



Release Date: November 21, 2014

National Gallery of Art Acquires Etchings from 18th-Century Venice and 20th-Century America, Bourke-White's Inaugural "Life" Magazine Cover Photograph, Proofs from Diebenkorn's Monumental "Green", Underground Comics, and Illustrated Books from Paul Mellon's Personal Collection



Margaret Bourke-White  
*Fort Peck Dam, Montana*, 1936  
 gelatin silver print  
 National Gallery of Art, Patrons Permanent Fund

Washington, DC—At its most recent meeting of the Board of Trustees, the National Gallery of Art's acquisitions focused on significant works on paper from the 18th through the 20th centuries, including a print of the first photograph to ever appear on the cover of *Life* magazine, made in 1936 by the trailblazing photographer Margaret Bourke-White (1904–1971).

Several exquisite preliminary impressions of *Green* (1986), the acclaimed print by Richard Diebenkorn (1922–1993), were accepted along with a generous gift from Kathan Brown, the founder of Crown Point Press: 57 works by Crown Point artists, including Chuck Close (b. 1940), Sol LeWitt (1928–2007), Julie Mehretu (b. 1970), and Chris Ofili (b. 1968). In addition, the Gallery broke new ground by acquiring a distinguished collection of underground comic books—176 in all—published between 1964 and 1977.

Five rare sets of etchings by artists, including Gianfrancesco Costa (1711–1773), Marco Pitteri (1702–1786), Pietro Gaspari (1720–1785), and Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727–1804), strengthened the Gallery's outstanding holdings of 18th century Venetian art. The Gallery also welcomed the arrival from the Mellon collection of 74 illustrated books by the world's finest modern painters and sculptors.

"These new acquisitions embody the innovation, continuity, and renewal that characterize art history," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "The Gallery is very grateful for the continuing generosity of its donors and to the public for visiting us—from every corner of the globe—to view the treasures of our permanent collection."

#### Diebenkorn Purchases and Gifts from Crown Point Press

One of the highlights of the Gallery's 2013 exhibition *Yes, No, Maybe: Artists Working at Crown Point Press* was Richard Diebenkorn's *Green*, considered by many to be his greatest print. Displayed alongside the edition print, which was acquired by the Gallery in 1996, were three preliminary impressions, known as "proofs." These unique working proofs, which display the artist's creative process, are widely different: in one, Diebenkorn added so much gray wash it could arguably be called a watercolor. In another, he pasted on so many additional elements, it could pass for a collage. The acquisitions were made possible by the Gallery's Patrons' Permanent Fund.

In conjunction with the Gallery's purchase of the Diebenkorn proofs, Kathan Brown (who founded Crown Point Press in 1962) generously donated three more proofs of *Green*. Brown also donated an additional 57 prints—mostly proofs but also edition prints (signed and numbered), and drawings—made from 1972 to 2010 by 24 Crown Point artists.

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Crown Point Press is credited with reviving interest in etching in the 20th century by serving as a studio, workshop, and publisher of etchings by artists whose previous careers had been focused not only on printmaking but on painting, sculpture, and conceptual art. These acquisitions add to the Gallery's approximately 1,700 works from the renowned San Francisco workshop.

### **Five Rare Sets of 18th Century Venetian Etchings**

Venetian artists embraced the freedom and potential "painterliness" of etching and reveled in creating multiple images displaying different aspects of the same subjects. *Anamorphoses* (c. 1747) by Giovanni Francesco Costa features eight distorted images that are intelligible only when viewed in a cylindrical mirror. Through the use of varied textures, *Vedute di Verona* (1747)—created collaboratively by Dionigi Valesi (c. 1730–c. 1780) and Giovanni Antonio Urbani (active mid-18th century)—exquisitely conveys the sparkling water and luminous atmosphere of Venice, "the Queen of the Adriatic."

The execution of these etchings also required masterful technique. Marco Pitteri, celebrated as one of history's virtuosos in the art of engraving, created *La Caccia in valle* (1763) without leaving a single mark or cross-hatch. *Architectural Fantasies* (1771) by Pietro Gaspari demonstrates a command of scenographic perspective and expertise in ancient architecture. Finally, the imaginary heads etched by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo in *Raccolta di teste* (1773–1774) harkens back to the physiognomic studies by Leonardo da Vinci.

These works may be viewed in the National Gallery of Art Print Study Room, which is open weekdays from 10:00 a.m. to noon and 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.; call (202) 842-6380 for an appointment.

