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Art review: 'Print by Print: Series From Durer to Lichtenstein' in Baltimore



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By Philip Kennicott, Published: October 27

Prints are too often the poor stepchild of the art world, brought in to fill a gap in an exhibition, serving as marginalia, a footnote or a stand-in for a painting that wasn't available. As supplemental material, they falter in their effect, seemingly too dense and inert to compete with sexier paintings or sculpture.

The Baltimore Museum of Art has put the not-so-humble print front and center in an exhibition of more than 350 works from 29 extended series of prints. Artists from Albrecht Durer to Roy Lichtenstein to contemporary printmakers such as **Daniel Heyman (born 1963)** and Andrew Raftery (born in 1962) are represented, not by individual works but by complete sets of works made to be comprehended as series or collections. The exhibition was organized as a collaboration between the BMA and the Museums and Society program at

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Johns Hopkins University, where students take an interdisciplinary approach to the museum world, studying preservation, curating and the political, legal and economic challenges of institutions that serve as stewards of material culture.

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(© Daniel HeymanPhotography BMA/The Baltimore Museum of Art) - Daniel A. Heyman. 'Our Eyes Were Covered with Plastic Wraps' from the portfolio 'The Amman Project.' 2006.



(© Sherrie LevinePhotography BMA/The Baltimore Museum of Art) - Sherrie Levine. 'After Duchamp' from the portfolio 'Meltdown.' 1989.

Was it the students who gave this exhibition its dual focus, one on great canonical works, another on exuberant, indulgent exercises in the form? "Print by Print: Series From Durer to Lichtenstein" is an exuberant reintroduction to the power of the print, offering a rare chance to focus on material most often encountered in excerpts, and reproduced in books.

Durer's "The Apocalypse," a set of woodblock prints made near the end of the 15th century, helped establish the artist's international reputation, and it's easy to see why. The lines are heavy, dark and organic, the structure of the image as architectural as any grand altarpiece. Yet you can sense Durer finessing the essential bluntness of the woodcut form, grappling with the basic question of how much data one could, or should, stuff into an image. This emerges as a theme of the exhibition, the density of information, and one of the pleasures of the show is how that density determines the viewer's relationship to the image, down to the physical distance from which the print wants to be seen.

Lichtenstein's 1969 "Haystacks" series is based on Monet's paintings of haystacks from Giverny, exploring changes in light and atmosphere throughout the day and through the changing of the seasons (most of them painted in 1890-91). Lichtenstein's trademark benday dot treatment, however, isn't concerned with atmosphere but with the serial exploration of color. More than any other series in this exhibition, they become legible only from a certain distance, where the dots blend together and reveal an echo of the Monet. They resist close-in viewing and set up an argument with the print as a private medium, visual chamber music for solitary study.

The six panels of Ed Ruscha's 1970 "News, Mews, Pews, Brews, Stews & Dues" also demand to be seen with the ceremonial distance of more public forms of painting. Ruscha self-consciously takes on a hefty subject, England, treated as a series of words in Old English typeface, silkscreened without other comment or visual context on large sheets of paper. The colors, however, are produced with unorthodox forms of dye, including squid ink, salmon roe,

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