



John Tallen

John Talleur

**RECENT WORK
MUSEUM OF ART
THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS
NOVEMBER 4 — DECEMBER 1, 1966**

This exhibition is the second in a series of one-man shows of work by American artists living within the eighteen-state region of the Midwest College Art Conference. As stated in the introduction to last year's catalogue, the aims of this series are twofold: first, to give the public in this area an opportunity to see works of contemporary art; second, to provide recognition to artists of demonstrated ability.

This year we are especially pleased to present the work of John Talleur, a member of the University of Kansas Drawing and Painting faculty.

Mr. Talleur's work has been seen at the University, incorporated into other exhibitions, and a glance at his exhibition record will reveal that his achievements have not lacked recognition elsewhere. It seems only fitting, then, that the prophet, for once, be honored in his own land.

MARILYN STOKSTAD

"Blessed is he that always hath the hour of death before his eyes. . . ."

THOMAS A KEMPIS



Death and birth and an interlude between darkened with violence; these are the themes of John Talleur's art. Literary themes, to be sure, and as such, highly unfashionable in today's "camp" society where many an artist would rather lose

his soul than his cool. Talleur's cool has long since evaporated. "I am distinctly a throwback to the Victorian era," he admits, "because if I am anything I am a Moralist—quite a different thing from being Moral to which I make no claim at all."

A moralist he is, but not in any Puritanical sense. There is no prudery in Talleur's work. Rather one finds a full-blown prophetic violence. Jeremiad alternates with the black despair of Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity."

Birth, Violence, Death. Says Talleur:

"These three (my Absolutes) are the most important things I know. They concern me constantly. That is why I make pictures about them. . . . [E]very picture I make is an indication of very serious concern, largely with these . . . things—which pretty much take in everything I care about. Occasionally I do a portrait for fun, or trees because I want to work out some formal problem and not get involved with anything important."

All of which would seem to indicate that Talleur regards formal problems as unimportant. A look at his work, however, proves this inference mistaken. The recent "Torso" series of color woodcuts, for example, are barely (if at all) recognizable as variations on the human form. Whether the viewer is even aware of the derivation is, to Talleur, relatively unimportant. "The Initial Idea," he says, "dictates the form." But once the basic visual forms are established the picture itself takes over and begins to direct its own evolution. The final

result may be totally different from the initial impulse. An extreme example of the kind of metamorphosis an idea undergoes in its translation into visual form is *The Blessing* (cat. 4) which began in 1964 as a bishop raising his hand in benediction. After an unsuccessful struggle to resolve the composition, Talleur put the block away and left it for more than a year. When he returned to it again the existing forms suggested a fresh approach. The original block was inverted, a second block added, and a new and totally non-objective image began to evolve. Now only the title remains as a reminder of the print's ecclesiastical origin.

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John Talleur is, of course, a printmaker. Intaglio prints (etchings, engravings, etc.) and woodcuts make up the bulk of his production. Painting, too, plays a role, but a less important one. As for craftsmanship:

"All artists are craftsmen; all printmakers are craftsmen. Painting craft is too easy—this one of its prime dangers; the printing craft is painful—one of its unpleasant features. Prints, even little "spontaneous" ones take lots of time to make, and much care to see that they are exactly what is wanted. Patience is the chief virtue of a printmaker; a rare virtue in most students today who seem to be interested in quick results, easily achieved."

In the beginning Talleur himself was perhaps a little impatient. Of his first serious prints, done as a student at the Chicago Art Institute, many are drypoints scratched with a steel needle directly into the copper plate. *Farewell, the War* (cat. 8, checklist 13) is one of these. Here already are Talleur's "Absolutes": the wolves (Violence), the baby (Birth) holding a knife poised at his mother's breast (Death). Here also are the melodrama and the bombast.

But patience can be learned. And Mauricio Lasansky, the master printmaker at the University of Iowa where Talleur entered graduate school in 1949, was a demanding teacher. His succinct appraisals of student work could be devastating. ("Ees not funny. Ees not poetry. Ees crap!") By the time Talleur left Iowa he had mastered many aspects of the craft. So much so, in fact, that he was praised in a national magazine as "a technical virtuoso." The intaglio print that evoked this encomium was *The Dead* (plate 1, cat. 2). Here, indeed, one finds a fascinating display of technical skill: a variety of soft-ground textures, aquatint, engraving, straight line-etching, embossed white areas bitten deeply into the plate which is, itself, an irregular shape—no longer the conventional rectangle. Another technical tour de force was *The Family* (checklist 33), a huge intaglio measuring four by five feet—up to that time the largest single plate ever printed at Iowa.

Technique in itself, however, can become a trap for the unwary printmaker who, seduced by the beauties of the medium, winds up a craftsman with an incredible vocabulary and nothing to say. Talleur is well aware of this danger:

"This is a deadly thing, when you look at something and say 'I wonder how the hell he did that.' That's bad. Seeing this way is a prime hazard of the profession of artist-teacher, and it makes seeing art very difficult."

