

Spring 2005

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La Salle University Art Museum

Madeline Viljoen

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Recommended Citation

La Salle University Art Museum and Viljoen, Madeline, "Benjamin Bernstein: A Memorial Exhibition" (2005). *Art Museum Exhibition Catalogues*. 8.

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(1908—2003)

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You probably know that, as a youth, Ben Bernstein grew up rather poor in New York and Philadelphia. He was the oldest son in an immigrant family originally from Poland, but a young man destined for greatness. In 1930 he and his brothers bought a rather decrepit truck and started a modest moving business. During the Depression years, it grew into the largest moving business in the city, the Quaker Moving and Storage Company. Later, he expanded into other businesses, especially United Van Lines and, as one of its founders, CTI — Container Transport International.

But Ben's life was abundant in many ways beyond business. There was a beautiful wife (who died too early); a devoted daughter, Robin; many sisters and brothers, especially Ed, also and art collector, and their children; the family gatherings, especially on the holy days; the broadening of his interests, as his travels abroad become more frequent. In his reading, there was a growing interest in Shakespeare that later led to several summer programs in Stratford and London where he became unofficial "grandfather" to young students from around the world. And early on, there was his new and growing love of art.

He began collecting from local artists like Julius Bloch and Seymour Remenick, later from Bruce Samuelson, Paul Keene, Sam Maitin — buying their work as they were beginning, continuing as they succeeded. In Europe, he was attracted to the bright, semi-abstract COBRA (Copenhagen-Brussels-Amsterdam) school; the mysterious surrealism of de Chirico; even the important prints of Miró and Cézanne.

I first met Ben in the 1960s. He and the Director of the Philadelphia Museum, Henri Marceau, were distributing the inherited art of a Philadelphia artist to local colleges and universities. It was the beginning of long friendship with Ben and a long series of similar contributions to our collections over the next decades. I would get a phone call from him with a cheery “Brother, come down and tell me what you and Caroline Wistar want!” Ben also encouraged us to “trade up” at the auction houses and improve the quality of our collections. And he also established an acquisition fund for the La Salle Museum for the same purpose.

It was in 1984 that the University decided that all this generosity should be noted with some solemnity. It was with much pleasure that I was deputed to see Ben one summer day at his farm to tell him that he was being offered an honorary degree. He was cooking our supper on the occasion, with my improbable assistance, when I mentioned this. “An honorary degree for me?” he said. And, with a twinkle in his eye, “But what about the reputation of the University?”

A few years later we named our modern and contemporary galleries after him, and soon after I had the personal pleasure of dedicating one of my books to him (he had helped, of course) — I could also have used it, years after, for his epitaph.

For Ben Bernstein

*Words, once my stock, are wanting to commend
So great a man and so good a friend.*

Br. Daniel Burke
Director



UNIVERSITAS LASALLIANA

IN OMNIBUS SEQUITUR

PROFESSOR DR. HENDRIKUS J. DE VRIES, S.J.

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The Benjamin D. Bernstein Memorial Exhibition

Benjamin Bernstein loved a broad array of different styles and periods of art. The main areas of his collecting interest might, nonetheless, be synthesized into three main categories: Philadelphia artists, Modern European artists, and Non-Western art.

Philadelphia Artists

Ben particularly favored a number of artists who taught at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, including Julius Bloch, Seymour Remenick, Sam Maitin and Bruce Samuelson. All of them were close friends of the collector, and it is noteworthy that many of them had a strong political and social consciousness.

Bloch, for example, was fascinated throughout his career with the experience of African-Americans and based many of his works on his close observations of black life. His sensitive renditions of African-American subjects earned him much praise, and in an article in the *Negro History Bulletin*, Alain Locke of Howard University observed that: "Julius Bloch is widely recognized for his psychological character studies of the Negro." Remenick too was politically active, though his commitment to social causes is not reflected in his art, and Maitin donated many of his prints to fundraising and publicity for local activist groups.

He also had an interest in the work of African-American artists active in Philadelphia. The works of Dox Thrash, who pioneered the novel carborundum print technique, as well as of Haitian-born Paul Keene round out this component of the collection.

Modern European Artists

The collection Ben assembled not only features some of the highlights of European Modernism, including works by Toulouse Lautrec, Paul Cezanne, Aristide Maillol, Henri Matisse, Fernand Leger, and Jean Miro, but also some of the lesser know lights, particularly those who belonged to the so-called CoBrA school, Eugene Brands, Henry Heerup.

