

# Jasper Johns : process and printmaking

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# Jasper Johns Process and Printmaking



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**I think that the picture isn't pre-formed, I think it is formed as it is made; and might be anything.**

—Jasper Johns<sup>1</sup>

Great artists throughout history have turned to the richness of the etched line, the transparency of the lithograph, and the expressive potential of the woodcut to explore new possibilities in their work and to examine their imagery against these varied surfaces and techniques. Rembrandt, Goya, Munch, and Picasso are among the giants who found in the print mediums important aesthetic outlets that led to enormous achievements in the history of images. Jasper Johns (born 1930) has been making prints since 1960, and has mastered the mediums of lithography, screenprint, and the various etching techniques in a body of over three hundred printed works. More fundamental, however, is the fact that Johns has incorporated the concepts intrinsic to printmaking—reflection, reversal, and transfer—into all aspects of his art. His prints have exaggerated, isolated, and compounded themes addressed in his paintings. The continual intercourse between Johns's printmaking and his painting is unique in our time; understanding his process in printmaking gives insight into the central ideas of his art in general.

Johns's painting process involves constant alteration and feedback as he paints out passages and changes others. He brings a similar approach to his prints, but in printmaking the proofing process allows him to record the stages of an image's development: Additions, subtractions, and other shifts are reflected in the extensive body of proofs that result from the creation of each edition. These proofs provide a unique and invaluable opportunity to understand

Johns's creative process as he recycled and refocused his images. In a "trial proof," the image is entirely printed but varies in some way from the final edition, either in the color of the ink, the size and type of paper, or the elements of the composition. By contrast, a "working proof" is one that an artist has embellished by hand, usually beginning with an early stage of the print and overdrawing with chalk, ink, paint, crayon, or pencil, reevaluating images without reworking the stone or plate.

Since 1962, Johns has been precisely annotating his proofs after an edition has been printed, indicating which are trial proofs and working proofs and listing the mediums of any hand-applied additions, amassing evidence of the evolution of his printed images. The great majority of the working proofs have been saved; Johns discarded those he felt revealed nothing about his working procedure and were not interesting as independent works.<sup>2</sup>

For Johns, "Printmaking encourages ideas because of the lapse of time involved.... The medium itself suggests things changed or left out."<sup>3</sup> His obsession with the repetition of images in changing contexts—an obsession perfectly aligned with the capabilities of printmaking—has inspired him to recycle many of his plates, stones, and screens, incorporating them into totally new compositions. For some prints, such as *Pinion* (1963–66; ULAE 27), Johns returned to the stones of works never completed; for others, such as *Flags II* (1970; ULAE 86) and *Decoy II* (1971; ULAE 125), rejected impressions of previously completed images served as the foundation for new works. Occasionally, as in *Fragment—According to What—Bent "Blue"* (1971; ULAE 92), only the

collage elements on the working proofs illustrate how prints have developed as extensions of earlier images. Other proofs reveal how surfaces have been rethought, tonal and spatial relationships reversed, and paper choices resolved.

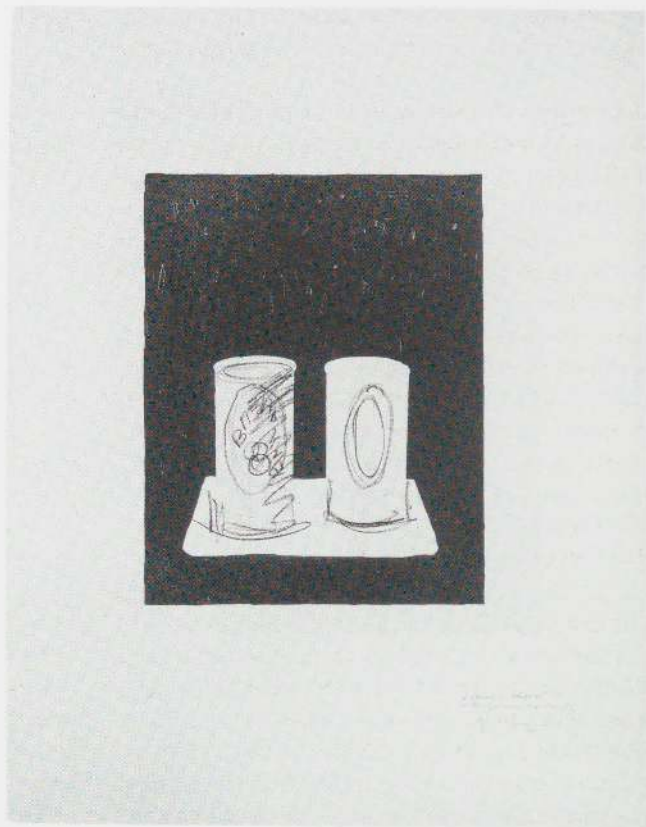
That prints embody the history of thought and action inherent in their creation appeals to Johns's long-held fascination with visual memory and the evolutionary process of imagemaking. The proofs of his first printed endeavors, the portfolios 0-9 (1960-63; ULAE 17-19), illustrate how he would eventually exploit this aspect of printmaking and manipulate lithography in provocative ways. All the images of the portfolios were made from the same stone, erased and reworked after each number was printed. On one proof, Johns bracketed areas in the background in crayon and wrote "hold" to instruct the printers to reserve this part of the stone's history for the next numeral.<sup>4</sup>

Johns has referred to the working proofs as "thoughts, experiments, and asides" that occurred during the working process.<sup>5</sup> The first work for which the evolution can be traced through an extensive body of such "thoughts" is his celebrated 1964 lithograph *Ale Cans*. No preliminary drawings exist for this image, making the working proofs the only clues to its progressive development.

*Ale Cans* is Johns's first print depicting one of his sculptures—the 1960 *Painted Bronze*. The proofs illustrate his struggle with the illusionistic questions involved in the translation of a three-dimensional object to a two-dimensional surface. Although a precise order of the proofs is difficult to determine, progressions of details help to establish their sequence. The first working

proof (fig. 1), printed on newsprint, reveals that the black background was an early decision. The background is the only printed element in this proof; the areas for the cans and base are left blank, with crayon additions loosely defining their form.

