

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.



Ferenc Berko, *Nude, Chicago*, c. 1950-51

July 8, 2016  
Ferenc Berko  
By William Meyers

Ferenc Berko (1916-2000) could well have been included in the Echoes show at Alma; he was born in Hungary, although he grew up in Germany, and is clearly a modernist. Moholy-Nagy, who frequently visited at Berko's foster parents' home, was a friend and mentor. Like Moholy-Nagy, Kertész, Capa and Munkácsi, Berko fled Europe in the 1930s to escape Nazi anti-Semitism, and spent many years in India before coming to Chicago at Moholy-Nagy's invitation. The 33 black and white prints at Gitterman illustrate Berko's commitment to the Bauhaus ideals of modernism and exploration. For instance, there are three sets of solarized nudes from 1950-51 in which one print is simply solarized and the other printed with the light values reversed, i.e., what was white is black and vice versa. This produced a high level of abstraction for what is still a recognizable female body.

Almost all Berko's compositions tend towards abstraction. "Bombay"(1938) looks down from overhead on a man washing a cloth in a body of water; the surface of stone blocks he stands on slants diagonally across the frame and the sun glistens off the surface of the water. The repetition of the stacked cans in "India" (c. 1938-1947) makes a rhythmic pattern. The "Fire Escape, Chicago" (1947) was shot from below and so becomes a filigree. Conversely, the "Tramlines, New York" (1949) were shot from overhead and are delicate white lines set in cobblestones. The "UN Building, New York City" (c. 1949) is a monumental white slab.