

Abstract Thought: Selected Prints from the Permanent Collection

January 27-March 11, 2011
Babcock Fine Arts Center Gallery

This exhibition of modern and contemporary prints has been selected from the College's permanent collection. Begun over 70 years ago and now comprising over 3,300 works of art and artifacts, the collection supports the academic curriculum and the cultural life of the College by providing original works of art for teaching and study purposes. Primarily serving Sweet Briar students and professors, the permanent collection, associated exhibitions, and related programs also support the College's outreach to alumnae, prospective students, peer institutions, and the general public, and provide service to the broader regional and educational community. Among the collection's core purposes are: the support of classroom and experiential learning; the stimulation and advancement of research in a variety of humanities disciplines; the inspiration of creative work across all the arts; and the cultivation of an appreciation for and an understanding of the visual arts within the scope of a liberal arts education.

This particular display highlights non-objective and abstract prints—serigraphs, lithographs, etchings, aquatints, woodcuts, and engravings—that span 40 years, from the mid 20th century to the present.

With one exception, all the artists represented are women. For the past decade or more, collecting the work of modern and contemporary female artists active in the graphic arts has been a deliberate focus of the Friends of Art, a philanthropic group of alumnae, faculty, staff, and College supporters that assists in the acquisition of works of art for the permanent collection. Indeed, half of the works shown here have come to campus through the support of the Friends of Art or as gifts from former or current Friends of Art board members.

Nancy McDearmon and student assistants Kate Gorman '11, Caitlin Playle '13, and Ashley Rust '13 prepared and installed the exhibition. Alexandra Eads '11 assisted with research and exhibition planning, wrote much of the annotated checklist, and presented the opening gallery talk.

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Sweet Briar College

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JOSEF ALBERS 1888-1976

Selections from *The Interaction of Color* ca. 1963

IV-3; V-3

VI-3; VII-4

VIII-2; XI-1

XIII-2 The Bezold Effect; XX11-1

silkscreen on paper

19 7/8 x 13 inches each (support)

Purchase by the Studio Art Department, 1977

1977.003

Born and educated in Germany, Albers taught furniture and glass design at The Bauhaus, an internationally acclaimed school founded in Weimar in 1919. There, he guided students away from Expressionism towards Constructivism through extreme reduction in form. He and his wife, Anni (also included in this exhibition), emigrated America in 1933 when the Nazi regime closed The Bauhaus. The couple initially settled as art professors at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, then moved to New York in 1949. Josef was appointed head of the school of design at Yale University in 1950.

The Interaction of Color is arguably Albers' most famous work and serves to demonstrate, in his words, "a new way of teaching color, of studying color...to make our eyes sensitive to the wonders of color interaction." This work, originally published in the early 1960s, consists of 81 large folders featuring over 200 color studies and accompanied by voluminous commentary and explanation by Albers. The folders shown here are in fact from the original 1963 Yale University Press edition, a *tour de force* of hand-pulled silkscreens. Since its publication, the portfolio has influenced generations of artists and designers across the world.

The selection of studies shown here illustrates Albers' exploration of some key experiments—in all he demonstrates the manipulation of eye and brain by the juxtaposition of various hues, tones, and shades. For example, in several, a spot or small square seems to change hue or vary in intensity depending on the background color. In others, a small alteration—such as using black instead of white—changes the way in which the viewer's eye "reads" space and volume in a pattern. In some cases—for example the designs with a yellow dot and circles—if a viewer stares intensely for a few moments then looks away, she will see a vibrant after-image.

ANNI (ANNEILISE FLEISCHMANN) ALBERS 1899-1994

Triangulated Intaglio I 1976

etching on paper

13 x 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

Gift of Celia Williams Dunn '61 in honor of her parents Celia Howell and Bernard Franklin Williams, 2001

2001.002

Born in Berlin, Albers was one of the first women to attend and then to teach at The Bauhaus. There, Albers was introduced to weaving, which would become her primary medium and one she taught at both The Bauhaus and Black Mountain College. Indeed, she was the first weaver to have a solo show at the Modern Museum of Art, in 1949, and is considered by many scholars to be the finest textile artist of the 20th century. Her two books, *On Weaving* (1965) and *On Designing* (1963) are recognized as landmarks. In 1963, Albers decided to branch out into printmaking.

