

*LITHOGRAPHS*

*GEMINI G.E.L.*

JOSEF ALBERS

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

FRANK STELLA

CLAES OLDENBURG

JASPER JOHNS

OCTOBER 13 — NOVEMBER 10, 1968

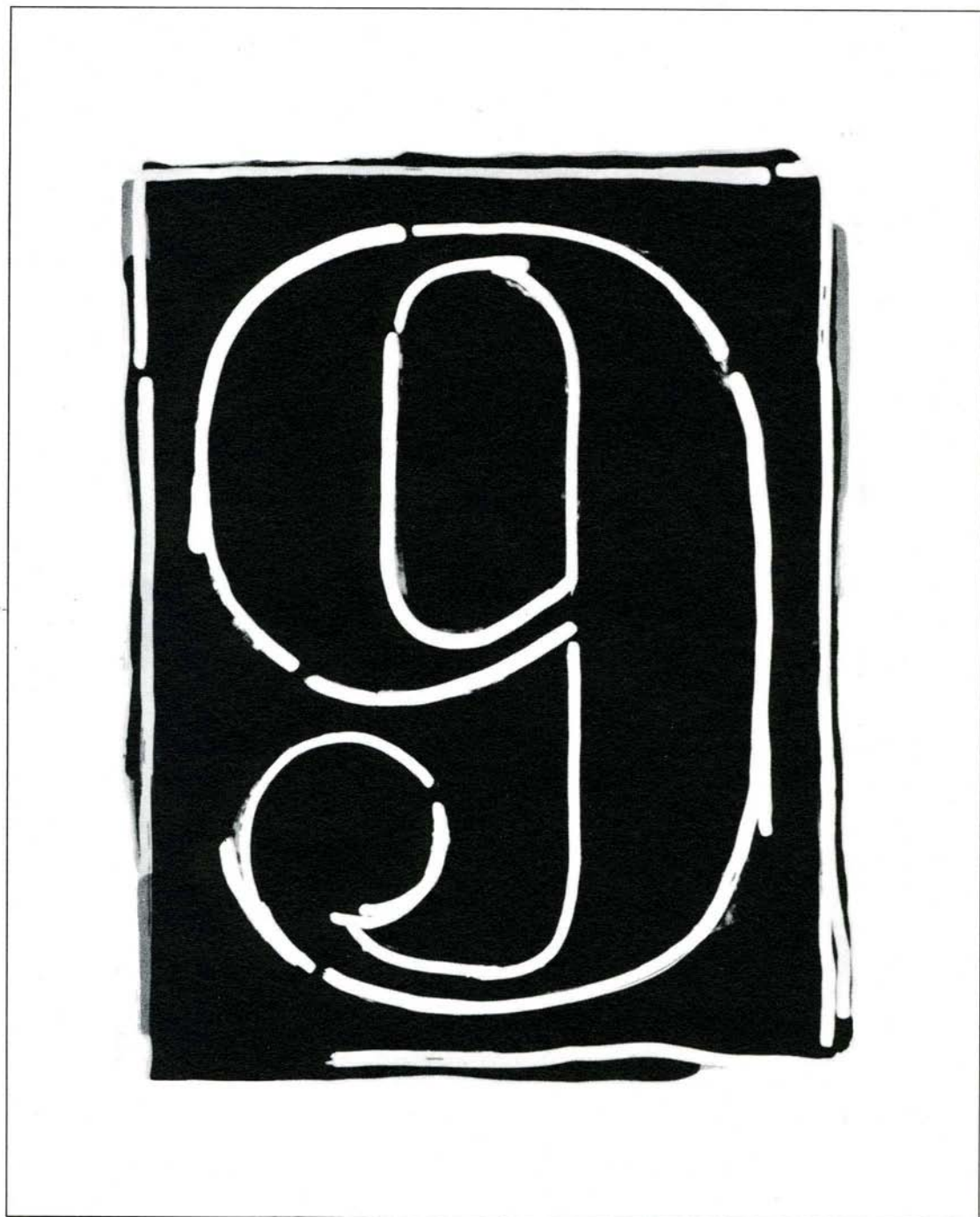
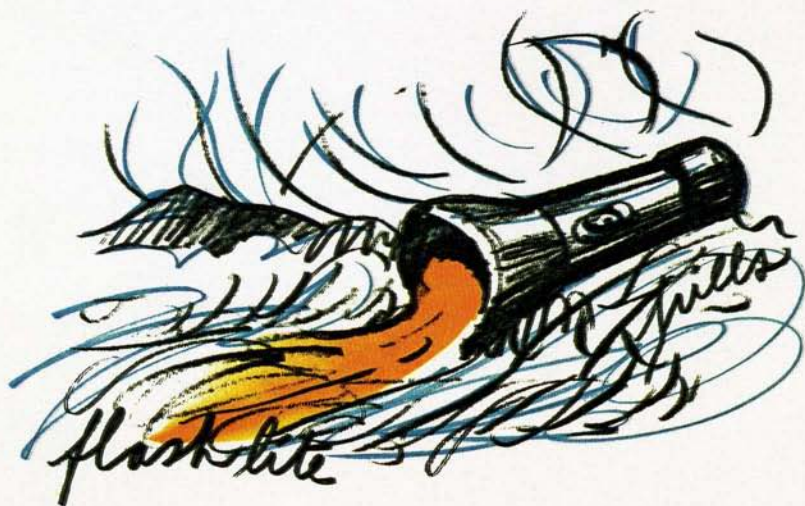


