



HORNETS' NEST:
ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM ON PAPER

HORNETS' NEST: ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM ON PAPER

PRINT GALLERY

JUNE 22–SEPTEMBER 23, 2012

Hornets—buzzing and dangerous insects—chew wood, mix it with saliva, and excrete a paper-like substance that they use to make their nests. The exhibition's title, playing with that of **Arthur Deshaies'** relief engraving, suggests the stinging combination that resulted when Modernist Abstraction and Expressionism collided in the mid-twentieth century to produce Abstract Expressionism,¹ as well as the works *on paper* that these artists created.

Organized to celebrate the visit of Jackson Pollock's 1943 painting, *Mural*, to Des Moines, *Hornets' Nest* presents twenty-seven works on paper from the Permanent Collections that were created between 1939 and 1970. The installation begins with important precursor works by **Gertrude Greene** and **Mark Rothko**. The exhibition includes works by Abstract Expressionist artists **Minna Citron**, **Sam Francis**, **Lee Krasner**, **André Lansky**, **Joan Mitchell**, **Anne Ryan**, and **Mark Tobey**. The Des Moines Art Center's recent acquisition, **Jackson Pollock's** drypoint print, *Untitled* (P19), 1944–45, is shown here for the first time. The exhibition also features European parallels and responses to Abstract Expressionism, as represented in works by **Pierre Alechinsky**, **Hans Arp**, **Jean Dubuffet**, **Hans Hartung**, **Henri Matisse**, **Anton Prinner**, and **Zao Wou-Ki**. It examines representational and abstract works by Americans who were influenced by the look of Abstract Expressionism, including Arthur Deshaies, **Paul Hachten**, **Dwight Kirsch** (a director of the Des Moines Art Center), **Eugene Larkin**, and **Rudy Pozzatti**.

Abstract Expressionism resulted from the converging of two seemingly opposite tendencies in early twentieth-century art—Abstraction and Expressionism. Abstraction arises from a conceptual, Platonic search for essentials and proceeds through

the distillation, simplification, and reconfiguration of form and space. Expressionism, on the other hand, comes out of realism. Expressionism involves the exaggeration and distortion of form, and the symbolic use of color to suggest a higher emotional truth.

During the Second World War and the post-war period, many artists in America and Europe believed that traditional modes of painting had run their course. For these artists, representational figuration (especially social realism) and figurative expressionism, cerebral abstraction, even the Modernist aesthetic that exalted the machine all failed to express the pervasive sense of anxiety at large in the world. They lived under the existential threat of the atomic age and in the miasma of Cold War paranoia. Artists shared with their contemporaries a sense of horror arising from their immediate knowledge of war and genocide. They felt disillusioned by the failed promises of science and ideologies to make the world better. Many were afflicted by personal demons.

During the 1940s, artists including Lee Krasner, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko began to create a new art that was abstract, subjective, emotive, and intuitive; "hotter" rather than "cooler;" and more hands-on. Their new art was passionate, visceral, gestural, and spontaneous. Although Abstract Expressionist images seem to be non-objective, many of these works, in fact, reference the natural world.

Although best known for making paintings, many Abstract Expressionist artists also made prints. During the war, British artist Stanley William Hayter relocated his Parisian printmaking workshop, *Atelier 17*, to New York. Hayter's studio became a gathering point where American artists met refugee and émigré European artists. They learned Hayter's experimental approach to intaglio printmaking, and they were exposed to his important ideas about automatism and spontaneity. The eleven prints that Jackson Pollock produced at

1. The term was already in use earlier in the century. It was first applied to American art by art critic Robert Coates in 1946. Some of the European equivalents of Abstract Expressionism were known as *Art Informel* and *Tachisme*.

Atelier 17 in 1944–45, including *Untitled* (P19), clearly show that he absorbed Hayter’s liberating lessons.

Fueled with energy, painters, printmakers, sculptors, and photographers found new graphic equivalents with which to express their visions in print. Jackson Pollock slashed and needled plates; Joan Mitchell and Sam Francis splashed and scribbled on printing screens and litho stones; others gouged blocks; Lee Krasner, working in collage, ripped and sliced paper; and Anne Ryan frayed fabric. Photographer **Harry Callahan** captured liquid, calligraphic light on film.

Abstract Expressionism burst on the scene more or less exactly at the founding of the Des Moines Art Center in 1948. During the Art Center’s early years, the style indeed seemed a hornets’ nest, at once threatening and dangerous to practitioners of other Modernisms. Throughout the 1950s, furious debate swirled concerning the necessity for figuration versus pure abstraction. But aspects of Abstract Expressionism were irresistible. Even though they worked figuratively, artists such as Deshaies, Larkin, Kirsch, and Pozzatti incorporated Abstract Expressionism’s compositional strategies and explosive energy into their own representational works. Abstract Expressionist drawings and prints entered the Art Center’s permanent collections throughout the 1950s (the grained and honey toned, maple-paneled Print Gallery that architect Eliel Saarinen designed in 1947 was—and still is—ideal for displaying such works). The Art Center did not begin acquiring major Abstract Expressionist paintings until 1972, when many of its leading practitioners had already entered the canon of art history.

