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Graphic Works of the American Thirties: A Book of 100 Prints. New York, Da Capo Press, 1977. 216 pp., illus., $7.95 (paper)

Nancy Heller

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FIGURE 1. Bellows, *Benediction in Georgia.* Mason, p. 53.

Bellows was an accomplished lithographic artist. Between 1916 and 1924 he drew 193 lithographs, all monochromatic and nearly all drawn directly on the stone. He claimed that he was rehabilitating the medium of lithography from the stigma of commercialism which had overwhelmed it in the second half of the nineteenth century, and there is a large kernel of truth in his claim. He was indeed the first major American artist in the twentieth century to make a reputation as a printmaker by working in the medium. Nevertheless it is an exaggeration to leave the impression, as does the book at hand, that the medium had fallen into total disuse as a fine art medium and that Bellows single-handedly revived it. (He was not alone – John Sloan, for example, who made some admirable lithographs even earlier than Bellows, merits some credit.) Still, Bellows was undeniably foremost among a number of American artists participating in what proved to be a world-wide revival of the medium, and his prints, more than any others, restored lustre to lithography's reputation as a fine art process in America.

His subjects were varied, almost bewilderingly so. His drawing style was also varied, as might be expected of an artist exploring a new medium. A few of his prints rank very high in any assessment of North American printmaking. His very first print, *Hungry Dogs,* is one of his best. His satires, of which *Benediction in Georgia* (Fig. 1) is one of the strongest, are sharply observed. His war series is quite powerful, even though it reflects the rage of an artist who knew the war through newspaper reports rather than from experience. Comparisons have often been made with Goya's *Los Caprichos* and *Los Desastres de la Guerra* and with Daumier, and while the spirit of these masters can be seen from time to time in Bellows's best prints, what is important about his work comes from the clarity and originality of his observations of particularly American subjects.

Following Bellows's death in 1925, his wife Emma prepared a catalogue of his lithographs using, among other sources, the artist's own notes and records. Published in 1927 and reprinted with revisions in 1928, it served for half a century as the authoritative source of reference for this body of the artist's work. Lauris Mason's well-produced catalogue raisonné now supplants it, being more complete (including two lithographs not recorded by Emma Bellows), more accurate in a few matters, and more useful. Mason's general model seems to have been Peter Morse's wholly admirable catalogues raisonnés of the prints of John Sloan and Jean Charlot, and while the result is not so sophisticated or intellectually alert as Morse's studies, it is quite a satisfactory job.

Each print is illustrated. The year of execution, dimensions, edition size, and Emma Bellows's catalogue number are given for each entry, and brief extracts from pertinent writings by the artist, his wife, or others are also included. Unique material from the Wiggin Collection of the Boston Public Library Print Room is cited. Appendices include a concordance of Mason's numbers with those of Emma Bellows and a list of holdings of Bellows lithographs in selected museums, a list which would be more valuable if it were not limited to seventeen institutions in eight states and the District of Columbia. There is no significant discussion of misattributions or forgeries. A foreword by Charles H. Morgan, author of the standard life of Bellows, illuminates a few aspects of Bellows's career as a printmaker, but it does not establish a context for the artist either in the history of lithography or in the graphic arts milieu of early-twentieth-century America. Nor is the foreword entirely free from the sort of wide-eyed admiration that has long been a burden to Bellows' s reputation.

The author and her assistant, Joan Ludman, have compiled a reference work which will be of obvious value to print curators and dealers. It will also be useful to scholarly studies not only of this important American artist, but also to the larger subject of fine art printmaking in North America during the first third of this century.

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Graphic Works of the American Thirties: A Book of 100 Prints. New York, Da Capo Press, 1977. 216 pp., illus., $7.95 (paper).

The original edition of this volume appeared in conjunction with the first art exhibit sponsored by the American Artists' Congress in New York City in December 1936, with simultaneous duplicate exhibitions in thirty other U.S. cities. Founded late in 1935, the Congress's objective, as stated by its secretary, Stuart Davis, was 'to take a firm stand against war and fascism, and for the defense of art and artists of all esthetic persuasions.' To that end, the Congress's thirteen-member jury assembled an exhibit of one hundred 'socially conscious' prints by U.S. artists working in a variety of media and styles. The reproduction of these prints forms the basis for this volume.

The inadequate introductory text includes discussions of the three major printmaking techniques represented in this exhibition – woodcut, etching, and lithography – plus an explanation of the rationale for the show. Conceived as a state-

ment against high-priced, limited-edition prints, the 1936 exhibition attempted to reach the largest possible public with high-quality images of Depression-era America.

Various stylistic approaches are included: stolid realism, abstraction, Surrealism, and Synthetic Cubism. Powerful linoleum and woodcut scenes are contrasted to works featuring Whistlerian subtleties of grey. Outright political caricature, like Aline Fruhauf's satirical group portrait of the Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court, is juxtaposed to the more generalized humour of Paul Cadmus's rowdy sailors on *Shore Leave*. While the imagery in a few of the prints now seems overly sentimental, most of the works of art retain much of their original power.

