

# Color Woodcuts in the Arts and Crafts Era

Factories were mass producing goods by the 1800s, which meant that fewer objects were made by hand. One goal of the Arts and Crafts movement was to revive the handcraft tradition. The movement originated in Britain and later spread in Europe and the United States around 1890, championing the aesthetics and superiority of craft techniques.

Against this backdrop, artists began making color woodcuts like those in these two galleries, filling them with qualities that Arts and Crafts proponents held dear. Such prints involve hand carving. They respect the nature of their materials: wood, paper, and ink. They reveal the direct hand of their maker, perhaps through uneven inking or coarsely cut lines. You'll also notice flat colors, simplified shapes, and motifs from nature. These were characteristics of Japanese prints and printmaking, which had a big impact on many artists in this exhibition.

Women artists flourished during the Arts and Crafts era, and a great number of prints in this show—about half—were created by women. U.S. artists appear in this gallery; international artists are next door.

Unless otherwise noted, the prints in this exhibition are gifts to Mia from Marla J. Kinney.

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Inspired by Arts and Crafts ideals, artists in the United States and Europe embraced the color woodcut in the early 1900s. A major influence was the British Arts and Crafts champion and designer William Morris (1834–1896), who believed that the arrival of mass production in the 1800s had sapped human labor of its dignity. He urged a return to an earlier time, when people used traditional craft techniques to make things by hand.

Adapting Japanese printmaking methods, artists began to cut, ink, and print their own color woodcuts. Yet the international artists in this gallery (prints by U.S. artists are next door) approached Arts and Crafts–inspired printmaking differently. British artists were interested in perfecting creative processes. Austrian artists adopted the color woodcut as a fresh, less-refined alternative to the painting styles taught in traditional art schools. And German artists liked subjects that affirmed their cultural identity—which may explain the several German nature scenes in this show.

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