Triangulated Intaglio I is evidence of the influence that Albers' training in weaving had on her prints. The precise arrangement of patterned triangles suggests textile design, while the etching's simplicity, order, and balance recall the reductivist dictums of her Bauhaus teachers and colleagues.

VIJA CELMINS born 1939

Constellation—Uccello 1983

aquatint and etching on paper

25 x 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

Purchase made possible by the Friends of Art, 1993

1993.008

Celmins was born in Riga, Latvia, and moved to the United States with her family in 1949. She grew up in Indiana and earned a BFA from the John Herron Institute in Indianapolis and went on to an MFA in painting from the University of California, Los Angeles. Upon graduating from UCLA, Celmins taught at the University of California and the California Institute of Arts, Valencia.

A painter and accomplished draftsman as well as a printmaker, Celmins has spent her career exploring with unnatural clarity and a sense of keen introspection the representation of three-dimensional space—waves in water and heavenly constellations have been perennial sources of inspiration for her—in the two-dimensional format of paper or canvas. *Constellation-Uccello* typifies her fascination with the process of printmaking as well as her intense observation and appreciation of nature, especially the interlocking, intersecting patterns of the natural world and man-made objects or designs. This is one of a number of prints in which Celmins combines multiple images on a single sheet, bringing together the night sky and a reproduction of a perspective drawing of a chalice by 15th-century Florentine painter Paolo Uccello.

MINNA WRIGHT CITRON 1896-1991
Plato's Cave 1959
etching and aquatint on paper
15 x 17 inches
Sweet Briar College Art Fund Purchase, 1962
1962.005

Citron, a native of the New York area, studied at the Art Students League in the 1920s. In the mid-1930s she moved to the City's Union Square neighborhood, where she became associated with the so-called Fourteenth Street School of urban realism and its best-remembered "members" Kenneth Hayes Miller, Moses and Raphael Soyer, and Isabel Bishop. Citron worked, too, for the Federal Art Project as an art teacher and muralist. Later in life, following travel to Europe, her work became far more abstract and Citron began to experiment with non-traditional printmaking techniques.

The concept of Plato's cave is taken from *The Republic*—Book VII—in which Plato recounts his teacher Socrates' explanation of human perception and comprehension. Socrates uses an allegory of flickering shadows cast indistinctly on the wall of a cave to explain to a student the dire limitations of mankind's knowledge.

DOROTHY DEHNER 1901-1994
Figures in a Landscape 1955
engraving on paper
9 x 11 ³/₄ inches
Purchase made possible by the Friends of Art, 1998
1998.004

Born in Cleveland to a progressive family—her mother was a women's rights activist—Dehner grew up in California. Living with aunts there after her parents' deaths, she studied drawing, painting, photography, dance, music, and acting and later attended the University of California and the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York to study theatre. In 1925, Dehner toured Europe and was inspired by the emerging movements of Fauvism and Cubism. Upon her return to New York, Dehner enrolled at the Art Students League and began her professional career as an artist. She married the sculptor David Smith, a fellow ASL student, in 1927.

In 1952, after her troubled marriage ended in divorce, Dehner began to work at Atelier 17, an important print studio and by 1957, she enjoyed high profile representation with a major New York gallery. Continually experimenting with different techniques and inventive ways to break down forms, Dehner sought to bring a spontaneous, improvisational element to her work. *Figures in a Landscape* exemplifies her combination of tribal or totemic imagery with a modern sensibility to manipulate shapes, and lines into a whimsical, rhythmic abstract composition.