Johns has said that the dark background was important as a means to



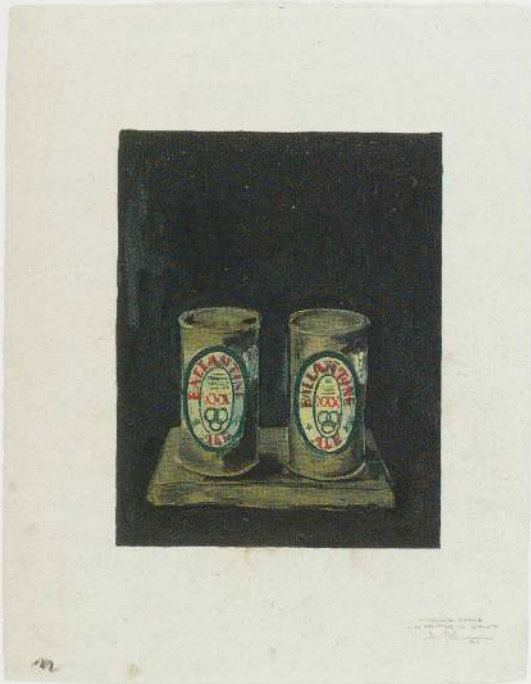
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Fig. 1. Working proof for *Ale Cans*. 1964. Lithograph with crayon additions, sheet: 26  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 20  $\frac{5}{8}$ " (67.5 x 52.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist in honor of Tatyana Grosman  
Cover: *Ale Cans*. West Islip, New York: Universal Limited Art Editions, 1964. Lithograph, sheet: 22  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 17  $\frac{3}{4}$ " (58.1 x 45.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the Celeste and Armand Bartos Foundation

flatten out the spatial depth.<sup>6</sup> It also provides a dark, somber context for the sculpture, one which intensifies its melancholic spirit. The crayon scribble over the outline of the left can serves as an early indication of the pictorial devices Johns would use to define the rounded cans.

The second working proof (fig. 2), hand-painted with gouache and acrylic paints mixed with metallic powders, is the most illusionistic. It is the black back-

ground alone that flattens the space of this painterly perspectival replication of the sculpture. As in the first proof, only the background is printed, indicating an early stage in the progression of proofs. Now, it is heavily painted over with black and gray gouache. The



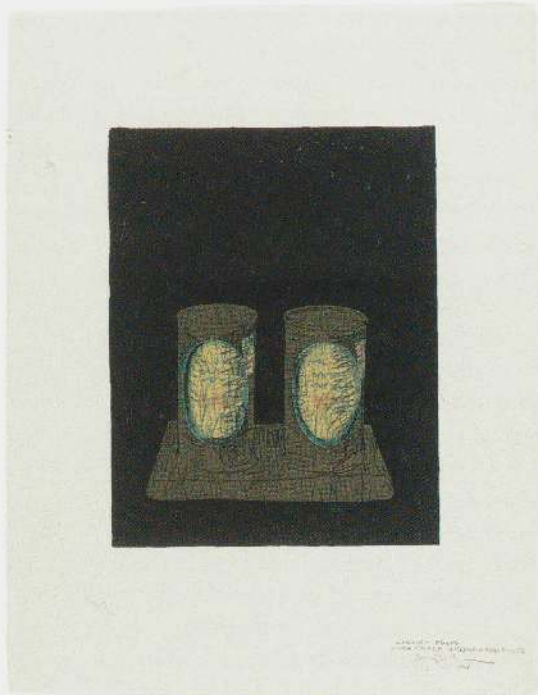
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Figs. 2–4. **Working proofs for Ale Cans.** 1964. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist in honor of Tatyana Grosman

Fig. 2. Lithograph with paint additions, sheet: 22 $\frac{1}{16}$ " x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (57.4 x 44.8 cm)

Fig. 3. Lithograph with chalk and crayon additions, sheet: 22 $\frac{13}{16}$ " x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (58.0 x 45.1 cm)

Fig. 4. Lithograph with ink and crayon additions, sheet: 22 $\frac{5}{8}$ " x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (57.5 x 44.8 cm)

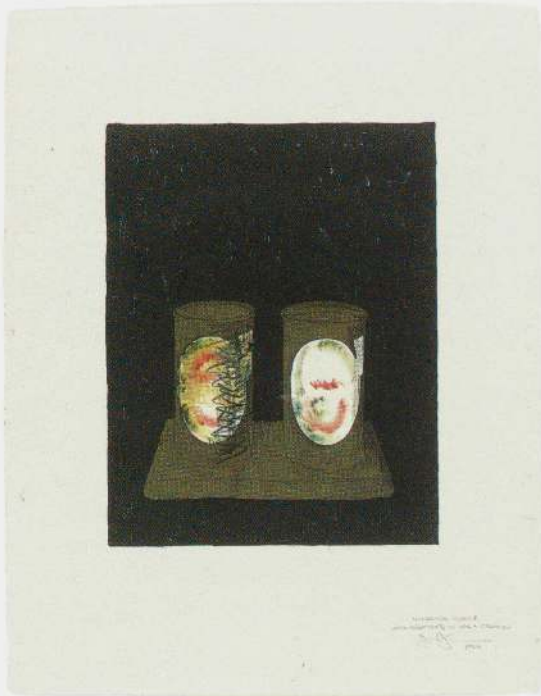


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labels are delicately painted, creating the initial sense of realism. But Johns has painted shadows on the right sides of the cans and base, conveying depth as though the image were lit from the left.<sup>7</sup> These and other corresponding details, such as the holes in the top of one of the cans, contribute to making this proof the most specific tribute to *Painted Bronze*.

