

Large-Print Labels

The Kitchen and Its Discontents

Artworks are listed in clockwise order.

A central space in the modern home, the kitchen hosts the contradictions of modern life. It is a place of nourishment, conviviality, and community, and simultaneously one of drudgery, isolation, and deeply entrenched gender roles. Associated with women's unceasing domestic labor, it has also emerged as a focus within their creative practices. Two of the twentieth century's groundbreaking designers, Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky and Charlotte Perriand, helped create two of its most influential kitchens, incorporating features they hoped would improve users' daily lives. LACMA has recently acquired examples of both designs. Drawing primarily on the museum's collection, *The Kitchen and Its Discontents* explores the complex cultural (and psychological) significance of this room.

The understanding of the kitchen as a specialized, separate cooking space is both modern and largely Western. Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, manuals and model homes demonstrated how scientific principles of efficiency and hygiene could be incorporated into domestic life (a subject discussed in the *Home of the Future* exhibition). While advertisements promoted glistening countertops and continuous cabinetry punctuated with sparkling new appliances, documentary photography captured improvisational, multi-use spaces in ordinary homes. Over time, the ideal kitchen shifted, from one managed by an expert with factory-like precision, as exemplified by Schütte-Lihotzky's design, to a more open space envisioned by Perriand and those who followed. Even so,

improvements did little to lighten women's domestic burden, and artists continued to bear witness to the quotidian messes and simmering tensions that underlie the domestic terrain, examining the kitchen as a microcosm for societal inequities and a stage for complex family dramas.

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James McNeill Whistler

United States, 1834-1903, active France
and United Kingdom

***The Kitchen*, 1858**

From the series *Twelve Etchings after
Nature (The French Set)*, 1858

Etching

LACMA, the Julius L. and Anita Zelman
Collection

M.86.366.4

Cham (Amédée Charles Henri de Noé)

France, 1819-1879

***Marguerite, que fait ce militaire dans
votre cuisine? Madame, je prenais une
leçon de macaroni, il arrive d'Italie!***, 1859

From the journal *Le Charivari*, 1859

Lithograph

LACMA, gift of George Longstreet

M.76.132.359

Here, a kitchen provides the setting for commentary on the Second Italian War of Independence, in which France allied with the Kingdom of Sardinia (part of pre-unified Italy) to defeat Austria. Subsequently, Franco-Sardinian troops marched triumphantly through Paris, where some soldiers apparently made themselves at

home. Here, the mistress of the house is shocked to find an Italian soldier lounging in her kitchen. Her maid quickly offers an excuse: "Madam, I was taking a macaroni lesson—he's from Italy!" The joke expresses a condescending French view of the time: that their Italian allies were more skilled at flirting and cooking than at frontline combat.

Max Yavno

United States, 1911-1985

***Migrant Family*, 1946**

Gelatin silver print

LACMA, the Marjorie and Leonard Vernon
Collection, gift of The Annenberg
Foundation, acquired from Carol Vernon
and Robert Turbin

M.2008.40.2596

Marion Post Wolcott

United States, 1910-1990

***One of the Wilkins Family Making
Biscuits, Near Tallyho, Granville County,
North Carolina***, 1939, printed later

Gelatin silver print

LACMA, anonymous gift, Los Angeles, in
honor of Robert Sobieszek

M.2005.150.147

Between 1938 and 1942, Marion Post Wolcott was a photographer for the Farm Security Administration, documenting the effects of the Great Depression on rural America. In September 1939, she traveled to North Carolina to photograph the Wilkins family on cornhusking day, when farmer Fred Wilkins harvested his corn crop. A

group of seventy-one photographs from this trip, archived in the Library of Congress, show outdoor labor with crops and livestock, domestic tasks and childcare, and rare moments of respite. In this example, Wolcott observes the Wilkins matriarch making biscuits (clearly without reference to a written recipe) in a simple, orderly kitchen.

Ben Shahn

Lithuania, 1898-1969, active United States

Stove in Home of Destitute Ozark Family, Arkansas, 1935

Gelatin silver print

LACMA, gift of Graham and Susan Nash

M.91.359.67

Richard Noble, photographer
United States, b. 1943

Leo Burnett Agency, advertising agency
United States, est. 1935

**Philip Morris & Co. Ltd., Virginia Slims
brand**, client

You've Come A Long Way, Baby, 1970s

Offset lithograph
LACMA, Decorative Arts and Design
Council Fund
M.2026.30

Joanne Leonard

United States, b. 1940

***Untitled*, 1970s**

Gelatin silver prints

LACMA, gifts of the artist

M.2018.91.62, .67, .93, 134

Joanne Leonard has been making "intimate documentary" photographs for over fifty years, deliberately departing from the dramatic storytelling of photojournalism and instead adopting a more neutral observational stance. In 1975 she began to examine the impact of technology on American life through images of the interiors of homes in her Berkeley neighborhood. Kitchens were one area of focus, in particular the presence of

appliances, both old and new. While Leonard does not picture the homes' inhabitants, she captures their personal touches and practical improvisations, suggesting the idiosyncratic and asynchronous ways in which technology is absorbed into everyday life.

