Woodson Art Museum

in your classroom & home

Purely Prints: Printmaking and Documenting American Culture
Summer 2014

Red Grooms, *Mango Mango*, 1974, silkscreen

Introduction

A summer visit to the Woodson Art Museum provides an opportunity to explore the varied styles, subjects, and processes of printmaking in twentieth-century American art. *Purely Prints* is a presentation of three exhibitions, highlighting the significant role of printmaking in American culture as a means to document social, artistic, and economic trends in our nation's history. *Pulled, Pressed, and Screened: Important American Prints*, on view June 21 through August 10, features fifty prints spanning the mid-to-late twentieth century. *Cityscapes: Silkscreen Prints* presents large-scale and highly detailed serigraphs of dynamic urban landscapes, on view June 21 through August 24. The third *Purely Prints* component, on view July 5 through August 24, is *Pop Art in America*, an exhibition showcasing the vibrant and seminal work of cultural icons Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, and others.

Purely Prints exhibitions prompt the consideration of changing modes and methods in American art movements through the lens of the print. Woodcuts, screenprints, lithographs, and etchings each afford their own aesthetic appeal for printmakers. Despite diverse production processes, the politics of printmaking present common themes. Noncommercial printmaking is accessible and affordable, allowing artists to create rich graphic content in a short time period and in large quantities. Prints lend themselves to experimentation, sharing information, and sending a message, providing artists with the tools to respond quickly to changing environments and artistic styles. For some twentieth-century printmakers – working in regional or academic factions and sharing a print shop – the possibilities and pace of prints engendered subversive content. Social Realists held up a mirror through their work to reflect the struggles of impoverished urban populations while Pop artists poked fun at the shallow and seductive nature of consumer culture. For a list of twentieth-century art movements reflected in these exhibitions, see the table overviews near the conclusion of these materials.

### *Pulled, Pressed, and Screened: Important American Prints*

Harry Gottlieb, *Strike is Won*, 1937, color screenprint on wove paper

Pulled, Pressed, and Screened surveys five decades of prints from the Syracuse University Art Collection. These works offer viewers a window into an ever-evolving American landscape – our challenges, triumphs, tastes, and stories presented through the eyes of fifty distinct artists. Depression-era farmers, the bustling streets of New York City, Civil Rights activists, and abstracted views of everyday items transport visitors to specific scenes and diverse American experiences.

The twentieth century was a game changer for the international art scene;