It is clear from this group that Ben had a passion for many different styles of art. If there is a common denominator in this collection, it is Ben's preference for work that was conceptual, and less photographically realistic. He was particularly attracted to compositions with bold flat forms, bright color and a rhythmical use of line, qualities that are often associated with twentieth-century art. This is most clearly evident in his love for the CoBrA school, which received its name from the cities that participated in the movement: Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam. The movement is essentially Danish in origin and retains a bias towards artists working away from the major centers of European art. The artists that belonged to this school found inspiration in children's drawings, folk art as well as in motifs from Nordic mythology.

Madeleine Viljoen
Curator

Special Exhibitions Gallery

1. Walter H. Williams (1920-1998), African-American

A New Day, n.d.

Oil on canvas

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Walter Williams studied first at the Brooklyn Museum of Art School under Ben Shahn, and later spent a summer at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. Shortly after completing his art studies in the early 1960s, Williams emigrated to Copenhagen, returning only briefly to the States to create a body of works that deals with the African-American experience of living in the South. This work was in all likelihood painted during that period.

2. Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), French

Four Men Bathing, 1896

Color lithograph, second state of 3 with printed signature

Printed by Auguste Clot

Bathers are a recurring theme in Cézanne's art, only in the latter part of the artist's career. From 1893-94, he painted three versions of the subject in which he strove to unite the qualities of light found in the Impressionists with the monumentality of form shown in the Old Masters. This is the third composition he made in lithography, and in it we see the artist drawing directly onto the stone and then using a maquette to color the impression. The printer, Auguste Clot assisted the artist in printing the final works, which were commissioned by Cézanne's art dealer, Ambroise Vollard.

3. Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), French
Six Bathers or The Little Bathers
Color Lithograph

4. Henk Willemse (1915-1989), Dutch
Still Life with Fruit and Oil Lamp, 1953
Oil on canvas

5. Henri Matisse (1896-1954), French
Nature More au Oeufs de Tourterelle, 1945
Pen and black ink on paper

Following an operation for a tumor in 1941, drawing -- because it was less strenuous than painting -- became an increasingly important medium for Henri Matisse. Early on, Matisse understood the importance of contour, as he experimented in delineating figures in black and filling them in with pure color. A simple pen and ink sketch, this drawing describes the outlines of the still life at the expense of color.

6. Eugene Brands (1913-2002), Dutch
Untitled

Gouache on paper laid down on board

From 1931-34, Brands studied to become a graphic designer, and later taught himself to paint. In 1948, after participating in an experimental exhibition at the Stedilijk Museum in Amsterdam, he joined the CoBrA group. His connection to the school was short-lived, however, as he soon branched off on his own. Despite breaking ties with the group, he continued to paint in their style, which was very much inspired by folk art and the art of children.

7. Fernand Leger (1881-1955), French
Vase Bleu
Color Silkscreen

8. Henry Heerup (1907-1982), Danish
Baby Carriage, 1977

Oil on canvas

Heerup, a member of the CoBrA school, focused many of his works on the idea of life, from conception to death. This work, titled *Baby Carriage*, suggests the idea of the carriage as a womb-like vessel for both human and vegetal life.

9. Fernand Leger (1881-1955), French
Font Mauve

Color silkscreen

10. Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), 1887-1965, Swiss

Untitled

Color lithograph

The famous modernist architect, Le Corbusier, not only designed buildings, but was also a prolific artist. He painted mainly in the morning, and claimed that his work as an artist helped to support and sustain his work as an architect. This work is influenced by the Cubist-inspired work of Pablo Picasso.

11. Henri de Toulouse Lautrec (1864-1901), French
Catalogue d’Affiches Artistiques, 1896

Color lithograph

Toulouse Lautrec documented the Bohemian nightlife of late nineteenth-century Paris and is well known of his frank portrayals of prostitutes and courtesans.

12. Bram van Velde (1895-1981), Dutch

Untitled, 1975

Color lithograph

Born in Leiden, Bram van Velde pursued his career as a painter in France. Following periods of experimentation in Fauvism and other Modern styles, he settled into abstraction. From the 1950s on, his art becomes freer and more spontaneous, earning him much admiration among the CoBrA school of artists, especially Pierre Alechinsky. This 1975 lithograph is exemplary of the fluid style of abstraction he developed during the latter part of his career.

13. Aristide Maillol (1861-1944), French

Woman Seen from the Back

Lithograph

14. Georges Braque (1882-1963), French

Birds

Color etching and aquatint

Georges Braque's first original prints date from 1911, and he explored the mediums of etching, drypoint, engraving and lithography. Like his paintings, Braque's graphic oeuvre is primarily concerned with form and space.

