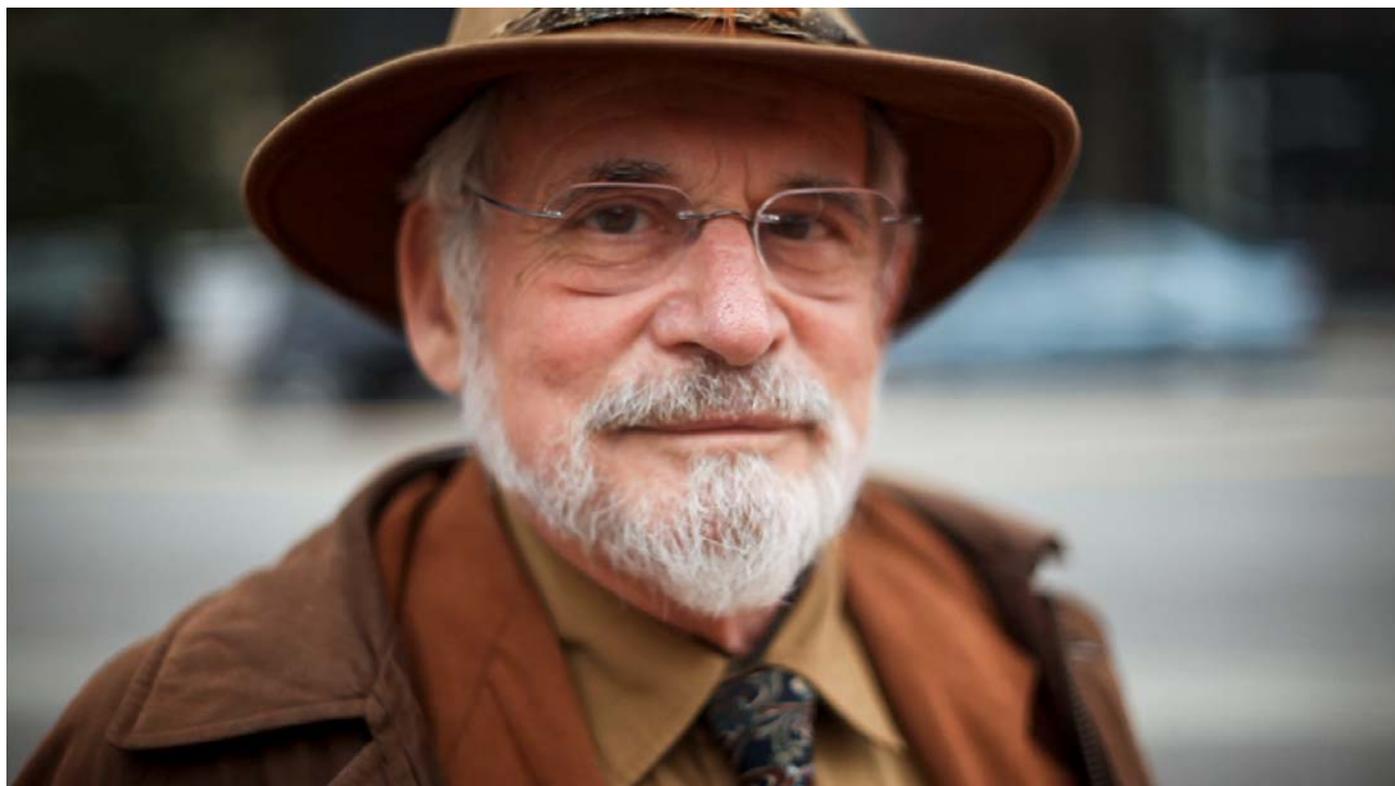


# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Sigmund Abeles

American, born 1934

## Winter Self Portrait

1970

*charcoal on paper*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from the Wright Southern Collection



# An Artist's Eye

## A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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George Bellows

American, 1882-1925

## Billy Sunday

1923

*lithograph*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase

Like Hopper, George Bellows was an undisputed master artist, equally adept at painting and prints. Things change, but fire and brimstone preachers are still very much with us, even if their churches are now more mega and hi-tech.

Underlying each of his compositions is a strict geometric understructure; Bellows was a true believer in the "golden section.\*" This genius's life was cut short far too early when his Christian Scientist wife refused to take him to a hospital when he was struck down with a ruptured appendix. What a loss.

\*The "golden section" or "golden ratio" refers to the proportions of the composition. The width of the rectangular composition is twice as long as the height. Such a composition is thought to be aesthetically pleasing to the eye.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Ruth Bernhard

American (born Germany), 1905-2006

## In the Box – Horizontal

negative date: 1962; print date: 1992

*gelatin silver print 46/50*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from the estate of Ruth Bernhard

First, I am so struck by this composition combining the beautiful curved lines of the nude within architecture, utilizing a common cardboard box. And then we see that her arm comes out and wraps around the corner of this box, similar to how in 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch painting an arm might break the picture plane increasing closeness. Ruth Bernhard has created an icon for all times.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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George Biddle

American, 1885-1973

## South Carolina Landscape

1931

*oil on canvas*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase

I have to wonder if George Biddle's charming painting depicting this poor South Carolina, African-American, most likely share cropper's farm, was done during the WPA art projects? Biddle drew inspiration from a number of artists he knew: the Mexican muralist, Diego Rivera, Jules Pascin, and of course, the Regionalists. One sees and feels a lot of Thomas Hart Benton in this work. Rhythm is paramount and heightened color pervades this scene. The little girl is coming back from a chore with the bucket in her hand.

In 1955, I was studying at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. One week, George Biddle was our visiting artist while his son, Michael, was a fellow student for that week. Another week, Ben Shahn was the artist in residence and his son, Jonathan, was a student, too. Jonny Shahn and I were roommates. At the time, I was very envious of anyone whose parent was an artist, but later I realized the pressures and tensions often built into that relationship.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Isabel Bishop

American, 1902-1988

## Outdoor Soda Fountain

originally printed in 1950; plate cut down in 1958

(this print from 1958 edition of 50 prints)

*etching, 24/50*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase

I always feel wildly fortunate to have studied drawing with Isabel Bishop in the summer of 1956 at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. Never having to teach for economic reasons, it was a very rare occurrence when she did so, and she just overflowed with a pent-up desire to share her knowledge and studio experiences. Isabel was the most poised and regal woman I had encountered and I often say if America had royalty, Ms. Bishop would be a duchess. Whenever she appeared at an opening, a line of admirers formed to pay her homage.

Bishop's ability to create monumental form on small rectangles is a wonder, as is her genius for elevating the working women observed and sketched in Union Square, where she kept her studio.

It was too good to be true that she once offered to have me visit her Union Square studio to trade prints. Living with the three Bishop etchings I own has enriched my life and work, too.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Tarleton Blackwell

American, born 1956

## The Hog Series XI

1984

*graphite drawing*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by the Metropolitan Life Foundation

I have only met Tarleton Blackwell once a few years back when we each exhibited a work at the SC State Museum's ambitious exhibition, *South Carolina Art: 100 Years, 100 Artists*. Yet I recall all of his strong, deeply felt art most vividly. He has indeed found a Blackwell vision of his South – hogs, self-portraits, and always using his finely-honed drawing skills.

*The Hog Series XI* is essentially a self-portrait in a mire of farm surrounds, swirling piglets, tractor steering wheels...the works. Tarleton stares at us unflinchingly.

