

Impressive Impressions: Selections from Ohio University's Kennedy Museum of Art Print Collection



Yvonne Jacquette —Bridges Over Cuyahoga River, Cleveland

Jeff Regensburger | May 18, 2014 4:41 pm

Whether by chance or by design, printmaking in all its forms has garnered a fair amount of interest from Columbus museums and galleries this spring. In March, the [Kerby Galleries](#) presented a terrific selection of American prints in their exhibition *The American Experience: Master Prints (1853-2014)*. On nearly the same schedule, and just a few miles to the north, The Faculty Club was displaying prints by the members of the Phoenix Rising Printmakers Cooperative in the exhibition *Pulling Prints Together*. Speaking of prints, let's not forget *Toulouse-Lautrec and La Vie Moderne: Paris 1880 - 1900* at the Columbus Museum of Art. While not specifically *about* printmaking, the works presented in that show served to highlight the importance of printmaking at the dawn of the modern age.



Now, hot on the heels of these offerings comes *Impressive Impressions: Selections from Ohio University's Kennedy Museum of Art Print Collection* at the Ohio Arts Council's Riffe Gallery. This stunning exhibition traces its origins to the 1980s, when then-Ohio University professor Donald Roberts decided to bring the art of the world's top artists to rural Athens, Ohio. He accomplished this ambitious feat by taking advantage of the (relatively) inexpensive medium of fine-art prints. In the years since, Ohio University and the Kennedy Museum have built a collection of more than 1800 prints, many of which highlight the post-war American "Print Renaissance". This was an era that saw not only an increased interest in fine-art prints, but also a new focus on experimentation in printmaking.

It's this sense of experimentation – this diversity of technique and approach – that's most evident in *Impressive Impressions*. Viewers are presented with a group of artists and printmakers who clearly believed that anything was worth trying. Many of the works incorporate multiple printmaking processes into a single image. Others utilize elements of collage and mixed media. Photographic images are used side-by-side with scribbled abstraction and scratchy cartoons. In many respects this experimentation serves to mirror the larger conversations going on in the world of painting and sculpture, reflecting a time when the visual vocabulary of art was being rewritten from the ground up. Then there's the scale. Impressive impressions might as well be a reference to the size of these prints, for this was the age of printmaking writ large. Over-sized paper and larger than life imagery is the rule here, not the exception.

Christo – Wrapped Venus

Eric Fischl – The Year of the Drowned Dog

So what of professor Roberts' desire to bring top-tier artists to Southeastern Ohio? Well, to borrow a phrase, I'd say "Mission accomplished". *Impressive Impressions* reads like a checklist of post-war modernism, with nearly every major artist and ism included. Abstraction Expressionism? There's a Robert Motherwell print. Pop Art? I'm sure you'll enjoy the Jasper Johns. Minimalism? I recommend Sol Lewitt's *Arc Bands, Four Colors Superimposed Progressively*. Post Painterly Abstraction? Try the Frank Stella. And on it goes.

And while I rarely pass on the chance to see works by art's superstars, I'm always on the lookout for the opportunity to learn about artists I'm otherwise unfamiliar with. *Impressive Impressions* offered that chance too. To that end I found the spare mark-making and inky density of Yvonne Jacquette's nocturne, *Bridges Over Cuyahoga River, Cleveland* to be a real treat. As a counterpoint to Jacquette, the color, rhythm and harmony of Karen Kunc's *Scrap Gate* channels the best of Paul Klee and adds up to one of the most gorgeous prints I've ever seen.

The Riffe Gallery has carved out a successful niche for itself by providing top quality, well-curated and informative exhibitions outside both museums and commercial galleries. *Impressive Impressions* is no exception to this trend, and the chance to see the works in this show shouldn't be missed. It's an exhibition that offers not only a wide range of technical virtuosity, but also a very informative look at the evolution of printmaking (and art!) in the second half of the 20th Century.

Impressive Impressions: Selections from Ohio University's Kennedy Museum of Art Print Collection runs through July 13 at the Riffe Gallery. For more information, visit [The Riffe Gallery website](#).

Image credits:

Yvonne Jacquette
Bridges Over Cuyahoga River, Cleveland
 Woodcut
 18' x 23"
 1999

Christo
Wrapped Venus
 Lithograph
 24" x 18.5"
 1974

Karen Kunc – Scrap Gate

Eric Fischl
The Year of the Drowned Dog
Suite of six intaglio prints
24" x 70.5"
1983

Karen Kunc
Scrap Gate
Woodcut
42" x 20"
1996

