



Lasting Impressions:
A Printmaker Collects



Ex Libris



6- Leonard Baskin,
Blake: a Fragment



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The Importance of Print: Comprehending the Moving Message of the Reproducible Image

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It is at once fortuitous and problematic that this particular exhibition is being mounted at this particular moment in time. We live and operate in an era in which the old post-modern saw, "What is art?" has itself become post-modern. By that, I mean that a general consensus answer was agreed upon by the art-going public several decades ago that art could be whatever the artist or viewer wanted. As conveniently glib as that answer to one of the great philosophically vague questions of the twentieth century may be, it in fact creates more problems than it solves. By the time the post-modernists got around to asking themselves that most puzzling of questions, the curatorial and museological worlds had just begun to shake off their centuries-old patina of inaccessibility and elitism that had, for so long, daunted those who were interested in delving into the world of expression, but found themselves shunned by museums' and galleries' insistence on "protecting" their collections from a presumably uninformed public.

This particular scenario presented a dangerous dichotomy: just as museums and galleries were beginning to become more inclusive and cognizant of the importance of the public's attention, the artists and image-makers themselves began to explore increasingly more esoteric, incorporeal, less easily comprehensible personal and psychological realities in their works. In essence, the exhibiting institutions had become more inclusive, yet the subject matter artists had chosen to explore within their exhibited works became more difficult to grasp. It is only within the last few decades that the rift between the institutional enthusiasm for visitors and the visitors' ability to comprehend artworks that had become personalized to the point of inaccessibility has begun to close.

Today, viewers are invited into the gallery, the museum, the artwork, the artist's personal reality with comparable equanimity—but this has not always been the case. Prior to the world's



7- Bill Bippes, *Old Jew in Israel*



6- Leonard Baskin,
Blake, an Imagined Death Mask

museums and galleries becoming more user-oriented and less doggedly over-protective of their collections, prior to the modern and post-modern artists plunge into the expression of their own psychological landscapes, the only genre of art that consistently welcomed the art-curious and expression-starved public into itself was the world of prints.

By its very nature, print is the most egalitarian of artistic genres. Printmaking affords the art consumer the opportunity to share in the appreciation of and participation in the exchange of ideas between the original artist and the viewer. Some would argue that as an image is reproduced, its importance suffers as the image's perceived exclusivity diminishes, when, in fact, what is truly taking place is the democratization of art. In a contemporary context, the antiquated notion that for art to be "special" it must be one-of-a-kind has been disproven. It is not the image's rarefication and singularity that imbues it with its impact—it is the power of the artist's message that it communicates, and that power is only multiplied as each reproduction in a series is created. By producing their images in series, artists broaden and amplify the efficacy of the message that their works belie. In turn, consumers of these serialized images become agents of the artist's agenda and are, by displaying, sharing, and advocating their prints, responsible for the continuation and diffusion of the artist's conception.

A desire to champion an artist's vision and aesthetic expression of that vision is the value of any art collector. Collectors do not expend time, energy and expense amassing works of art to simply cloister them away in the dark recesses of their own private spaces. Instead, collectors use their collections of paintings, sculptures, drawings—and, yes—prints to further the aim of their chosen artist, which is to communicate with others how they see, experience, and value the society in which they operate. It is true that collectors do protect and perpetuate the physical legacy of the artist—the artwork itself, but they do not do it selfishly. Collectors protect their works while sharing them because they are keenly aware of the fact that, as long as the artwork survives, so too do the message, motivation and moral with which the artist instilled it.

By choosing to come and experience the collected prints of this exhibition, the visitor also becomes a part of an ongoing dissemination of the artists' personal vision. The driving, creative force that caused the artists to create and reproduce their works combines with the desire and enthusiasm of the collectors to spread that unique and precious encapsulated conception, which is ultimately borne out as the viewers are able to witness and internalize the work's meaning from their own subjective and highly specific perspectives. What visitors to this exhibition of prints are participating in is a centuries-old conversation between the image-maker, driven by a desperate passion to communicate, and the image-consumer, expectantly and enthusiastically waiting to perpetuate the effect of the image-maker's work among those who possess a kindred fascination with humankind's undying determination and ability to describe to the world how it perceives itself.



