

MAJOR SURVEY OF AMERICAN PRINTS MARKS 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF PRINT ROOM

American Prints: 1913-1963, an exhibition of 112 works by more than 80 artists presented on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of The Museum of Modern Art's Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Print Room, will be on view from December 5 through March 3 in the Sachs Galleries (third floor). Directed by Riva Castleman, Curator of Prints and Illustrated Books, assisted by Alexandra Schwartz, Curatorial Assistant, this exhibition, selected entirely from the Museum's collections, is the first historical survey of American prints held at the Museum in 15 years.

The exhibition begins with the year of the Armory Show, which included such disparate American artists as realists George Bellows and John Sloan, the more radical Arthur B. Davies and Walt Kuhn, and modernists such as John Marin; all five are included in this survey. While Impressionism and Cubism influenced many American artists during the teens and 20s, individual styles such as those of Edward Hopper and Charles Sheeler persisted. In the 1930s the abstractions of Stuart Davis contrasted with the Social Realism of Grant Wood, Reginald Marsh and Thomas Hart Benton and his student Jackson Pollock, while at the same time Josef Albers was introducing Americans to Bauhaus ideas. The influx of Surrealists during World War II had a strong effect on American artists and helped lead to the development of Abstract Expressionism.

During the 1930s printmaking groups arose which experimented with new techniques such as serigraphy, with Ben Shahn one of its leading practitioners. Stanley William Hayter, a World War II refugee, brought his new methods of intaglio printing (engraving, etching, etc.) to this country. A renewed interest in the work of the German Expressionists was reflected in the large woodcuts of Leonard Baskin. The unwillingness of Abstract Expressionists to work in copper plate or wood block led to the opening of lithography workshops for their use. June Wayne and Tatyana Grosman offered the resources of their workshops to artists such as Louise Nevelson, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg.

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"While the choice of any fifty-year period is an arbitrary one," according to Ms. Castleman, "beginning a survey of modern printmaking in America in 1913 has some historical precedent. Five decades after the Armory Show American artists had changed the direction of influence; their work was exhibited and sold in Europe, and many European artists had begun to react."

The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Print Room, the first study room for modern prints in the world, was founded in 1949. Mrs. Rockefeller began to purchase prints in 1927 and by the early 1930s was collecting with the Museum in mind. Space for a print room was part of the plan of the Museum's new building opened in 1939. Due to the war and other, more pressing needs for the designated area, the Print Room did not open until 1949, a year after Mrs. Rockefeller's death.

In addition to housing material from which exhibitions are selected, the Print Room and its resources--11,000 prints, illustrated books, portfolios, original blocks, plates and stones, as well as documentary materials, catalogs, technical books and periodicals--are available to the public for study by appointment. The Print Room is visited by artists, students, book editors, authors, professional printers, and other interested people.

The Museum also hosted, in connection with the 25th anniversary, a one-day symposium titled American Prints: 1913-1963, on December 3, featuring two panel discussions and a buffet luncheon at which William S. Lieberman, Director of Drawings and former Curator of Prints, spoke to the guests.

The Museum of Modern Art gratefully acknowledges the support of its exhibition program by the New York State Council on the Arts.

Additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Mark Segal, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. Phone (212) 956 - 7501, -7296.