
 Search Anything Art 

# Four Masters of Postwar Art

Paul Laster

[View Collection](#)



# Four Masters of Postwar Art

CURATED BY

**P** Paul Laster 

[Play Collection](#)

Looking back at four artists who helped shape the contemporary art scene, three shows featuring masters of postwar art are currently on view within a five-block radius on New York's Upper East Side. Michael Werner Gallery is presenting the pioneering paintings and works on paper



Home



Explore



Events



Library



## Four Masters of Postwar Art



of Markus Lüpertz in the sublime solo show “The grace of the twentieth century is rendered visible by the dithyramb I have invented. Paintings from 1963-1976” (through April 23); Mnuchin Gallery has paired colorful abstract canvases by Willem de Kooning and Kasuo Shiraga in the engaging exhibition “De Kooning / Shiraga” (through April 16); and Van Doren Waxter is highlighting Richard Diebenkorn’s figurative and abstract paintings and drawings on paper in its powerful presentation “Works on Paper 1946–1992” (through April 23).



Home



Explore



Events



Library





# Four Masters of Postwar Art



## Included Works

Markus Lüpertz, Willem de Kooning, Kazuo Shiraga, Richard Diebenkorn, and more.



**"MA - dithyrambisch I  
(MA – dithyrambic I)"**  
Markus Lüpertz



**"Schnecke (Snail)"**  
Markus Lüpertz



**Untitled XVI**  
Willem de Kooning



**Soryu no Mai [Dance of  
the Two-Headed  
Dragon]**



Home



Explore



Events



Library



# Four Masters of Postwar Art



**Untitled XVI**  
Willem de Kooning



**Soryu no Mai [Dance of the Two-Headed Dragon]**  
Kazuo Shiraga



**Untitled III**  
Willem de Kooning



**Kisan**  
Kazuo Shiraga



**Untitled (Shoes - CR no. 4557)**  
Richard Diebenkorn

**Untitled (CR no. 4509)**  
Richard Diebenkorn





## Four Masters of Postwar Art

1/8



Markus Lüpertz

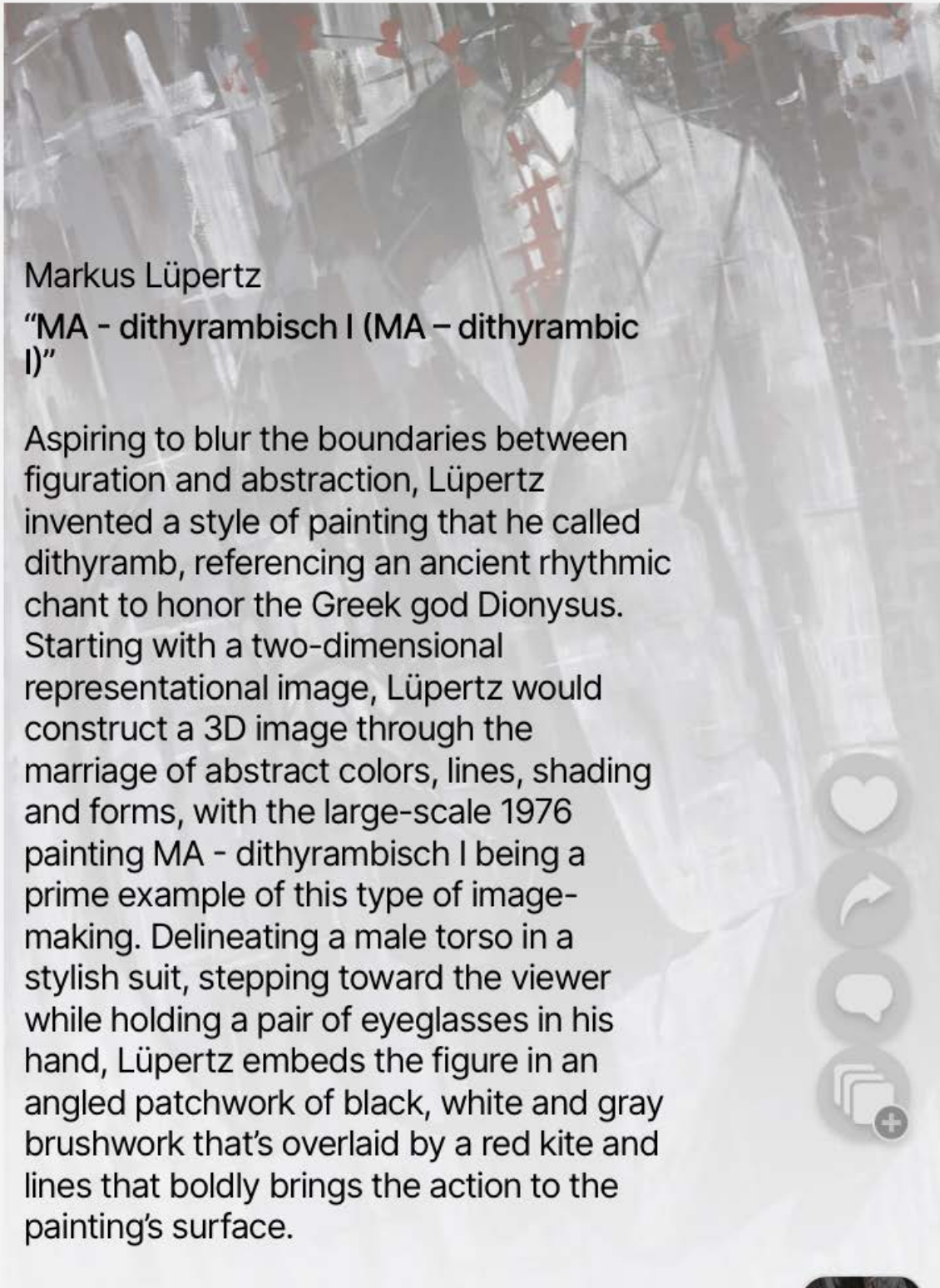
"MA - dithyrambisch I (MA - dithyrambic I)"

