

# Overview

It is with great pleasure that we announce the acquisition of the Crown Point Press archive by The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. The archive includes one impression of every print edition published by Crown Point Press, as well as many proofs from editions printed but not published by the Press going back to its inception in 1962. Also included are preparatory working proofs and sketches which provide a fascinating and rare insight into the artists' creative process. The Fine Arts Museums will continue to receive similar materials related to all future projects undertaken by the Press. At present, there are over 2000 works by 77 artists in the archive.

The Fine Arts Museums' Associate Director and Chief Curator Steven Nash comments:

*For The Fine Arts Museums, acquisition of the Crown Point Press archives represents a quantum leap for our prints and drawings collection and for the entire modern program. For almost 30 years, Crown Point Press has stood for the very best in the printmaking field, both in terms of the quality of their production and the integrity with which they have explored the medium of etching, and more recently, woodblock printing. Their archive is an art historical gold mine that will be utilized inexhaustibly for exhibitions, publications, and teaching. Of particular interest to our Museums is the close working relationship the*

*acquisitions will bring with the Press and its staff and artists.*

We are particularly gratified that the collection will remain in the San Francisco Bay Area. It will be housed at the Legion of Honor, along with the other fine works on paper of the Museums' Achenbach Foundation. The Legion of Honor will close this fall for extensive remodeling to improve and enlarge its graphic art galleries, storage rooms, study areas, and renowned conservation laboratory. After the reopening of the Legion in the spring of 1994, the Museum will present an exhibition of the



California Palace of the Legion of Honor, The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Crown Point prints. The exhibition will be accompanied by a major publication.

Constance Lewallen

May 15, 1991

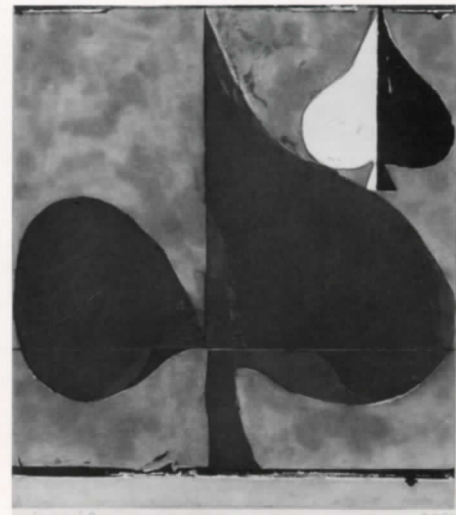
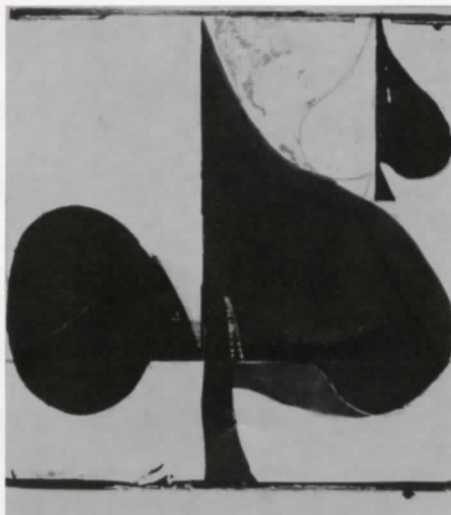
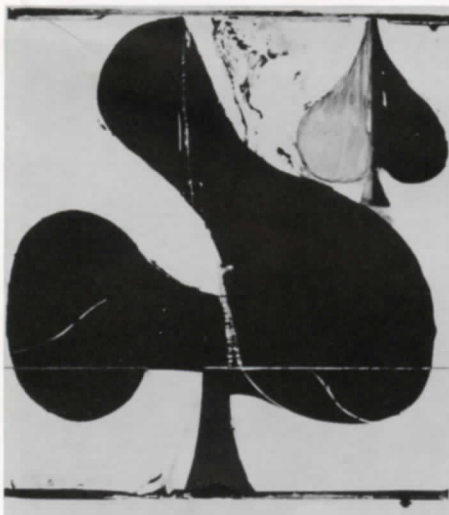
## Dear Friends,

Yesterday afternoon a truck pulled up to Crown Point Press and loaded up prints and unique materials—artists' preparatory sketches, notes, working proofs, blocks, plates—the first installment of the delivery of our archives to The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. As it pulled away, I waved goodbye, feeling as if my children were going off to have a life of their own.

That new life, combined with our new building in San Francisco, will make Crown Point Press more visible, more public. There will be a major exhibition at the museum and a catalog, for one thing, in about three years. In a way we've been a kind of insiders' enterprise up to now, with clients, staff, and artists connected in a circular relationship. I expect gradually to see some Saturn's rings of more people, whom we will welcome, but at the same time I want to indicate to you old friends how much we value you.

