

Artwork
as Screen

Yale
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SCREENS

Genealogies of the Excessive Screen
A Mellon Sawyer Seminar at Yale

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Artwork as Screen

The works gathered together in this booklet serve as a *tour*, a *genealogy*, and a *counter-history* of the screen. As the itinerary of a tour, this guide showcases the often neglected role played by screens in the history of art generally (and in the collection of the Yale University Art Gallery specifically).

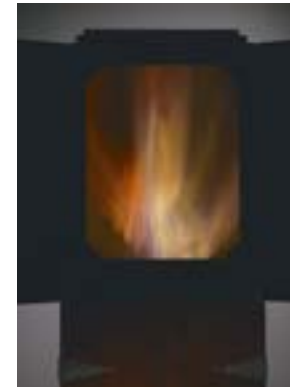
Along this tour, the screen—a medium that tends to recede into the background or dissimulate its role as a medium—springs forth as an object of aesthetic experience. This selection of works also offers a *genealogy* of the screen. Since the 15th century the English word *screen*, as well as the French *écran*, the Italian *schermo*, the German *Schirm*, has denoted objects performing functions other than supporting a projected representation. It was a filter; a divide, a shelter; a camouflage, participating in the strategic production of power and space in a range of historically specific constellations.

As *counter-history*, this guide accounts for screens beyond the visual representations of cinema, television, and home computing that dominated 20th century notions of the screen. Moreover, it demonstrates the utility of the screen as an interpretative lens for works of art.

In that spirit, nine scholars of Film and Media at Yale have annotated the works included in this guide, exhibiting the latent definitions of the screen—and the latent screens to be experienced within the Yale University Art Gallery collection.

Keely Orgeman

Thomas Wilfred's *Clavilux Junior* brought the aurora borealis into the modern home. This aesthetic device thus upended two novel experiences: the sight of the polar lights, usually visible only in arctic regions, and the viewing of this phenomenon simulated at the planetarium, in which the surface for the projection of auroral imagery—the ceiling dome—was equivalently, in the artist's instrument, a concave screen facing the viewer. Wilfred's invention transplanted the screen's window onto the world into a domestic space, as if to anticipate the television in its widespread use.



Thomas Wilfred
Unit #86, from the *Clavilux Junior (First Home Clavilux)* Series
Metal, glass, electrical and lighting elements,
illustration-board screen in an oak-veneer cabinet
1930



Anna Shechtman

Self-reference is built into the title of Marcel Duchamp's *Tu m'*, a 10-foot-long panoramic painting that points (both symbolically and indexically) to the artist's own oeuvre. In this abridged grammatical formation—allegedly shortened from the French *Tu m'emmerdes* (you bore me)—“me” becomes a screen for “you,” a surface upon which “you” is given meaning (i.e. that which bores me). Like the first-person pronoun, the canvas of *Tu m'* is also a screen, a site upon which apparent projections of Duchamp's readymades—the bicycle wheel, the hatrack, and a corkscrew—are fixed.



Marcel Duchamp

Tu m'

Oil on canvas, with bottlebrush, safety pins, and bolt

69.8 x 303 cm

1918



Brigitte Peucker

One of Richter's photo-paintings, this is a portrait of the dead. Commissioned by the bereaved, the oil on textured canvas doesn't occlude its photographic origins. Both by way of and beneath the blurring so characteristic of Richter's style, the face that looks out through a car windshield has the look of a death mask. The indexicality of the photograph—sometimes compared to a death mask, a trace of the subject—is both revealed and contained by the blurring effect of the glass screen.



Gerhard Richter

Bildnis Holger Friedrich (Portrait Holger Friedrich)

Oil on Canvas

140 x 140 x 2.9 cm

1972



Lisa Åkervall

Titus Kaphar's *Another Fight for Remembrance* depicts a crowd of protestors—partially obscured from view by layers of white paint—in the wake of the 2014 fatal shooting of unarmed black teenager Michael Brown by a white police officer. This whitewashing of the protestors evokes racialization as a screen that renders its subjects invisible. This depiction resonates with a larger body of works, such as Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and W.E.B. Dubois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, that associate blackness, in the words of Dubois, with being "shut out from their world by a vast veil."



Titus Kaphar
Another Fight for Remembrance
Oil on Canvas
228.6 x 182.88 cm
2015



Andrew Vielkind

At the turn of the 20th century, tea screens were commonly placed in front of a kettle to prevent the flames of tabletop burners from being extinguished by a breeze. Although they played a practical role in regulating environmental conditions such as wind and temperature, the tea screen frequently doubled as an aesthetic object. The hinges and ornate leaf patterns cast into the silver evoke the adorned folding screens used in East Asian countries for either decoration or maintaining privacy while dressing.