While researching Blackwell's career, most impressive were his many deserved honors and awards, including a White House invite by Laura Bush. The interesting fact that he is a licensed and practicing undertaker jumped out at me. Such intimacy with death would have to inform one's imagery. I know of no other artist with this dual career.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Pierre Bonnard

French, 1867-1947

## Le Graveur (The Engraver)

no date

*etching*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by David S. Moore

A great master colorist and intimist, it is hard not to love his highly personal visionary works. In this intaglio print, we are privy to watching a printmaker engraving a plate, all hunched over his work in total concentration. There is homage to the wonderful French painter and printmaker Jacques Villon (Marcel Duchamp's brother) in how the hatching, often without outline, builds the volume. Cézanne, the father of modernism, is also clearly felt as a pathfinder in the formal structuring of this simple composition.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Debbie Fleming Caffery

American, born 1958

PaPa

1987

*photogravure*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by Ethel S. Brody

The overall mood here is sooty, grimly smoky, even toxic, and it feels that this could well be a charcoal drawing – albeit we know it is a photograph. The method of photogravure - printed identically to an intaglio print - can achieve these ink-wiped qualities.

I had not known of the artist previously yet am compelled by the strength and mystery of her image and have learned that Debbie Fleming Caffery is a Southern imagist of great depth.



# An Artist's Eye

## A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Walter Antonius Carnelli

American (born Austria), 1905-1959

### Nude

1940

*oil on board*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from John Richard Craft

This dozing nude in a cloth-wrapped chair goes back to my years hanging around the Columbia Museum. I admired it then and still do. The subtle cropping makes her come closer and makes the composition feel more intimate.

I knew nothing of the life of the artist. Good ole *Google* - now I know that Walter Antonius Carnelli was born in Graz, Austria in 1905 and the poor guy died young in 1959. He worked as a painter, muralist and printmaker and showed at the Corcoran and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, so he obviously lived and worked in the states.



# An Artist's Eye

## A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Elizabeth Catlett

American, 1915-2012

### Sharecropper

1945

*linoleum print on paper, artist's proof 7*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by the Anna Heyward Taylor Purchase Fund

Elizabeth Catlett makes powerful art, packing feeling, empathy and graphic force in all the varied media she used during her long, long prolific life.

I never met Ms. Catlett personally but familiarity with someone's art makes one almost feel one knows the artist, nevertheless. Catlett studied with the Mexican muralists and the social content of her art never wavered from their influence. Yet she also brings a feminist perspective to all of her art, as well as the perspective of her African-American heritage. She is truly a first-rate sculptor, and I think you can discern that from her grasp of form and rhythm as seen in this man with his hat. It is wonderful to learn that Catlett, born in the States but trained and living in Mexico, as she has for many decades now, is indeed still alive and is producing new art.\* She is currently the focus of an exhibition at the Bronx Museum of Art, *Elizabeth Catlett in Conversation with 21 Contemporary Artists*. Her art and influences continue to inspire and inform many younger artists today. Most, but not all, are younger African-Americans.

The everyday reality of sharecroppers was very real to me growing up in Horry County, SC. My uncles sold them their work clothes and Sunday clothes when they came to Conway with their mules and wagons. Whether it was in the store, at mom's rooming house, or on the beach, people-watching became my favored past time.

\*Sigmund Abeles curated this exhibition in June 2011. Elizabeth Catlett died on April 2, 2012, after this exhibition was organized.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Marc Chagall

French (born Russia), 1887-1985

## The Shepherd

after 1931

*etching*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Anthony L. DePersio

To my mind Chagall – like Renoir and Dali – once he was internationally renowned, cranked out far too many sweet works for his waiting-line collectors in later years. Chagall was truly a singular modernist and imagist with whimsy and uniqueness. This etching belongs to his great period of early works; a bridge from his Russian Jewish *shtetl* life to the encouraging atmosphere of Paris with its often foreign émigrés making fresh artistic breakthroughs. This sheet is from his Bible series, showing his naïve drawing invested with his inner feelings.

One of my upstate New York neighbors is Bella Meyer, Chagall's granddaughter, and the U.S. authenticator of her grandfather's works. Her twin sister does that job in Europe.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Charles S. Chapman

American, 1879-1962

## The Wolf Pack

c. 1940s

*oil on canvas*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Dr. John R. Timmons

If ever there was love at first sight for a work of art, that was my fiercely passionate reaction to the little powerhouse canvas by an artist I'd never heard of before – Charles S. Chapman's *The Wolf Pack*. The little painterly work takes a while to disclose those menacing wolves in its moodily deep-woods, softly lit landscape. All the elements add up to a small masterpiece that I really covet. If ever I was compelled to put a painting under my coat and flee, this painting engendered that bad impulse. There are two small Degas works of art at the Metropolitan Museum for which I have to curb similar urges.

*Google* lets me know that Mr. Chapman was born in 1879 and died in 1962, seemingly having lived his life in New Jersey, and lo and behold was a fellow National Academician.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Larry Clark

American, born 1943

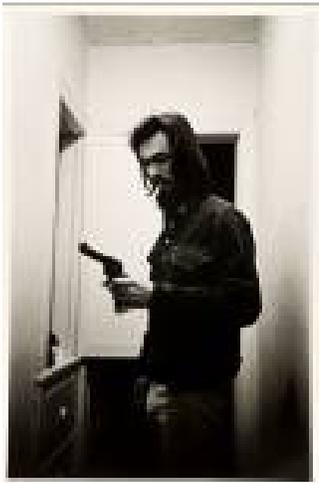
## Untitled, Part of *Tulsa* Album of Photographs

1971

*gelatin silver print*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Diana Henstell

This armed and dangerous dude is made scarier, more threatening, because it is a stark black and white photograph. His menacing gesture, cramped in a tight corner, silhouetted gun and dark-socketed eyes make me want to beat it fast. Yet within the safety of "it is art," I dare myself to take him in for a little longer. I mentally compare this work with the leather covered figures with guns by Nancy Grossman or some of Gregory Gillespie's meaner self-portraits: all-American images whose goals were the opposite of seeking conventional beauty, but rather harsh, underbelly truths.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Chuck Close

American, born 1940

Phil/Fingerprint

1981

*lithograph, 18/36*



Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds partially donated by Robert D. Ochs and Edward C. Roberts

It is simply irrefutable that Chuck Close has made major contributions to contemporary figuration by being one of the most innovative painters, printmakers and photographers alive. His ambition in scale and sheer volume of art is astounding. Then how does one begin to factor in his serious illness – wheelchair bound – with a brush or printmaking tool attached to his hand as about all he can manage, movement-wise? Thankfully he can speak brilliantly. As the newer works emerge, the elements that make up the forms are more and more loose and comprised of odd, abstracted shapes.

It would seem that without the ability to walk back and forth, his work might have gotten tighter -- just the opposite! Close's work is so vivid and vibrant and has its own unique living quality.

Here is a master of our time in the realm of portraiture-of-his-own choosing (as opposed to commissioned works whose sitters could influence the result, demanding flattery). And then, Mr. Close has a rare condition in which he cannot recognize a person by their face, yet faces are his sole subject matter. It is all a miracle to behold. It needs to be known that he works exclusively from his own photography that has been squared-up and painted/etched small section by small section. In the end, the success of the final result is what counts.

*Phil/Fingerprint* is of Chuck's close friend, the famed composer, Philip Glass. The museum has another Close portrait of Glass made up of toned blobs of paper-pulp. A decision as to which to use here was difficult for me, but I chose this intense visage made entirely by the pressure and different densities of ink.

After moving to NYC in 1994, we chose The Ethical Culture Elementary School for our son, Max. It just happened that Chuck Close's daughter, Maggie, was in his fifth grade class. I felt school-age kids should learn to draw objectively, directly from life and arranged to give such a class to any interested, after school hours. We mostly drew in Central Park, which was just across the street, and all seemed to enjoy and gain from the challenge.

# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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August Cook

American, 1897-1990

## Sugar House, Pomfret

no date

*engraving*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase

I never met August Cook, but always admired his work - both prints and painting - for their muted, poetic realism. Such honest observation and mastery of his media epitomizes his vision. The mood and restraint of this landscape makes it special and memorable. I believe August Cook and I, along with Jasper Johns, are rare South Carolinian members of the National Academy which has now been around for 185 years.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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James F. Cooper

American, 1907-1968

## Sausage Tomorrow

c. 1939

*etching*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by Brenda P. Brown

Night scenes automatically seem shrouded in mystery. This community swine slaughtering draws one in, but only those who know this type of toil could be of help. The air is flooded with pungent odors of raw meat, entrails and steam. Sausage will last since it is preserved. Cooper is well aware of the great night scenes of Rembrandt, Goya and the American Regionalists and uses their tonalities and compositions to create this compelling, maybe to some repellent, night of cooperative labor. It is through my friendship with Boyd Saunders that I was made aware of the fine prints of James F. Cooper. In 2004, Boyd and Stephanie Saunders published *The Etchings of James Fowler Cooper*.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Judy Dater

American, born 1941

## Imogen and Twinka at Yosemite

1974 (this print dated 1990)

*gelatin silver print*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase

In this contrast of all contrasts, aged, famous photographer Imogen Cunningham plays a sort of hide and seek around a truly ancient, rough-barked tree with a sinuous, sensual model who happens to have the cute name Twinka. How fleeting is youthful beauty, how steady is work, and how perfect is photography for capturing and preserving an amazing millisecond in time?



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Richard Diebenkorn

American, 1922-1993

## Seated Woman in Striped Dress

1965

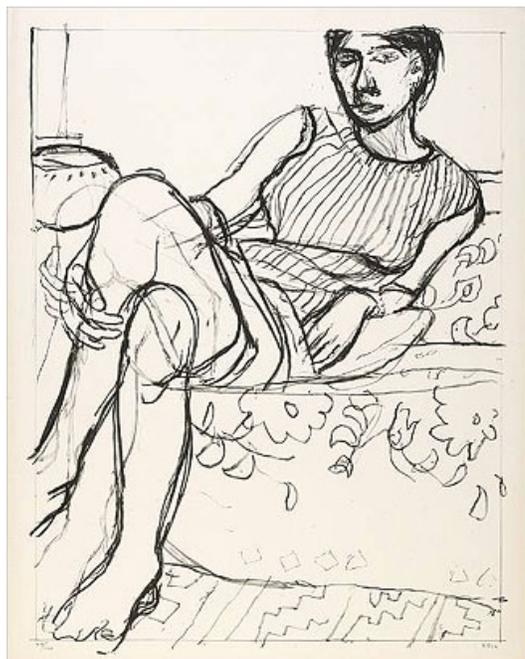
*lithograph, trial proof VI*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase in honor of Ruth Hisaw

There is so much sensitive, empathic humanity made with so few marks – directness personified. Diebenkorn is a favorite of mine in the fact that he brought the spirit of Abstract Expressionism to figuration, especially at the time of this print. A group of West Coast artists met and drew regularly from the model, and Paul Wonner, whose work was in the original *An Artist's Eye* exhibition, was part of this group.\* Nothing refreshes and challenges artists' preconceived notions of what is out there like working from life.

It is extremely difficult to distinguish a lithograph from a drawing, unlike say the other fine arts printing media. In this case, as I also do, the stone or litho-grained plate was brought to where the model was posing and worked there, directly from life.

\*This exhibition contains 59 pieces from the original *An Artist's Eye* exhibition due to limitations with fragility, weight and transport.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Larry Dinkin

American, born 1943

## Landscape of Structure from a Dream

1999

screen print, 57/140

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Martin and Estelle Karlin

To my knowledge, this very painterly screen-print is the first Larry Dinkin I've seen – indeed a true find for me. Since then I have researched his work and found a terrific painter who can most convincingly build believable images of solid forms in space. His title, *Landscape of Structure from a Dream*, pretty much defines his developed skills. His color is heightened and juicy. Confidence is his watchword, and how he loves to apply a loaded brushstroke that describes something convincing in an invented industrial-like space. I confess that screen-prints are not my media and I have no idea how he achieves this painterliness with that print media.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Hans Erni

Swiss, born 1909

## Girl with Towel

1949

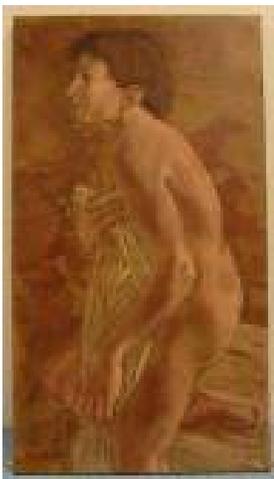
*oil on canvas*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Dr. Eugene Kaplan, in loving memory of Sarane Lenore Rosenberg Kaplan, "Rainie"

I have to suspect that few know Hans Erni's work. A Swiss painter, sculptor, printmaker and designer, Erni celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2009. So much - perhaps too much - of his inspiration comes right out of Picasso's classical period and his *Suite Vollard*, nevertheless he has made a significant body of lyrical works and is far more famous in Europe than in the U.S.

*Girl with Towel* has a tenderness and vulnerability. Her arm is so near to the edge of the picture plane, and the palette is so limited. Drawing is what is primary, even though the piece is oil on canvas. (I have to remark that the placement of her ear is a bit odd.)

Since age fourteen back in Myrtle Beach, SC, I have deliberately built a now vast collection of catalogs and books on representational artists, and the two catalogs of Erni's sensitive art in my library do get looked at repeatedly over the years.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Rafael Tufiño Figueroa

Puerto Rican (born America), 1922-2008

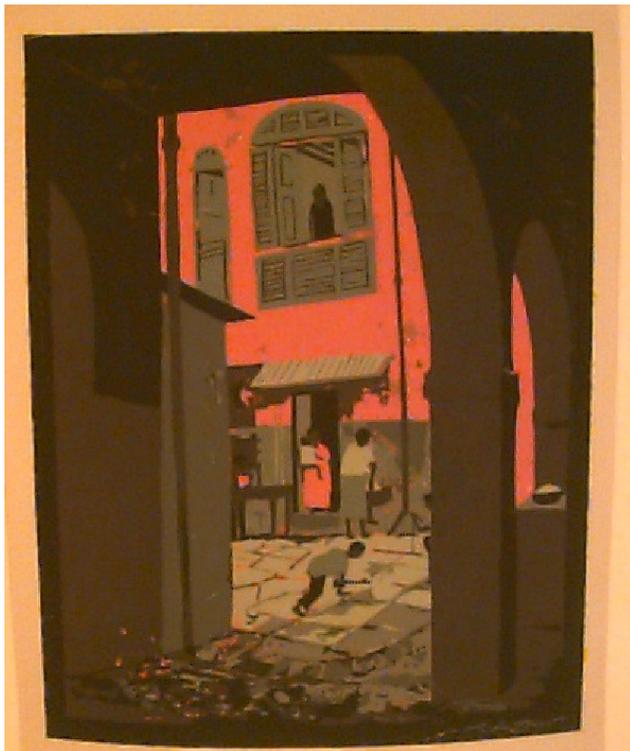
## Untitled

1953-1954

*screen print in colors*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Mr. and Mrs. John R. Himes

This hot/cool courtyard scene is “untitled” yet we each could easily give it a name and put ourselves into the well-described exterior with everyday people. There is a just-right amount of simplification here. Usually a hot color visually comes forward, and darker neutral hues recede; however, here the muddy, high-walled arched opening holds the foreground, and indeed the rich hot pink stays where it is intended. The closest person is the animated boy playing handball, who is in contrast to the mysterious shrouded figure in the high window. I find this a very satisfying work by an artist I had not even heard of prior to my selections.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Janet Fish

American, born 1938

## Diane's Vase

1998

*oil on canvas*

Columbia Museum of Art 50th Anniversary acquisition purchased with funds donated by Leona Sobel

*Diane's Vase* is one astounding painting performance – a truly updated Manet, each stroke Janet Fish applies hits a bulls-eye. As a totality the canvas appears to glow from within. This is a prime example of contemporary realism.

