
Nancy Heller
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 pow-
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 lineoleum and woodcut scenes are contrasted to works featuring Whistlerian subtleties of grey. Outright political caricature, like Aline Fruhaufl'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" × 3 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 Surenford), 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.