

COLLECTION OVERVIEW

GRAPHIC ARTS

I. SCOPE

This overview covers original graphic artwork, which includes caricatures and cartoons, fine and historical prints, posters, illustrations, documentary and master drawings, and postcards and other visual ephemera in both physical and digital formats. These often-unique primary visual materials are for the most part found in the Prints & Photographs Division (P&P) and are also in the Rare Books and Special Collections, Geography and Maps, Asian, Music, and other divisions. Books and serials about the graphic arts are in the general collections.

In terms of subject content, the graphic arts collections complement nearly every Library of Congress collecting area overview including American History, European Studies, Hispanic American Studies, Decorative Arts, Fine Arts, and Motion Pictures.

Architecture, Design, and Engineering graphic works are covered in a separate Collection Overview.

II. SIZE

Estimated at more than 500,000 items.

(Source: Prints & Photographs Online Catalog, Guide Records)

III. GENERAL RESEARCH STRENGTHS

Visual American culture, communication, and creativity are the general research strengths for the graphic arts collections. Artists' drawings and prints have long had a special capacity to capture the imagination and intellect in powerful ways. Each carries the thumbprint of the creator's interior vision while reflecting their understanding of the material world. As the oldest repository for the visual arts in Washington, as well as the national copyright depository, the Library of Congress has built one of the most comprehensive and diverse collections of graphic art in America. The collections include major artists as well as lesser-known creators meriting further study.

Documentary, fine art, and popular prints and drawings are extensively represented in a diversity of styles including representational, narrative, figurative, and abstract. Though the earliest works are from 15th century Europe, the Library's greatest research strength is in original prints, posters, and drawings, including both fine and applied graphic art, produced in the U.S. from about 1840 to the present day.

IV. AREAS OF DISTINCTION

Political Art and Propaganda, 1700s to the Present. In this field the Library's holdings are unparalleled. Particular emphasis has been placed on acquiring works produced by governments and opposition groups in the United States and abroad, and on political satire and caricature in the United States (from the colonial period to the present), in England (1600-1832), and France (1770-1871).

American City Views. Prints and drawings of cities, towns, and settlements from the colonial period to the 20th century are extensively represented. These views form an extraordinary resource on urban and local history, urban planning, land use, architecture, and daily life in the United States on a broad geographical basis.

American, European, and Latin American Posters. The Library has an extensive collection of documentary, advertising, political, and fine art posters from the origins of the medium in the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. Includes the largest collection of WPA posters.

Graphic Design. The design and uses of the printed media for utilitarian purposes in the United States and in Western Europe is well documented in the collections. The collections are an important resource in particular for the study of American advertising and corporate design, and trademark, type and letterform design.

The Golden Age of Illustration. Original drawings by leading American book, magazine, and newspaper illustrators, which were made primarily during the so-called 'golden age of American illustration' from the 1880s-1920s are well represented in the collections. Examples of later 20th century and contemporary creators complement these holdings.

Original Cartoon Drawings. The Library's collection traces the long evolution of the cartoon as a form of graphic art disseminated to the public for its amusement and edification. Through its extensive holdings of drawings by significant creators of humorous and satiric art, the Library seeks to encourage the study of original cartoon and caricature drawings as key cultural, social, and political touchstones and as works of art.

American Artists' Prints from the 19th century forward. Most of the major American artists from the Etching Revival to World War II are substantially represented including James McNeill Whistler, John Taylor Arms, Joseph Pennell, George Bellows, John Sloan, John Taylor Arms, and others. Since the 1930s, the Library of Congress has maintained an active program of acquiring contemporary prints, particularly by American artists, with notable holdings also for European, Latino, and Japanese printmaking.

Certain Areas of American and Master Western European Printmaking. These include: the woodcut from the fifteenth century to the present; British and French prints of the etching revival; French nineteenth-century lithography.

19th Century Popular Prints. Popular prints and illustrated broadsides of historical, graphic and/or documentary importance, primarily produced in the U.S. as well as abroad. Includes the largest public collection of Currier & Ives prints.

Civil War Drawings. Primarily eyewitness sketches of Civil War scenes and events, including military personnel, battles, civilian activities, and landscapes.

Early Baseball Cards (1887-1914): Representing more than one thousand major and minor league ballplayers (primarily major league), from teams in thirteen identified leagues and seventy-five cities in the United States and Canada.

V. ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Digitized versions of many graphic art collections are available in the Prints and Photographs Online Catalog (PPOC), <http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html>

Many graphic artworks also appear in Library exhibitions, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/>

VI. WEAKNESSES/EXCLUSIONS

Collections that cover such a wide range of subjects will inevitably have gaps and weaknesses.

P&P, like most other American collecting institutions, is today engaged in a particular effort to better represent the significant achievements and contributions to American history and culture of all ethnic and racial groups.

P&P graphic art holdings are weak for certain geographic areas, e.g., Africa, China, Australia, Korea, and India.

Propaganda from Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Far East is relatively sparse.

Digital prints that constitute original works in themselves are of collecting interest but currently not well represented. Generally considered out of scope are reproductive prints of original artworks in other media such as drawings, paintings, and prints, and three-dimensional graphic works.