

The Museum of Modern Art

50th Anniversary



NO. 11
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRINTED ART: A VIEW OF TWO DECADES SURVEYS IMPORTANT AREA OF CONTEMPORARY ART

The past twenty years have been unprecedented in the production of fine prints and other printed matter by leading artists. The printed image seems ubiquitous in contemporary art and, indeed, the very definition of art today often appears to derive from the communicative possibilities inherent in the print mediums. PRINTED ART: A VIEW OF TWO DECADES, a major 50th Anniversary exhibition of The Museum of Modern Art, surveys this renaissance in printmaking: from Pop and Minimal Art to the ephemeral booklets and periodicals of the Conceptualists; from established masters to emerging talents. Directed by Riva Castleman, Director of the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, PRINTED ART, the first full-scale survey of contemporary prints at the Museum since the influential 1964 exhibition Contemporary Painters and Sculptors as Printmakers, includes more than 175 artists from Eastern and Western Europe, North and South America, and Japan.

PRINTED ART: A VIEW OF TWO DECADES has been made possible through a grant from the McGraw-Hill Foundation, Inc. On the occasion of the exhibition, The Museum of Modern Art is publishing an illustrated catalogue by Ms. Castleman.* In addition, six leading artists will discuss their work in different print mediums at 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday evening, February 26 (Mel Bochner, Chuck Close, and Joyce Kozloff) and March 11, (Ed Ruscha, Richard Artschwager, and Alex Katz). On Monday, March 17, at 7:30 p.m., the Museum's Junior Council will present a discussion by artists on books by artists. Moderator for this Artists' Forum will be Ingrid Sischy, Editor of Artforum and former Director of Printed Matter.

* Printed Art: A View of Two Decades. Riva Castleman. 144 pages; 105 illustrations (15 color). \$16.50 hardbound; \$9.95 paperbound. Published and distributed by The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

"A great part of the creative activity of this era has been directed toward the widespread communication that prints make possible," observes Ms. Castleman. The first great swell of activity came in the early 1960s with Pop Art. "If the fifties were a period of discovery, the sixties were one of explosive development. By the early sixties, Pop Art, the controversial style with subjects too familiar and banal to be taken seriously, had a large enough audience to encourage its most important practitioners to make prints." Perhaps foremost among these was Andy Warhol, whose 1962 Marilyn Monroe Diptych is on view. For the most part, the Pop artists derived their subjects from printed mass imagery, and silkscreen appropriately became their preferred medium. Pop and Pop-related artists featured in the exhibition include Allan D'Arcangelo, Robert Indiana (Love), Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, and Tom Wesselman. The impact of popular culture and the seeming impersonality of the silkscreen process is also evident in the work of a number of European and British artists included in the exhibition, among them Patrick Caulfield, Oyvind Fahlstrom, Richard Hamilton, Alain Jacquet, R.B. Kitaj, Eduardo Paolozzi, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Joe Tilson, and Wolf Vostell.

During the 1960s, however, most artists continued to work in the more traditional and complex medium of lithography. As Ms. Castleman observes, "The revival of lithography in America that preceded the silkscreen revolution continued to influence the way art was printed for the entire decade of the sixties and longer." With the encouragement of such lithography workshops as Tatyana Grosman's Universal Limited Art Editions on Long Island, and the Tamarind Workshop and Gemini G.E.L. in Los Angeles, artists such as Josef Albers, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Jim Dine, Ellsworth Kelly and Helen Frankenthaler, among others, became part of a veritable explosion of printmaking activity. They extended the size of prints, experimented

with commercial techniques and machinery, and led printers to scientifically study and improve their materials. The intaglio techniques--etching, engraving, aquatint, etc.--continued to be practiced in the 1960s, more in Europe than in America, however. Such works by Lucio Fontana, David Hockney, Picasso, and Miró, to name but four, are included in the exhibition. Among Americans, Barnett Newman and the Minimalists Sol LeWitt and Robert Ryman are especially notable for their use of etching and aquatint. Exponent of a new attitude toward the intaglio process, Sol LeWitt (Lines from Sides, Corners and Center) "sought clarity and precision in a medium that had so frequently been the vehicle for a looser, more casual execution."