She's considered one of America's "Eye Ball Realists" (meaning working solely from life *sans* photography) along with Jack Beal, Philip Pearlstein, Alfred Leslie and William Beckman. I first met Janet decades ago at Jack Beal's. Janet is such a warm, caring person with a good sense of humor, and her husband Charles Parness' art is solely comprised of humorous self-portraits. They are both fun to be around.

Jack Beal and I ran a successful workshop for realist artists in the summer of '85 in La Napoule, France and the next summer at the University of New Hampshire. Will Cotton, now a rising star showing at Mary Boone Gallery, NYC, was one of our students the first summer.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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James Montgomery Flagg

American, 1877-1960

## Untitled

c. 1925

*pen and ink drawing on illustration board*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Everett Raymond Kinstler

Some works seem dated by fashion of the time like this drawing, yet the “story” of James Montgomery Flagg’s untitled F. Scott Fitzgerald-like couple truly speaks to all times and to all of us. Flagg’s masterful slashing strokes of varied thickness excite and move the eye, and here is an example of the term I like to use about media and subject: “the great flip-flop.” At one second we might only see marks then the marks change and coalesce into convincing subject matter. Late works by Rembrandt are fine examples. Those sort of bold marks are also masterfully used by Flagg’s Swedish contemporary, Anders Zorn.

Flagg lived in the same New York City studio building I now live in - the Hotel des Artistes.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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William K. Greiner

American, born 1957

## T.V. in Bayou, Charrette, Louisiana

1993

*Fuji Crystal Archive print, 6/8*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from William K. Greiner

Dastardly dismal is this too familiar image from our throw-away times. Too often the conflict between what little nature is left, thrown in with abandoned technology that is so fast obsolete or too fast breaking down with no more Mr. Fixit shops, is toxic to our eyes, sensibilities and healthy future.

Greedy, we want to have all that is available; recycling seems just too hard to get folks to do. The poor planet is assaulted from every which way.

Drawing a line from corner to corner we watch as the floating, now old-fashioned console T.V. slowly sinks. We have to hope and pray for an awakening to save ourselves from ourselves, while being painfully aware of gigantic masses of plastic in the oceans the size of nations.

Like as with Käthe Kollwitz, in the hands of an artist, social commentary can be elevated to high art, or fine art, whatever you wish to call it. So thank you William Greiner, concerned art photographer.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Archibald Standish Hartrick

Scottish (born India), 1864-1950

## On Munitions – Dangerous Work (Packing T.N.T)

c. 1917

*lithograph, plate 5*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by the Helen Calhoun Adams and Robert Adams IV Memorial Collection

I must confess that this artist was totally unknown to me, yet his masked munitions worker haunts me. Plus I realized just how it was similar in feeling and content to my lithograph *Pietrasanta Carver*. The mask is not for mystery in either case, but to protect the subject: this young female war factory worker from inhaling toxins, and my former wife, a stone carver, from getting silicosis from stone dust.

Hartrick was born in Bangalore, India. He studied at both Edinburgh University and the Slade School, where the best of drawing was taught in Great Britain. He was known for his war art and posters and died in 1950. To what dangerous ends we humans go to fight wars and protect ourselves as our environment continues to degrade.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Everett Raymond Kinstler

American, born 1926

## Carolina Shrimp Man

1969

*watercolor*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Everett Raymond Kinstler

I can count Ray Kinstler as a friend and fellow National Academician. His career is interesting: beginning in comic strips, then illustrating untold numbers of pulp fiction book covers, evolving into the painter of presidents (he made a first-rate one of Bill Clinton). He also painted the portrait of the Columbia Museum's former director - and my friend and supporter - Jack Craft, in his canary yellow jacket. Ray informed me that Dr. Craft drove him to the coast, and that is where he hastily made this perceptive watercolor of this shrimp man.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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John Koch

American, 1909-1978

## Painter and Models

1972

*oil on canvas*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase

I am very passionate for the best of John Koch's work. For sure, Koch's *Painter and Models* is one of his masterpieces. When I refer to my book on his art and see this highly engaging work, I always smile realizing it is in the Columbia Museum's collection – how great!

Koch was the Vermeer of Central Park West, an American master whose light-filled canvases often depict the life of a figurative artist. Like so many filmmakers whose films explore the very process of making films, this artist shows us the process of the day-to-day posed models in his studio. Not so unlike Philip Pearlstein whose art is more "updated." Note the little "window" formed by the bent arm and torso of the male model, showing a self-portrait of Koch, and the contemporary touch of the female nude taking time during her break from posing to make a phone call.

Another attribute of Mr. Koch was his generosity toward younger representational artists. He would invite them to his parties where major collectors gathered, and he would also purchase their works directly.



# An Artist's Eye

## A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Käthe Schmidt Kollwitz

German, 1867-1945

### Bread

c. 1924

*lithograph*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase



In the 1960s, I decided Käthe Kollwitz was my artistic grandmother and I put up a photo of her in every room in my home. Her powerful art is strong enough in drawing, composition, and empathic meaning to stand up to two world wars and deep economic depression in Germany, like no other European artist – man or woman. During WWII an SS guard was assigned to prevent her from working. Later she was given shelter in a castle and did work again, but she did not live to see that horror of a war end.

In the 1970s in New Hampshire, I met and became friends with the famed Berlin photographer Lotte Jacobi, who escaped Nazi Germany and lived out the rest of her life rurally in the state. Her father was one of Germany's first commercial photographers and his name was Sigmund, so our bond was strong. Periodically she'd send me another original photo that she took of the great Käthe Kollwitz. I don't know if her photos of the printmaker occurred over one session or more. Jacobi is most known for her images of Albert Einstein and Lotte Lenya. My first print by another artist - besides trades with fellow artists - was a Kollwitz print purchased out of the back of a station wagon from traveling print seller, Bill Tomlinson. He worked for the Baltimore print dealer Ferdinand Roten Galleries. On that day, Mr. Tomlinson looked at my prints, took them back to Mr. Roten, and I was added to the illustrious list of artists. My national print career was launched - all from a meeting in the driveway of the Richland Art School at the Columbia Museum of Art.

The cry for bread, especially in the midst of war and violence worldwide, seemingly will not cease.

# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Jacob Lawrence

American, 1917-2000

## The 1920s...The Migrants Arrive and Cast Their Ballots

1974

*screen print in colors on Domestic paper, 98/125*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Kent/Lorrillard, Inc.

Jacob Lawrence and Romere Bearden are at the pinnacle of modern African-American masters while using their strong graphic sense to tell their people's story.

Pattern plays a huge part in the success of this image from the era of poll tax times. Our eyes read the whites, then the reds, then the muted blue, then the few black shapes, then the ochre-yellows, then the blues against the earth-colored ground. Keeping it direct and simple, Lawrence first uses overlap to place one figure in front or behind another like the Egyptians did long before anyone had a clue about linear perspective. He also employs early one point perspective, as we would see in works by Giotto, by diminishing the figures as they recede in space. Yes, it is indeed purposely "primitive" to enhance the potency of this important moment in the struggle to make democracy work for all American peoples. Form and content interplay perfectly, and this is one great silkscreen print.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Larry Francis Lebby

American, born 1950

## If I Show You My Tenderness

1980

*lithograph on 100% rag Arches buff paper, 70/150*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase

I value empathy in figurative art, while avoiding being merely sentimental, as fulfilling a vital role. While in our times it could be “cool” to be meaningless, I value caring and warmth highly, and thus chose Larry Francis Lebby’s color lithograph of a group of six African-American women, most probably singing gospel. I myself have been working on a series of Gullah women, mostly singing, and keep mentally referring to two works of art of singers whose silent images still evoke sound: one by Degas and the other by Eakins.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Jack Levine

American, 1915-2010

## Gangster's Funeral

1965

*drypoint*

Columbia Museum of Art 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary acquisition purchased with funds donated by Leona Sobel

Jack Levine feels like influential family to me. When I was just twenty, the head of the Skowhegan School took me personally to Levine's crowded NYC studio, and I was in awe. Astonishingly, the fine Ingres-like drawing he made for his oil *String Quartet* (in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art) was made when he was twelve years old!

