



RECONSTRUCTING
Ralston Crawford

November 4–December 13, 2019

Menconi +
Schoelkopf

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“I look to the left and to the right, ahead and behind. Then I paint from my memory . . . In these recollections the last instant and many years ago are important. Perhaps it would be a difficult synthesis to establish, but a picture referring to Pennsylvania, with further reference to Nanakuli, seems possible to me.”
—Ralston Crawford, 1947

Ralston Crawford (1906–1978) is often classed as a Precisionist, but that appellation tells only a part of the story. Some paintings of the 1930s and early 40s were in the “immaculate” style, but all along he harbored a fascination with growth, change, and decay. Crawford began his studies in Philadelphia: the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the Barnes Foundation impressed upon him the importance of Cezanne. An early painting emulating Hugh Breckenridge (fig. 1), a star teacher at PAFA, distills Cezanne’s plasticity as both the construction and decay of an object: object as process.

Early watercolors like *Barn Under Construction* (fig. 2), extend this. Often swept up into the triumphalist narrative of construction, even these early works can be read ambiguously: is the barn being constructed? Restored and reconstructed? Demolished? This ambiguity is central to Crawford’s work across his long career.

The war years may be the peak of Crawford’s Precisionism. Illustrations for covers of *Fortune Magazine* evince “impersonal industry,” (fig. 6) but alongside these “immaculate” planes of color we also see some of the rare instances of human figures in Crawford’s drawing and painting (figs. 4, 5). The scarcity of people in Crawford’s painting has historically been cited to substantiate the impersonality of Precisionism, but the long-view of Crawford’s oeuvre makes a different case: the human figure was there all along, (fig. 7) even at Precisionism’s zenith.

Crawford emerged from the 1940s with an appreciation for the two sides of the coin of atomic age: awesome power, for creation or destruction. What was certainty and optimism in the 1930s became anxiety and doubt by the 1950s. Crawford turned to photography and print-making to embrace subjects like New Orleans jazz funerals (fig. 10) and maritime junkyards (fig. 24): vibrant celebrations of life in the presence of death.

The arc of his career moved to the extreme opposite of Precisionism, considering the obsolete and discarded as relics for veneration. What could be less precise, less industrial, than mausoleums (fig. 30.) in New Orleans or a junkyard in Maine? Crawford found in these all of the elements of life, beauty, and art, as in the barns of Pennsylvania.

Crawford’s eye sought familiar forms at opposite ends of the earth; finding them, his work seems to double back on itself. A photograph of a buoy (fig. 24) inspires a painting (fig. 25), but the canvas shares a resemblance to a photograph of peeling posters in New York (fig. 26). So, too, do the subjects double. Crawford found a counterpoint to the New Orleans “jazz funerals” he’d studied in the 50s and 60s in Seville in the 1970s: the *Semana Santa* processions (fig. 28)—an emotional ritual of death and rebirth. Following a diagnosis of cancer in the early 1970s, Crawford took up these themes with his own end in sight. He was buoyed by travel and by his work, producing some the largest and most exhilarating canvases years later than doctors predicted he would live. The almost abstract forms in these late works encompass all his subjects: one can find in their triangular forms the nautical lines of Bora Bora, the peaked hoods of Seville, the bell of a bugle in a New Orleans street parade. This was no accidental ambiguity, but the studied reminiscences he had been working to elaborate for decades.

— JONATHAN SPIES



“A Picture Referring
to Pennsylvania . . .”

