

Works in Process, July 31, 2021-January 22, 2022

Art isn't always about a finished product. The groups of objects in this exhibition demonstrate how ideas—and even artworks themselves—develop throughout the process of creation. Whether an image translated into a sketch then simplified into a design, a pattern made into an object, or motif preserved through careful documentation and later used as inspiration, these objects speak to one another, demonstrating some of the ways artists work through their ideas.

Line gives shape and form to vision, and it is also an own expressive entity that rewards close study. Whether articulated with a brush, pen, or pencil or carved and impressed, each mark conveys the artist's thought process.

Curated by

Emily Banas, Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts

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Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (1874–1948), a daughter of Rhode Island senator Nelson W. Aldrich and the wife of John D. Rockefeller Jr., was a lifelong supporter of the arts. Mrs. Rockefeller assembled a remarkable collection of Asian woodblock prints, donating more than 700 Japanese prints to the RISD Museum.

RISD Museum is supported by a grant from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, through an appropriation by the Rhode Island General Assembly and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and with the generous partnership of the Rhode Island School of Design, its Board of Trustees, and Museum Governors.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Joseph Stella, American, 1877-1946
Study of a Male Wood Duck, early 1900s
Colored pencil on paper
18.1 x 26 cm (7 1/8 x 10 5/16 inches)
Gift of Mr. Robert Aron 81.233



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Japanese

Sketch of Ducks and Plum Blossoms, 1800s

Ink on paper

Image: 55.2 x 40 cm (21 3/4 x 15 3/4 inches)

Gift of Mark S. Pratt 2020.46.26



Karl Wilhelm de Hamilton, Flemish, ca. 1668-1754

A Menagerie of Game Birds, 1718

Pen and ink on paper

26 x 32.2 cm (10 5/16 x 12 11/16 inches)

Anonymous gift 84.230.5



Birds are the focus of these studies in graphite and ink. Each composition, whether a preparatory sketch or an investigative study, is carefully articulated, revealing the artist's varied interests and intentions.

Using colored pencils, Joseph Stella meticulously rendered the subject of his study, a wood duck, capturing its feathery texture with layered, repetitive lines. Despite the softness conveyed, Stella also leans into a pronounced angularity, perhaps a hint at his cubist predilections. In contrast, the monochromatic sketches are composed of rapidly executed lines that reveal the artists' planning processes as they each created a foundational work for a painting or print.

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William Edgar Brigham, American, 1885-1962, (RISD 1906; RISD Faculty)

Study of Parrot on Perch, 1914

Watercolor on paper

35.6 x 25.4 cm (14 x 10 inches)

Gift of the Estate of William E. Brigham 63.011.157



William Edgar Brigham, American, 1885-1962, (RISD 1906; RISD Faculty)

Design Using Bird Motif and Preliminary Sketches, 1914

Watercolor on paper

35.6 x 25.4 cm (14 x 10 inches)

Gift of the Estate of William E. Brigham 63.011.163



William Edgar Brigham, American, 1885-1962, (RISD 1906; RISD Faculty)

Jewelry Designs, 1914

Watercolor on paper

35.6 x 25.4 cm (14 x 10 inches)

Gift of the Estate of William E. Brigham 63.011.164



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William Edgar Brigham, American, 1885-1962, (RISD 1906; RISD Faculty)

Nature Study: Various Birds, 1914

Watercolor and graphite on paper

35.6 x 25.4 cm (14 x 10 inches)

Gift of the Estate of William E. Brigham 63.011.165



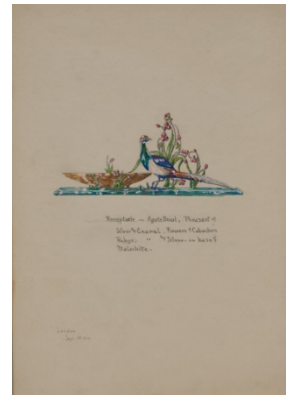
William Edgar Brigham, American, 1885-1962, (RISD 1906; RISD Faculty)

Agate Bowl with Pheasant and Flowers, 1914

Watercolor and graphite on paper

35.6 x 25.4 cm (14 x 10 inches)

Gift of the Estate of William E. Brigham 63.011.166



Nature was a great source of inspiration for metalsmith William Edgar Brigham. He created dozens of sketches in pencil and watercolor of plants and animals, translating his drawings into patterns before settling on a design for an object. These works were made from observations of birds at the London Zoo, the first zoo established for the scientific study of animals.

