

Innovation and Abstraction: Women Artists and Atelier 17

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Atelier 17, Greenwich Village, New York, 1951

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Thank you to all the lenders for making these important works available for *Innovation and Abstraction*. I benefited from conversations with the staff at many of the lending institutions or research in their institutional archives. Over the course of my six years researching Atelier 17, I have had the privilege to speak with many of the artists' descendants or friends, whose insights shaped my project. Their collective passion has inspired me to shed light on the women of Atelier 17's years in New York.

With this exhibition, I am thrilled to introduce some my dissertation research, and I look forward to sharing more with my forthcoming book manuscript.

Christina Weyl, PhD

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010)

Untitled, plate 2, first version, state III, variant, from *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, 1946-47

Engraving with ink additions

Plate: 6 13/16 x 5 1/2 in.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Gift of the artist, 1993.

Untitled, plate 6, third version, state II, from *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, 1946-47

Engraving and drypoint

Plate: 6 15/16 x 4 13/16 in.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Gift of the artist, 1993.

Untitled, plate 9, state II, from *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, 1946-47

Engraving with ink additions

Plate: 8 7/8 x 3 15/16 in.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Gift of the artist, 1993.

Ascension Lente, state IX of XIV, 1949

Engraving, with scorper and monotype

Plate: 8 3/4 x 6 7/8 in.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Gift of the artist, 1990.

Minna Citron (1896-1991)

Squid Under Pier, 1948

Engraving and etching

Plate: 15 1/16 x 18 3/8 in.

Christiane H. Citron, Denver, CO

Ishtar, 1946

Oil on canvas, 27 1/4 x 31 in.

Susan Teller Gallery, New York, NY

Worden Day (1912-1986)

The Burning Bush, 1954

Woodcut in color, 51 x 15 in.

Brooklyn Museum, Dick S. Ramsay Fund

Kiva, 1968

Painted wood, 13 1/8 x 7 x 7 in.

Montclair Art Museum. Museum purchase,

1970

Dorothy Dehner (1901-1994)

River Landscape #4, 1953

Engraving

Plate: 4 1/2 x 17 3/4 in.

The Dorothy Dehner Foundation, New York

Plate for *River Landscape #4*, 1953

Copper, 4 1/2 x 17 3/4 in.

The Dorothy Dehner Foundation, New York, NY

Arabesque, 1976

Bronze, 12 7/16 x 8 1/4 x 7 3/8 in.

The Dorothy Dehner Foundation, New York, NY

Sue Fuller (1914-2006)

Cacophony, 1944

Soft ground etching

Plate: 11 x 8 in

Susan Teller Gallery, New York, NY

Collage for *Cacophony*, 1944

String on paper, 11 x 8 in.

Susan Teller Gallery New York, NY

String Composition #11, 1946

String mounted in wood frame, 30 x 24 in.

Private Collection, Southampton, NY

Alice Trumbull Mason (1904-1971)

Indicative Displacement, 1947
Soft ground etching
Plate: 10 3/8 x 15 5/8 in.
Washburn Gallery, New York, NY

Paradox #10: Chiaroscuro, 1968
Oil on canvas, 16 x 18 in.
Washburn Gallery, New York, NY

Louise Nevelson (1899-1988)

Majesty, 1952-54
Etching and engraving
Plate: 21 15/16 x 18 in.
Brooklyn Museum. Gift of Louise Nevelson

Plate for *Majesty*, 1952-54
Copper, 21 15/16 x 18 in.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of the artist, 1967

Moving-Static-Moving Figure, ca. 1945
Painted terra cotta, 19 x 20 3/4 x 2 1/16 in
Whitney Museum of American Art, New
York. Gift of the artist

Anne Ryan (1889-1954)

Beside the Sea, ca. 1944
Soft ground etching
Plate: 5 x 3 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New
York. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1944

Abstract No. XXXII, 1949
Woodcut in color
Block: 7 x 18 3/4 in.
Lent by the Brooklyn Museum, Gift of the
artist

Number 319, 1949
Cut and torn papers, fabrics, gold foil and
bast fiber pasted on paper, mounted on black
paper, 7 3/4 x 6 3/4 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New
York. Bequest of Elizabeth McFadden, 1986
Pollock-Krasner House only

WOMEN ARTISTS AND ATELIER 17

Christina Weyl

Stanley William Hayter (1901-1988) opened Atelier 17 in 1927 on Paris's Left Bank as an informal printmaking workshop. Faced with the threat of Europe's growing conflict, he relocated the studio to New York City in 1940 where it remained until 1955.¹ As in Paris, Hayter



structured the workshop by offering classes twice per week—on Mondays and Thursdays—to artists willing to pay the monthly tuition and, after basic instructions of the techniques and equipment, members could work anytime during open hours.² The goal of Atelier 17 was to equip artists with advanced technical knowledge so that they could experiment fearlessly and produce prints showcasing inventiveness and personal reflection. The collaborative environment, where artists shared discoveries and worked together, created fertile conditions for the exchange of avant-garde ideas and the development of formal breakthroughs.