Aspiring to blur the boundaries between figuration and abstraction, Lüpertz invented a style of painting that he called...



**P** Paul Laster





Markus Lüpertz

“MA - dithyrambisch I (MA – dithyrambic I)”

Aspiring to blur the boundaries between figuration and abstraction, Lüpertz invented a style of painting that he called dithyramb, referencing an ancient rhythmic chant to honor the Greek god Dionysus. Starting with a two-dimensional representational image, Lüpertz would construct a 3D image through the marriage of abstract colors, lines, shading and forms, with the large-scale 1976 painting MA - dithyrambisch I being a prime example of this type of image-making. Delineating a male torso in a stylish suit, stepping toward the viewer while holding a pair of eyeglasses in his hand, Lüpertz embeds the figure in an angled patchwork of black, white and gray brushwork that's overlaid by a red kite and lines that boldly brings the action to the painting's surface.



**P** Paul Laster





Markus Lüpertz  
"Schnecke (Snail)"

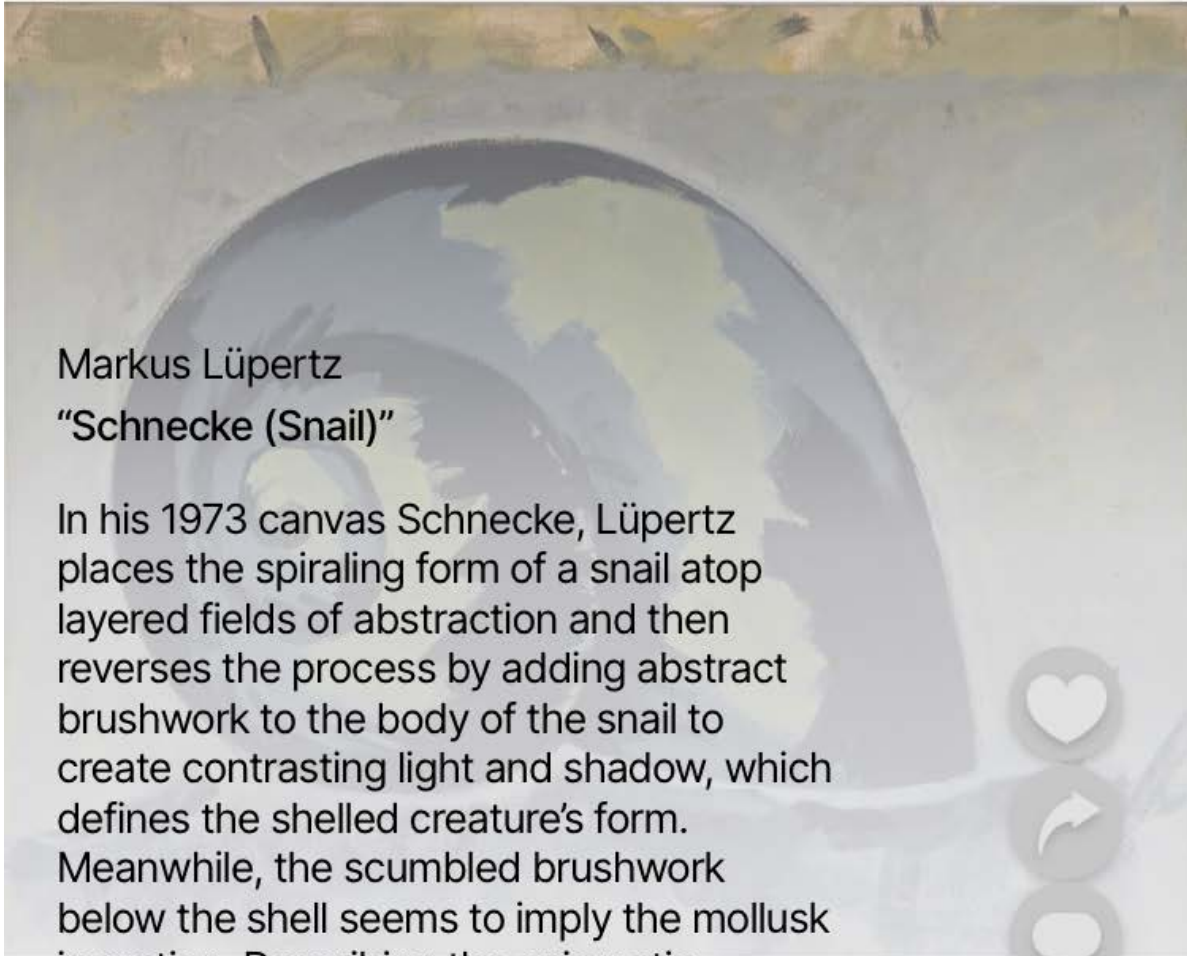
In his 1973 canvas *Schnecke*, Lüpertz places the spiraling form of a snail atop layered fields of abstraction and then rev...



**P** Paul Laster







Markus Lüpertz  
"Schnecke (Snail)"