FIGURE 9 — JASPER JOHNS





The intense and immense interest in the so-called fine arts generated among the general public particularly within the last two decades has rendered the artist more vulnerable than ever to the wiles and subtleties of the writer on art. The media of comment and interpretation of art (or its corruption and exploitation according to some) do seem to have proliferated in geometrical progression when compared to the arithmetical increase of original artistic statement. Little of this writing can stand on its own poetic merits; to be sure, much of it is popularizing, parasitical prose, and there seems to be little enough reason for adding to its bulk here.

But the phenomenon itself is worth marking or even exploring briefly in order to distinguish it from an important tradition, now flourishing with a new vigor, in which works of art are being reproduced. We are of course referring to that broad surge of activity in the area usually called the "graphic arts." This term may include a host of approaches and techniques ranging from etching and engraving (whether on wood, linoleum or metal plates) to silk screen prints — and sometimes it overlaps the areas of photography and typography. Here we shall be concerned with some of the more recent outstanding creative efforts and technical advances in the field of lithography, and more especially with the activity and publications of Gemini, G.E.L., which within the space of a few years has come to be widely acknowledged as among the very finest lithographic presses anywhere in the world.

The different approaches of current writers to art may indeed suggest various points of view from which to regard Gemini. There are the reviewers and critics, whose writing about art ranges from the most vapid and superfluous journalism to essays containing sometimes helpful interpretation, stimulating insights and invaluable documentation. The latter ideal suggests an appropriate mode for writing about, say, the publication of a particularly important series of prints. It is with such an intent that I have, for example, written about Gemini's completion of the "Booster and Seven Studies" by Robert Rauschenberg, in ART INTERNATIONAL last year. Then there are the masters of *belles lettres*, or more generally, the cultural historians for whom the phenomenon of Gemini, G.E.L. in Los Angeles — rather than the significance of any particular series of prints — is of primary interest. Thus we might consider some of the commercial or even sociological implications of Gemini's philosophy and practice, among which are these stated goals: "To have a standard of excellence that permits only graphics of the highest quality to be printed," while publishing these quality graphics in size ranges and edition numbers that permit a retail price low enough to encourage many individuals (particularly young people, and those who could not otherwise afford to own original paintings) to purchase contemporary works of art.

