

MULTIPLICITY

Exhibition Wall Text

Multiplicity implies abundance and variation. This selection of contemporary prints from the permanent collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum features a multiplicity of styles, techniques, and approaches artists have used over the past decades. All the prints are parts of editions and each impression is an original work of art.

Many of the prints were conceived as multi-part works. There are series, sequences, groups, and composites. Repetition and juxtaposition are often integral to the artist's expression. While the art market favors the unique, the rare, and the precious, artists themselves pay little heed to these considerations as they create their prints.

These prints are the result of collaboration between the artist and professional printers who help realize the artist's vision. This interaction alters the stereotype of the artist working alone in the studio and celebrates the power of collaboration.

Chamber

1985

color woodcut on paper

Gregory Amenoff

born St. Charles, IL 1948

In *Chamber*, the rough texture of the woodcut surface and outlines contribute to the work's expressionistic qualities, while the rich colors lend a decorative balance to the composition. Although overall patterning and exuberant color are the first elements to strike the viewer, closer examination reveals abstract landscape and biomorphic forms, delicately printed on sensitive Japanese paper. The "chamber" of the title may refer to a mountain cave, with its religious and mystical connotations of a hermit's retreat, or to an underwater cavern, home to mysterious creatures of the sea. Based on one of Amenoff's paintings but considerably altered in scale and color, the print is transformed into an independent work of art.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase 1991.94.2

Black Dice

1982

9 prints, color aquatint, photo etching, softground, and lift-ground on paper

John Baldessari

born National City, CA 1931

Black Dice is based on a still photograph derived from an English gangster film of that name. The photograph represents a split second from a longer, continuous narrative. The artist divided the image into nine equal sections and developed each as an independent abstract composition in which key elements of the original scene remain identifiable. Baldessari is interested in things exploding and imploding, and being disjunctive. He likes to include the original movie still when the prints are exhibited so that the viewer can better understand the individual parts as well as the whole.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase 1993.31.1a-i

Red Jesus

1986

color woodcut on paper

John Buck

born Ames, IA 1946

Red Jesus was based on a painting and sculpture called *Gallilee* that John Buck made shortly after he returned from a trip to Israel in 1980; *Father and Son* was made in the same year, explaining the religious allusion in both titles. In spring 1981, Buck traveled to China where he visited a forest of gigantic stone tablets in central China, where he realized the potential of the woodblock to be seen as a rubbing. The large scale of these generic figures has something in common with the souvenir rubbings that tourists sometimes make from tombs. The imagery in my work is personal and social, political,

religious, popular. In essence, I build the surface out of images of a personal nature—my experiences—and work toward an idea that reaches for something outside my own personal dimension. Maybe I should say that it is impossible for me to ignore the events of our time The background of my drawings consists of my fantasies, experiences, loves, hates, the stuff of everyday life.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Tom and Judy Brody 2009.38.2

Day One–Day Seven, from the portfolio Seven Day Diary (Not Knowing)

1978

etching, drypoint, and sugar aquatint on paper

John Cage

born Los Angeles, CA 1912–died New York City 1992

John Cage began making prints after a long and distinguished career as a musical composer. When he was invited to make prints at Crown Point Press in San Francisco, he called upon ideas and principles he had used as a musician: the development of an idea over time, reliance on chance as a discipline, the privileging of process over representation, and what he called “the social habits of musicians . . . the division of labor.”

The title of this series refers to the seven-day period over which he made the prints, completing one each day. When he began, he did not know the technical aspects of the printmaking processes he was going to use, but learned them as he worked with assistance from the professional printers. Over the course of seven days, he tried all the processes available to him at Crown Point Press. He chose a paper he liked as well as the horizontal format and the size of the margins. He selected modest sized copper plates that floated within a twelve-inch central square, and determined the size and shape of his plates by consulting his I Ching charts. His attitudes developed from his studies of Zen Buddhism. By creating a sense of emptiness, he expressed visually the Zen state of “not knowing.”

