

Contemporary Art from the Marshall Erdman and Associates Collection

The corporate collection at Marshall Erdman and Associates represents a hidden treasure in Madison. Started by Marshall Erdman in 1982, it continues to grow steadily under the leadership of Tim Erdman, now including more than 2,000 works of art. The collection was conceived to include works on paper that are the best of contemporary graphic arts. It is selected from works by local printmakers and artists who have collaborated at the University of Wisconsin's Tandem Press as well as representative artists from across America and Europe.

When the collection hangs on the walls of Marshall Erdman and Associates offices in Madison, the works provide a stimulating environment for the company's employees and for visitors alike. This exhibition allowed the opportunity to see the works in more continuity than was possible in its usual surroundings and take stock of its overall effect.

For example, the collection has many works whose form and elements are outside of traditional approaches to graphic arts, like Judy Pfaff's unusual choices of media, Enrique Chagoya's amalgam of images from popular culture and European iconography into a comic-book-like codex, and Dennis Nechvatal's expressionist exploration of repeated elements. These works live side-by-side in the collection with prints by Miró, Warhol, and Motherwell, pioneers of their day, whose works now have the status of monuments—they are part of the history of images which new artists work with.

Among the pleasures the collection affords is its breadth of approach to particular subjects. Although many of the works present the human figure, the variety of treatments can stretch preconceived notions of representation. Comparing Margo Humphrey's bust portrait *The History of Her Life Written across Her Face* made up from the incidents of a life to David Lynch's untitled, anonymous, minimal half-length personage we see not only a vastly different approach in color and composition but in the sheer textures of the works as well. Humphrey's brilliant colors make the smooth surface of her print vibrate with life, while Lynch's monochromatic print gains a rich depth from the pressure with which the ink is pressed into the paper.

The more abstract prints show as much range of approach, but of particular interest are the differences between Suzanne Caporeal's explorations of color and Jane Kent's mark making; both artists approach fundamental aspects of art, creating visceral works of delicate balance and subtlety.

Many of the works defy traditional characterizations, like Lesley Dill's *Poem Dress of Circulation*, in which the print is shaped into a garment. Likewise, Chuck Close's work *Georgia I*, which is made up not of printed paper, but of carefully shaded and laid down paper pulp, defies conventional ideas of what a work on paper is, and in doing so expands our understanding of what art can be.

This quality of exploration is what makes this collection interesting, and it informs the growth of the collection today. Tim Erdman has said: "The test of good art is that it continues to offer new surprises, new dimensions."