Mary Frey

United States, b. 1948

***Untitled*, 2002**

From the series *Family, Friends and Strangers*, 2002-ongoing

Inkjet print (pigment-based)

LACMA, purchased with funds provided by the Ralph M. Parsons Fund

M.2026.122

Laura J. Gerlach, photographer
Germany, b. 1980

***Frankfurter Küche #1, Im Heidenfeld,
Siedlung Römerstadt, 2017***

***Frankfurter Küche #7, Im Burgfeld,
Siedlung Römerstadt, 2018***

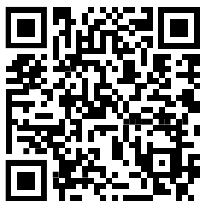
***Frankfurter Küche #9, Damaschkeanger,
Siedlung Praunheim, 2018***

Inkjet prints (pigment-based), printed 2026
Courtesy of the artist

Laura J. Gerlach began her ongoing *Library of Frankfurt Kitchens* as an effort to document the famous design, gradually developing the project into a digital archive. She identifies kitchens that have survived

over time in family dwellings, museums, and elsewhere, then captures them using a 360-degree camera, which allows each space to be explored immersively. Her images show multiple variations in color and cabinet configuration and reveal signs of personal use and wear and tear, distinguishing each "edition" of these factory-produced units.

Explore Gerlach's digital *Library of Frankfurt Kitchens*.



Kelli Connell

United States, b. 1974

Kitchen Tension, 2002, printed 2003

From the series *Double Life*, 2002-ongoing

Dye coupler print

LACMA, purchased with funds provided by
the Ralph M. Parsons Fund

M.2004.18.3

Kelli Connell's series *Double Life* seems to portray scenes from the everyday lives of a lesbian couple, but closer examination reveals that both "characters" are played by the same model, Kiba Jacobson. Using a medium-format camera on a tripod, Connell poses and shoots the photographs individually and later combines them digitally to create an aura of intimacy that is

fictional but feels absolutely real. *Kitchen Tension*, one of the earliest works in this extensive series, focuses on the psychological strain and internal discord inherent in domestic life, even in the absence of traditional patriarchal expectations.

Lee Friedlander

United States, b. 1934

Max, London, 1994

From the series *Extended Portrait of R. B. Kitaj*, c. 1970-2002

Gelatin silver print

LACMA, gift of William and
Sandra Christenberry

M.2003.204.9

Catherine Opie

United States, b. 1961

Oliver/Thanksgiving, 2004, 2004/2024

Inkjet print (pigment-based)

Courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects,
Los Angeles

Cindy Sherman

United States, b. 1954

Untitled Film Still #3, 1977

From the series *Untitled Film Stills*, 1977-80

Gelatin silver print

LACMA, the Audrey and Sydney Irmas
Collection

AC1992.197.113

Laurie Simmons

United States, b. 1949

***New Kitchen/Aerial View*, 1979**

Dye destruction print

LACMA, purchased with funds provided by
the Ralph M. Parsons Fund

AC1997.171.1

Carrie Mae Weems

United States, b. 1953

Untitled, 1990

From the series *Kitchen Table*, 1989-90

Gelatin silver prints

LACMA, purchased with funds provided by
the Ralph M. Parsons Fund

M.91.107.1, .2, .3

Andrea Zittel

United States, b. 1965

***The A-Z Body Processing Unit*, 1999**

Gouache on paper

Courtesy of the artist and Sprüth Magers

In 1991, artist Andrea Zittel established A-Z Administrative Services, its title a sly nod to her initials. As part of this corporate conceit, she proposed minimalist systems to address basic human needs. *A-Z Body Processing Unit* acknowledges that the kitchen and bathroom, in the artist's words, "feature many of the same fixtures but attend to opposite aspects of the same process." Suggesting that consumption and waste could be serviced in a single, portable unit, the work raises questions

about the logical conclusions of efficiency, while revealing how architectural structures have served to mask social discomfort with basic bodily functions.

Martha Rosler

United States, b. 1943

Semiotics of the Kitchen, 1975

Single-channel video with sound (6 mins., 9 secs.)

