Zena Mill

The Zena Mill, located about four miles east of Woodstock, was not far from Brown's home. The structure predates 1750 and operated until the 1940s, first as a saw mill and then as a grist mill. It has since been adapted for use as a private residence and although somewhat altered in appearance it remains picturesque. Brown's Zena Mill has a vibrancy not often seen in his other lithographs. A complex design and sharply contrasting qualities of light and line provide an undercurrent of intense energy to this scene of quietude.

M.J.P.
PREFACE

In honor of the 1981 American Print Conference, the Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery and the Syracuse University Art Collections are pleased to present the exhibition and catalog entitled Bolton Brown, Lithographer.

The lithographs in the exhibition were created and printed by American artist and Syracuse University alumnus Bolton Brown. Two other works in the show, one by George Bellows and the other by Troy Kinney, were printed by Brown.

The art works in this exhibition are entirely from the holdings of the Syracuse University Art Collections.

My sincere appreciation is extended to David Tatham, Professor and Chairman of the Fine Arts Department at Syracuse University, for curating the exhibition in collaboration with the first year graduate museology students, and for writing the illuminating essay for the catalog. Dr. Tatham provided for the students a role model of curatorial excellence.

I would also like to thank the museology students: Stephanie M. Buck, Tracey S. Nurik, Michele J. Pavone, Sharon A. Robinson, Jan-Marie A. Spanard, Lora S. Urbanski, and Fine Arts student Kimberly McKenna for their contribution in researching the illustrated prints and preparing the exemplary captions.

I also wish to acknowledge the following staff members for their dedicated participation: Leonard Eichler, Preparator; Paula Bucci, Office Coordinator; Carol Allen, Graduate Assistant; and Kazimiera Kozlowski, Graduate Assistant.

My gratitude is extended to Dr. August L. Freundlich, Dean, College of Visual and Performing Arts; Dr. Alfred T. Collette, Director of the Syracuse University Art Collections; and Mr. Domenic Iacono, Registrar and Collections Curator, for their continued support of the exhibition program.

Finally, I wish to express my deepest appreciation to the Martin S. Ackerman Foundation for providing the funding for this catalog.

Joseph A. Scala
Director
Lithography—printing from stone—is the youngest of the classic printmaking pro-
cesses. It was invented in 1798 and within a generation rivaled the older copperplate and
woodblock processes as a means of pictorial printing, at least in their commercial applica-
tions. Lithography's inherent and unique possibilities for fine art expression were also
understood in these years, but during the nineteenth-century this potential was realized
rarely in Europe and even less often in America. In the United States vast quantities of
lithographs poured forth from commercial publishers and printers to serve purposes as
diverse as the illustrations of books and the banding of cigars, but virtually no fine artist
of significant reputation took more than a passing interest in lithography as a medium
for serious original work. Currier & Ives and numberless other publishers issued thousands
of framing prints to serve as household dec-
ations, and referred to them as "art prints,"
but only very rarely did a lithograph appear
that could by any measure qualify as an origi-
nal print of notable artistic merit. (It needs to
be said that a much larger number have other
merits as examples of popular and vernacular
art and as historical documents.) By the close
of the century commercial lithography was in
thrall to photography and seemed little more
than the worldly, all-too-vulgar younger sis-
ter of etching and wood engraving. These
two had recently been rejuvenated by a
medium for his particular approach to the art
of drawing and it also offered formidable chal-
lenges of the kind he welcomed. One challenge
was in the physical demands of lithography as
Brown practiced it—he soon began carrying
slabs of limestone throughout the Wood-
stock countryside so that he could draw on them directly from nature. Another challenge
lay in the idea of investing the tired old me-
dium with artistic respectability, for this
would be an uphill battle against ingrained
skepticism. He also saw in lithography, we
may assume, a way to make a virtue of his
strong preference for a solitary way of life in
art, for while lithography since its inception
had typically been a collaborative process in
which an artist drew on a stone which was
then taken through the stages of presswork by
a master printer, Brown now proposed to
do it all himself.

He spent the years 1914-1916 in wartime
England, studying lithography as it was prac-
ticed by artisans, probably in the shop of
Thomas Way, where H.P. Bray had printed
Whistler's transfer lithographs. When Brown
returned to America he brought with him a
press and stones and installed them in his
Woodstock studio. By 1919 he had established
reporters to the Sierra Club Ballata. After his
death in 1936 a high Sierra peak was named
Mount Bolton Brown in his honor.