In his 1973 canvas *Schnecke*, Lüpertz places the spiraling form of a snail atop layered fields of abstraction and then reverses the process by adding abstract brushwork to the body of the snail to create contrasting light and shadow, which defines the shelled creature's form. Meanwhile, the scumbled brushwork below the shell seems to imply the mollusk in motion. Describing the enigmatic process of defining figurative representation abstractly, Lüpertz said, "I didn't want to paint figuratively anymore, so I invented something abstract that is also figurative, a dithyramb."



**P** Paul Laster





# Four Masters of Postwar Art

3 / 8



Willem de Kooning  
Untitled XVI

A Dutch immigrant who landed in America at age 22 in 1926, Willem de Kooning started out—like most artists in his time...

**P** Paul Laster







Willem de Kooning  
Untitled XVI

A Dutch immigrant who landed in America at age 22 in 1926, Willem de Kooning started out—like most artists in his time—working figuratively before turning to abstraction. After his initial creative experiments with what would become known as abstract expressionist painting, he wove female figures into his expressive brushwork for much of the 1950s. Returning to more abstract, less representational imagery in the 1960s, '70s and '80s, the artist made some of his most distinctive paintings, including the large-scale 1975 canvas Untitled XVI, which rhythmically layers brushwork and scraped areas with countless colors of paint to achieve an all-over composition that keeps the eye in continuous motion.