41- Kathe Köllwitz, *Zertretente* (*The Downtrodden*)

The Evolution of an Art Collection

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Collecting is one of a handful of attributes acknowledged as those which make us truly human. Along with language and creativity, collecting is one of those higher level abilities that develops more fully when acts of survival give rise to periods of leisure. This is the basis for culture and what separates human activities from those of other creatures. To collect is to make conscious decisions about the ordering and organizing of objects and ideas.

As an artist—and an artist who also works in printmaking media—the development of an art collection comprised mainly of prints seemed fairly natural. Prints, as multiple copy artworks, are typically less expensive to acquire than other art objects such as paintings and sculptures. A person with a modest income can actually afford to purchase a print by an artist whose work in some other more singular medium might remain quite out of reach.

Most prints are completed on paper and they are generally produced via very physical processes using three dimensional plates or blocks. Often, the evidence of the processes used to form the blocks can only be discovered through close examination of the prints themselves. A photographic reproduction will likely not yield adequate detail to assess or analyze a technique. An artist who surrounds him or herself with works by master artists slowly absorbs the technical information available in those works and is able to incorporate it into or modify it for his or her own processes.

The genesis of this collection came during my graduate and undergraduate studies. I have a recollection of attending a regional museum exhibition during my junior or senior year of college at which I remarked to my professor that one of the **woodcuts** looked like a Leonard Baskin work. The professor responded, “It’s actually a Bill Bippes.” Mr. Bippes was another of my professors during the time of my undergraduate studies. Both Bippes and Baskin are represented in this collection, and there is a certain similarity between their woodcut styles.

I cannot recall when I first came across the work of Leonard Baskin. He is a giant among printmakers but is not necessarily a household name. Aside from Rembrandt and Edvard Munch, I do not imagine I knew much about any other printmakers during this early stage of my education. I was still somewhat unfamiliar with printmaking processes. What I did know was that I was attracted to the slightly darker kind of imagery that is often a hallmark of Baskin’s work.

It is those elements of the **sublime**, as opposed to the more traditional concepts of beauty, that denote one path within this collection. It is that quality that can most easily be spotted within the works of both Baskin and Bippes, but also in images by Kathe Köllwitz, Georges Rouault, Gregory Gillespie, and Robert Hodgell. I suspect it was a similar quality that drew renowned American illustrator Barry Moser—represented here by the work *Resurrection*—to the region of Amherst, MA, to learn the technique of **wood engraving** directly from Baskin.

Relief: Printing methods such as woodcut, linoleum cut, and wood engraving, that utilize ink placed on the uppermost surface of the block. Woodcuts are produced from blocks made from the plank side of the wood, using knives and gouges. Wood Engraving uses the harder, denser end-grain of the wood and can hold finer lines made with specialized engraving tools.

It should come as little surprise that the first print obtained for this collection was one of Baskin's—*Death Among the Thistles*. Death and suffering are prominent subjects for artists who investigate the sublime. The great narratives and myths of all world cultures are steeped in these matters. Baskin's illustrative works often focused on the tragic events from these tales. *Oedipus at Colonus*—a simple line etching—suggests this, as do the two woodcuts (*Othello Young* and *Grieving Othello*) that consider themes from Shakespeare. Even in Baskin's series of portraits of artists he admired—represented here by four small wood engravings printed on a single sheet—the inclusion of William Blake is a nod to Blake's similar taste for the sublime. The death mask of Blake in this print comes across as delicate yet eerie.



2- Leonard Baskin, *Death Among the Thistles*

The work of Kathe Köllwitz also depicts the sublime and often alludes to the struggles of humanity. She began working with print media before the onset of the twentieth century and is often improperly grouped with the German Expressionist artists who worked during the periods of and between the world wars. Printmaking saw a resurgence during this period, particularly among various Expressionists—including those outside of Germany, such as Edvard Munch,

Sublime: a philosophical term referencing the quality of greatness—whether physical, moral, intellectual, metaphysical, aesthetic, spiritual or artistic—that is beyond human measurement or imitation.