With that in mind, I came up with the idea of a Crown Point Press Club, oriented around the seasons of the year. We'll keep the membership small enough that we can give extra service to each person. We'll have special events, one each season—the first will be a weekend etching workshop during the summer in San Francisco. And we'll give you a chance to get some special prices on our prints, if you want to buy (you don't have to buy to be a member). The information is elsewhere in this newsletter; if you want to join, do it right away as we have a deadline of July 15.

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Two working proofs (left) and one edition print (right) of *Combination* by Richard Diebenkorn, 1981, color aquatint etching, paper size: 31 x 24", image size: 15½ x 13½", edition 40. This is an example of the kind of material that is in the Crown Point Press archive.

## New Editions

Recent etchings by Christian Boltanski, Sol LeWitt, and José Maria Sicilia are being shown for the first time in our Prints in Series exhibition, currently in our San Francisco and New York galleries (through June 29).

Boltanski's *Gymnasium Chases* is a portfolio of photogravures based on a photograph of the 1931 graduating class of the Gymnasium Chases, a Jewish high school in Vienna. Although Boltanski has employed many of these same portraits in altar-like installations, this is the first time the class is presented in its entirety.

The portfolio consists of 23 photogravure portraits and a title page which holds the original group photograph and a statement by the artist. These are contained in a metal box reminiscent of the biscuit tins of the ordinary type Boltanski knew in his childhood in Paris.

The Crown Point Press printers made photogravure plates from Boltanski's greatly enlarged black and white photographs of the individual members of the class. The value gradations are continuous, like that of a photograph, but appear to be softer and richer, perhaps because in photogravure the darks and lights are formed and controlled by the physical depth of the etch into the copper plate.

Memory, loss, and death are the themes of Boltanski's art. The fate of these students is not known, but given that they were Austrian Jews living on the eve of the Nazi rise to power, one imagines the worst. One of the subjects recognized himself from a photograph in Boltanski's "Lessons of Darkness" survey exhibition in New York. He survived. Perhaps others will be identified through the dissemination of these prints.

Sol LeWitt's new etchings are somewhat of a departure, being less controlled than we have come to expect from him. LeWitt came to the press with no precise preconceived plan. This is not surprising as it has been his custom to work out forms in printmaking that later appear in wall drawings or other works. LeWitt worked in five formats, creating three square images and two verticals. In each format, except for the largest, there are four color and four black and gray images. For each of the color plates, LeWitt painted acid on the copper in a loose, all-over arrangement of roughly triangular shapes, yielding faceted color areas with occasional larger areas of tone. In the most colorful group, the 11 x 11" square images, one is reminded of stained glass or colored gemstones. The black and gray companion prints are composed of a hardground black plate overlaid with a gray spitbite. The lines delineate the faceted areas, some of which are shaded with cross-hatching.

Spanish artist José Maria Sicilia created three series of spare and seductive etchings, devising a unique method of veiling his printed imagery. In *Series A* and *Series B*, he placed a sheet of Japanese hosho paper that had been dipped in melted beeswax between the printed paper and

the Plexiglas of the frame.

*Series A* consists of seven aquatints on translucent hosho paper. Each print contains two to five silhouettes of objects the artist found in a book on Americana. These include, among others, a jug, a skull, a figurine, a rooster, and a crescent moon. In each case, one or more of the images is printed on the back of the paper, while the other(s) are printed on the front. The cream-colored "waxed" paper obscures the printed imagery, which is further clouded by an extra sheet of Plexiglas within the frame.

*Series B* is printed on white rag paper (in front of which the waxed paper is placed). The five individual prints form a single work. Each depicts a solitary object (a spoon, a figurine, a teacup, etc.) against a mottled rose background created by a combination of spitbite and aquatint.

Sicilia's intention in these poetic, multilayered works, as in his paintings (which similarly portray identifiable images nearly concealed beneath layers of monochromatic translucent paint) is the expression of the mysterious qualities of light and matter. In a layered surface, he observes, "things appear and disappear...so that in the end you're left with a kind of mirage." The at times ambiguous, shadowy forms in his works are like objects one might see at the bottom of a shallow river, "with all its movement and reflections."

Each of the large works that comprise *Series C* contains two superimposed, silhouetted images (a spoon and a jug, for example), one of which is printed on the back and the other on the front of the diaphanous Japanese paper. In these works Sicilia omitted the waxed paper layer so that the layering and transparency are accomplished only through the printing reversal.

