

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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NATIONAL GALLERY TO PRESENT 1980s PRINTS

FROM THE COLLECTION OF JOSHUA P. SMITH

WASHINGTON, D.C., August 28, 1989 - A sweeping survey of prints made during the past decade will be presented in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art, December 17, 1989 - April 8, 1990. The 1980s: Prints from the Collection of Joshua P. Smith will include more than one hundred prints and illustrated books lent by Joshua P. Smith, a Washingtonian who is one of the most vigorous collectors of contemporary prints in the United States. The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art and will not travel.

"We are delighted to be able to share Joshua Smith's holdings with our visitors. He is a passionate collector who has kept his finger on the pulse of the international print world during an extraordinary decade," said J. Carter Brown, director, National Gallery of Art.

More than ninety American and European artists, including many of the most significant artists working today, will be represented in the exhibition. Among them are several of longstanding distinction, such as Richard Diebenkorn, Jasper Johns, Alex Katz, Ellsworth Kelly, and Robert Rauschenberg.

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Also included in the exhibition are artists whose work has received increasing attention during the 1980s, such as Jennifer Bartlett, George Baselitz, Richard Bosman, Jonathan Borofsky, Francesco Clemente, Eric Fischl, Howard Hodgkin, Yvonne Jacquette, Robert Mangold, Brice Marden, Elizabeth Murray, Mimmo Paladino, Susan Rothenberg, Joel Shapiro, Terry Winters, and James Turrell.

Ruth E. Fine, curator of modern prints and drawings, National Gallery of Art, selected the works and organized the exhibition to reflect the major artistic currents of the decade, such as an emphasis on expressionism; the revitalization of figurative imagery, often marked by a deliberate primitivism; the production of prints on an increasingly large scale (Steven Campbell's The Hiker Said, "Death You Shall Not Take The Child," 1983, measures approximately 100 x 100 inches); and a renewed interest in small prints executed in series.

From Susan Rothenberg's Pinks (1980), a monoprint woodcut on Umbria paper, to Not Vital's Snowblind (1987), a multi-part work done in several media on seven sheets of Fabriano Tiepolo paper, the works in the exhibition reveal the far-reaching diversity in the art of the contemporary print. The exhibition will include prints in all of the traditional printmaking media: woodcut, etching, lithography, and screen printing. Examples of monotypes, hand-colored impressions, and prints combining printing techniques with direct painting and drawing, such as George Baselitz's Reading Man (1982), will reveal the recent focus on prints as unique objects.

Joshua P. Smith, a graduate of Harvard Law School, gave up his longtime job as an attorney with the U.S. Department of Energy in Washington, D.C., in 1986 to devote himself to art full time. He began collecting photography in late 1960s while practicing law in New York City. In the early 1970s he became interested in American prints, especially those of the 1930s and 1940s. As the 1980s unfolded, he began collecting internationally and focused on contemporary work, in addition to working as an independent curator and organizer of exhibitions.

A fully illustrated exhibition catalogue, published by the National Gallery of Art, will include an in-depth interview conducted by exhibition curator Fine with Smith about his ideas and insights concerning prints in the 1980s, and extensive bibliographic data for the period.

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The 1980s

Prints from the Collection of Joshua P. Smith

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Prints are works of art produced in editions, or multiple original impressions of the same image. They are made by transferring a layer of ink from a printing surface, or matrix, onto paper or another material. Often, a printing press supplies the pressure necessary for the transfer. The various printmaking techniques are defined by the type of matrix and the manner in which it carries the ink. Complex color prints may call for several matrices, and more than one process may be used for a single print. Below is a brief description of methods employed in the prints on view.

INTAGLIO: An umbrella term covering etching and related techniques in which the printing ink that yields the image is held by recessed lines or areas that are incised into the matrix. A copper plate usually serves as the matrix, although other metals and such materials as plastics may be used.

Etching: A term referring to a number of linear and tonal techniques. For line etchings a sharp tool is used to draw through an acid-resistant substance, or *ground*, that covers the plate. The

drawn lines expose areas of the metal that are then eaten away (etched) in an acid bath to produce the incised image. The longer the plate is immersed in the acid, the deeper the lines will be and the darker they will print.

Hardground etching: The plate is covered with an acid-resistant ground that hardens to the touch as it dries.