In the next two proofs, the realistic depiction of the sculpture has been abandoned in favor of more abstract renderings. Shadows have been eliminated and the labels merely sketched in. Johns has always

been interested in the different surfaces attainable with different mediums, and in the contrast between printed and hand-applied textures; he exploited those contrasts here. The olive cans and base are now printed, and a metallic ink simulates the bronze of



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the sculpture. In the third proof (fig. 3), the ochre label has been applied with crayon, as has the red and black scribbling. While no words are decipherable, the scribbling is certainly suggestive of lettering. In the fourth proof (fig. 4), Johns left the label backgrounds blank, allowing the white of the paper to show through and dramatically flattening the cans against the picture plane. He used his fingerprints to crudely indicate color areas on the labels, creating vibrant textural effects and contrasts with the printed surfaces of the cans but undermining a realistic depic-

tion. The right-hand label suggests a mirror, reflecting the left in paler, starker form. *Painted Bronze* is Johns's only sculpture to double an image, and the experiments in this working proof focus on comparing the two labels. This juxtaposition and mirroring of like but dissimilar motifs became an important concern for Johns as he explored his vocabulary of images in changing contexts.<sup>8</sup>

The last working proof in the series is entirely printed, with the exception of the black crayon lines that loosely outline the image. The printed areas here are the same as those in the final, editioned print (cover). Most noticeably, Johns has returned in large part to the dimensional effects of the second proof (fig. 2). The printed labels closely resemble the painted versions of the earlier stage, though here, instead of shadows, Johns drew black lithographic crayon lines to suggest volume. But typical of Johns, every mark of illusionism is countered by its denial. The surrounding rectangle, freely drawn and printed in black, confounds our reading of the cans as volumetric and reinforces the two-dimensionality of the paper. Denying the spatial perspective, Johns created the perceptual ambiguity characteristic of his strongest work. This progression of "experiments and asides" is our first glimpse of Johns's approach to the depiction of a sculptural image on paper and reveals the complex rethinking that distinguishes his working process.

*Ale Cans* is anomalous in Johns's art of the 1960s. Typically in this period, when Johns chose to represent objects, he eschewed a drawn depiction, preferring to affix the object directly to the canvas. In printmaking, this translated into tracing, imprinting, spelling, or photographing the objects. *Pinion*, for example, begun in 1963, incorporates the impression of Johns's own body kneeling on the stone in a sprinter's pose, the name of each body part in stenciled letters, and the first photographic element to appear in his prints: a detail from the 1965 painting *Eddingsville*. The photograph itself had become an object to be included in the

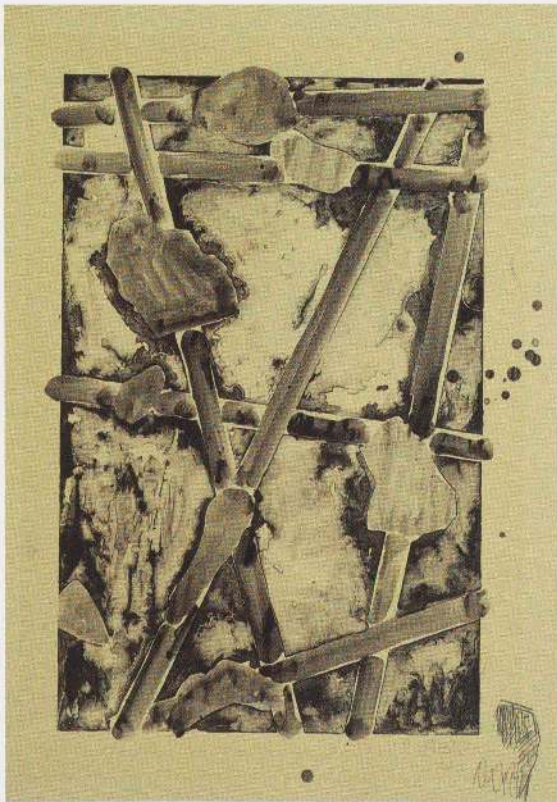
lithograph. In the numerous proofs for this lithograph, Johns experimented with the balance between autographic and photographic elements. This balance became a critical issue with the increasing importance of photography in Johns's prints of the late 1960s and 1970s, as in *Passage I and II* (1966; ULAE 29, 30), *Voice* (1967; ULAE 31), *Decoy* (1971; ULAE 98), and the *Good Time Charley* series (1972; ULAE 103–18).

In *Four Panels from Untitled 1972* (1973–74), one of Johns's most structurally and conceptually intricate prints, the fourth panel hinges on the interaction between autographic textures and photographic replications. The print is based on *Untitled* (1972), a four-panel painting containing Johns's first cross-hatch motif. One panel of the painting is an overall cross-hatching pattern in secondary colors, and two are bold red, white, and black flagstone designs—all three seemingly abstract in appearance. The startling fourth panel has seven wood stretcher bars, each with a wax cast of a body part affixed to it, crisscrossing over a subdued brown background.<sup>9</sup> This complex and disjointed work inspired five drawings and over fifty prints.

Johns began working on the prints within a year after the painting, and they remained the focus of his printmaking for the next three years.<sup>10</sup> In the course of his work on the large four-part lithograph, he completed two prints of the fourth panel alone, as well as a series of seven lithographs of the individual body casts from the fourth panel.<sup>11</sup> The *Casts* panel was the locus of Johns's reexamination of the painting, and thirty working and trial proofs exist for its corresponding panel in the lithograph, more than for any other print in his career. A close analysis reveals Johns's efforts to establish a balance between the components of the panel itself—casts, bars, and background—and its overall integration with the other panels of flat, abstract design. The contrasts between the textures and colors of the photographic casts, the wood slats, and the background occupied Johns through most of

the progression of proofs as he experiments with a spectrum of reversals and figure-ground relationships.