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Bequest of Moses Lasky 2004.32.5.1–7

Singing and Printing I

2001

unique monoprint woodcut, hand colored with acrylic paint on paper

Jim Dine

born Cincinnati, OH 1935

Images of the classical *Venus de Milo* recur frequently in Jim Dine’s art. A universal symbol of love and beauty, she has also been interpreted as an archetypal mother-figure or fertility symbol. In the series of prints titled *Singing and Printing*, of which this is the first, the same woodcut image of Venus appears in each impression, but the addition of hand-painting makes each one unique and frequently quite different from the others. Perhaps the artist is alluding to the various meanings of Venus by repeating the image, yet making each representation distinctive.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of the Jerome F. Meyer Trust 2004.22.2

James Buchanan / 1857–1861 and Abraham Lincoln / 1861–1865 from the portfolio Hindsight is Always 20/20

2008

letterpress on paper

R. Luke DuBois

born Morristown, NJ 1975

In *Hindsight is Always 20/20*, Luke Dubois takes the State of the Union addresses from each presidency and sorts them according to word frequency. The artist then prints the most frequently appearing words as an eye chart for each president, with the more frequently used words in larger type at the top of the chart and the less frequently used words toward the bottom. The traditional eye chart includes sixty-six letters, and Luke Dubois's charts substitute sixty-six words. The lists contain words that are not only important for the issues addressed by each president but also give an impression of how language was used at the time. Each of the forty-one presidencies to have State of the Union addresses (William Henry Harrison and James Garfield died before they could submit a single message to Congress) has its own eye chart. The two charts on display are for James Buchanan and Abraham Lincoln, and give a concise overview of the issues facing the country just prior to and during the Civil War.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment 2011.9.14 – .15

Red Celia, from the series Moving Focus

1984

color lithograph on paper

David Hockney

born Bradford, England 1937

David Hockney created the *Moving Focus* series of twenty-nine prints over an extended period of time, from 1984 through 1986. In contrast to most print series, in which there is usually a cohesion of subject matter, style, and size, the *Moving Focus* prints include interiors, chairs, vases with flowers, views from a Mexican hotel, and portraits, all of varying sizes. What unifies the series is the artist's obsession with the depiction of space: the use of reverse perspective, the experience of being within a space, and the exploration of multipoint perspective. This series has been described as "Hockney's dialogue with Picasso."

Red Celia is a portrait of Celia Birtwell, a close friend and favorite model. One of the most direct and powerful images of the series, the pose and execution of this print recall Matisse more than Picasso, perhaps a reference to the friendly rivalry between the two artists.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of James A. and Marsha Perry Mateyka in memory of Mary and Peter Perry 2011.17

View of the Hotel Well III, from the series Moving Focus

1984–1985

color lithograph on paper

David Hockney

born Bradford, England 1937

View of the Hotel Well, III is one of a group of images of the Hotel Romano Angeles in the little town of Acatlan, where he stayed when his car broke down on the way from Mexico City to Oaxaca. When he returned to Los Angeles, he told printer Ken Tyler about his experience, and Tyler encouraged him to return to the hotel and make images on Mylar, which were then transferred to a photosensitive plate back at Tyler's workshop.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of the Jerome F. Meyer Trust 2004.22.1

Untitled (We Will No Longer Be Seen and Not Heard), from the Untitled portfolio

1985

9 prints, photo offset lithograph and screenprint on paper

Barbara Kruger

born Newark, NJ 1945

Barbara Kruger's dramatic juxtaposition of found photographs and provocative text examines the representation of power in mass-media images. Using sign language, gesture, and words to create and contradict meaning, she employs language to question cultural stereotypes. Because of her feminist sympathies, one assumes the "we" of this message refers to women, but its meaning is less specific and encompasses all groups of people without power.

Kruger came to art from a background in graphic design. Her work investigates the seemingly innocuous yet potentially insidious ways in which ideological messages infiltrate daily life by means of the mass media.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase 1986.50a–i

Wavy Brushstrokes Superimposed #1–4

1995

4 prints, hand-drawn photo transfer with aquatint on paper

Sol LeWitt

born Hartford, CT 1928–died New York City 2007

Wavy Brushstrokes Superimposed # 1–4 is a set of four serial images based on an idea with permutations determined by rules the artist contrived. LeWitt began with a drawing of wavy brushstrokes, which was then photographically transferred to several metal plates and printed as an aquatint. By varying the colors and the order in which the successive plates were printed, the images vary from one to the next while sharing a single basic format. The successive printing of plates allowed for multiple variations on a

single image. The sumptuous surface, curvilinear design, and layered colors of these prints show the artist pushing beyond the geometric forms and straight lines for which his work is best known.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mike Wilkins and Sheila Duignan 2010.34.1–.4

