

# ***Impressions of Modernity***

## ***Prints from 1870 to 1945***

**P**rints are often overlooked in histories of Modernism, although many painters and sculptors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were also printmakers. This focus exhibition presents a roster of notable avant-garde artists and investigates how their prints challenged conventions of subject-matter, style, and technique and presented unique visions of an ever-changing world. The period often aligned with Modernism, ca. 1870 to 1945, saw some of the most drastic shifts in the political, economic, social, and cultural frameworks of societies across the globe. The rise of capitalism, the escalation of nationalism, the rapid development of technology and industry, as well as the calamitous devastation and repercussions of multiple wars irrevocably altered Europe, the Americas, and the world. Representing diverse perspectives and movements—including Realism, Impressionism, Fauvism, and Expressionism—these prints not only reflect artists' impressions of their times, but also convey the ethos of perpetual transformation that defines modernity.





Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883)  
*Le Guitarrero (The Guitar Player)*, 1867 or later  
Etching and drypoint on paper  
Gift of Dorothy Small (85.166)

Best known today as a Realist and Impressionist painter, Manet was also an active printmaker. He began making etchings around 1860 at a time when he and others sought to revive the medium as a fine art. In 1862 Manet and other artists and printers formed the Société des Aquafortistes (Society of Etchers), a group that promoted Old Master print techniques and issued monthly installments of members' works.

*Le Guitarrero* is based on Manet's 1860 painting *The Spanish Singer* (Metropolitan Museum of Art), one of two submissions that was accepted at the Paris Salon in 1861, his debut year. His main inspirations for this image were the paintings of Diego Velázquez (1599–1660) and the prints of Francisco Goya (1746–1828).

Rather than being conservative, Manet's retrospection of Velázquez and Goya was considered avant-garde, for things *à la Espagnol* were highly fashionable in mid-nineteenth-century Paris. In addition, by inventing this portrayal of a street musician, he chose to imitate the humble subjects of the Spanish masters, rather than their history paintings or royal portraiture, which were regarded as more elevated. Manet also inflected this image with a spirit of modernity by representing the musician dressed in an inauthentic hodgepodge of costume pieces and clearly posed with props in his studio. Neither the painting nor the print attempt to conceal the artist's act of deception.





Débarquement en Angleterre



Félix Buhot. aq. f. 1879.

Félix Hilaire Buhot (French, 1847–1898)  
*Débarquement en Angleterre (Landing in England)*, 1879  
Etching, drypoint, aquatint, roulette, and spirit ground  
on cream laid paper

Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2016.8)

Buhot innovatively combined multiple intaglio techniques in order to achieve the graphic equivalent of the loose brushwork and atmospheric effects of Impressionist painting. This image captures the experience of a wet, wind-swept boardwalk in the seaside town of Ramsgate, where Buhot disembarked in England on September 9, 1879. The velvety, richly black marks in drypoint in the lower half of the composition, combined with the ethereal mid-range tonal values in aquatint above, convey the transience of light and shade under rain-laden, swiftly moving clouds. Areas of brightness in the sky and around the dog on the boardwalk indicate that Buhot stopped out parts of the design, preventing them from being etched in the acid bath. He also scraped and burnished previously etched lines to smooth the plate and create reflections of light on the boardwalk and on the sea through the railing at the right. His multiple revisions of this plate demonstrate his remarkable experimentation in printmaking, through which he achieved a painterly style in graphic media.



Camille Pissarro  
*Rue Damiette, Rouen*, ca. 1884  
 Crayon and watercolor  
 on paper  
 Cleveland Museum of Art (1968.357)

Camille Pissarro (French, 1831–1903)  
*Rue Damiette, à Rouen (Damiette Street, in Rouen)*, 1884  
 Etching and aquatint on buff-colored laid paper  
 Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2017.7)

As with Pissarro's paintings, this print captures a transitory moment of an everyday scene, as townsfolk go about their activities on rue Damiette, a street that links two of Rouen's significant Gothic landmarks, the Church of Saint Maclou and the Abbey Church of Saint Ouen. The distinctive pinnacled tower of Saint Ouen and its south portal are framed by the houses and shops on this narrow street. Comparing the print with the crayon and watercolor study for it (bottom left) reveals that Pissarro elevated the placement of the church's façade, rendering it more prominent in the etching than in his sketch. This is significant for demonstrating that Pissarro did revise his designs, although his artworks convey a sense of spontaneity and immediacy and, hence, seeming reality. Pissarro's friend, Claude Monet, would later study another Gothic edifice in Rouen, the Cathedral of Nôtre-Dame, which he painted from 1892 to 1894 in more than thirty versions, showing different times of the day and varied atmospheric conditions. He, too, reworked these compositions extensively in the studio.

