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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ACQUIRES SEMINAL WORK BY BONTECOU AND WORKS ON PAPER, INCLUDING WOODCUTS BY SHAPIRO



Washington, D.C. -- The National Gallery of Art announced today the acquisition of *Untitled* (1962), a three-dimensional relief by Lee Bontecou. It will go on view in the East Building concourse galleries beginning in April.

"Lee Bontecou's *Untitled* represents an important moment in postwar art when she begins to develop a powerful group of objects that have become a hallmark of the period," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

The Collectors Committee and a private donor also made possible the acquisition of a group of five intaglio prints ranging from 1956 to 1981 by Austrian artist Arnulf Rainer; an etching by Dutch artist Anton Heyboer titled *Lesbies* (1964); a linocut and etching by German artist Jürgen Partenheimer, both from 1983; two woodcuts by sculptor Joel Shapiro; a lithograph and screenprint by Yvonne Jacquette titled *Mississippi Night*

Lights (1985-1986); and the cibachrome print *Sing Sing* from American photographer James Casebere's prison series of 1991 to 1994.

UNTITLED BY LEE BONTECOU

Lee Bontecou has been creating an original body of work since the late 1950s, most notably wall-mounted, three-dimensional objects. These early reliefs were constructed from frameworks of welded metal onto which the artist tautly affixed sections of raw, sometimes tattered or frayed canvas. Beginning in 1959, they were characterized by round, dark apertures that are sometimes interpreted as menacing voids. In the 1960s, these objects received stunning praise from key contemporaries, including Donald Judd and Eva Hesse, for their formative role in redefining the terms of art.

Untitled, bearing a single aperture and simple frame, represents Bontecou at the height of compositional sophistication. Circular bands produce a simultaneous effect of expansion and contraction around the center, which is a dark recess. The National Gallery's collection also includes *Untitled* (1960), a small-sized relief by Bontecou, in addition to a drawing, several prints, and an unbound folio, which includes 6 etchings.

Lee Bontecou was born in 1931 in Providence, Rhode Island. She attended New York's Art Students League from 1952 to 1955 and studied there with the sculptor William Zorach. She was one of the few women artists to achieve broad recognition in the 1960s.

WORKS ON PAPER AND PHOTOGRAPHS

A group of five intaglio prints by Austrian artist Arnulf Rainer, ranging from 1956 to 1981, represents his artistic growth as a printmaker during that period. His prints adapt gesture to the tools and materials of the medium employed. *Tabernacle* and *Tomb Figure* (both 1956) feature etched marks in intricate lattices and are the artist's first two published prints. *Stalks* (1971) gathers drypoint strokes into a bristling storm cloud. *Covered Girl* (1970) introduces a warm backdrop of pinkish skin tone beneath an obliterating blue wave. *Blue Cross* (1981) merges color, gesture, and symbol into an evocative presence. These works are the first by this neo-expressionist artist to enter the collection. *Lesbians* (1964) is the work of Dutch artist Anton Heyboer, who like

Rainer, looks to the naïve art as a model.

A linocut and etching by German artist Jürgen Partenheimer are also included in the acquisition. These two (both *Untitled* works and dating from 1983) reflect alternate approaches to line and reveal the artist's ties to modernist artists such as Paul Klee. Partenheimer's prints join a miniature volume and a series of recent large prints by the artist already in the collection. Joel Shapiro's art has consistently veered between the rigorously abstract and the openly referential --polar sides represented by the newly acquired woodcuts: *Untitled No. 1* (1985) presents one of his minimalist figures printed in miniature from a composite wood veneer matrix; *Untitled* (1988) emphasizes process --holes drilled in the printing block and a few carved lines set up tension with the printed wood grain and call attention to materials and technique. Four sculptures, two drawings, and five prints by the artist are in the collection. Yvonne Jacquette's most vibrant works are aerial night scenes of urban settings. A seamless fusion of lithography and screenprint, *Mississippi Night Lights* (1985-1986) is the fourth print by the artist to enter the collection and the most significant.

James Casebere makes and photographs table-size architectural models adapted from real, charged, symbolic spaces: frontier homes, prisons, factories, churches, sewers, and the interiors of state residences. His prison series (1991-1994), which includes *Sing Sing* (1992), is his most highly regarded. The spare but elegantly lit spaces, always devoid of people, suggest a bleakly compelling endpoint for penal architecture, in which buildings (with their mute, coercive logic) supplant humans.

HISTORY OF THE COLLECTORS COMMITTEE

The Collectors Committee has made possible the acquisition of more than two hundred works of art. Approximately half of these acquisitions have been works by living artists. Inspired by Paul Mellon, the committee was formed in 1975. Mellon asked Ruth Carter Stevenson, chairman of the Gallery's board of trustees from 1993 to 1997, to be the first chair of the Collectors Committee. Barney A. Ebsworth and Doris Fisher, both major collectors of 20th-century art, currently chair the Collectors Committee. Ebsworth, of Seattle, is the founder and retired chairman of INTRAV, Royal Cruise Line, and Clipper Cruise Line. Fisher lives in San Francisco and is co-founder, with her husband Donald,

of The Gap.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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