

ART

## The History of a Printmaking Workshop for Women Artists, From Elaine de Kooning to Faith Ringgold

From 1984 to 2012, printmaker and professor Nancy Campbell ran the Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop, where women artists like Kiki Smith and Vija Celmins produced remarkable prints.



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Faith Ringgold (American, b. 1930), "And Women?" (2009), serigraph; printed by Curlee Raven Holton. Gift of the Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts (photo by Laura

SOUTH HADLEY, Mass. — On the wall facing the entrance of a new exhibition at Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, *In the Making: The Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop*, hangs a cluster of eight prints that represents the possibilities of printmaking. There's an image that riffs on prehistoric cave paintings alongside a purely expressive assembly of color and shapes. Below it is a timeless abstract seascape in grays and blues, and off to the side is a cartoon addressing the politics of its moment. It's a cross-section of what this experimental and process-driven medium can do, presented through the work of some of the most prominent women artists of the last few decades.

Each print was produced at the Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop, an intermittent series of artist residencies that ran from 1984 to 2012 and was organized by printmaker and professor of studio arts Nancy Campbell. Its purpose was to bring successful women artists to the western Massachusetts campus to shed light on how printmaking works. Over the years it yielded a remarkable collection of lithographs, etchings, serigraphs, collagraphs, and at least one photogravure.



Jessica Stockholder (American, b. 1959), "Skein" (2008), collagraph, relief and photo transfer in pink, purple, green and yellow ink. Gift of the Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts (photo by Laura Shea)

The exhibition is not just a way to examine these limited-edition works, but to create a valuable record of them while showing off a range of inventive approaches to printmaking. For each workshop, Campbell invited visiting artists who worked with a master printmaker on campus for a series of open studio sessions and a public lecture (“All are welcome” was a common refrain on fliers for the public portions of the visits). The first workshop, in 1984, brought Elaine de Kooning, who created “Untitled, from the Lascaux Series” (1984, printed by John Hutcheson), a lithograph on woven paper evoking the distinctive horses and buffalo in the earliest known human-made drawings, at the Lascaux caves in France, which she had visited the year before.

The works, from different points in the printmaking process, showcase the experimentation and creativity that lead to the final product. Kiki Smith’s “Falcon” (1999, printed by Carol Weaver) is a color etching and aquatint of an impossibly detailed falcon with a hood on its head; seen from the back, the individual barbs and color gradations on each feather are painstakingly rendered.



Kiki Smith (American, b. Germany, 1954), "Falcon" (1999-2001), color etching and aquatint on paper. Printed and Published by Harlan & Weaver. Gift of the Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts (photo by Laura Shea)

Curator Katelyn Allen, who developed the exhibition as part of a post-baccalaureate fellowship, said in a phone interview that preserving the spirit of

the workshop was a big part of the show. There is so much material that some works will be switched with others in January.

Allen's intentions come through in her presentation of finished works as well as test prints, proofs, and plates pulled from the college's archives, to reconstruct the creative process. Accompanying Jessica Stockholder's collagraph "Skein" (2008, printed with Liz Chalfin) — a swirl of colors in various depths and patterns — is the copper plate used to create the image. Another process-oriented piece is Sylvia Plimack Mangold's "Hazel Boyd Eureka" (1997, printed by Carol Weaver), a drypoint of a particularly ornate orchid and its leaves, represented in different states of completion.

Because it can be widely reproduced, printmaking is an ideal medium for political and social content, and a few works engage with issues that remain timely today. A serigraph by Faith Ringgold called "And Women?" (2009, printed by Curlee Raven Holton) juxtaposes portraits of Abigail Adams and Sojourner Truth, overlaid with their words about women's rights from Adams's letter to her husband and Truth's legendary 1851 speech "Ain't I a Woman."



Sylvia Plimack Mangold (American, b. 1938), "Hazel Boyd Eureka" (1997), drypoint, etching and color spitbite aquatint; final state. Gift of the Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts (photo by Laura Shea)

Others present their message in both symbolic and literal ways, like Joan Snyder's "Can We Turn our Rage to Poetry?" (1985, printed by John

Hutcheson), a lithograph in which brightly colored geometric shapes seem to jump off the paper, or Sue Coe's "The Environmental President" (1992, printed by Melissa Katzman Braggins), which parodies President George H. W. Bush's environmental record in the tradition of a political cartoon.

Some works revel in minute details, including a fascinating series from Vija Celmins. Her "Untitled Galaxy" (1986, printed by Doris Simmelink) is an etching over nine working states. It begins as a grid of meticulous lines from which blank spots emerge as stars in later states, and the build up of cross-hatched lines converge to form a deep field of darkness, creating a compelling, high-depth portrait of the night sky. It's a painstaking process, which builds up to something unexpected and awe-inspiring, as with many of the works in the show. The workshop has provided not only a unique historical record of work from a roster of amazing artists, but a demonstration of the power of collaboration and craft.





Vija Celmins (American, b. Latvia 1938), "Untitled Galaxy: State 12" (1986), etching. Gift of the Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts (photo by Laura Shea)

[In the Making: The Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop](#) *continues at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum (50 College Street, South Hadley, Massachusetts) through June 21, 2020. The exhibition was curated by Katelyn Allen.*