

**SPECIAL EXHIBITION EXPLORES INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES IN POSTWAR
AMERICAN PRINTMAKING**

The Pull of Experiment: Postwar American Printmaking, September 25, 2009–January 3, 2010



Karl Kasten, *Valencia*, 1960. Color soft-ground etching and aquatint with scraping and burnishing. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of James N. Heald II, B.S. 1949

For printmaking in America, the twenty years following the Second World War were a dynamic and innovative period during which artists fundamentally reconsidered the boundaries of the medium. The Yale University Art Gallery offers a special exhibition featuring American and European émigré artists whose work in intaglio printmaking was marked by this new impulse for experimentation. *The Pull of Experiment: Postwar American Printmaking*, on view from September 25, 2009, through January 3, 2010, examines the creative spirit inspired by interactions among these artists following the war and explores these artists' experimentation with style, techniques, tools, and materials. The forty-two prints in the exhibition are drawn largely from the Gallery's permanent collection

and include a recent donation of works, as well as several loans, from the collection of Yale alumnus James N. Heald II, B.S. 1949.

Exhibition Overview

The Pull of Experiment: Postwar American Printmaking showcases American and European émigré artists renowned for their contributions to intaglio printmaking. Among the many Europeans who immigrated to America in the years leading up to and during World War II were numerous printmakers, many of whom settled in New York City or at universities throughout the country, establishing workshops and heading print departments. From the various experiences and exchanges this mobilization produced, American and European artists alike were exposed to a plethora of styles, imagery, and ideas. *The Pull of Experiment* features the innovative prints that resulted from this period of intense interaction, including work by the European artists Harry Bertoia, Naum Gabo, Boris Margo, Gabor Peterdi (who taught at Yale for more than 25 years), and Karl Schrag, and American artists Fred Becker, Sue Fuller, Roderick Fletcher Mead, Louise Nevelson, and Jackson Pollock.

One such notable émigré, whose work is also featured in the exhibition, was the British artist Stanley William Hayter. Hayter's New York workshop, Atelier 17, was the first modern independent workshop in America devoted to experimentation with intaglio printmaking and was a gathering place for many of these artists, where they could exchange ideas, demonstrate new techniques, and share advice. Led by Hayter, they sought to revitalize the creative properties of intaglio printmaking and bring about its

reconsideration as a primary artistic medium. The European artists encouraged their American counterparts to cross boundaries and explore printmaking.

The artists in *The Pull of Experiment* turned to printmaking, a medium that has technical requirements above and beyond that of painting or drawing, with new exuberance and intent. “Many artists of this period felt that printmaking had become a medium used to imitate other media, such as painting and drawing, and I want to show how these artists insisted that method and result come together to create a unique effect—that it was important for the process to be appropriate for the image,” says **Katherine Alcauskas**, the Florence B. Selden Fellow at the Yale University Art Gallery and organizer of the exhibition. Influenced by a number of contemporary movements, including Cubism and Surrealism, artists adapted their imagery and personal style. Alcauskas points out, for instance, that the Jackson Pollock print featured in the exhibition is indicative of how Pollock’s experimentation in intaglio printmaking helped unlock his visual style.

The Pull of Experiment also illustrates how these artists, some of whom had worked in factories during the war, brought unconventional, and often industrial, tools and materials to traditional print processes, adapting drills and plastics to their practice, and thus blurring the traditional boundaries of intaglio printmaking. In addition, they used conventional intaglio printmaking tools and materials with new intention, repurposing traditional print processes for new and highly innovative ends. With these explorations, the artists featured in this exhibition felt that they could acquire a greater proficiency in the medium, which in turn could engender a stronger sense of freedom in their work.

Through experimentation, the printmakers working in America during the postwar period expected to discover the most fitting and creative means for producing their imagery. The artists active during this period had a profound effect on the future of printmaking. *The Pull of Experiment* is accompanied by a sixteen-page brochure with an essay by Alcauskas, exhibition checklist, and suggested further reading.

Intaglio Printmaking

Intaglio printing is one of three categories of printmaking, along with relief printing and planographic printing. In intaglio prints, grooves are formed in a matrix, most often a metal plate, through processes such as engraving, etching, or aquatint. Ink is then forced into these grooves and is transferred to paper with the aid of a printing press.

The Pull of Experiment: Postwar American Printmaking is organized by *Katherine Alcauskas, the Florence B. Selden Fellow, Department of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs. It is made possible by an endowment created with a challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Florence B. Selden Fund, with additional support provided by Mr. and Mrs. James N. Heald II, B.S. 1949.*



Stanley William Hayter, *Danse du soleil (Sun Dance)*, 1951. Color engraving and soft-ground etching with scorper work, 15 1/2 x 9 5/16 in. (39.4 x 23.7 cm). Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Herbert Fink. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Related Programming

Free gallery talks take place on September 29, October 20, November 11, and November 17:

Tuesday, September 29, 4:00 PM: “The Pull of Experiment: Postwar American Printmaking,” Katherine Alcauskas, the Florence B. Selden Fellow, Department of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs

Tuesday, October 20, 12:00 PM: “Karl Schrag’s *Night Wind*,” Alexander Nemerov, professor of History of Art and American Studies, Yale University

Wednesday, November 11, 12:20 PM: “Surrealism in American Printmaking,” Tatsiana Zhurauliova, PH.D. candidate, History of Art, Yale University

Tuesday, November 17, 4:00 PM: “Material Witness: Prints as Object Confessions of the Creative Act,” Joseph Goddu, print scholar

A Master Class on *The Pull of Experiment: Postwar American Printmaking* is presented by Katherine Alcauskas on Thursdays, October 1, November 5, and December 3, at 5:30 PM. To register for the series, please visit our Web site or call 203.432.9525.

Yale University Art Gallery

The Yale University Art Gallery, America’s oldest and one of its most important university art museums, was founded in 1832, when patriot-artist John Trumbull donated more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Since then, the Gallery’s collections have grown to number more than 185,000 objects, spanning the globe and ranging in date from ancient times to the present day. In addition to its celebrated collections of American paintings and decorative arts, the Gallery is noted for its important holdings of Greek and Roman art; early Italian paintings; later European art; Asian art; African art; art of the ancient Americas; and Impressionist, modern, and contemporary works. The Gallery is now preparing for the final phase of a ten-year expansion and renovation project. This includes the renovation of the Swartwout building and Street Hall, the two historic structures adjacent to the Gallery’s recently renovated Louis Kahn building. Located at the corner of Chapel and York Streets in New Haven, Connecticut, the Gallery is open to the public free of charge: Tuesday–Saturday 10:00 AM–5:00 PM (Thursday until 8:00 PM, September–June); Sunday 1:00–6:00 PM. Closed Mondays and major holidays. For additional information, the public may visit <http://artgallery.yale.edu>, or call 203.432.0600.

For additional information or images, contact Ana Davis, Associate Director of Public Information, at ana.davis@yale.edu or 203.432.0611.