

ARTS

Artists of two eras showcased in Union College prints exhibit

Josef Albers' "Embossed Linear Construction 1-B" will be on display along with other groundbreaking

Bill Buell | August 31, 2013



This aquatint etching by Francisco Goya from the early 1800s shows a crowd of spectators watching a performer and their horse at a Spanish festival.

PHOTOGRAPHER: UNION COLLEGE

Josef Albers didn't need a whole lot of material when he worked. Sometimes, all that was necessary was paper.

Albers' "Embossed Linear Construction 1-B," produced by a traditional printmaking process in which ordinary sheets of watercolor paper become subtle bas-relief images, will be on display along with other groundbreaking methods of creating art in "A World of Prints: Selections From the Union College Permanent Collection."

The exhibit opens Friday, at the Mandeville Gallery in the Nott Memorial. An opening reception is set for Thursday, Sept. 12.

“When he did his embossed pieces, he didn’t use any ink or paint,” said Julie Lohnes, curator of art collections and exhibitions at Union. “To create his image, he raised portions of the paper and that created a shadow and dark lines. When the light from our gallery hits the paper, that’s what produces the image.”

If Albers’ minimalist approach isn’t to your liking, there’ll be a total of 30 prints on display by 26 different artists. The exhibit consists mostly of prints donated by Union College alumni such as Arnold and Felice Burns, as well as the Martin S. Ackerman Foundation.

It is made up of work from two distinct periods: the late 1700s into the 1800s, and the late 1960s into the ’70s, when artists like Albers and Roy Lichtenstein were creating new ways to make art. However, men like Manet, Millet and Goya were also breaking new ground two centuries earlier.

Breaking the rules

“The historical connection in the exhibit is that in both time periods, these groups of artists were absolutely on the cutting edge,” said Lohnes. “They were bending the rules and breaking the rules. The two groups may seem quite a ways apart, but the sensibility of what they were trying to do in the larger scheme of the art world was quite similar. They just had different methods, and the end product was vastly different.”

Along with Albers’ work, the show consists of etchings and lithographs. Manet’s print of motherhood, “La Petite Fille Tenant un Bebe,” is one of the highlights according to Lohnes, along with Millet’s image of a layperson at work, “La Grande Bergere.” Others from the earlier time frame include Goya’s “Los Proverbios,” which shows crowds of spectators at a Spanish carnival, mesmerized by the performers.

“Goya was very moody, and brought sketching to another level,” said Lohnes. “His work was groundbreaking. All of the artists in our exhibit were visionaries of their generations.”

An abstract painter and theorist, Albers will also be remembered as a designer, photographer, typographer, printmaker and poet. He was a German-American who taught at Yale University from 1950-58 and continued painting until his death in 1976 at the age of 88.

Lichtenstein, meanwhile, became popular in the 1960s and along with Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns and James Rosenquist, was a leading figure in the new art movement called pop art.

“Both Lichtenstein and Albers chose new approaches to painting and dared to challenge contemporary conventions about what was deemed art by using reductive, minimal methods of application,” said Lohnes. “Lichtenstein did so by simulating commercial printing, and Albers went even further and used lines and shadows.”

Lohnes, who was born in Washington, D.C., and raised in Baltimore, majored in painting and minored in art history at Boston University before getting her MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She has worked at numerous art galleries before recently taking the position at Union College.