LACMA, purchased with funds provided by Ruth L. Eliel and William N. Cooney

M.2016.360

This video exemplifies Martha Rosler's ability to blend feminist activism with subversive humor. In a pointed parody of idealized 1970s cooking programs—specifically the cheerful persona of Julia Child—Rosler methodically inventories kitchen accoutrements. By demonstrating tools from A to Z (Apron, Bowl, Chopper, and so on), she exposes these objects as the structural elements that define and

confine women's lives. Rosler's movements gradually shift from the "natural" domestic grace expected of women to instructional to absurdly violent, shattering and channeling a raw, simmering resistance to patriarchal norms.

Jona Frank

United States, b. 1966

***Mirror, Mirror*, 2016**

From the series *Cherry Hill: A Childhood Reimagined*, 2016-20

Inkjet print (pigment-based) on polyester film with lightbox, fabricated 2026

LACMA, purchased with funds provided by the Ralph M. Parsons Fund

M.2026.121

In her autobiographical series *Cherry Hill*, Jona Frank brings together photographs, writing, and installation to revisit her upbringing in suburban New Jersey. *Mirror, Mirror* centers a smiling mother and daughter, dressed alike and proudly displaying homemade pies in the family's

cheerful, well-appointed kitchen. As the larger narrative of *Cherry Hill* makes clear, such moments of harmony were fleeting for Frank; her mother was a puzzle to the young girl, sometimes nurturing and sometimes frustrated. Frank ultimately escaped this "perfect" setting to be herself and to be an artist.

Nancy Meyers, director
United States, b. 1949

Jon Hutman, production designer
United States, b. 1962

Beth A. Rubino, set decorator
United States, active 1987-present

It's Complicated kitchen set, in
Traditional Home, December 2009
Private collection

Mark D. Sikes, designer

United States, active 2011-present

Amy Neunsinger, photographer

United States, b. 1968

Nancy Meyers's kitchen renovation, in
Architectural Digest, June 2022

Private collection

Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, Inc.

United States, est. 1997

Hewlett-Packard Company, corporate
sponsor

United States, 1939-2015

"Living with Technology Watch, Click & Win Sweepstakes" advertisement, 2001

Private collection

Martha Stewart personally designs her kitchens as highly functional spaces that blend professional efficiency with cozy aesthetics. The Studio A set featured in this sweepstakes advertisement was inspired by her East Hampton home, and brought this vision to television viewers. Through her best-selling book *Entertaining* (1982) and her media empire, Stewart redefined

domestic life as both aspirational and performative-establishing a desirable, though often unreachable, standard that made her one of the earliest lifestyle influencers. Her success became a feminist statement that mastery of the domestic sphere could hold cultural and economic power.

Ralph Bartholomew, Jr.

United States, 1907-1985

International Nickel, client

Untitled, 1960, printed later

Dye coupler print

LACMA, gift of the Bartholomew family,
courtesy of Keith de Lellis Gallery

AC1998.1.17

Commercial photographer Ralph Bartholomew, Jr., helped define the visual language of mid-century advertising. His captivating color sensibility comes through powerfully in this vibrant print. However, the image was first published in a black-and-white advertisement for International Nickel in *LIFE* magazine. The brushed

nickel-chrome plating of the wall-mounted oven has a luster echoed by the satin cocktail dress worn by a brunette model, who is showing off her appliance rather than actually using it to prepare a meal. The accompanying copy declares: "Just one glance and you know it-this type of finish is modern!"

Bill Owens

United States, b. 1938

***We're really happy, our kids are
healthy...,***

1970-71, printed 1982

From the series *Suburbia*, 1968-72

Gelatin silver print

LACMA, anonymous gift, in honor of Robert
Sobieszek

M.2005.150.94

Julius Shulman

United States, 1910-2009

**Buff, Straub, and Hensman, Bass House
(Case Study House #8), Altadena, 1958**

**Pierre Koenig, Stahl House (Case Study
House #22), Hollywood Hills, 1959-60**

**James Garrott, Farr House, El Segundo,
1956**

**Image from *Lanai Kitchens* (Las Vegas,
Nev.), 1969**

Inkjet prints (pigment-based), printed 2026
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles
(2004.R.10) © J. Paul Getty Trust

The leading chronicler of mid-century California architecture, photographer Julius Shulman staged glamorous images of modern homes that were widely disseminated through magazines and other publications. This selection of Shulman's photographs captures an idealized vision of the mid-twentieth-century kitchen, where fashionably clad models-all women-prepare meals on pristine countertops. Modernist principles of open, flexible spaces and indoor/outdoor living are achieved with pass-through counters and vast expanses of glass, while unified built-in cabinets are structured to accommodate the latest appliances.

Ralph Bartholomew, Jr.