**P** Paul Laster







## Four Masters of Postwar Art

4 / 8



Kazuo Shiraga

Soryu no Mai [Dance of the Two-Headed Dragon]

A leading member of the postwar artists collective Gutai Art Association (Gutai), Kazuo Shiraga was best known for his un...



**P** Paul Laster





Kazuo Shiraga

Soryu no Mai [Dance of the Two-Headed Dragon]

A leading member of the postwar artists collective Gutai Art Association (Gutai), Kazuo Shiraga was best known for his unique method of making gestural abstract paintings with his feet. Stepping onto a large canvas, which was spread out on the floor, the artist would smear the oil paint with his feet. In his energetic 1994 painting *Soryu no Mai* [Dance of the Two-Headed Dragon], we see his actual footprints in the black underpainting overlaid with a broader palette of vibrant hues. Like Jackson Pollock, Shiraga seems to be dancing around and with the canvas to create the action on the surface. Besides his feet, he also used boards, spatulas and other tools to push the paint around to achieve the lively results that he desired.

 Paul Laster







## Four Masters of Postwar Art

5 / 8



Willem de Kooning

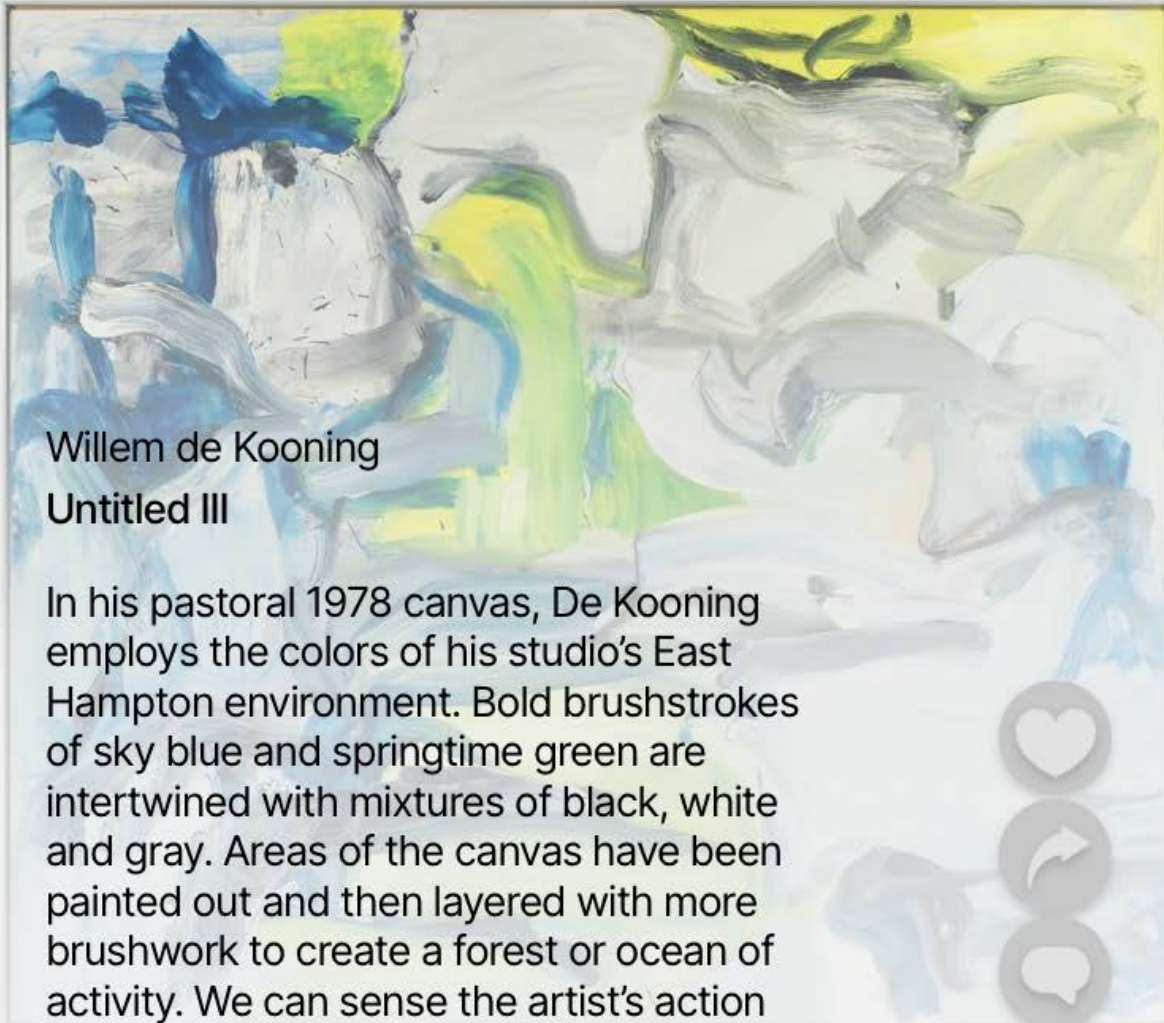
Untitled III

In his pastoral 1978 canvas, De Kooning employs the colors of his studio's East Hampton environment. Bold brushstroke...

**P** Paul Laster







Willem de Kooning  
Untitled III