Across its three successive locations in Greenwich Village, Atelier 17 became a laboratory that facilitated women artists' exposure to and eventual practice of modernist styles, including abstraction, surrealism, and expressionism. At least ninety-one women artists passed through Atelier 17's doors during its fifteen years in New York, representing almost half of the overall roster of almost two hundred artists.³ Making prints at Atelier 17 served as a conduit through which these female artists realized extraordinary professional achievements and impacted the direction of printmaking, postwar sculpture, fiber art, junk art, and neo-dadaism. For many artists, affiliation with Atelier 17 also catalyzed a strong feminist consciousness decades before the women's art movement of the 1970s.

Innovation and Abstraction: Women Artists and Atelier 17 focuses on a core group of eight female artists who bent technical rules of printmaking and explored uncharted aesthetic terrain with their etchings, engravings and woodcuts: **Louise Bourgeois** (1911-2010), **Minna Citron** (1896-1991), **Worden Day** (1912-1986), **Dorothy Dehner** (1901-1994), **Sue Fuller** (1914-2006), **Alice Trumbull Mason** (1904-1971), **Louise Nevelson** (1899-1988) and **Anne Ryan** (1889-1954). With the exception of Bourgeois's prints, these artists' graphic works have been largely absent from narratives of postwar American art, not to mention histories of Atelier 17, despite having regularly been exhibited in print annuals, museum exhibitions, and gallery shows during the 1940s and 1950s. This exhibition marks the first time their works have been exhibited together in the context of women's collective innovations at Atelier 17.

Women artists' paths to discovering deeply personal and abstract imagery through modernist printmaking mark an underexplored aspect of the postwar New York School. Their abilities to carve out progressive artistic identities and professional reputations as avant-garde printmakers was unprecedented given the male-dominated art world and conservative, midcentury gender norms. Within the last two decades, revisionist studies of Abstract Expressionism have noted that women artists—as well as other minorities—actively produced modernist paintings and sculptures, but struggled to achieve equal recognition alongside the now-canonical, white male Abstract Expressionists.⁴ Printmaking, with its lower place on the hierarchy of artistic mediums, offered women artists of the postwar generation many more

opportunities to explore uncharted aesthetic territory and build up professional visibility while on the periphery of the New York School. A vibrant nexus of postwar modernism emerges from close study of the women artists of Atelier 17.

The pioneering efforts of female members of Atelier 17's New York studio have been little studied—overshadowed by Hayter and the coterie of expatriate (male) Surrealists and young (male) American artists, many of whom became the major artists of the period. Hayter himself downplayed the latter's importance to the workshop's New York years, once stating, "most of the big names, like de Kooning, Motherwell, Rothko, Pollock...didn't do anything outstanding when working with us. And their work doesn't represent the Atelier's best efforts."⁵ Female artists, on the other hand, made significant contributions to graphic innovation, as the current exhibition illustrates. It clarifies the germinal importance of women's experimentation with unorthodox printmaking processes at Atelier 17 by pairing their prints—and two of the copper plates used to create them—with their sculptures, paintings, or collages.

These selections highlight three ways in which women's printmaking practice influenced their artistic practice outside Atelier 17. First, impressing fiber and textiles into soft ground intaglio plates simulated the experience of making a collage and led many women to explore fiber in other formats. Second, carving metal plates or woodblocks prompted other artists to think three-dimensionally and become more engaged with sculpture after Atelier 17. And, third, the workshop's reputation for technical experimentation inspired several women artists to think innovatively about their artistic practice beyond printmaking and make lasting contributions to the postwar art scene.