In the somewhat more restricted scope of the art historian the existence of Gemini — since its founding in 1965 as "Gemini, Ltd." by Ken and Kay Tyler — also asserts its importance. It was just at this time that the Los Angeles "art world" was enduring several crises. The Los Angeles County Museum had suffered a serious setback in the eyes of many local artists and patrons by having lost its initial director, Dr. Richard F. Brown — and by becoming thereby embroiled in rife and bitter disputes which involved the museum's functions far too much with petty and personal political considerations. The respected publication ARTFORUM at about the same time decided to move its offices to New York; and several of the leading galleries were forced, or chose to go out of business. One could not help viewing the artistic future of Los Angeles — and thus, to a certain justifiable extent that of the Far West in general — somewhat darkly. Among institutions, the universities, like the museums, had largely failed to provide any kind of healthy cultural focus. But in the midst of this rather bleak situation Gemini swiftly established itself as a signal, positive force, and the authority of an institution (in a most healthy sense) passed to it and was acknowledged with optimism. Nevertheless, it would be quite wrong to suppose that the influence of Gemini was only apparent

or important in a local sense. On the contrary, perhaps part of the reason Gemini was able to succeed in these ways, almost without trying, may be seen in the adamant lack of a parochial attitude. Of course West Coast artists stood most to gain from Gemini's express program of sponsoring younger painters and others, drawn to graphic media for the purpose of exploring and experimenting with new methods and materials, new forms and surfaces, and larger scales for both two- and three-dimensional graphics. Another effect of the Gemini program was felt when top flight contemporary artists were invited to work — whether at the Gemini press, in studios arranged for them, or in industrial shops and laboratories toward "research and development in new areas of printing, combinations of print media, improved types of equipment and the adaptation and redevelopment of industries' new materials and processes to the craft of hand printing."

From this it is easily seen how a strictly historical account of the printing industry, or how a chronicle of technological innovations would have to take serious notice of Gemini, G.E.L. For the impact of this activity was not, by any means, provincial in scope. Indeed, the art historian concerned with broader movements and trends in the fine arts of recent years would certainly note a resurgence of creative interest in the graphic arts. And in the few years of its operation, Gemini would fit squarely into this picture — in some ways as an effect, as a fulfillment for which there was a crying need, but in other perhaps more important ways also as a cause. Many artists, and among them some of the best known and most highly respected men, would quite probably not have chosen to devote their serious attention to graphic production had there not been a Gemini with its eagerness to confront challenge and, together with the artist's own unique requirements, to probe new and (if necessary) unorthodox solutions for specific esthetic statements.

Above all, it is important to emphasize that this approach has *worked*. It has consistently proven its success on many levels. Not only have artists been delighted (sometimes amazed!) when Ken Tyler and his printers have come up with solutions for especially taxing problems, they have also frequently gained a deepening respect for the craft of printing which has had a feedback effect on the rest of their art.

Now, of course, the reputation of Gemini among practicing artists is more than secure — it is, for some anyway, almost mystical. For example, Frank Stella worked on the "Star of Persia" and the "V" series for a period of months during 1967 and 1968. The two "Star of Persia" prints use metallic colors on graph paper with critical precision in registration of one color over another, with the addition of metal flakes in the ink for pigmentation. And the "V" series are unique prints using also metallic colors, with an epoxy overprinting which gives to the surface a very special texture and high gloss. Stella was thus able to re-state and to extend his serial ideas from painting into the medium of graphics — precisely because he could obtain colors in the litho process, which he developed together with the printers at Gemini, that were impossible to obtain in his paintings on canvas.

In their first major project, the "White Line Squares" series by Josef Albers, begun in 1966, some significant steps were already taken toward refining the art of printing. The prints required eleven months to be produced, backed by several years of planning and discussions between Tyler and Albers. The problem was to find some way of printing Albers' idea of a flat field square (considerably difficult to achieve with consistency and uniformity) with a white line inside. The results showed a degree of critical registration and accurate flat color that were previously unknown to the field of lithography; thus Tyler has printed all of Albers' lithographs published in America.