36- Kathe Kollwitz, *Aufruhr (Revolt/Uprising)*

while also commenting on the state's political predicament during the turn of the twentieth century. *Uprising* and *Whetting the Scythe* find the peasants arming themselves against their oppressors, taking up farming implements as weapons. *Uprising* is actually the most didactic of the series. It was the first produced and is seen as somewhat separate from the rest of the series. An apparition, a ghost-like female nude figure, rises above the peasants, inciting them to break free from their oppressive overlords. It is not a factual scene but an allegory.

Whetting the Scythe is an unnerving work that is best observed in person and not from a reproduction. In this work Kollwitz utilized the technique of **soft-ground etching**. Deep textural impressions were made in the acid resistant coating on the plate, creating soft patterns, like woven cloth, that create value throughout a very moody image. The image exhibits a combination of the artist's technical expertise and supreme draftsmanship. It can be contrasted with *The Downtrodden*, which uses **hard-ground etching** and **aquatint** to create form and value. This work is based off an earlier work by Kollwitz and is related to another series called *A Weavers Rebellion*. The figures are modeled in the fashion of a traditional line drawing. Originally composed with an

Drypoint: An intaglio technique where the image is created through the direct incising of a drawn line into the plate with a sharp tool.

Intaglio: A printing method in which the recessed areas of the plate are printed into or onto a paper surface. Traditionally, metal plates, like copper, are used and recessed areas of the plate are created through either direct incising, engraving, or through chemical processes like etching.

additional image to be printed off the left end of this plate, the artist was eventually dissatisfied with this image on its own, though it remains an outstanding example of her work.

Köllwitz' *The Downtrodden* bridges two of the major directions of this collection. Along with the dark tenor of the sublime, this work has connections to religious imagery. While the nude male figure laid out across the bottom of the image is not specifically a representation of the dead Jesus, it does recall the crucified Christ. In fact, it looks remarkably similar to a painting of the dead Christ—*The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*—by the artist Hans Holbein the Younger, ca. 1520-22. Most religious imagery within the collection, however, takes on a far more Modernist or contemporary flavor.



37- Kathe Köllwitz,
Beim Denglen (Whetting the Scythe)

Georges Rouault is regarded by many as the last great religious artist. He was once associated with the French Expressionist group *Les Fauves* (wild beasts), along with Henri Matisse. He is mostly known for paintings and prints that blend the sinful suffering of humanity—presented in views of prostitutes, corrupt judges, and circus performers—with the suffering of Christ. The prints here include wood engravings produced after Rouault's ink drawings for his *Passion* series, and one intaglio work from his *Miserere* series.

The *Miserere* prints were born out of a long, arduous process. The series of fifty-eight large **intaglio** plates began as the artist's ink drawings; they were next transferred to copper plates using recently developed photomechanical processes. Rouault was highly dissatisfied with those initial images and proceeded to rework all the plates through traditional methods of drypoint, etching, aquatint, and **mezzotint** (The one pure mezzotint work in the exhibit is by Donald Furst—*All Fall Short*—an artist

Hard-ground: A protective coating for a metal plate that, when scratched through with a sharp tool, leaves fine, exposed lines that can be etched with an acid. **Soft-ground:** Similar to hard-ground but with the addition of tallow or petroleum that allows the ground to be lifted from the plate by pressing textures or lines onto the plate surface. **Aquatint:** An acid based intaglio process that yields soft, tonal gradations through an initial speckled dusting of a powdered ground on the surface of the plate.



50- Georges Rouault, from *The Passion*

often trade works, and printmakers do it all the more because they create multiples of their images. Edward Knippers is one of the artists with whom I have had the great fortune to trade works. His work is influenced by Rouault, as well as by several German Expressionists. The work often takes up themes of the Passion of Christ, as seen in the woodcuts in this exhibit. There is a direct and graphic quality to his style that complements the subject matter. Another of my artist friends from graduate school—Leah Renee Gregoire—is represented by a drypoint (*Stations of the Cross 8: Christ Preaches to the Women of Jerusalem*) and an engraving (*The Death of St. Clare*). She and I both work with the human figure. As we were developing our styles through drawing, painting, and printmaking, it was artists from the previous generation, like Knippers, who were a source of inspiration. Gregoire updates traditional images and stories with contemporary objects that

who also explores religious concepts). Though the plates were completed from 1922 to 1927, the prints were not published until 1947. The plate in the exhibit—*He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live* [John 11:25]—shows the richness of the artist's technique. The softness of the values seems more like charcoal on paper than an intaglio print.

