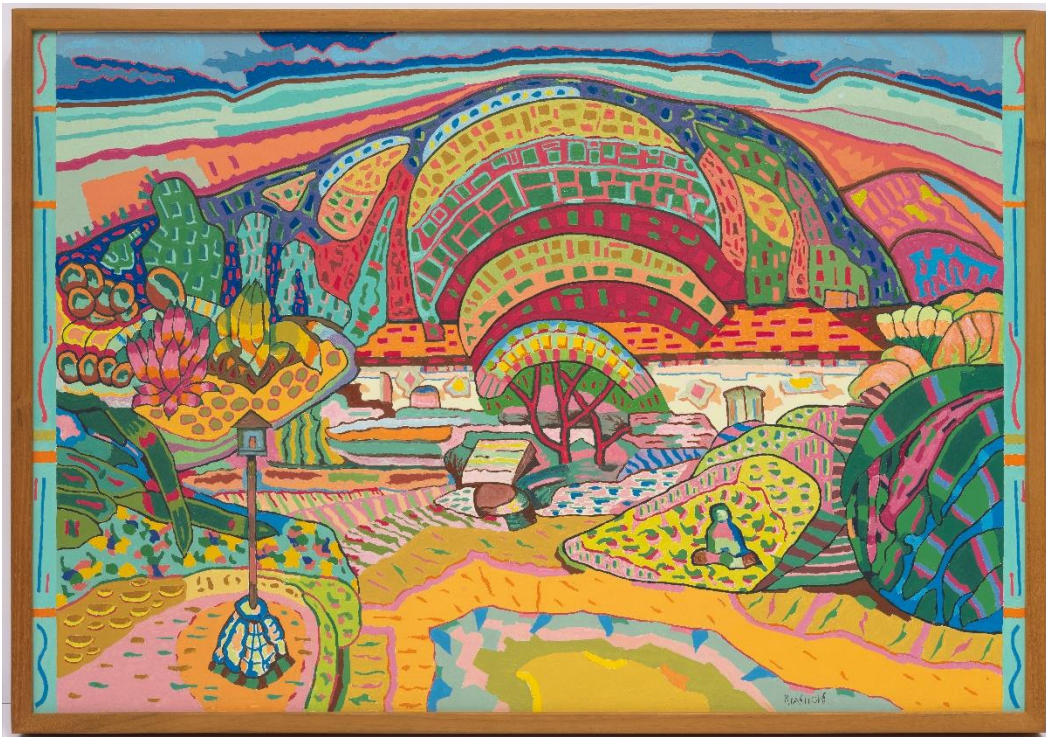


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**Skirball Cultural Center reveals details of
Peter Krasnow: Breathing Joy and Light
May 4–September 3, 2023**

**Exhibition draws from the Skirball’s extensive collection of the
artist’s work inspired by his Jewish heritage, nature, and the
optimism of Southern California**



Peter Krasnow, Casa Verdugo, 1923, repainted 1963. Oil on board. Collection of the Skirball Cultural Center, gift of Peter and Rose Krasnow. Photo by Robert Wedemeyer.

“When tragedy was at the deepest point, my paintings breathed joy and light—color structures instead of battle scenes, symmetry to repair broken worlds. A means of protest to ease the pain.”
—Peter Krasnow

LOS ANGELES, CA—The Skirball Cultural Center presents [*Peter Krasnow: Breathing Joy and Light*](#), an exhibition of 20 paintings and drawings from the Skirball's extensive collection of the artist's work. On view at the Skirball from May 4 through September 3, 2023, the exhibition focuses on works made primarily during the decades after World War II and the Holocaust. To ease the despair brought on by that painful period, Krasnow created vibrant paintings teeming with exuberant, abstract forms, radiating optimism, and evoking a spiritual world of renewal. Krasnow emigrated from Ukraine to the United States at age twenty in 1907 and established himself in the Los Angeles art community in the 1920s, where he was inspired by the hope and possibility of Southern California. His paintings incorporate elements of his Jewish heritage and the organic forms and vivid hues found in the plant life of his Atwater Village home and studio.

"Peter Krasnow's personal history and his vital body of work are a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the healing power of expression. His works are full of joy, energy, and hope and are particularly poignant in the context of his journey from Ukraine to the United States," said Jessie Kornberg, President and CEO of the Skirball Cultural Center. "*Breathing Joy and Light* speaks directly to the lived experiences of our Founder Uri Herscher's whose own journey to Southern California inspired the Skirball's mission of welcoming the stranger. Like Uri, Peter Krasnow found a home and a community here in which to create."