There is an overall stasis in a beautiful and fluid early working proof on newsprint (fig. 5). In it, Johns has printed a mottled tusche background.<sup>12</sup> The wood slats and body casts are hand-drawn, also in tusche. The casts seem to float in a liquid environment created



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Figs. 5–7. **Proofs for *Four Panels from Untitled 1972***. 1973. Collection the artist

Fig. 5. **Working proof 2D**. Lithograph with tusche additions, sheet: 46 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 32 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (117.9 x 83.5 cm)

Fig. 6. **Trial proof 5D**. Lithograph, sheet: 42 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 29 <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (108.3 x 76.0 cm)

Fig. 7. **Working proof 10D**. Lithograph with chalk, crayon, and paint additions, sheet: 42 <sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 29 <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (108.4 x 76 cm)

by the unified tonalities of the brown paper and watery medium. To avoid drawing the casts, as he had for the individual *Casts from Untitled*, Johns decided to photo-

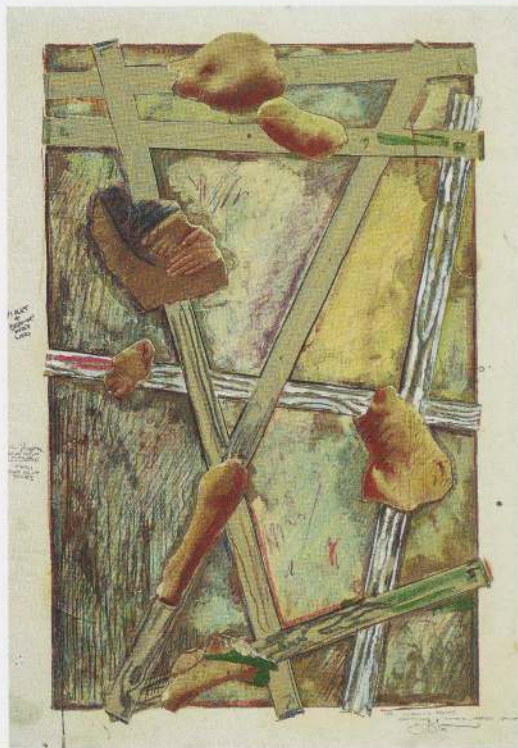


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graph the *Casts* panel of the painting. The photographic element could then be treated as an object on its own and manipulated.

In an early trial proof (fig. 6), Johns attempted to unify the composition with linear patterns, black scribbles on the background, and a wood grain for the slats. Tones of brown and black predominate in this version. The casts are now dramatically printed with dark shadows, reminiscent of old photographs and in stark contrast with the autographic style of the background. This highly romantic treatment of the casts does not appear in any of the later proofs.

One of Johns's next experiments, a heavily over-drawn working proof with chalk, crayon, and paint additions (fig. 7), focuses on subtle spatial effects and



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color. Indications of these interests appear in a margin notation: "Violet and orange under wood." Background, slats, and casts are printed in near tones of brown and gray. But for the first time, the wood slats are not uniform. Johns has highlighted two of the slats with white paint, creating a layered sense of shallow space as they now more clearly pass under the other bars. In addition, their cross format, with face and torso attached, intensifies the allusion to a crucifixion, already implicit in the motif of the body on wood boards.<sup>13</sup> Johns covered the background quadrants of this proof in chalk passages of yellow, violet, and blue-





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green diagonal strokes, and added strong color outlines along the slats. Here, his experimentation has led to a jigsaw puzzle effect in the background; colored segments, the yellow in particular, jump out and confuse the spatial coherence. The idea of segments of varied color does not occur again after this sensuous proof.

The next working proof (fig. 8) introduces a new background plate, covering the quadrants between the slats with tonal rather than linear passages. Johns's interest in tonal reversals is apparent as he first attempts this version, creating a dark background and light slats, only to reverse the contrast in the next, where the slats are now black and the background is a

light brown. Roughly drawn shadows on the casts flatten out their illusionistic tendencies and contribute to a sense of overall pattern. Color has been restricted largely to the markings on the slats.

The dialogue between positive and negative areas continues in later proofs. Johns then tried another background plate, this time spraying the plate with tusche resulting in a less dense and more porous sur-



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Fig. 8. Working proof 11D for *Four Panels from Untitled 1972*. 1973. Lithograph with chalk and crayon additions, sheet: 42 $\frac{11}{16}$  x 29 $\frac{13}{16}$ " (108.5 x 76 cm). Collection the artist

Fig. 9. *Four Panels from Untitled 1972* (panel D). 1973-74. Los Angeles: Gemini G.E.L., 1974. Lithograph with embossing on four sheets, each sheet approx.: 40 x 28 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (101.6 x 72.4 cm). Collection the artist

face. In the final print (fig. 9), he also minimized the range of textures, substituting a washy, brushed effect for the wood grain. Color subtly invades the background in sprayed areas of red in the center, blue in the upper right, and yellow in the lower left. In a late proof, he printed the slats in black, only to reject the high contrast in favor of a light, subdued brown, closer to the tones of the casts and background, for the editioned print. The gray body casts bring little attention to themselves, almost blending into the wood slats; only non-body attributes such as the sock and the shoes on the feet are printed in color. Subtleties predominate, and contrasts are softened in the final print. The casts seem to float, like the flagstones, across the surface. The "thoughts, experiments, and asides" that Johns created in the course of the resolution of this complex and disturbing image are evidence of a process involving trials and reversals, positives and negatives, and a continual questioning of ways of imagemaking.

In the 1970s, Johns mastered the mediums of aquatint and screenprint.<sup>14</sup> He explored the former in the illustrated book *Foirades/Fizzles* (1976; ULAE 173) by Samuel Beckett, a scrutinizing exegesis on the untitled four-panel painting of 1972. Initially, he was wary of etching techniques including aquatint, because he felt he could not control their sensuous textures. However, working in 1975–76 in Paris on *Foirades/Fizzles* with Aldo Crommelynck, a renowned master etching printer, Johns learned to manipulate the tonal range and textural qualities available in aquatint.<sup>15</sup>

These skills were instrumental in the creation of an extraordinary group of etchings, beginning with *Land's End* in 1978 (fig. 11), in which Johns reworked, reoriented, and recombined three copper plates over a period of fourteen years. In etching, in particular, the history of an image's creation can be carried in the plate from one work to the next, making it a perfect vehicle for Johns's fascination with visual memory. "For me," Johns has said, "the most interesting thing

about etching, is the ability of the copper plate to store multiple layers of information. One can work in one way on a plate, later work in another way, and the print can show these different times in one moment."<sup>16</sup> This technical facility also appealed to Johns's interest in memory and reflection, ideas that resurface throughout the *Land's End* images.

