

## ABSTRACT

In 2014, sixteen boxes of artist Harry Brorby's personal documents, drawings, photographs, and ephemera were donated to The De Pree Gallery. A respected West Michigan-based painter, printmaker, and sculptor in the 1960s and 70s (whose work is part of the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and Walker Art Center in Minneapolis to name a few), this project seeks to understand Brorby's prolific career within the context of Contemporary Art and, moreover, the notion of artistic legacy and collective cultural memory. To this end, students have been divided into five project teams, each focusing on a specific aspect of the archives and its preservation: website creation and content management (Amy Van Dommelen, project manager), organization of archival material (Stephanie Harron, project manager), digitization of archival material (Brant Biba, project manager), contact management and historical reconstruction (Nancy Lanning, project manager), and provenance reconstruction (Erin Schregardus, project manager). In addition to this group component, each student is concentrating on a specific aspect of Brorby's archives that peaks their curiosity — something they would like to personally explore further. Individual research papers and on-line digital portfolios will serve as measurable outcomes for the course.

## OBJECTIVE

As part of the larger "Harry Brorby Project," our group's purpose is to reconstruct the provenance of Harry Brorby's entire body of art. "Provenance" is the history of a piece of art - specifically including its place and time of origin as well as an up-to-date record of ownership. Using documents from the archives and living contacts, our end goal is to construct a comprehensive as possible online catalogue that chronologically arranges each piece from Brorby's known body of art, along with its corresponding history.

## METHOD

Within the boxes with personal artifacts we received this past January was documentation in various forms of Brorby's artwork from throughout his artistic career; among these were photographs, exhibitions pamphlets, newspaper clippings, sales ledgers, gallery correspondence, undeveloped film roles, and personal business letters discussing his work. To map out Brorby's artistic career, we needed to locate, extract, and synthesize all traces and references to artworks from the documents of his everyday life. By reconstructing the provenance of Brorby's works, we can find who was interested in his work and why, which will aid in placing Brorby as an artist within a larger art historical context.

Faced with massive amounts of paper and photographs, the first step was to dive in with the archiving team to get our bearings within Brorby's world (to learn more about the archival process check out the archiving poster!). We collected any documents and photographs relating to the creation, sale, or exhibition of art we came across and filed them in a box accordingly. This created the base of our information pool.

With the volume of this initial pool of information, we decided to divide our project into three sections: the first was to tackle the massive stack of exhibition pamphlets and begin constructing a timeline of events and lists of associated pieces of art. We began collecting all of the information in common digital documents in a Google Drive. In order to ease the digitization process of provenance information, the second section of the project was to assign each item an accession number, or a unique identifier, so as to organize Brorby's works and related documents into collections.

As the process continued, an initial picture of Brorby's artistic career emerged. Accordingly, the holes in our information began to appear: missing dates, names, images, sales histories, and more. The third section of our project was to fill in these holes. To do so, it was necessary to reach out to outside sources (also with the help of the contact management team). These sources are long-time friends of the Brorby family that have been entrusted with his works, as well as galleries that his works have been shown and sold. This system of continual synthesis of information to construct a final document cataloguing the provenance of Harry Brorby's art has proven to be a cycle of collecting, documenting, and evaluating in which each cycle unveils a little more of Brorby's history.

## CONCLUSION

This is an ongoing project that we have only scratched the surface of, but ultimately the discovery of the history of Brorby's art will help place his body of work into larger artistic context and reveal its relationship to other artists and movements of his time. With "The Harry Brorby Project," we hope to respectfully bring life back to the reputation of Harry Brorby. Brorby was a painting professor at Hope and taught classes out of his home to educate the community and we would like to acknowledge his place within our community.