I. *After Breckenridge*, c. 1933

Oil on canvas

16 × 22¾ inches

Inscribed at tacking edge: Breckenridge



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Under Construction

2. *Barn Under Construction*,
Bucks County, c. 1938

Watercolor on paper
16 × 20 inches
Signed at lower center: Ralston Crawford

3. *Construction Watercolor*, c. 1940

Watercolor on paper
8 × 10 inches (sheet)
Inscribed on verso: RCE 00005





Under Construction

4. *Unloading the Cargo*, 1942

Oil on canvas

28¼ × 40 inches

Signed at lower right: Crawford

Inscribed on stretcher: Unloading the Cargo, 1942 28

× 40 Estate stamp on verso on stretcher: Ralston

Crawford Estate / RCE No. 42.3

5. *Study for Unloading the Cargo*, 1942

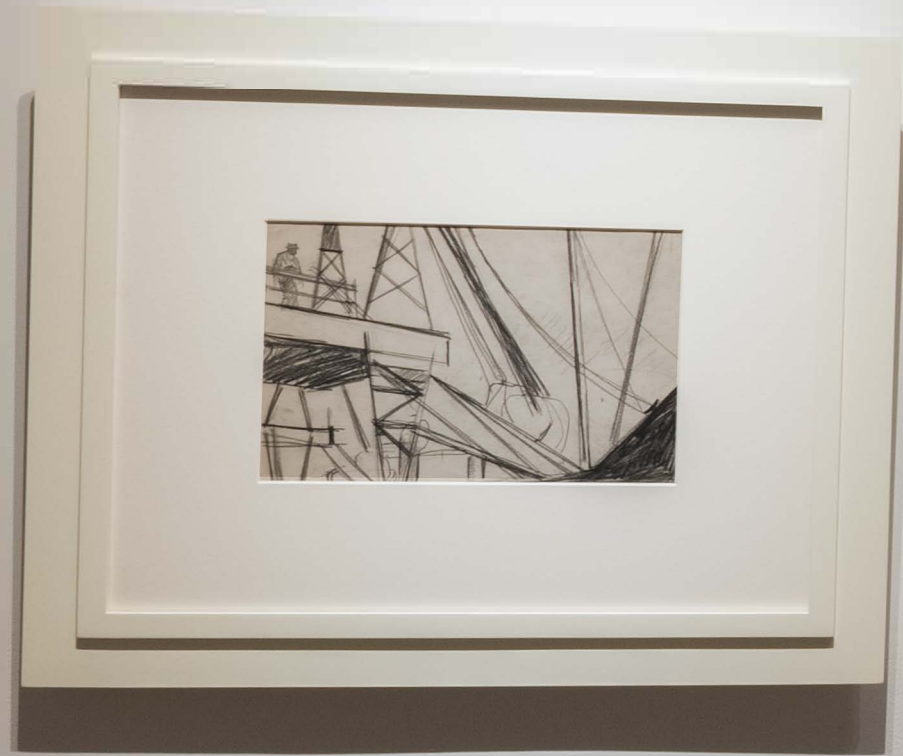
Ink on paper

9⅞ × 13¼ inches

Inscribed on verso: RCE D 189



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The Brief

Elation of Flight

6. *Air Transport (Cover design for "Fortune Magazine")*, 1945

Gouache and ink on composition board
13 × 10½ inches (mat window)
Signed lower right: Ralston Crawford



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Down to Earth

“I have used the phrase ‘properties of the twentieth century.’ I am thinking of the sudden fade-out of the San Francisco coast and the startlingly quick close-up of the beach at Honolulu. Or George Lewis and his clarinet in New Orleans, and in a moment the pyramids of Mexico. And a while before these things, the cloud at Bikini.” —RC

7. *Alice Zeno,
George Lewis’s Mother, 1950*

Inscribed on verso: P270
9½ × 7½ inches
20 × 16 inches (sheet)
Gelatin silver print



8. *Chester Jones, 1953*

Gelatin silver print
9½ × 13½ inches
11 × 14 inches (sheet)
Inscribed on verso: NO 53 13 / gelatin silver
print / 11574