Many of the works in this collection containing religious imagery or overtones were obtained from artist friends. Artists

Mezzotint: An intaglio process in which the surface of a metal plate is roughened with a serrated tool to produce an overall texture that will print as a rich black. The image is then developed by scraping and burnishing away the texture to produce grey to white value variations.

force viewers to reconceptualize the meaning of those narratives for our current times.

Katherine Brimberry's work, *True Image*, may also consider themes from the Passion of Christ, yet it does so through some truly innovative methods. The face of Christ in this print relates to the sixth Station of the Cross, in which St. Veronica wiped the bloody, sweating brow of the Savior with a handkerchief. The image of Christ was then said to have miraculously transferred to the cloth. Brimberry created the face through a fairly straightforward intaglio method—aquatint. However, she did not print the image straight onto the paper but on a silk handkerchief that was simultaneously glued to the paper backing in the printing process, through a method called **chine collé**.



12- Katherine Brimberry, *True Image*, Station 6



33- Edward Knippers, *Gethsemane*

Other religious images within the exhibit share a similar affinity for innovative printing processes. Guillermo Silva Sanz de Santamaria's *Crucifixión* intaglio is such an example. The individual figures within this composition are composed from separate, oddly shaped plates. One can see the embossed plate mark around each figure. Though the coloration of this work is subdued—to fit the content of the narrative—

Chine Collé: A French term that describes the printing method in which a thin material is simultaneously glued to an underlying paper during the printing process.

it is inked in the same manner as more colorful works in the exhibition, also by this artist. The **à la poupée** inking method allows for more colorful results, but there can be an unpredictable diversity of color effects within the edition of prints. This is why some artists from the twentieth century sought new methods for printing in color. They wanted greater control over the printed edition.

Prints created in color mark the next stream within this collection. I first started working with printmaking processes when I was in graduate school. Originally, I was more interested in **monoprint** methods because my training had been mainly in painting. I found that I could control this printing process more like a painting and get the exact, colorful results that I wanted. While Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione is believed to be the originator of monoprinting, his work in this exhibit is limited to etchings. Edward Knippers' work, *Three Figures*, displays a typical monoprint—or **monotype**—style in which



26- Stanley William Hayter, *The Anatomy Lesson*

a plate is covered with a layer of ink, sections are wiped away with various tools, and, finally, the image is offset from the plate onto a sheet of paper. The untitled work by Kate Hammett pushes the boundaries of what is accepted as both a monoprint and a print, in general. The image is not made on a block or plate but right on the sheet of paper, though the lifting of the ink/paint with the fingertips is quite similar to the effect in the Knippers work.

It was not until I began to work with the campus galleries at my graduate school that I became fully enchanted with printmaking. My main responsibility was to devise a database that included the two to three thousand works in the university's collection. The professors who had originally established the printmaking program at the school had amassed an extensive

à la poupée: *A French term that references the "little dolls" or cotton daubers used to apply colored ink directly to an intaglio plate's surface; each color is worked into the appropriate area(s) of the design.*

collection of prints, mainly during the 1960s and '70s. They had been taught by Mauricio Lasansky at the University of Iowa. Lasansky specialized in colorful intaglio works, like *El Maestro*. Students came from all over to learn from him, and then dispersed across North America to start printmaking programs at dozens of colleges and universities. My position at the university gave me the opportunity to sort through a treasure trove of prints every week.

Lasansky had studied under one the greatest innovators of twentieth century printmaking, Stanley William Hayter. Both artists are represented here, and both were also represented in that university collection. I would often drag my printmaking professors into the gallery storage areas to look at a work and explain the technique to me. I was mystified by the brilliant colors of Hayter's work. Hayter had set up a printmaking workshop where artists could come to experiment with printing techniques; first in Paris, then in New York, and eventually in Paris, again. He was able to work with some of the leading artists of his day at both locations. Hayter was first interested in the process of engraving, as seen in the work *Death by Water*. Those early pieces were connected to Surrealism. Later, he became intrigued by the possibility of printing color images, but he did not want to use multiple plates to get this result, as Lasansky did. Transitional experiments in color techniques show up in works like *The Anatomy Lesson*, which utilized stencils to apply color to the surface of the intaglio plate before printing.

