

The Museum of Modern Art

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JASPER JOHNS: A PRINT RETROSPECTIVE

May 19 - August 19, 1986

"I tend to think that all art work is heroic. I think it's a heroic enterprise from childhood, from the beginning, whenever it begins."
Jasper Johns 1978

"The provocatively silent and still life that Johns creates conveys infinite nuances of meaning which multiply into a boundless territory of possibilities."

Riva Castleman

JASPER JOHNS: A PRINT RETROSPECTIVE, the most complete examination to date of this foremost American artist's prints, opens at The Museum of Modern Art on May 19, 1986. Organized by Riva Castleman, director of the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, the exhibition represents twenty-five years of printmaking. Ms. Castleman has emphasized the quality of Johns's creative expression in her selection of 175 lithographs, etchings, silkscreens, and monotypes. Three of his paintings are also included that have a direct relationship to prints of the seventies and eighties.

Johns began to experiment with printmaking at Universal Limited Art Editions at the invitation of its founder, Tatyana Grosman. In 1960 she delivered two lithographic stones to him at his New York loft, and that year he completed his first print, Target, inspired by an earlier drawing of the same title. He then created the series of numerals 0-9 from a single stone. Johns was quick to exploit the potential of lithography, and he eventually investigated and became equally adept at etching, serigraphy, and monotype. By the end of the sixties he had produced over 120 prints.

JASPER JOHNS: A PRINT RETROSPECTIVE discloses the artist's inimitable draftsmanship, his ability to create provocative and fascinating imagery,

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and his extraordinary mastery of the techniques of printmaking. The contents of the exhibition illustrate the relationship between the artist's printmaking and painting: elements of the prints appear in the paintings, elements from the paintings are reworked in the prints and reappear in the paintings. The masterpieces range in scale from intimate prints such as the four-inch-square Target 1 (1967) to a series of seven-and-a-half-foot monotypes, completed in 1983, which have never been presented to the public.

Johns made his prints primarily at the workshops of Universal Limited Art Editions in West Islip, New York; Gemini G.E.L. in Los Angeles; Simca Print Artists in New York; and Aldo and Piero Crommelynck in Paris (published by Petersburg Press, London and New York). Many of the works in the exhibition are from private collections, including that of the artist; approximately half are from the collection of the Museum.

Johns has produced a body of work that is distinguished for its originality and its elegant, elusive, and highly ambiguous style. When the artist presented his work in the 1957 group exhibition at the Jewish Museum, Artists of the New York School: Second Generation, it received immediate and widespread critical acclaim. Within a year he had his first solo exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, where he has continued to exhibit regularly. The Museum of Modern Art was the first museum to acquire his paintings, which were included in its 1959 exhibition Sixteen Americans. Tatyana Grosman saw Johns's work for the first time in the latter exhibition.

In conjunction with this exhibition, Riva Castleman has written an extensively illustrated catalog in which she discusses the evolution of Johns's printmaking in the context of his work in other mediums. Running parallel to her text are over 100 quotations selected from both interviews

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with and writings by Johns. A special poster featuring an image created by the artist for the occasion is being published to accompany the exhibition.

Following its premiere at The Museum of Modern Art the exhibition will travel to the Fort Worth Museum, Texas; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, and other European locations.

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For further information or photographic materials, contact Jeanne Collins or Jessica Schwartz, Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.