

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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THE MUSEUM
OF MODERN ART

FOR WEDNESDAY RELEASE

MASTER PRINTS, AN EXHIBITION OF 230 AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN PRINTS, TO COMMEMORATE OPENING OF ABBY ALDRICH ROCKEFELLER PRINT ROOM AT MUSEUM.

A large exhibition of prints, chosen from the Museum's collection of about 3,000, and offering a comprehensive survey of the past 65 years of printmaking, will open to the public on Thursday, May 12 at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street. It will remain on view in the first floor galleries through July 10. John Hay Whitney, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, has announced that at the same time the Museum will open to the public the new Print Room dedicated to the late Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a founder of the Museum and for many years its Vice-President. (See release #30, April 22, for fuller detail.) The artists represented in the exhibition are from 20 countries. Many of their prints are in color, and many will be seen publicly for the first time. The exhibition was selected by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of the Museum Collections, and William S. Lieberman, Associate Curator in charge of Prints.

The exhibition begins about 1885 with the lithographs of the impressionists, Degas, Cézanne and Renoir; their contemporaries and followers in France; Ensor in Belgium; Munch in Norway; Vallotton in Switzerland. Of special interest are several rare color woodcuts by Gauguin, a wall devoted to Toulouse-Lautrec, a large color lithograph screen by Bonnard, van Gogh's only etching and the Douanier Rousseau's single lithograph.

The contemporary School of Paris is comprehensively represented with emphasis on major printmakers such as Chagall, Matisse, Rouault and Jacques Villon. Eighteen Picassos, selected from the Museum's 200 examples, range from 1904 to the present. The recent revival of color lithography in France is indicated, and work by younger artists such as Henri Adam, Jean Dubuffet and Mario Prassinos may also be seen.

The exhibition offers a brief review of cubism in France with Braque, Picasso, Delaunay, Léger and Marcoussis and indicates the spread of the abstract tradition into Central Europe with the lithographs of Kandinsky, Lissitzky and Moholy-Nagy. It also explores the modern tradition of fantasy with the dada inventions of Ernst and

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Schwitters and the surrealist prints by Dali, Hayter, Giacometti, Masson and Miro.

A large gallery, devoted to the German expressionists, shows the dramatic woodcuts and lithographs of Kirchner, Nolde, Kokoschka, Kollwitz and many others. Seven prints by Paul Klee have been selected from the Museum's collection of more than 60 examples of his work - probably the largest group in the world.

The work of North and South American printmakers occupies three galleries. The choice from Mexico starts with the late 19th-century master Posada and includes major lithographs by the well-known Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros, as well as prints by artists of the younger generation. The second and third galleries in the American section are devoted to artists of the United States, whose work constitutes approximately one-half of the entire collection. Prendergast, the oldest pioneer of the modern movement in the U. S., is represented by two rare monotypes done before 1900. Then come etchings and lithographs by George Bellows, John Sloan, Arthur B. Davies, John Marin and Edward Hopper. In the same gallery are 6 rare color woodcuts by Max Weber. American "precisionist" exponents of realism are represented by the lithographs of Lozowick, Sheeler, Stefan Hirsch, Grant Wood and Albright and by the drypoints of Landeck and Kupferman.

The recent renaissance in American printmaking, stimulated to a great extent by the Englishman Stanley William Hayter, is suggested by prints shown in the last gallery. When Hayter, in 1940, moved his studio Atelier 17 from Paris to New York, new experiments in engraving inspired largely by his teaching changed the direction of American printmaking. Prints by his associates and students include etchings and engravings by Sue Fuller, Raymond Jordan, Mauricio Lasansky, Gabor Peterdi, André Racz and Yves Tanguy. Here also are found examples of a revived interest in woodcuts of exceptional scale and boldness in the work of Adja Yunkers and Bernard Reder, Europeans now living in the U. S., Charles Smith who prints with movable blocks, and the abstract compositions of Louis Schanker. Graphic techniques are of particular interest in this last gallery with suggestions of numerous possibilities developing from recent and successful experiments in the use of such textures as cloth and string and in engraving and etching on celluloid and lucite.

The value of individual prints, ranging from \$25 to nearly \$2,000, indicates on the one hand the availability of original graphic work to even the most modest collector and, at the same time, the high esteem and value which the medium can attain.

In a special Bulletin and check-list to be issued at the opening of the exhibition and the print room, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of the Museum Collections, has written the following comments under the heading "Modern Prints and the Museum":

"The past sixty years have witnessed such an extraordinary flowering of the art of printmaking that now, in the mid-twentieth century, fine prints have assumed an unprecedented importance, especially for a museum of modern art. Never before have practically all the foremost painters and many of the principal sculptors of a period devoted so much of their best energies to the production of original prints.... Not only have the greatest modern artists produced hundreds of prints for our walls and portfolios, but with magnificent suites of original plates they have invaded the illustrated book.... It seems probable that more great illustrated books have been produced in our half-century than at any time since the invention of printing. [The collection contains over 100 illustrated books and portfolios.]... Today 'wall-size' prints by the foremost artists of our time are within the reach of almost everyone - and the public demand for them is increasing.

"Prints have always had a place in the Museum of Modern Art, even in its original plans. In fact the first acquisitions actually received by the Museum were a group of German prints bought... in November 1929, the very month the Museum opened its doors.... Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr... had begun to buy prints as early as 1927. By 1931 she was definitely collecting with the Museum in mind. [She] argued... that prints, because they were low priced enough to be available on a democratic scale, should hold a place of special importance in a museum concerned with encouraging the widespread collecting of original works of art by living artists.... Space was therefore provided for a print room in the plans of the new building which opened in 1939. Then, in 1940, Mrs. Rockefeller gave the Museum her collection of 1,600 prints. But because of the war, the print room was not to be opened for another nine years. The space intended for it was used instead for the study of films in connection with various defense and war offices.

"In 1945, as the war was drawing to a close, Mrs. Rockefeller resumed her active interest in the print collection.... Her tastes were definite, but occasionally she would be persuaded to purchase works which she herself did not admire.... With characteristic humor and good grace, she suggested [these] might be listed as purchased with a 'Fund for Prints which Mrs. Rockefeller Doesn't Like.'... Mrs. Rockefeller died in April 1948 just as final plans for opening the print room were being prepared. More than anyone else she had been responsible for the Museum's collection and activities in the field of fine prints. The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Print Room is appropriately named."

Writing on the contents of the print collection, William S. Lieberman, newly appointed Associate Curator in charge of Prints, comments:

"In the field of 20th-century prints the Museum's collection is unequalled, at least in this country.... Only two or three

other private and public collections in America equal and, with individual artists, sometimes surpass the Museum's treasures of late 19th-century prints.... From the point of view of quality and quantity the representation of the contemporary School of Paris is the best in existence and constitutes one quarter of the entire collection.... American artists, outnumbering by far those of any other country, account for roughly one-half the entire collection."