This inexpensive volume is invaluable for its reproductions of difficult-to-obtain prints by both well-known and relatively unknown artists. The reproductions are of good quality and, since they are printed on only one side of a page, they may be removed and mounted separately. However, sometimes the illustrations are too small to fill the page adequately, as in the case of Max Weber's *Pensioned* (4 1/4" × 1 7/8"), which seems lost amid the white expanse of a page almost five times its size.

My major quarrel with Da Capo Press is that they neglected to provide a few features which would have made it easier to see the prints in their social and artistic contexts. While including a list of illustrations, this book contains no index or bibliography, both of which would have added greatly to its utility. Also, since so many of the artists represented are relatively unknown today (e.g. Riva Helfond, Charles Surendorf), it would have been helpful to have included capsule biographies. More important, there could have been a brief foreword by a specialist in the history of prints, or American art of the 1930s, explaining the history and purpose of the American Artists' Congress, and examining both the original introduction and the works of art themselves in the light of the renaissance in U.S. printmaking that has continued, and grown, since that time.

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JAN VAN DER MARCK *George Segal.* New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1976. 233 pp., illus., $37.50.

It is peculiar that although no one would dispute the necessity of including the work of George Segal in a discussion of art in the 'sixties, such work has always fallen victim to hasty definitions based on dubious derivations or on proud declarations of what it is not. Finally, fifteen years after the first plaster casts were exhibited at the Green Gallery in 1962, Jan van der Marck has presented the first serious and comprehensive study of this artist. Classifying previous commentaries on Segal, which at various times related him to such diverse artistic movements as Abstract Expressionism, Dadaism, Pop Art, and Happenings, Van der Marck attempts to correct and clarify the accounts of Segal's intentions and actions in order to free him from an art-historical limbo.

By covering a period from 1961 to 1972, it is possible to document Segal's development from his paintings, which revert to a figurative style as Abstract Expressionism wanes, to the discovery of the technique of using bandages soaked in plaster which allowed him to create three-dimensional casts, and finally to the creation of his sculptural environments.

The book contends that the most common misinterpretations of Segal's sculpture concern its relationship to painting and to real-life situations. A superficial criticism of his work misreads a manufactured element into his use of plaster casts of real people, thus equating him with Pop Art. In similar fashion, his use of real trucks, restaurant equipment (Fig. 1) and other objects in the environmental settings of his work gives rise to associations with Happenings. However, what many critics fail to see is that far from being simply carbon copies of human forms, the plaster figures are reworked after the casting to emphasize and suppress certain features in accord with the artist's preconceived notion of the piece. The handling of the plaster surface relies heavily upon Abstract Expressionism, and its placement within the highly structured framework of a designated environment allies the work closely to the historical tradition of Cubism, Constructivism, and Neo-Plasticism. Emphasis is placed by the author upon the failure of critics to conceive of the figures and their surroundings as single entities. Critics also forget that Segal's career began in painting, and that he has not discarded the influences of Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, and Hofmann.

Van der Marck's sympathies lie with Michael Fried, who has interpreted Segal's sculpture along the theoretical lines of the Minimalists. Expanding upon Fried's analysis, Van der Marck discusses the theatrical quality of the sculpture, and the 'distancing effect' (a term coined by Fried) created between the object of art and the spectator. This final point reminds us that Segal's sculpture can only be viewed from an external point; the observer is not welcome into the rooms or spaces that define the boundaries, and the viewer's role is thus passive as with a traditional piece of art.

To substantiate his arguments, the author proceeds to discuss sev-

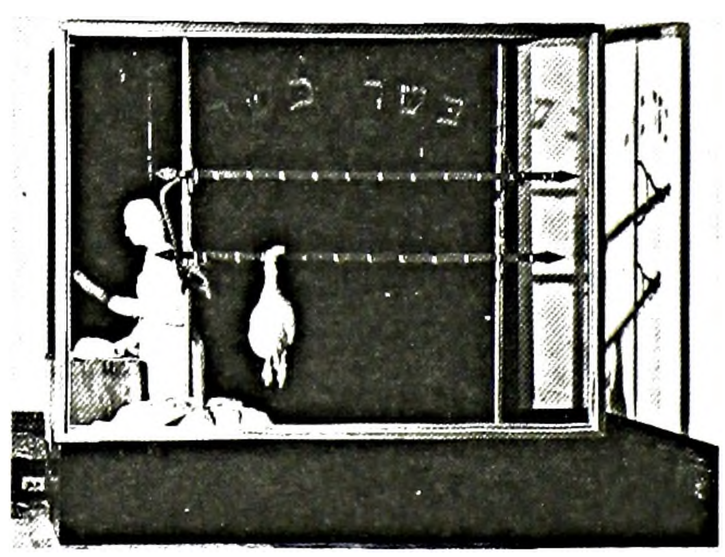

FIGURE 1. Segal, *The Butcher Shop.* From Van der Marck.