The composition of the 1978 etching is based on a haunting, dark blue-gray painting of 1963. Fifteen years later, Johns transformed the image into a light, airy, and colorful etched version. Although closely replicating certain aspects of the painting, even the direction of a brushstroke in some areas, he removed its ominous sense of a drowning figure. The handprint used in both versions appears lost and helpless in the larger painted work; in the print, it becomes a commanding authorial mark. The print also represents a color version of the dark, nearly monochromatic painting, a common translation for Johns—as if the overall heavy blue-gray paint had been lifted to reveal the white background in the print.<sup>17</sup> The color words and their reflections now dominate the composition and shimmer on the surface, enlivened by the black and color scribbled lines. There are numerous allusions to water in the painting—from the title to the drowning arm—which reinforce the idea of reflection. The puddling aqueous surface of a 1977 *Land's End* drawing in ink and watercolor also suggests this interpretation.

In the ethereal working proof with crayon additions (fig. 10), Johns outlined the major compositional elements in black etching with a bamboo pen. He used lift-ground etching techniques, in which the artist draws directly on the plate, to achieve the fluidity of lines seen here. Johns added crayon to determine the colors of the aquatint areas in the edition.

Johns used three copper plates to make *Land's End*, one for the black elements and two for the color. In a tour de force on the theme of visual memory, he reworked each of the plates, imparting new contexts to each. Most simply, in 1979 he reworked the black plate

and editioned *Land's End II* (ULAE 205), a dizzying, Pollock-like overall surface from which the handprint emerges. In this graphic representation, nearly all the

elements are subsumed in the pattern of lines. The shallow sense of space, created by the letters passing under and over the arm, the "device circle,"<sup>18</sup> and the



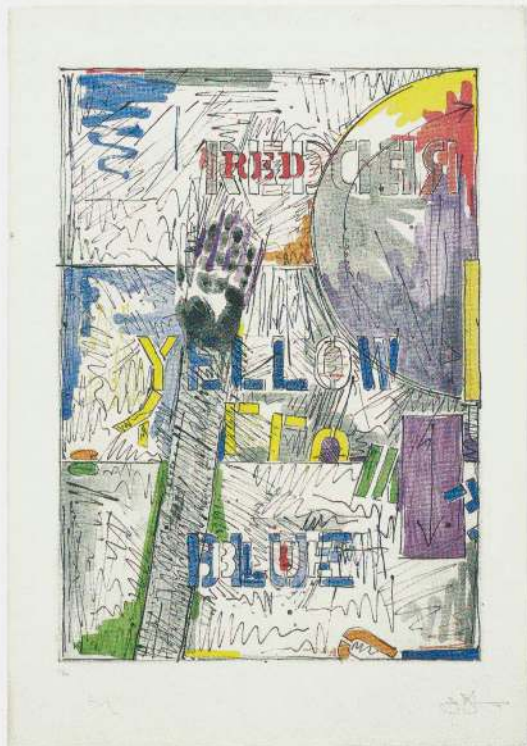
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Fig. 10. **Working proof for *Land's End***. 1978. Lift-ground aquatint and drypoint with crayon additions, sheet: 36 x 24  $\frac{5}{16}$ " (91.5 x 61.7 cm). Collection the artist

Fig. 11. ***Land's End***. London and New York: Petersburg Press, 1979 (dated 1978). Lift-ground aquatint, spit bite, and drypoint, sheet: 42 x 29  $\frac{1}{2}$ " (106.7 x 74.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Elinor and Edmund Grasheim

Fig. 12. **Working proof (2nd state) for *Untitled (Blue)***. 1982. Lift-ground aquatint and spit bite with tusche additions, sheet: 41  $\frac{7}{16}$  x 29  $\frac{7}{16}$ " (105.2 x 74.8 cm). Collection the artist

Fig. 13. ***Untitled (Blue)***. London and New York: Petersburg Press, 1982. Lift-ground aquatint and spit bite, sheet: 42  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 29  $\frac{3}{4}$ " (107 x 75.5 cm). Collection the artist

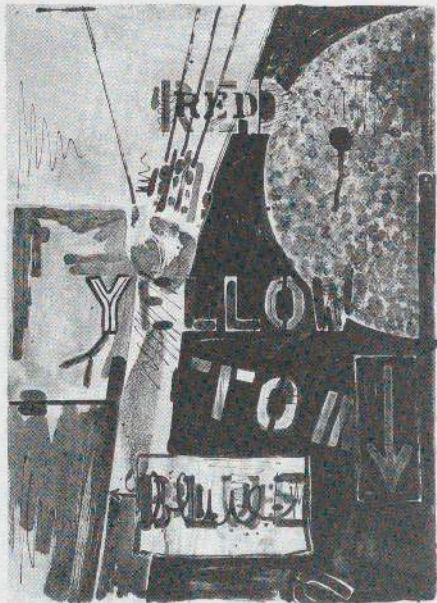


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horizontal grid line, seems further compressed without the color.

Comparable to Johns's expansive and imaginative approach to lithography, he reworked all three of the *Land's End* etching plates and used them as the foundation for a set of three prints published in 1982, *Untitled (Red)*, *Untitled (Yellow)*, and *Untitled (Blue)* (ULAE 224, 225, and 226, respectively). Johns added a new plate of flat color for each print and combined it with one from *Land's End*. Each was printed in the muted monochrome colors of their titles. The set

reflects his increasing interest in patterning and texture in these years, and is dominated by motifs of repeated circles and handprints. The allusions to water are faint remembrances and, while knowledge of the earlier prints is not essential for the appreciation of the new set, the viewer's awareness of *Land's End* focuses attention on the issues of memory and reflection that Johns explored in these works.