Gorham Manufacturing Company
Tea Screen
sterling silver
Providence, Rhode Island, United States
1900



Dudley Andrew

Trapezoids of light fall like projected beams on the walls of *Rooms by the Sea*, the first wall screening off whatever is represented in the painting that is framed and hung on the second. A threshold divides the unfathomable sea from the land, as did God on the 3rd Day. The rooms give onto this trapezoid of blue, rippling with expectations...of some immense wave, or ship, or shark—the unrepresented Real that lies just beyond this and every screen.



Edward Hopper
Rooms by the Sea
Oil on canvas
74.3 x 101.6 cm
1951



Regina Karl

A screen announces things to come. It is a delicate surface that serves as a means of projection as much as a site of protection. In this altarpiece *Annunciation*, our attention is with the surroundings of the Virgin Mary. De' Landi chooses the *hortus conclusus* (lat.: enclosed garden), a classical motif in Renaissance painting that symbolizes the mystery of Mary's immaculate conception and her protection against all evil. Fictive reliefs that imitate antiquities are screened on the wall, which offers only a sneak peek into the garden of paradise, announcing the divine.



Neruccio de' Landi
The Annunciation
Tempera on panel
sight (framed): 66.04 x 147.32 x 8.255 cm
ca. 1480



Bernard Geoghegan

The Dura-Europos Roman shields, dating from the 3rd century and adorned with symbols for victory as well as a deity of war, served for decoration rather than combat. This double potential of shields—as shelter for protection and surface for imagery—locates them within an expanded history of screens. This functional coincidence inspired film theorist Siegfried Kracauer to liken the film screen to Athena's shield, by which Perseus gazed at Medusa's reflection. In the screenic shield (or shieldlike screen), horror, violence, and protection coincide for that spectator who has the courage to look.



Scutum

Shield

Painted wood and rawhide

105.5 × 41 × 30 cm

Yale-French Excavations at Dura-Europos mid-3rd century A.D.



Swagato Chakravorty

Designed c. 1899 in New York as a church window, John La Farge's *The Good Knight*—over 15 feet tall—announces itself as a monumental object. Its balanced imagery, depicting the Knight standing with removed armor underneath a Florentine arch, centers and guides the spectator's gaze. The opalescence of variously-colored glass renders this window as a screen in multiple senses: its physical translucency that admits light but obscures clear vision; the arch that visually signifies spatial division, and an overall monumentality made light, membranous, by the play of colored light.



John La Farge

The Good Knight

Leaded glass

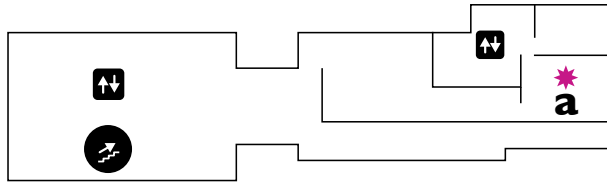
482.601 × 142.24 cm

Designed 1899, dedicated 1903

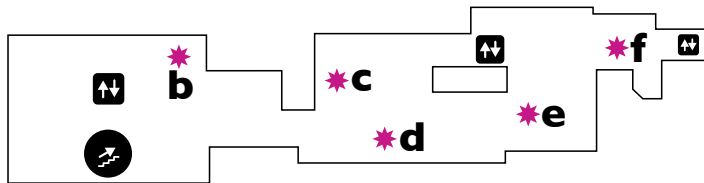


Floor Plan

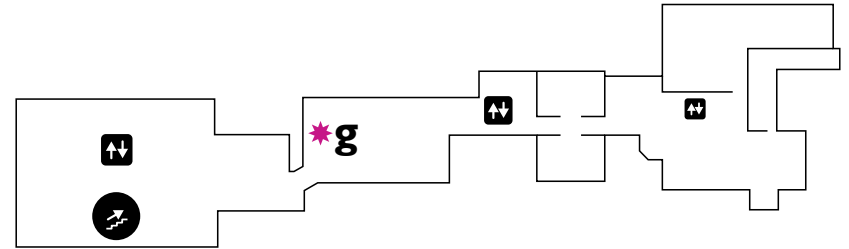
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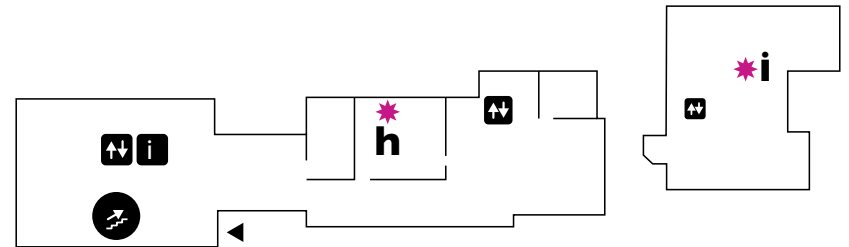
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Image courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery