Jasper Johns lithographs

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JASPER JOHNS LITHOGRAPHS

AN EXHIBITION ORGANIZED BY THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

"The problems are solved, not by | made the lithographs False Start giving new information, but by (cat. 11 and 14) and Painting with arranging what we have always known." Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations.

The thematic and compositional development of Jasper Johns's lithographs parallels his painting and sculpture in image, rather than in time. The paintings that precede his first lithographs by six years indicate an exploration fundamental to any statement he would articulate in any other medium. Philosophically, Johns demanded increasingly more, both from himself and from the viewer. In retrospect, his first prints were crucial to this quest; and when he drew his first lithographs in 1960, he began the exploration anew.

He again chose two-dimension-

al, simply patterned, and wellremembered objects: numbers, targets, and flags. As in his painting, he depended on the memories such objects activated to energize the spectator's new awareness. In order to maintain a flattened picture plane within the prints, Johns introduced a laborious linear structure that evokes the layers of encaustic and newsprint of his paintings of the 1950s. An effort to emulate the density of Redon's black lithographic crayon seems apparent, particularly in Target (cat. 1). Johns at this time was attacking his paintings with a brilliant brushwork that occasionally crept into the development of his prints. An attempt to introduce a brushed-on wash into areas of Target was discarded. The progression of work on the Flags, especially as it remains visible in proofs and states, was almost a technical regression. Flag I (cat. 5) is pure tusche applied with a brush, as directly as in his paintings and drawings. In subsequent states, crayon entraps the fluid lines; the gray Flag III (cat. 7) represents a flattened arrangement so enmeshed that it totally cancels out our visual memory

Johns's first lithograph was a scale of numbers above a zero (plate 1 in the 0-9 portfolios). Although this print was not published until 1963, it precedes the far more complex and larger image of the superimposed numbers in 0 through 9 (cat. 4). The sequential development of the digits, built from line alone, catches the eye in a weblike trap. The sensuosity of the curved lines further confuses the mind so that the cognitive game of counting the numbers is fraught with doubts. The element of time is also introduced here-time that progresses or regresses as the numbers grow larger or smaller.

The emotional content of Johns's themes becomes more important as they replay themselves. The 1960 Coat Hanger (cat. 3), another familiar object elevated to an icon, has an emotional value which it retains in different guises in later works. In its bare, unaltered state, it is emptiness. The tension of the thin wire against the densely packed | Hand (cat. 18) were begun in 1963. ground introduces an element of frustration. Later, it is unbent and | Hatteras relates closely to a hooked onto objects that set up paradoxes. The wire links objects with unseen presence in Pinion (cat. 29), and eating utensils with breath in Voice (cat. 46).

Another of the developments in his paintings that Johns was to in-

Two Balls (cat. 8 and 10), he was already far into this area of unstable relationships. False Start ncorporates the jabbing brush strokes with an intellectual game of naming colors what they are not. The eleven stones necessary o convey this cacophony of ambiguity were more than Johns ever attempted again. Both False Start and Painting with Two Balls are closer transcriptions of his paintings than were the earlier prints. Painting with Two Balls, besides graphically demonstrating the tension of a flat plane rent by the introduction of solid forms, introduced into his prints two important elements: bands of red, yellow, and blue (not yet fully developed into symbols) and a crayon delineation that is selfsustaining. A proof of the crayon drawing for this print in white ink on black paper (a method that eventually offered variations for other prints) indicates the beginning of a tendency to depart from the complication of the total surface. The crayon strokes provide a chiaroscuro effect that later, in the rendering of Ale Cans (cat. 23) in 1964, tends to show concrete substance.

The Painted Bronze sculpture of 1960 brought new attention to Johns's work. The simple experiential conclusion that he was presenting reproductions of two ale cans as art overlooked entirely the precedent for such a confrontation in his own work. As had been the case earlier, the commonness of the objects induced a blind reaction, while inherent in the piece itself were Johns's autographic handling of the surface and the alteration of form that characterized his two-dimensional works. Both absence and presence are implied in the different physical states of the cans (in the sculpture, one can has been punc tured). The lithograph is a por trayal of the object from which this lesson of opposites has been learned—an illusion of a prior illusion, still provocative of further deception. The print is now called Ale Cans and was once named Beer Cans; it was never titled Painted Bronze. "(A) having painted a picture gives it the title Flag. (B) having made a sculpture gives it the title Painted Bronze. (A) referring to (B)'s work says beer when to be in character he would say ale" (John Cage, "Jasper Johns: Stories and Ideas." Jasper Johns. New York, Jewish Museum, 1964.)

The crayon-drawn stone of Ale Cans again demonstrates an intention to model the surface. In this case, perspective is alluded to, although in the final print much of the drawing is obliterated by an almost solid black background. As a last step, Johns drew a line around the entire composi tion, the same means he used in the illusionistic Pinion to recall the eye to the flatness of the real surface.

Pinion, Hatteras (cat. 17), Skin with O'Hara Poem (cat. 27), and All made use of body imprints. painting of the same year, Periscope (Hart Crane), executed in blacks and grays but still signaling red, yellow, and blue. The extended hand has described an arc, adding the measurement of elapsed time to that of the numtroduce into his printmaking was | bered scale of inches at the bot-

measuring, so there is always | ings as the means by which he atsomething else that Johns can do with his objects: "Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it" (Jasper Johns 'Sketchbook Notes," quoted in Art and Literature, Spring 1965). The cover of this checklist, a spec trum printing of the black-andwhite Hatteras, introduces a new problem, for the colors red, yellow, and blue uncomfortably overlap the confines of the spaces so named. Again, the colors and what we call them are not the Originally Pinion, like Skin with

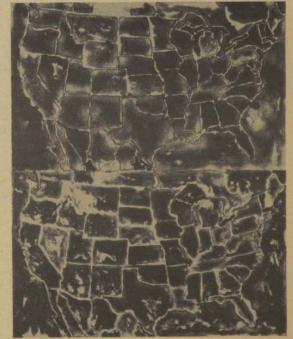
O'Hara Poem, was meant to have a poem printed on the lower part of its composition. The late Frank O'Hara, poet and a curator at The Museum of Modern Art, was an admired friend of many artists. Ultimately, only Skin was enhanced by his poem, and the 1963 stone for Pinion was overprinted with another stone and a photographic plate. Johns used a photo-

tempted to reconcile lithography with the complex constructed paintings of the 1960s. Pinion was a composition rescued and given life with a photographed portion of his painting Eddingsville. Passage (cat. 44), on the other hand, was a reconstruction that placed n jeopardy many of the classical tenets of printmaking. The levels of illusion in this composition, derived from black-and-white photographs of a color painting, flatcolor panels, crayon outlines, and brushed-on tusche, rest precariously on the paper. The photographed portions are dead, while the truly lithographic areas have the characteristic life referred to by print lovers. The opposition of techniques creates an almost intolerable sense of strain.

Watchman (cat. 49) is another composition dealing with the post-1960s theme of change. It too is after a painting-construction, but in this case, instead of photoincongruity. In 1962, when he I tom. As the infinite is implicit in I graphed section from his paint- I graphing the assembled objects









(leg and chair), Johns has re- | the same title—a spoon and fork | bition at the Rhode Island School | monly printed on light bulbs. placed them with a white silhouette. His sketchbook note that "the watchman falls 'into' the trap of looking," and "leaves his job and takes away no information" certainly may serve as a warning to one who studies this work.

Between the execution of Passage and Watchman, Johns worked on his largest stone up to that time, Voice (cat. 46). It has photographed elements derived from the painted composition of

on a wire—but the component that overpowers the eye is the large, fluid spume that covers the entire area. It is a tour-de-force of lithographic technique, using an elusive wash to evoke the abstract concepts of breath, sound, saliva, throat, voice. Johns had had some bitter experiences with this technique. In 1962 he had attempted a sequential table of letters, Alphabets (cat. 15), but the stone would not retain the image. Recent Still Life (cat. 33), a poster for an exhi-

of Design, had a wash background, and the first stone cracked before the edition was

Two other compositions with light bulbs, of 1966 and 1970, again make use of wash. Both are reminiscences of Johns's sculptures, and the 1966 print was even proofed in a bronze ink. The soft, carefully balanced fluidity of the later print is pinned down by a rubber-stamp insert of the statement about watts and volts com-

The overall balance of wash, particularly where it is used to describe form, is most beautifully apparent in the Two Maps (cat. 36 and 38) lithographs. In these prints, the puddling of the liquid as it defines the States of the Union, especially in the upper map, is ingeniously controlled. Proofs for the Maps show the care Johns exercised in manipulating his brush. A discarded crayondrawn stone that might have overprinted the maps was a superflu-



ous addition. By doubling the | what is void? maps, Johns redistributed our concentration on minutiae.

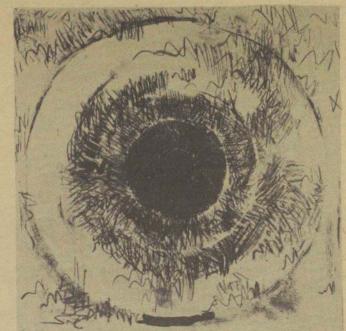
Progression of small forms, bearers of the kind of aesthetic information that Johns presents, began with the alphabet se-quences. According to Johns, even the numbers with all their permutations developed from an alphabetical table that he saw quite early in his artistic career. The measured changes in position are veiled by the embroidering brushwork he carries over each letter form. In the unpublished 1962 version of Alphabets, this is accomplished by black ink alone. The stencil-patterned letters drift in and out of focus as if printed on a curtain blown by the wind, and yet the tautness of the unvarying measured rectangles holds the surface flat and unyielding. Gray Alphabets (cat. 66) of 1968, much larger than any of Johns's pre-vious or subsequent prints, is printed in four shades of gray. By increasing the size of the tables, the linear movement of the pattern becomes more visible. Much of the subtlety now lies in

the muted grays.

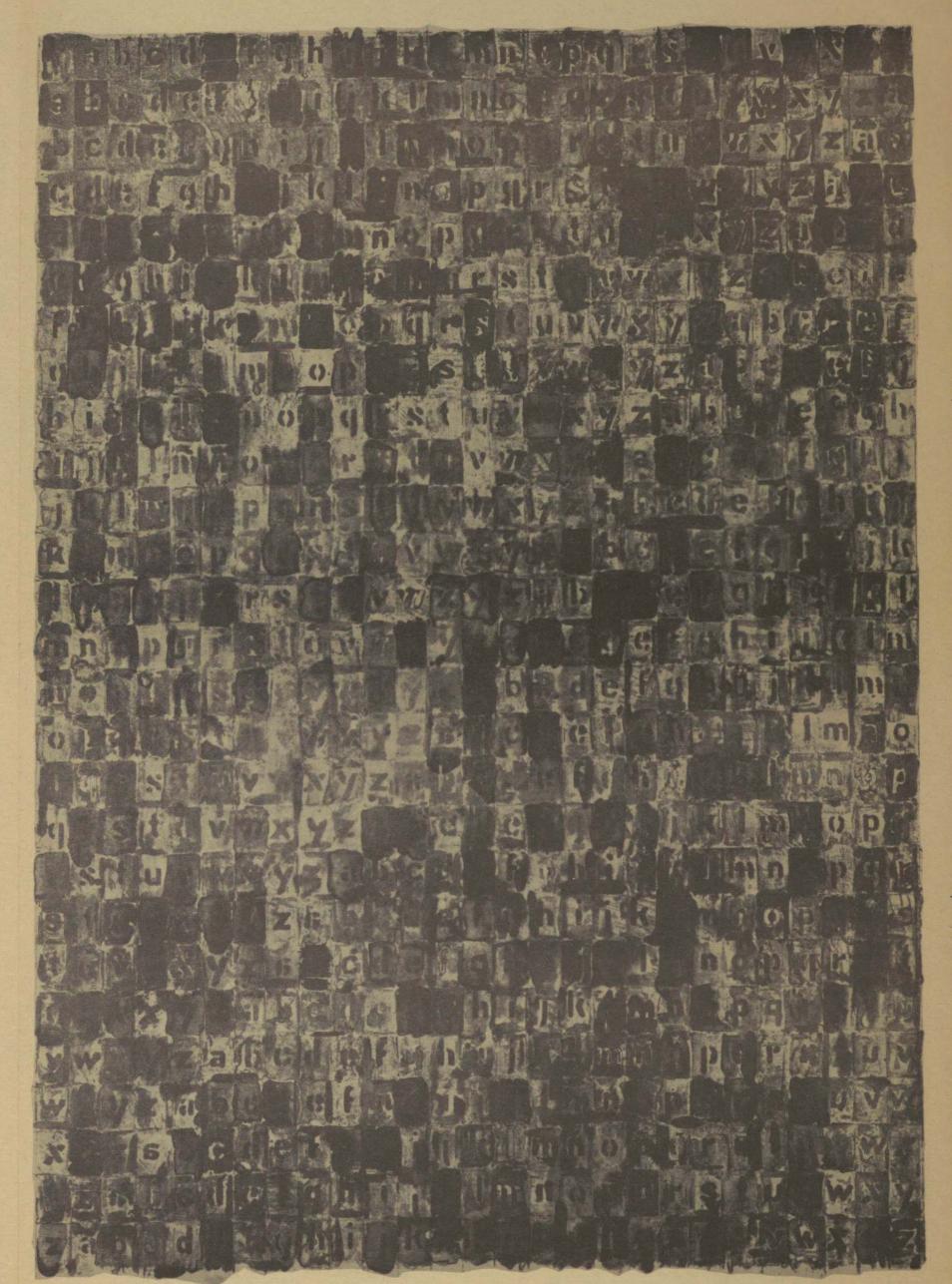
The subject of alphabets holds the position of a favorite child in Johns's artistic vocabulary. The 729 different formal arrangements (the number of rectangles in the table) suggest infinite possibilities for interpretations. Numbers, on the other hand, have what?). This aspect of numbers is exploited in the large-scale Numerals (cat. 56-65) of 1968-69, monuments in print to our passive acceptance of symbols. Figure 7 (cat. 63), with its oblique reference to Duchamp, confounds the sense of the abstract that numbers purportedly convey. In other philosophical question: a craft lay in the hands of Ameri-

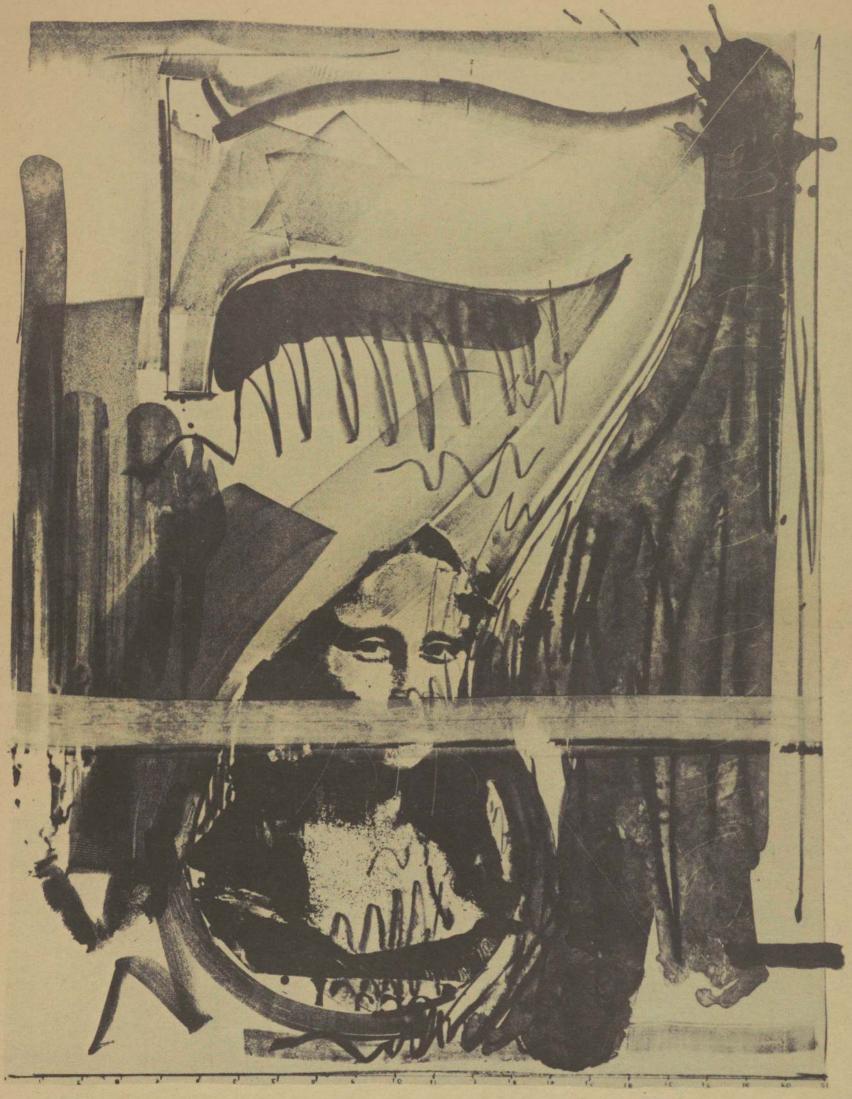
JASPER JOHNS began his printmaking career at Universal Limited Art Editions. This workshop was begun in the Long Island home of the artist Maurice Grosman and his wife Tatyana. Under the latter's direction, Universal had published prints by Fritz Glarner, Grace Hartigan, and Larry Rivers before Johns was invited there in 1960. Mrs. Grosman had admired his paintings in the exhibition "Sixteen Americans" at The Museum of Modern Art and invited him to visit the workshop. During his visit, it was decided to leave some small stones with him to work on at his studio. They eventually carried the images of Target and "0" for the portfolio 0-9. (That Johns immediately envisioned a portfolio delighted Mrs. Grosman, who seems to thrive, spiritually and intellectually, on their complex production.) A larger stone, not quite so tempting, was brought back to the Long Island studio, where its surface was soon transformed into Coat Hanger.

After eight years in the small garage-workshop, which had been modernized and embellished but not noticeably expanded during that time, Johns was invited by Kenneth Tyler to make lithographs at his workshop in Los Angeles, Gemini G.E.L. Unlike Mrs. Grosman, who when technical skills, although she had judgment and persistence, Ken Tyler was already a practicing artist and master lithographer when he opened Gemini in 1965. Through years of practice, he had become aware of the many problems connected with lithography and wanted to improve the techchoosing this image to illustrate I nical methods of printing. He also the meaning of a cancellation recognized that the future of proof, Johns presents us with an- printmaking as an art rather than









tors

Johns began his work at Gemini, as he had his printmaking in 1960, with a 0-through-9 series, this time in the form of single numerals. After the stones and plates had been drawn using almost the complete gamut of his graphic skills, they were printed in black and warm grays. Having discovered while working on Pinion how to ink a stone in order to achieve the effect of a rainbow, Johns decided this was something

ca's foremost painters and sculp- | else to do to Numerals. In lith- | white paint on color proofs, pro- | Johns's ography, it is necessary to roll ink onto the stone many times for one print, and to achieve the effect he sought, several colors on the same ink roller had to be carefully transferred to the stone. After considerable technical experimentation, Color Numerals came into being. A few of the proofs of Color Numerals show the metamorphosis of these signs into agents for a systematic transformation of our color sense. Additionally influential one. In the tions in white, first tried out in field of print connoisseurship,

vide each image with stabilizing elements. In Figure 7 (cat. 64), the artist's hand laid on the stone in a sort of benediction reminds the viewer that there is only surface here.

Since 1960, 130 of Johns's prints have been published; 91 of these have been lithographs. Although this would not be considered a prodigious production for a tenyear period, it has been an excep-

first lithographs by an American to have achieved considerable international renown. His was certainly the most prophetic work during the early period of the revival of lithography in America. Now that we can see in trial, experimental, work, and artist's proofs the concentrated devotion he has given to the medium, we no longer wonder at the pivotal role that Jasper Johns has played in contemporary American print-making. —Riva Castleman

LITHOGRAPHY (WRITING ON STONE)

Lithography is based on the mutual antipathy between grease and water. The image may be drawn with a grease-based crayon, pencil, and/or liquid (tusche) on Bavarian limestone, zinc, or specially treated aluminum plates, or it may be transferred to stone or plate by drawing on a special paper. In all cases, the stone or plate will not retain the image unless its surface structure has been changed by light etching with gum and acid so that it will accept ink only where the image

has been drawn. (Areas that must | remain uninked are kept wet to forestall the natural inclination of the stone or plate to accept grease/ink.) After the stone or plate has been dampened and ink rolled onto it, damp or dry paper is placed over the stone or plate and both are run through a flat-bed press under considerable pressure. Normally, one stone or plate is used for each color, exceptional care being taken to place the paper exactly in the same position on each subsequent stone or plate (registration). As an artist changes, embellishes, or simply continues to build his composition

on the stone or plate, the printer will make proofs, experimental proofs, and/or progressive proofs -the last term generally being used to describe proofs that show the progress of printing each successive color.

An edition is that number of prints authorized by the artist and publisher; each print is usually designated by its number within the total edition, e.g., 1/12 indicates the first print among twelve to be pulled. In most cases, the edition is limited by the ability of the stones or plates to retain a uniform image. The term "artist's proof" is usually reserved for

those prints that the artist retains, which are identical to the published edition. "H.C." (hors commerce) may appear on prints identical to the edition which are retained by the publisher, or on small editions of prints never is-sued for sale. "Bon à tirer" (ap-proved for printing) appears on only one proof, the one to which the printer must make the entire edition conform. After the last print of the edition has been pulled, the stone or plate is defaced; a cancellation proof may be printed to record this fact.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Unless otherwise noted, the published lithographs are gifts to The Museum of Modern Art from Mr. and Mrs. Armand P. Bartos or from The Celeste and Armand Bartos Foundation. With the exception of Alphabets (cat. 15), all works shown are published or proofs for published prints. All work from Universal Limited Art Editions (cat. 1-55, 68-70) carries the blind stamp "ULAE." All work from Gemini G.E.L. (cat. 56-67) carries the blind stamps @ and @. Dimensions given are of the printed image, height preceding width. Numbers in parentheses indicate the number within the total edition. *denotes an illustration.

- Target. 1960. Lithograph, 12 3/16 X 12 3/16" (1/30). Target. 1960. Lithograph
 - with ink wash, 12 5/16 X 12 3/4" (artist's proof). Collection Tatyana Grosman, West Islip, Long Island, New
- Coat Hanger I. 1960. Lithograph, 25 9/16 X 21 1/16" (1/35).
- 4. 0 through 9. 1960. Lithograph, 24 X 18 7/8" (1/35).
- 5. Flag J. 1960. Lithograph, 17 1/2 X 26 3/4" (artist's proof). Collection Leo Castelli, New York.
- Flag I. 1960. Lithograph, printed in white, 17 5/8 X 26 13/16" (artist's proof). Collection the artist, New York. Flag III. 1960. Lithograph, printed in gray, 17 1/2 X 26 3/4" (artist's proof).
- Painting with Two Balls I. 1962. Lithograph, printed in color, 20 15/16 X 17" (1/37).
- Painting with Two Balls I. 1962. Lithograph, printed in white, 20 15/16 X 17". Collection Mrs. Leo Castelli, New
- 10. Painting with Two Balls II. Lithograph, printed in 20 15/16 × 16 15/16"
- False Start | 1962, Lithograph, printed in color, 18 X 13 3/4 (1/38)
 False Start | 1962, Lithograph, printed in red, 17 1/2 11. False Start
- 33/4" (56 Collection You
- False graph printed in 13 1/2" (tenth 3/8 % 1/2). Collection the New York
- False Start II. 1962. Lithograph, printed in color, 18 X 13 3/4" (1/30)
- *15. Alphabets. (1962). Litho-graph, 34 1/4 X 23 11/16"

