

A behind the scenes look: the making of the “Print by Print: Series from Dürer to Lichtenstein” exhibition at The Baltimore Museum of Art

One of our recent projects was to make frames for The Baltimore Museum of Art’s “Print by Print: Series from Dürer to Lichtenstein” exhibition. In doing research on the exhibition I noticed the funding came because of the collaboration the museum did with the students from The Johns Hopkins University (JHU) and the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). Since funding has become much more of an issue in these days of reduced budgets, this caught my attention and I wanted to find out more about the collaboration. I was also interested in sharing with our readers a behind the scenes view of the making of an exhibition. On Friday November 18, 2011 I met with **Rena Hoisington**, BMA Curator & Department Head of the Department of Prints, Drawings, & Photographs, **Alexandra Good**, an art history major at JHU, and **Micah Cash**, BMA Conservation Technician for Paper.

Karen Desnick, Metropolitan Picture Framing

I was especially intrigued about the funding of this exhibition and the collaborative aspects with the students of The Johns Hopkins University and the Maryland Institute College of Art. Can you elaborate on the funding source and how the collaboration worked?

Rena Hoisington, BMA

I submitted a proposal for organizing an exhibition of prints in series a couple of years ago. [Dr. Elizabeth Rodini](#), Senior Lecturer in the History of Art Department at The Johns Hopkins

University and the Associate Director of the interdisciplinary, undergraduate Program for Museums in Society, then approached the Museum about working on a collaborative project that would result in an exhibition. We have worked on collaborative projects with Elizabeth in the past, but this time she wanted to do something more ambitious and apply for a grant from [The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation](#).

We turned in a draft of our grant application and the Mellon Foundation was so enthusiastic about the project that they encouraged the Program in Museums in Society to apply for a larger multi-part grant. We submitted that grant application in October 2010 and we found out that we received the grant in December 2010. The class started the first week of February 2011. We turned around this whole project in one year, which was amazing.

Karen Desnick, Metropolitan Picture Framing

A project of this size normally would take how long?

Rena Hoisington, BMA

It depends. We like as much lead time as possible. For most loan exhibitions you want at least 4 or 5 years. This exhibition fortunately was drawn entirely from our collection because we have such strong holdings of western prints (nearly 60,000), ranging from the late 15th century up to the present. In an ideal world we would have liked to have had two years to do this exhibition. Because of the collaborative nature of the project, we didn't have an objects list until May, and then Micah had to frame more than 300 prints over the summer, which is a tight schedule.

Karen Desnick, Metropolitan Picture Framing

Let me turn to you for a moment Alexandra. How did you get involved? And can you talk about what the process was like?

Alexandra Good, JHU

When I was selecting my classes I read the description and had no idea what I was getting into until I came. I was

pleasantly surprised. I didn't expect to have so much hands-on involvement. It was really an eye opening experience to see how everything works. The first 2 weeks we did a very fast overview of all the techniques of printmaking. We were then each assigned a different series that we researched. We then wrote the labels for each series. We also dealt with potential themes, marketing ideas, and educational programs. Finally, we all sat down and submitted a list of which series we would like to be in the exhibit.

Karen Desnick, Metropolitan Picture Framing

The themes were interesting to me. There are nearly 60,000 prints in the collection. How did you narrow the section to 350 prints and six themes?

Rena Hoisington, BMA

Before the class started I had chosen 64 complete or almost complete series from the collection and those were the ones that were up for consideration in the class. In the class we tackled a century of printmaking per week except for the 20th century, which we broke into two halves. Each week I would assign the students a series and send them a checklist in an email.

☒ They would come in and see the prints in the study room and write an informative and concise label of 100 words. They gave a 10 – 15 minute presentation and suggested a possible theme. From the beginning we thought it would be more interesting to combine old master, modern and contemporary series. In the beginning I gave the students a possible list of 5 – 10 themes. The students came up with great ideas. Several of the themes in the show – especially “Design” and “Places: Real and Imagined” – came from the students. It was very much about brainstorming. After we had gone through all the centuries of print making, we met with different people in the museum so the students could get a better sense of the collaborative nature of organizing an exhibition. The students then turned

in their ideal checklists. They had to choose 35 series organized according to 5-10 themes. I collated those lists as best I could and we had two very long class discussions to arrive at the final list of 29 series organized according to 6 themes.

Note: the themes and artists in the exhibition are:

Imagination: Yukinori Yanagi , Ed Ruscha ,
Kurt Seligmann , Max Klinger ,
Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Marcel Duchamp

Narrative: Louis Marcoussis, John
Martin, Odilon Redon, Albrecht Dürer, William Hogarth

Design:

Sonia Delaunay, El Lissitzky, Hans Collaert, Johann
Theodor de Bry, Italian 18th or 19th Century

Places: Real & Imagined: Andrew Raftery,
Giovanni Battista Piranesi,

Julie Mehretu, Ludovic Napoléon Lépic, Canaletto

Appropriation: Sherrie Levine, Roy Lichtenstein

War: Daniel A. Heyman, Pablo
Picasso, Fabius Lorenzi, Augustin Coppens, Robert
van Audenaerde, Dutch 17th century after Jacques Callot

Alexandra Good, JHU

It was really interesting because there were certain things I put into a theme and other people had in totally different themes. It was a unique way to see how everyone interprets things differently. I think that is how we got some original themes like "Places: Real & imagined".