In his pastoral 1978 canvas, De Kooning employs the colors of his studio's East Hampton environment. Bold brushstrokes of sky blue and springtime green are intertwined with mixtures of black, white and gray. Areas of the canvas have been painted out and then layered with more brushwork to create a forest or ocean of activity. We can sense the artist's action and reaction as the painting intuitively was brought to life—over the course of a day, a week or a month—and De Kooning knew it was finished. Cerebral and emotional, it's the mark of the man.



**P** Paul Laster





## Four Masters of Postwar Art

6 / 8



Kazuo Shiraga

Kisan

Shiraga would also use a rope, hung from the ceiling of the studio, that he would hold onto and glide over the surface of the ca...

**P** Paul Laster







## Kazuo Shiraga Kisan

Shiraga would also use a rope, hung from the ceiling of the studio, that he would hold onto and glide over the surface of the canvas on the floor, in order to keep him from falling while applying the paint. The 1991 monochromatic painting *Kisan* may have been made entirely with the artist's two feet and massive amounts of blood-red paint. Analyzing the action, we can see the marks made by his toes and the sides and bottoms of his paint-covered feet, see the splashes of the paint made by throwing it into the primed white canvas and sense the wild movement of his body as he expressively slid through the surface of the painting while precariously suspended above it. A pure action painting, *Kisan* emits an energy that's both explosive and divine.