As noted with the inscription, "No 5, Épreuve d'artiste," this is the fifth proof Pissarro printed, after he had revised the design once. This print was made before the plate was steel-faced and published posthumously as an edition of forty in 1907.





Maurice de Vlaminck (French, 1876–1958)

*Au Bordel (At the Brothel)*, 1906

Woodcut on paper

Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2017.6)

This woodcut is believed to be Vlaminck's first attempt at the medium; it was most likely hand-printed by the artist in 1906 in the studio he shared with fellow artist André Derain (1880–1954) at Chatou, outside Paris. Vlaminck reportedly used a piece of wood he took from the wall of the toilet of their studio and carved the design with a pocketknife. This artist's proof is one of only four known impressions taken before the block was cut down twenty-two millimeters on the bottom for publication in 1920 in the avant-garde Parisian journal *Action*.

Vlaminck and Derain are known for their brilliantly colored paintings composed with broad areas of unmodulated color. Their style earned them the epithet *fauves* (Wild Beasts) in an exhibition review by Louis Vauxcelles in 1905. They and fellow Fauvist Henri Matisse (1869–1954) all began experimenting with woodcut in 1906. The sinuous lines, clearly defined shapes, and stark black-and-white of the medium corresponded to their bold, high contrast paintings. Moreover, carving the woodblock reminded them of African and Oceanic sculptures that they so admired and that stimulated their fantasies about the 'tribal' and 'savage' cultures that made them. This fascination coincided with their interest in Sigmund Freud's theories about the 'primitive' mind and sexuality, which Vlaminck's image forces the viewer to confront.





Christian Rohlfs (German, 1849–1938)  
*Austreibung aus dem Paradies (Expulsion from Paradise)*  
Ca. 1915–1916  
Woodcut on paper  
Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2011.7)

A painter associated with Berlin Expressionism, Christian Rohlfs took up printmaking late in his career, in 1908, when he was sixty years old. He was inspired to begin experimenting with woodcut after seeing an exhibition of prints by artists of the group *Die Brücke* (The Bridge). He would go on to make 185 prints over the next three decades, almost all in woodcut or linoleum-cut, which he hand-printed. The back of this sheet has another impression of this block in black ink, which partially shows through to the front. The back also bears the estate stamp of his widow, Helene Rohlfs, who preserved his work, since Rohlfs died soon after the Nazis expelled him from the Prussian Academy of Arts having deemed his art 'degenerate.' Few impressions of this woodblock exist.

Through its stark contrasts between the indigo-colored ink and paper and its bifurcated composition, this image evokes the irreparable consequences for the Original Sin of Adam and Eve. Their banishment from the Garden of Eden could be interpreted as a metaphor for the destruction and anguish of the Great War then ravaging Europe and the world at large.





George Grosz (German-American, 1893–1959)

*"In meinem Gebiet soll's soweit kommen..."* ("Under my rule it shall come to pass..."), number 2 of 9

