

PAPER TRAIL: With 125 prints and drawings by 64 contemporary artists in a show of recent gifts, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts deepens its commitment to new art.

Abbe, Mary. **Star Tribune** [Minneapolis, Minn] 19 July 2013: E.16.

They're all here. Many of the top artists of the past 50 years are represented in "It's New/It's Now" at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. With 125 prints and drawings by 64 contemporary artists, the show is a rich, wide-ranging survey of late-20th-century art, mainly by American talents. All are gifts to the museum from 35 collectors, primarily Twin Citians.

"This really is a celebration of our collecting community, which has been particularly generous in recent years," said Dennis Michael Jon, the museum's associate curator of prints and drawings.

Museums rely on the generosity of private collectors for the bulk of their holdings. That's especially true for the MIA's print and drawing department, whose 43,000 items span six centuries, from medieval and renaissance drawings to the present, with byways into illuminated manuscripts, artist-designed books, botanical prints and fashion illustrations.

"These gifts are especially strong in work from the 1980s and '90s," Jon added, noting that people tend to buy art by their contemporaries, so as a new generation begins to bequeath or donate their collections, the works involved are more modern.

Work by many of the gift artists has been shown at the institute over the years, but at least 90 percent of them have also been associated with Walker Art Center -- from Andy Warhol and David Hockney to Jim Dine and Kiki Smith.

As time passes, however, these once-young turks have become 20th-century masters better suited to the institute's art-historical sweep.

Figuration and abstraction

Occupying seven galleries, "It's New" begins with strong figurative imagery, including a 2004 portrait head more than 5 feet tall that Chuck Close composed from hundreds of multicolored squiggles and dots arranged in diagonal grids of pointillist color. A pair of 1982 watercolors show Dine at his most expressive, scraping and gouging the thick paper as he reworked the bruised torso of "Jessie," a favorite model.

"Pirate Jenny," a bold, green-and-black 1989 woodcut by Minnesota-based Fred Hagstrom, nicely complements Dine's dark angst, while Hockney counters it with his affectionate lithograph of "Celia in an Armchair" and his exuberant, cubistic "Image of Gregory." Opposite them, the bleak eyes of Mapplethorpe glower tragically from a 1989 photo-lithograph printed on gold leaf the year the artist died.

Siah Armajani's incredibly poetic elegy "Mississippi Delta" is the riveting centerpiece of a gallery of loosely narrative imagery. A triptych more than 13 feet long and over 3 1/2 feet tall, it is a meditation on Hurricane Katrina's flooding of New Orleans. Meticulously drawn with colored pencil on silvery Mylar, its aqueous shimmer enhances reflections of the city's skyline, an overturned car, a brooding blackbird, an empty coat suspended like a crucifix above the water.

Among the gestural abstractions, a confetti-like fall of red and green paint marks Joan Mitchell's 1992 homage to dying sunflowers. In a cascading red/blue screenprint, Pat Steir evokes a fiery "Berlin Waterfall," then uses delicate splashes of aquatint to suggest a mist of "Wind and Water."

Personal and political meet in a handsome 6-foot-tall photogravure-screenprint by Lorna Simpson, who stacks images of a black woman's face above a slave cabin over a braid of hair coiled like an old-fashioned rug.

Feminist imagery

Tough and occasionally playful images by key feminists fill the gallery, among them Smith, Lee Bontecou, Louise Bourgeois and Elizabeth Murray. Men have a say, too, notably Terry Winters, who turned out a striking portfolio of etchings -- inspired by an Edgar Allan Poe poem -- that pair his seedpod drawings with haunting X-rays of skeletal body parts.

In the next section, collage abstractions by Robert Motherwell flank a lyrically beautiful "Madame Butterfly" woodcut by Helen Frankenthaler. Opposite them hang Sean Scully's huge, sensual planes of ripe amber and rust, black and gray. And don't miss Joel Shapiro's antic screenprint in the corner, just a few black-and-blue bars that turn into a dancing figure.

Since the galleries loop together, the "final" gallery on this tour might be the starting point for another approach. The centerpiece here is a monumental drawing more than 6 feet square by John Newman of a complex, propeller-like shape that seems to be spinning in space. A tour de force of interlocking lines, planes, circles and ovals, it is a masterful conception of three-dimensional forms rendered on a two-dimensional plane.

There's much more, of course, including Roy Lichtenstein's subtle antiwar screenprint that looks like an Art Deco paean to American industrial might, serene geometrics by Ellsworth Kelly and Josef Albers, and a quirky little Jasper Johns lithograph made from a phonograph record.

Starting in the 1960s, American print studios -- ULAE (Universal Limited Art Editions), Crown Point, Tyler Graphics and others represented here -- revived a medium that had grown inbred and stale. They brought in young artists, encouraged technical innovation and weren't afraid to work at large scale. Like the garage entrepreneurs of Silicon Valley, they transformed the way the (art) world looked and worked. This show samples their legacy with brio.