the United States took center stage as a bold trendsetter in a previously Euro-centric art world. American artists were able to come into their own and re-envision American visual culture and identity thanks to several key factors. The U.S. government gave Depression-era artists a lifeline through the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project, which employed over 5,000 artists between 1935 and 1943. Visual artists were put to work creating murals and artworks for (non-federal) public buildings like schools, libraries, and hospitals, teaching art through newly created art centers, designing and developing government and educational posters, and documenting American art and artists. Researching and cataloguing folk arts, movements, processes, and artists through the Federal Art Project yielded the Index of American Designs, which aimed to document the range of the nation's material culture and offered guides on the techniques and materials used to create them. In documenting and funding uniquely American arts, craft, and design while ensuring artists continued working in an stable fiscal climate, a sense of community and creativity developed in a generation of artists. Federal Art Project-funded artists featured in *Pulled, Pressed, and Screened* include Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, Stuart Davis, Harry Gottlieb, Ben Shahn, and Grant Wood.
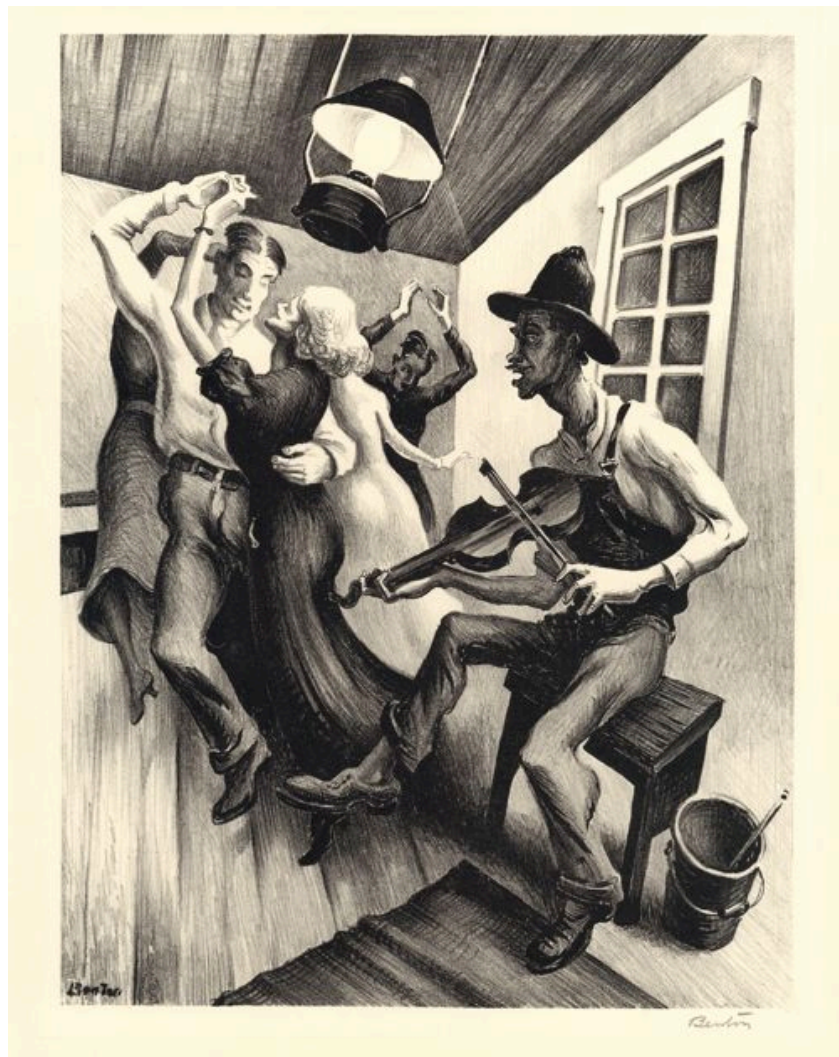
Thomas Hart Benton, *I Got a Gal on Sourwood Mountain*, 1938, lithograph on wove paper