Softground etching: The acid

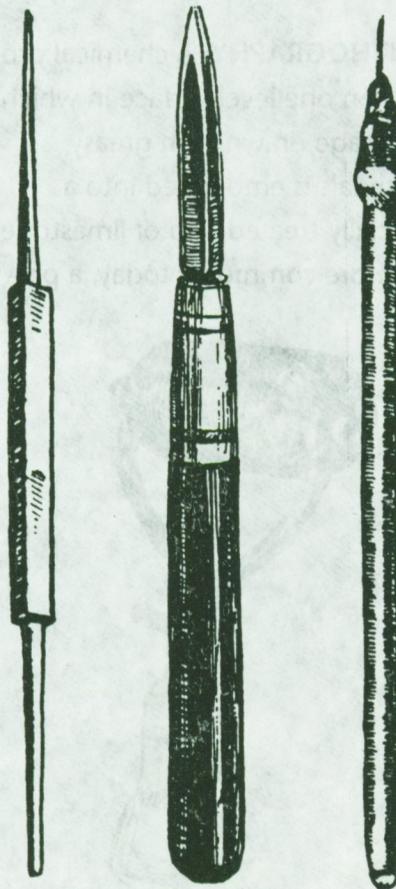
resist is made with such materials as vaseline that remain pliant and receptive to impressions from textured materials as well as to drawn lines.

Liftground etching: The image is created on the plate with a water-soluble material. The plate is then covered with an acid-resistant ground that is allowed to harden. When the water-soluble image is washed away, it lifts with it those areas of the acid resist lying on top. The plate is then immersed in acid, which bites the exposed areas into the metal. Liftgrounds can be made of sugar, salt, and soap; hence terms such as *sugarlift* and *soaplift*.

Other tonal etching processes:

Aquatint: Areas of the metal plate are dusted with fine particles of an acid-resist such as powdered resin; the exposed areas are bitten away by the acid bath to create a granular surface that produces effects similar to watercolor washes.

Gravure: The acid-resistant ground is a photo-sensitized gelatin layer that is dissolved in those areas of the metal plate to be eaten away by acid.



Openbite: Areas of the plate are left uncovered by either aquatint or another acid-resistant etching ground, yielding tonal areas of a mottled character.

Photo-etching: Various photographic methods and materials such as mylar and negative and positive films are used to create the image.

Spitbite: Acid is painted directly on the metal plate, often over an aquatint ground, to produce freer, looser effects.

INTAGLIO processes that do not use acid:

Carborundum print: The image is painted onto the plate with a pastelike mixture of abrasive powder (carborundum) and glue.

Drypoint: A sharp needle drawn with pressure directly across the metal plate raises a burr on either side of the incised line; this burr holds the printing ink and creates velvety effects.

Mezzotint: The surface of the plate is given an overall rough texture that prints dark. The image is defined by manipulating the surface with a *scraper* or *burnisher* to produce lighter tones.

Burnisher: A smooth, rounded tool for working a plate and for removing parts of an intaglio image. Often used in concert with a *scraper*.

Scraper: A triangular knife for scraping away parts of an image from an intaglio plate. Often fol-

lowed by *burnishing* to smooth the surface.

RELIEF: A term covering the processes in which the printing ink is applied to the top surface of the matrix after an image has been cut or carved into it, or otherwise formed. The inking process is the opposite of intaglio where the ink is held in recessed areas of the matrix.

Linocut or linoleum cut: The image is cut or carved into a sheet of linoleum.

Woodcut: The image is cut or carved into a slab of wood.

Wood collage print: A variant of the woodcut process in which an assemblage of wooden elements is printed in relief.

LITHOGRAPHY: A chemical process on one level surface in which an image drawn with greasy materials is embedded into a specially treated slab of limestone or, more commonly today, a pre-

pared metal lithographic plate. Before printing the stone or plate is dampened. The complex process is based on the principle that grease and water do not mix.

Screenprint: A stencil process in which the image is applied or adhered to a screen, thereby blocking out certain areas. Ink is then forced through the open areas. The process is sometimes called *silkscreen*, silk being a material traditionally used for the screen.

Monotype: The unique image is drawn and/or painted onto a smooth, flat surface—glass or metal—and then transferred by pressure to paper. Although monotypes lack a physically or chemically treated matrix to allow for the repetition of an image, it is possible to print further ghost images, each one paler than the previous one.

Related Terms:

Chine collé: a process of adhering or gluing a thin sheet of paper to a heavier sheet, either before or during printing.

Embossing: An inkless process in which the printing paper is forced into the matrix, often with a press, to create three-dimensional effects.

Monoprint: A uniquely inked impression from any kind of matrix; for example, a *monoprint woodcut* is a unique print from a carved woodblock.

