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IMPORTANT AMERICAN PRINTS FROM THE SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY ART COLLECTION

The period between 1930 and 1980 could arguably be one of the most important phases in American printmaking. The regionalist and urban realist art movements burst on the scene and government supported workshops helped make printmaking equipment available to practitioners of these art trends. Once held biases towards particular print media were being abandoned. The European avant-garde use of print media showed that it was the image and the ideas behind the art that mattered most. American artists quickly adopted similar new ideas and began to fashion their own agenda of what constituted artistic potential including the adaptation of industrial materials and machinery. A new inclusive environment toward all printmaking media would emerge during these 50 years.

The influx of European artists into the USA (and especially New York City) spurred by the rise of fascist and Nazi governments, had a profound impact on the printmaking environment in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Young American artists such as Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, and Mark Rothko were able to work along side important European painter/printmakers such as Joan Miró, Marc Chagall and Yves Tanguy. The transfer of ideas and the excitement generated by this exchange energized the various communities of artists- surrealists, abstract expressionists, social realists, and others who inhabited the print studios of the 1940s.

After the second World War print workshops opened and welcomed a new generation of artists to develop their art. The idea of a communal workshop where artists could find print presses and other materials needed to create editions of prints emerged and took hold. Within the next twenty years universities and art schools around the country developed well-equipped studios and printshops as well as knowledgeable technicians sharing their expertise. This atmosphere created an environment that helped artists appreciate the ubiquitous nature of printed materials as a way of exposing their art to the widest possible audience. Collaborations between artists and printers enabled artists to realize qualities in their print designs that otherwise might never have been achieved.

American printmaking continued to evolve during the next several decades and artists pushed the processes in innovative ways. Color screenprinting and color lithography became very popular with young artists and often both processes were combined to get maximum effect. An appreciation of printing technologies often used for commercial printing allowed artists to experiment with these techniques and realize new potential. Printmaking emerged from this period as the media of choice for many important artists and that reality continues to this day.

This exhibition of 51 important American prints surveys the activities of artists who put designs on paper during this exciting period. Thomas Hart Benton, Anne Ryan, Milton Avery, Dorothy Dehner, Robert Motherwell, Helen Frankenthaler, Andy Warhol, Elizabeth Catlett, Jasper Johns and Romare Bearden are a few of the artists represented in this examination of the growth in popularity of printmaking among American artists during this 50 year period. Especially significant are the contributions of women to printmaking during this period as well as the impact of African American artists on the graphic arts. Combined with artists who immigrated to the United States during these decades and the increased numbers of painters and sculptors who took up printmaking, this exhibition makes abundantly clear the egalitarian nature of the print.

LEONARD BASKIN ►

Leonard Baskin was a sculptor and printmaker who studied for a time at Yale University but received his bachelor's degree from the New School for Social Research. He was a long-time instructor at Smith College and later, at Hampshire College. Although known for his sculpture, Baskin's Gehenna Press became known worldwide for its printing of small edition art books that often contained original designs and poetry. Baskin was also known for making his political views apparent in his art and saw himself following in the tradition of Goya, Hogarth and Daumier. "The roster of artists who thus employed the print for social and programmatic ends is formidable. These are the moralists and the political partisans. I ally myself with this tradition, seeking for guidance in prints both learned and unlearned, ever aware of their long popular tradition, seeing in their quintessential black and whiteness the savagery of Goya, the melancholy of Dürer, and the gentleness of Rembrandt."



Leonard Baskin, *Tobias and the Angel*, 1958

Romare Bearden, *Tidings*, 1973



◀ ROMARE BEARDEN

Romare Bearden is probably best known for portraying African American life through collage art. Born in North Carolina he received his undergraduate in mathematics before studying under George Grosz at the Art Students League. His education was followed by service as a caseworker for the New York City Department of Social Services that gave him special insight into the lives of economically challenged people. After resuming his art career as a painter in the 1950s, he worked abstractly, but in the 60s he reintroduced figurative elements into his work in collage, lithography, and screenprinting. His collages were exhibited at MoMA in 1971 where they received acclaim for their rich colors, complicated designs, and theme of "the prevalence of ritual" as "the choreography of daily life." A major retrospective of his work traveled throughout museums in the United States, beginning around the time of his death in 1988.