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Jasper Johns

Exhibition Dates: November 17, 2012 – January 5, 2013

Leslie Sacks Contemporary is pleased to announce an exhibition of prints by Jasper Johns, which will explore five decades in the career of this pivotal contemporary American artist. The exhibition will coincide with a major retrospective of Johns' work at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Emerging on the New York art scene in the 1950s, Jasper Johns, along with Robert Rauschenberg, was a driving influence for the movements that followed Abstract Expressionism, including Pop Art, Minimalism and Conceptual Art. Johns became known early on in his career for his use of common symbols and motifs, such as numbers, maps and the American flag. By continually reworking and revisiting these images in new contexts, Johns played with the form and geometry of iconic and mundane symbols, at times imbuing them and at other times distancing them from their complex representational meanings.

Johns' interest in presenting familiar and potentially overlooked sights in a new emblematic light has evolved over the years to encompass a repertoire of motifs, including targets, cans of paintbrushes, light bulbs and crosshatching marks. In doing so, he has crafted an entire visual language consisting of found objects, art historical references and, occasionally, a discreet nod to his personal life. Throughout years of constant personal reinvention, Johns has maintained a disciplined and methodical approach, often playing with figure-ground relationships and bright primary colors in order to create images that are full of contained, yet vibrant energy.

Johns is known for his keen knowledge of art history and, since the beginning of his career, has been particularly influenced by Marcel Duchamp's "ready-mades," which turned everyday objects into pieces of art. Johns' paintings such as the early *Target with Plaster Casts, 1955* have incorporated pre-existing items. Many of his editions have also explored three-dimensionality, using objects and transfers. Johns made a print of *Target with Plaster Casts* in 1980.

Figure 7, from The Black Numerals Series, 1968, is a complex composition that shows the evolution of Johns' experimentation. It merges diverse, yet equally recognizable symbols – Leonardo DaVinci's iconic portrait of Mona Lisa and the commonplace numeral seven – in a cryptic pairing. Gestural scribbling conflates the picture's planes and any meaning is oblique.

In another nod to art history, Johns introduced the crosshatch into his repertoire of symbols during the 1970s, taking the pattern from a quilt in the Edvard Munch self-portrait, *Between the Clock and the Bed, 1940-43*. While the Crosshatch series focuses exclusively on the geometry of the pattern, similar abstract, linear markings have been used in a number of different iterations. They appear in Johns' *Corpse and Mirror* series, and constitute the background for a number of other works.

Later works show Johns inventing new symbols, while continuing to revisit others. *The Seasons*, 1989 is a complex print based on a series of paintings of the same title. The piece includes repeated images of a ladder and rope, portions of other Johns paintings, a sliver of crosshatching, references to DaVinci and, most uniquely, a portrayal of Johns himself in the form of an outlined shadow. A 2004 print, *Bushbaby*, also explores a multitude of "Johnsian" symbols, including a totem-like figure, pieces of lumber and string, another picture within a picture and a harlequin pattern. Both works are the artistic equivalent of rubik's cubes, puzzles that Johns challenges viewers to decipher using both their knowledge of art history and, more importantly, their knowledge of Johns himself. It is only through understanding the story behind each symbol and the evolution of each motif that the true significance of Johns' art is revealed.
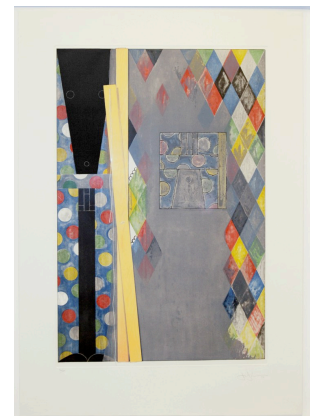
Hi resolution jpeg's available upon request
L: Jasper Johns, *Target with Plaster Casts*, 1980, Etching and aquatint, 29 3/4 x 22 1/4 inches, Edition of 88
R: Jasper Johns, *Bushbaby*, 2004, Etching, 43 x 30 inches, Edition of 55