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James Rosenquist

Welcome to Water Planet and House of Fire

The *Welcome to the Water Planet and House of Fire* is a group of ten paper-pulp works with lithographic collage elements that were created during a year and a half period of collaboration between September 1988 and December 1989. James Rosenquist continued what David Hockney had started with his *Paper Pools*: a quest for scale and development of new techniques for coloring paper. Whereas Hockney was the innovator of coloring paper using cookie-cutter-type molds with turkey basters, ladles, and spoons, Rosenquist developed an elaborate system using plastic stencils and pattern pistols (which are similar to airbrushes but hold pulp instead of ink). Rosenquist's push for larger handmade paper and a change in coloring methods resulted in the creation of a colored paper surface comparable to the airbrush precision of his painting.

The pattern pistol/template working method evolved from Rosenquist's frustration with the metal cookie-cutter molds Hockney had used. Rosenquist found that these molds posed problems because they did not always lie flat and they tended to create rounded corners. He also found that when the paper pulp was applied by hand, it was thick and uneven; and when dried and pressed the pulp's colors changed. The templates afforded Rosenquist a more precise outline and the pattern pistol allowed a thinner application of paper pulp which made more delicate color gradations possible. Rosenquist was then able to simulate the effects of print and watercolor washes and to gradually mix and build up colors. It would provide the contrast for the cut-out, hard-edged lithographic sections that would be collaged onto this surface. With the exception of *House of Fire* (which is after a 1978 painting), the *Welcome to the Water Planet* images refer to an ongoing series about the Water Planet, Earth. Each image embodies Rosenquist's ecological ideas about man's fate and nature's in an age determined by advertising, technology, and science. In each there is a contrast between the Earth's cosmic placement in a vast universe and the debris of consumer culture.

During the project, Rosenquist spent over 100 days at the workshop. He sprayed each of the paper pulp sheets for each edition and during the process used 27,000 gallons of paper pulp; drew seventy stencils to create 720 sheets of handmade colored papers, one relief plate, and forty-four separate lithographic sections which utilized 139 colors.