**P** Paul Laster







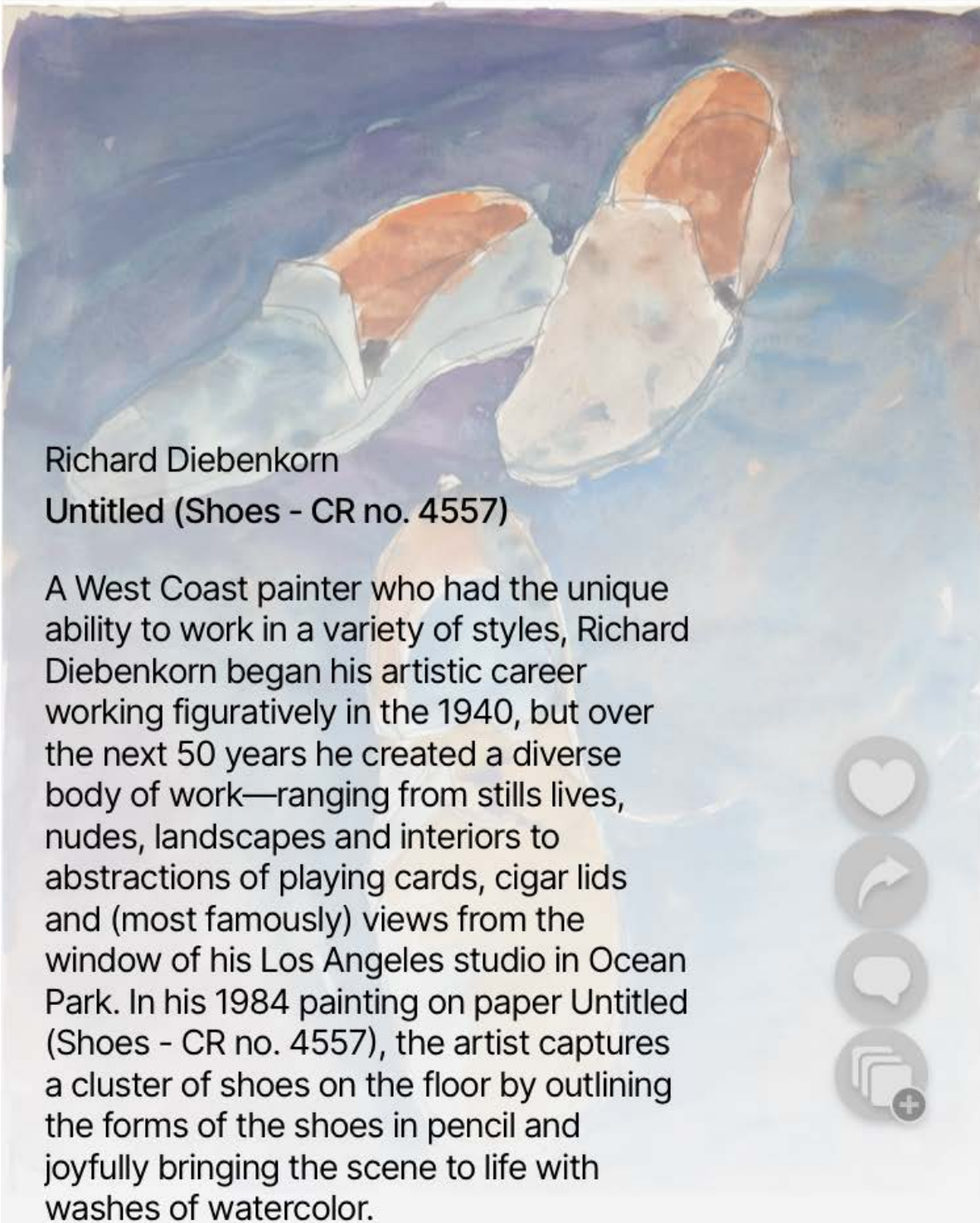
Richard Diebenkorn  
Untitled (Shoes - CR no. 4557)

A West Coast painter who had the unique ability to work in a variety of styles, Richard Diebenkorn began his artistic career wor...



**P** Paul Laster





Richard Diebenkorn  
Untitled (Shoes - CR no. 4557)

A West Coast painter who had the unique ability to work in a variety of styles, Richard Diebenkorn began his artistic career working figuratively in the 1940s, but over the next 50 years he created a diverse body of work—ranging from stills, nudes, landscapes and interiors to abstractions of playing cards, cigar lids and (most famously) views from the window of his Los Angeles studio in Ocean Park. In his 1984 painting on paper *Untitled (Shoes - CR no. 4557)*, the artist captures a cluster of shoes on the floor by outlining the forms of the shoes in pencil and joyfully bringing the scene to life with washes of watercolor.



