

The Museum of Modern Art

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DUBUFFET PRINTS FROM THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

March 5 - April 23, 1989
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

Seventy printed works by the renowned French artist Jean Dubuffet (1901 - 1985), selected from The Museum of Modern Art's complete holdings of his graphics, are presented in a retrospective exhibition at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and five other American museums. Opening on March 5 in Fort Worth, the exhibition is organized by Audrey Isselbacher, associate curator, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and James Fisher, curator of prints, the Modern Art Museum, Fort Worth.

One of the most original artists to emerge in Europe after World War II, Dubuffet developed an extraordinary style based on his fascination with the art of the insane (L'Art Brut) and an unconventional belief that "nothing is ugly." Although he was a painter, sculptor, draughtsman, and writer, Dubuffet gave intense concentration to printmaking, an effort rivaled in this century only by Pablo Picasso. Dubuffet created more than 600 prints, primarily exploring the compositional and textural possibilities of lithography.

The exhibition includes prints in various mediums from all periods of Dubuffet's prolific career, with emphasis on his innovative experiments in lithography--experiments that redefined an artist's role in the printmaking workshop. Works from over thirty-five years of Dubuffet's printmaking illustrate his close integration of process and content, and his ambiguous,

invented environments based on natural phenomena. Several original maquettes for Dubuffet's lithograph "assemblages" of the sixties are also on view.

The artist's inquiry into printmaking culminated between 1957 and 1962 with the execution of his Phenomena prints, which constituted a quest to create prints without, in his words, "ever touching a brush." In this extensive series, the artist built up a large inventory of lithographic images, created by collecting impressions directly from natural sources--rocks, an orange peel, a friend's back--or producing chemical reactions on the plate. The images were cut up, recomposed, and then transferred to a collection of master plates. The Phenomena eventually comprised 362 prints grouped in twenty-four albums, which were used and reused in other works through the sixties. Among the nine prints on view from the series are Rock Foam, from the portfolio Water, Stones, Sand, 1959, and Scintillation from the portfolio Geography, 1960.

A selection of works created in the thirteen years preceding The Phenomena are also presented. The prints range from Dubuffet's first enthusiastic attempt at lithography, Landscape with Onlooker, 1944, to his first use of assemblaged imprints. In Landscape with Bulldog, 1953, from the period Incursion of Botany into Lithography, the artist explores the use of accidental forms to suggest recognizable images.

Dubuffet's method of creating lithographs by transfers of assemblages, which he perfected in the sixties, is further demonstrated in the exhibition by two collaged maquettes for the prints of The Sleepwalker and Man in a Hat, both 1961. A selection of progressive color proofs used in the production of Figure in Red, 1961, along with the published version of the work, show how the artist combined cut-up Phenomena lithographs with new plates containing figurative elements.

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The exhibition also contains a selection of Dubuffet's silkscreens made in the seventies after the artist invented a new pictorial vocabulary he made from ballpoint pen doodlings and called "hourloupe." Dubuffet considered silkscreen a more accurate conveyor of the sharp, crisp, linear tracings and flat interlocking forms, which camouflaged depictions of everyday objects.

During his last years, Dubuffet's style underwent an aesthetic reversal. The silkscreen, Memorable Facts III, 1978, is an assemblage of more gestural scribbles, broad areas of color, in combination with self-contained "hourloupian" units. In the latest work in the exhibition, the 1982 lithograph, Passers-by, Dubuffet renounced assemblage in favor of the most basic lithographic technique, direct manual drawing. He is also the author of

After its showing in Fort Worth, DUBUFFET PRINTS FROM THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART travels to the Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi (June 2 - July 16, 1989); The William Benton Museum of Art, Storrs, Connecticut (October 22 - December 22, 1989); The Detroit Institute of Arts (March - May 1990); Krannert Art Museum, Champaign, Illinois (August 24 - October 7, 1990); and the Cincinnati Art Museum (November 2, 1990 - January 6, 1991). He has served as

contributing editor to Artforum * * * Artforum International for several years.

His other publication credits include a critical introduction to Hugo Ball's The Flight Out of Time and The Cut-Outs of Henri Matisse.

Born in Yorkshire, England, in 1943, John Elderfield is a graduate of the University of Leeds, England. He received his Doctor of Philosophy degree at the Courtauld Institute of Art at the University of London. He held a Harkness Fellowship at Yale University from 1970 to 1972, and was a recipient of a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in 1973. From 1973 to 1975 he taught art history at the University of Leeds.

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