Brigham's animated painting of a parrot translates into an equally expressive and colorful repeating pattern. This pattern then manifests in a design for a pendant with the same flowering foliage, which morphs into an elegant teardrop shape that forms the parrot's perch. Even as a static object, Brigham's parrot pendant incorporates the movement and liveliness of his real-life rendering. Similarly, his drawings of pheasants are brought to life in a design for a bowl that places the bird within a bejeweled habitat of gems, enamel, and silver.

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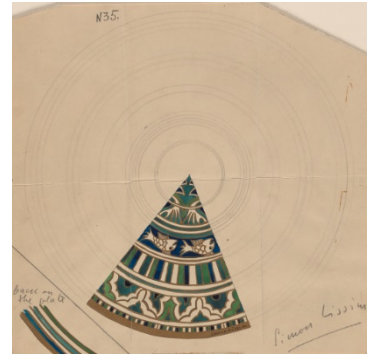
Simon Lissim, American, b. Russia, 1900-1981

Design for a Plate—Fish and Abstract Designs, ca. 1960

Pencil, watercolor, ink, and gold on paper

28.6 x 28.6 cm (11 1/4 x 11 1/4 inches) (irregular)

Gift of the artist 71.103



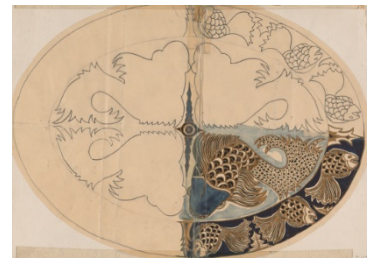
Simon Lissim, American, b. Russia, 1900-1981

Design for a Platter—Fish Motif, 1961

Pencil, watercolor, ink, and gold on paper

32.1 x 44.3 cm (12 5/8 x 17 3/8 inches)

Gift of the artist 71.104



These designs feature imagery of fish, a subject that appears time and again in Simon Lissim's paintings and design drawings. Born in Kiev, Russia, he moved to Paris at 19 years old to embark on what would become a prolific career as an artist, designer, and illustrator. In the 1920s he began designing for Sèvres, the French porcelain manufactory.

Lissim created hundreds of designs for porcelain manufactured by Sèvres, Castleton, and Lenox over the course of his career. He likely made many more designs than were ever physically produced, but the works shown here demonstrate how he repeated patterns, enlivening them with bold colors.

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Robert Evans Locher, American, 1888-1956
Design (Urn and Swans), ca. 1920–1940
Graphite on paper
51.9 x 44.5 cm (20 3/8 x 17 1/2 inches) (sheet)
Gift of the Locher Family 60.084.17



Robert Evans Locher, American, 1888-1956
Design for Wallpaper (Lady - Lily - Swan), ca. 1920 - 1940
Graphite and wash on paper
47.9 x 46.2 cm (18 7/8 x 18 3/16 inches) (sheet)
Gift of the Locher Family 60.084.14



Robert Evans Locher, American, 1888-1956
Design for Wallpaper (Lady - Lily - Swan), ca. 1920 - 1940
Graphite and watercolor on paper
47.6 x 48.3 cm (18 13/16 x 19 inches) (sheet)
Gift of the Locher Family 60.084.15



Robert Evans Locher, American, 1888-1956
Imperial Wallpaper Company, American, 1903-1963, manufactory
Lady - Lily - Swan Wallpaper, ca. 1920 - 1940
Paint on paper; machine-printed
Sheet: 65 x 49 cm (25 9/16 x 19 5/16 inches)
Gift of the Locher Family 60.084.21



This series of drawings demonstrates Robert Evan Locher's talent for transforming classical imagery into sleek and modern wallpaper designs. A serene landscape with swans, flowers, and an urn was simplified into a concept drawing, followed by small changes in shape, scale, and composition that are evident in the final product. This design was likely pared down for easier manufacturing, but it also reflects budding Art Deco and Streamline Moderne aesthetics.

Locher was a prolific gay artist, creating illustrations for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*, designing interior spaces and theater sets and costumes,

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and working with companies to make products that married historic and modern styles for broad appeal.