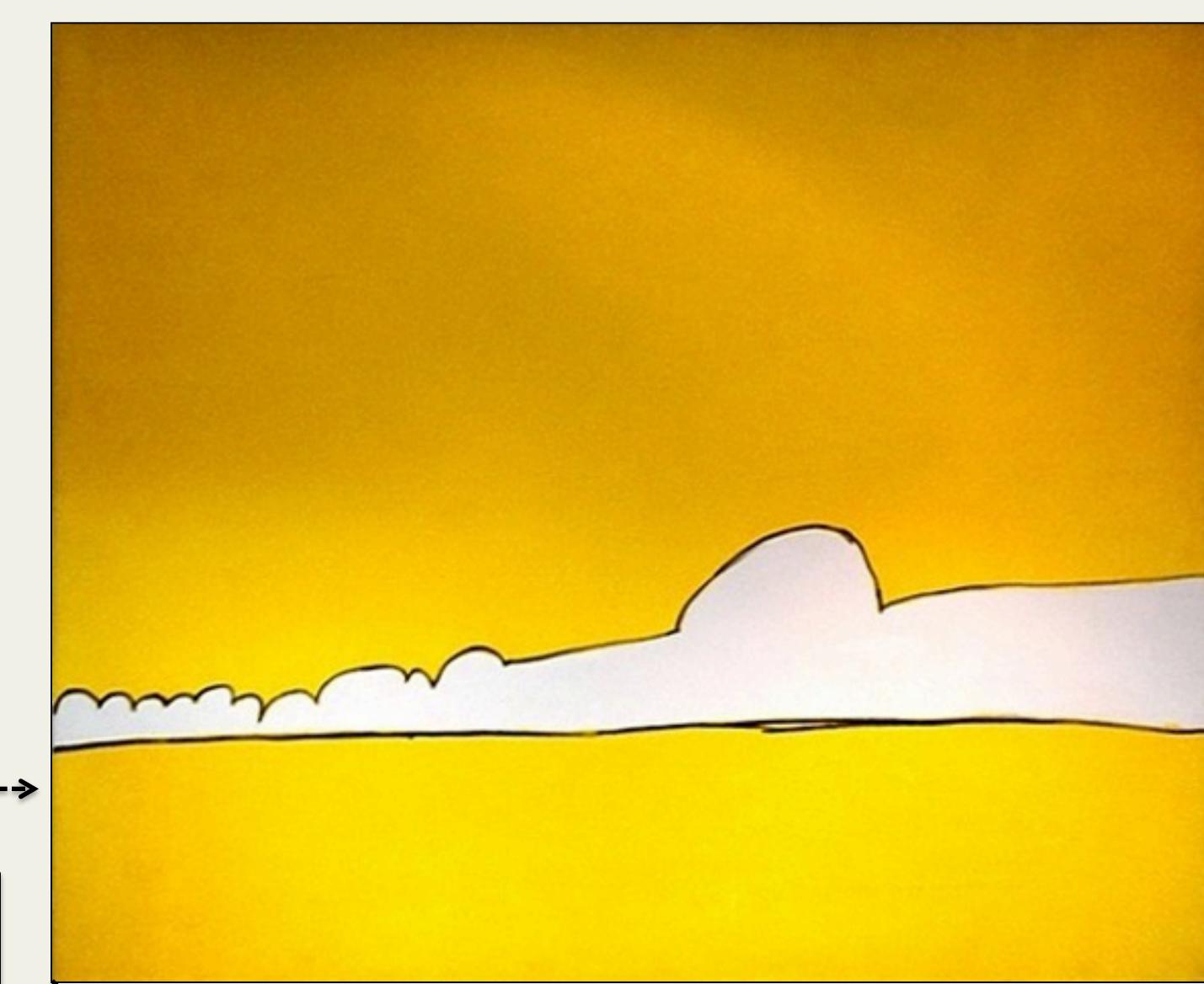
## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the friends and family of Harry Brorby, Dr. Heidi Kraus, and ART 361 members for their contributions.

"PAINTING, OR THE OTHER ART MEDIA HAVE BECOME MY LANGUAGE, MY MEANS OF COMMUNICATING WITH OTHERS, MY MEANS OF SEARCHING FOR THE INTANGIBLE THAT TAKE OUR LIVES AWAY FROM THE EVERYDAY, PRACTICAL EXISTANCE."  
-Harry Brorby, *Why Do I Paint*

The *Yellow Series*, Brorby's most prolific endeavor comprised of over one hundred pieces, is one of the most recognized collections of his work. The yellow was inspired by his fascination with the atmosphere of the southwest.

