

PRESS RELEASE

INTO THE NEW. BEING HUMAN: FROM POLLOCK TO BOURGEOIS

6 APRIL TO 17 JULY 2022

Exhibition Hall of the Department of Prints and Drawings

Frankfurt am Main, 5 April 2022. After more than twenty-five years, the Städel Museum is once again dedicating an exhibition to American art on paper from 1945 to the present. From 6 April to 17 July 2022, some fifty outstanding prints, drawings, and multiples by artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Chuck Close, Jim Dine, Jasper Johns, Bruce Nauman, Jackson Pollock, Larry Rivers, Kiki Smith, or Kara Walker will be presented, all of which deal with the theme of being human.

American art of the past eighty years is full of boundary crossings and contradictions. It is as unconventional as it is multifaceted: Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Concept Art, Minimal and Performance Art. In a relatively short period of time after 1945, various and at times contradictory aesthetic concepts developed in New York and (later) on the West Coast. Artists chose their media and materials freely and strategically – depending on the message they wanted to convey. Printmaking played a key role in this context. As a laboratory for experimentation in form and content alike, it offered artists new possibilities. From the 1960s onward, this went hand in hand with the founding of new printing and paper workshops. Artists collaborated closely with these workshops to produce technically sophisticated prints and objects (multiples), often in self-confidently large formats. This printmaking revolution went down in art history as the ‘Graphic Boom’.

Under the influence of ever-new political, economic, and societal upheavals and crises, many of the works revolve around human existence itself. Naturalistic depictions of the human figure now give way to the sign-like and abstract, the incomplete, the imprint, the blank space. Artists reflect on human perception and experience as fragmentary and question language as an instrument for describing the world.

Philipp Demandt, Director of the Städel Museum, on the exhibition: ‘The Städel Museum has been collecting contemporary American art on paper since the 1960s.

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Today, the collection includes important works from Jackson Pollock to Louise Bourgeois. After more than twenty-five years, we are once again taking a look at this outstanding collection and also presenting recent acquisitions. It is worthwhile to examine all these works time and again under new aspects, and to make them accessible to the public. The fact that we have been able to expand our holdings for decades is due in particular to the Heinz and Gisela Friederichs Foundation – their great commitment to art on paper sustains this area of the collection as well as this exhibition.’

‘From the late 1940s onwards, American art provided important impulses for the Western art world. Printmaking, with its great experimental potential, was particularly decisive here. The exhibition traces this creative impulse – not, however, in a systematic overview of the history of its development, as it were, but in connection with a thematic question that arose from the work with the museum’s own collection. In reaction to the manifold crises and upheavals of the twentieth century, after wars and the use of weapons of mass destruction, many artists reflected in their works time and again on the question of what is universally human – a question that could not be more topical’, explains Regina Freyberger, Head of the Department of Prints and Drawings from 1750 and curator of the exhibition.

The Städel Museum began collecting contemporary American art on paper at the same time as the ‘Graphic Boom’; today, it forms one of the focal points of the Department of Prints and Drawings. The fact that this collection can be consistently expanded and enriched by further aspects to this day is primarily made possible by the Heinz and Gisela Friederichs Foundation, which celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in 2021. Important complementary acquisitions in the field of prints and drawings can be realized through the support of the Städelischer Museums-Verein.

With the exhibition *Into the New. Being Human: From Pollock to Bourgeois*, the Städel Museum commemorates the recently deceased initiator of the foundation, Gisela Friederichs.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published by Sandstein Verlag – supported by the Georg and Franziska Speyer’sche Hochschulstiftung.

Chapters of the Exhibition

Dissolution of the Figure

When art reflects on being human, it does so for the most part – and most strikingly –

by depicting human beings and their body. As early as the nineteenth century, however, scientific discoveries and social upheavals had changed the image of humans. The idea that the naturalistic representation of a person's outward appearance sufficed to describe that person began to lose credibility. In art, the figure dissolved into paraphrases.

In their works, Jackson Pollock and David Smith conceive the human being as a universally valid pictorial symbol: Their figures are highly simplified, appear archaic, prehistoric, and thus timeless, as in Pollock's *Figure* from 1948. In his large-format woodcut *Angel of Death* (1959), Leonard Baskin frayed the body into a curved linear script, revealing its physical and psychological fragility. Jasper Johns, Jim Dine, and Louise Bourgeois – for example in the drypoint etching *Sainte Sébastienne* (1992) – present the human being as fragmented, while Larry Rivers depicted a 'linguistically' dissected human body. Wholeness as such no longer appears representable.

The body cut into pieces underscores the vulnerability of the human being and suggests a final loss. This is also true, and even more so, when the work of art shows only traces that the body has left behind. George Segal, Jasper Johns, and Kiki Smith – for example in her lithograph *Untitled (Hair)* from 1990 – work with such traces. The human being is moulded and printed – and is thus both a motif and an artistic tool, both present and absent. Finally, Jim Dine's bulging boots – *Silhouette Black Boots on Brown Paper* (1972) – and Jasper Johns's coat hangers describe merely a blank space. All that remains is the object, auratically charged by humans.

Fragmentary Perception

Human perception is determined by countless sensory impressions that are fragmentary in themselves. The fragment in the works of George Segal and Jim Dine refers to this experience, to the incomplete and thus subjective quality of the human worldview. It is also a basic theme of the series *Photographs & Etchings* (1969), for which Jim Dine and Lee Friedlander relished in the task of combining the irreconcilable.

Friedlander took his photos on his travels in the U.S. with a roll-film camera. They look like spontaneous snapshots from surprising vantage points. Far from being an uninvolved observer, the artist himself is often present: in shadows, reflections, his feet.

