

Jasper Johns

American, born 1930

Savarin, 1977–81 Lithograph on paper

Collection of Donna Perret Rosen and Benjamin M. Rosen

Johns began experimenting with printmaking in the early 1960s, and the medium quickly became a generative force at the center of his art-making. As Johns remarked in 1979, “Just the process of printmaking allows you to do—not allows you to do things but makes your mind work in a different way than, say, painting with a brush does...you find things which are necessary to [the process of] printmaking that become interesting in themselves [and] become like ideas.” In *Savarin*, Johns explores the relationship between painting and printmaking, creating a print of a Savarin coffee can jammed with paintbrushes.

Flags I, 1973 Silkscreen on paper

For Johns, printmaking is a tool that can help us better understand and interpret the world around us. Early prints like *Flags I* investigate how we derive meaning from visual signs, be they culturally charged symbols like the American flag or more seemingly straightforward forms like numbers and letters. Each of the two American flags in *Flags I* are imperfect copies of one another, showing us that even iconic imagery like the American flag can never be seen quite the same way twice.

#6 (from ‘*Untitled 1975*’), 1976 Lithograph on paper

The process of printmaking required Johns to break his images down to their constituent parts, isolate and analyze all elements of their form, and then reconstruct them across multiple printings and plates. In the 1970s, Johns created a series of paintings and prints like #6 (From ‘*Untitled 1975*’) that transform crosshatching—the crossed lines used by printmakers to create light, shadow and depth—into his central motif. Johns’ crosshatched works explore how the abstract shapes and forms we often use to compose images might carry their own independent meanings.

0–9 (With *Merce’s Footprint*), 2009 Bronze

Johns often relentlessly reorders, reverses and recombines numbers, upending conventional chronology in order to put familiar forms like *Figure 8* in a new light. The finely wrought surfaces of mixed media works like *0 through 9* and *0–9 (With Merce’s Footprint)* remove numbers from the calculus of everyday experience to reflect on their deeper relationship to memory and human consciousness. As

Johns said in 1969, “Numbers...were things people knew, and did not know, in the sense that everyone had an everyday relationship to numbers...but never before had they seen them in the context of a painting. I wanted to make people see something new... when something is new to us, we treat it as an experience.”

Figure 5, 2013 Lithograph on paper

When creating numbered prints like *Figure 3* and *Figure 5*, Johns reworks the printing plate in between each printing so that every successive print—and every encounter with each number—is a unique experience. Eliciting this more meaningful relationship to numbers, Johns transforms printmaking from an impersonal process of duplication into a meditation on the resonance of numbers as recurring markers of time and human experience. Johns considers his close study of numbers to be akin to other artists’ studies of the human form, a comparison he invites by titling them as “figures.”

Usuyuki, 1981 Screenprint on paper

In the early 1980s, Johns collaborated with Simca Print Artists in New York to create *Usuyuki*, titling it after a Japanese word meaning “light snow.” Like Johns’ *Flag I*, each of the work’s three panels are imperfect copies of one another. Torn snippets of newspaper headlines appear and recur in different places throughout each panel, as if to question the veracity and permanence of mass-produced information. These fugitive fragments of newsprint call forth the ephemeral quality of the “news,” with the title “Snow” evoking the blur of contemporary media culture as well as the cloudy and often inexact nature of human memory.

Untitled, 2014 Lithograph on paper

Johns created this print as an artist’s proof for a limited edition print he produced for the May 2014 issue of the magazine *Art in America*. The print combines many of the forms Johns has experimented with throughout his career: numbers, maps, letters and the American sign language alphabet. Johns often incorporates both mass-produced and personally hand-carved sign language stamps into his art, appreciative of the way that sign language employs the human hand as a tool of communication.

Katy Martin

Hanafuda/Jasper Johns, 1978–81

DVD from Super 8mm film, 35 minutes

Collection of the Artist

Filmmaker Katy Martin created this film of Jasper Johns while he was working with Simca Print artists in New York to create his *Usuyuki* series, a print from which is on view in this gallery. Johns created *Usuyuki* using a staggering variety of techniques, from collage to photography to screenprinting. Martin's film captures Johns' working method in exquisite detail, showing him producing and revising multiple proofs and editions, and highlighting his close collaboration with the master printers at Simca.

Fragment of a Letter, 2010 Intaglio on paper

Johns based the intaglio diptych *Fragment of a Letter* on a letter Vincent Van Gogh wrote to Émile Bernard, printing part of the letter in text on the right, and then translating that passage into sign language on the left. In addition to the many handprints that sign out the letter's content, Johns also included his own handprint in the lower right corner, leaving behind physical trace of himself in his own art. So doing, Johns creates a connection between handwritten letters and the people, bodies and meanings behind them.

Bushbaby, 2004 Ink on plastic

Johns frequently mines the work of other artists, exploring different aspects of their work across multiple mediums. He derived *Bushbaby*'s bold design from the harlequin patterns Picasso incorporated into many of his most famous paintings and collages. Johns created this drawing in ink on plastic, a nonabsorbent material that makes the resultant drawing appear fluid and unfixed, as if the ink never quite dried. Constantly adapting and reworking the familiar patterns and forms of famous artists, Johns conveys the meaning of art as something in a similar state of flux.

Cup 2 Picasso, 1973 Lithograph on paper

Johns created *Cup 2 Picasso* by tracing Picasso's profile on both the right and left side of this print, so that the lines of Picasso's forehead and chin transform into a cup or goblet when viewed from afar. This trompe-l'oeil effect tricks the eye into turning the profile of a person into an inanimate thing. So doing, Johns shows us how objects—including his own artworks—often convey more than immediately meets the eye. "The most conventional thing, the most ordinary thing," Johns once said, "can suggest the world."

Regrets, 2014, Aquatint on chine-collé

In 2012, Johns encountered a tattered 1960s photograph of the painter Lucien Freud that inspired him to embark on a new body of work entitled *Regrets*. Over the ensuing two years, John subjected this photograph to endless manipulations and modifications, reversing, mirroring, inverting, etching, coloring and painting until his work bore little trace of the portrait with which it began. Like so much of Johns' work, *Regrets* embraces the ambiguity between meaning and form that Johns often conveys as an unanswerable question at the core of his art. "The final statement [in a work of art]," Johns says, "has to be what you can't avoid saying, not what you set out to say."