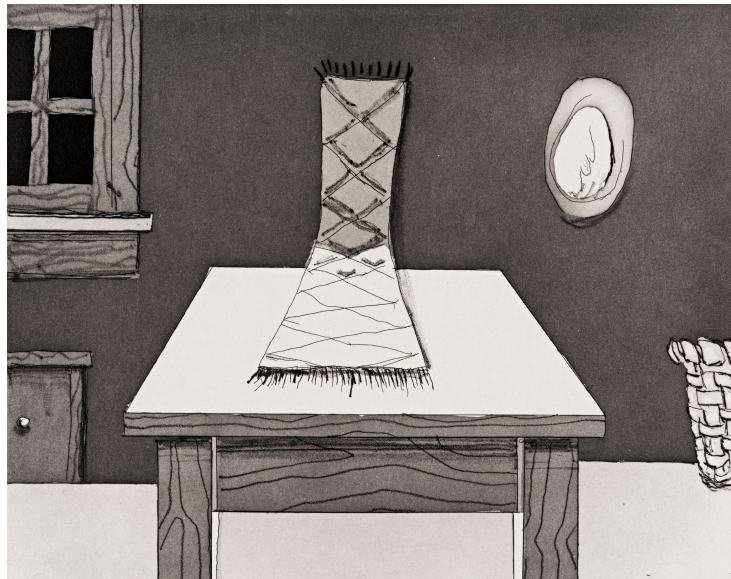


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# The New York Times

## *A Review of 'Punctuating Space: The Prints and Multiples of Richard Artschwager' at Vassar College*

By Joyce Beckenstein



"T,w,m,d,r,b #3" (2003), aquatint, drypoint and etching. CreditCreditCollection of Harlan & Weaver, Inc., New York

Richard Artschwager made ordinary things extraordinary. In fact, much of his remarkable career soared on an unremarkable black dot. Artschwager, who died in 2013, elongated it into a lozenge shape, called it a "blp" (pronounced blip), then stenciled or attached his sundry creatures throughout a city or in oddball museum locations.

What he did for the dot he did for Formica, elevating the much-slighted mid-20th-century laminate to high art with his furniture-inspired cubes and small multiples. He flirted with Pop Art, minimalism and conceptualism, but married no one genre, happier to flit among them. "Punctuating Space: The Prints and Multiples of Richard

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Artschwager," curated by Wendy Weitman for the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College, connects Artschwager's dots through his lesser-known prints and multiples to where elitist art takes a democratic bow.

Artschwager began as a chemistry and mathematics student at Cornell before turning to art. He studied in Paris with Amédée Ozenfant, a painter who with the architect Le Corbusier developed purism, a Cubism offshoot reflecting machine-age precision. Early on he supported his young family by working as a photographer and as a furniture maker who made Formica altars for ship chapels.

Minimal art, multiple-art processes, handmade objects and manufactured materials set Artschwager's subversive sense of humor going in the direction of art without pretension. Printmaking became a precision tool for his sculpture, the unique surfaces derived from etching, lithography and screen prints offering myriad textural effects and, as this exhibition emphasizes, multiple opportunities to explore the visual and psychic dislocations between two- and three-dimensional space.

"Interior" (1972), a predominantly black-and-white screen print based on a photograph, is a stunning example of this mix. In it, Artschwager juxtaposes different perspectives of a stately old parlor as he exploits the room's sumptuous textures — a carved wooden chair, a deep-pile rug — to viscerally animate space.

Then he turns minimalist: "Interior #2" (1977), a drypoint etching scratched directly onto a plastic plate, radically strips a generic room down to a tableau of the six objects — table, window, mirror, door, rug and basket — that defined his large-scale sculpture and multiple editions.

These mercurial weaves of texture, form and spatial relationships are most notably documented in a never-before-exhibited series of drawings and working proofs for "t,w,m,d,r,b #3" (2003). It begins with a small yellow sticky-note drawing. Subsequent proofs — etchings embellished with charcoal, pencil, pastel or ink details — provide insight into Artschwager's deliberate choices and the way he made art happen.

Why did this painter and sculptor spend so much time with prints? "They are multiples, repeatable, less precious, collectible, so democracy is inherent in them," Ms. Weitman said. Her curatorial choices make explicit Artschwager's serial collisions of the ordinary with the fine-art object.