

# Three Centuries Of American Prints



From The National Gallery Of Art

**By Kate Eagen Johnson**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — “Prints are not marginal.” Judith Brodie, curator and head of the department of Modern prints and drawings at the National Gallery, spoke with confidence about the often-overlooked medium. “Through the exhibition and catalog we reveal the story of prints, one that parallels the history of American art. They set, and kept, the pace.” She and Amy Johnston, assistant curator of prints and drawings, have co-curated “Three Centuries of American Prints from the National Gallery of Art” on view at the museum through July 24.

To commemorate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the National Gallery, they have produced

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“Blind Singer” by William H. Johnson, circa 1940. Color screen print with tempera additions, image: 16¾ by 11 inches. Reba and Dave Williams Collection, Florian Carr Fund and gift of the Print Research Foundation.





an exhibition of remarkable quality and historical sweep drawn solely from the institution's holdings. The National Gallery's acquisition of important print collections over the years has made such an expansive show possible.

To comprehend the rarity of this highly anticipated project, consider that a major museum last mounted a comparable appraisal of American graphics more than three decades ago. After the exhibition closes in Washington, D.C., it will travel to Prague and to Mexico City, locales selected because they are uncommon venues for American art exhibitions.

Observing that the museum-going public favors painting, sculpture, architecture and now photography

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Sa Ga Yeath Qua Pieth Tow was among the Native American dignitaries who traveled with Albany Mayor Pieter Schuyler to call upon Queen Anne in 1710. The print is from the set titled "Four Indian Kings." "Sa Ga Yeath Qua Pieth Tow, King of the Maquas" by John Simon after John Verelst, after 1710. Mezzotint on laid paper, sheet: 16 $\frac{1}{8}$  by 10 inches. Paul Mellon Fund.



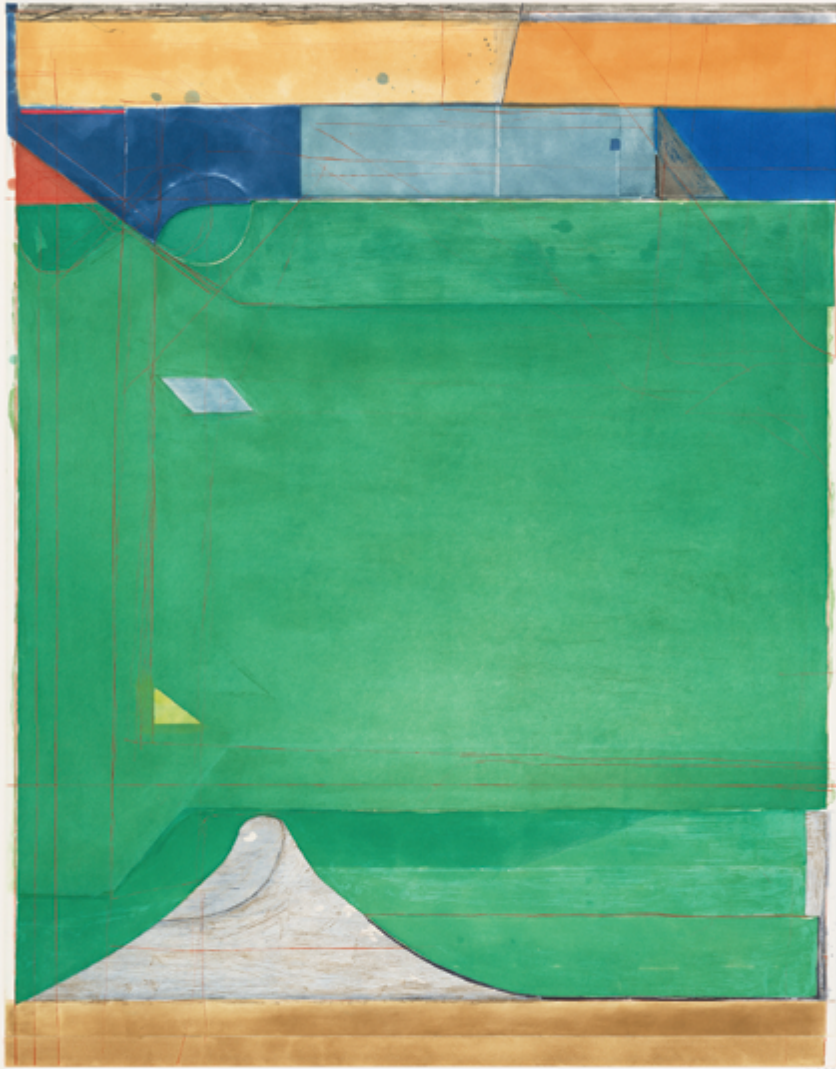
With the light sensitivity of works on paper in mind, Johnston noted, “We can’t show prints all the time as we can paintings. This exhibition provides a wonderful opportunity.” “Stoops in the Snow” by Martin Lewis, 1930. Drypoint and sand ground, plate: 10 by 15 inches and sheet: 13½ by 18½ inches. Gift of Addie Burr Clark.

over prints, Brodie related that she and Johnston “wanted to bring prints to the fore, but we did not want to get tripped up by the technical.” She has noticed that many people feel they need to know how to create a print to appreciate one, a high bar not faced by other arts such as photography or architecture. In Brodie’s opinion, deep knowledge of printmaking is not a prerequisite for enjoyment.

“I don’t want to burden viewers,” she said. “If they’re interested in technique, great. But I want them to look at these works and see that they are intertwined with the story of American art.” (Print connoisseurs should have no fear. The catalog

Active from 1834 to 1907, the partnership of Nathaniel Currier and James Ives produced more than 7,500 print titles. Fanny Palmer was one of the firm’s leading artists. “A Midnight Race on the Mississippi” by Frances Flora Bond Palmer for Currier & Ives, 1860. Color lithograph with hand coloring on wove paper, image: 18⅛ by 28 inches and sheet: 22 by 32 inches. Donald and Nancy de Laski Fund.





contains exacting technical information in the glossary, exhibition checklist and portions of the text.)

This ambitious retrospective resulted from a convergence of events. According to Brodie, mounting a three-century survey from the museum's own collection was feasible after the 2008 acquisition of the Reba and Dave Williams collection of 5,200 prints. For the early section of the exhibition, she and Johnston plucked gems from Harry W. Havemeyer's recent gift and promised gift of 177 Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century prints.

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**“Green” by Richard Diebenkorn, 1986. Spitbite aquatint, soap ground aquatint, and drypoint, plate: 45 by 35¼ inches and sheet: 53½ by 40¾ inches. Eugene L. and Marie-Louise Garbáty Fund and Patrons' Permanent Fund.**

Then there was the unanticipated closing of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 2014. Appointed steward of the Corcoran's holdings, the National Gallery of Art was directed to choose the most suitable works for its own collection and to distribute the rest. A number of these additions appear in the exhibition...

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“Woman Bathing” by Mary Cassatt, 1890–1891. Color drypoint and aquatint on heavy laid paper, plate: 14<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> by 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches and sheet: 18<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> by 12<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches. Gift of Mrs Lessing J. Rosenwald.

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