In 1901 Brown, now married and the father
of three children, returned to the East to
found with others the art colony Byrdcliff
in the lovely country that surrounds it.
I went to Bolton Brown one summer to
study lithography in his Woodstock studio.
By 1919 he had established
himself as the nation's leading large art lithog-
ographer and there was no longer much serious
question about the medium's respectability.
He was prolific—between 1915 and the early
1930s he drew and printed perhaps as many
as six hundred lithographs. He exhibited,
promoted, and sold his prints with vigor, and
wrote and spoke about his work in museums
and schools of art. He printed lithographs
that had been drawn on stone by other artists,
most notably George Bellows, John Sloan,
Arthur B. Davies, and Frank Benson, signing
each impression as printer. Beginning in 1919
he taught lithography in his Woodstock stu-
dio. John Taylor Arms was a student there as
also were, at least qual-
ity, Charles Burchfield and J.J. Lankes. Arms later recalled
his experience:

I went to Bolton Brown one summer to
study lithography in his Woodstock studio
and in the lovely country that surrounds it.

. . . I labored long hours under the guidance of
a great workman and a great teacher.

We arose early and went forth to draw in
the fields, taking [our stones] with us in a
wheelbarrow (which could be up-ended and
converted into an excellent seat of beauty).
We drew in sunshine and in pouring rain,
latter made possible by the fact that,
among the literally hundreds of litho-
graphic crayons which Brown tested and
made, were a number with which the artist
might draw with perfect facility on a
stone placed under water. . . . [At night] we
sat and talked for a while about the great
lithographers of the past, whom he knew
and loved as if they were living today:
about art in general, and religion, and
working, and living. Those days and nights
were perhaps the most strenuous, and cer-
tainly among the richest, of my professional
life.

In 1920 Syracuse University conferred on
Brown an honorary doctorate (D. Litt.). In
1929 the Art Institute of Chicago invited him
to give the Scammon lectures which were
published the following year as Lithography for
Artists. This book marked the culmination
of Brown's work as an artist and printer. He
had proved his case. He concluded his lec-
tures about lithography saying "I have peddled
it, written it, exhibited it, hawked it and
talked it, lectured it, demonstrated it, and
done it. Wherewith, I make my bow." After
1930 his activity as a lithographer gradually
diminished and in the years just before his
death in 1936 he threw himself with typically
wholehearted vitality into the art and craft of
the potter.

Brown's lithographs are an important body
of work in the history of the graphic arts
in America. He was a skillful draughtsman,
a splendid technician, an unexcelled printer,
and a profoundly serious seeker of beauty,
and all this tells in his work. So too does his
penchant for the objective analysis of all
things. But perhaps the most distinctive
quality of his prints considered as a group is a
didactic one. Brown's lithographs constitute
a long, elaborate, and fascinating lesson in the
possibilities of the medium—of kinds of
crayons and textures of stones and properties
of papers, and the effects of etches, inks, and
presswork. And this, he said, was his aim.
Each of Brown's prints demonstrates some quality not seen in the others, and the qualities are not always what we expect to find in a lithograph. Play (No. 20) is enough like a woodcut to have been wrongly catalogued as a relief print in more than one collection.3

There is something of the preacher at work in this—his subjects. His intimate knowledge of the Woodstock countryside is infused with emotion and his recollections of scenes in California mountains are full of feeling. Only in a few of his groups of ideal female nodes gathered at sylvan pools does he seem to strike less than a true note. These are the closest to academic practice and farthest from the nature he knew.

But for all his virtuoso skill in drawing and his deeply felt response to nature in all its moods, Brown's originality as a graphic artist lies in the enduring success of his efforts to change the attitudes of artists, printers, critics, and collectors toward the medium. He is not always what we expect to find in a lithograph. The quality not seen in the others, and the qualities Brown was an eloquent writer about art in general and lithography in particular. His view of the man who draws on stone is a lithographer, not a lithographer. His graphic draughtsman, not a lithographer. Art Galleries

Biographical information about Brown has been drawn from the material of the College of Arts and Sciences. The description of Bolton Brown's career elsewhere.

In undertaking the research for this exhibition and catalog, I was ably assisted by Stephanie Mary Buck, Tracey Nurik, Michelle J. Pavone, Sharon Robinson, Jan-Marie Spanard, and Lori Urbanelli, first year students in the graduate program in Museum Studies of the College of Visual and Performing Arts, and also by Kimberly McKenna, senior year major in the Department of Fine Arts of the College of Arts and Sciences. The descriptive captions written by these students are signed with their initials. A bibliography relating to Bolton Brown that has been ably compiled by Rosemarie Romano, graduate student in the Department of Fine Arts, has been issued separately as a supplement to this catalog. For the resourcefulness of all of these, and of the staffs of the University Art Collection and the Lowe Art Gallery, I am deeply grateful.

