

The Museum of Modern Art

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MASTER PRINTS BY ALECHINSKY TO OPEN AT MUSEUM

PIERRE ALECHINSKY: A PRINT RETROSPECTIVE, an exhibition exploring this contemporary artist's work in the print media, will open in the third-floor Sachs Galleries at The Museum of Modern Art on June 11, 1981. Organized by Riva Castleman, Director, and Audrey Isselbacher, Assistant Curator in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, with the cooperation of Mr. Alechinsky and Yves Rivière, the exhibition will remain on view through August 11, 1981.

A selection of 85 works drawn almost entirely from the Museum's collection and spanning every phase of Alechinsky's career from his first print made in 1946 to the present, comprises the retrospective. Pierre Alechinsky has devoted more energy, technical skill, imagination and patience to the print media than perhaps any other contemporary artist. The Belgian-born artist has created some 950 works in various print media. Today, according to Riva Castleman, "he continues to retrieve from his crowded past and bustling present the astonishing images that inhabit his prints." It is Alechinsky's seemingly insatiable hunger for experiment and experience that makes his works so vital and vivid.

Pierre Alechinsky, who was born in Brussels in 1927, began to make prints as a student at La Cambre, the Belgian national college of architecture and decorative arts. While he was there he experimented in all the print media he would later use: linoleum cut, woodcut, etching and

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lithography. His 1948 series of etchings, Trades, with text by Luc de Heusch, proved to be the first of many collaborations between Alechinsky and living authors, particularly his fellow countryman and friend Christian Dotremont, and Walasse Ting, the Chinese poet-writer.

In 1948, Alechinsky and Dotremont became founding members of COBRA, a group of Danish, Belgian and Dutch artists and writers (among them Asger Jorn and Karel Appel) who shared a common purpose: to infuse their work with natural expression. The name COBRA was derived from the letters of the members' cities: Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam. Most of its members, including Alechinsky, adhered to COBRA's "Expressionist and mythological bases throughout their artistic careers," Castleman writes. "Taking the particular iconography of the folklore of their countries, they combined animate imagery with turbulent execution. They put into their work the fascination of self-provoked fear."

When COBRA disbanded in 1951, Alechinsky went to Paris to study at Atelier 17, the etching and engraving workshop of S. W. Hayter; one year later, Alechinsky and Dotremont were asked to contribute an etching to the album 21 Etchings & Poems then being compiled by Hayter's students in New York. Was It Snowing?, an etching combining verse by Dotremont and illustration by Alechinsky, resulted.

In 1954, Alechinsky met Walasse Ting, who introduced him to oriental calligraphy, an ancient art form which was to influence Alechinsky's work significantly. Its impact can be seen in the way the artist's forms "emerge from complex tangles of lines," says Castleman. During the 1960s

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forever eager to incorporate into his work new techniques and images garnered from his own experience, Alechinsky experimented with: a new form of lift-ground etching permitting freer and more direct drawing in this medium; spiral shapes suggested by Reinhold's sculpture; an idea he got from looking at Mayan friezes which resulted in the artist's execution of works framed with marginal drawings; and the use of old deeds and worthless stock certificates for drawing and printing. In 1968, inspired by Malcolm Lowry's novel Under the Volcano, Alechinsky introduced images of volcanic activity into his prints, an idea that blossomed into a series of lithographs -- Vulcanalogies (1970) -- and a series of etchings -- Vulcanalyses (1971).

During the early 1970s, Alechinsky became particularly intrigued by circular motifs, which he worked into three series of etchings: Rural Wheels, Reels and Cerclitude. Similar motifs, in the manner of Japanese han (seals) were introduced in 1976. Later that year he completed a set of etchings on Central Park, and a series on Niagara Falls.

The COBRA legacy is still visible in Alechinsky's remarkable body of work with its linear, emotion-driven composition. His prints throb with complex arrangements of scribbles, snake-like creatures and imps. "Even when the theme is prescribed by a specific occasion, the compositions formed by Alechinsky spring from an alien world that taunts and enchants," writes Castleman. His undulating shapes "are of the same grotesque world" from which his fellow Belgian and acknowledged idol James Ensor drew his subjects. Alechinsky "entrances us with the symbols of his own past and reminds us of our own subconscious fascination with improbable terrors," says Castleman.

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PIERRE ALECHINSKY: A PRINT RETROSPECTIVE has already travelled extensively under the auspices of the Museum's National Program of Circulating Exhibitions. The exhibition has been seen in Houston, Texas (Sarah Campbell Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston); San José, California (San José Museum of Art); Wichita, Kansas (Ulrich Museum of Art); Ontario, Canada (Art Gallery of Hamilton); and Montreal, Canada (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts).

In conjunction with this exhibition, two films will be shown in the Roy and Niuta Titus Auditorium on Fridays at noon. The films are Encre (1963), produced by Jean Cleinge for SOFIDOC (20 minutes) and Alechinsky (1970), directed by Luc de Heusch for Albina Productions (20 minutes). They will be shown on June 12, 19 and 26; July 3, 10, 17, 24 and 31; and August 7.

Free distribution of an illustrated brochure to accompany the exhibition, with text by Riva Castleman and a complete checklist of the items on view, is made possible through the generosity of the Société Générale de Banque, Belgium.

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Born in Pécs, Hungary in 1902, Breuer graduated from the local

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symbol of "modernism," the Bauhaus was formed by Walter Gropius shortly

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