Alex Katz's two new woodblock prints were created in Japan in collaboration with our

Ukiyo-e-style printer, Tadashi Toda. Both prints depict women isolated on a bright white background. *Ursula* is a profile view of a woman, head crop-ped and off to the extreme left of a narrow, horizontal format. She wears a grey, blue, and yellow hat on her head and from her ear dangles a large silver earring. In Katz's work, details of clothing and adornment are revelatory. Often, as in this case, Katz will repeat a subject in several media; *Ursula* exists also as a large painting.

Crisp outlines, broad areas of light-filled color, and simplified forms, are all characteristic of Katz's work. *Swimmer*, a subject that has engaged Katz from time to time for at least three decades, is a full frontal view of a young woman in a red swimsuit, hands on hips, looking directly at the viewer. Her delicate wisps of blond hair and facial details—eyes, eyelashes—belie the technique of woodblock relief printing. (Critic Rene Ricard once observed, "Alex Katz was the first artist to paint eyelashes right.")

Constance Lewallen  
Associate Director

## Notes

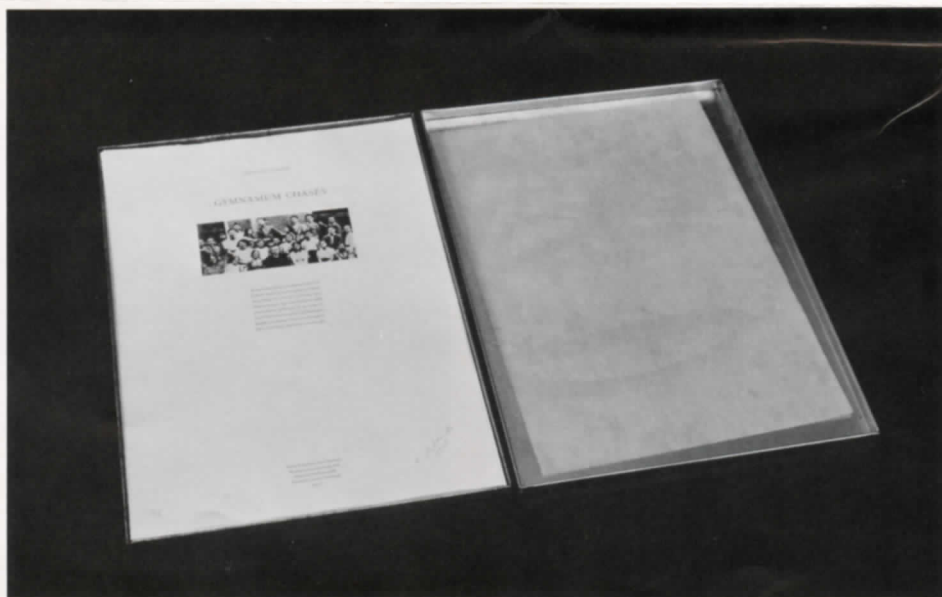
France's National Prize for Sculpture has been awarded to Christian Boltanski.

John Cage and Tim Rollins + K.O.S. will be represented in the Carnegie International exhibition this fall in Pittsburgh.

Bryan Hunt was the recipient of the first Seoul International Art Festival's \$100,000 grand prize.

Sol LeWitt has created his first permanent public artwork in France. It is an eighty-one square meter wall drawing, located in the main lobby of the Grand Théâtre at la Ferme du Buisson, Marne-La-Vallée Center for Art and Culture.

Sculpture by Spanish artist Susana Solano is currently on view as part of the "New Works" series of exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.



Christian Boltanski, *Gymnasium Chases*, 1991, galvanized metal portfolio case, 24 x 17 1/4 x 3/4"