During the 1930s, the Roosevelt administration helped organize and guide visual artists through a dry spell in the fine art market. The 1940s led to the immigration of hundreds of European artists seeking refuge in the United States from the upheaval of World War II. European modernism came rushing onto the growing New York art scene with the arrival of artists like Marc Chagall, Max Ernst, and Joan Miró whose sweeping influence on galleries, studios, and schools was crucial in shaping the Abstract Expressionist movement. Abstract Expressionism shifted the focus of artists and critics from Paris to New York where postwar concerns focused on psychology, universal truths, and more organic, emotionally charged aesthetics. Noteworthy Abstract Expressionists featured in *Pulled, Pressed, and Screened* include Anne Ryan, Helen Frankenthaler, and Robert Motherwell.
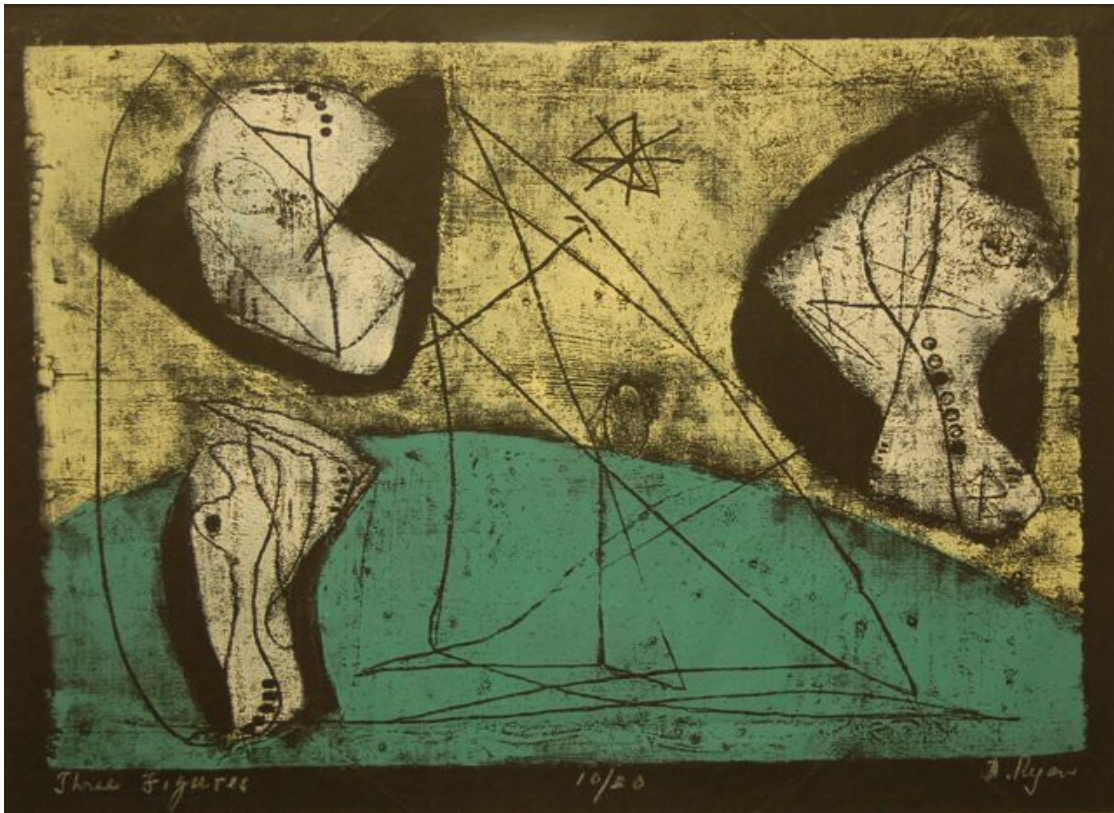
Anne Ryan, *Three figures*, 1948, color woodcut on black wove paper

The exploration of esoteric themes and nonobjective subjects paved the way for some of American art's most beloved artists, including Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, and Alexander Calder. Despite the sophistication and progress marked by the distinctly American Abstract Expressionist movement, the cyclical and reactionary nature of artists took the popular art market in an entirely new direction in the late 1950s and 60s. Pop Art shifted the subjective toward a matter-of-fact presentation of popular culture.

British art critic Lawrence Alloway coined the term "Popular Art" in 1955 in reference to a growing trend on the avant-garde art scenes of London and New York, which favored the ennobled depiction of commonplace items in dramatic color and scale. Despite its English origins, the Pop Art movement truly took shape in the United States. American postwar consumer culture

was growing rapidly as new technologies and the well-oiled wartime industries turned their attention to the newest battlefront – the homestead. Consumer culture focused on the 1950s family unit, domestic achievement, and the value of American advancements and superiority. The United States was on an economic upswing and had established itself on the world stage as a superpower. With economic prosperity and inflated egos, Americans did their best to move past the trauma of the second World War and embraced a vapid but cheerful cultural norm. Pop artists of the 1960s were well positioned to mock the nation's love affair with products and perceived shallow ideals tottering on the brink of a decade of social reform and activism.