In my unique apprenticeship to Gerard Tempesta during my high school years in Myrtle Beach, he turned me on to the painterly-rich, subject-rich work of Levine and the other Boston-based master, Hyman Bloom. Both reside in my mind's eye most of the time. The last time he and I spoke face to face was at his 90<sup>th</sup> exhibit at the DC Moore Gallery. He died last year, and when at the recent National Academy meeting, when we stand to pay homage to those of us who passed away, I felt a deep pang of loss to have his brain, sarcastic nature and hand stilled.

In his inky-lush print the energetic planes, made from rich parallel marks as his diamond point tools cut directly into the copper plate, create a broken up image that is highly aware of Cézanne. The shifting planes, coupled with the open structuring, show he is looking at Abstract Expressionism. Nevertheless, the dominance of abstraction in the art world at the time this image was made (1965) ignored his modernist shifts, and eclipsed a potent artist like Levine, which left him bitter.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Richard Morrison Lofton

American, 1908-1966

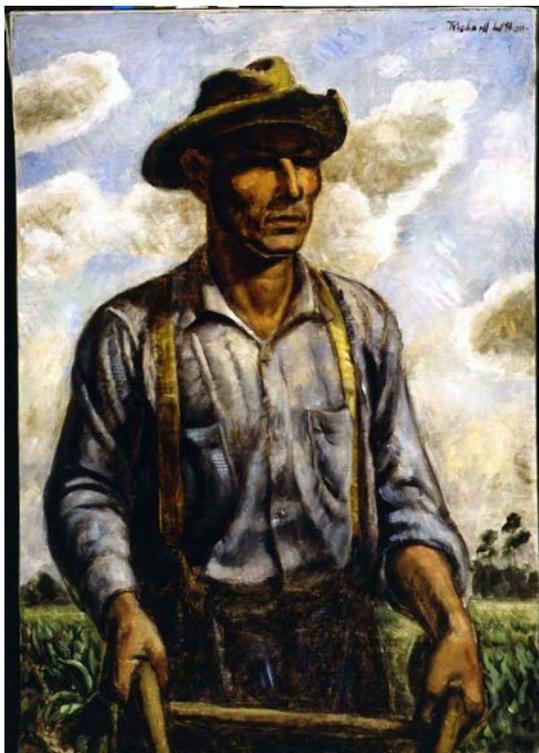
## Tobacco Farmer

1939

*oil on Masonite*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Mr. and Mrs. Dwight Morrow, Jr., and Melissa Lofton

Tobacco was the main crop in my home county of Horry. As far as I could tell, both black and white farmers worked their butts off for subsistence. They brought their families into Conway, the county seat, in their mule-drawn wagons to get provisions and sometimes to auction off their dried, bundled golden leaves of tobacco. Once again I do not know the art of Richard Morrison Lofton; but I find the painterly realism, with strong darks and proud brushstrokes, to be worthy to hold its own in this exhibition.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Joseph Margulies

American, 1896-1984

## The Seeker

no date

*aquatint etching*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Ruth Suddath Green in memory of Pauline Suddath Green

Totally absorbed in his study of Torah is this orthodox Jew. However, whether familiar or not with the subject-matter, we as art viewers also see a vibrant patterning of light and dark and strong directional shapes set one against the other – a zigzag between content and form.

My paternal family were/are ultra-orthodox, and I was named for my rabbi grandfather who was very renowned and who preached in large synagogues, first in Hungary and then in Brooklyn. I need to add that I grew up without my father, without even a snapshot of him and only met him for one day when I was eleven. (We did get to know one another, uneasily, when I was in NYC to study art – which was decidedly against the second commandment and not worthy of his blessings).

In the mid-1980s, I was invited by my first cousins to come observe and draw (and furtively photograph) in the huge Lubavitcher Hasidic Synagogue in Brooklyn, resulting in five finished pastels and many quick drawings.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Merritt Mauzey

American, 1897-1973

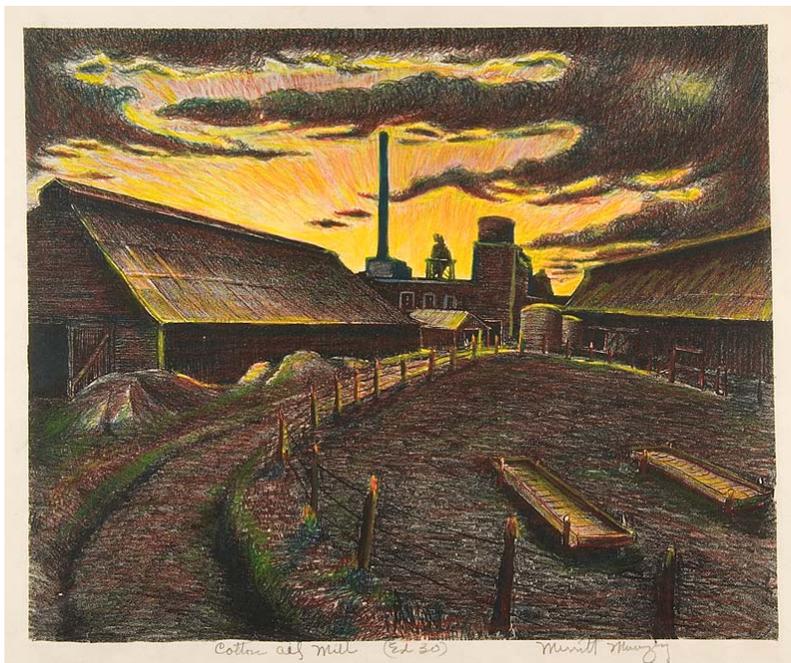
## Cotton Mill (Molten Skies)

no date

*hand colored lithograph*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from the artist

Once upon a time, America manufactured lots of things, and even if working conditions were often harsh, folks had jobs – all this within my memory. Thanks to our global economy that is no longer true. This grimy view, with not a soul in sight as the hot sun sets, holds my attention and provokes questions of what is next for our workers, our society? Mauzey was a lesser-known Regionalist, but this sober yet punchy industrial image tells it like it was. Art freezes time and memory.