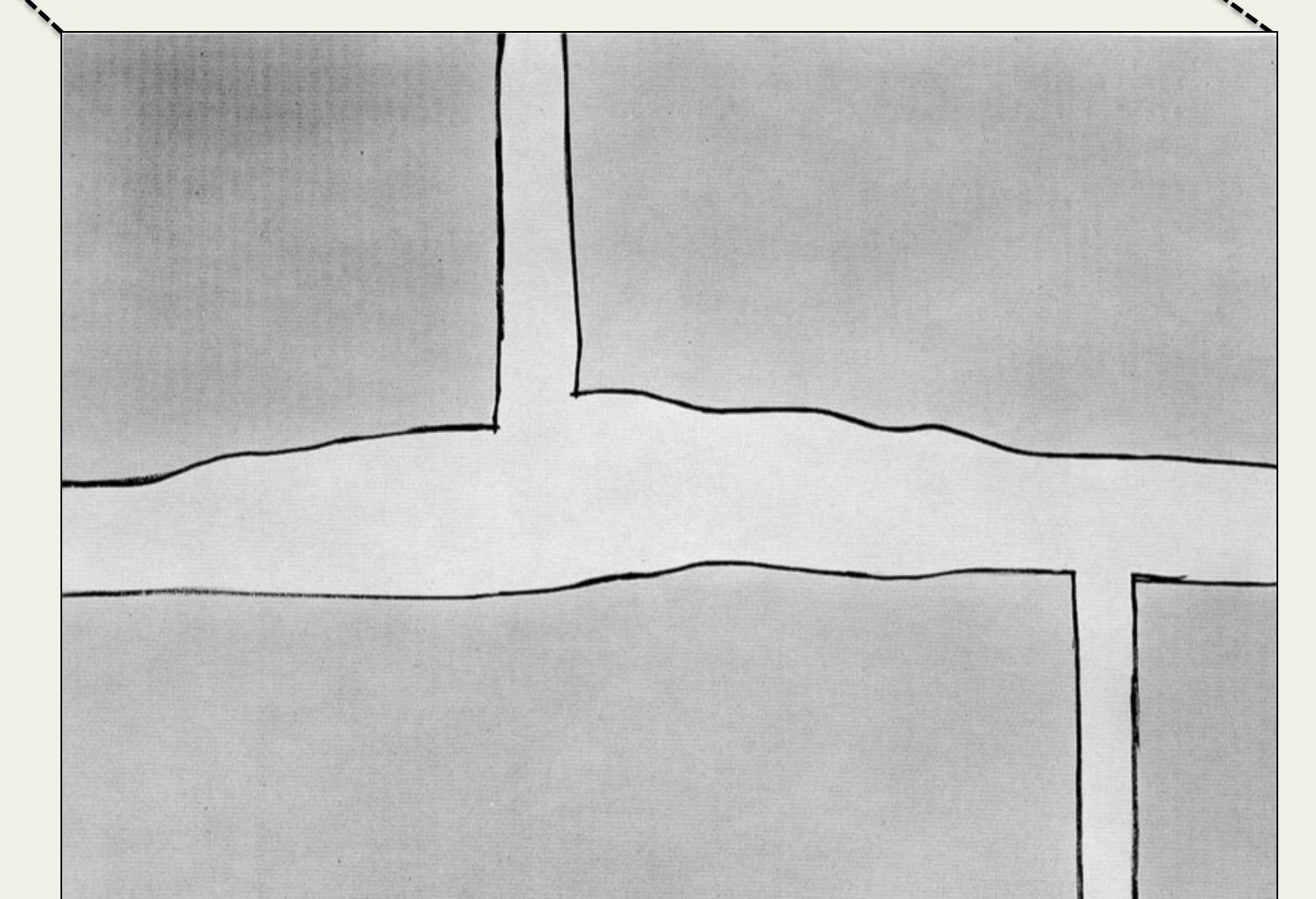
PRIZES AWARDED FROM  
Chicago Art Institute, Brooklyn Museum, Des Moines Art Center, Walker Art Center, Butler Art Institute, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Grand Rapids Art Gallery, Library of Congress, Philadelphia Print Club, Springfield Art Museum, Los Angeles Art Museum, Michigan Watercolor Society, Detroit Institute of Arts, Memphis Art Museum