Following graduation from Iowa and an additional year there as a teaching assistant, Talleur went to Paris on a Fulbright grant. Lacking the extensive equipment necessary for making intaglio prints which he had concentrated on at Iowa, he turned to another print medium. With only a knife, a plank, inks and a means of spreading them, paper and a wooden spoon for printing, Talleur

produced his first woodcuts. Paper placemats from a nearby cafeteria were positioned face downward on the inked block and rubbed from the back with the wooden spoon. The results of this primitive printing process, bold, simple and direct if somewhat conventional, may be seen in the 1952 *Self Portrait* (checklist 34), Talleur's first serious woodcut.

This experience of finding his way alone in a new medium had a salutary effect on Talleur. It served as an antidote to his earlier tendencies toward technical elaboration at the expense of meaning.

It is also significant that Talleur's first woodcut was printed in color. This has always been an important element in Talleur's prints, both intaglio and woodcut. But because the latter are more easily printed, the introduction of color presents fewer technical problems. The inking, wiping and printing of a complex intaglio plate may take more than an hour for a single impression. And since a separate plate is ordinarily required for each color, one miscalculation in the course of printing a two- or three-color intaglio can result in the loss of several weeks' work. Woodcut printing, on the other hand, while not by any means simple, is somewhat speedier and much less uncertain.

Since his Paris experience Talleur has made the woodcut an important part of his production. In recent years, in fact, it has come to predominate and while important intaglios like *The Phoenix* (cat. 20, checklist 82) and *Benjie and Friend* (cat. 22, checklist 78) have been made, most of the major works have been color woodcuts such as *Spring* (cat. 3, checklist 65), *M.M. and J. le B.* (cat. 4, checklist 60) and the *Torso* series. Talleur has also produced a few small and, for him, relatively spontaneous woodcuts like *A Walk in the Garden* (cat.



COMMENCEMENT EXERCISE (CHECKLIST 100)



TWO SAINTS IN FOUR BLOCKS (CHECKLIST 55)

21, checklist 74) inspired by a newspaper photo of the late Pope John XXIII, and cut (appropriately) on the lid of a box of Cistercian cheese.

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John Talleur is also a Catholic, a fact of no little importance to the understanding of his work. He is not, however, an “official”—or even a “semi-official”—Catholic Artist. That is, his work is not of the sort that earns commissions for modernized devotional images in modernized churches. It bears no bishop’s *imprimatur*—much less a *nihil obstat!* In fact, although Talleur denies any satirical intent, one can hardly help noting that the Church hierarchy is depicted in a less than flattering manner in such prints as *The Consistory* (checklist 40) and *The Procession* (cat. 10, checklist 83).

Religious images do appear frequently in Talleur’s work, particularly scenes from or relating to the Passion: *Consummatum Est* (checklist 42), *I Stretched Forth My Hands* (cat. 17, checklist 44), *The Deposition* (checklist 30), *The Burial* (checklist 54), and the series of the *Veronica* (checklist 58, 64, 68). Here again, the emphasis is on death and suffering, the imagery reminiscent of certain fifteenth-century German woodcuts. Saints also appear in various combinations, but Talleur does not present them scrubbed and haloed as objects of piously sentimental devotion. *M.M. and J. le B.* (Mary Magdalen and John the Baptist, cat. 4, checklist 60) for example, are in Talleur’s version about as disreputable a pair of penitents as one can imagine. Nor is his motivation always of the sort likely to win ecclesiastical approval. The woodcut just mentioned was inspired at least in part by a desire to depict hair—John the Baptist with his animal skin robe and the Magdalen with her flow-

ing tresses being deemed appropriately hairy subjects. In short, Talleur explains:

“If an idea for a picture occurs to me (and it is always first and most important—the Idea) and the iconography happens to be Christian (or Jewish or Buddhist) then if it seems reasonable I use the iconography that helps explain the idea. No idea, no picture.”

In what sense, then, can Talleur be regarded as a “religious artist”? The best answer to this question has been given by Jacques Maritain, the Catholic philosopher, who (along with John Dewey) is one of the strongest intellectual influences on Talleur’s work. Christian art cannot be forced, according to Maritain. “A young man does not say to himself, ‘I am going in for Christian art,’ as he might say ‘I am going in for agriculture.’” It cannot be achieved through conscious intellectual effort.

“Do not *separate* your art from your faith. But leave *distinct* what is distinct. Do not try to blend by force what life unites so well. If you were to make your aesthetic an article of faith, you would spoil your faith. If you were to make your devotion a rule of artistic operation, or turn the desire to edify into a method of your art, you would spoil your art.”

(Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*)

A man’s art, in other words, will be religious or Christian or Catholic precisely to the extent and degree that he, himself, is any or all of these things.