Eventually, Hayter and his assistant Krishna Reddy developed a process called simultaneous color printing or color viscosity printing. They developed intaglio plates that had several levels, like a topographical map. A variety of soft and hard rollers deposited both oily and stiff inks on these differing levels to create astonishingly brilliant color combinations, all from one plate. Aside from being the only print by Hayter on a circular plate, *L'Oeil* is a beautiful example of how three colors of ink can come together to produce an even greater range of colors. Reddy's work became even more complex than Hayter's throughout the years. His almost sculptural approach to the plate



27- Stanley William Hayter, *L'Oeil (The Eye)*

Monoprint: A non-editionable print that is a unique work, printed from a plate or block. Monoprints may be pulled from already completed intaglio plates or blocks as variations of those images, but **monotype** is the more accurate term for works pulled from plates that have not been worked with any other printmaking processes.

allows for stunning and innovative imagery.

It is Dick Swift's work, however, that inspired me the most. The university possessed a copy of *Prophecy II*. The oddly shaped plates, the vibrant color, the religious imagery, and the figurative elements all spoke to me. I made a vow at that time that if I could ever find a copy of that print, I was going to buy it. I guess that was where my collection really began.



61- Dick Swift, *Prophecy II*

About three or four years later, after a long search, I found a gallery that represented Swift that actually had a copy of that print available. When I called to purchase it, I inquired about the artist. He was elderly, but still doing well, and the gallery owner arranged a phone conversation between us. Talking to the artist, himself, about his processes was a highlight of my collecting experiences.

Later, I came across other works by Swift. Many exhibit his preference for soft-ground textures (*Veneration of the Ancestors* and *The Disrobing of Christ*) as well as his interests in religious and mythological imagery (*Oedipus*). The acquisition of *Prophecy*, the previous version printed before *Prophecy II*, incorporating an additional plate, allowed for a wonderful comparison between the two prints. As I have studied these works over the years, they have greatly influenced my own processes and style. The inclusion of Hebrew text in the *Prophecy* works also made an impact on my artwork and established the final segment of the collection—works with textual elements.

Works like Swift's *Prophecy* intaglios and Moser's *Resurrection* display fairly straightforward passages of text. The work of Sandra Bowden, which incorporates both Hebrew and Greek,

Collagraph: A printing method in which a plate or block is created with collage elements glued to the surface; it may be printed through intaglio and/or relief inking.



9- Sandra Bowden, *In the Beginning II*

presents text as an integral formal design element. Her **collagraph** technique makes the deeply embossed text a physical aspect of the work. The text—as text—is nearly invisible and illegible at times, but it is the foundation of both the physical artwork and the religious concepts explored within the work. *In the Beginning II* is a full circle Christian theological statement wherein the opening verses of the Old Testament book of Genesis are connected to the New Testament gospel of John. “In the beginning” was God, yet in the beginning was also the Word of God, made flesh in the Son, Christ.

The Marv'lous Work Behold, by Tim Rollins + K.O.S. (Kids of Survival) is a collaborative work that uses a mixture of text and sheet music. The work is from a series called *The Creation* that uses Franz Josef Haydn's oratorio of the same name as an inspiration. The visual exploration of the chaos of the formation of the universe nearly obscures the text and musical notations. Yet, it is the foundation of the work, much like the text in the pieces by Bowden. Kenneth Steinbach's *Shine is My Reason* uses an embossing similar to Bowden's, yet his text is in the form of Braille letters. Image and word become an inseparable and incarnational aspect of all these pieces. The word *is* the image.

The works here represent only a portion of the entire collection, yet one can recognize the threads that run throughout the works. These artists not only move and inspire me; their works influence me in other ways. As a collector, I have organized these works into categories of interest, but sometimes it takes many years before I realize that certain elements are actually being manifest in my own work. On a deeper level this indicates the most desirable aspects of collecting artwork. Collecting is not about the monetary value of the work, it is about how the work impacts us daily in our hearts, minds, and souls. The objects and things with which we surround ourselves are bound to leave a mark on us over time, and that is the lasting impression of great art.