Andy Warhol, *Birmingham Race Riot*, 1964, screenprint

Pop Art in America

Moving chronologically through the *Purely Prints* offerings, we transition to *Pop Art in America*, an exhibition featuring twenty-one prints from the Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale, Nova Southeastern University collection. From images of soup cans and oversized celebrity portraits to cartoonish depictions of war and garish neon prints of electric chairs, Pop Art appeals to many for

Andy Warhol, *Mick Jagger #9*, 1975, silkscreen

its seemingly playful and bright style. But artists like Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, and Roy Lichtenstein were zeroing in on troublesome cultural patterns in mid-century America. Fetishizing fame and walking the line between irony and indulgence was a game Andy Warhol played well. Warhol's bizarre look, offbeat and tragically hip screenprints, and know-nothing one liners made him a quotable and unforgettable figure in American culture. Despite his aesthetic attraction to all things overt, flirtatious, and counterculture, Warhol himself was a quiet, deeply religious homebody who lived with his adored mother well into adulthood.

Roy Lichtenstein profited by replicating the work of comic book artists and reworking images on a large scale, which magnified and called attention to secondary subjects in their original context. Many times the repackaged subject included an aloof, attractive young woman, violence, and images of war – isolated, mature subjects all retaining their now inappropriate childish colors and cartoon style.

Consider, for example, Lichtenstein's lithograph *Sweet Dreams Baby*. The phrase may have been used in a clever way in the original comic, but the usually sweet sentiment is unsettling when so glaringly out of context. The juxtaposition of the isolated text and the close cropping of the punch may cause viewers to think about the ways in which violent acts can be made trivial and disturbingly humorous.

Pop artists replicated, retooled, and repurposed dominant aesthetics and forms of mid-century American visual culture that almost subliminally flood our senses on a daily basis. Questions of artistic license, commercial art vs. fine art, and significance of context when encountering an image were hallmarks of the Pop Art movement. Notions of the evolving nature of images and subjects continued throughout art and the quality of the photograph was top of mind for the soon-to-follow Photorealist movement, which took realism and replication to a whole new level.

Roy Lichtenstein, *Sweet Dreams Baby!*, 1965, lithograph

Cityscapes: Silkscreen Prints by Photorealist Artists

Cityscapes includes ten silkscreen prints of urban landscape imagery by Photorealist printmakers of the 1970s and 80s. This collection from the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri, Columbia, includes prominent Photorealist artists such as Charles S. Bell and Noel Mahaffey. Photorealism evolved from Pop Art in the United States during the late 1960s and early 1970s and explored the role photography plays in art as a medium and source of documentation. The aesthetic qualities of a printed photo – graininess, pixels from an out-of-focus image, glossy or matte finish, and overexposure of film – are trademarks of analog photography and were closely documented by Photorealist painters and printmakers recreating photographs. Optical illusions of light, dark, and texture come into play in *Cityscapes* as viewers must think about how to separate the different visual qualities of screenprints and photography.

Don't forget, in the silkscreen printing process a carefully crafted frame must be created for each color in the print and painstakingly registered – or aligned in layers by overlapping color.