Peter Krasnow: Breathing Joy and Light is organized into four sections starting with a biographical timeline which charts his journey from Novograd Volynsky (now Zvyagel) Ukraine, where he dreamed of going to art school as a teenager, to his move to the United States to evade the threat of antisemitic violence. Shortly afterward, he met his future wife Rose Bloom, a social worker at an immigrant aid organization, who became his constant companion and a major source of inspiration for his art. Together they moved to New York City, and then ultimately California, brought West by the promise of possibility and the inspiration of the American landscape. The Krasnows settled on a parcel of land they bought in Tropic, an area that is now within the confines of modern-day Glendale and Atwater Village

During World War II, Krasnow found himself emotionally impacted by the violence wrought by the war, sparking an entirely new style and purpose in his paintings. He began to create abstract, geometric paintings in radiant hues. He saw these vibrant compositions as a means of resisting the bleak despair of the war and the Holocaust that devastated Jewish communities like his own in Ukraine and the rest of Europe. His work in reaction to the war and its aftermath is evident in the section called "The Realm of the Archetype" which examines Krasnow's interest in what he felt were shared patterns, or archetypes, found across human cultures and historical periods. His paintings from this time suggest mystical, fertile worlds. These compositions' forms resemble cellular structures and the growing limbs of plants; dancers in ecstatic poses; ancient architecture like pyramids, archways, or obelisks; and speech-like markings that evoke sound and energy.

Krasnow often incorporated elements of his Jewish heritage into his paintings, a theme that is explored in the section “Jewish Roots.” Notably, he was inspired by the Hebrew alphabet and its ancient precursors, as well as Jewish folklore.

The final section, “Writing with Color and Form,” highlights Krasnow’s artistic techniques of using pure colors and distilling the elements of art—line, shape, and color—to their basics. He compared his experiments in abstract painting with learning how to write:

“I softened my brushes grown stiff and brittle with disuse, unscrewed the rusted tubes, cut up small squares of board and began. A single color complementing another single color, a single form balancing another single form, two colors against two colors, two forms merging with two more forms, larger boards, more colors, more forms... A B C growing into words, sentences, paragraphs, finally into a full page!”

Krasnow insisted that the forms in his paintings, while they might suggest letters or plants, are without one defined meaning. He invited visitors to his studio to enjoy looking at and interpreting his paintings freely.

“Peter Krasnow championed the power of creativity to sustain the human spirit in difficult times and sought out the transcendent possibilities of visual art. A key member of Southern California’s artistic avant-garde for over 50 years, Krasnow’s legacy has long been overlooked because of his reticence to seek publicity during his lifetime. Now, art historians are reconsidering the importance of figures like Krasnow and exploring the intersections of their identities — in Krasnow’s case, as an immigrant, a Jew, a Californian, and an artist — to build a fuller view of the importance of their work in the context of 20th century American art,” said Laura Mart, Associate Curator, Skirball Cultural Center.

Peter Krasnow: Breathing Joy and Light is accompanied by a soundtrack which was created by Alejandro Cohen and Mark “Frosty” McNeill of nonprofit internet radio station dublab, which is dedicated to the growth of music, arts, and culture. Using Krasnow’s life as a point of inspiration, the soundtrack incorporates Jewish Ukrainian folk music and works by Southern Californian composers from his creative circles, as well as contemporary Yiddish music and abstract, spiritual compositions that draw on themes of renewal and creation.

To deepen people's understanding and appreciation of the artist, his work, and his source of inspiration, the Skirball is also offering an online class beginning May 3 called “Sparkling Newness: The Life of Ukrainian American Artist Peter Krasnow.” Taught by author and artist John Paul Thornton, the class will journey through the California Modernist art scene and explore midcentury design to understand how Krasnow was influenced to build a visual language of color, movement, and joy. More information, including dates and times, is available at skirball.org/programs/classes.

Ticketing for the Spring 2023 Exhibitions:

Peter Krasnow: Breathing Joy and Light and [Chloë Bass: Wayfinding](#) will be included with admission to [Blacklist: The Hollywood Red Scare](#), [Noah's Ark at the Skirball](#), or as part of general admission. Advance timed-entry reservations are recommended for Noah's Ark at the Skirball and *Blacklist: The Hollywood Red Scare*; tickets for these exhibitions will be sold separately.

Tickets for *Blacklist: The Hollywood Red Scare* are now available. Special pricing: \$18 General; \$15 Seniors, Full-Time Students, and Children over 12; \$13 Children 2–12. General admission and tickets to Noah's Ark at the Skirball: \$12 General; \$9 Seniors, Full-Time Students, and Children over 12; \$7 Children 2–12. Exhibitions are always free to Skirball Members and Children under 2.

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Peter Krasnow: Breathing Joy and its related educational programs at the Skirball Cultural Center are made possible through support from the following donors:

Skirball Cultural Center Volunteer Service Council

About the Skirball:

The Skirball Cultural Center is a place of meeting guided by the Jewish tradition of welcoming the stranger and inspired by the American democratic ideals of freedom and equality. We welcome people of all communities and generations to participate in cultural experiences that celebrate discovery and hope, foster human connections, and call upon us to help build a more just society.

Visiting the Skirball:

The Skirball is located at 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 12:00–5:00 pm; Saturday–Sunday, 10:00 am–5:00 pm; closed Mondays and holidays. Advance timed-entry reservations are recommended for the permanent exhibition Noah's Ark at the Skirball which is ticketed separately. Exhibitions are always free to Skirball Members and Children under 2. For general information, the public may call (310) 440-4500 or visit skirball.org.