Collage and Fiber

Gender infiltrated the critical appreciation of artists' approaches to printmaking and their handling of tools. Male and female artists often practiced etching and engraving with identical instruments, materials, and approaches, but critics routinely divided their technical achievements along gender lines, no matter how groundbreaking or innovative. Leading up to Atelier 17's arrival in New York, many artists and contemporary observers feared that the art of engraving was in crisis, having fallen into the service of reproduction. Responding to engraving's enervated condition, Hayter peppered his teaching and writing with warlike metaphors. In doing so, he transformed engraving's primary tool, the burin, into a highly masculinized object. By 1944, Rosamund Frost of *Art News* revealed the extent to which Hayter's campaign had thoroughly altered perceptions when she said the burin left a "masculine signature in the clean tension of its line."⁶

Setting aside the burin, several female members of Atelier 17 became fascinated with the textural and aesthetic possibilities of working with soft ground etching. In this intaglio technique, the metal plate is covered with a protective coating (the ground) that does not harden but remains sticky. Anything that touches the soft ground—for example, handprints, botanical materials, or fabric—pulls away the coating and exposes the plate underneath to acid bite. Although their motivations for working with textiles were diverse—ranging from a desire to make abstract collages to a need to release personal psychological tensions—critics overwhelmingly found ways to debase their soft ground etchings as decorative, domestic, or feminine. Despite the unfair reviews that plagued their soft ground etchings, these women artists were on the cutting edge of twentieth century artists' quest to reassert fiber and textiles as fine art materials. They impressed lace, string, and woven fibers into their plates with expressive and modernist intentions.

Soon after arriving at Atelier 17 in 1943, **Sue Fuller** began researching soft ground etching and broadly expanded the technique through experimentation. She firmly believed that textile designs for her soft ground etchings were far from meaningless feminine patterns, as period reviewers would write, but instead the notable introduction of collage into printmaking. Fuller, in fact, argued the earliest incidence of modernist collage was not the work of Pablo Picasso or Georges Braque, but the innovative early soft ground etchings of Mary Cassatt for which she impressed “nubby materials” and other scraps of fabric over a metal plate. With this assertion, Fuller recognized Cassatt’s pioneering collage aesthetic more than twenty-five years before Miriam Schapiro and Melissa Meyer would articulate similar views and coin the term “femmeage.”⁷



Sue Fuller, undated. Sue Fuller letters to Florence Forst, Archives of American Art.

In *Cacophony* (1944), Fuller impressed pieces of cut-up Victorian lace, which she had inherited from her mother, around the print’s edges, and she also teased the threads from a recycled garlic bag to shape the two female figures, as seen in the preparatory collage.⁸ Soft ground etching led Fuller to explore the artistic possibilities of textiles with her three-

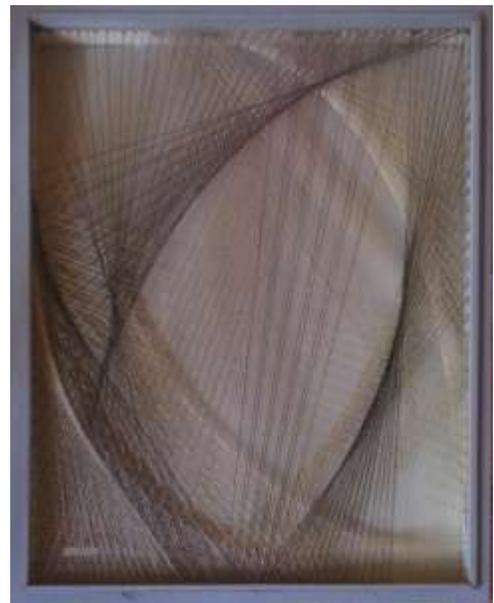
dimensional string-wrapped pieces that she made from the mid-1940s onward. *String Composition in Yellow and Grey* (1946), one of her first experiments, was exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art’s *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America* (1951). Although these abstract “string compositions” were usually categorized as decorative or feminine because of their materials, they captured Fuller’s beliefs about the tensions and structures of modern architecture and engineering. With them, Fuller became an early pioneer of what became known as fiber art in the 1960s.



Sue Fuller, *Cacophony*, 1944. Soft ground etching, 15 x 11 ¾ in. (plate).



Sue Fuller, collage for *Cacophony*, 1944. String on paper, 15 x 11 ¾ in.



Sue Fuller, *String Composition #11*, 1946. String in wood frame, 30 x 24 in.

Sue Fuller's theory about soft ground etching as avant-garde collage had a far-reaching impact on members of Atelier 17. **Anne Ryan's** best-known work, the collages that she produced between 1948 and her death in 1954, owe a great debt to her contact with Sue Fuller and training in soft ground etching. Although viewing an exhibition of Kurt Schwitters's collages at the Pinacotheca Gallery in 1948 is almost uniformly cited as the inspiration for Ryan's collages, the parallels between soft ground and collage, as Fuller advocated, primed Ryan's later work.⁹

The two artists overlapped at Atelier 17 in 1943 and were friendly. Ryan saw the creative benefits of collaging overlapping or adjacent textures into soft ground as seen in prints like *Beside the Sea* (1944). In this surrealist image where

a woman walks down the beach, a fine layer of silk stocking sits underneath a larger hexagonal pattern from fishnet stockings. Scraps of fishnet stockings would later appear in Ryan's collages, such as in *Number 319* (1949).