Untitled #1–#6, from the Untitled Press series

1972

6 prints, lithograph on paper

Brice Marden

born Bronxville, NY 1938

Robert Rauschenberg invited Brice Marden to make prints in 1972 at his Untitled Press located on a property adjacent to his home on Captiva Island, Florida. The artists reached the printmaking workshop by a road cut through subtropical vegetation. The gestural nature of these prints expresses the experience of reaching the studio: “Every day to get to the workshop I had to walk from the house through this jungle. These have much more of a jungle feeling. This is much more vegetal than other prints.” The succession of prints suggests the brief passage of time as Marden crosses from house to workshop.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the C. K. Williams Foundation and the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment 2008.9.1–.6

Local Calm

2005

color aquatint, etching, and engraving on paper chine collé

Julie Mehretu

born Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 1970

Local Calm is one of three etchings that Julie Mehretu called collectively, *Heavy Weather*. She began working on these prints two weeks after hurricane Katrina had devastated New Orleans as the area was bracing for another storm, already named Rita. To express the wind currents and chaotic movement of the storm, she called upon her experience crossing the Drake Passage the previous year. This stretch of ocean between Cape Horn and Antarctica, where the Atlantic and the Pacific meet, has some of the worst sea weather in the world. As her boat plunged and pitched, she focused her attention on a soaring albatross that was following the ship, gliding and catching air currents, majestically indifferent to the turmoil below. She imagined herself to be the albatross, caught in the maelstrom but able to carry on as nature intended. She captures the interaction of sea and air with lines, marks, and suggestions of forms.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Lichtenberg Family Foundation 2006.23

The Drum and the Dance

1996

mixed intaglio and lithograph on paper, with artist-designed custom frame

Judy Pfaff

born London, England 1946

The Drum and the Dance is one of twelve prints inspired by Pfaff's travels to Japan. The long, narrow horizontal shape of the prints in this group recalls the format of Chinese scrolls. Some of the shapes suggest sound or shock waves; other forms suggest musical scores and miniature solar systems. Asian allusions include palmistry, writing from Hindu account ledgers and Tibetan medical books, as well as popular and folk art. Forms recur in more than one print as new elements are introduced. Each print is framed with its own hand-stenciled, painted, and silver-leafed frame, inspired by the Book of Kells, and relating to the imagery found in that print.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of David M. Maxfield 1997.76.1

Becky, Carma, Fern, Esther, Avey, and Bona, from the portfolio Cane

2000

woodcut on paper

Martin Puryear

born Washington, DC 1941

The prints were inspired by the strong and pivotal female characters in the book. The images are abstract portraits in which Puryear attempted to capture the spirit of the individual character. The meaning of each is enhanced by the presence of the others and its relationship with the text.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Linda Lichtenberg Kaplan and museum purchase through the Lichtenberg Family Foundation 2002.12.2.2–7

Representation of Chaos, In the Beginning, Let There Be Light, The Marv'lous Work Behold, In Splendour Bright, The Heavens Are Telling, and Most Beautiful Appear from the portfolio, The Creation

2004

screenprint with chine collé on paper

Tim Rollins and K.O.S.

born Pittsfield, ME 1955 and founded New York City 1982

Tim Rollins founded the artist collective K.O.S. (Kids of Survival) in New York in 1982 with a group of children from his neighborhood in the South Bronx. Working together with a changing group of "underachieving" students, Rollins has directed numerous art projects that foster collective creativity, much as a Gothic cathedral or tribal art surpassed the energy and skills of a single person.

Working with at-risk area kids participating in the Pyramid Atlantic workshop's visual literacy program in Silver Spring, Maryland, Rollins chose Franz Josef Haydn's oratorio, *The Creation*, to be their source

of inspiration. As they listened to the music, the group made drawings and prints and contemplated the beginning of the universe, moving from the void to the primal and momentous appearance of light and the ensuing emergence of heaven, earth, celestial bodies, land, sea, plants, and animals. Each of the prints embodies one of the seven days of creation.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Anne and Ronald Abramson 2008.37.1–7

Mezzo Fist #I

1990

mezzotint and chine collé on paper

Susan Rothenberg

born Buffalo, NY 1945

Susan Rothenberg's art is distinguished by psychologically charged images, heavily abstracted but still recognizable as living forms. Best known for her early images of horses, she has turned her attention to the expressive qualities of the human form, often suggesting motion through broad, gestural marks. Through simplification of form, she achieves an intensity and directness of expression in which enigma and ambiguity take on psychological dimensions.