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For *Untitled (Red)*, he rotated one of the 1978 plates 180 degrees—a type of reflection—before reworking it. The device circle now appears in the lower left, filled with rows of small circles. Johns's handprints enliven the surface. In *Untitled (Yellow)*, the pattern of circles spreads over the entire sheet,

with *Land's End II* visible underneath. A new, extended arm reflects the *Land's End* arm seen below the constellation of circles.<sup>19</sup>

*Untitled (Blue)* (fig. 13) is the most similar in composition to *Land's End*; the lettering, device circle, armprint, and much of the background brushwork from the 1978 plate remain. In the working proof with tusche additions (fig. 12), the most obvious changes



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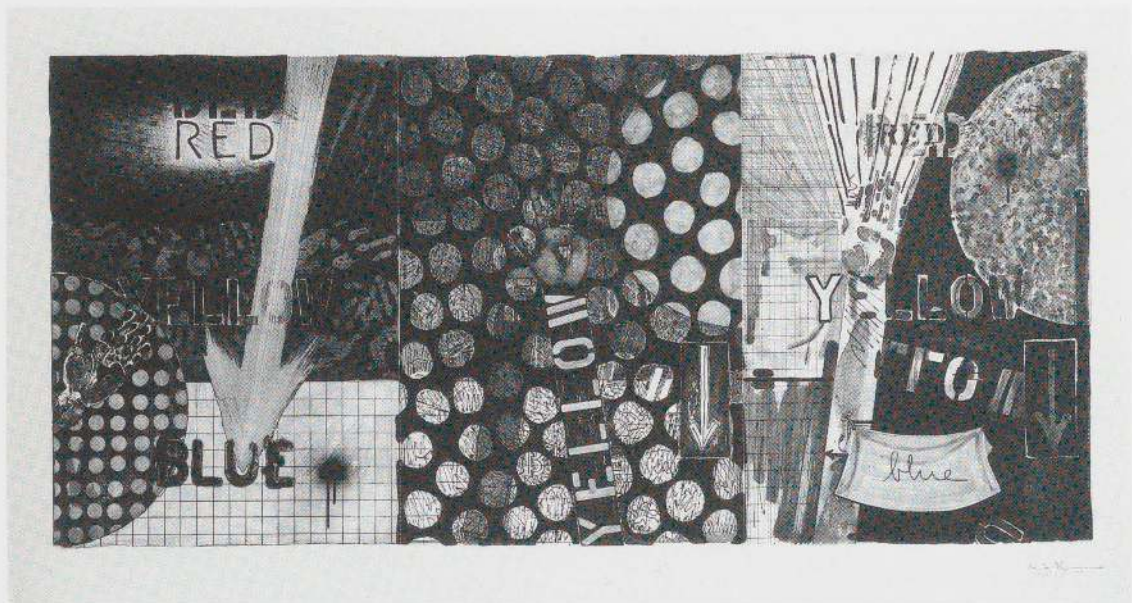
are already apparent; Johns vertically bisected the image into light and dark halves by extending the fingers with a fan of lines and printing the right side with a dark wash background. He experimented with the important "BLUE" title lettering, isolated now on a white rectangle. Negative/positive relationships are

intensified by Johns having printed the letters as dark on light on dark. Playing with the spatial ambiguities, he wrote "BLUE" three times, each on a different plane, and added a cursive script in tusche on top of the double stencil letters from *Land's End*.

In the final print, the white rectangle has become a trompe-l'oeil handkerchief nailed to the background, reminiscent of the Cubist works Johns was looking at in this period. The cursive "blue" appears with only a shadow of the previous stencil form visible underneath, a subtle reminder of the plate's history. The pun of printing the word "blue," meaning sad, on a handkerchief as a Veronica's veil, is typical of Johns's preoccupa-

tion with the changing meaning of language in changing contexts.<sup>20</sup>

In 1984, in an unusual twist, Johns made a painting on three panels following these three prints, rather than preceding them.<sup>21</sup> Not unlike the translation from the painted *Land's End* to the etched version, Johns traced some of his aquatint strokes almost precisely in the painting's encaustic surface.<sup>22</sup> In 1991, Crommelynck brought the copper plates for the *Untitled (Red)*, *(Yellow)*, and *(Blue)* prints to New York to ask Johns if he wanted to cancel them. It is customary to deface the plates and stones used in the creation of a print after the edition is printed to



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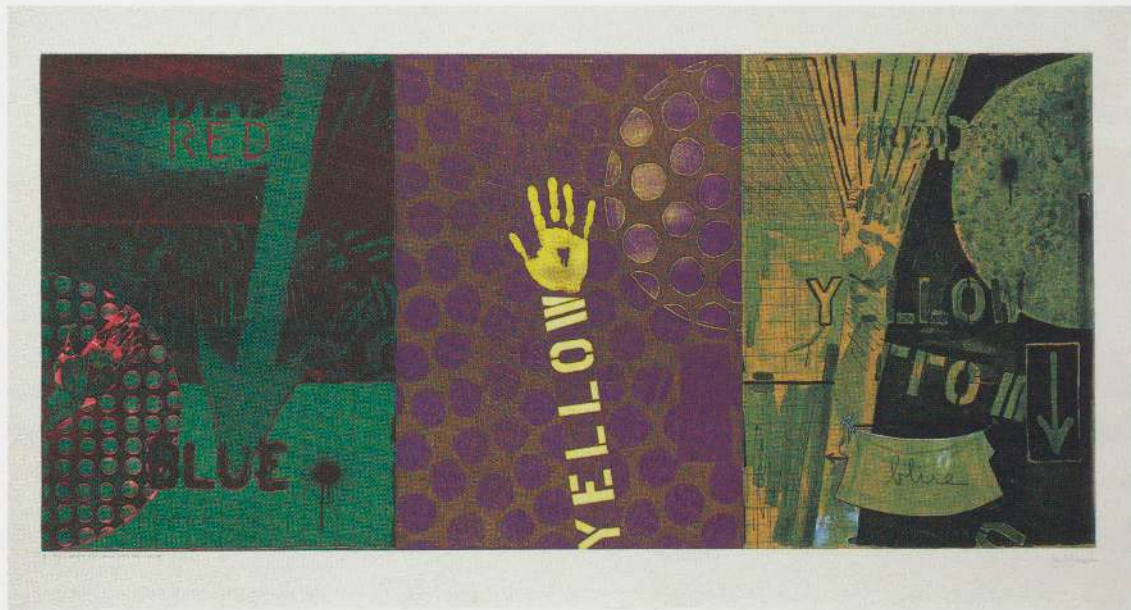
Fig. 14. *Untitled*. West Islip, New York: Universal Limited Art Editions, 1991. Lift-ground aquatint, soft-ground etching, spit bite, and drypoint, sheet: 41  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 78" (106.4 x 198.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Emily Fisher Landau