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Music in the Streets

9. *St. Ann Street*, 1954

Oil on canvas
24 × 18 inches
Signed at lower left: RALSTON CRAWFORD

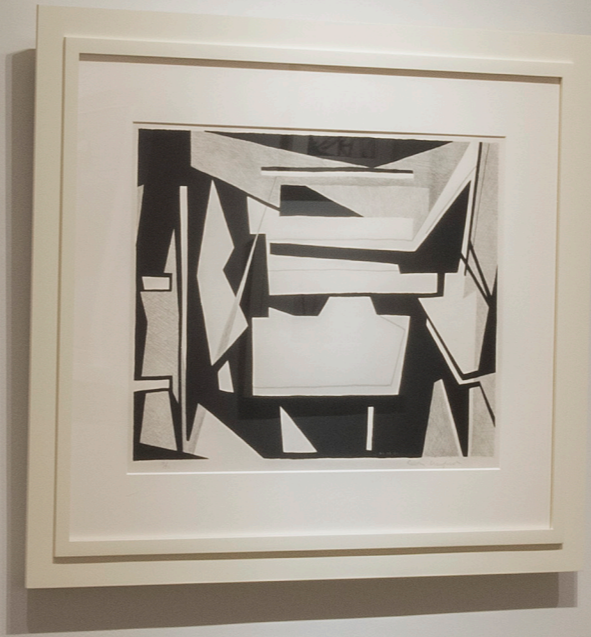
10. *Outdoor Recording Session*, *New Orleans*, 1950

Gelatin silver print
Inscribed on verso: RCE P141



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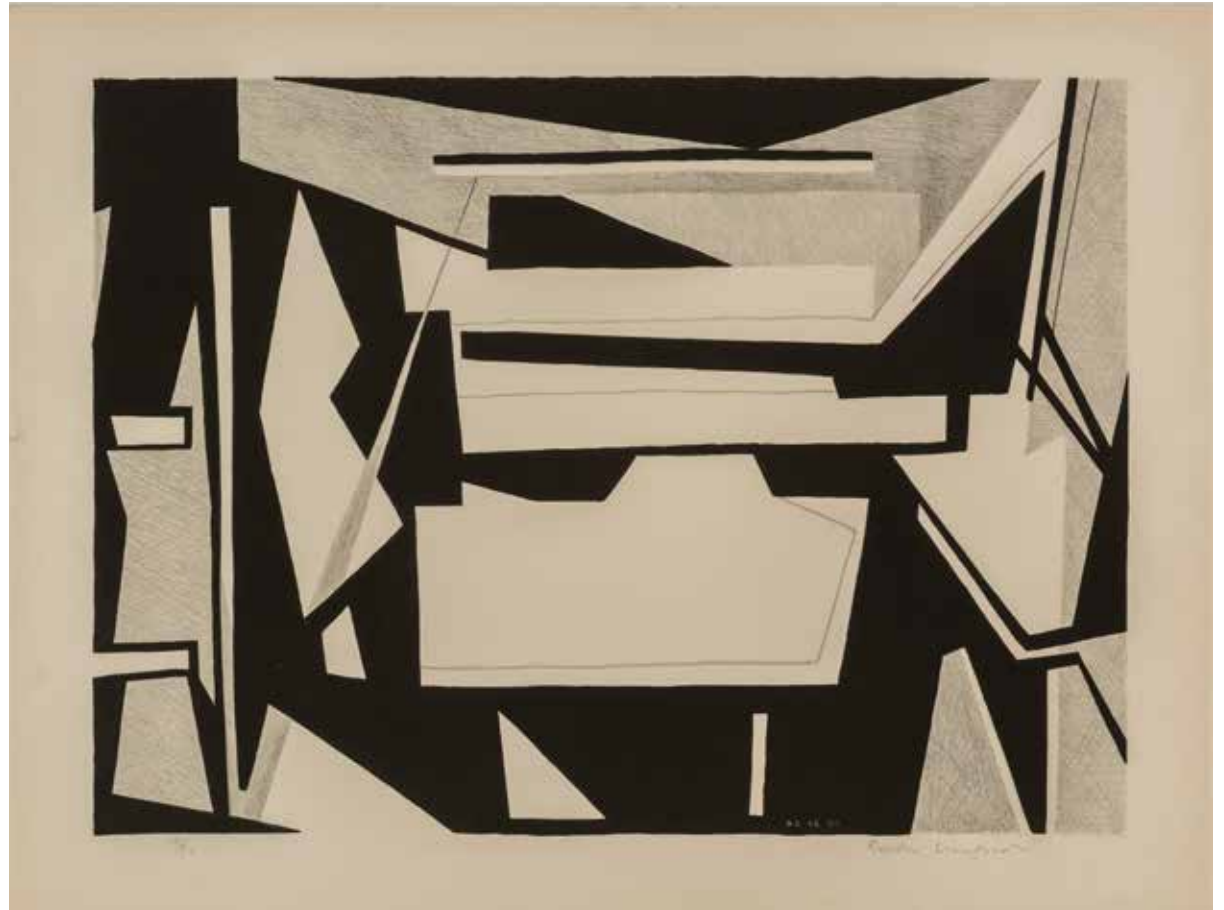
Music in the Streets