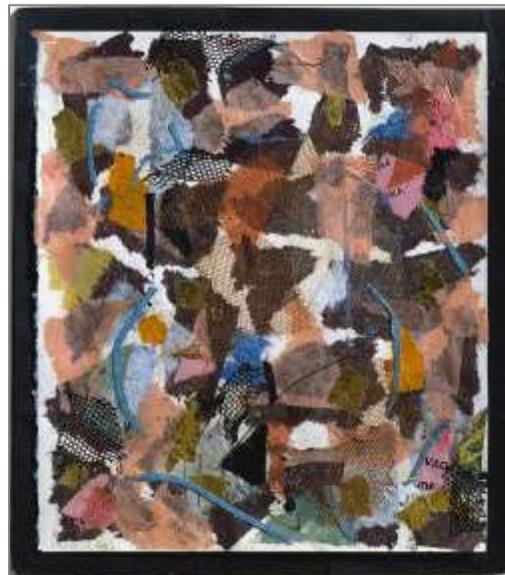
Because her prints only show an indexical trace of these fibers—having been transferred indirectly to paper via soft ground, acid bite, and ink—it is easy to forget they have a basis in the same materials as her collages. Sadly, in Ryan's lifetime, the textiles and fiber of her prints and collages overshadowed her artistic innovations to the point where her artwork became synonymous with her gender.



Anne Ryan, ca. 1949. Photograph by William Pippin. Anne Ryan Papers, Archives of American Art.



Anne Ryan, *Beside the Sea*, ca. 1944. Etching and soft ground etching, 5 x 3 in. (plate)
© Estate of the artist.



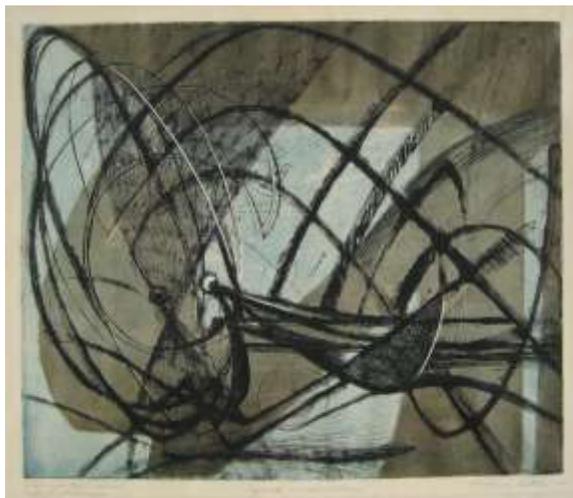
Anne Ryan, *Number 319*, 1949. Cut and torn papers, fabrics, gold foil, and bast fiber pasted on paper, mounted on black paper, 7 3/4 x 6 3/4 in.
© Estate of the artist.

Unlike Fuller's and Ryan's reliance on soft ground etching to make modernist collages, **Minna Citron** saw the technique as an expressive tool to convey her inner psyche and feminist agenda. *Squid Under Pier* (1948) visualizes Citron's personal struggles with her ex-husband and overbearing mother and mother-in-law. She juxtaposed the "masculine" technique of engraving—as she learned from Hayter—with "feminine" soft ground etching to picture her subconscious struggles.¹⁰ The swirling black lines in the foreground and raised white lines, made by forcefully gouging the copper plate with the scorper and burin tools, suggest male aggression and Citron's disquiet over her failed marriage. The twisted piece of veiling at left, similar to the material found on a birdcage hairpiece, embodies her domineering mother and mother-in-law.



Minna Citron, ca. 1950. Courtesy of Christiane H. Citron.

Searching for more clarity about feminine stereotypes and women's place in patriarchal society, Citron started in the 1940s to collect clippings of women as represented in art from prehistory to modernism. Her semi-abstract painting, *Ishtar* (1946), reflects this research interest and embodies the ferocity of the ancient goddess through the vibrant red background and scraping strokes that define Ishtar's wings, a typical iconographical feature. Citron eventually incorporated her research into a proto-feminist manuscript entitled "Venus Through the Ages: The Character of Women as Portrayed in Art," written with her lifelong friend Jan Gelb (1906-1978). In the manuscript, Citron paired *Ishtar* with a quote about the great goddess from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), a book Citron owned and used liberally as a source for recovering the importance of women in pre-patriarchal societies.¹¹



Minna Citron, *Squid Under Pier*, 1948. Engraving and etching, 15 1/16 x 18 3/8 in (plate). © Estate of Minna Citron / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.



