

CURATOR'S CHOICE

Permanent Collection Feature of the Month

"The Sleeping Woman," a 1961 oil painting by Richard Diebenkorn (b. 1922), is the Curator's Choice for March. Please plan to take a special look at it in the Front Lobby the next time you visit the KIA.

The artist began his studies at Stanford University where he pursued a professional career in accordance with his parents' wishes. However, while at Stanford, Diebenkorn discovered music, literature, and art. He was particularly impressed with the work of Cezanne, Picasso, and Matisse. These artists became his personal heroes, and their influence can be seen in earliest works.

Instead of pursuing a profession, Diebenkorn joined the Marine Corps Officer Training Program, and took advantage of the many opportunities to visit major U.S. art museums and collections near the places he was stationed. His artistic activity during his time included painting landscapes and drawing portraits of his Marine buddies. After being released from the Marines at the end of World War II, he was influenced by Robert Motherwell and Picasso's Cubism and worked toward a major change to abstraction. He enrolled in the California School of Fine Arts where he studied under friend and mentor David Park (another artist represented in the KIA Permanent Collection).

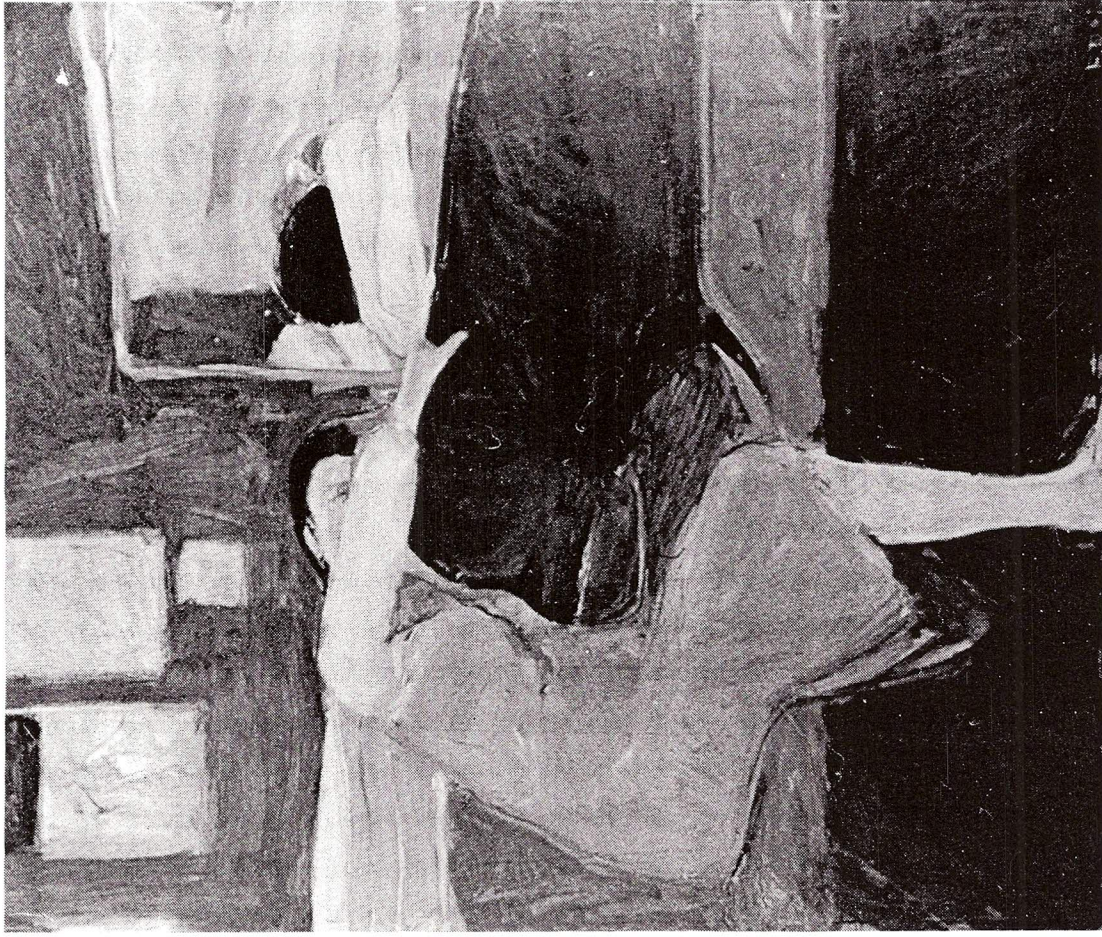
In 1955, Diebenkorn began to question his painting of abstractions. He said, "Something was missing from the process — I sensed an emptiness." As a personal challenge and a search for a new direction, he switched back to representational and figurative painting, beginning with still lifes, then adding figures to his canvases.

This device can yield surprises or create a mystery in its reflections, opening up space and serving as a painting within a painting, often offering more to interest the viewer than does the overt subject.

The flat areas of color are seen in Diebenkorn's earlier and later works. Here the large areas of subdued color are enriched by bolder blues, streaks of yellow-orange, and by the skintone. The solitary figure rests easily in the geometrically arranged environment, obviously painted by a man whose love for the medium can be seen in his careful organization of brushstroke and color.

When the painting was purchased for the KIA Permanent Collection in May 1969, Diebenkorn was described as a noted California artist who had turned from abstraction to realism. In actuality, Diebenkorn rejected the California Figurative Painter label; and by the time he moved to his studio in Santa Monica (1967) and began the continuing series of luminous, abstract "Ocean Park" paintings, even his representational imagery had become flat and simplified.

In 1988, "The Sleeping Woman" was sent to a Chicago conservator for restoration. After being cleaned and protected, the painting was loaned to the Paine Art Center and Arboretum (Oshkosh, Wisconsin) for "Painting from the San Francisco Bay Area," a travelling exhibit they organized. "The Sleeping Woman" just returned to the KIA after circulating with this show to The North Carolina Museum of Art (July-Sept. 1988), then back to the Paine Art Center (Sept.-Nov. 1988), and to the Lakeview Museum of Arts and Sciences (Jan.-Feb. 1989). — by Jan Nesburg, KIA Librarian



"The Sleeping Woman," by Richard Diebenkorn, 1961.

"The Sleeping Woman" was painted during this crucial period. In his figurative paintings, the subject typically is unaware of the viewer — in this case, asleep. Her head resting on her arm and the weight of the sup-

porting arm and elbow form a focal point that is further emphasized by the verticals of her leg and the hangings on the wall behind her. The mirror in the corner is common to a number of his works from the early