Fig. 15. Trial proof (primaries with secondaries) for *Untitled*. 1991. Lift-ground aquatint, soft-ground etching, spit bite, and drypoint, sheet: 42  $\frac{3}{16}$  x 77  $\frac{13}{16}$ " (107.2 x 197.7 cm). Collection the artist

ensure no unauthorized proofs. Johns has resisted doing this to be able to recycle his images in later works. In keeping with this practice, instead of destroying the plates that Crommelynck brought to him, Johns returned to them once again for further elaboration, deciding to print all three abutting on one sheet.<sup>23</sup>

Unifying this monumental image was a challenge. For the 1991 untitled print (fig. 14), Johns printed the entire image in black and added an overall grid.<sup>24</sup> He also emphasized the horizontal divisions of density, shade, and surface as the eye moves up the image. The

arm on the right balances the prominent downward arrow from the *Untitled (Red)* plate on the left (suggested from its rotation of the original *Land's End* plate). The two arms in the central panel are a rotated reflection of the mirrored "YELLOW" in the right panel.



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staggering patterning of grids, circles, and handprints, and the cacophony of ruled, imprinted, scribbled, brushed, and dripped marks is more intense than in any earlier printed work.<sup>25</sup> The device circle in each panel is highlighted with surface effects. These textures are compounded by the handprints at left and the overall circle pattern of the center panel. The sense of layering and space from the earlier plates is intensified and here proceeds from shallowest to deepest across the panels, as flattening devices such as palm imprints and drips characterize the left panel and perspectival space is suggested by the grid in the right panel.

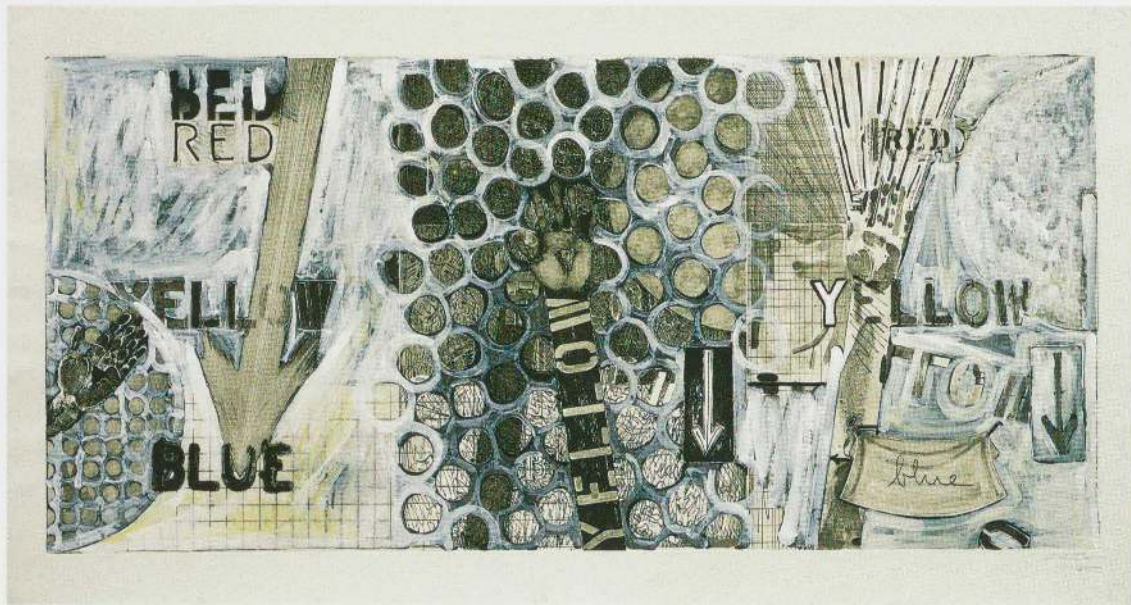
A myriad of reflections and rotations bounce across all three panels, providing a subtle cohesive glue. The

The "RED" at the upper left now appears twice, the free-hand word reflected in stencil. As in the 1982 set, the panels on either end are revolved images of each other.

Johns's experiments with these plates did not end when the 1991 edition of *Untitled* was complete. He made a set of sixteen dazzling trial proofs, exhausting all of the possible color combinations.<sup>26</sup> In one of the simpler proofs, annotated "Black with Primaries," the black print appears over backgrounds of solid red, yellow, and blue, now brighter than the colors in the 1982 prints.<sup>27</sup> In one of the most striking of the color proofs, marked "Primaries with Secondaries" (fig. 15), the color is rotated: The black of the earlier proof is printed in the primaries and the primaries are printed

in their complements. The reflections of red, yellow, and blue in their complements of green, purple, and orange produce the most extraordinary and electric color anywhere in Johns's printmaking. The images are transformed again as the yellow arm of the central panel thrusts itself at the viewer, and the underlying scribbles, printed in yellow, shoot like sparks from a dramatically lit orb. The large arrow of the left panel recedes in dark green, but neon red flashes out from the device circle. Much of the depth and layering

Johns dissected and rebuilt *Land's End* in these prints, isolating parts and reconfiguring them into new wholes. They are extraordinary examples of the facility of printmaking and its compatibility with Johns's continuous search for alternatives, variations, opposites, negatives, and rotations of his images. He manipulated the three plates from 1978 over a period of fourteen years, adapting them to his latest concerns, compounding them with new possibilities, but always mindful of the history being traced in the copper—



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Fig. 16. Working proof for *Untitled*. 1991–92. Lift-ground aquatint, soft-ground etching, spit bite, and drypoint with paint additions, sheet: 42 3/4 x 77 3/4" (107.3 x 197.5 cm). Collection the artist

apparent in the black edition, however, is obscured. The reflected arm in the central panel is barely visible, and the intriguing spatial planes are compressed. The overall range of tonality, pattern, and texture is also subdued by the color.

a history not visible anywhere else in the complex, provocative, and challenging work of this master artist and printmaker.