Minna Citron, *Ishtar*, 1946. Oil on canvas, 27 1/4 x 31 in. © Estate of Minna Citron / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

Beginning her work at Atelier 17 around 1945, **Alice Trumbull Mason**, a founding member of the American Abstract Artists group, quickly recognized the tremendous textural possibilities of soft ground etching would complement her style of geometric abstraction. Like Fuller, Citron, and Ryan, she abandoned the sharp and aggressively masculine tools of etching and engraving in favor of soft ground.¹² In a portion of a typeset manuscript, which appears to be speaking notes for a public presentation about her prints, she explained her attraction to impressing textures into soft ground because it facilitated one of her primary aesthetic goals: generating visual movement among geometric elements. In the speech, she stated, “my greatest interest [in printmaking] is in playing one texture against another as I do with colors in painting.”¹³



Alice Trumbull Mason, undated. Alice Trumbull Mason papers, Archives of American Art.

Of *Indicative Displacement* (1947), Mason argued that the variety of grey tones and textures impressed onto the rectangles that float in parallel spatial arrangements created a rhythmic shift among planes. Like most of Mason’s soft ground etchings, *Indicative Displacement* is anything but static; it exhibits a dynamic energy of textures and shapes.

Paradox #10: Chiaroscuro (1968), one from a series of *Paradox* paints completed in the late 1960s, shows the continuation of Mason’s fascination with movement and unresolved equilibrium.¹⁴ The canvas is divided in half—light on top and dark on bottom—with groupings of rectangular shapes that balance the composition with their tones and weight.



Alice Trumbull Mason, *Indicative Displacement*, 1947. Soft ground etching. 10 3/8 x 15 5/8 in. (plate).



Alice Trumbull Mason, *Paradox #10: Chiaroscuro*, 1968. Oil on canvas, 16 x 18 in.

Sculpture

The experience of carving deeply into copper plates or woodblocks inspired many women artists to defy longstanding gender boundaries deterring women from sculpture and to intensify their activity in three-dimensions after affiliation with Atelier 17. Historically, it was believed women lacked the strength to manipulate sculptural tools or handle hard stones, sculpture's traditional medium. Men, in contrast, possessed the stamina to realize any subject in three-dimensions, whether carving, casting or welding. In the face of these essentialist claims, American women artists still pursued careers as sculptors and achieved varying levels of success.¹⁵ Summing up the difficulties, the feminist art historian Ann Sutherland Harris stated archly, "penetrating space was a male prerogative."¹⁶

Many female members of Atelier 17 underwent profound journeys of self-discovery through the exercise of incising plates and creating other three-dimensional effects in printmaking. Confronting the bias against women in sculpture and postwar ambivalence about women's strenuous labor, these women artists sculpted their artistic reputations within postwar modernism. They solidified and invigorated their creative ambitions through their exhausting investigations of printmaking matrices and became emboldened to pursue fulltime careers as sculptors.

Among her female peers at Atelier 17, **Worden Day** specifically mentioned the importance of printmaking's sculptural dimensions to locating and developing artistic identity.



Worden Day, ca. 1959. Worden Day papers, Archives of American Art.

Day began her affiliation with Atelier 17 in 1943, at which point she worked exclusively with intaglio processes. While holding a teaching position at the University of Wyoming in Laramie between 1949 and 1952, she became fascinated with expanding the size of her graphic work to communicate her wonderment about the vastness and diversity of the western landscape.

Soon after returning to New York from Wyoming, she taught a course about woodblock printmaking at Atelier 17 in

November 1954 and started producing intricately carved wood block prints like *The Burning Bush* (1954), which stands at four and a half feet tall.¹⁷

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Day shifted her creative focus to making wall-hanging or free-standing woodcarvings. She saw direct parallels between her actions of cutting into her woodblock and carving these later sculptures, writing once that woodcutting "forms a bridge to high-relief and sculpture in the round."¹⁸ The deep folds carved into *Kiva* (1968), originally a piece of found wood, make obvious allusions to the Pueblo ritual rooms she saw while traveling in the American West and suggest her indebtedness to the labor of woodblock printmaking.



Worden Day, *Kiva*, 1968. Painted wood, 13 1/8 x 7 x 7 in.



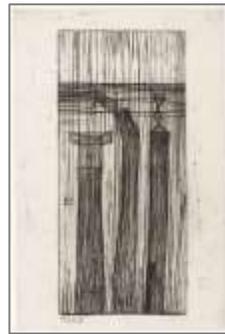
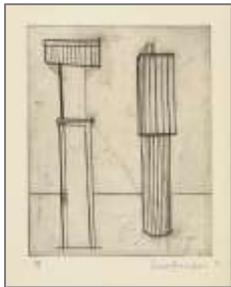
Worden Day, *The Burning Bush*, 1954. Woodcut in color, 51 x 15 in. (block).