From the portfolio *Die Räuber (The Robbers)*, 1921–1922

Photolithograph on cream paper

Printed by Hermann Birkholz

Published by Malik Verlag, Berlin, 1922

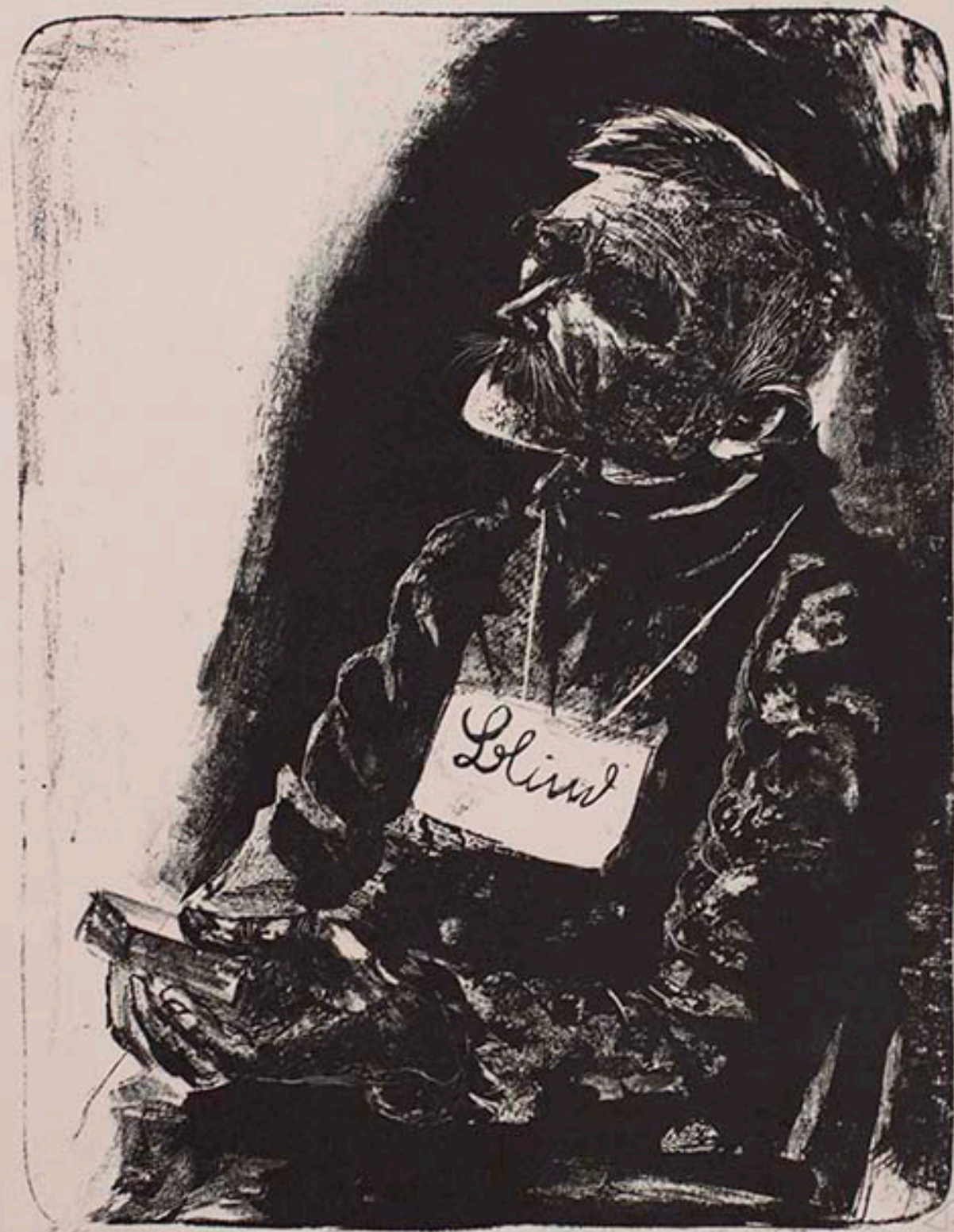
Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2006.16)

Unlike most German Expressionists, Grosz was not interested in experimenting with printmaking techniques; he used prints entirely so that his art and ideas might reach wider audiences. Most of his prints are photo-lithographs – mechanical reproductions – made from his drawings.

This print caricatures greedy industrialists seated around a table, gambling with exorbitant amounts of money, which was just beginning to undergo hyper-inflation by the middle of 1921; they also wager bets with sparkling jewels. A swastika on the tie of the figure in the foreground signals his espousal of the nationalist, racist, and xenophobic ideas of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazis, then beginning to garner popular support.

These men are juxtaposed with figures representing the impoverished masses: unemployed men loitering outside factories, an old woman wrapped in a shawl, a pockmarked orphan in a tattered gown, and a disabled veteran. They are framed by two armed policemen, referring to paramilitary forces protecting capitalist assets. Grosz's disillusionment with society and his disparaging of authorities are unmitigated in this image of staggering disparity between the affluent and powerful and the poor and powerless. Because of his trenchant political and social critiques, his work was censored three times in the 1920s.





Otto Dix (German, 1891–1969)

*Blinder (Blind Man)*, 1923

Lithograph on fine laid paper, numbered 31/66

Published by Karl Nierendorf, Cologne

Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2017.5)

The First World War and the ongoing instability that followed motivated Dix's early, remarkably prolific period of printmaking from 1919 to 1924. In 1914, Dix had enthusiastically volunteered for the armed forces and served for the duration of the war, despite being wounded multiple times. His experiences eviscerated the sense of nationalism he had felt at the start of the war. As a result, he became highly critical of German postwar society. His printed works could communicate his criticisms differently than his paintings in public exhibitions could; prints were viewed in private contexts, usually in portfolios, and generally received less attention from authorities who censored his and other artists' work.

Themes of trauma, brutality, and desolation dominate Dix's imagery in the 1920s, which was and still is shocking in its realist portrayals of both war and postwar society. This lithograph focuses on the plight of disabled and disenfranchised veterans. Over 4.2 million German soldiers were wounded in the war; they returned to a debilitated country that could not support them, and they became prominent fixtures of urban life in particular.