11. *Lafayette Street*, 1954

Lithograph
16 × 22 inches
Edition of 30 plus 5 AP
Signed lower right: Ralston Crawford
Inscribed in plate in reverse: 10 21 54

12. *New Orleans Fall*, c. 1961

Gelatin silver print
10½ × 13¼ inches
11 × 14 inches (sheet)
Signed and inscribed on verso: [RC] / N.O. Fall
/ gelatin silver print / 1965I / RCE: 909



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CLARENCE'S SHOP

7up

KING EDWARD

KING EDWARD

Cigarettes are better on the side

A Darker Palette

13. *The Sails No. 5*, 1956

Oil on canvas

26 × 40 inches

Signed at lower right: RALSTON
CRAWFORD

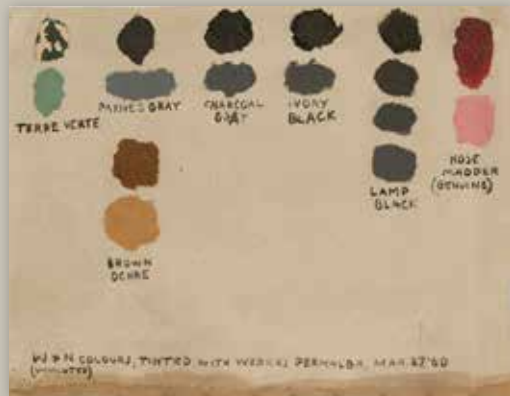
Signed and dated on stretcher: Ralston
Crawford / Started Apr. 17, 1956

14. *Ralston's Palette*, 1960

Oil on canvas

Inscribed with color names throughout

Inscribed at bottom: W&N COLOURS,
TINTED WITH WEBER'S PERMALBA,
MAR. 27, '60



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TERRE VERTE



PAYNE'S GRAY



CHARCOAL
GRAY



IVORY
BLACK



LAMP
BLACK



ROSE
MADDER
(GENUINE)



BROWN
OCHRE

W & N COLOURS, TINTED WITH WEBER'S PERMALBA, MAR. 27, '60
(UNDILUTED)

A Darker Palette

15. *Nets with Red*, 1956

Oil on canvas

19½ × 25½ inches

Signed at lower right center:

RALSTON CRAWFORD



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STANTON CRAWFORD



Croix-de-Vie

16. *Croix-de-Vie*, 1957

Gelatin silver print
8 × 10 inches (sheet)
Signed and inscribed on verso:
RC / 07774



17. *Croix-de-Vie*, 1957

Gelatin silver print
8 × 10 inches (sheet)
Signed and inscribed on verso:
RC / 07776



18. *Croix-de-Vie*, 1957

Gelatin silver print
8 × 10 inches (sheet)
Inscribed on verso: P10977 /
CROIX 2.1 × 14
86172B



Croix-de-Vie

19. *Croix-de-Vie*, 1957

Oil on canvas
18 × 13 inches
Signed and inscribed on stretcher bars:
Croix-de-Vie / Ralston Crawford 1957