# An Artist's Eye

## A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Russell Maxey

American, 1906-1994

### Insurance

1940s

*gelatin silver print*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Russell Maxey

Is this living *Venus of Willendorf* heading for the beach or leaving to get back in her car? Such large women were not uncommon sights at my Mom's rooming house and on Myrtle Beach. Later such figures also entered my art. The wide range of body types in Henry Clew's *The Thinker* at Brookgreen Gardens set a high standard for me to attempt to achieve. How I welcomed in Sir Kenneth Clark's major treatise *The Nude*, his chapter on "The Alternative to Beauty." There are so many wonderful images in Russell Maxey's portfolio, but this striding bather stopped me in my tracks.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Katharine Merrill

American, 1876-1962

## Burnham Beeches

no date

*aquatint*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Mrs. Alexander Stork

Having massive trunks with roots grabbing the ground, like hands, the presence of this group of trees is both protective and monumental. The way the print "grew" feels as organic as the growth which formed these ancient beings. This work has a similarity to the pastel *Old Oaks* by Alfred Hutton, which was in the original *An Artist's Eye* exhibition. My youthful visits to Brookgreen Gardens to teach myself to draw built in a lifelong wonder of such huge, shading trees that feel like they were here since the beginning of time.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe

American, born 1951

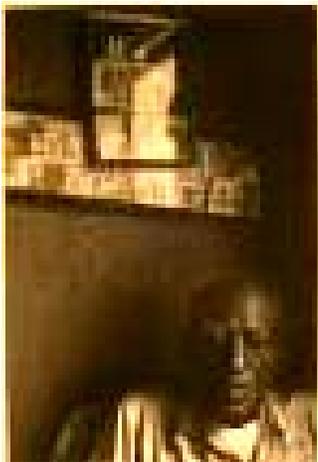
## 98 Year Old Islander with Family Photos

1979

*gelatin silver print*

Columbia Museum of Art gift of the artist

What a contemplative image. A Rembrandt-like photo, or is it more an Andrew Wyeth-like piece? This noble aged man snuggled deep in the lower right corner with his gallery of snapshots carefully arranged behind him, reinforcing his long life comprised of the many warm family experiences that punctuated his lengthy existence. This photo stood out in Jeanne Montoussamy-Ashe's brilliant photographs and, for me, is totally memorable.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Philip Mullen

American, born 1942

## Cola. Wall

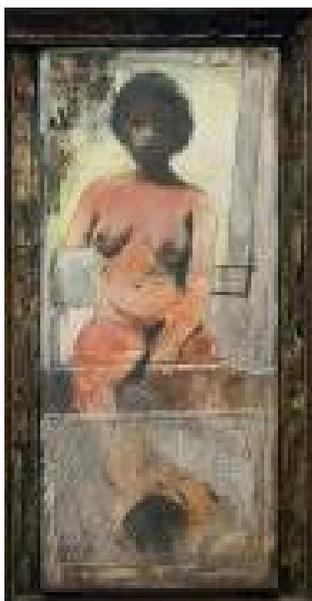
1969

*mixed media*

Columbia Museum of Art, Museum Purchase Award, 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition, Guild of South Carolina Artists

One's eyes lock on the mark-filled, frontal face of this nude called *Cola. Wall*. So much raw energy exudes from this bold work. Soon we discover that there is another reclining figure holding down the base of this spirited painting, and then later we get lost in the smaller faces and figures on the "frame." Since every day I urge myself not to lose the drawing in a composition, I salute Philip Mullen for keeping an open, evolving hand in his work. At a recent visit to his studio, I witnessed the high energy he can still exert in building a series of new paintings – wow!

In their many years of teaching at the University of South Carolina's art department, the contributions that Philip Mullen and Boyd Saunders made to the education of so many evolving young artists is truly deep and significant.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Otto Neals

American, born 1931

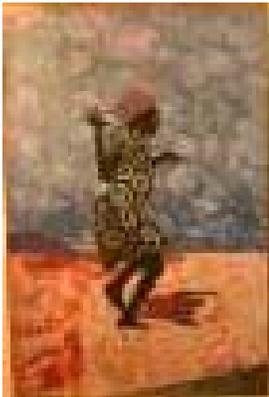
## Shadow and Substance

1983

*lithograph*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by Metropolitan Life Foundation

Thanks to my friendship with Thomas Johnson, former archivist and librarian at the South Caroliniana Library, as well as published poet, I met Otto Neals in New York City several times. While we each are South Carolinians, both of us live in NYC now. Otto is a soft-spoken, sensitive man with quiet self-confidence and an infectious smile. This color lithograph of a dancer embodies the grace found in the artist. My eye touches the points of the moving figure's extremities, what I call the constellation of the pose. Her silhouette is played against an almost batik-like ground and sky.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Claes Oldenburg

American (born Sweden), 1929

## Rolling Tie and Collar

1995

*lithograph, artist's proof 3/10*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts

Here is one of my all-time favorite artists, mainly because he can draw like nobody's business and consistently gives us high art along with a smile. Humor is rare and so welcomed in the fine arts; Oldenburg, Red Grooms, and sometimes Christo, are masters of contemporary drawing.

These two studies of flying collars and ties are so brilliantly animated. Wind is palpable, and not one mark or stroke could be added or subtracted – just like a great golfer, the fewer strokes the better.

I actually got in some trouble with an entrenched conservative faculty when I loudly proclaimed, "Claes Oldenburg is one of the very best draughtsman alive!" The clubiness of art politics can be such a pain and make it difficult to keep one's eyes, mind and heart open to experiences.



# An Artist's Eye

## A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Paula Rego

Portuguese, born 1935

### Mother and Daughter

1997

*8 color screen print on paper*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by Ethel S. Brody

Paula Rego is simply amazing. She makes contemporary images that bite and resonate. R. B. Kitaj coined the term "School of London." I often proclaim myself a "School of London" artist in exile. This is a group of artists whose figurative work is very fresh and relevant. I feel great kinship with Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, David Hockney, R. B. Kitaj and Paula Rego. Also, Rego is the mother-in-law of the extraordinary figurative sculptor Ron Mueck, who deservedly is "School of London" now.

Golly, how I wish this museum had examples from each of those artists, but *Mother and Daughter*, and all it implies, holds its own within this exhibition. This one picture, coping with the oft-complicated relationship between mothers and daughters, could and does trigger thousands of real life and fictional stories that hit home. Catch the contrast in dress, gaze, and attitudes between the wily, sexy mom and her modest, yet still forward gazing offspring.

Rego was born and raised in Portugal but spent most of her life in London. I saw a powerful solo show of hers at Washington DC's National Museum of Women in the Arts. Her monumental pastels push personal narrative, and one is more daring than the next. She continues to work at the top of her game.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Richard Samuel Roberts

American, 1880-1936

## Unidentified Portrait

1920s

*gelatin silver print, posthumously printed from the original photographic plate*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Gerald E. Roberts, Beverly Roberts, Cornelius C. Roberts and Wilhelmina R. Wynn

Wow! I have to wonder what this sturdy and determined little girl, dressed in white and planted on her tricycle, went on to do in her life. I spent hours and hours swinging on an identical swing with my first cousins at their parent's beach house in Myrtle Beach.

Other than Gus Manos, who was a friend in my USC years, I was not really all that familiar with the breadth and scope of work of most of the photographers in the museum's collection, except for Richard Samuel Roberts. My very good friend, South Carolina's poet and librarian-archivist, Thomas Johnson, was a co-author of *A True Likeness* (a beautiful title for a figurative artist), a book which focuses in depth on the work of the almost forgotten African-American Columbia-based photographer, many of whose glass-plate negatives were stored on the earth in the crawl space under his house.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Edward Ruscha

American, born 1937

## Insect

1973

*lithograph and silkscreen*

Columbia Museum of Art 50th Anniversary acquisition, gift from Jasper Johns

Californian Edward Ruscha is best known for his version of the famous Hollywood sign. Connected to both Pop Art and commercial design, Ruscha's works, like those of his fellow Californian Wayne Thiebaud, are both clever and humorous while clearly being "high art" icon images. Both artists, by their fully invested intensity and mastery, transform the ordinary into the extra-ordinary.

Since lettering is an element most often used by Ruscha, *Insect* is less typical. His swarming ants gravitate toward a vortex. Our eye follows the multiple direction-ness of these tiny crawling creatures that congregate from each side of the sheet, moving inwardly, getting denser. A good alternate title might be *Ants Locate a Sweet Spot*, don't you think?



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Alison Saar

American, born 1956

## Snake Man

1994

*woodblock print and lithograph, 16/20*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by the Anna Heyward Taylor Purchase Fund

The impetus for Alison Saar's *Snake Man* comes from non-Western, so-called primitive art. Frontal, menacing, a pupil-less man biting a snake that might indeed be about to bite back – watch out!