The coolness and impersonal imagery of 1960s’ Pop Art and Op Art eventually supplanted the burning force that had been unleashed during the 1940s and ’50s. Yet as late as 1970, Abstract Expressionist-influenced brushwork appeared in Paul Hachten’s quasi-Minimalist print, *Parsubin*, in which rough calligraphic signs, trapped in a grid, are screen-printed on an opalescent ground on aluminum. Abstract Expressionism, now subdued and tamed, had lost its sting.

This gallery guide is published in conjunction with *Hornets’ Nest: Abstract Expressionism on Paper*. The exhibition is on view in the Print Gallery of the Des Moines Art Center from June 22–September 23, 2012.

The exhibition is organized by Amy N. Worthen, curator of prints and drawings.

© 2012 Des Moines Art Center

All rights reserved
Des Moines Art Center
4700 Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50312-2099
515.277.4405
www.desmoinesartcenter.org

Design: Annabel Wimer
Photography: Rich Saunders, West Des Moines

PDFs of this gallery guide may be downloaded from the Art Center’s website.

Support for this exhibition and its programs is generously provided by the Des Moines Art Center Print Club.

Cover: Sam Francis, *Untitled*, 1963 (detail)

Exhibition programs

Gallery Talk
Amy N. Worthen
Thursday, September 6 / 6:30 pm
Print Gallery / FREE admission

Lecture
“Jackson Pollock’s Prints at *Atelier 17*”
Joann Moser, Senior Curator,
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Thursday, September 13 / 6:30 pm
Levitt Auditorium / FREE admission



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



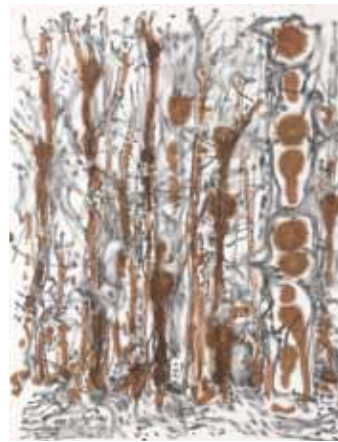
12



13



14



15



16



17



18



19



20



22



23



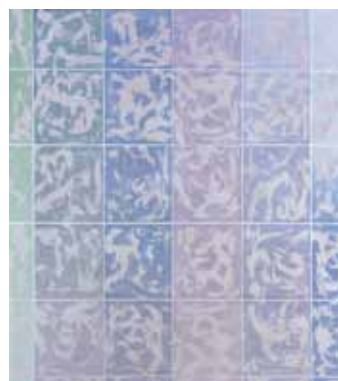
21



24



25



26



27

Checklist

The works are listed in approximate chronological order. Dimensions are given in inches and centimeters. Height precedes width.

1. Gertrude Greene American, 1904–1956
Abstract Collage, 1938

Collage and pencil on paper
12 x 8 in. (30.5 x 20.3 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center's Louise Noun Collection of Art by Women through Bequest, 2003.319

2. Mark Rothko American, born in Russia, 1903–1970

Abstract Composition, ca. 1944
Watercolor on brown paper
25 3/4 x 19 15/16 in. (65.4 x 50.6 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of Benjamin Weiss, 1956.23

3. Jackson Pollock American, 1912–1956

Untitled (P19), 1944–45 (printed in 1967)
Drypoint and engraving on paper
15 1/2 x 22 3/4 in. (39.4 x 57.8 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Purchased with funds from Jeanne and Richard Levitt, 2012.9

4. Harry Callahan American, 1912–1999

Camera Movement on Neon Lights at Night,
Chicago, 1946 (printed 1980–1981)
Dye transfer print
8 13/16 x 13 5/8 in. (22.4 x 34.6 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of Jeff Perry in honor of Myron and Jacqueline Blank, 2009.78

5. Harry Callahan American, 1912–1999

Camera Movement on Neon Lights at Night,
Chicago, 1946 (printed 1980–1981)
Dye transfer print
9 1/8 x 13 9/16 in. (23.2 x 34.4 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of Jeff Perry in honor of Myron and Jacqueline Blank, 2009.89

6. Henri Matisse French, 1869–1954

Le Lagon (The Lagoon), plate XVII from the portfolio "Jazz", 1947
Screenprint (pochoir) on paper
16 3/8 x 25 1/2 in. (41.6 x 64.8 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. E.T. Meredith III, 1985.21.19

7. Henri Matisse French, 1869–1954

Le Lagon (The Lagoon), plate XVIII from the portfolio "Jazz", 1947
Screenprint (pochoir) on paper
16 3/8 x 25 1/2 in. (41.6 x 64.8 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. E.T. Meredith III, 1985.21.20