20. *Croix-de-Vie*, 1957

Ink on paper
8 × 10 inches (sheet)
Inscribed lower center: 4.8.57



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CRAWFORD

Composition and Decomposition

21. *Composition No 3*, 1958

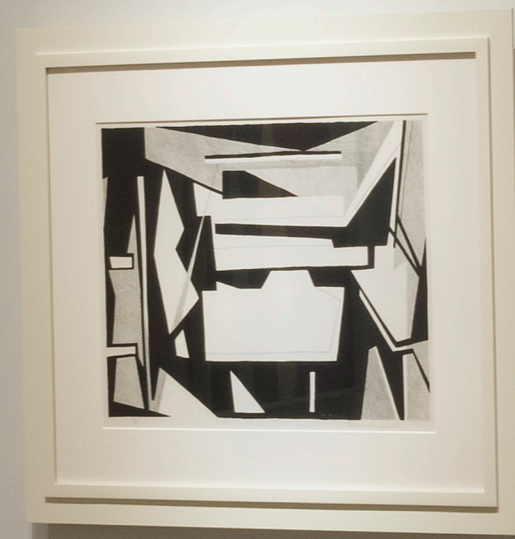
Oil on canvas
26 × 36 inches
Signed lower center: Crawford

22. *St. Louis Cemetery, New Orleans*, 1959

21 × 27 inches
Edition of 15 with 4 AP
Lithograph on Arches paper



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At the Water's Edge

23. *Nassau No. 3*, 1968

Oil on canvas
45 × 30 inches
Signed with initials at lower right: RC

24. *Buoy, Port Clyde*, 1964

Gelatin silver print
10¾ × 16½ inches
16 × 20 inches (sheet)
Inscribed on verso: 16005
Dated on verso: 1964



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At the Water's Edge

25. *Port Clyde No. 4*, 1969

Oil on canvas
30 × 40 inches
Signed at lower right with initials: RC

26. *Torn Signs* (*"Our Studio Homes"*), 1964

Gelatin silver print
13½ × 13½ inches
Inscribed on verso: 9-64 / 4 × 4
Inscribed on verso: 16005
Dated on verso: 1964



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AGREEMENT

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BRING POSTERS, BANNERS, ETC.

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US OUT OF OUR STUDIO HOMES**

For further information, call : GR-3-68C



The Street Procession

27. *The Procession*, 1973

Oil on canvas
40 × 60 inches
Signed and dated at lower right: RC 73

28. *Social Aid and Pleasure Club
Parade in Gertown*, 1961

Gelatin silver print
8 × 10 inches (sheet)
Inscribed on verso: New Orleans, Louisiana,
September, 1961 35 MM / 06661



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REGAL
beer
known for its Better Taste

ORIENTAL LOUNGE

AIR CONDITIONED

BROADWAY



The Street Procession

29. *Andalucia to Yorkshire*, 1973

Oil on canvas

45 × 30 inches

Signed at lower right: RC

Signed and inscribed on stretcher: Andalucia
to Yorkshire / Ralston Crawford / 45 × 30 /
Started / Dec. 12, 1972 / Completed / 3.1.73.



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Basin Street Blues

30. *Basin Street Cemetery*, 1974


Oil on canvas
30 × 28 inches

31. *Basin Street Cemetery, New Orleans, LA*, 1974

Gelatin silver print
11 × 14 inches



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A black and white photograph of a gravestone for Jacob A. Stiegler. The stone is dark with white lettering. It is set in a concrete base. To the left is a large, light-colored rock. To the right is another gravestone with some text visible. The scene is outdoors with some plants and a shadow cast on the ground.

JACOB A. STIEGLER
PITTSBURGH, PA.
FEB. 20, 1910

Basin Street Blues

32. *Basin Street Cemetery,
New Orleans, LA, 1974*

Gelatin silver print
14 × 11 inches (sheet)

33. *Basin Street Cemetery,
New Orleans, LA, 1974*

Gelatin silver print
11 × 14 inches



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Basin Street Blues

34. *Seville*, 1976

Oil on canvas

12 × 16 inches

Signed at lower right: RC

Inscribed on verso: Seville, 1976





RC

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For a full list of prices and works available, click on the link below:
<http://privateview.net/2/cef0eafadb21987e356089>

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