

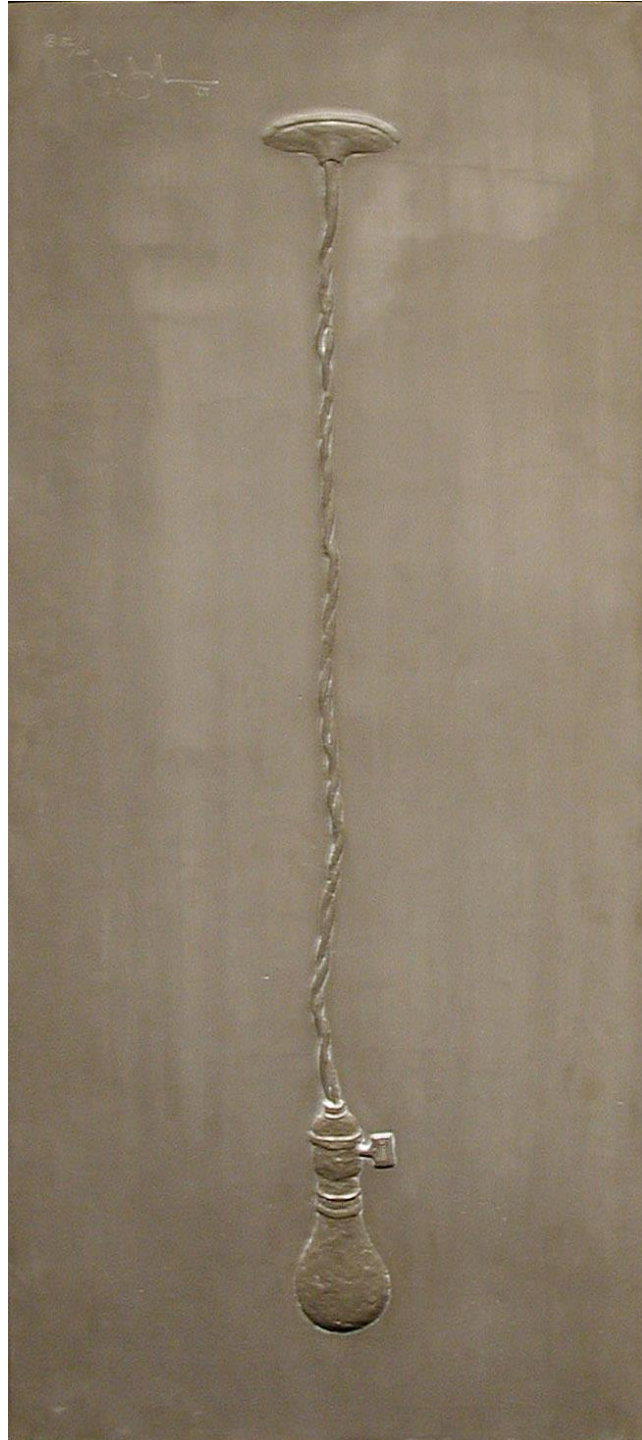
Today's Masterpiece: Jasper Johns, [Light Bulb](#), 1969. Lead relief. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Norton S. Walbridge, 1991.14.



Welcome back to **Masterpiece Minute on Virtual SDMA**. I'm your host, **John Digesare**, Senior Registrar at the San Diego Museum of Art. Drop in the first Friday of each month to pick up a new mini talk led by SDMA curators and special guests spotlighting works of art from the Museum's collection. Today I want to focus on a work by Jasper Johns that is currently hanging in Gallery 10 on the Museum's first floor.

In 1969 Jasper Johns created six lead reliefs at the innovative print studio, Gemini G.E.L. in Los Angeles. *Light Bulb*, the tallest of these works exists in an edition of 60 examples plus 14 proofs. The production of *Light Bulb* was overseen by Gemini founder, Kenneth Tyler with assistance from Jeff Sanders. Of Johns' 346 published prints, these reliefs are the only multiples executed in lead. Originally paper had been considered as the support for these works but it was found to tear during the embossing process. For this work Johns first made a low relief model in wax or plaster from which cast metal and epoxy molds were made. A thin piece of cold rolled lead, .015 in. thick was placed between the molds and pressure was exerted by a hydraulic press. The resulting image was then chemically washed so it would oxidize naturally over time. If all the examples of this relief were lined up, the unique patina on each would be readily apparent. *Light Bulb* depicts an ordinary object, in life-size, hanging by a loose, twisted electrical cord, mounted above. The dull lead surface absorbs rather than reflects light. On several occasions Johns has mentioned that gray is his favorite color, but he has also noted that one might think of it as an absence of color. While making the model Johns pressed an actual on/off switch in, leaving the brand name, LEVITON in reverse. Curiously, this relief offers the viewer two different perspectives. The ceiling plate appears as if viewed from below, while the light bulb and socket are seen from above. A hanging lightbulb first appeared in Johns' work in a drawing from 1957. Johns would also depict this subject in a lithograph, *Recent Still Life* from 1965-1966, which was published by Universal Limited Art Editions. *Light Bulb*, was gifted to SDMA on May 30, 1991, by Mr. and Mrs. Norton S. Walbridge, the first work by Johns to enter the collection, which has now grown to twenty-two pieces.

This has been **John Digesare**, thank you for listening here at **Virtual SDMA**.



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