Katsushika Hokusai, Japanese, 1760-1849
Canary and Herbaceous Peony, ca. 1834
Polychrome wood block print
Image: 24.9 x 17.3 cm (9 13/16 x 6 13/16 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.500



Katsushika Hokusai, Japanese, 1760-1849
Canary and Herbaceous Peony, ca. 1834
Monochrome woodblock print
Sheet: 27.2 x 19.1 cm (10 11/16 x 7 1/2 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.484



This rare pairing of a printer's proof with a finished print offers a glimpse into the collaborative nature of the woodblock printing process. Upon receiving a design sketch from the artist—in this case Hokusai—the carver would paste it onto a woodblock and cut into it. As a result, few original sketches survive today. A monochrome proof like this one was printed from the carved block and returned to the artist for instructions and edits. The annotations on this proof's right side, which specify color preference, were added to advance the process.

Given the compositional differences between these two works, it is unclear whether the print eventually evolved from this specific proof. Nevertheless, the record of the collaborative interaction between artist, carver, and printer remains noteworthy.

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Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Java Sparrow and Plum, 1847-1852
Polychrome woodblock print
Image: 33.8 x 11.3 cm (13 5/16 x 4 7/16 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.208



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Edoya Matsugoro
Tanzaku Triptych, 1840s
Polychrome woodblock print
Overall: 33.3 x 22.5 cm (13 1/8 x 8 7/8 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.091



Utagawa Hiroshige, Japanese, 1797-1858
Sketches for Tanzaku Prints,
Ink and color on paper
34.1 x 22.2 cm (13 3/8 x 8 13/16 inches)
Gift of Thomas Michie 2007.120.3



These sketches and prints reveal Hiroshige's wide knowledge of avian and botanical subject matter. Each bird is an identifiable species, as are the plants and trees they are paired with. In the top print, a Java sparrow perches on a blossoming plum tree, while the middle print pairs a kingfisher with irises and other flowers. The similarity of the sparrows in the sketch and the print suggests that the drawing was likely created as a preliminary design.

This grouping also provides insight into the production of *tanzaku* (vertical strip) prints in Japan during the mid-1800s. Woodblocks came in standard sizes, and artists prepared compositions that filled the entire surface of the block. Here three compositions, separated

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by vertical lines, were fit onto a single block. After printing, the prints were cut into separate strips.

Chinese

Birds on a Maple Tree, 1600s

Woodblock print

21.9 cm (8 5/8 inches) (length)

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.611



School of Katsushika Hokusai, Japanese, 1760-1849

Seven Sketches: Birds, 1800s

Ink on paper

29.8 x 19.1 cm (11 11/16 x 7 1/2 inches) (sheet)

Museum Collection INV2005.61



As direct products of an artist's hand and vital manifestations of thought processes, sketches and studies are important teaching tools. These drawings of birds were mounted on a single sheet for easy study and reference. The positions and movements depicted here presented a range of options in the planning of compositions.

Copying is fundamental to East Asian artistic practice, with apprentices and students often using their teacher's works as models. Printed manuals provided a source for reference for many, including people who were not trained to be artists. Illustrations such as these birds on a maple tree provided detailed brush articulation and exemplary compositions for the uninitiated.

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Margaret C. Whiting, American, 1860 – 1946
or
Ellen Miller, American, 1854 - 1929
Design for an Embroidered Bedspread, ca. 1900
Paper and colored graphite
Gift of Miss Margaret Whiting 45.006.12



Margaret C. Whiting, American, 1860 – 1946
or
Ellen Miller, American, 1854 - 1929
Design for an Embroidered Bedspread, ca. 1900
Paper and colored graphite
Gift of Miss Margaret Whiting 45.006.7



Margaret C. Whiting, American, 1860 – 1946
or
Ellen Miller, American, 1854 - 1929
Design for an Embroidered Bedspread, ca. 1900
Paper and colored graphite
Gift of Miss Margaret Whiting 45.006.13



Ruth Culver Coleman, American, d. 1801
Valance, late 1700s - early 1800s
Wool and linen
256.5 cm (101 inches) (length)
Museum Works of Art Fund 44.684.2



These drawings were likely made by Margaret Whiting or Ellen Miller, founders of the Deerfield Society of Blue and White Needlework in Massachusetts. The society's mission was to revive the craft of needlework and create an industry to boost the local economy. Beginning in the 1890s, Whiting and Miller documented historical embroideries across the Northeast, making hundreds of sketches to preserve each textile and its methods of construction. Drawings were labeled with the embroiderer's name and type of object. Some

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contained detailed notes about color, shading, and technique, as seen [here](#).

These drawings were made from an embroidery by Ruth Culver Coleman, who also used similar motifs in embroidering this valance, which would have hung at the top of a four-poster bed. More than a century after Coleman's death, her designs—as captured by Whiting and Miller—may have served as inspiration for the Deerfield Society needleworkers.