- (proof). Collection the artist, New York.
- Figure 1. 1963. Lithograph, 1/8 X 6 3/8" (1/8).
- Hatteras. 1963. Lithograph, 38 1/4 X 29 1/8" (1/30).
- 18. Hand. 1963. Lithograph, 13 11/16 × 97/16" (1/29).
- 19. 0-9.1960-63 (published 1963). Portfolio of ten lithographs, printed in color, 16 1/16 X 12 3/16" (C/C1/10).
- 20. 1: overprinting for 0-9 portfolio. 1963. Lithograph, printed in green, 8 5/8 X 6 3/4" (artist's proof 1/2). Collection the artist, New York.
- 21. 0-9: overprinting for 0-9 portfolio. 1963. Lithograph, printed in gray, 18 3/8 X 33 5/8" (artist's proof 1/2). Collection the artist, New York.
- 6: correction for 0-9 port-folio. 1963. Lithograph, 3 3/16 X 2 1/2" (H.C. 3/3). Collection Tatyana Grosman, West Islip, Long Island, New York
- *23. Ale Cans. 1964. Lithograph, printed in color, 14 1/4 X 11 3/16" (1/31).
- 24. Ale Cans. 1964. Lithograph, printed in color, with added collage, crayon, ink, and paint, 14 3/16 X 11 3/16". Col-
- lection the artist. New York. Ale Cans. (1964). Litho-25. Ale Cans. (1964). graph, with paint additions, 14 1/16 X 11 1/8". Collection the artist, New York.
- Ale Cans. 1964. Lithograph,
 14 1/2 X 11 3/8" (artist's proof). Collection the artist, New York.
- Skin with O'Hara Poem. 1963-65. Lithograph, 21 X 33 1/16" (1/30).
- 28. Skin with O'Hara Poem. (1963). Lithograph, with ink additions, 22 X 34 1/16". Collection Tatyana Grosman, West Islip, Long Island, New York.
- 29. Pinion. 1963-66. Lithograph, printed in color, 38 9/16 X 24 1/2" (1/36)
- Pinion, 1963. Lithograph, 31 1/16 X 23 1/4" (working proof 1st stone with shoe over-print) Collection the artist,
- New York. 31. Pinion. 1963. Lithograph, with pencil additions, 34 3/4 X 24 1/8" (working proof). Collection the artist, New
- otolithocolor, 10 proof, photo plate). Collection the artist, New York. Recent Still Life. 1965. Litho-
- 19 3/16 (63/100). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of David Whitney.
- 34. Recent Still Life. 1965. Lithograph, printed in color, 34 1/8 X 19 1/4" (proof). Collection