Alison is the daughter of the equally well-known California-based artist Betye Saar, and both are African-American women artists who have achieved solid national and international status with their strong, simplified imagery.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Boyd Saunders

American, born 1937

## The Cistern, from *The Farm Series*

c. 1978-79

*intaglio, artist's proof*

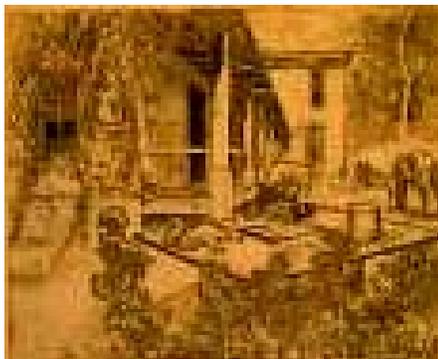
Columbia Museum of Art purchase

Boyd Saunders is indeed a first rate printmaker/imagist, and I am proud to be able to call him a good friend over decades, despite the rarity of our actual visits. And he invariably cracks me up with his more than colorful Southern expressions. His portfolio, *Spotted Horses*, which I obtained via trade, strengthens my collection.

Boyd was and is deeply connected to teaching, and how very fortunate USC was to have him impart his mastery and humanity to generations of young artists.

Saunders' art is really rewarding in both technical and emotional means. The art of Boyd Saunders reaches me (and so many others) on deep, personally resonant levels. This museum holds his *The Farm Series*, and my personal sensibilities (as a life-long lover of dogs and horses) grabbed on to this print with its roly-poly, conked-out puppy and a distracted, grazing horse, neither of whom are aware of our intruding presence.

Perhaps if Boyd and I had not been so naturally visual, we might have become writers.



# An Artist's Eye

## A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Walter Richard Sickert

English (born Germany), 1860-1942

### Ciceley Hey

no date

*etching*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase

This portrait pays more attention to just about everything within its frame except for the young woman's face, causing one to wonder what the artist's motivation for making this etching might be. However it keeps holding my interest while withholding easy answers. I think his "portrait" is of how the light meets the darks.

Sickert, the son of actors who often changed his persona, was a real buddy of Degas. His works were direct, often raw. It is safe to surmise that the contemporary "School of London" art, with artists such as Francis Bacon, David Hockney, Lucian Freud, (a school I often feel I am heir to in exile) wouldn't have the same look or feel without the modern break-through realism of Sickert coming before. Oddly, a huge question mark surrounds the "confession" he made on his death bed that he was Jack the Ripper. Those who seem to give this credence cite his famed *Camden Town Murder* interior narratives series. Say it isn't so!



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Joseph Simpson

English, 1879-1939

## The Pastellist, Herbert Freyer

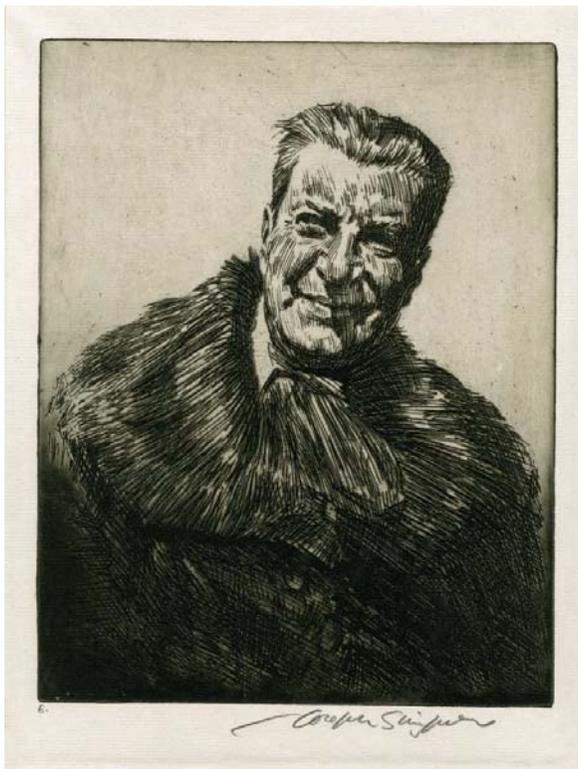
no date

*etching*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase

I adore making discoveries of artists deserving of real attention, but who I never encountered before – thus is the case with Joseph Simpson's etched portrait of his contemporary, Herbert Freyer – both are new to me. Thanks to *Google* I learned about both the maker and the subject.

The bold execution and solidity of forms in bright light kept this work in the must-show group. Simpson had to have known the masterful etching of Anders Zorn, who used diagonal lines to boldly construct his memorable images.



# An Artist's Eye

## A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Sandy Skoglund

American, born 1946

### Babies at Paradise Pond

1995

*color photolithograph*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by the Anna Heyward Taylor Purchase Fund

Could it be – real? No way. But wait, where do an artist's imagination, vision, and dark humor come in? Sandy Skoglund belongs in a small but special group of convincing personal narrative surrealists or magic realists.

A major part of the strangeness of this baby doll-populated bright day in an otherwise ordinary, pleasant park is the two tonality of the print: tinted green landscape and warm toned little army of nude babies diminishing in perspective to the lake's edge. Here is a unique imagist who makes her strange worlds believable, and how they stick in one's mind's eye.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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A.J. Smith

American, born 1952

## Old Man

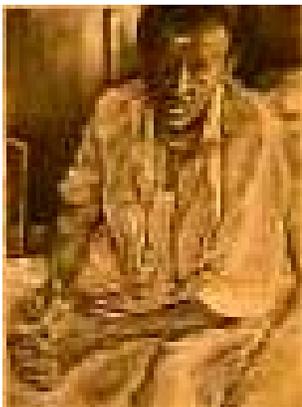
no date

*lithograph*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase

I frankly know nothing about the artist A. J. Smith; however, this poignant little print is certainly arresting, and I came back time after time to its haunting qualities.

Tightly packed into the allotted space, this piece is reminiscent of the Elizabeth Catlett work, also in this exhibition. Once there was a symposium of artists from South Carolina chaired by J. Bardin. When I showed my slides, J. (perhaps under the influence of some bourbon) blurted out, "Sig, did your parents work packing sardines? You need to listen to more jazz to learn how important the spaces between the forms are." That candor shocked some, but I am out to learn wherever I can, so thank you J. Yet, sometimes those tightly packed rectangles are necessary, or at least I have a high tolerance for compressed compositions.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Kiki Smith

American (born Germany), 1954

## little chicks

1998

*etching*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds provided by Ethel S. Brody

Kiki Smith is a highly successful, expressive figurative artist who works in as many media as I do. I often find her work of mixed quality. Either they succeed or they do not, for my taste. This rather humble sheet of five chicks, or biddies as they were called in my South Carolina youth, engages me in their simple arrangement. I want to note that she is the daughter of the late minimalist sculptor Tony Smith, who once said the only tool he had in his studio is a telephone, having had all his art fabricated by others. And now his more successful daughter draws, etches and sculpts representationally, by her own hand. Somehow the theme of my selected show is embodied in the powerful need to keep real life imagery in timeless art.



# An Artist's Eye

## A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Raphael Soyer

American (born Russia), 1889-1987

### Entering the Studio

c. 1935

*oil on canvas*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by friends of the museum on the occasion of the Grand Opening, July 18, 1998

Raphael also had two brothers who were painters - Isaac and Moses - but he was the best of them. I first learned of his art in *Life* magazine, and his humble yet probing nitty-gritty realism immediately drew me to his art and, I suppose, influenced my art. *Entering the Studio* is a simple yet haunting painting – a shy woman set off to one side amplified by her shadow – but like all good art, the sum is far more than its parts, and the work has resonance.

This painting is dated 1935, the year I turned one.