Dine's etchings describe a similarly personal perspective. His motifs hold strong autobiographical and emotional meaning for him. The bathrobe has been his metaphorical self-portrait since 1964; the tools are associated with memories of his

family's hardware store. Dine and Friedlander thus deny the viewer an objective and universally valid view of the world.

Present absent

The human body, imprinted or cast, becomes an artistic tool in the work of Jasper Johns and Kiki Smith. There, however, it possesses an immaterial quality above and beyond what is perceivable with the senses. For Bruce Nauman, his body is his working material. In 1968, he used his fingers to push and pull the skin of his face into different forms. These he recorded in a series of eleven holograms. The five silkscreen prints *Studies for Holograms* (1970) take up this work. The person behind the face is irrelevant to Nauman; now the human being serves solely as sculptural material.

For Chuck Close and Robert Longo, the person who is photographed and whose photo is then translated into a work of art is likewise not the subject. In his grid compositions, such as *Self-Portrait* (1999), Chuck Close traces the construction of human representation. Longo is interested in the rhythm of bodies in gestures that cannot be clearly interpreted. The people visible in the prints, who can also be identified, are thus both present and absent.

Memory

Memories and experiences connect and distinguish people. Memories are not retrievable in their entirety, however, but often triggered spontaneously and unexpectedly by outward stimuli. The works of artists Louise Bourgeois and Jim Dine frequently reflect on the biographical memories that form individual identity and shape a person's actions.

At the same time, people are influenced by social or collective memories that root them in a certain group of human beings. Within this context, structural violence and power imbalances can lead to the silencing of voices and the exclusion, suppression, or obliteration of memories. Kara Walker critically questions such memory frameworks. She directs her attention to the 'treasure trove of sufferings' (Aby Warburg) amassed by the transatlantic slave trade and slaveholding in the U.S. With exaggerated racist as well as sexist clichés, she prompts the viewers to become aware of, reassess, and adjust their own collective memories. The exhibition shows this through the print series *An Unpeopled Land in Uncharted Waters* (2010).

Text and Language

Language defines the relationship of the self to the world. It enables human beings to recognize, understand, and describe what is around them and what they feel; it makes communication and dialogue possible. Art responds in different ways to the fact that the human being is a linguistic being—for instance with the figural hieroglyphs of David Smith or the ideogram-like configurations Mark Tobey uses to translate the modern urban experience into two-dimensional imagery. Dorothy Dehner in *Letter* (1953) and Louise Nevelson likewise both worked with a pictograph-like vocabulary of forms reminiscent of language and writing but not readable as text.

The labels Larry Rivers used to identify individual body parts, on the other hand, are decipherable. Yet to read also means to enunciate the word actively, at least in one's mind. It is only through its utterance that a word takes on its true meaning, which can differ depending on emphasis and emotional colouring. Artists such as Jasper Johns, Bruce Nauman, and Ed Ruscha accordingly also addressed themselves to the conditionality and equivocality of language and writing.

Artists in the Exhibition

Leonard Baskin, George Bellows, Louise Bourgeois, Chuck Close, Dorothy Dehner, Jim Dine, Lee Friedlander, Jasper Johns, Robert Longo, Bruce Nauman, Louise Nevelson, Jackson Pollock, Larry Rivers, Ed Ruscha, George Segal, David Smith, Kiki Smith, Mark Tobey, Kara Walker

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Exhibition dates: 6 April to 17 July 2022

Curator: Regina Freyberger (Head of the Department of Prints and Drawings from 1750, Städel Museum)

Venue: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Information: www.staedelmuseum.de

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Opening Hours: Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun + public holidays 10 am – 6 pm,
Thur 10 am – 9 pm

Special Opening Hours: Current information on special opening hours, for example at Easter and Whitsun, can be found at www.staedelmuseum.de

Study Room of the Department of Prints and Drawings: Wed, Fri 2 – 5 pm,

Thur 2 – 7 pm, by prior appointment at graphischesammlung@staedelmuseum.de

Tickets and admission: Prices during the special exhibition *RENOIR. ROCOCO REVIVAL* (until 19 June 2022): Tickets can be booked online at shop.staedelmuseum.de/en. Tue – Fri 16€, reduced 14 €; Sat, Sun + public holidays 18€, reduced 16€; free admission for children under 12 / after 21 June 2022 Tue – Sun 16€, reduced 14€; free admission for children under 12

Current COVID information for your visit: An overview of the current regulatory requirements applying to individual visitors and groups can be found at www.staedelmuseum.de/en/covid-info. We advise you to check for updates immediately prior to your visit.

General guided tours: Regular one-hour guided tours of the exhibition. From 10 April 2022 onwards, every second Sunday, 12 noon for an additional charge of 5 euros. Tickets for the guided tours are available exclusively via the online shop at shop.staedelmuseum.de/en. Current information on the overview tours is available at www.staedelmuseum.de.

Programme: The exhibition will be accompanied by an extensive programme. Tickets for the supporting programme are available exclusively via the online shop at shop.staedelmuseum.de/en. All information on the programme available at www.staedelmuseum.de.

Catalogue: The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published by Sandstein Verlag, edited by Regina Freyberger, with a greeting from the Heinz and Gisela Friederichs Foundation, a foreword by Philipp Demandt, and contributions by Regina Freyberger and Marius Henderson; 152 pages, 29.90€ (museum edition). The catalogue will also be available via the online shop shop.staedelmuseum.de/en from the beginning of the exhibition. The catalogue is supported by the Georg and Franziska Speyer University Foundation.

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