15. Simon Bilew (b. 1915), French

L'Ensorceluse, 1958

Oil on masonite board

16. Joan Miro (1893-1983), Spanish

Le Matador, 1969

Color etching and aquatint

17. Oscar Dominguez (1906-1958), Spanish

Bullfight, 1947

Color lithograph

Though relatively unknown, Dominguez was an important Surrealist in his own day, who exhibited together with his countryman, Salvador Dali. Dominguez was also a close associate of another prominent Spanish artist, Pablo Picasso, and this work is influenced by their mutual interest in bullfights. Dominguez worked under Picasso's influence after leaving the Surrealist movement.

18. Dame Elizabeth Frink (1930-1993), British

Benjamin D. Bernstein

Bronze with dark brown patina

Lent by Edward Bernstein

Ben was a longtime friend of Frink and had the largest collection of her work in America. She is one of England's most recognized contemporary sculptors and the artist for La Salle University's *Walking Madonna* on the campus quad. which was acquired with much support from Ben Bernstein.

Hall Cases

Japanese 19th Century Prints and Books

In the 1960's Ben Bernstein made numerous extended business trips to Japan for Container Transport International. While there, he purchased for a song, a collection of Japanese, late 19th century "Ukiyo-e" woodcut prints and illustrated books. In the 1980's Ben donated several hundred of such works to the La Salle University Museum, a selection of which are seen in these cases. "Ukiyo-e" refers to the fleeting, floating world of everyday life in Japan especially as experienced by those who serviced and patronized the licensed pleasure and entertainment districts found in all major cities, especially Edo (now Tokyo).

The primary subjects as exemplified here were the educated courtesans and the lovers in the "red-light district" *Yoshiwara* as well as the local Geisha, teahouse, bath house girls and the actors in the ever popular Kabuki Theater. The woodcut prints were produced by three persons: the artist who made the design, the master carver who traced and then cut the design onto the key block and the printer. The artist and his dates are the only inscription translated for this exhibition.

However, most prints often included the title of the series, the subtitle, dates, publisher's name, address and seal and from 1790-1874, a censor mark. Although these prints and books were mass produced for popular consumption and valued and treated with no more respect than a souvenir postcard, their innate sense of color, harmony and rhythmic decorative designs make them now regarded and valued as a major artistic achievement. We owe much gratitude to Ben for his early recognition of their value.

CASE I

1. **Kikusui Shigehiro**, (Active 1865-1878)

2.+ 3. **Katsushiki Hokusai** (1780-1849)

Vol. VII *Manga Series*

(Toshiro Katano of Aichi Prefecture,

September 1, 1878)

Katsushika Hokusai (1780-1849) is considered to be a leading master of 19th century "Ukiyo-e" woodcut prints and book illustrations, especially those depicting birds, flowers and landscapes. His most notable print series was *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji* and his three volume *One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji* (see #3 for preparatory sketch). The fifteen *Manga* sketchbooks he published from 1814 onwards, a few of which are exhibited here, are considered to be an important part of his artistic production.

CASE II

4. **Utagawa Kunisada** (Toyokuni III), 1786-1864

5. **Katsushiki Hokusai** (1780-1849)

Vol. X *Manga Series*

(Oyo Shorin of Nagoya)

6. **Katsushiki Hokusai** (1780-1849)

Vol. II *Manga Series*

Hokusa Kacho Koden (Flowers and Birds)

(Nagobei Okura Kineido, Tokyo, March 10, 1891)

CASE III

7. Utagawa Kunitera (1808 — 1876)
8. Katsushika Isai (1821 — 1880)
Vol. V. Kacho Sanui Saiga Zushiki Series, 1865
9. Unknown
Vol. I *Chano Yu Hyorin Taisei*
Commentary on the tea ceremony

CASE IV

10. Utagawa Kunisada (Toyokuni III), 1786-1864
11. Enjo Takata
Vol. IV. Illustrated Book of Selected Chinese
Poems (Toto Shorin)
12. Unknown
Vol. II. Famous Places of Kisco Highway
Caroline Wistar
Curator

Twentieth-Century Gallery

19. Jean Dries (1905-1973)

Fruits sur Nappé Rose

Oil on canvas

20. Henri Hayden

Bouilloire en Cuivre, 1965

Oil on canvas

Hayden specialized in still life and landscape. The influences of Cézanne and Cubism are evident in his art.