I just acquired a Soyer self-portrait lithograph – my first Soyer. However, a letter he sent to me after he saw my *Max Drawings* (which were shown at the Columbia Museum in 1987 among its 13 venues) sympathizing with me (and my son, Max) over Max's premature birth ordeal is in my archive at the South Caroliniana Library and is, for me, such a treasured thing.

In NYC in the late 1950s, during the dominance of the Abstract Expressionists, I would hear artists put down Soyer as “the poor man's Degas.” The tsunami of that art movement sure had its toll, but nevertheless, there were still individuals who could only believe in art reflecting life, realism.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Jack Spencer

American, born 1951

## Baptismal Candidates

1995

*gelatin silver print, 24/30*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase

First of all, we cannot see one face, only the full-length backs of five black women garbed in white baptismal gowns and head-scarves. Nonetheless, I fell in love with this captured moment. It has mystery, it has compositional structure, we only see a little water, and the lovely golden caramel tonality framed in the upper portion by lacy pines, soothes me. Jack Spencer's *Baptismal Candidates* is a masterpiece.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Anna Heyward Taylor

American, 1879-1956

## Egrets

no date

*linoleum block print on rice paper*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Mrs. Howard E. Manning

Egrets are so South Carolina. And so is the sensitive printmaker Anna Heyward Taylor, whose family's mansion housed the "old" Columbia Museum of Art - the one I knew so well thanks to my strong friendship with David Van Hook, artist and museum preparator.

I delight in the downward movement of the pair of diving egrets countered by the upward reaching grasses with the man-made city of Charleston squeezed between the organic-ness of the bottom and top forces. It is not an easy decision to choose between pure white and pure black; Ms. Taylor was a master at it.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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George Clair Tooker, Jr.

American, 1920-2011

## Window

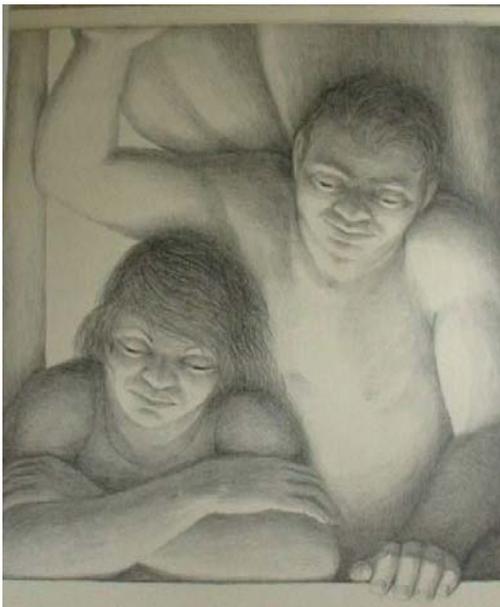
1994

*lithograph*

Columbia Museum of Art 50th Anniversary acquisition purchased with funds donated by the Anna Heyward Taylor Purchase Fund

George Tooker was a major figure in a very small group of precise, magic realists that included Paul Cadmus and Jared French. They admired early Italian egg tempera painting, stroke by deliberate stroke, building their both intimate and also monumental forms in space. Tooker's work, which while in my twenties I saw at both galleries and museums, affected me with his almost robot figures repeated over and over to make NYC a pretty weird, austere, unfriendly place. Tooker is just one of many solid, highly admired and collected figurative artists included in this selection of mine whose careers were crushed by Abstract Expressionism.

I like the term "the constellation of composition," and here our eye moves from one point to another in a deliberate rhythmic pattern. We go from head to head, eyes to eyes, across the hands, appreciating the music of this piece.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Renzo Vespignani

Italian, 1924-2001

## Abandoned Truck

1952

*four-color lithograph*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase

I got all excited and pleased when this rather stark work turned up. An Italian working at the same time as the Italian School of Realism in films, Vespignani sought to rely on traditional drawing means to nevertheless come up with a new and fresh way to express his world recovering from WWII. His works on paper are how he is best known. I get to see one of his works biannually on the waiting room walls of my doctor's office. Who gets and stays remembered in the high fashion of the art world is a study in itself, but alas, with darned few rational answers.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Edouard Vuillard

French, 1868-1940

## Theo van Rysselberghe

no date

*etching*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by Leona Sobel

This rather cinematic cropped close-up composition of the artist's friend, Theo van Rysselberghe, in his studio is seemingly done casually with, perhaps, homage to Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's draftsmanship. I'm a great lover of Vuillard, one of my favorite "formalists" through all his evolutions as a long-lived artist. Very close to Bonnard - both Vuillard and Bonnard were members of the Nabi Group. Vuillard never lets me down in his drawing; unlike Bonnard, who could draw very well but too often favors color and modernism over structural, observational drawing. Vuillard has it all: good composition, drawings and color - always.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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John Wilson

American, born 1922

Martin Luther King, Jr.

2002

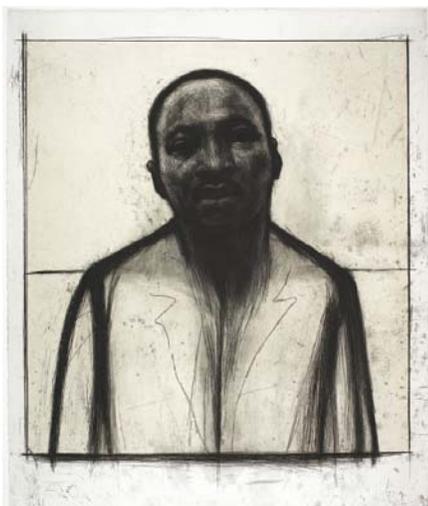
etching and aquatint on chine collé, 37/50

Columbia Museum of Art purchase

It is my great pleasure and honor to have taught in the graduate fine arts program at Boston University with John Wilson. His long and successful career, ennobling and documenting his African-American community and history, is truly impressive and well deserved. Maybe, best of all, John is a super human being, what in Yiddish is called a *mensch*.

We both build our compositions and “contents” leaning on strong drawing with empathy toward those portrayed. The rich blacks in *Martin Luther King, Jr.* really make this straightforward, highly simplified portrait of this great civil rights leader appear powerful.

John received a commission to do a colossus head of King, initially in wet clay. Physically it was the size of a compact car, and he made it in his garage, which became more and more dust filled. Consequently, he became ill from silicosis. Thankfully he has recovered and is highly productive again.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Jerome Witkin

American, born 1939

## About Apples

1977

*crayon on paper*

Columbia Museum of Art purchase with funds donated by Dr. and Mrs. John O'Neil

Jerome Witkin and I have been friends since 1956, when we both attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture 55 years ago -- seems impossible. Jerome was a true prodigy and stays a phenomenon. I am in awe of his powers. He was the youngest student to attend Skowhegan and the youngest visual artist to win a Guggenheim.

Nothing technical stops him; rather, he puts all sorts of obstacles into his art and then conquers them. He can draw like an angel, while his images sometimes might be directed by the devil. Never afraid to upset or disturb, his Holocaust images are wild and painfully blunt. After first seeing them and then being asked to follow him home for dinner, I backed into his car and ruined his door (which I paid for). The range and scope of Witkin's work puts him, for me, on a parallel with a successful humanist filmmaker.



# An Artist's Eye

A Journey through Modern and Contemporary Art with Sigmund Abeles

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Edmund Yaghjian

American (born Armenia), 1903-1997

## Midwife

c. 1980

*pencil on paper*

Columbia Museum of Art gift from Candy Yaghjian Waites

Ed Yaghjian was my painting teacher at USC, and his one blue eye and one brown eye were most unforgettable. Having taught at the Art Students League, he accepted a position teaching and chairing the art department in Columbia. He was among the last generation of artists who held no academic degrees but was very well read and worldly. No longer living in NYC, he did seem to obsess a bit over changing styles in the NYC scene. What I like, and why I chose this compelling, caring portrait of a midwife is its honest, invested observation without concern for style – only observed humanity.