Fran Bull, *Lincoln Center/Dusk*, 1979, serigraph on paper

Printmaking Processes & Techniques

Printing Process	Techniques Used	Print Types	Associated Tools
Relief	• In relief printing, ink is applied to "above surface" areas of a carved block to create a print. • The basic concept is that of a rubber stamp • The artist removes surface areas, which are not desired. • The resulting print is a mirror image of the carved block. • Multiple colors in a relief print require the artist to work from the lightest to the darkest, while also considering background to foreground elements of composition. • In reductive relief printing, the layering of colors and print features results in the gradual destruction of the block, which an artist must take into account when determining the number of works in an edition and how many extra prints to make at each stage of the process in case errors in registration occur. • Inked block images can be transferred to paper by hand or through a printing press.	• Woodcuts/woodblock prints • Linocut/Linoleum prints	• Wood block – can be a soft or hard wood depending on desired aesthetic of resulting print. Softwoods and plywood are easy to carve and may result in wood grain patterns appearing in areas of the print. Hard woods like cherry or ash are more challenging to carve but yield cleaner, more detailed lines. • Wood blocks may be treated by the artist with a sealant like shellac or acrylic varnish to allow for better ink release onto paper and to help prevent the surface of softer woods from splitting. • Linoleum blocks created commercially or by the artist, are typically mounted onto a wooden base. • Artists may draw directly onto a wood or linoleum block prior to carving or transfer an image via carbon paper. • Carving tools include u-shaped gouges, v-shaped gouges, knives, and flat and round chisels. • A brayer – a handheld rubber roller – is used to spread ink evenly across the surface of a carved block. • A baren is a round, smooth disc with a handle used to press paper onto the inked block and transfer the impression of print onto the paper.

Intaglio	- Intaglio printing involves the incising of an image into a copper or zinc plate, making it a "below surface" process (the opposite of relief printing). - The ink applied to the plate is transferred to damp paper, which is pressed into cut lines on the plate. - Incised lines have been created through engraving (using a tool to scratch the surface) or etching (using acid to corrode the metal). - In etching, the metal plate is covered in an acid-resistant resin called ground into which the artist incises a line using an etching needle. The plate is then dipped into an acid bath, which reacts with the incised lines where the plate was exposed creating grooves, where ink will sit. The ground resin is removed from the plate, which is then inked. The plate is cleaned and wiped down ensuring all excess ink is removed (ink remains in the lines of the artist's design). A damp piece of paper is then placed onto the plate and run through a printing press resulting in the transfer of the print. - Engraving lines into a copper plate requires the use of a tool called a burin. Mezzotint rockers and burnishers also may be used to apply various textures and subtle tones to the print. - Similar to relief printing, intaglio prints result in a mirror image of the design.	- Etching "Aquatint" is a type of etching - Engraving "Dry point" and "Mezzotint" are types of engraving	- A copper or zinc plate - A "burin" is a handheld engraving tool with a steel shaft and a sharp point, which is pushed away from the artist as they cut into a metal plate. - Dry point is an engraving technique using a sharp metal needle, which creates "burrs" or raised lines alongside the cuts on the metal's surface. Burrs translate into desirable rich lines in prints, but wear down quickly as the plate is pressed repeatedly. - A "burnisher" is a hand tool with a flat and slightly curved metal shaft used to smooth an engraved plate, adding texture and tone. - A "mezzotint rocker" is a hand tool with a flat, half moon shaped blade used to apply a stippled texture to prints. Mezzotint rockers offer a softer texture alternative to harder hatching and crosshatching lines. - Corrosive acid referred to as "mordant" - Acid resistant resin referred to as "ground" "Aquatint" print plates are not coated fully in ground prior to an acid bath, adding tonal variety to the print where the plate was further corroded - Water is used to dampen printing paper to soften fibers allowing them to readily accept ink and become pressed into the grooves of the plate. - Printing press