The "Booster" project with Robert Rauschenberg presented an assortment of technical, artistic and sometimes purely practical problems, most of which have been mentioned in the article referred to earlier. At this time it might be worth recalling that the super-print, as a culmination of the seven studies, is (with one possible exception) the largest lithograph ever published by a fine arts press. Rauschenberg is currently at work on another project, in fact, which pushes Gemini's capacity to its limits — an exceptionally



large litho, measuring forty by eighty-four inches, the dimensions of the largest hand litho press. But even the slightly smaller "Booster" project required special research in order to obtain a lithographic paper large enough and fine enough for the print.

Ken Tyler has also brought Gemini to the attention of the printing industry. A recent article in the trade publication *WESTERN PRINTER AND LITHOGRAPHER* (April 1968) cites his design and development in 1965 of a hydraulic motor driven flat bed printing press. He designed and built a second such press in 1967, and it "represents some of the most unique innovations of any press developed for hand printing in the world." But it doesn't stop there. About one-fourth of Gemini's time is devoted to print and material research, experimentation and testing. Almost every phase of printing is touched by these investigations: from improved ball grained aluminum plates and the chemicals for these plates to refining light-sensitive coatings and transfer paper techniques, from papers that will print litho and screen combinations, or that will emboss with litho, to ink research in producing fluorescent, metallic, matte finish, epoxy and litho-screen inks.

Some of these brilliant newly developed "Day-Glo" colors were used for the first time by Robert Rauschenberg in a series published earlier this year based on the theme of Bonnie and Clyde. This was also the first time Rauschenberg had so concentrated upon a single recurrent subject in his art and had used it in a graphic project. There were some extraordinary circumstances surrounding the work on these prints — the artist, in order to preserve the spontaneity of the drawing, worked day and night for six days, with the Gemini staff right beside him.

In addition to single prints, Gemini, G.E.L. has published two fine litho books. The first of these was *ABOUT WOMEN*, with poems by Robert Creeley, and a sumptuous series of prints by John Altoon. One of the most recent projects comprises the second book in Gemini's catalog, and the first major effort in the litho medium by Claes Oldenburg. The de luxe edition will include both the prints and the text by the artist — a relatively rare combination of both imagery and writing for publications of this sort. As in earlier projects, some entirely new problems were posed by the artistic conceptions, such as special kinds of embossing and ball point pen transfers, together with an unusually wide spectrum of other litho and printing techniques. Even further in the direction of three-dimensional prints will be a future edition of Oldenburg's sculptural version of the Chrysler Airflow, to be released later this year.

The above mentioned artists represent just a few of those who have been drawn to Gemini to work, although these series have established high technical standards for the history of graphic production in America, as well as marking impressive statements in our contemporary artistic life. Among the other distinguished artists who have worked with the Gemini staff are Man Ray, Allan D'Arcangelo, Ed Ruscha, Joe Goode, David Hockney, Kosso Eloul, William Crutchfield and many more.

There remains to be mentioned in conclusion the superb series of prints currently being prepared for publication by the foremost lithographer of our time, Jasper Johns. The recurrent imagery of numerals in John's art finds lithographic expression in a group of prints called "Figures," which also marks the largest scale on which the artist has worked with this theme. They might be taken as a sort of compendium of litho techniques, and as a testament of the resourcefulness of Gemini, employing a tremendous range of print qualities from bold crayon to subtle wash. As a stunning counterpart to the imagery of numerals there is also "Gray Alphabets," the largest single print Johns has attempted. It uses four colors in top overlay printing of metallic flake pigment, and generally brings to hand made lithographs a certain authority never before articulated with such grandeur.

Since 1966 the press was incorporated as Gemini, G.E.L. (Graphic Editions Limited) by Ken Tyler, Sidney Felsen and Stanley Grinstein. In those few years it has dramatically risen to become the brightest sign — with high promise, and already responsible for the most impressively successful achievements within the world of the graphic arts.

Robert Rauschenberg and printer, Charles Ritt, during the printing of Reels (B + C).