TARA DONOVAN born 1969
Untitled (*Bubbles*) 2005
etching on paper
29 5/8 x 29 3/4 inches
Purchase made possible by the Friends of Art, 2010
2010.008

Born in New York, Donovan was educated at the School of Visual Arts, New York, the Corcoran College of Art and Design, and Virginia Commonwealth University. She had her first solo exhibition at the Corcoran in 1999, and came to national attention with her inclusion in the 2000 Whitney Museum of American Art biennial. Since then, she has exhibited widely across the nation. In 2001, Donovan was the Augustus Saint-Gaudens Memorial fellow and soon thereafter was awarded a residency by Atelier Calder in France. In 2008, the MacArthur Foundation awarded her a prestigious grant recognizing her outstanding professional achievements. The same year Donovan was given her first major museum retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

Seeking inspiration in everyday objects—toothpicks, paper plates, pencils, twist-ties, drinking straws, and Dixie cups—Donovan has built a reputation for creating site-specific or site-built sculptures that transform utterly mundane materials into mesmerizing, almost ethereal, visions. Interviewed in *Art in America* in 2003, the artist explained that, “What I want to do is fix the ephemeral and submit the inconsequential to the process of art making.” Branching out into printmaking in the past five years, she has used items such as rubber bands and steel pins to create the print matrix. As early as 2003 she began making drawings by placing bubbles of ink on Foamcore board. This print, one of series, is an outgrowth of those drawings. The artist places bubbles of ink and etching acid on the plate, essentially using the bubbles in place of an engraving burin to create the image. As in all Donovan’s work, serendipity and the inherent physical properties of her material play an important role in the creative process.

YVONNE JACQUETTE born 1934
Nightscape 1998
woodcut on paper
15 5/8 x 19 3/8 inches
Gift of Catherine Caldwell Cabaniss ’61, 2001
2001.010.003

Jacquette was born in Pittsburgh and raised in Stamford, Connecticut. She attended the Rhode Island School of Design and currently lives and works in New York and Maine.

Jacquette is closely identified with a high-angle or aerial point of view, a perspective that allows her to explore and manipulate an otherwise ordinary representational image so that it dissolves into utterly flat, abstract patterns.

LOUISE KAMES born 1955
Two Elements 1990
etching on paper
29 x 39 inches
Purchase made possible by the Friends of Art, 1994
1994.001

Kames earned a BA in studio art and art history from Clarke College in Dubuque, Iowa, an MA in art history from the University of Illinois in 1980, and an MFA in printmaking from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1988. She currently chairs the art and art history department at Clarke University, where she is a professor of art. Her drawings, prints, and installation-based work have been exhibited all across the United States through solo exhibitions, as well as in juried exhibitions. Kames has been a fellow in residence at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.

Commenting on Kames' work, Sweet Briar Professor of Studio Art Laura Pharis has remarked, "[it] combines the physical, intellectual, and spiritual...she contrasts painterly gestures with elegant draftsmanship in portraying still life objects or objects found in nature, but everything is a visual metaphor; everything has a meaning within its meaning." *Two Elements* illustrates Kames' emphasis on organic compositions and her desire to translate a sense of unexpected awe into a formal arrangement.

IDA RITTENBERG KOHLMAYER 1912-1997
Synthesis Print 1993
silkscreen on paper
22 x 26 ½ inches
Gift of Chloe Fort Lenderman '62 and Julia Fort Lowe '63 in memory of their mother, Chloe Frierson Fort '36, 1993
1993.012

A native of New Orleans, Kohlmeyer was educated at Newcomb College. She earned a BA in English Literature in 1933 and received a MFA degree from Newcomb Art School, Tulane University, in 1956. She subsequently attended summer school in Provincetown, Massachusetts, with the influential abstract painter Hans Hoffman and had her first New York exhibition in 1959. Kohlmeyer taught at Newcomb Art School, Tulane University, 1956-1965 and at the University of New Orleans 1973-1975. She is perhaps best known nationally for a public commission titled *Aquatic Colonnade* (1987-1990) at the Aquarium of the Americas, New Orleans.