The passing interest of both Rembrandt Peale in the late 1820s and Whistler in the early 1850s was bid to potential publication. Few other artists of their rank so much as dabbed in it. They were a virtuoso skill in drawing and his deeply felt response to nature in all its moods. His intimate knowledge of the Woodstock countryside is infused with emotion and his recollections of scenes in California mountains are full of feeling. Only in a few of his groups of ideal female nodes gathered at sylvan pools does he seem to strike less than a true note. These are the closest to academic practice and farthest from the nature he knew.

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Cedars

Two hikers emerge from the depths of a cedar forest and pause to contemplate one of nature's monolithic monuments. Brown's crayonwork in the center of the print, where the notch is bathed in sunlight, contrasts with that which forms the dark woods of the foreground. Another interesting contrast exists between the intimate mood of the cascade and pool in the foreground and the vastness of the space beyond. Cedars is a reminiscence of Brown's passionate avocation of mountaineering in the Sierra Nevadas and a reminder that his efforts for the preservation of wilderness were commemorated after his death by the naming of Mount Bolton Brown in the High Sierras.

K.McM.

My House

In this view of his house near Woodstock, Brown has transcribed onto stone a momentary impression of a familiar place and made it permanent. My House has a sense of immediacy that results from both the medium and Brown's drawing style. The image is a comfortable one, evoking a feeling of peace and harmony between man and nature. It is also autobiographical, not only in reporting the appearances of a moment in Brown's life but also in showing the house he built largely with his own labor some years earlier. The subtle spectrum of greys reinforces the quiet mood while the myriad energetic crayon strokes lend vitality.

S.M.B.
Naiads

Naiads lives up to its title by seeming to emerse its subjects—water nymphs—in an indistinct, aqueous world. Brown bridges the real and the imaginary in this diffused environment, much of it drawn in fine, thread-like lines. This is among the most ethereal of his many treatments of nudes in sylvan settings. The intangibility of the figures and the landscape are partly the result of Brown's belief that the nature of the crayon used to make the drawing on stone will contribute much to the development of the design.

S.A.R.

Cloudy Dawn

Cloudy Dawn is a composition that employs highly subtle tonal contrasts to produce the image of a hazy morning. Brown's remarkable proficiency in the medium is evident especially in the momentary and atmospheric effects he achieves in this landscape. Unlike his Sugar Maple, which emphasizes the artist's dextrous manipulation of line, Cloudy Dawn conveys a more sensitive, aesthetic interpretation of nature. In this quiet early morning moment, all seems held in abeyance waiting for the sun to warm the air and evaporate the mist.

J-M.S.
Sugar Maple

Sugar Maple is a strong depiction of a single maple tree on an overcast windy day. Brown would describe this drawing as a purely linear study and it is a fine display of his own technical virtuosity. Bold, blunt crayon marks define the substance and the motion of the dark, heavy areas of the drawing while finer strokes of a more apprehensive quality suggest foliage. The branches seem in motion. The forced, abrupt, and staccato lines seem as strong as the tree itself.

J-M.S.

The Bowl

In this still-life Brown emphasizes the inverse volumes of the two main objects—the open form of the bowl and the closed form of the pear—and their different surface textures. The indistinct edges of these things fit well with the background of hazy, wandering lines that build patterns of light and shadow. Brown conveys the tactile qualities of the surfaces, from the high gloss porcelain of the bowl to the rough skin of the pear.

L.S.U.
Brown was deeply moved by the picturesque scenes he found in Woodstock and its environs and he drew and painted them for more than a third of a century. The mood of serenity in Anderson's Old Mill is one he captured often in the meadows and fields of the region. Here he suggests the continuation of these fields by cropping the trees and he emphasizes the openness of the countryside by leaving undrawn passages on the stone. Alternations of light and dark move the viewer's eye on to the mountains in the distance.

T.S.N.

Catalog of the exhibition. The prints are listed here according to serial number, given in parenthesis following each title. Brown numbered each of his drawings serially. Dimensions are given in centimeters, height before width.

Lithographs drawn and printed by Bolton Brown:
1. The Shower, (47).
2. Sifting Shadows, (54).
3. Crusty Dune, (60).
4. Sierra Woods, (95).
5. Young Cedars, (143).
11. My House, (351).
15. Nude Family Bathing, (393).
22. Pastoral Scene, (477).
27. The Cooled Tree, 1948.
28. The Upper Quarry, (553).
29. Two Ponds, (563).
30. Lake Ladies, (584).
31. Hadleys, (570).
32. Below the Falls, (574).
33. Paradise River, (598).
34. The Beal, (601).
36. George Bellows.
37. Troy Kinney.