*Yellow Series #76-3, 1968-1971, oil on canvas, Armstrong De Graaf International Fine Art Gallery, Saugatuck, Michigan*



*Meal at Fancy Restaurant, 1963, oil on canvas, (55 x 70in), poster image of solo-show in 1964 at the Donald Morris Gallery in Detroit, Michigan*

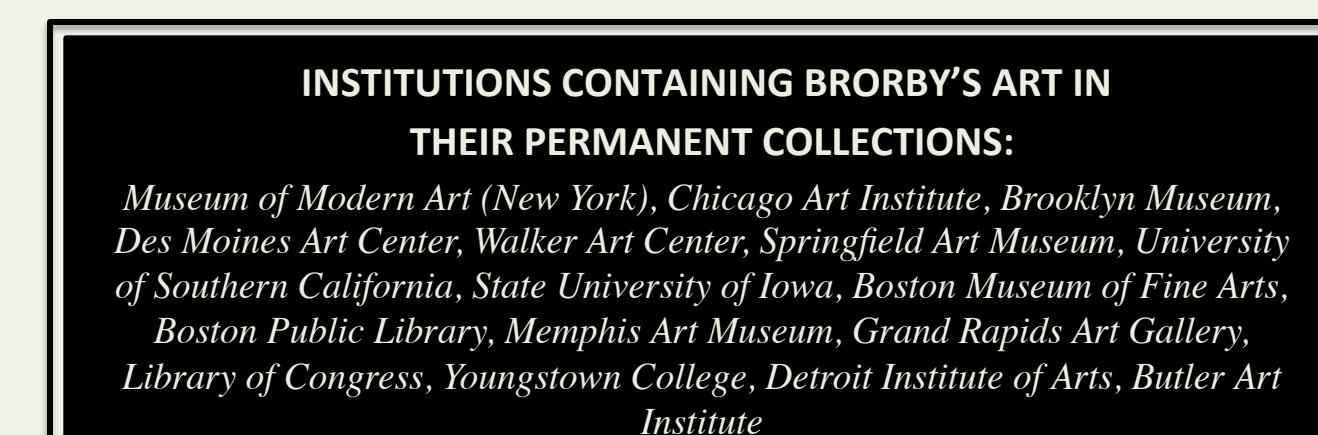


*Yellow Series #7, 1968, oil on canvas, won the Pauline Palmer Prize of one thousand five hundred dollars at the 72nd Annual Exhibition by Artists of Chicago and Vicinity at the Art Institute of Chicago, 1969*



*Cornfield, 1951, etching and engraving, Museum of Modern Art, Brooklyn Museum, (plate: 45.3 x 60.7cm, sheet: 49.9 x 66cm)*

*Cornfield* was also featured in Hope College's 1952 *Opus*. Brorby studied the art of engraving under Maricio Lasansky, whose style he was greatly influenced by.



*Germantown Mansion, 1953, oil, (60 x 45in)*



*Merry-go-round, 1954, intaglio, award winner at the 1954 24th Annual Exhibition at the Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri*



*Woman Washing Clothes #1, wood and glass, (55 x 27 x 38in)*

**BIRTH OF HARRY BRORBY**  
Chicago, Illinois

1927

1951

1953

1954

1960

1963

1970

2012

EXAMPLES OF HARRY BRORBY'S PRIMARY MEDIUMS

# THE HARRY BRORBY PROJECT: RECONSTRUCTING PROVENANCE

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