

The Exhibition

An Art of Changes: Jasper Johns Prints, 1960-2018

April 24 – July 10, 2022

An Art of Changes: Jasper Johns Prints, 1960-2018 surveys six decades the artist's practice in printmaking through over 70 works drawn from the Walker Art Center's complete collection of his prints.

When American artist Jasper Johns' paintings of flags and targets were first exhibited in 1958, they brought him instant acclaim and established him as a critical link between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. Over the following 60 years, Johns (American, b. 1930) has continued to fascinate viewers with his paintings, drawings, sculpture, and prints. Today, he is considered one of the greatest living American artists and one of the most innovative artists ever to make prints.

Johns created his first print, a lithograph of a target, in 1960. He immediately realized that printmaking was the perfect medium to explore imagery through repetition and variation, and he has said "*I like to repeat an image in another medium to observe the play between the two.*" Since 1960, he has reworked many of his paintings in print form, using strategies and techniques such as fragmenting, doubling, reversing, and varying scale or color.

The exhibition follows Johns' creative process over time as he reconsiders and revises key motifs with slight variations. Through the simple gesture of revisiting different signs and symbols with

slight variations, Johns has spent a lifetime exploring the relationship between memory and visual perception.

Works in the exhibition related to four thematic areas: **Signs and Systems**, **In the Studio**, **Surfaces**, and **Traces**.

In **Signs and Systems** viewers will see examples of the artist's familiar flags, targets, and numerals. Johns chose to explore these symbols because they are instantly recognizable and need no interpretation. Because he depicted familiar imagery, he did not need to invent his own subject matter. Johns has explained this created "room to work on other levels" and allowed him to explore the relationship between image, symbol, and meaning by experimenting with colors, textures, and printing techniques.



Jasper Johns, *Flags*, 1967–1968 Collection Walker Art Center, Art Center Acquisition Fund, 1968. ©Jasper Johns/Licensed by VAGA, New York (left); Jasper Johns, *Flags I*, 1973 Collection Walker Art, Center, Gift of Judy and Kenneth Dayton, 1988, ©Jasper Johns/VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York (right)

In the Studio includes images that focus on Johns' studio and the materials he uses to create his work. Taking inspiration from the tools and furnishings of his workspace, such as paintbrushes, canvases, rulers, brooms, and lightbulbs, he delves into some of the questions an artist might consider when beginning a new piece. What kind of mark should be made, with what kind of tool? When an object is deconstructed, what is the relationship between the parts and the whole?



Jasper Johns, *Savarin*, 1977 Collection Walker Art Center, Gift of Judy and Kenneth Dayton, 1988. ©Jasper Johns and U.L.A.E./VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Published by Universal Limited Art Editions

Surfaces showcases more abstract works and looks closely at Johns' use of patterns and shapes. Two new motifs dominated his work from the mid-1970s through the early 1980s: irregularly



Jasper Johns, **Between the Clock and the Bed**, 1989, Collection Walker Art Center, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Stacy Roback, 1991 ©Jasper Johns/Licensed by VAGA, New York

shaped polygons and patchwork clusters of parallel lines (like those in background of the *Savarin* lithograph above). Both were abstract patterns that Johns re-created from memory after seeing them in passing in New York.

Traces focuses on more recent works that feature autobiographical and personal imagery. In the 1980s Johns began using a wide range of personal, autobiographical imagery in his work, including references to his childhood and family, objects from his home and studio, and his own artworks. These provided a new vocabulary based on universal human experiences such as birth, death, loss, and aging.



Jasper Johns, *The Seasons (Summer)*, 1987, Collection Walker Art Center, Gift of Judy and Kenneth Dayton, 1988 ©Jasper Johns and U.L.A.E./VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Published by Universal Limited Art Editions

Printmaking Techniques and Processes

Printmaking is an art form that involves the transfer of an image created on one surface (such as stone, wood, metal, or glass) onto another surface, usually paper. There are several different types of printmaking, but the three that are most commonly practiced by Johns are **lithography**, **etching**, and **screen printing**. An illustrated online guide from The Metropolitan Museum of Art that provides in depth explanations of printmaking is available here:

<https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/collection-areas/drawings-and-prints/materials-and-techniques/printmaking>

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