Karen Desnick, Metropolitan Picture Framing

Then what happens?

Rena Hoisington, BMA

As of May we had the checklist. So Micah started working on all of the matting and framing.

Micah Cash, BMA

Many of the works had never been exhibited before. Each individual piece had to be measured and then taken into account the series they were in to come up with options for exhibiting. I would then present those ideas to Rena. Some would fit into standard frames but there were a number of prints that required custom frames. We ended up having 4 different colors of frames in the exhibition. I spent about month and a half coming up with possibilities to let Rena know what was and was not possible. For example, if none of these are going to fit in my standard frames, we have to purchase. And that opens up the idea that now we can go outside the normal colors that we have. I can fit all of these in a standard frame but I don't think it will look good. So then we have to weigh if we go for the cost of purchasing something new. We then would pull out one series at a time and talk about it and come to a conclusion and then sleep on it. After that I guess we made one or two changes before I ordered the frames.

Rena Hoisington, BMA

I loved it when Micah told me that for two Picasso prints *The Dream and Lie of Franco*: "I want these to be modern but with that color of the paper I have to make them look old master with the wall."

Micah Cash, BMA

The paper was so dark that if we put them in black it really just didn't look right.

Karen Desnick, Metropolitan Picture Framing

These are the little details that people don't appreciate that you obsess over. Okay, the framer is busy working. What other aspects did you need to address?

Rena Hoisington, BMA

There were multiple things. All the students had brainstormed talking points with **Anne Mannix**, our **Director of Communications** so she could prepare the PR materials for the

exhibition. I also needed to meet with different people in the **Department of Marketing & Communications** to talk about the advertisements for the show.

We also met with **Preston Bautista, Director of Public Programs**, to brainstorm programming possibilities. From this discussion we decided to have a panel with two of the contemporary artists [Daniel Heyman](#) and [Andrew Raftery](#). More than 200 visitors attended the panel discussion, which was held on December 3.

We also worked closely with our **Department of Exhibition Design & Installation** – especially with **Karen Nielsen, Director of Exhibition Design & Installation**. She is always brilliant in terms of transforming the Thalheimer Galleries.

It was really hard to come up with a color that would complement all of that material. She was the one who picked that color. Because we knew we couldn't use for example bright white because it would just kill the old master prints. She came up with a custom mix of kilim beige, lightened with a little bit of white. It is custom mixed for us and it is perfect, absolutely perfect.

We then started working on the floor plan. With the wall we wanted to have enough room to break up the series but we didn't want the installation to feel like a maze. We thought about sight lines and how you would take each series in its entirety, as well as each print individually. I basically worked with the floor plan I had used in **"Looking through the Lens"** a photography show we did in 2008 because I liked that floor plan a lot. I started with that and plugged in the series the students and I had selected. We also had to figure out what series would play well together. For example, Imagination has the Ruscha and the Tiepolo and they would not go well side-by-side.

Over the summer, two of the students from MICA, Nick Simko & Jennifer Tam, produced four interactive educational programs

about different aspects of the exhibition. This will help shed more light on certain works in the print series that we couldn't go into with 100 words on the label. Nick has one program comparing **the Apocalypses of Albrecht Dürer and Odilon Redon** and one program comparing **William Hogarth and Andrew Raftery**. He was actually able to go to Providence and meet Andrew Raftery and do an interview with him. Jennifer did one on contemporary printmaking and she was able to go to Philadelphia and meet Daniel Heyman. She actually transcribed all of the text on the eight drypoints in **The Amman Project –** the testimony of several former detainees from Abu Ghraib prison. She also did a program on different printmaking techniques which is going to be invaluable for people. It has still photographs and three films demonstrating different techniques.

[*The Apocalypse of Dürer and Redon*](#)

[*The Prints of Hogarth and Raftery: A Comparison*](#)

[*Contemporary Printmaking*](#)

[*Printmaking Techniques*](#)

While this was going on **Tom Primeau, Director of Conservation** was treating some of the works. He also did the hinging for all of the prints.

Micah Cash, BMA

Because of space limitations most of the hinging took place in the paper lab. The mats would be cut, put on a cart, and wheeled down the hall. Tom would hinge them and give them back at the end of the day and I would frame them the next morning.