In *Mezzo Fist I* and *Mezzo Fist II* the subject appears to be a figure hitting its own face with its fist. Her imagery functions metaphorically rather than literally, with themes of violence, menace, confrontation, and sexuality expressed through contrasts of hard and soft, male and female, movement and stasis, solid and void, order and chaos, and figure to ground.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase 1991.94.4

Savasan 10

1996

carborundum collagraph, siligraph, and etching on paper

David Shapiro

born New York City 1944

David Shapiro conceives all of his paintings and prints as series. The Savasan series refers to the horizontal yoga position that describes the seven body centers or chakras. Each of the works in the series features a horizontal field divided into six parts, with the seventh chakra represented by the entirety of the piece. The composition reflects the progression of emphasis from one body center to the next in yogic meditation practice.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of David M. Maxfield 2003.80.1

Banshee Pearls

1991

12 prints, lithograph with aluminum leaf additions on handmade Japanese paper

Kiki Smith

born Nuremberg, Germany 1954

The title *Banshee Pearls* refers to ancient female spirits, the banshees of Gaelic folklore whose high-pitched wails presaged a death in the family. Kiki Smith remembers her father calling her a banshee as a teenager, and she embraced the idea of herself as a death figure.

Multiple self-portraits in different scales are interspersed with skulls, masks, and breast-like forms. Smith was intrigued by distortions of her own face, especially those that made her horrific-looking. The lithographic plates were made from photographs and photocopies of her face, and printed in both negative and positive registers. She used childhood photographs, prints of her own hair, and impressions from her teeth pressed against the photocopier. The flowers and heraldic symbols drawn on the plate with tusche introduce a counterpoint of beauty to the otherwise grotesque imagery.

Smith frequently creates images of the human body and its parts, both internal and external. The multiple images and repeating rectangular form of the sheets set up a rhythm that recalls such bodily rhythms as the pulse, the heartbeat, the menstrual cycle—all unseen, but essential to life. The twelve prints of *Banshee Pearls* were intended to be seen together, but the artist encourages rearranging the order and the overall format of the series. Her art is non-hierarchical, open-ended, and subject to personal interpretation.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Lichtenberg Family Foundation
2004.6a–l

Alabama Loyalists Greeting the Federal Gun Boats, from the portfolio Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)

2005

offset lithograph and screenprint on paper

Kara Walker

born Stockton, CA 1969

For her series *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*, Kara Walker appropriated and enlarged select illustrations from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War*, a two-volume publication of 1866. She chose fifteen wood engravings, enlarged them through offset lithography, and overlaid them with large, black stencils. Walker's signature silhouettes interrupt and transform the nineteenth-century narratives of battle, death, and retreat in these large-scale prints. According to the artist, the Civil War prints from *Harper's* "are the landscapes that I imagine exist in the back of my somewhat more austere wall pieces," namely the large black silhouette compositions for which she is best known.

Walker's scenes are set in the American South before and during the Civil War. They play off stereotypes to portray, often grotesquely, life on the plantation, where masters and mistresses and

slave men, women, and children enact a subverted version of the past. Walker suggests a critical understanding of the past and proposes an examination of contemporary racial and gender stereotypes.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment 2008.19.1.1

Karintha* from the book *Cane

2000

bound book with artist-made wooden slipcase; text by Jean Toomer

Martin Puryear

born Washington, DC 1941

Cane is a book of prose and poetry by Jean Toomer, a masterpiece of African-American literature by one of the leading writers of the Harlem Renaissance. In the afterword to this edition, Leon Litwack, an historian of the black experience in America, writes:

Even in the absence of narrative continuity, *Cane* has a cohesion, an aesthetic unity, a thread that binds the various vignettes and stories together. The pieces can stand alone, but their diversity is very much a part of the story—a large story about the meaning of being black in America.

Puryear is well known as a sculptor in wood; he designed the wooden box for this artist's book.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Linda Lichtenberg Kaplan and museum purchase through the Lichtenberg Family Foundation 2002.12.1