Throughout her career, **Louise Bourgeois** was outspoken about the physical challenge of carving an engraving. Like Day, she recognized that the tremendous energy required to engrave lines on a copper plate was comparable to the act of carving a sculpture. *Ascension Lente* (1949) is the result of grueling physical labor. The many parallel lines that form the curving shapes were challenging to make, as was the deeply carved oval-shaped mark at lower left, an example of a scorper mark, one of the signature techniques Hayter taught at Atelier 17.¹⁹ She wrestled with the overt masculinity of engraving's labor, and yet her sculptural imagination flourished at Atelier 17.

Forms that she visualized in her engravings, particularly those in her portfolio *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* (1947), materialized as freestanding sculptures shortly after their creation. Just as the prints' vertical, human-like forms stand either singly or as part of "figural" groupings, Bourgeois installed her totemic, wooden *personages* in environmental arrangements that pushed the boundaries of American postwar sculpture. The tall, narrow form of *Nature Study* (1984) clearly evokes these early sculptures. But the hermaphroditic sculpture—where bulging breasts sit atop a phallic form—also reflects Bourgeois's continuing engagement with reconciling masculinity and femininity in much the same way she adapted engraving's masculinity to fit her creative vision.



Louise Bourgeois, ca. 1949.



Louise Bourgeois, Plates 2, 6 and 9 from *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, 1946-47. Engravings with drypoint and ink additions, 6 13/16 x 5 1/2 in., 6 15/16 x 4 13/16 in., 8 7/8 x 3 15/16 in. (plate) respectively.



All images of works by Louise Bourgeois © The Easton Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

Louise Bourgeois, *Ascension Lente*, 1949. Engraving, with scorper and monotype, 8 3/4 x 6 7/8 in. (plate).



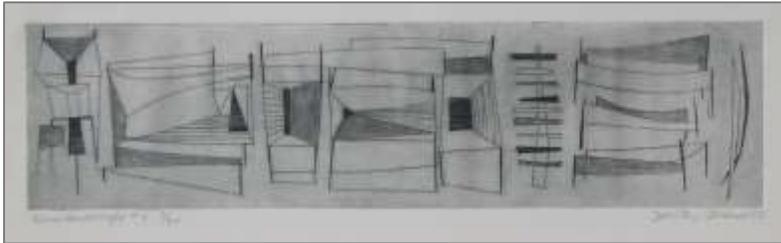
Louise Bourgeois, *Nature Study*, 1984. Bronze, dark and polished patina, 47 x 12 x 12 in.



Dorothy Dehner, 1959. Courtesy Zimmerli Art Museum.

Carving into copper plates reactivated **Dorothy Dehner's** longstanding interest in three dimensional work, a passion that she set aside for nearly twenty-five years to avoid competing with her husband, the sculptor David Smith (1906-1965). Arriving at Atelier 17 in 1952, shortly after finalizing her divorce, Dehner felt a new freedom to work in a sculptural way. She recalled in an interview that “digging into the plate with a burin was a marvelous experience for me and it brought back all my feelings of working three-dimensionally.”²⁰ The wiry forms in *River Landscape #4* (1953), part of a set of five, show Dehner beginning to imagine the construction of the sculptures that would become her primary focus from 1955 until her death in 1994.

Forms in *Arabesque* (1976), a bronze made through the lost-wax process, directly echo those in *River Landscape #4*. The piece's tall totem, for example, has crossbars just like those on the right side of the print. Similarly, curved horizontal lines that connect to verticals in the print are also present in *Arabesque*. Following a custom at Atelier 17, Dehner kept many of her copper plates as sculptural objects and exhibited them next to their corresponding prints to showcase her engraving's deep grooves and depth. The plate for *River Landscape #4* offers a rare opportunity to see such sculptural markings.



Dorothy Dehner, *River Landscape #4*, 1953. Engraving, 4 1/2 x 17 3/4 in. (plate).

Below, the copper plate for *River Landscape #4*.



Dorothy Dehner, *Arabesque*, 1976. Bronze, 12 7/16 x 8 1/4 x 7 3/8 in.

Innovation

Atelier 17 distinguished itself as a technical powerhouse, where artists routinely discovered novel ways of working with traditional printmaking processes and pioneered new approaches to marking plates with unconventional tools. Midcentury gender norms, however, sometimes got in the way of recognizing women's achievements as innovative printmakers.



Louise Nevelson, ca. 1954.
From *Ceramic Age* magazine.