Rena Hoisington, BMA

And then there were the labels. I was working with all the drafts. The students went through two drafts of all of the labels. I was deciding on which one to use. I went in and copy edited all of them. Some I could leave almost as is, some I did a little tweaking, and some I did more rewriting. I wanted to preserve the students' voice but have a little more

consistency. The labels then go through a whole list of people. They went to **Linda Andre, Manager of Teacher Programs & Resources**; to **Frances Klapthor, Registrar and Associate Curator for the Art of Asia**, who checks all of our information to make sure titles, dates, medium, and credit lines are correct; to **Anne Manning, Deputy Director of Education**; and to **Jay Fisher, Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs and Senior Curator of Prints, Drawings & Photographs** for a final review. They come back to me and I then give it to **Vicki Kaak, Graphic Design Manager**, who does the labels.

Note: Labeling is an important topic, since some studies have shown that gallery visitors can spend more time reading the labeling than looking at the pictures themselves. The following is an example of a label that is used in the exhibition.

Albrecht Dürer
German, 1471–1528
The Apocalypse
c. 1496 –1498, printed 1511 16 woodcuts

The approach of the year 1500 (the half millennium) raised fears that the end of the world was at hand. During those same years the young Albrecht Dürer created a group of book illustrations that would prove to be one of the most influential series in the history of printmaking. His inspiration was the concluding book of the Bible, often called “The Apocalypse of Saint John” or the “Book of Revelation,” that foretold the events of the second coming of Christ. (“Apocalypse” is the Greek word for “revelation” or “unveiling.”) The Apocalypse was the first book to be designed and published by an artist. Dürer also broke with earlier book conventions in that he entirely subordinated the text – printed on the reverse of each sheet – to his illustrations, each clearly marked with his large and distinctive monogram. Not only did the technical virtuosity of these woodcuts elevate the medium to an unprecedented level of sophistication, but Dürer’s pictorial inventiveness and imaginative envisioning of the text set the iconographic standard for how “The Apocalypse of Saint John” would be illustrated for years to come.

Gift of Blanche Adler, BMA 1929.17.12.5, 1929.17.12.11, and 1934.48.1, and Garrett Collection, 1946.112.5845-5848, 1946.112.5850-5855, 1946.112.5857, and 1946.112.8106-8107

Karen Desnick, Metropolitan Picture Framing

You've had a very busy summer. And after all that is done and it is hung on the wall you have to advertise it. You, obviously, get involved with meeting with donors, funders, and members. What kinds of activities do you do?

Rena Hoisington, BMA

We have a press preview, special preview days for our members, and a council opening for our upper level donors. It was great because six of the students came back and wore special student curator buttons to answer questions about the class and their involvement in organizing the exhibition at two of our opening events. Alexandra was at both. Do you want to talk about the differences in the council opening Saturday night and the members opening on Sunday afternoon?

Alexandra Good, JHU

A lot of people like I expected wanted to know how the class worked, my involvement, my thoughts on the process. The next day people came in who knew printmaking very well asking me intense technical questions and I was kind of taken aback. I wasn't expecting that. There were really knowledgeable people. Questions that we had no answers for such as the type of pigments used. It was interesting. Everyone was very curious to talk to us.

Karen Desnick, Metropolitan Picture Framing

What will you do differently after you've had this class?

Alexandra Good, JHU

I'm a senior and I have never had a class like this. I've taken a ton of art history classes. I've seen slide by slide but having the experience of being able to work with things up close at the museum and being able to see the final project was a totally new experience for me. I really hope they do more classes like this. Knowing this, I have a totally new appreciation for every exhibition I see. It's a new perspective when I walk through a gallery. Lighting I never

thought about. Wall color I never considered. I remember coming in and talking to Micah about the frame colors. All these tiny details I had never considered.

Karen Desnick, Metropolitan Picture Framing
Rena, what have you learned from the students?

Rena Hoisington, BMA

It was nice for me because I have not taught a class since 2000 at SUNY Stony Brook. It was great to get my head back into teaching. I really love seeing the arc of the class from beginning to end. I love seeing the students get excited about the material and build on their knowledge. When we were looking at the prints in the study room, the questions that came up, the points the students made, was a learning experience for me. I was so impressed with the different ideas for the themes and the different ways they connected the work. Before the show opened, it was a thrill to walk some of the students in and see their faces.

Alexandra Good, JHU

It was really cool to see our work actualized. I hadn't seen it all summer. I knew what prints we were using and I knew our labels but I had no idea what it would actually look like. It was probably a week or two before the actual opening I got to come in and see it. It was unbelievable to see it up there – really great.



Students involved in the exhibition are:

Alexandra (Ali) Good, JHU, history of art

Sofia Iaterola, JHU, history of art and international studies

Meaghan Lavin, JHU, history and history of art

Michele Ly, JHU, molecular and cellular biology

Cassandra McClure, JHU, mechanical engineering

JuWon Park, JHU, history of art and international studies

Hayley Plack, JHU, history of art and museums & society

Nick Clifford Simko, MICA, art history, theory, and criticism
/ curatorial concentration
Jennifer Tam, MICA, art history & painting / curatorial
studies & book arts
Christie Young Smith, JHU, art history and psychology

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Baltimore Museum of Art