

The Museum of Modern Art

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SEVEN MASTER PRINTMAKERS: INNOVATIONS IN THE EIGHTIES

May 16 - August 13, 1991

Fifty-five exceptional prints made during the 1980s by seven artists who have virtually redefined the medium--Jim Dine, David Hockney, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, and Frank Stella--are presented in an exhibition opening at The Museum of Modern Art on May 16, 1991. Organized by Riva Castleman, director, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, **SEVEN MASTER PRINTMAKERS: INNOVATIONS IN THE EIGHTIES** explores the stylistic and technological innovations made in printmaking by these well-known artists. Each began to explore the various possibilities of the print mediums during the 1960s, eventually dominating the art of the print with adventurous, creative efforts.

Remaining on view through August 13, the exhibition has been selected from the Lilja Collection and has been supported in part by Scandinavian Airlines System.

SEVEN MASTER PRINTMAKERS is a concentrated study of works by these active painter-printmakers, each of whose work underwent a perceptible change in style or content during the 1980s. The majority of the prints in the exhibition were made at five workshops, including Aldo Crommelynck, Gemini G.E.L., Universal Limited Art Editions, Graphicstudio, and Tyler Graphics Ltd., which offered the artists technical expertise, advice, and materials at their facilities.

The monumental scale and intense coloration of many of the prints were made possible by technological advances in the course of the last decade, including

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the expanded size of the printing press, industrial methods of cutting plates and woodblocks, and experimentation with inks. Lichtenstein, for example, used a technique of printing with wax (Waxtype) developed by Graphicstudio, providing texture and relief to his *Brushstroke Figures* series. In the *Welcome to the Water Planet* series, Rosenquist produced multiples of his enormous prints by making ten-foot-long sheets of his own paper in a method specially devised for him by Ken Tyler.

For most of these artists, printmaking also incorporated many forms of handwork. Dine, for instance, colored his drypoints, drew on his prints with pencil, and scuffed their surfaces. The intermingling of processes in Stella's *Squid*--a play of lines, colors, patches of paper, and textures--help to create the energy inherent in its composition. According to Ms. Castleman, "Stella's cut-and-torn forms spill through space in the *Waves* prints, much as the undulating print-covered metal forms spill out of the associated colossal reliefs."

While the prints might include already familiar subject matter, each of the artists experimented with new styles and content. Dine's diptychs and triptychs include hearts and bathrobes from earlier works, along with new imagery taken from objects in museums and from books, such as the spinal column from Gray's *Anatomy* seen in *Sovereign Nights*. Johns's print series, *The Seasons*, combines such recognizable images associated with him, such as the American flag, the Mona Lisa, and George Ohr's pottery, with others derived from Picasso: the artist's full-length shadow (borrowed from Picasso's 1953 painting *The Shadow*) and a group of stars above a ladder with a rope attached to it (found in Picasso's 1936 painting *Minotaur Moving His House*). Another Picasso-influenced print, Hockney's *An Image of Celia*, demonstrates the artist's use of "moving focus," by

which several viewpoints of a single subject combine to reveal, in the manner of Cubism, its multiple aspects. He had adapted this method to the printmaking medium from his previous photographic collages.

In the 1980s, Rauschenberg's Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI) program presented retrospectives of the artist's works in such cities as Caracas, Beijing, Lhasa (Tibet), Mexico City, Moscow, and Tokyo. Before the showing in each location, Rauschenberg made works from materials and images from that area, thereby incorporating aspects of the local culture into his art. For his Moscow exhibition, he made some of the prints on view in this exhibition.

These seven printmakers, having developed into mature artists with established reputations by the 1980s, brought to the art of the print an ability to create particularly innovative, engaging, and self-assured works. Ms. Castleman writes, "What characterizes the prints made during the 1980s by these artists is their confidence....The artists attained, whatever the cost in time and materials, solutions to their own aspirations. Only a few artists of great talent and solid professional reputation could command the facilities that would allow this to happen, and only the caliber of intuitive and innovative printers who have worked with them could have made it possible."

Following its New York showing, an extensive international tour is planned, including sites in Mexico, France, Australia, and Japan.

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