Louise Nevelson made her earliest prints—thirty etchings—during two stints at Atelier 17, first in 1948 and then between 1952 and 1954.²¹ Although Nevelson's prints generally follow many experimental trends seen at Atelier 17, she pushed the boundaries of acceptability—even by the workshop's avant-garde standards—with her unorthodox methods of marking copper plates. Before coming to Atelier 17, she had already practiced incising facial features onto blocky terra-cotta sculptures like *Moving-Static-Moving Figure* from the mid-1940s, and the parallel process is noticeable in the linear figures she carved for prints like *Majesty* (1952-54).

Disliking engraving's tools, Nevelson experimented with making expressive markings with a can opener. Despite evoking obvious parallels to domesticity, the can opener empowered her to convey bold emotions that were uncharacteristic of the tool's intended purpose in the postwar home. She also tested printmaking's traditions with her expressive application of textures in soft ground etching. Instead of running a static collage through the press as Sue Fuller would, Nevelson dipped textiles directly into acid and spread them across her plates.²² This spontaneity unsettled her colleagues, who suggested Nevelson's plates were "messy." *Majesty* has passages of hastily applied cheesecloth and overlapping lace trims. Her introduction to the layering potential of intaglio provided the creative impetus for her shift from blocky clay figures to the innovative monochromatic wall reliefs that earned her fame in the mid- and late-1950s.



Louise Nevelson, *Majesty*, 1952-54.
Etching, 21 15/16 x 18 in. (plate)

Below, the copper plate for *Majesty*.



Louise Nevelson, *Moving-Static-Moving Figure*, ca. 1945.
Painted terra cotta, 19 x 20 3/4 x 2 1/16 in.



Anne Ryan, too, made innovative strides for postwar modernism with the woodblocks she began making in 1945. She carved them into household detritus such as wood shingles and cabinet doors that she likely found discarded on the street.²³ The block for *Abstract XXXII* (1949) is, in fact, an old floorboard plank. Ryan printed her woodblocks in dramatic colors onto sheets of black paper, which had originally served as wrapping around light-sensitive photo paper. Her frugal aesthetics, though, tied to her experience of the Depression and shortages in World War II, anticipated appearance of Junk and Neo-Dada art and sculpture in the 1950s.



Left, Anne Ryan, *Abstract No. XXXII*, 1949. Woodcut, 7 x 18 ¾ in. (block). Right, the block for *Abstract No. XXXII*, in the collection of the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (not in the exhibition).

NOTES

¹ In 1950, Hayter returned to Paris where he reopened Atelier 17. After his departure, several artists took over directorship of the studio, with varied levels of charisma, success, and management styles.

² Atelier 17's bibliography is extensive. For basic information, see Joann Moser, *Atelier 17: A 50th Anniversary Retrospective Exhibition* (Madison, WI: Elvehjem Art Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1977); P. M. S. Hacker, ed., *The Renaissance of Gravure: The Art of S. W. Hayter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Helen Harrison, *Atelier 17 and the New York Avant-Garde, 1940-1955* (East Hampton, NY: Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, 1993); Carla Esposito, Dominique Tonneau-Ryckelynck, and Duncan Scott, *Hayter Et l'Atelier 17* (Gravelines: Musée du dessin et de l'estampe, 1993).

³ This near parity of genders grew out of strides women made within the Graphic Arts Division of the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA-FAP). Nationally, women represented about one-quarter of the total artists employed. New York City's WPA-FAP graphic unit, one of the best-documented workshops employed at least thirty women, representing one-third of the eighty-eight total artists, a slightly higher ratio than the national average. For more on statistics, see Kimn Carlton-Smith, "A New Deal for Women: Women Artists and the Federal Art Project, 1935-1939" (PhD diss., Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 1990), 241; Elizabeth G. Seaton, ed., *Paths to the Press: Printmaking and American Women Artists, 1910-1960* (Manhattan, KS: Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, Kansas State University, 2006), 15. In recollections of the WPA-FAP workshops, women printmakers extolled them as models of egalitarianism. For more on the limitations of such equality, see Helen Langa, "Egalitarian Vision, Gendered Experience: Women Printmakers and the WPA/FAP Graphic Arts Project," in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: IconEditions, 1992); Helen Langa, *Radical Art: Printmaking and the Left in 1930s New York* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 213-19.

⁴ For examples, see Ann Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Joan Marter, *Women and Abstract Expressionism: Painting and Sculpture, 1945-1959* (New York: Baruch College, 1997); Norman L. Kleeblatt, Lisa Saltzman, and Mia L. Bagneris, *From the Margins: Lee Krasner, Norman Lewis, 1945-1952* (New York: Jewish Museum, Distributed by Yale University Press, 2014); Joan Marter, ed., *Women of Abstract Expressionism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

⁵ Carolyn Paul, "Printmaking Pioneer: Stanley William Hayter," *Art News* 77, no. 6 (September 1978): 74.

