1994

J.J. Lankes (1884-1960): Woodcuts of Rural America

University of Richmond Museums

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/exhibition-brochures
Part of the Fine Arts Commons, and the Printmaking Commons

Recommended Citation

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the University Museums at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Exhibition Brochures by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.
J.J. Lankes
(1884-1960)
WOODCUTS OF RURAL AMERICA
INTRODUCTION

In 1917, while working at the Newton Arms Company factory in Buffalo, New York, Julius John (J. J.) Lankes created his first woodcut. His only implements were a graver, used to score rifle stocks, and a block of apple wood he had cut from a fallen tree. The experiment proved a turning point in the life of the thirty-one-year-old laborer, draftsman, and erstwhile art student. Rapidly mastering the difficult white on black woodcutting technique, he went on to produce some 1,300 designs over the next forty years.

J. J. Lankes moved to Virginia in 1925. His artistic interests were ideally suited to the depiction of the landscape and houses of rural Tidewater Virginia in the 1920s. He saw in these deteriorating buildings the erosion by time and nature on man and his monuments. Lankes found and recorded, in its unretouched condition, a Williamsburg of decaying eighteenth-century structures together with more stately edifices. In virtually all his images, nature is a strong, often controlling, presence: beneath the surface of the natural object, it lurks as a mysterious, perhaps hostile, force. Generally, we are reminded of the power and endurance of nature, beside which man and his creations are shown as insignificant and transitory.

Lankes' major subject was pre-industrial America, rich in natural beauty, history, and sturdy people who bonded with the land. In his life as in his work Lankes remained a democrat — a scoffer at pretension, a skeptic of entrenched authority, champion of the plain, and respecter of the natural. These values, combined with extraordinary technical skills, won praise from such notable contemporaries as John Taylor Arms, Charles Burchfield, Rockwell Kent, Ray Nash, Charles Harris Whitaker, and Carl Zigrosser. Several of these artists helped pave Lankes' way as an illustrator of books by prominent authors of the 1920s and '30s, most notably Sherwood Anderson, Roark Bradford, Robert P. Tristram Coffin, Robert Frost, and Ellen Glasgow.

Today, Lankes' woodcuts remain evocative representations of American rural life of an earlier time. His unique vision is evident in this retrospective, which includes works ranging in date from 1917 to 1955. Carl Zigrosser wrote in 1942, "his woodcuts are of the country, and have the smell and feel of the country in them." We not only perceive Lankes' contribution to "American scene" printmaking but also take delight in his vision of early twentieth-century America and of universal themes.

But one should bear in mind that however lofty the larger themes of his work may be, Lankes' approach to art was primarily specific and not theoretical. Thus his more expansive ideas are to be inferred. As Sherwood Anderson observed in "J. J. Lankes and His Woodcuts" (1981), Lankes "is a man deeply concerned with life, but it is his way to get at life through things. He feels always the reflected life in things, in barns, sheds back of barns, in little houses in which poor people live. 'Look,' he says. 'Look again. Don't you see it? . . . Life is here in these inanimate things people have touched.'"

The "things" subsumed in these images reflect a broad and richly detailed spectrum. They range from historical figures and buildings to rural domestic life; from the seasons to commonplace natural objects; from literature to plowing; from Buffalo, New York, to the lower Chesapeake Bay; from the James River to the stars. The sheer variety of these subjects defies neat summarization; each image conveys a unique message. However all of them, to borrow a phrase from Gray's Elegy, are "short and simple annals" evoking a rural past that has all but disappeared.

Welford Dunaway Taylor
James A. Bostwick Professor of English, University of Richmond
Richard Waller
Director, Marsh Art Gallery, University of Richmond

Co-organized by the University of Richmond Marsh Art Gallery and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, the exhibition will travel throughout the Commonwealth through the Virginia Museum's Department of Traveling Exhibitions and Media Services following its venue at the Marsh Art Gallery (March 9 to April 17, 1994). We are indebted to the lenders and extend our thanks to Roger and Emily Fournier, Elizabeth L. Howard, and J. B. Lankes.
CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

All of the works are woodcuts signed in pencil by the artist; all are printed in black ink, except where noted. Each entry includes year; dimensions of the image in inches, height precedes width; and artist’s logbook record number in parentheses.

Three Ships
1917, 3 7/8 x 6 (0015)
Collection of J. B. Lankes

The Knoll (top)
1919, 4 1/4 x 2 13/16 (0064)

Mower (bottom)
1919, 3 5/8 x 5 7/8 (0050)
(both printed brown ink)
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Meeting House at Springbrook, New York
1919, 4 3/8 x 5 7/8 (0051)
University of Richmond Marsh Art Gallery

Walt Whitman
1919, 8 15/16 x 8 1/8 (0054)
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Saint Mary’s Inn
1920, 5 7/8 x 8 (0092)
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Indian Summer
1922, 5 15/16 x 8 3/16 (0199)
Collection of J. B. Lankes

New Hampshire (Apple Tree and Grindstone)
1923, 3 x 4 1/16 (0253)
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Barn near Lititz, Pennsylvania
1923, 7 1/4 x 5 5/8 (0259)
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Near Newville, Pennsylvania
1923, 7 3/8 x 5 5/8 (0260)
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Aspens
1924, 6 1/2 x 4 11/16 (0333)
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Designs for Greeting Cards:
Greetings from J. J. L. (upper left)
1925, 3 1/2 x 5 (0351)
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Greetings from Theodore and Anna
Popp 1927-28 (lower left)
1927, 5 1/2 x 3 3/4 (0516) (printed red, blue, green, and black ink)
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Christmas Greeting (upper right)
1925, 2 3/16 x 5 1/16 (0370)
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