Disabled veterans were encountered along busy streets or squares, begging or selling petty items. This print captures this reality with an anonymous "everyman" veteran, who wears a sign stating his disability. Dix reinforced his condition by depicting the man's empty eye sockets with black ovals.





98/100 Diego Rivera

1932

Diego Rivera (Mexican, 1886–1957)

*Los Frutos del Trabajo (The Fruits of Labor)*, 1932

Lithograph on cream-colored paper, numbered 98/100

Published by the Weyhe Gallery, New York

Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2006.15)

Rivera is a key figure of the Mexican Mural Movement, one of *Los Tres Grandes* (The Three Greats), along with José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949) and David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974). His work as a printmaker is not well-known; he produced only fourteen prints, almost all in the 1930s.

In 1931, Rivera's largescale paintings — essentially mobile murals — were featured in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, making him the second artist ever to have a solo exhibition there. Carl Zigrosser, director of the Weyhe Gallery in New York, encouraged Rivera to make prints as a means to disseminate his images and ideas to a wider audience. Using his murals as the basis for his designs, Rivera drew five lithographs, including this one. He remained in New York while overseeing their production at the workshop of George C. Miller (1894–1965).

This print and the four others he made in 1931–1932 refer to Mexico's complex history of agrarian reform, a significant concern and legacy of the Mexican Revolution. The image conveys a central tenet of Marxist ideology, which Rivera espoused: the growth and stability of a society's economy rests not on the elite but on laborers, especially its 'fruitful' farmers. Given Rivera's communist values, it is surprising that he did not make more prints, an art form more affordable and accessible than other media.





Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

*Sculpteurs, Modèles et Sculpture (Sculptors, Model and Sculpture)*, number 41 of 100 from the *Suite Vollard*, 1933

Etching on paper

Printed by Roger Lacourière, Paris

Published by Ambroise Vollard, Paris, 1939

Gift of the Student Fee Capital Improvement Committee, University of Missouri (91.325)

As part of his extraordinarily prolific output, Picasso made numerous prints throughout his career, including the *Suite Vollard*, a set of one hundred intaglio works commissioned and published by his dealer, Ambroise Vollard (1865–1939). Picasso made the series in exchange for paintings in Vollard's possession, but which paintings were traded is still unclear: some reports say they were by Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Paul Cézanne, others say that they were some of Picasso's own early works.

Picasso made most of the plates for the *Suite Vollard*, including this one, in a flurry of activity in 1933, but he did not complete the series until 1937. It was printed in an edition of 230 by master printer Roger Lacourière (1892–1966), a monumental task that spanned two years. In 1939, Vollard's sudden death and the German invasion of France meant that full sets did not appear on the art market until the 1950s.

Picasso inscribed each plate of the series with the date he finished it—in this case, March 20, 1933 (printed in reverse because it was etched on the plate). With these records of completion, the suite has been interpreted as a visual journal of the artist's personal and creative life during the mid-1930s. Indeed, many of the images portray his mistress at the time, Marie-Thérèse Walter, and feature subjects engaged in both art-making and love-making.





Vassily Kandinsky (Russian, 1866–1944)

*Unanimité (Unanimity)*, 1939

Color lithograph on Arches paper, numbered 242/300

Gift of Clotilde Möller (92.63)

Kandinsky, whose paintings represent some of the earliest examples of pure abstraction in Western art, also produced numerous lithographs, woodcuts, and etchings of nonobjective imagery. This print exemplifies his exploration of formal arrangements using foundational elements of line, shape, and unmodulated color. Each color of this design was produced with a separate lithographic stone, meaning that each of the 300 prints that were made for this edition required the precise inking and placement of multiple stones each time.

A Russian by birth, Kandinsky was a leading figure of multiple international modernist movements. In Munich before World War I, he co-founded the Expressionist group *Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider)*, as well as published multiple editions of his influential treatise, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst (On the Spiritual in Art)*. In Moscow from 1914 to 1921, he was active in Constructivist circles. After returning to Germany in 1921, he taught at the Bauhaus, a progressive, state-sponsored school of art, architecture, and design. In 1933, the Nazis closed the Bauhaus, and he fled persecution for his Jewish heritage, settling in Neuilly-sur-Seine, near Paris.

Created during his exile in France just as the Second World War commenced, this abstract image with its balanced composition and its title *Unanimité (Unanimity)* alludes to harmony and hope at a bleak period in world history.