrocal, 17 ½ x 21 ¼ in. (44 x 54 cm). Collection of Adaline J. Hilgard; *Presence*, 1947. Magnesite, 42 ¾ x 17 ¾ x 7 ¼ in. (109 x 45 x 18 cm). Collection of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; gift of the Women's Board and the Membership Activities Board.

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The Nevada Museum of Art is the only art museum in Nevada accredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). A private, nonprofit organization founded in 1931, the statewide institution is supported by its membership as well as sponsorships, gifts and grants. Through its permanent collections, original exhibitions and programming, and E.L. Cord Museum School, the Nevada Museum of Art provides meaningful opportunities for people to engage with a range of art and education experiences. The Museum's **Center for Art + Environment** is an internationally-recognized research center dedicated to supporting the practice, study, and awareness of creative interactions between people and their environments. The Center houses unique archive materials from more than 1,000 artists working on all seven continents, including Cape Farewell, Michael Heizer, Walter de Maria, Lita Albuquerque, Burning Man, the Center for Land Use Interpretation, Great Basin Native Artists Archive, Ugo Rondinone's *Seven Magic Mountains*, and Trevor Paglen's *Orbital Reflector*. Learn more at nevadaart.org.

Land Acknowledgement

The Nevada Museum of Art acknowledges the traditional homelands of the *Wa She Shu* (Washoe), *Numu* (Northern Paiute), *Newe* (Western Shoshone), and *Nuwu* (Southern Paiute) people of the Great Basin. This includes the 27 tribal nations that exist as sovereign nations and continue as stewards of this land. We appreciate the opportunity to live and learn on these Indigenous homelands.