

MFA presents Marks Made: Prints by American Women Artists

OCTOBER 12, 2015

The Museum of Fine Arts St. Petersburg will present Marks Made: Prints by American Women Artists from the 1960s to the Present. The exhibit will open Saturday, Oct. 17 and will continue through Sunday, Jan. 24, 2016.

The MFA has built an impressive collection of prints by American women and premieres the largest grouping to date in this stunning exhibition of more than 90 works. The vast majority of the prints are gifts of discerning art collectors Martha and Jim Sweeny of St. Petersburg or museum acquisitions made possible by funds from the couple.

Many of America's most talented and innovative artists, most still active, are represented in Marks Made: Prints by American Women Artists from the 1960s to the Present.

This pioneering exhibition includes work by artists such as Anni Albers, Helen Frankenthaler, Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, Agnes Martin, Joan Mitchell, Louise Nevelson, Louise Bourgeois, Janet Fish, Joyce Kozloff, Jennifer Bartlett, Joan Snyder, Lynda Benglis, Lee Bontecou, Judy Chicago, Barbara Kruger, Elizabeth Murray, Judy Pfaff, Susan Rothenberg, Faith Ringgold, Kiki Smith, Pat Steir, Lorna Simpson, Lesley Dill, Nancy Graves, Yvonne Jacquette, Kara Walker, Betty Woodman, Arlene Shechet, and Betye Saar.

Nearly all print processes are on display. Four selections from the Portfolio Compleat by the Guerilla Girls, a museum acquisition made possible by the generosity of the Sweenys, will be another highlight.

The Guerilla Girls began protesting the treatment of women by the established art world in the mid-1980s and are still making waves. Members choose pseudonyms based on the names of late influential female artists and wear gorilla masks in their protests and appearances to maintain anonymity. One of the founders, Käthe Kollwitz, will speak during the opening weekend, on Sunday, Oct. 18, 2 p.m. Kollwitz was one of Germany's most significant 20th century artists, known for her drawings and prints of women, the poor and the marginalized.

The abstract works in Marks Made are by such pioneers as Anni Albers, Helen Frankenthaler, Lee Krasner and Elaine de Kooning; and by contemporary artists like Julie Mehretu and Jessica Stockholder. Agnes Martin's "On a Clear Day" (1973), a portfolio of 30 screenprints featuring her subdued color and signature grid, has been lent by the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

Anni Albers and her husband Josef were leading Modernists who met at the Bauhaus in Germany, came to America to escape the Nazis and had a profound influence on this country's artists. Anni made her mark as a printmaker and textile artist. Her two color lithographs—gifts of Thom O'Connor in honor of his wife Linda O'Connor—have a poetic, even mystical quality.

Lee Krasner was married to Jackson Pollock and Elaine de Kooning to Willem de Kooning, but both were accomplished artists in their own right. Their art has received ever-greater acclaim over the years. Krasner is part of a small circle of women to have received a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and Elaine de Kooning: Portraits is currently on view at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Elaine de Kooning's "Jardin de Luxembourg I" (1977), Joan Mitchell's "Flower I" (1981) and "Arbres (Trees)" (1991–1992), and Pat Steir's "Peacock Waterfall" (2001) and "From the Boat" (1991) reference nature, but veer toward abstraction. Jennifer Bartlett's well-known series "The Elements" (1992) combines representation and abstraction. "Ocean with Cross #1" (2005) by Vija Celmins, Louisa Chase's "Dawn" (1982), and Sylvia Plimack Mangold's "The Nut Trees" (1985) are among those prints that more explicitly explore the natural world.

In contrast, Janet Fish has transformed the domestic realm with her bold, colorful still lifes. Joyce Kozloff brings the decorative, often seen as the province of women, into higher profile, titling one of her works, "Is It Still High Art?" (1979). Howardena Pindell was inspired by the great tradition of quilting in African American communities in "Flight/Fields" (1989).

Betty Woodman and Arlene Shechet, two of the world's most inventive ceramic sculptors, also challenge the distinction between craft and fine art. Woodman has concentrated on the vessel—its multiple uses and meaning throughout time—which can be seen in her imaginative "Greek Pots Visit Edo" (2002). Shechet's "Parallel Play: Spill" (2012) uses relief and has an extremely tactile surface. She molds paper pulp like clay.

Fascinating prints by the towering sculptors Louise Bourgeois and Louise Nevelson suggest their three-dimensional work. Bourgeois' "Reply to Stanley Hayter" (1996) focuses on the eye, perhaps alluding to his early Surrealist work and one of her sculptural series. Bourgeois' "Beautiful Night" (2004), a nine-color lithograph on music paper, is magical.

There are many other gems, such as Yvonne Jacquette's evening scenes of Manhattan and the Brooklyn Bridge, an energetic and abstract urban landscape by Nicola López and Elizabeth Peyton's portrait of Robert Mapplethorpe. Barbara Kruger's "We Will No Longer Be Seen and Not Heard" (1992) is a notable feminist work, uniting image and text.

Katherine Pill, the museum's assistant curator of art after 1950, has organized the exhibition, and a handsome illustrated catalogue with a foreword by Judith Brodsky is available in the museum store. The essays are by Art in Print editor Susan Tallman, master printer Erika Greenberg-Schneider, and Pill. Two limited-edition prints by Elisabeth Condon and Jane Hammond, who are represented in Marks Made, have been produced in collaboration with the University of South Florida St. Petersburg and Bleu Acier Editions of Tampa to celebrate both the exhibition and the MFA's 50th anniversary.