8. Henri Matisse French, 1869–1954

Le Lagon (The Lagoon), plate XIX from the portfolio "Jazz", 1947
Screenprint (pochoir) on paper
16 3/8 x 25 1/2 in. (41.6 x 64.8 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. E.T. Meredith III, 1985.21.21

9. Anne Ryan American, 1889–1954

Untitled (No. 588), after 1948
Collage on paper
3 5/8 x 3 1/2 in. (9.2 x 8.9 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center's Louise Noun Collection of Art by Women through Bequest, 2003.345

10. André Lansky French, born Russia, 1902–1976

Abstract Composition, 1949
Color lithograph on paper
9 1/8 x 11 15/16 in. (23.2 x 30.3 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Cowles, Jr. 1957.34

11. Anton Prinner Hungarian, 1902–1983

Composition, 1951
Soft ground etching and stencils on paper
9 3/4 x 18 5/8 in. (24.8 x 47.3 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of Louise R. Noun, 1956.10

12. Minna Citron American, 1896–1991

Douleur Liberatrice (Liberating Sadness), 1951
Soft ground etching and stencils on paper
11 x 14 in. (27.9 x 35.6 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center; Gift of the Artist to the Truby Kelly Kirsch Memorial Collection, 1953.45

13. Lee Krasner American, 1908–1984

Black and White Collage, 1953
Collage and oil on paper
30 x 22 1/2 in. (76.2 x 57.2 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center's Louise Noun Collection of Art by Women, 1992.2

14. Jean Dubuffet French, 1901–1985

Jeux and travaux (Play and Work), 1953
Color lithograph on paper
25 3/4 x 19 3/4 in. (65.4 x 50.2 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Cowles, Jr. 1957.31

15. Dwight Kirsch American, 1899–1981

Spruce and Totems, Sitka, Alaska, 1953
Ink on paper
10 1/4 x 7 3/4 in. (26 x 19.7 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center; Gift of the Artist to the Truby Kelly Kirsch Memorial Collection, 1953.37

16. Eugene Larkin American, 1921–2010

Mannequins in Nevada, 1954
Woodcut on paper
26 1/2 x 19 in. (67.3 x 48.3 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Purchased with funds from the Edmundson Art Foundation, Inc., 1954.18

17. Arthur Deshaies American, 1920–2011

Hornet's Nest, 1956
Relief-printed Lucite engraving on paper
12 x 16 in. (30.5 x 40.6 cm.)
John C. Huseby Print Collection of the Des Moines Art Center through Bequest, 1994.140

18. Hans Hartung German, 1904–1989

Black Crescent on Yellow Background, 1956
Color aquatint on paper
14 13/16 x 20 3/8 in. (37.6 x 51.8 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Cowles, Jr. 1957.33

19. Rudy Pozzatti American, born 1925

Weeds and Rocks, 1956
Ink and watercolor on paper
10 x 20 in. (25.4 x 50.8 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center; Gift of Maynard Walker to the Truby Kelly Kirsch Memorial Collection, 1956.22

20. Zao Wou-Ki French, born in China, 1921

The Engulfed Village, 1956
Color lithograph on paper
14 5/8 x 26 1/4 in. (37.1 x 66.7 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Cowles, Jr. 1957.38

21. Zao Wou-Ki French, born in China, 1921

Untitled [Gravure IV] (Etching IV)
Color intaglio on paper
11 3/4 x 23 1/2 in. (29.8 x 59.7 cm.)
John C. Huseby Print Collection of the Des Moines Art Center through Bequest, 1994.328

22. Joan Mitchell American, 1926–1992

Untitled, 1957–58
Screenprint on paper
11 x 14 in. (27.9 x 35.6 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Purchased with funds from the Kay Reynolds Stroud Art Fund, 2003.367

23. Jean (Hans) Arp Swiss, born in Germany, 1887–1966

Non Loin du Soleil, de la Lune, et des Étoiles (Not far from the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars), 1962
Color lithograph on paper
25 5/8 x 18 7/8 (65.1 x 47.9 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections,
Gift of Wells Fargo & Company, 2003.239

24. Sam Francis American, 1923–1994

Untitled, 1963
Three-color lithograph on paper
22 1/4 x 30 in. (56.5 x 76.2 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of Joel Wachs, 1976.97

25. Pierre Alechinsky Belgian, born 1927

Lino-Litho, 1970
Color linocut and lithograph on paper
15 x 21 1/2 in. (38.1 x 54.6 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Gift of Dr. Howard Weissman, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, 1979.75.7

26. Paul Hachten American, born 1934

Parsubin, 1970
Serigraph on painted aluminum
31 1/2 x 27 3/4 in. (80 x 70.5 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Purchased with General Memorial funds, 1972.88

27. Mark Tobey American, 1890–1976

Untitled, 1970
Lithograph on paper
10 1/2 x 11 in. (26.7 x 27.9 cm.)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;
Purchased with funds given in memory of Kenneth E. Hartman, 1970.13