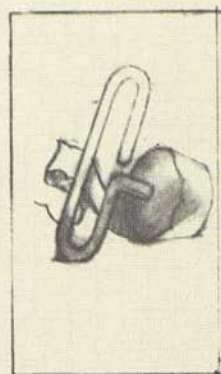


New Pasadena Museum

Auditorium

Exhibitions

Books  
Restaurants



= litho crayon





## JOSEF ALBERS

## WHITE LINE SQUARES SERIES II

1	GRAY BLACK	— IX	21 x 21"	JA66	1159
2	YELLOW OCHRE	— X	21 x 21"	JA66	1160
3	MAGENTA	— XI	21 x 21"	JA66	1161
4	RED GOLD	— XII	21 x 21"	JA66	1162
5	BLUE	— XIII	21 x 21"	JA66	1163
6	PEARL GRAY	— XIV	21 x 21"	JA66	1164
7	RED	— XV	21 x 21"	JA66	1165
8	BROWN TAN	— XVI	21 x 21"	JA66	1166

## ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

## BOOSTER AND 7 STUDIES

1	STUDY #1	18 x 14"	RR67	101
2	STUDY #2	41 x 30"	RR67	102
3	STUDY #3	23 x 31"	RR67	103
4	STUDY #4	24 x 34"	RR67	104
5	STUDY #5	25 x 33"	RR67	105
6	BOOSTER	72 x 35½"	RR67	106
7	STUDY #6	47 x 35"	RR67	107
8	STUDY #7	33 x 48"	RR67	108

## ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

## REELS (B + C)

1	STORYLINE I	21½ x 17"	RR68	171
2	STORYLINE III	21½ x 17"	RR68	172
3	STORYLINE II	22 x 18"	RR68	173
4	LOVE ZONE	27 x 23"	RR68	174
5	FLOWER RE-RUN	23½ x 18½"	RR68	175
6	STILL	30 x 22"	RR68	176

## FRANK STELLA

## V - SERIES

1	IFAFA I	16¼ x 22¾"	FS67	151
2	ITATA	16¼ x 22¾"	FS67	152
3	IFAFA II	16¼ x 22¾"	FS67	153
4	BLACK ADDER	16¼ x 28¾"	FS67	154
5	QUATHLAMBA I	16¼ x 28¾"	FS67	155
6	QUATHLAMBA II	16¼ x 28¾"	FS67	156
7	EMPRESS OF INDIA I	16¼ x 35¾"	FS67	157
8	EMPRESS OF INDIA II	16¼ x 35¾"	FS67	158

## FRANK STELLA

STAR OF PERSIA I	26 x 31"	FS67	110
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## CLAES OLDENBURG

## NOTES

1	UNTITLED	15¾ x 22½"	CO68	177
2	UNTITLED	15¾ x 22½"	CO68	178
3	UNTITLED	15¾ x 22½"	CO68	179
4	UNTITLED	15¾ x 22½"	CO68	180
5	UNTITLED	15¾ x 22½"	CO68	181
6	UNTITLED	15¾ x 22½"	CO68	182
7	UNTITLED	15¾ x 22½"	CO68	183
8	UNTITLED	15¾ x 22½"	CO68	184
9	UNTITLED	15¾ x 22½"	CO68	185
10	UNTITLED	15¾ x 22½"	CO68	186
11	UNTITLED	15¾ x 22½"	CO68	187
12	UNTITLED	15¾ x 22½"	CO68	188

## JASPER JOHNS

## NUMERAL SERIES (10)

1	FIGURE 0	37 x 30"	JJ68	193
2	FIGURE 1	37 x 30"	JJ68	192
3	FIGURE 2	37 x 30"	JJ68	198
4	FIGURE 3	37 x 30"	JJ68	194
5	FIGURE 4	37 x 30"	JJ68	190
6	FIGURE 5	37 x 30"	JJ68	195
7	FIGURE 6	37 x 30"	JJ68	191
8	FIGURE 7	37 x 30"	JJ68	196
9	FIGURE 8	37 x 30"	JJ68	189
10	FIGURE 9	37 x 30"	JJ68	197

