

Asger Jorn : 8 litografier = (8 lithographs)

[Starr Figura]

Author

Jorn, Asger, 1914-1973

Date

1998

Publisher

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index of participating artists.

Asger Jorn

8 Litografier (8 Lithographs)

(1945, published 1949)

Three from a portfolio of eight lithographs

Each sheet 19½ x 14" (49.5 x 35.6 cm)

Publisher: ARS-Verlag, Stockholm

Printer: Jens Christian Sørensen, Copenhagen

Edition: 160

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Gift of the artist, 1947

The Danish artist Asger Jorn (1914–1973) is best known as one of the founding members of the European movement known as COBRA, a contemporary but independent counterpart of Abstract Expressionism in the United States. The term COBRA is an acronym derived from its members' three cities: *CO*penhagen, *BR*ussels, and *Am*sterdam. Among the other personalities in the COBRA group, which officially lasted from 1948 to 1951, were Christian Dotremont and Pierre Alechinsky (Belgium), and Karel Appel and Corneille (Cornelis van Beverloo) (The Netherlands). Like the Abstract Expressionists, the COBRA artists utilized some of the methods and ideas of Surrealism, especially its emphasis on the unconscious as a means of uncovering universal truths. But at the same time, the COBRA artists rejected Surrealism's basis in theory and intellectualism in favor of greater experimentation and spontaneity. In striving towards a kind of primitivism, the COBRA artists also looked to Nordic folk

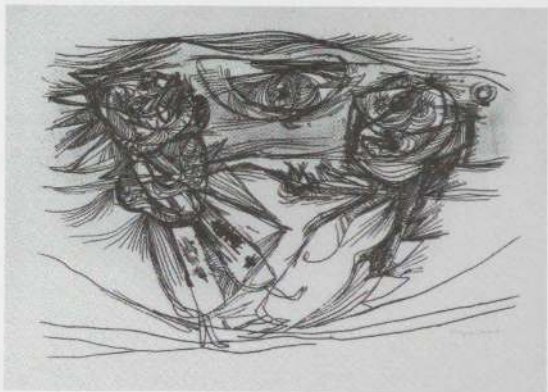


Plate 2

art and mythology for inspiration. Jorn was the originator of the COBRA style, in which turbulent swarms of figurative and abstract forms suggesting ghosts and mythical figures are closely woven together.

8 Litografier was created just before the advent of COBRA, during a period in which Jorn was developing his personal iconography and experimenting with various ideas and techniques that he had encountered as a young artist in the 1930s. He had spent several months in Paris in 1936–37, studying under Fernand Léger and working for Le Corbusier at the 1937 *International Exhibition*. More influential than this formal training was his exposure to Surrealism, especially Joan Miró's biomorphic forms, André Masson's automatic style, and Paul Klee's linear patterning and magical subject matter. Jorn's own style synthesized these influences together with his interest in Scandinavian myths and his affinity with the angst-ridden work of James Ensor and Edvard Munch.

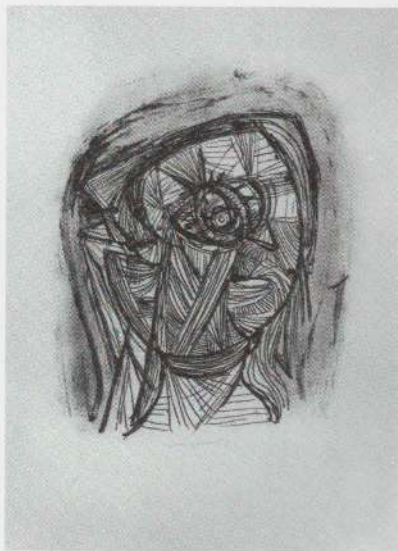


Plate 5

During the mid-1940s Jorn created several series of works based on personal themes, to which he assigned evocative, often made-up names. *8 Litografier* is specifically related to one of these themes, called *Didaska*, a term Jorn coined that combines "Dida" and "Aska." "Aska" may refer to the ash (ask), a sacred tree in Nordic mythology, while "Dida" was the nickname of a woman Jorn knew at the time. Jorn's *Didaska* paintings and drawings, created between 1944 and 1946, are populated with figures resembling birds or gnomes. Many are two-figure compositions, as in Plate 2. Typically, the two personages are either close together or

combined into a single pattern, and their heads are disproportionately large. Other *Didaska* images present a single bird-like figure, as in Plate 5. A third example of *Didaska* imagery, which is manifested in Plate 8, is a quasi-abstract, all-over composition, in which a dense web of flowing lines reveals a complex cluster of birds, trolls, and other mysterious beings. Many pairs of tiny circles represent the wide eyes of faces that peer out at the viewer.

Jorn was a prolific painter and printmaker who made over 2,200 paintings and more than 430 prints between 1932 and 1972. He was also a writer whose books and articles covered everything from philosophy and economics to archaeology and aesthetic theory. In addition to COBRA, Jorn was involved in several other



Plate 8

short-lived organizations and artist groups, and these activities often served as alternate outlets for his writing and printmaking. For example, during the war years in Copenhagen, he made some of his first etchings on the underground presses which he was also using to print the illegal Communist monthly, *Land og Folk* (Country and People). Jorn created many of his prints as illustrations for books, and the periodical COBRA, published by the COBRA artists, often featured both articles and original lithographs by Jorn.

Jorn recognized the impact that printed matter could exert through its dissemination, and he

had an instinct for the expressive potential that is particular to each print medium. In *8 Litografier* he was able to achieve fluid lines and elaborate patterning through lithography, the printmaking technique that is closest to drawing. The portfolio format also appealed to Jorn, as it enabled him to "warm up" to his technique and allowed his forms to evolve through more than one image, thus contributing to the spontaneity and unconscious rhythm that he desired.

Starr Figura
Assistant Curator

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