"Printmaking became a major component in artistic expression of the sixties and seventies because artists could find in the various media, and their work in them, the solutions to problems of form, color, meaning, and all the elements that make up the composite of subject and style that is art," notes Ms. Castleman, underscoring the central importance of printmaking to the art of the 1960s and 1970s. Printmaking not only brought about advances in technique, but provoked a reassessment of art's social purposes as well. This was especially true during the politically and socially tumultuous period of the late sixties and early seventies. The atmosphere of protest increased the need to communicate widely, so artists flocked to the presses.

Throughout the seventies, artists pursued printmaking with the same energy, imagination and seriousness once given to unique works. One important trend in art favored presenting information solely through signs and language, and prints composed of words alone soon became acceptable as art. Ms. Castleman: "Having substituted real objects for their illusory painted counterparts in the 1950s, the artists in the 1960s set about examining the elements that made up a work of art. Conceptual artists approached the question of art process by

electing language over customary visual forms.... While Conceptual artists preferred to conjure up the visible by means of the idea, they often presented such ideas in formats that were as fascinating as the ideas." On view in the exhibition will be conceptually oriented prints by Art-Language (Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin), Joseph Beuys, Mel Bochner, Marcel Broodthaers, On Kawara, and Les Levine, among others. Also to be seen are such powerful and politically concerned works as Richard Hamilton's Kent State, a silkscreen made from photographs of a TV broadcast of the 1970 tragedy, and Robert Filliou's 7 Child-like Uses of Warlike Material of 1970.

Similarly, there developed in the early seventies, parallel to the finely printed, limited edition silkscreen or lithograph (whether of the "high art" or the "anti-art" variety) meant to be displayed on a wall, a more ephemeral printed art in the form of booklets, packages of printed papers, periodicals and posters. This diverse area of printed work often replaced all other tangible creations of artists: a Conceptual artist could present a permanent document of an idea or action without offering it as a completed project. Some works of art were created in places so remote that the print media became the only connection an artist could establish with an audience. Thus, the burgeoning phenomenon of "artists' books" became one of the most active and fruitful areas of activity in the 1970s, one that continues to grow and to influence the youngest generations of contemporary artists. PRINTED ART presents a very wide selection of books, broadsides and postcards, by artists including Vito Acconci, Laurie Anderson, John Baldessari, Bernhard and Hilla Becher, Ben, Christian Boltanski, Marcel Broodthaers, Stanley Brouwn, Daniel Buren, Victor Burgin, John Cage, Hanne Darboven, Peter Downsborough, Hamish Fulton, Gilbert and George, Dan Graham, Richard Higgins, Alison Knowles, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long, Gordon Matta-Clark, Annette Messenger, A.R. Penck, Dieter Roth, Allen

Ruppersberg, Ed Ruscha, Michael Snow, Bernar Venet, and Lawrence Weiner, among many others.

"The use of the photographic image has been a sort of 'basso continuo'" in the printed art of the past two decades, Ms. Castleman believes. Beginning with Pop Art, "photographically induced imagery (along with the techniques that the artist has had available to transform it into mechanically printed form) has been a dominant factor in this period, manifested in large scale prints and intimate bookworks." As seen in the exhibition in the work of such artists as Robert Rauschenberg (Preview from the "Hoarfrost" series), R.B. Kitaj (In Our Time), many of the makers of artists' books, and such Photo-Realists as Chuck Close (Keith) and Richard Estes (from his portfolio "Urban Landscapes No. 2"), to name but a few, the transformation of the photographic, filmed, or video image into a human-designed image is a basic element in the printed art of our time.

"More than just printed souvenirs of the major stylistic movements of the last decades, the prints of Pop, Op, Minimal, Conceptual, Photo-Realist, and recent figurative artists are of major significance in the understanding of the art of our time," Riva Castleman writes in her Preface to the exhibition catalogue, emphasizing the importance of this survey of prints for a broader understanding of all the visual arts of our day. "Printed art produced by most contemporary artists is an integral part of their creative activity and represents a fundamental aspect of artistic endeavor during the past twenty years."

The Museum's overall exhibition program is supported in part with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts.

January 1980

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