Kohlmeyer much admired the work of Mark Rothko, whom she encountered at Tulane in the 1950s, and Spanish artist Joan Miró. Rothko's use of saturated color and Miró's biomorphic abstraction are echoed in Kohlmeyer's exuberant mature work. An accomplished printmaker as well as a sculptor of monumental brightly painted wood and aluminum totems, Kohlmeyer typically worked with bold colors and patterns abstracted from organic and geometric shapes.

IDA RITTENBERG KOHLMAYER 1911-1997 (United States)

Tokens of Identity 1981

silkscreen on paper

24 x 36 inches

Gift of John W. Poynor, M.D., in honor of William J. and Catherine Caldwell

Cabaniss '61, 2003

2003.017

JOYCE KOZLOFF born 1942

Untitled 1977

lithograph on paper

28 ½ x 18 ¼ inches

Purchase made possible by the Friends of Art, 1997

1997.002

Born in New Jersey, Kozloff graduated from the Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1964 and earned an MFA from New York's Columbia University in 1967. She also studied at the Art Students League, Rutgers University, as well as the University of Florence throughout her lifetime.

Kozloff's decorative work is inspired by crafts associated with women and non-Western design patterns, which she reconfigures and blends to create a decorative form of abstraction. She has described her work as "[a] collage of imagery from different cultures." Like her contemporary Miriam Schapiro, one of Kozloff's prime goals has been to legitimize the design sensibilities of traditional artisans and to celebrate decorative schemes used throughout different cultures. In the work shown here, for example, she suggests ornamental patterns often seen in Islamic mosaics and textiles.

BRIDGET RILEY born 1931

Eclipse 1982

silkscreen on paper

40 x 25 inches

Gift of the estate of Shirlee S. Dalton through Diane Dalton '67, 2002

2002.008

Born in London and educated at Cheltenham Ladies College, Goldsmith's College of Art, and the Royal Academy of Art in London, Riley has devoted her career to exploring completely non-objective optical illusion. Her large-scale prints offer a hypnotic vision of undulating patterns and carefully juxtaposed colors that seem to shift with a palpable internal energy.

SUSAN ROTHENBERG born 1945

Breath-Man 1986

relief and intaglio print on paper

20 ¾ x 20 ¼ inches

Purchase made possible by the Friends of Art, 1988

1988.003

Born in Buffalo, Rothenberg attended the fine arts program at Cornell University, but dropped out after failing a sculpture class. Rothenberg lived for a while on a Greek island before moving to New York. There, Rothenberg immersed herself in the Manhattan art scene and began to create art that reflected her individuality. She noted in a 1987 interview, “By the middle seventies I sensed that people were tired of minimal and conceptual art. It made sense to paint an image of something you could recognize and feel something about.” The artist has described herself as “an image maker and an image breaker.”

Breath-Man is one of the many works during a chaotic time in Rothenberg’s life that she recalls as “a turbulent year, I don’t think it was a time for contemplative images.”

Explaining the swirling lines and abstracted figure, Rothenberg has commented, “I don’t feel like getting into who the human being is, what the dynamic is...I don’t want to get too literal...I want the viewer to be able to do the work, too.”

BARBARA TISSERAT born 1951

Untitled from *Taking Measure* 1986-1987

lithograph on paper

10 x 13 1/8 inches

Purchase made possible by the Friends of Art, 1993

1993.003

Born in Colorado, Tisserat attended Colorado State University where she earned a BFA with an emphasis in printmaking and graphic design. She continued on to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she graduated with an MFA in printmaking. After graduate school, Tisserat taught drawing and printmaking at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, until she moved to Richmond. She has been a member of the faculty the Department of Painting and Printmaking at Virginia Commonwealth University’s School of the Arts since 1978.

Tisserat’s untitled lithograph from the series *Taking Measure* exemplifies a common thread of utter simplicity throughout her work. Created through a painstaking process of layering deliberately misaligned elements, her prints incorporate both Tisserat’s exacting control of the medium and her openness to serendipity in the printmaking process. She commented in 1987, “rather than telling, describing, and defining, the image might instead suggest, evoke, and allude.”

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