A COLLECTING SPIRIT

GIFTS OF PAUL KANIA
"I believe art belongs primarily to the public."

—PAUL K. KANIA
With a sensitive eye and a generous spirit, Paul K. Kania has built a substantial art collection, donating more than two hundred and fifty objects to the Allentown Art Museum of the Lehigh Valley over the past twenty years. Spanning the mid-nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, the collection features paintings, photography, and ceramics, with its focus and strength in American and European works on paper.

Kania began purchasing art in the late 1960s, when he was a young teacher in the Bronx. One Saturday morning in the summer of 1971 he was struck by a piece he saw in the window of the Morris Gallery in Greenwich Village. It was *Ce sera la dernière, petit-père!* (This will be the last time, father!) from Georges Rouault’s *Miserere* portfolio, a series defined by the artist’s experience of World War I and the parallels he saw in Christ’s sacrifice for humanity. With the purchase of a pair of prints from the series, Kania realized that he had the ability through his collecting to not only preserve important artworks but, by donating them to a museum, to insure that many more people would get to experience and appreciate them.
The Allentown Art Museum regularly displays selections from Kania’s donations in the permanent collection galleries and has featured his gifts in a number of exhibitions, including Jeffrey Becom: Colors of India (2015), Clare Leighton: Rural Life in the 1930s (2012–2013), and Picasso, Rouault, Beckmann: Portfolios (1999). A Collecting Spirit: Gifts of Paul Kania presents more than one hundred and fifty works, exploring the areas of greatest depth as well as celebrating its exciting diversity.
A Collector’s Cabinet

Based on the way in which private collections were displayed in seventeenth-century Europe, “A Collector’s Cabinet” juxtaposes works in a variety of media, from Lucius Wolcott Hitchcock’s 1890 oil painting to Jeffrey Becom’s 2008 photographically derived archival pigment ink prints, with etchings, engravings, lithographs, woodcuts, and wood engravings in between. It features the earliest (John Gould’s 1837 *Common Wild Duck*) and latest (Linn Meyers’s *Untitled*, 2015) of Kania’s gifts. This section of the exhibition also includes the few artworks that Kania lived with for an extended period of time before donating them: prints by Rouault, Joan Miró, James Tissot, Frank Short, Joseph Gray, Winslow Homer, Asa Cheffetz, Sonia Lamut, and Benjamin Levy.


Kania’s passion for the prints of Stanley William Hayter and artists associated with the innovative and influential twentieth-century print workshop Atelier 17 have made this an area of notable depth within the Museum’s collection. Along with the Peter Grippe Collection, these works tell the story of the intersection of European and American art and culture during World War II and beyond. Hayter founded Atelier 17 in 1927 in Paris, moving it to New York in 1940 when many European artists were fleeing the war. Here exiled Surrealists met American Abstract Expressionists in a spirit of cooperation and experimentation, developing new techniques and resurrecting lost ones.
In 1950, Hayter returned to Paris and reestablished the workshop there while Peter Grippe managed Atelier 17 in New York. Interestingly, Morris Weisenthal, of the aforementioned Morris Gallery, where Kania bought those momentous Rouault prints, was involved in publishing the important portfolio 21 Etchings and Poems, which came out of the collaborative energy of Atelier 17 and featured prints by twenty-one artists, Hayter and Grippe included, and twenty-one poets, including Weisenthal.

The influence of Atelier 17 cannot be overstated. Argentinian-born Mauricio Lasansky received a Guggenheim Fellowship to study with Hayter at Atelier 17 in New York in 1943. Later moving to Iowa to run the University of Iowa's print shop, he taught Thomas Lias, another innovative American printmaker. Thanks to Kania's donations, the Allentown Art Museum currently boasts the largest holdings of Lias's work of any museum. This section of the exhibition demonstrates some of Hayter's influence and provides an overview of his lifetime of work, from his earliest drypoints and engravings to complicated simultaneous color viscosity prints.


Printmaking Processes

The Kania collection is distinctive in its holdings of unique materials that demonstrate artists’ processes, such as copper printing plates and color proofs and variants. These include works by Hayter, as well as by Fred Becker, who often printed for Hayter at Atelier 17 and from whose estate a number of Kania collection pieces came.

A set of Fred Becker’s plates and proofs for the soft-ground etching, engraving, and drypoint Celestial Grub includes color separations (a proof of each plate printed individually in a single color) along with the copper plates from which they were printed, which in combination formed the final version of the
print. There are also color variants, proofs of alternate combinations of colors that the artist may have considered before printing a consistent edition.

A copper plate and progressive proofs of *Forms in Space* by Lias reveals how he built his image through a series of additions and subtractions. State 2 is a relatively simple line engraving and etching. Between states 2 and 3 he has added soft-ground etching. He has given his image greater depth in state 4 through the introduction of aquatint, which provides an even tone of varying depths in certain areas. In the final state of the print, he has burnished out some of the lines he had drawn, making part of what was visible in state 4 now invisible.
Contemporary Abstraction on Paper

As a collector, Paul Kania has long been a supporter of contemporary artists, purchasing recent paintings in the 1960s, new prints from Associated American Artists in the early 1980s, and monotypes and lithographs from Tamarind Institute in the 2000s. Tamarind is credited with helping to revitalize the art of lithography in America and continues to give artists the opportunity to experiment with printmaking in collaboration with master printers. Kania was drawn to works by Meyers, Daniel Brice, David Row, and Johnnie Winona Ross, all characterized by subtlety, depth, and lyricism within a minimal abstract format.

The depth and range of Kania’s gifts to the Allentown Art Museum are a powerful testament to a lifetime of dedication and an incredible generosity that will benefit this Museum and all who visit it for years to come.

—ELAINE MEHALAKES

ELAINE MEHALAKES is a curator and writer and the Vice President of Curatorial Affairs at the Allentown Art Museum. She is a specialist in modern and contemporary prints and has curated numerous exhibitions of works on paper, new media art by emerging artists, artist commissions, and a series of letterpress poetry broadsides.

Opposite, top to bottom:
A Collecting Spirit: Gifts of Paul Kania is on view June 25–September 3, 2017, in Trexler Hall and Scheller, Rodale, and Fowler Galleries. The exhibition is supported through the generosity of an anonymous donor and the Harry C. Trexler Trust, the Julius and Katheryn Hommer Foundation, the Century Fund, the Bernard and Audrey Berman Foundation, the Leon C. and June W. Holt Endowment, the Martin Guitar Charitable Foundation, the Rider-Pool Foundation, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Friends of the Museum.

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