United States, 1907-1985

Eastman Kodak Co., client

Untitled, 1947, printed later

Gelatin silver print

LACMA, gift of the Bartholomew family,
courtesy of Keith de Lellis Gallery

AC1998.1.7

Esther Bubley

United States, 1921-1998

The Rood Family, Wahoo, Nebraska,
1948

Gelatin silver print

LACMA, gift of Saul E. Levi

M.2007.210.15

Aage Sikker-Hansen

Denmark, 1897-1955

***Køkkenet, Danmarks Største
Arbejdsplads***, c. 1950s

Offset lithograph

LACMA, gift of Lucinda and David Pollack

M.2025.76.1

Declaring the kitchen Denmark's "biggest workplace," this poster repositions domestic labor as a professional pursuit. Illustrator Aage Sikker-Hansen uses bold, single color forms with reduced details and soft curves to depict a woman cutting produce, asserting both the femininity and modernity of the subject. This lithograph was used to promote a series of exhibitions staged in Denmark in the 1950s and 1960s that

showcased new, rationalized kitchen designs as part of an ongoing effort to make housework more efficient.

The Frankfurt Kitchen

Beginning in 1925, the city of Frankfurt responded to Germany's dire housing crisis with the visionary New Frankfurt social housing program. Urban planner Ernst May led a team of architects who built over ten thousand affordable units and other amenities for working- and lower-middle-class tenants. Each dwelling contained a compact, standardized kitchen designed by trailblazing architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky. She and her team drew on factory layouts and the designs of railcar and ship galleys in order to reduce residents' unnecessary movements. Inspired by American efficiency experts, they also organized time-motion studies, dramatized in the accompanying film. Schütte-Lihotzky's rationalized design

dignified housewives as professional workers, promoting a liberated role for the "New Woman" by striving to eliminate drudgery and free up time for other pursuits.

The Frankfurt Kitchen included a seated preparation area, modern gas stove, and fold-down ironing board. Innovative storage bins allowed residents to pour grains and beans directly from the container. Widely publicized through articles and exhibitions, Schütte-Lihotzky's kitchen was imitated internationally.

This example comes from the Bornheim Housing Estate, one of the largest developments. Built several years into the New Frankfurt construction, it incorporates feedback from earlier iterations. Most

notably, the architects responded to concerns of mothers with young children by moving the pouring bins from a low cabinet to a less-accessible position.

Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, designer
Austria, 1897-2000, active Germany

Frankfurt Kitchen from the Bornheim Housing Estate, c. 1926-30

Various materials including wood, paint, enameled metal, aluminum, ceramic, and glass

LACMA, gift of the 2025 Decorative Arts and Design Acquisitions Committee (DA²) and the Robert Gore Rifkind Foundation, Beverly Hills, CA, with additional support from Debbie and Mark Attanasio
M.2026.116.1-.23

Humboldt-Film GmbH (Berlin),

production studio

Germany, est. c. 1921

Paul Wolff, director

Germany, 1887-1951

Die Frankfurter Küche, 1927

Short film (silent; 7 mins., 35 secs. TBC)

Kitchen for Unité d'Habitation

The Unité d'habitation was commissioned and built in Marseille between 1945 and 1952, when Europe was facing a postwar housing crisis. Visionary architect Le Corbusier developed the project as a "vertical garden city," integrating 337 units of middle-class housing with a host of communal amenities for eating, exercising, and shopping. He proposed that the kitchen, as situated in these apartments, "should become the center of French family life."

Designer Charlotte Perriand returned to Corbusier's office to work on this project after nearly a decade of solo practice. For Unité, she designed a modular, built-in kitchen that prioritized the needs of the

women who used it. Like Schütte-Lihotzky, Perriand incorporated inventive labor-saving features and current technologies. The kitchens were equipped with an electric stove and sink with integrated waste disposal, and clad with easy-to-clean aluminum sheeting. While electric refrigerators were deemed too expensive for middle-class residents, she positioned the icebox so it could be supplied with ice blocks delivered daily from within the complex's distinctive "interior streets." And Perriand designed the open "kitchen-bar" to allow "the mistress of the house to be with her family and friends while she was cooking," rather than "isolated like a slave at the northern end of a corridor."

Charlotte Perriand, designer
France, 1903-1999

**Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard
Jeanneret)**, architect
Switzerland, 1887-1965, active France

Atelier des Bâisseurs (ATBAT),
workshop
France, 1945-65

***Kitchen for an Apartment in Unité
d'habitation, Marseille, France,***
designed 1948-50, this example c. 1952

Oak, beech and oak plywood, aluminum,
and stoneware

LACMA, gift of the 2019 Collectors
Committee
M.2019.212