Whitaker’s Road Greeting (lower right)
1929, 3 1/2 x 4 1/2 (0639A)
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

From Six Little Moods by J. J. Lankes:
Evening (upper left)
1925, 2 x 4 (0355)

Night (lower left)
1925, 1 11/16 x 4 (0356)

Winter (upper right)
1925, 1 3/4 x 4 1/16 (0373)

The Wind (lower right)
1925, 1 11/16 x 4 (0352)
Collection of J. B. Lankes

June
1925, 6 5/16 x 4 15/16 (0365)
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Coal Yard Office
1925, 6 13/16 x 6 9/16 (0380)
Collection of J. B. Lankes

March Day in Georgetown
1925, 4 1/2 x 3 5/16 (0383)
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

Klostergasse, Rothenburg
1926, 6 7/8 x 5 (0406)
University of Richmond Marsh Art Gallery

Bew’s Store
1926, 4 11/16 x 6 15/16 (0417)
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Virginia Farmhouse
1926, 4 1/16 x 6 15/16 (0424)
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Neglected (Barn and Horse)
1926, 1 7/8 x 5 9/16 (0427)
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Barn for Marbacha
1926, 6 x 3 13/16 (0436)
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Affliction
1926, 6 5/8 x 4 3/8 (0456)
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier
A Lane on the Bank of the James River  
1926, 14 5/8 x 12 5/16 (0460)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Cabin by the Road  
1926, 5 x 4 1/4 (0466A)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

The Doctor Calls  
1926, 15 x 17 3/8 (0470)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Empty House  
1927, 8 7/8 x 12 (0482)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg  
1927, 6 11/16 x 5 3/16 (0492)  
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Swinging  
1927, 6 5/8 x 8 7/8 (0496)  
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

Visiting (Cherry and Maple Streets, Buffalo)  
1927, 6 1/2 x 5 1/4 (0505)  
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

Plowman, Open Cutting (top)  
1927, 2 13/16 x 5 3/16 (0510)  
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Turning Plowman, End of Furrow (bottom)  
1927, 2 1/16 x 5 1/8 (0527)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Spring Plowing  
1928, 8 1/8 x 5 1/16 (0536)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Bumble Bee  
1928, 5 1/16 x 3 1/2 (0539)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

April  
1928, 5 1/4 x 3 1/2 (0543)  
Private Collection

Evening Star (No. 2)  
1928, 5 3/4 x 7 (0551)  
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

Bookplates:  
Bristow Hardin (upper left)  
1931, 4 x 2 7/8 (0786)  

Frederick Koch (lower left)  
1928, 3 5/8 x 2 5/8 (0552)

Genevieve Taggard (upper right)  
1931, 3 7/8 x 2 1/2 (0758)  

W. Lloyd Wright (lower right)  
1932, 4 1/8 x 3 3/16 (0792)  
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

From Thomas Gray's 1751  
Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard:  
Stanza 15 (Graveyard) (top)  
1940, 3 1/16 x 5 3/16 (0992)  

Stanza 22 (Man on Road) (bottom)  
1928, 3 1/16 x 5 3/16 (0561)  
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Big Sycamore Tree, West Running Brook  
1928, 5 1/2 x 3 1/2 (0568)  
Private Collection

West Running Brook (No. 3)  
1928, 5 5/8 x 3 3/4 (0571)  
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Worn Road  
1929, 8 7/16 x 6 3/4 (0586A)  
Collection of J. B. Lankes

November  
1929, 7 1/16 x 5 9/16 (0594)  
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

Apple Picker (Henry Holt and Company  
Autumn 1929 Catalog Cover)  
1929, 8 3/16 x 5 11/16 (0601)  
Collection of J. B. Lankes

The Lane (No. 2)  
1929, 7 1/16 x 5 15/16 (0646)  
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

St. John's Church, Hampton  
1930, 5 7/16 x 7 (0650)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

The Path (No. 2)  
1930, 6 1/2 x 4 1/2 (0655)  
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

Oyster Boats, Hampton  
1930, 5 1/4 x 7 1/16 (0660)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Farmyard  
1930, 8 3/8 x 6 11/16 (0661)  
University of Richmond Marsh Art Gallery

Kent's Gate  
1930, 6 7/16 x 9 (0683)  
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

Wash Day  
1930, 5 5/16 x 8 3/16 (0709)  
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

Noonday (North Newport News, Virginia)  
1931, 5 7/8 x 7 7/8 (0746B)  
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

House for Sale  
1931, 7 1/4 x 5 7/8 (0749)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Jamestown Tower  
1931, 5 x 7 (0773)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

In North Newport News  
1932, 6 1/8 x 7 7/8 (0811)  
Collection of Elizabeth L. Howard

New Year's Day  
1934, 12 x 10 1/8 (0886)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Stone Barn near Beaver Creek, Maryland  
1937, 5 x 8 3/8 (0938)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Near Millersville, Pennsylvania  
1937, 6 x 9 1/16 (0952)  
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Barn near Mannheim, Pennsylvania  
1939, 5 15/16 x 9 7/8 (0968)  
Collection of J. B. Lankes

Winter Twilight  
1939, 9 x 11 1/8 (0971)  
University of Richmond Marsh Art Gallery

Building the Tower of Independence  
Hall, Philadelphia 1732  
1943, 12 1/8 x 16 3/16 (1067)  
Private Collection

People Going to Church (left)  
1945, 2 15/16 x 4 (1083)  

Pine Trees in Winter (right)  
1955, 4 1/2 x 3 1/2 (1199)  
Collection of Roger and Emily Fournier

Cover: Farmyard, 1930

Printed © 1994 Marsh Art Gallery, University of Richmond, Virginia 23173