**P** Paul Laster

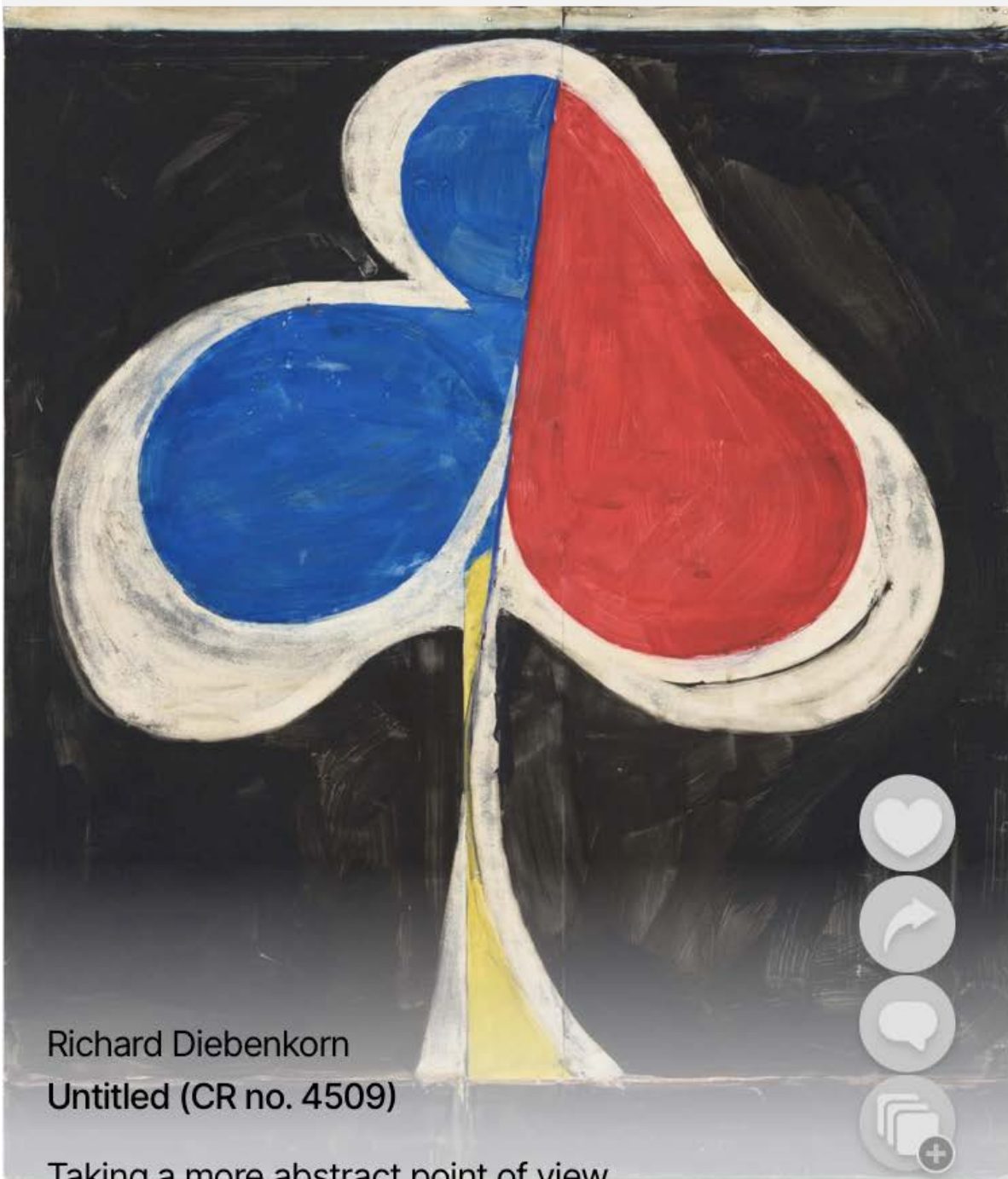






# Four Masters of Postwar Art

8 / 8



Richard Diebenkorn  
Untitled (CR no. 4509)

Taking a more abstract point of view,  
Diebenkorn joined two oddly cut pieces of  
paper together to create the ground for t...



**P** Paul Laster





Richard Diebenkorn  
Untitled (CR no. 4509)

Taking a more abstract point of view, Diebenkorn joined two oddly cut pieces of paper together to create the ground for the 1981 gouache on paper piece *Untitled* (CR no. 4509). Depicting the spade symbol from a deck of playing cards, the artist gave the primary-colored symbol a sensuous form that's graphically outlined in white against a black field. Playful yet bold in its composition, construction and coloration, it could be a metaphor for how Diebenkorn emphatically engaged both games of art and life.



**P** Paul Laster