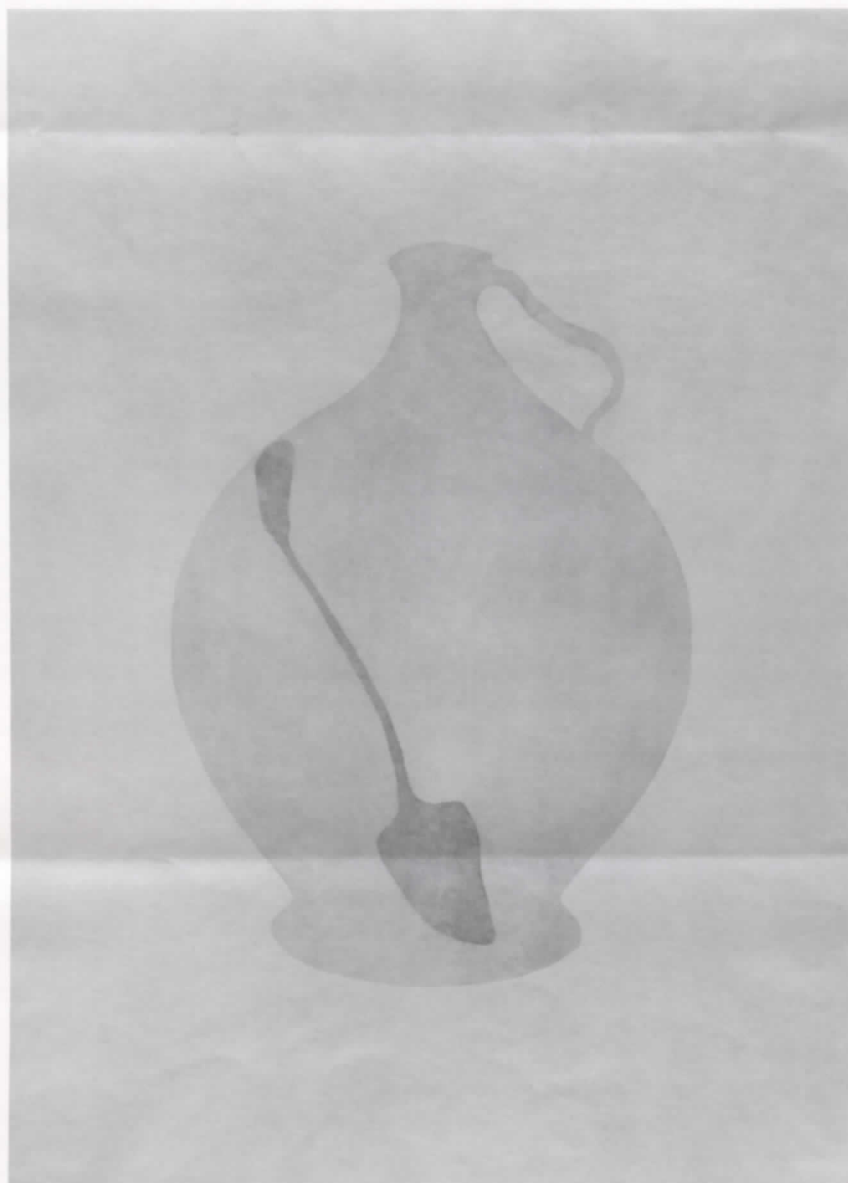




Christian Boltanski, *Gymnasium Chases*, 1991, #14 from a portfolio of 24 photogravures, paper size: 23¼ x 16½", image size: 19½ x 13½", edition 15



Christian Boltanski, *Gymnasium Chases*, 1991, #11 from a portfolio of 24 photogravures, paper size: 23¼ x 16½", image size: 19½ x 13½", edition 15



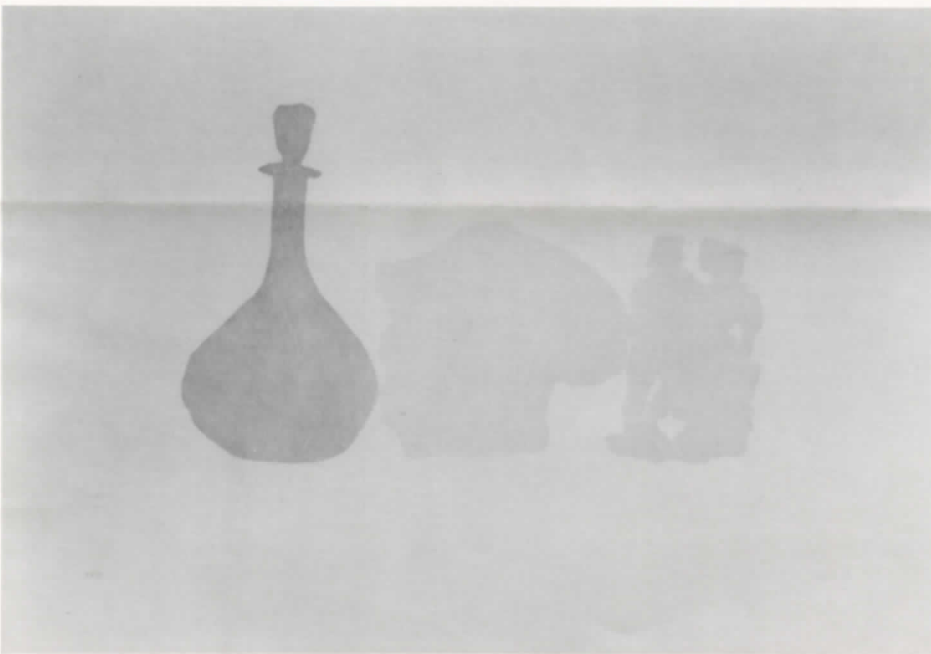
José Maria Sicilia, *Series C*, #3, 1990, color aquatint etching, paper size: 64 x 47½", image size: 45 x 36", edition 15



