

Creator and Character: Artists Interpret James Joyce



Richard Hamilton
In Horne's House, 1981-82
Etching and aquatint, 62/120
20 3/4 x 17 inches
Racine Art Museum, Gift of Karen Johnson Boyd
Photo: Jon Bolton

Active early in the twentieth century, Irish novelist and poet **James Joyce** has been a highly influential and compelling figure for other creative minds. This exhibition, with works that were donated to RAM by Karen Johnson Boyd, features prints that focus on Joyce as subject. Mrs. Boyd originally acquired these works with the intent of organizing an exhibition of this material. RAM is pleased to present her original exhibition at the museum.

Perhaps best known for *Ulysses* (1922), a work based on Homer's ancient Greek epic poem, the *Odyssey*, Joyce wrote novels, short stories, and poetry. He has been identified as a prominent individual in the avant-garde literary and artistic circles of the early twentieth century. Joyce's manipulations of language and narrative were matched by a demanding and resolute personality as well as a relatively colorful personal life. He and his works are celebrated in cities around the world on "Bloomsday," that is, June 16 (the day chronicled in *Ulysses*).

Recent connections with contemporary literary efforts—such as an exhibition in Philadelphia that combines priceless materials by **Maurice Sendak** and **James Joyce** with items talk show host **Stephen Colbert** used to write a children's book—reinforce Joyce's legacy today.

Creator and Character includes portraits of Joyce as well as reflections on the content and the characters in his works. The artists whose pieces are gathered here, including two major figures of modern art, were drawn to Joyce for various reasons. As one might expect, the creators' interpretations match their own interests, working styles, and project needs. Those featured include **Peter Blake**, **Gisele Freund**, **Richard Hamilton**, **David Levine**, **Robert Motherwell**, and **Paul Wunderlich**.

Many of the artists in this exhibition have engaged with Joyce's literature over a startlingly long period, blending their artistic development with an evolving reading of his works over the course of their lives. **Richard Hamilton** first came to the idea of illustrating Joyce's *Ulysses* during the late 1940s. He completed the series 40 years later, and put it on exhibition 20 years after that. Cartoonist **David Levine** drew James Joyce repeatedly across four decades. **Robert Motherwell** referenced Joyce's works as themes and titles for his own compositions throughout his career and spent five years planning and printing the volume of *Ulysses* seen here. **Gisele Freund** spent only two days photographing Joyce in the 1930s, but returned to the events of those days repeatedly in books and articles she published during the rest of her life. It is a testament to the complexity and innovation of Joyce's writing that he continues to be such a rich source of inspiration for artists of the past century and today. Their interpretation of his work forms part of the author's ongoing legacy.

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Although British pop artist **Peter Blake** is best known for his design for the jacket of the **Beatles'** record, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, his longest-running project is a series of illustrations for a radio play by author **Dylan Thomas**. Blake has chosen other authors and their books as subjects for his compositions also, exploring them through print-making, collage, painting, and sculpture.



Peter Blake

James Joyce, from the *James Joyce in Paris* portfolio, 1983-84
Etching and aquatint
8 7/8 x 6 3/4 inches
Racine Art Museum, Gift of Karen Johnson Boyd
Photo: Jon Bolton

Gisele Freund was an important twentieth-century photographer, well known for her images of artists, writers, and patrons, as well as other topics she covered for national magazines. It was an assignment for *Life* magazine that gave Freund the chance to photograph Joyce, whom she greatly admired. Although he did not often consent to having his picture taken, when she contacted him in 1938 he was eager for images and press coverage to promote his newly-completed book, *Finnegans Wake*. **Eugene Jolas** had been crucial to the completion of the book, offering Joyce support at a time when even many of the author's friends were critical of this latest composition. Joyce had a very specific sense of how he wanted to appear in the photographs, and asked to be shown discussing the final draft of the book with Jolas.

Esteemed as one of the creators of the pop art movement, **Richard Hamilton** developed an early fascination with Joyce's book *Ulysses* that lasted him the rest of his life. As a young man Hamilton began preliminary sketches to illustrate the novel, but set them aside a few years later. After a hiatus he returned to the project, completing some of the original sketches as planned while completely re-designing others. Hamilton explored the linguistic and narrative complexity of *Ulysses* by approaching illustrations for each of the book's eighteen chapters in a different style.

David Levine served as illustrator for the *New York Review of Books* for 40 years, producing hundreds of caricatures of authors, celebrities, and politicians. He drew James Joyce many times, depicting him at all stages of life, and emphasizing different aspects of his personality each time in keeping with themes of the accompanying article.

Prominent twentieth-century abstract painter and printmaker **Robert Motherwell**—known for dramatic brushstrokes and energetic imagery—

held Joyce as one of his favorite authors. He based titles of his artwork on Joyce's writing and devoted years to producing the volume of *Ulysses* on display in this exhibition.*

Paul Wunderlich created illustrations for *Giacomo Joyce*, one of Joyce's lesser-known works, published posthumously. Penned when Joyce was a young man, the sixteen-page *Giacomo Joyce* is the account of a teacher's troubled and illicit longing for his wealthy Jewish female student. Wunderlich, who served briefly on the German side during World War II as a teenager, includes imagery that references the Holocaust, while also highlighting the woman's complex status as both powerful and vulnerable. The artist, who is known for surrealist and erotic imagery, also includes images of himself in several of the prints, sometimes in animated conversation with Joyce and sometimes alongside the female subject of Joyce's story. This technique creates the sense of a dialogue among author, artist, subject, and audience over the text's meanings.

***About the version of *Ulysses* with Robert Motherwell's prints**

This hand bound letterpress printed book was published in 1988 by Arion Press, based in San Francisco, California. The edition of 150 copies has 838 numbered pages and 40 unnumbered pages that contain Motherwell's prints. It is printed on French handmade paper with handset type. The book and its slipcase are covered with blue cloth and the book has white pigskin trim. It was accompanied by an additional suite of 22 Motherwell etchings from his illustrations for the book. These were issued in an edition of 40. Karen Johnson Boyd's gift to RAM includes this suite of etchings.



James Joyce
Ulysses with prints by Robert Motherwell, 1988
Handbound letterpress book
13 1/8 x 10 1/16 x 5 1/16 inches
Racine Art Museum, Gift of Karen Johnson Boyd
Photo: Jon Bolton