

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Circle 5-8900 Cable: Modernart

WALL LABEL

LONDON, NEW YORK, HOLLYWOOD: A NEW LOOK IN PRINTS

September 20 - November 6, 1966

The distances between the capitals of the world, particularly its swinging cities, have become short indeed. It is not so uncommon today that artists partake of more than one country. This is particularly true of several British and American painters and sculptors most of whom are relatively young. The American painter Jim Dine and the British painter David Hockney, for instance, live and work with equal facility on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as on the West Coast. For the past ten years the American painter R. B. Kitaj has made London his permanent address. The British painters and sculptors Richard Hamilton, Allen Jones, Eduardo Paolozzi, Peter Phillips and Joe Tilson find inspiration in the architecture of New York and the landscape of Hollywood. The frequency of such exchanges is comparatively recent: the results have been spontaneous, enthusiastic and often witty.

This exhibition consists of the work of fifteen artists, six of whom are British, eight American, and one, a Colombian who lives in New York. Their attitudes are often similar and are sometimes best articulated by their prints, many of which are conceived in series. A larger selection might include artists working in abstract styles; this small exhibition, however, is limited to those who speak in a realistic idiom often accentuated by "pop." Their serigraphs and lithographs look fresh and vigorous. Their iconography frequently derives from the intense and pedestrian, even vulgar, realism of everyday American culture.

To the British the United States may seem more exotic than does England to an American. Richard Hamilton, David Hockney, Eduardo Paolozzi and Joe Tilson celebrate such diverse monuments of Manhattan as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Rainbow Room, the street and stellar attractions of Hollywood and, simply, the American housewife beset by impedimenta.

(more)

128

A decade ago "fine prints" were seldom associated with the avant-garde. Today, however, the example of one of its principal exponents in the United States, Jasper Johns, established a precedent of involvement with printmaking which several artists in London and New York have been quick to follow. They do not seek inspiration in the exalted. They discover truth in the imagery of mass media whose visual language and distribution blatantly or subtly but always constantly assault the eye; in the new folklore of science fiction and comic books; in commercial advertising and trademarks printed and televised; in ordinary and anonymous objects such as book matches and household appurtenances.

The exhibition's subtitle, "a new look in prints," indicates the sometimes unexpected physical appearance of the works themselves as well as the new and different media which have become part of modern printmaking. Today the distinction between sculpture and painting is frequently difficult to determine. This is also true of printmaking which has moved into a third dimension. Several artists, as printmakers, freely employ collage and assemblage, formal elements usually associated with painting and sculpture. Others have been anxious to exploit technological devices perfected by industry. Of these, Robert Rauschenberg's Shades (1964) was perhaps a pioneer effort.

Rauschenberg's Shades, in the far gallery, consists of movable plastic parts, subject to unrestricted rearrangements, and a stationary title plate, contained within an aluminum case and illuminated by an electric light bulb. Each individual plate consists of a lithograph printed on an acetate sheet then laminated to plexiglas. Two other American artists, Claes Oldenburg and Tom Wesselmann have also experimented successfully with impressions on plexiglas and vinyl and the results are often as much sculptural objects as they are multiple prints.

Even when printed on paper some of the prints appear extraordinary. One serigraph by Joe Tilson measures six and one half feet high, another is actually a relief. Two impressions by Omar Rayo are uninked, two lithographs by Allen Jones

(more)

are designed to be folded, four more defy the conventional rectangle of the traditional print. A landscape by Roy Lichtenstein is screened on metallic paper. Jasper Johns startlingly and eloquently employs details of his own anatomy, a foot, a hand and a face. R. B. Kitaj's mysterious incantations reassemble words and pictures into strange densely printed complex patterns and, incidentally, contain references to such notable historical personages as Audubon, Isadora Duncan, Jack London, Claude Monet and Rasputin. David Hockney prints a frame around his pictures of pictures. Photographs, advertisements, words, numbers, bits and fragments of all sorts are stripped from their original context and are redrawn or rearranged. Frequently what the artists print has already been printed. They are not concerned with the chemistry of "fine" printmaking; their primary interest is in the image as it is finally realized.

William S. Lieberman

Note: In the labels to the exhibition the artists are identified by nationality and the prints themselves by the city in which they were made.