

WASHBURN

JACKSON POLLOCK *The Graphic Works*

January 17 – March 2, 2019

This precious survey shows how Pollock tried his hand at different kinds of printmaking, sporadically, presumably motivated by mentors like Thomas Hart Benton, and by the opportunity, never realized, to increase his income. My few remarks concern the etchings.

Pollock did not attempt intaglio printmaking (scratching lines into metal) until the autumn of 1944, encouraged by his longtime comrade Reuben Kadish to utilize the famous Atelier 17, displaced by the War from Paris to the New School in Greenwich Village. Having worked with many of Pollock's favorite artists in Paris, including Wassily Kandinsky, Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso, Stanley William Hayter, the impresario of Atelier 17 now welcomed fellow refugees, like André Masson, Marc Chagall and Yves Tanguy. Although Pollock's intaglio prints took inspiration from the graphic automatism of Joan Miró etchings published by Pierre Matisse Gallery in the late 1930s, his decision to try intaglio was likely instigated by the exhibition devoted to Atelier 17 at the Museum of Modern Art from June to October 1944. In 1945 Hayter moved his operation to 46 E. 8th St., across the street from the apartment shared by Pollock and Lee Krasner.

Pollock's life was too busy in late 1944 and 1945 for sustained printmaking: he had to prepare for his second solo show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery, which helped build his confidence to marry Krasner in October 1945 and then in November to re-locate permanently from Manhattan to Long Island. There he began to paint on the floor the way a printmaker works on images, from above. The few fruits of Pollock's introduction to intaglio were a handful of trial proofs pulled from roughly a dozen plates. Some are utterly simple, stressing an unschooled grasp of representation in sympathy with prehistoric art, children's art, or graffiti. Images of slithering snakes appear throughout his work, as do snaking lines that refuse to take shape as anything other than themselves. But the majority of Pollock's etchings are brashly overworked, pulsing throughout with impetuously etched lines and shadows that simultaneously indicate and obliterate interacting nude figures, their disjointed, ideographic body parts similar in graphic vocabulary to the bizarre vestiges of figures in Pollock's paintings, watercolors and drawings from these same years. De Kooning's paintings from the early 1940s share the sense of grotesquely distorted figures in flux with an occasional glimpse of something familiar in the chaos, like a matchbook, or in one of Pollock's largest horizontal etchings a fork on the ground.

Pollock worked up a few of his ambitious trial proofs as gifts for friends, adding washes and accents with watercolor and gouache to the inky visual excitement of the underlying print images. But he never exhibited or published any of his intaglio prints. It was Lee Krasner in 1967 who saw to that, publishing editions printed by Emiliano Sorini from seven plates. She realized these grotesquely lyrical images made in reverse supplement Pollock's works. No matter what the medium he used for self-expression in 1944 and 1945 Pollock increasingly began to treat line and texture per se as pure graphic energy.

Charles Stuckey, June 2017

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