Sol LeWitt, *Color & Black*, 24 x 24, #1, 1991, spitbite aquatint etching, paper size: 24½ x 24", image size: 11 x 11", edition 25



Sol LeWitt, *Black & Gray*, 30 x 17, #4, 1991, hardground and spitbite aquatint etching, paper size: 30 x 17", image size: 17 x 5", edition 10



José Maria Sicilia, *Series A*, #5, 1990, color aquatint etching, paper and image size: 18¾ x 27½", edition 15



Alex Katz, *Swimmer*, 1990, color woodblock print, paper size: 33½ x 27½", image size: 16 x 20", edition 100



Alex Katz, *Ursula*, 1990, color woodblock print, paper size: 12 x 30", image size: 8 x 26", edition 100

(continued from front cover)

The other day I took a group through the press who were not "art people" but who were alert and interested, had a lot of questions. For example: "Why is it costly to have the artist come here to work? They're skilled professionals; they come, draw, and you process it—right?" Or, later on: "If it's a popular image and the edition sells out, then I would think the artist would just come and draw another one like it and start a new edition." I fielded the questions bravely, defending printmaking—sometimes people think that printmaking is a way of mass-producing images that artists have developed elsewhere, that we are a sort of image-manufacturing place. So I tell them how we put the artists in a position to do their best work, how aware we are of the fragility of new ideas which can be killed by a frown or a yawn.

And I notice they are still puzzled. And it dawns on me; it's not printmaking, particularly, that they think is image-manufacturing, it's art. They think an artist is a skilled person trying to make images that will please people, that people will buy!

Artists *are* skilled people, generally speaking, but—having worked with them for almost 30 years—I know for sure they are not (at least primarily) trying to please people. So, what are they trying to do? Art is a branch of philosophy, so perhaps we are searching for the universal; this, of course, can only be found through the particular—that is why personal histories do play a part, although few artists will admit to trying to "express themselves." In fact, few artists will admit to "trying" to do anything. They say they are just working, they are looking for a surprise, they want to learn something, they are putting one foot in front of the other.

Kenneth Baker, art critic for the San Francisco Chronicle, dealt with this issue last month (April

28) in a long review of the exhibition "Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet" at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. He wrote of our "materialist culture" which makes us satisfied with art if it simply objectifies "another's mind and skills," and added that modern Western art deals with the perceptual, psychological, or sociological, as opposed to the spiritual nature of Tibetan art. Only if we can find in art understanding that seems to be a matter of participation rather than consumption can Western art find a parallel to the spiritual, Baker says.

In other words, if the artist is not trying to tell us something, and we are not trying to "get it," maybe we could get on the wave length of the art and come out with something close to spiritual—at any rate non-materialistic. Artist Tom Marioni in 1979 wrote an introductory statement for a book called *Performance Anthology* (Contemporary Arts Press, San Francisco) in which he described 1970s performance art as a "statement against materialism" and went on to point out that at the end of the decade "there seems to be a return to the object not as an end in itself but rather as material to explain a function. This is a kind of pre-Renaissance idea of art, where the object is used in a social, architectural, or religious way." Or maybe you could say spiritual?

And on the other side of the coin, a different kind of art, the paintings of pies and cakes by Wayne Thiebaud are described by Adam Gopnik in the April 29, 1991 issue of *The New Yorker* as "slowing down and chastening the associations they evoke, so that a host of ambivalent feelings—nostalgic and satiric and elegiac—can come back later, calmed down and contemplative: enlightened." Or maybe you could say spiritual?

No, probably you couldn't say spiritual—it is too strong, too specific. Possibly devotional.

But even that cannot really describe the work—it describes, perhaps, the way the work was made. That word, devotion, is in John Cage's list of words, ten words used as a basis for a work called *Composition in Retrospect*. The list reads: Method, Structure, Intention, Discipline, Notation, Indeterminacy, Imitation, Devotion, and Circumstances.

These words describe the artist's approach; it is the approach that matters most I think.

Finally, I couldn't really explain it to the puzzled people on my tour. Despite all of this, we are making images to sell. And we do want to sell them now, while they are new rather than later when they are historic. Please stay with us as we move into the next era for Crown Point Press.

All best regards,

Kathan Brown  
President, Crown Point Press

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