An exciting footnote to the story of the *Land's End* plates is in progress. In 1992, Johns overpainted a proof from the 1991 edition with white acrylic (fig. 16). He had used this process of "whiting out" in previous working proofs for black etchings to experiment with areas to be burnished out in later states.<sup>28</sup>

This proof shows a more austere, streamlined version of the three panels. Most of the heavy black areas have been painted over and their textures concealed. The velvety surface of the black aquatint is replaced with the brushwork of the more matte acrylic paint. Johns isolated the words "RED," "YELLOW," and "BLUE" in each panel and emphasized the vertical elements—the arrow in the left panel and the arms of the center and right panels. The white circles in the center section extend left and right, blurring the divisions between the panels.<sup>29</sup> The enormous image appears tighter, more unified, and grander than any of its previous incarnations.

Although no further development of this print exists at the time of this writing, in August of 1996, Johns was shown this unannotated proof and asked why he had embarked on this ambitious work a year after the etching was completed. Had he, in 1992, been contemplating another edition, a further reflection of *Land's End*? Johns then annotated the piece "Working proof with acrylic additions" and revealed that he would now have to return to these plates for this annotation to be correct. Thus, the succession of images that began with a painting in 1963 continues. Johns's contemplation of this may engender another printed rendering, and with it a new succession of accompanying memories.

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#### Notes

Author's note: In writing this article, I have relied on the important scholarship in Christian Geelhaar's catalogue *Jasper Johns: Working Proofs* (Basel: Kunstmuseum, 1980). ULAE numbers accompany titles of prints not illustrated and correspond to numbers in *The Prints of Jasper Johns: 1960-1993: A Catalogue Raisonné* (West Islip, New York: Universal Limited Art Editions, 1994).

1. Quoted in David Sylvester, *Jasper Johns Drawings* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1974), p. 18.

2. Occasionally, a working proof is annotated shortly after it is created "if it has served its purpose in the working procedure and I am sure that I wish to keep it." (Johns in interview with the author, August 20, 1996.)

3. Johns quoted in Joseph E. Young, "Jasper Johns: An Appraisal," *Art International* 13 (September 1969), pp. 50-56.

4. Johns bound ninety-six proofs for the 0-9 portfolios into two volumes to underscore the process that went into their innovative production.

5. Johns in interview with the author, August 20, 1996.

6. Johns in interview with the author, November 6, 1990.

7. The fingerprint on the lower right of the base matches Johns's thumb imprint on the sculpture, indicating its handmade status.

8. See Wendy Weitman, "Jasper Johns: Ale Cans and Art," *Studies in Modern Art* 1 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991), pp. 39-65.

9. Independently, each panel is in disequilibrium, with its component elements—hatches, stones, or bars—veering off in different directions, but the lack of central focus in each panel helps to unify the work as a whole.

10. Johns often explores new themes in his paintings while analyzing and dissecting older ones in his prints.

11. See *Sketch for Untitled I* and *Sketch for Untitled II* (both 1974) and *Casts from Untitled* (1974; ULAE 130-45). Each body cast was editioned in a different color as well as in black.

12. Tusche is the liquid medium used for drawing and painting on lithographic stones or plates.

13. The fragmented body part has been a recurrent motif in Johns's art since the mid-1950s, and is seen in such as works as *Target with Plaster Casts* (1955).

14. The fewest number of working proofs exist for the screenprints. Hiroshi Kawanishi of Simca Print Artists, Inc., the workshop where Johns has made most of his screenprints, suggested that the ease and speed with which changes can be made in this medium may account for the lack of proofs with hand additions. Numerous trial proofs do exist for *Usuyuki* (1981).

15. See Richard Field, "The Making of *Foirades/Fizzles*," in *Foirades/Fizzles: Echo and Allusion in the Art of Jasper Johns* (Los Angeles: UCLA, Wight Art Gallery, 1987), pp. 99-126.

16. Johns quoted in Geelhaar, pp. 37-38.

17. Johns often prints color and black versions of his editions, although the color version usually precedes the black.

18. The semicircle with a ruler as its radius, referred to as "device circle" after a 1959 painting, is meant to imply that the ruler theoretically scraped the arc on the surface.

19. The reflected arms were first seen in the painting *Diver* (1962).

20. Because the plates for his 1982 prints were in Paris and Johns



was in New York, he worked with New York printer Maurice Payne in 1981 on a set of smaller images (ULAE 217, 221–23), printed on individual sheets as well as together on one sheet, to be used as color tests for the Paris edition.

21. *Untitled (Red, Yellow, Blue)* (1984).

22. The central "yellow" panel differs the most because the print's linear background is virtually impossible to emulate in paint. Instead, Johns has painted the background in a pale violet, yellow's complementary reflection.

23. The painted version hung in the artist's home in Saint Martin for many years. On a visit to Saint Martin, architect Philip Johnson, who was designing furniture for the house, moved the three canvases closer together, proposing an even closer installation. Johns maintained this configuration in the 1991 three-panel print. (Johns in interview with the author, August 21, 1996.)

24. Because Aldo Crommelynck did not have a press large enough to print all three plates together, Johns took them to Universal Limited Art Editions. (Johns in interview with the author, August 24, 1996.)

25. These effects appear in his paintings of this period as well, such as *Untitled* (after Holbein; 1990).

26. This extensive set of trial proofs is unusual even for Johns. They were done in preparation for a still unrealized project.

27. If this print is rotated ninety degrees it strikingly resembles his other compositions of red, yellow, and blue horizontal bands, such as *Periscope* (1963).

28. Working proofs for *Foirades/Fizzles* and *The Seasons* (1989; ULAE 247) show extensive use of white acrylic paint.

29. Johns used a similar medium to similar effect in the working proof with paint, ink, and graphite additions for *The Seasons* to blur the distinctions between the four plates.

I am grateful to James Meyer and Sarah Taggart in Jasper Johns's studio for their generosity of time and knowledge in the realization of this exhibition. Bill Goldston, director of Universal Limited Art Editions, provided crucial historical and technical details for which I am most appreciative. I am extremely thankful to Nelson Blitz, Jr., and Catherine Woodard, and to Maria R. Celis-Wirth, who have loaned their artworks so the public may enjoy them in this context.

Without the cooperation of the artist, an exhibition about the creative process would be unthinkable. I owe the greatest debt of gratitude to Jasper Johns for allowing me the privilege of studying his process in printmaking.

—W.W.

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