### **Important Photographs by Bourke-White, Steichen, and Weems**

The lush, exhibition-size (more than 12 inches in height) *Fort Peck Dam, Montana* (1936) is the first work by Margaret Bourke-White to enter the Gallery's collection. A milestone in the development of documentary photography during the 1930s and one of the American photographer's most iconic works, *Fort Peck Dam, Montana* was published on the cover of the inaugural issue of *Life* magazine on November 23, 1936. An emblem of the machine age, this photograph depicts the stark, massive piers for an elevated highway near the dam, constructions so enormous they dwarf the engineers at their feet.

A stunning and exceptionally rare platinum print by Edward Steichen (1879–1973), *An Apple, A Boulder, A Mountain* (1921), was created during a transitional time in Steichen's career. Although he had early, meteoric success with painterly photographs, upon returning from a tour of duty in World War I he was depressed and conflicted about the merit of his previous art. Steichen then began a self-imposed apprenticeship to better understand the basics of photography, spending months photographing simple objects in order to convey nuances of light, texture, and volume. *An Apple, A Boulder, A Mountain* represents this important period.

The Gallery has also acquired *Slow Fade to Black, Set II* (2010), its second body of work by Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953). A play on the cinematic fade, the deliberately blurred photographs of black female performers, including Josephine Baker, Dorothy Dandridge and Nina Simone, call attention to these talented women while posing questions about the fragility of fame and how one is remembered or forgotten by history.

The photographs by Steichen and Bourke-White will be featured in the upcoming exhibition ***In Light of the Past: 25 Years of Photography at the National Gallery of Art*** (May 3–July 26, 2015). Weems' photographs will go on view in ***The Memory of Time: Contemporary Photographs at the National Gallery of Art, Acquired with the Alfred H. Moses and Fern M. Schad Fund*** (May 3–September 7, 2015).

Photographs from the collection can be viewed by appointment in the Photographs Study Room, which is open weekdays from 10:00 a.m. to noon and 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.; call (202) 842-6144 for further information.

### **Paul Mellon's Personal Collection of *Livres de peintres***

Illustrated books from the collection of Paul Mellon (1907–1999), originally bequeathed by Mr. Mellon in 2001 subject to a life estate in his wife, Rachel Lambert "Bunny" Mellon (1910–2014), have been received by the Gallery. The 74 volumes chart the course of one of the most significant developments in the history of 20th century art—*livres de peintres*, books illustrated by the great painters of the School of Paris.

This exceptional collection includes Edgar Allen Poe's *Le Courbeau (The Raven)* (1875) illustrated by Edouard Manet (1832–1883) and Jules Renard's *Histoires Naturelles* (1899) illustrated by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901), which features a personal dedication (with a drawing of a fox) from the artist to his favorite printer. The Gallery's volume of Paul Verlaine's *Parallèlement* (1900) with lithographs by Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), considered by many to be the first great illustrated book of the 20th century, is accompanied by more than 100 of Bonnard's original drawings. The group also includes Henri Matisse's (1864–1901) momentous *Jazz* (1947) and *Paris Sans Fin* (1969), Alberto Giacometti's (1901–1966) ode to the sensuality, beauty and everlasting excitement of the City of Light.

### **Underground Comic Books**

Abigail and William Gerdtts, leading scholars in the history of American art, have presented a collection of 176 underground comic books to the Gallery. The gift not only represents the Gallery's first acquisition of works by cartoonist Robert ("R.") Crumb (b. 1943), but also marks the first time that comic

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books have been added to the permanent collection. Offering an excellent snapshot of an era, the Gerdts' collection showcases the heyday of these counterculture publications, which were born in response to the Comics Code Authority's restrictions on content relating to violence, sexuality, and drug use in mainstream publications. The collection begins with seminal issues of *Zap Comix* (founded by Crumb in San Francisco in 1967) and ends with *Arcade: The Comics Revue* (founded by Art Spiegelman (b. 1948) and Bill Griffith (b. 1944)), offering a broad account of the underground comics movement from 1964 to 1977.

All prints, drawings and illustrated books, including the newly acquired treasures from Mr. Mellon's collection, may be seen by appointment in the Gallery's Print Study Rooms, which are open weekdays from 10:00 a.m. to noon and 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.; call (202) 842-6380 to schedule a visit.

## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt), Twitter at [www.twitter.com/ngadc](http://www.twitter.com/ngadc), and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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