- the artist, New York.
- 35. Recent Still Life. (1965). Lithograph, with pastel additions, 33 X 19 1/2". Collection the artist, New York
- Two Maps I. 1965-66. Lithograph, printed in gray, 31 5/8
- X 25 3/8" (1/30). 37. **Two Maps I.** 1965. Lithograph, printed in black-andwhite, 20 11/16 X 26 9/16" (proof plate...not used), Collection the artist, New York.
- *38. Two Maps II. 1966. Lithograph, 25 9/16 X 20 3/4" (1/30)
- 39. Two Maps I & II. 1966. Lithograph, 13 5/16 X 20 3/4" (proof stone not used in final version). Collection the artist, New York.
- 40. Light Bulb. 1966. Lithograph, printed in color, 8 9/16 X 14 13/16" (1/45)
- Light Bulb. 1966. Lithograph, printed in color, 8 5/8 X 14 3/4" (trial proof). Collection the artist, New York.
- Ruler. 1966. Lithograph, printed in color, 17 15/16 X 12 1/8" (1/25).
- 43. Ruler. 1966. Lithograph, printed in color, 18 1/16 X 12 1/16" (trial proof 1/3). Col-
- lection the artist, New York.
 Passage 1. 1966. Lithograph, printed in color, 26 X 32 7/8"
- 45. Passage I. 1966. Lithograph, with added crayon, pencil, ink, and collage, 27 1/8 X 36 3/4" (working proof). Collection Barbara Rose, Madison, Connecticut.
- 46. Voice. 1966-67. Lithograph, printed in color, 45 1/4 X 30
- 13/16" (1/30). 47. Voice. 1966. Photolithograph, 41 3/16 X 29 9/16" (proof, photo plate 1/3). Collection the artist, New York.
- 48. Voice. (1966-67). Lithograph, with ink and crayon additions, 43 9/16 X 28 3/4" (working proof). Collection the artist, New York.

 Watchman. 1967. Litho-
- *49. Watchman. graph, printed in color, 34 1/4 X 23 5/8" (1/40).
- 50. Targets. 1967-68. Lithograph, printed in color. 34 1/2 X 26 (1/42)
- 51. Targets. 1967-68, Lithograph, printed in violet, 13 1/2 X 13 proof). Collection (trial he artist
- Lithograph inted in cold with chall and paint additions, 34
- printed in color, 34 5/8 X 25 7/8" (1/43).
- 54. Flags. 1967. Lithograph, printed in color, with ink additions, 17 1/8 X 23 1/2" (working proof). Collection

- the artist, New York
- White Target. 1967-68. lithograph, printed in white, 13 5/16 X 13 3/16" (1/34).
- Figure 0 from the series Numerals. 1968. Lithograph, printed in color, 28 X 21 15/16" (29/70). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, John B. Turner Fund.
- Figure 0 from the series Colored numerals. 1969. Lithograph, printed in color, with chalk additions, 27 5/8 X 21 3/4" (working proof). Collection the artist, New York.
- Figure 0 from the series Colored numerals. 1969. Lithograph, printed in color, 28 1/4 X 23 3/16" (experimental proof 1/2). Collection the artist, New York.
- Figure 5 from the series Numerals. 1968. Lithograph, printed in color, 27 3/4 X 22 9/16" (29/70). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, John B. Turner Fund.
- Figure 5 from the series Colored Numerals. 1969. Lithograph, printed in color, with white-paint additions, 28 3/4 X 22 5/8" (working proof). Collection the artist, New York.
- 62. Figure 5 from the series Colored Numerals. 1969. Lithographs, printed in color, with crayon additions, 27 11/16 X 25 3/8" and 27 3/4" X 25
- 3/8" (working proofs). Collection the artist, New York.
 63. Figure 7 from the series Numerals. 1968. Lithograph, printed in color, 27 13/16 X 21 7/16" (29/70). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, John B. Turner Fund.
- Figure 7 from the series Colored Numerals. 1969. Lithograph, 7 3/4 X 5 9/16" (trial proof 1/2). Collection the artist, New York.
- Figure 7 from the series Colored numerals. 1969. Litho-graph, 27 7/8 X 22" (cancellation proof 1/2). Collection the artist, New York
- Gray Alphabets. 1968. Lithograph, printed in color, 51 1/4 X 34 7/16" (48/59). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, John B. Turner Fund. Gray Alphabets. 1968. Lithograph, printed in color, 51 3/8
- (color trial proof ion the artist, York
 - 1970. Lithograph, ouvenir olor, 24 1/4" X 17 50)
- Light Bulb. 1970. Lithograph, printed in color, 10 11/16 X 10 1/2" (1/40).
- Scott Fagan Record. 1970. Lithograph, printed in color, die-cut, 12 3/8 X 12 7/8" (1/20).