⁶ Rosamund Frost, "Graphic Revolution: Studio 17," *Art News* 43 (August 1944): 11. Sue Fuller remembered Hayter shunned the etching needle as "a ladylike instrument" and converted etchers like Mauricio Lasansky to engraving.

Sue Fuller, "Atelier 17 and the New York Avant Garde 1940-55" 1993, 2, Priscilla Cunningham papers regarding Sue Fuller, 1982-2006, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷ For Fuller's article, see "Mary Cassatt's Use of Soft-Ground Etching," *Magazine of Art*, February 1950, 54-57.

For the foundational article on "femme," see Melissa Meyer and Miriam Schapiro, "Femme," *Heresies* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1978): 66-69.

⁸ In a letter to Jacob Kainen, Fuller explained that *Cacophony's* garlic bag made it a humorous parody of the Lower East Side's "garlicky elegance," which she saw as the "strident antithesis" of Fifth Avenue. Sue Fuller to Jacob Kainen, October 12, 1947, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Special Exhibition File.

⁹ Rose Fried Gallery is normally cited as the location for the Schwitters show in 1948, but the Schwitters catalogue raisonné indicates it was held at the Pinacotheca Gallery. Rose Fried took over management of the Pinacotheca Gallery from its founder Dan Harris and later changed the gallery's name to her own. See *Anne Ryan: A Retrospective, 1939-1953* (New York: Susan Teller Gallery, 2007), 3, n. 3.

¹⁰ See Citron's description in Karl Kup, *The Graphic Work of Minna Citron, 1945-1950* (New York: New School for Social Research, 1950), n.p.

¹¹ The quoted passage can be found in Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage, 2011), 79. Minna Citron and Jan Gelb's "Venus" manuscript can be found in both artists' papers at the Archives of American Art. Daniel Belasco discussed "Venus" briefly in his dissertation, "Between the Waves: Feminist Positions in American Art, 1949-1962" (PhD diss., New York University, 2008).

¹² Mason's daughter believes that midcentury connotations of etching and engraving tools with masculinity may be a potential reason her mother preferred soft ground etching. Emily Mason Kahn, interview by Christina Weyl, February 6, 2013.

¹³ Alice Trumbull Mason, "Untitled Speech," ca. 1950, reel 630, grids 171-174, Alice Trumbull Mason papers, 1921-1977, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁴ For more on Mason's career, see Marilyn Brown, *Alice Trumbull Mason, Emily Mason: Two Generations of Abstract Painting* (New York: Eaton House, 1982).

¹⁵ For a survey of American women sculptors, see Charlotte Streifer Rubinstein, *American Women Sculptors: A History of Women Working in Three Dimensions* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1990). A recent notable study by Melissa Dabakis examines the group of female sculptors who established studios in Rome in the middle of the nineteenth century, showing that they navigated the expatriate experience advantageously to jumpstart their professional careers and to challenge entrenched conceptions about female creativity. Melissa Dabakis, *A Sisterhood of Sculptors: American Artists in Nineteenth-Century Rome* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014).

¹⁶ Ann Sutherland Harris, "Entering the Mainstream: Women Sculptors of the 20th Century," *Gallerie 2* (Fall 1989): 8-9.

¹⁷ "Woodcut Course at Atelier 17," *Arts Digest* 29 (November 15, 1954): 15.

¹⁸ Worden Day, "Why Painters Turn Sculptors," *Art Voices* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1965): 52.

¹⁹ Deborah Wye and Carol Smith, *The Prints of Louise Bourgeois* (New York: Museum of Modern Art; distributed by H.N. Abrams, 1994), 27.

²⁰ Quoted in Joan Marter, Judith McCandless, and Michael Zakian, *Dorothy Dehner and David Smith: Their Decades of Search and Fulfillment* (New Brunswick, NJ: The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1983), 25.

²¹ For more on Nevelson's Atelier 17 prints, see Christina Weyl, "Innovative Etchings: Louise Nevelson at Atelier 17," in *American Women Artists, 1935-1970: Gender, Culture, and Politics*, ed. Helen Langa and Paula Wisotzki (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2016), 127-43.

²² Louise Nevelson, *Dawns + Dusks: Taped Conversations with Diana MacKown* (New York: Scribner, 1976), 107.

²³ In 1971, Ryan's daughter Elizabeth McFadden donated fifty-four wood blocks to the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History (see accession nos. 23280.1-23280.54)