Lithography			
Lithography	• Lithography is a younger printing technique – 400 years younger than the European woodcut. German actor and author Alois Senefleder invented lithography in 1798. • Lithography is a "surface print" printing process, also known as a "planographic print," meaning the surface from which something is printed is flat. This means the printed and non-printed areas of a design must be separated by other means on the same surface. • The lithographic stone is ground and cleaned thoroughly ensuring optimal surface quality. • An artist's design is applied directly onto the lithography stone (typically limestone) using a grease pencil. **The lithographic process is rooted in the principle that oil and water do not mix.** • "Processing" the stone aims to chemically distinguish the image and non-image areas of the artist's design, allowing the stone to reject or receive ink correctly and consistently. The fatty acids of the grease pencil interact with the stone's surface and will attract ink, while the undrawn areas are treated to receive water but repel grease. This surface treatment is called "etching" and involves a mixture of gum arabic and acid, which is applied to desensitize the stone's surface so that remaining drawing marks left by the grease can be removed with a solvent. • The cleaned image, now etched into the surface, is inked with a roller. The stone receives a "second etch" to complete the desensitization into lasting and defined ink-attracting and resistant areas.	• Types of prints: 　o "Monochromatic" prints are popular because they utilize one color and require only pressing. 　o "Chromolithographs" or "color lithographs" are multiple-colored lithographic prints, which require multiple pressings of each new color onto a print. Artists also may hand color elements onto a print. • A "photolithographic print" is a modern variant, which employs photographic processes of light exposure and chemical etchings on metal plates. These etched areas either accept or reject light through which patterns are transferred through a photomask.	• Lithographic stone, typically cut from Bavarian limestone, must be cut, polished, and surface treated in a uniform and precise manner to ensure flaws in the stone do not affect the transfer of a print or an inconsistency in the stone's weight or shape do not cause it to crack in a printing press. • Lithographic grease crayon or liquid "tusche" in the form of a stick, liquid, or paste, which each produce distinct textures in line and change the aesthetic of the print. • Drawings on stone must be treated with rosin and talc, which protect the design during the acid bath, which transfers grease onto the stone. • The etching processes treat surfaces to become either "hygroscopic" (attracts and holds water) or "hydrophobic" (resistant to water but attracted to grease) using a solution of gum arabic and nitric acid, which penetrate the pores of the stone around the image preventing the acceptance of ink in those areas. • Lithographic turpentine is used to remove excess drawing material on the stone's surface, but does not strip the hydrophobic layer where ink will be accepted.

Screenprinting	- Screenprinting is the second "surface" or "planographic" printing process, which creates printed images using a flat mesh stencil on the substrate (like paper or fabric). - A woven mesh screen with an ink-blocking stencil transfers the artist's design onto the substrate when ink is smoothly passed over it using a squeegee, forcing ink through the screen. - Stencils for screenprinting can be created by adhering paper stencils to the screen, by drawing onto the screen using a screen-filling/hardening liquid screen filler, or through a photomechanical transfer process. In photomechanical transfers, a layer of photo-sensitive emulsion is applied to the screen and when dry, the screen is covered by the prepared film and exposed to UV light. The photo's image then hardens onto the photosensitive screen. Areas not covered by the film do not harden and can be cleaned and the screen mesh restored. - Multicolored screenprints require the creation of a distinct stencil corresponding to the area of the print requiring that color. Artists must carefully register (align) layers of color for each print in an edition. Some artists, like Andy Warhol, embraced the registration mishaps and areas where ink bled through a stencil. A Photorealist printmaker like Fran Bull, however, would discard a poorly registered print.	- Also known as: - Silkscreen - Serigraph - Screenprint	- Water - or oil-based inks may be used in screenprinting and often are selected based on the print's intended substrate. - Prior to the invention of polyester, mesh silk was used for screens – hence the name silkscreen printing. Synthetic threads and nylon/polyester meshes are used to create most contemporary screens. - The hinged frame is made from wood, and the screen is nailed into the frame's bed. Tape is used to seal off the screen and frame, ensuring ink does not bleed through onto the substrate. - A rubber blade squeegee is used to draw a bead of ink down the screen in a firm, smooth motion. - When multiple screens are used to create a single print, a jig is used to properly register layers of color and establish uniform prints in an edition.

