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Show recalls
moderns' emergence



DAY & NIGHT

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BY QUENTIN YOUNG
LONGMONT TIMES-CALL

DENVER — During the last month of 1948, a seminal event in the history of Colorado art took place.

Members of the Denver Artists Guild were participating in an exhibition at the Denver Art Museum, which then was located in the Chappell House on Logan Street.

A group of 15 artists, viewing the guild as stagnant, broke away and put on a simultaneous show at the museum.

The move was a direct challenge to traditional aesthetic values by adherents of modern styles, and that's exactly how it was portrayed in the press of the time. As surrealism and abstraction challenged landscapes and other safer genres, newspaper articles spoke of a "showdown" and "schism" in Colorado art.

Though the episode was at times acrimonious, it also was fruitful. The shows drew scores of visitors, and it proved a milestone in the state's artistic journey.



Kirkland Museum, Courtesy photo

"Mountain Rhythms," by Vance Kirkland.

Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art recalls that momentous month with its

current exhibition, "15 Colorado Artists: Breaking With Tradition," on view through

July 31.

The exhibition includes work by the artists, who in-

Check it out

What: "15 Colorado Artists: Breaking With Tradition"
When: Through July 31
Where: Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art
 1311 Pearl St., Denver
Cost: \$6 to \$7
Information:
www.kirklandmuseum.org

deed called themselves "15 Colorado Artists," who exhibited works in the breakaway show. Many of the pictures now on view were completed well after 1948. But some of them hung in the groundbreaking show.

In considering the Kirkland show, there's no better place to start than with Vance Kirkland himself. A stylistically restless artist and staunch defender of artists' prerogatives — he said people who were ignorant of art but talked about it anyway should "shut up" — he among the 15 moderns made some of the most modern pictures.

Kirkland, who died in 1981, is today best remembered for

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Kirkland Museum, Courtesy photo

"Forest of the Subconscious," an oil-on-board painting by William Sanderson.

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his late dot paintings, but in 1948 he was more of a moody surrealist. He also was pushing toward total abstraction, as in "Mountain Rhythms," which hung in the 1948 show and is included in the Kirkland show. It's an intersecting mix of colors that, while more abstract than representational, depicts clouds grasping mountain peaks.

Kirkland's significance to the advancement of modernism in Colorado is evident in that he was the founding director of the University of Denver school of art, and 10 of the 15 Colorado Artists were faculty at the school.

Several of the modernists were women, including Mina Conant, who of the 15 possessed the most original imagination. Her images make immediate demands on your attention and then refuse to readily leave your mind. Her "Birthday Party," an oil painting from 1974, is a haunting picture of five children, or, rather, horrifying creatures with certain similarities to children.

The 15 also included Don F. Allen, John Billmyer, Marion Buchan, Jean Charlot, Angelo di Benedetto, Eo Kirchner, Moritz Krieg, Duard Marshall, Louise Emerson Ronnebeck, William Sanderson, Paul K. Smith, J. Richard Sorby and Frank Vavra.

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Co-Curators Hugh Grant and Deborah Wadsworth



Kirkland Museum, Courtesy photo

"Birthday Party," an oil-on-board painting by Mina Conant.



Eo Kirchner, "The Seeds Were Sown," date unknown, serigraph, Collection of Augustana Lutheran Church



Moritz Krieg, "Untitled (Surrealist Painting)," late 1940s, oil on canvas board, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Harlan J. Berk



Paul K. Smith, "Nocturne," c. 1950, oil on board, WoodwardHall Collection



Denver Remembers Its Modernist Art War

CONSERVATIVE AND RADICAL ARTISTS CLASHED here in Denver in 1948 over the legitimacy of modernist art, and that conflict is chronicled in *15 Colorado Artists—Breaking With Tradition*, an exhibition of paintings, photos and news clippings at the Kirkland Museum of Decorative & Fine Art, 1311 Pearl St. Shown above: *The Lovers*, William Sanderson, oil on canvas, 1947.