21. Claude Venard (1913-1999), French

Still Life with Fish

Oil on canvas

Venard, like Hayden, belonged to the French school of artists and was a painter mainly of landscapes and still-lives. His art follows a post-cubist compositional style: using paint that he applied with a pallet knife, the artist builds up his forms to create flat areas of pure color.

22. Rene Genis (1922-2004)

Still Life with Flowers on Table, 1968

Color lithograph

23. Seymour Chwast (1933-1999), American

Still Life with Pipe

Oil on canvas

24. Seymour Remenick (1933-1999), French

Autumn Trees

Watercolor

In the latter part of his career, Remenick focused on landscapes and still-lives. This scene of *Autumn Trees* is typical of the artist's preference for traditional subjects that he painted in a slightly muddy, subdued palette.

25. Seymour Remenick (1933-1999), American

Interior with Blue Window

Oil on canvas

Remenick's early works are more abstract than his later works, and reveal his initial training with the Modernist artist, Hans Hoffman.

26. Julius Bloch (1888-1966), American

Bobby Fields, 1948

Oil on canvas

From 1947-1962, Bloch taught portraiture at the Pennsylvania Academy. This portrait of Bobby Fields belongs to a number of portraits of African Americans he made in these years, including a portrait of the artist Horace Pippin, who had recently risen to fame. This painting is unusual for being painted in a traditional academic realist style, rather than modernist one.

27. Julius Bloch (1888-1966), American

Shoe Shine Boy

Watercolor on paper

The shoeblack or shoeshine boy was a popular subject in art from the 19th century on, and we find references to him not only in high art, but also in popular music and cartoons. Yet, whereas the figure polishing shoes in a number of well-known paintings by nineteenth-century paintings is probably only nine or ten years old, in Bloch's drawing, the "boy" is a full-grown man. During the depression, millions were unemployed and turned to the street for

employment. Shoeshine "boys" abounded on city sidewalks, ranging in age from teenagers who should have been in school to men past retirement age. Bloch's drawing reflects the Socialist Realist focus of prints produced as part of the WPA.

28. Dox Thrash (1892/3-1965), African-American

Girl Reading

Carborundum print

From 1935-1942, Thrash was the head of the Graphic Arts Division of the WPA in Philadelphia. This program was devoted to the development and production of Fine Arts prints during the Depression. This sensitive treatment of a young child reading might be compared to works by artists like Mary Cassatt. What is unusual, of course, is the artist's focus on an African-American subject.

29. Bruce Samuelson (b. 1946), American

Untitled, 1992

Pencil, pastel and oil on paper

Samuelson's drawings begin with Old Master draftsmanship, which is successively broken down by repetition and overlapping lines. The diffused contours are supplemented by the use of careful shading in pastel and oil, all of which lend vibrancy to his figures. Samuelson has taught for some twenty-five years at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

30. Julius Bloch (1888-1966), American

Tired Travelers, 1927

Oil on canvas

In this painting, inspired by the French nineteenth-century realist artist Henri Daumier's treatment of the so-called *Third-class Carriage*, Bloch focuses on travelers on a train. Surrounded by other weary workers, the African American closes his eyes and rests his head on his shoulder. Like his fellow traveling companions, the figure appears serene, reflecting Bloch's fascination with representing the tired workman relaxed and at peace.

31. Sam Maitin (1928-2004), American

Vivify with Color, 1997

Mixed media collage

The title of this work captures the essence of Maitin' art: exuberant color and a life-affirming sense of joy. Matisse pioneered the paper cutout technique in the early twentieth-century, which became immensely popular amongst a number of twentieth-century artists, including Maitin.

32. Sam Maitin (1928-2004), American

For a Friend (5), 1994

Gouache collage on paper

Maitin was a very close friend of Ben's to whom the artist dedicated this work.

33. James Havard (b. 1937), American

Cross Timbers, 1973

Acrylic on silver sprayed paper

34. Hitoshi Nakazoto (b. 1936), Japanese-American

Thonga A, 1977

Scratched carborundum sandpaper

Nakazoto is adjunct professor of art at the University of Pennsylvania, where he teaches printmaking. This work is typical of Nakazoto's propensity for a minimalist use of color, combined with grid structures. The glistening grains of sand in the paper add luster to the image.

Curators

Madeleine Viljoen

Caroline Wistar

NOTE: Other works of art throughout the galleries, which have also been given, funded or partially funded by the Benjamin D. Bernstein Acquisition Fund are designated with a blue circle sticker near the label.