Movements in Twentieth-Century American Art and Printmaking featured in *Purely Prints*

Movement/Time Period	Associated Artists	Characteristics
Social (Urban) Realist Movement, 1930 – mid-1940s	• Edward Hopper (1882 – 1967) • Ben Shahn (1898 – 1969) • Raphael Soyer (1899 – 1987) • John Augustus Walker (1901 – 1967)	• Present American struggles • Sought to comment on social, economic, and political conditions during the Depression Era • Realist style with careful use of exaggeration to communicate critical messages and themes
Regionalist Movement, 1930s	• Thomas Hart Benton (1889 – 1975) • John Steuart Curry (1897 – 1946) • Grant Wood (1892 – 1942)	• Rejection of urban life and gritty industrial scenes • Nostalgic images of rural life • Aimed to present a truthful representation of architecture and figures from the American Midwest
Abstract Expressionist Movement, 1940s – mid-1950s	• Anne Ryan (1889 – 1954) • Helen Frankenthaler (1928 – 2011) • Robert Motherwell (1915 – 1991) • Willem de Kooning (1904 – 1997)	• Reflected Modernist notions of spiritualism, psychology, individual experience, and emotional integrity • Abstracted subjects with an emphasis on color, movement, and nonobjective biomorphic shapes
Pop Art, mid-1950s – late 1960s	• Andy Warhol (1928 – 1987) • Robert Rauschenberg (1925 – 2008) • Roy Lichtenstein (1923 – 1997) • Robert Indiana (b. 1928) • Jasper Johns (b. 1930)	• Subjects focused on simple and accessible everyday imagery such as advertising, celebrity culture, utilitarian objects, and consumer goods • Blurring the lines of high and low art and exposing the fickle nature of art market, fame, and prescribed public opinion
Photorealist Movement, mid-1960s – 1980s	• Richard Estes (b.1932) • John Baeder (b. 1938) • Tom Blackwell (b. 1938) • Charles Bell (1935 – 1995)	• Camera serves as the primary source of artistic information for artists translating images for paintings or prints • Visual aesthetics of a photo – pixels, glares on windows and glass, and flashing light reflections – are recreated in the print

Before Your Visit
Review the four types of printmaking using these materials and additional online resources:

- The Museum of Modern Art's interactive "What is a Print?" site:
  http://www.moma.org/interactives/projects/2001/whatisaprint/print.html
- The Minneapolis Institute of Arts YouTube channel printing process videos:
  - Relief: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0skLwaFpn0
  - Intaglio: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNKn4PORGBI
  - Lithography:
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHw5_1Hopsc&list=PL60EF8C723EACBBB7
  - Screenprinting:
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wogKeYH2wEE&list=PL60EF8C723EACBBB7&index=4
- Try a few basic printmaking techniques to learn more about processes:
  - *Relief printing:* Rubber stamps can be used to convey relief printing basics. Make your printing plate with Styrofoam trays. Invite participants to draw their image with a toothpick or dull pencil on the Styrofoam. Next, ink "the plate" using a soft, rubber brayer (roller) to apply a thin, even layer of ink for printing. Place a piece of a paper on top of the plate and use a wooden spoon to press the paper onto the plate, transferring the image.
  - *Screenprinting:* Tape stencils onto a sheet of paper and using a squeegee and washable ink, pull a bead of ink down the paper and over the stencil. Lift the stencil to reveal the image and understand this basic method of screenprinting.

@ the Woodson
During your docent-led Museum visit, a volunteer docent will lead your group through the galleries, offering insights and encouraging thoughtful dialogue inspired by the artwork on view. All docent-led experiences involve a hands-on artmaking component related to current exhibitions. During *Purely Prints*, groups will work with a Museum educator and volunteers to design and create their own relief prints in the Museum's classroom.

Activity Guides
Each visitor on a docent-led experience receives an Activity Guide to extend learning and enrichment beyond of the Museum and to share their visit with friends and family outside the gallery walls.

Woodson Art Museum Information
Please encourage your group members to visit the Museum again. Admission is ALWAYS free and the Museum is open 9 am – 4 pm, Tuesday – Friday, and Noon – 5 pm on Saturday and Sunday. On the first Thursday of every month – Night Out @ the Woodson – the Museum offers hands-on art for all ages from 5:30 – 7 pm. Call the Museum or visit the website for more information:

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