CHECKLIST

Kendall Banning, American, 1879–1944
Cast Hand of Mark Twain (1835–1910), 1908, plaster
Gift of Kendall Banning, Class of 1902; 29.63.17456

Benjamin Degen, American, born 1976
In Sight, a Riot, 2008, pen on paper
Gift of Hugh J. Freund, Class of 1967; 2010.89.4

Hector Garcia, Mexican, born 1923
José Clemente Orozco, 1945, gelatin silver print
Gift of Peter H. Voulkos; PH.2001.51.5

Fernand Leger, French, 1881–1955
Feasts of Famine (Fêtes de la Faim), from the portfolio 8 Lithographs for Rimbaud, 1949, lithograph on wove paper
Gift of Varnjan Boghosian; PR.955.41.2

Roy Lichtenstein, American, 1923–1997
Finger Pointing, from the portfolio Works by Artists in the New York Collection for Stockholm, 1973, screenprint on wove paper
Gift of James Sutton Regan, Class of 1964; PR.974.372.13

Frank Lobdell, American, 1921–2013
7.20.91, 1991, etching and aquatint on Rives BFK paper
Gift of Elizabeth and Mark T Gates Jr., Class of 1959; PR.992.15.8

Wendy Snyder MacNeil, American, born 1943
Untitled (Hand), not dated, platinum print on tracing paper
Purchased through the Mrs. Harvey P Hood W’18 Fund; PH.985.14.10

Jack Pierson, American, born 1960
Untitled, 1995, etching and aquatint on wove paper
Purchased through the Hood Museum of Art Acquisitions Fund; PR.995.53

Do-Ho Suh, Korean, born 1962
Bowl, Peter Norton Family Christmas Project, 2004, handblown glass
Gift of the Director of the Hood Museum of Art; G.2004.82

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


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HAND ALONE
Articulating the Hand in Art

In Chauvet, France, red ochre handprints and stencils are found in chambers throughout the Pont-d’Arc Cave. These are the oldest known representations of the human impulse to make marks, to bring pigment to surface. A common hypothesis: these hands are a form of early signature. And so on through history, with the hand being created into a distinct visual trope again and again. Think of Egyptian hieroglyphs and how they look so distinctly Egyptian. Look at the Assyrian hands on their carved reliefs, and notice how clearly Assyrian. Or even Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Raphael—all are of the same style, yet each produces a distinguishable hand. The hand, for all of its biological vulnerability to flourishies of expression like few other body parts, is an intimate, made space, both visual and tactile—the space of the handed self.

This is all to open with a simple, maybe even self-evident, idea: the hand is a versatile vehicle for meaning, and this is a fact long acknowledged. This is not so surprising, for certainly the artist must obsess over the hand; it is his instrument for shaping the world, the visual index of his inner self. Consider Kendall Banning’s (Class of 1992) cast of Mark Twain’s hand. The intention is obviously portraiture; the eponymous title proves this is meant to represent Twain’s whole. There is the hand, and so there is he. Wonder, “Can the hand synecdochically substitute for Hector Garcia, a photographer, in the same way it can for Orozco, a more material artist?”

Kendall Banning’s (Class of 1992) cast of Mark Twain’s hand asserts the same as Garcia’s photograph of Orozco, that the hand can stand for man the artist. This conflation of personality and physiology is historically rooted in trends like phrenology, the study of the skull as a means of revealing the character, and in the widespread practice of casting the hands of the rich and famous, as an alternative of sorts to the bust. Today, the impulse to believe in the physical manifestation of personality seems silly. But certainly we all believe character can be revealed from the hand, almost as from the face. The barest hint of a suit in Lichtenstein’s Finger Pointing reinforces the urgent authority of the color scheme, and the unsettling nature suggested by its thick, forceful lines. The smashed bottle held lackadaisically by the hand in Degen’s pen and paper work makes quite obvious the wielder’s intent, and is suggestive of his broader personality. The dangled cigarette in Pierson’s untitled print tells of practiced apathy, ennui. All this in the pose of a single hand. You don’t even need two.

Detaching the hand from the arm literally imposes the critical distance necessary to become aware of the things we forget we assume about our hands. And rest assured: you are assuming. In psychology, the sensory homunculus is a miniature representation of the “body within the brain.” It visually demonstrates what man would look like if the size of his body parts were directly proportional to how richly innervated a given appendage. The lips balloon, the arms and legs whither. And the hands? They explode, each becoming bigger than the man himself. This re-visualization of hands relative to their sensorial impact may explain the human capacity to find hands in works as elusive as Frank Lobdell’s 7.20.91. Here, the hand is abstracted to a near unrecognizable extent. And yet, there they are—three-pronged hands connecting to form a border for an otherwise difficult work made of unlike colors and unlike shapes. The term abstract is unfortunate for it suggests remoteness, recalling the emotionally disembodied, instead of just the literally disembodied. Behold the human capacity to recognize pattern, to find itself in the inanimate.

Able to shape, and shaped by what it encounters, the hand requires an attentive eye. The space between an artist and his work, and the space between a work and its audience, is an intimate, made space, both visual and tactile—the space of the handed self.

Margaret E. Tierney, Class of 2014
Kathryn Conroy Intern

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