

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

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AMERICAN PRINTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY ON VIEW AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

A survey of five decades of printmaking in North and South America, one of the largest print exhibitions ever presented at the Museum of Modern Art, will be on view from September 8 through November 14. Selected exclusively from the Museum's comprehensive collection of original prints, the survey consists of 125 examples in various graphic media including several newly developed techniques. The exhibition AMERICAN PRINTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY celebrates the fifth anniversary of the opening of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Print Room which contains more than 4000 prints by European and American artists. William S. Lieberman, Curator of Prints, selected and installed the exhibition.

The exhibition is grouped into four large sections beginning with reporters of the American Scene from 1900 through today. The next two sections summarize the tremendous renaissance in printmaking which has taken place in the United States during the past fifteen years: first, in the bold re-evaluation of the traditional methods of etching and engraving on metal; and, more recently, in the revival of interest in the woodcut, particularly the large woodcut in color. The fourth large section of the exhibition is devoted to the graphic work of painters and print-makers of Latin America.

About one quarter of the exhibition chronicles the American scene in etching and lithographs, mostly small in size and printed in black and white. The city is viewed in a variety of interpretations: the loose impressionism of Childe Hassam, the "ash can" school of John Sloan, John Marin's famous Chrysler Building of 1913, the evocative night scenes of Edward Hopper, the precisionist renderings of buildings by Charles Sheeler and Niles Spencer, the whimsy of Wanda Gag's Third Avenue El, the vivid abstraction of Stuart Davis. Sporting events -- boxing, cockfighting, polo -- are reported by George Bellows, "Pop" Hart and Paul Cadmus. The magic realism of an artist such as Ivan Le Lorraine Albright is contrasted with the more romantic fantasy of Arthur B. Davies, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Federico Castellón and Rico Lebrun. The satires of Grant Wood and Adolph Dehn, aimed at academic life and grand opera, are matched by the more turgid social comments of artists such as Raphael Soyer.

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Commenting on the exhibition, Mr. Lieberman says:

"For the first decades of the century, the most memorable prints had been created by artists who were primarily painters. But the past fifteen years have witnessed an extraordinary renaissance in printmaking, and today many American artists devote their major energies to the producing of original prints.

"Any survey of contemporary printmaking in the United States must consider the British engraver Stanley William Hayter. In 1939 he moved his studio, Atelier 17, from Paris, where he had been associated with the surrealists, to New York City. His technical ingenuity and his insistence on direct use of the burin changed the direction of the intaglio print in America. In this exhibition many artists such as Gabor Peterdi, Mauricio Lasansky and André Racz continue Hayter's tradition of teacher and engraver. Armen Landeck and Alton Pickens are less concerned with technical innovation and use conventional means to describe in precise detail a world of fact or dream.

"More recently there has been a considerable revival of interest in the woodcut, stimulated by the pioneers Louis Schanker and Adja Yunkers and the younger Antonio Frasconi and Leonard Baskin. A few of the woodcuts in this exhibition deliberately assume some of the aspects of painting. Wood engraving, in which a much harder block is used, has usually been limited to prints of extremely small size. Misch Kohn and Arthur Deshaies, however, breathe new vitality into a technique too often constricted and severe.

"Color lithography is still much less developed in the United States than in Europe. Rapid advances, however, are being made by artists such as Will Barnet, Ralston Crawford and Byron McClintock.

"Constant innovation has expanded the possibilities of traditional techniques. Many prints in the exhibition, for instance, reveal the use of actual textures such as cloth and wire mesh to increase the pictorial effect of the image when printed. Not only the etching and woodcut have been re-evaluated, but several completely new techniques have been discovered. Serigraphy, a method of printing from screens of silk, has been popularized by artists such as Ben Shahn, Robert Gwathmey and Sylvia Wald. The cellocut, another new medium which exploits discoveries in plastics, has been developed by Boris Margo."

Shown as a separate section of the exhibition are prints by Latin American artists selected from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Haiti, Mexico and Uruguay. In Mexico a strong tradition of printmaking originated with Posada, one of the greatest popular artists of our time. Today's Big Three of Mexican art, Orozco, Rivera and Siqueiros, are represented by two large lithographs each, and the work of several younger Mexican artists is also included.

"AMERICAN PRINTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY gathers together artists working in all parts of the Americas. As a survey it demonstrates the three chief characteristics of recent prints: emphasis on large scale, use of color, and experimentation followed by technical innovation. It is the vitality and enthusiasm of artists such as these that has made the past ten years the most exciting decade in the history of American printmaking," Mr. Lieberman says.

This is the first exhibition of the Museum's 25th Anniversary year and precedes the formal opening of the Anniversary Celebration which will take place on October 19 when the largest exhibition of paintings from the Collection ever presented will go on view.