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After all the talking is done the works themselves remain and are their own best interpreters. Somber, violent, sometimes garish, occasionally awkward, but sustained by an intensity that tolerates no decorous euphemisms, they become in the end eloquent through the force of an Idea that shapes its own expression.

BRET WALLER



CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

RECENT WORK

1. FLOATING TORSO (checklist 95)
color woodcut
35 x 47½ inches
black and red w/graphite
2. TWO TORSOS (checklist 96)
color woodcut
26¼ x 20 inches
3. FLOWER (checklist 98)
color woodcut
28 x 21½ inches
4. THE BLESSING (checklist 101)
color woodcut
25¾ x 23½ inches
5. DAMNED LOT OF FUN HERE'S TO 25
MORE LETTERS — POSSIBLY, YEARS
CERTAINLY (checklist 106)
color woodcut
18 x 26 inches
6. SITTING TORSO (checklist 99)
color woodcut
24 x 21 inches
7. TRIPTYCH (entrance arch)
8. TORSO
sculpture
length 29 inches
9. WHOLEINWON
sculpture
height 89 inches
10. LAVABO FOR DOUBTING TOMS
sculpture
height 48 inches
11. THE RAPE OF EUROPA
oil
47 x 50 inches
12. THIS IS THE WAY
oil
49½ x 69 inches
13. NIGHT FLIGHT
oil
50 x 57 inches
14. STORM LINE
oil
50 x 73½ inches
15. STUDY FOR TORSO
drawing
16½ x 13⅝ inches
16. HELLO TO HORAPOLLO
drawing
22 x 15½ inches
17. VICTIM (checklist 94)
color intaglio
17⅞ x 19¼ inches
18. WOUNDED (checklist 102)
color intaglio
17⅞ x 24 inches
19. VERTICAL TORSO (checklist 103)
intaglio
35½ x 23½ inches
20. LES PETITES DE GEORGES (checklist 104)
intaglio
18 x 24 inches
21. FLYING BISHOP (checklist 105)
color woodcut
37 x 54 inches
22. COMMENCEMENT EXERCISE
(checklist 100)
color woodcut
42 x 23½ inches

RETROSPECTIVE (1950-1965)

1. FLIGHT I, II, III (checklist 71)
color woodcut
triptych, each panel 48 x 36 inches
2. THE DEAD (checklist 31)
color intaglio
17½ x 23½ inches
3. SPRING (checklist 65)
color woodcut
70¼ x 18¾ inches
4. M.M. et J. le B. (checklist 60)
color woodcut
61 x 26 inches
5. SALUTE TO MARTHA (checklist 45)
color woodcut
48 x 21½ inches
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Cerf
6. TWO SAINTS IN FOUR BLOCKS
(checklist 55)
color woodcut
50 x 30 inches
7. AMBROSE AND AUGUSTINE (checklist 56)
color intaglio
16¾ x 16½ inches
8. FAREWELL, THE WAR (checklist 13)
drypoint
10 x 7⅞ inches
9. TORSO (checklist 94)
color intaglio
17⅞ x 19¼ inches
10. THE PROCESSION (checklist 83)
woodcut
26½ x 53 inches
11. A HAND FOR HOWARD (checklist 57)
color woodcut
48 x 32 inches
12. SELF PORTRAIT IN SUNGLASSES
(checklist 76)
color woodcut
11¾ x 11⅞ inches
13. SELF PORTRAIT (checklist 67)
color intaglio
17⅞ x 23⅛ inches
14. CRAW DADDY (checklist 48)
color intaglio
23¾ x 17½ inches
15. CONSUMMATUM EST (checklist 42)
color intaglio
12⅞ x 23¾ inches
16. THE CONSISTORY (checklist 40)
color intaglio
10 x 26½ inches
17. I STRETCHED FORTH MY HANDS
(checklist 44)
color intaglio
18⅞ x 23¾ inches
18. FAMILY DEATH (checklist 24)
intaglio
28¼ x 20⅞ inches
19. MOONSONG (checklist 87)
color woodcut
45½ x 26½ inches
20. THE PHOENIX (checklist 82)
color intaglio
35¾ x 23¼ inches
21. A WALK IN THE GARDEN (checklist 74)
woodcut
7¼ inches diameter

22. BENJIE AND FRIEND (checklist 78)
color intaglio
23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches
23. THE VERONICA II (checklist 64)
woodcut
26 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 21 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches
lent by Mr. Kelvin Hoover
24. SELF PORTRAIT (checklist 34)
color woodcut
13 x 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches
25. LARGE CRUCIFIXION (checklist 92)
color woodcut
47 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 36 inches
26. BLUE CIRCLE MACHINE (checklist 93)
color woodcut
48 x 36 inches
27. FINAL SCENE (checklist 77)
color woodcut
20 x 29 inches

CHECKLIST OF PRINTS BY JOHN TALLEUR

NOTE: Dimensions are given in inches, height before width. One may expect to find variations of up to one quarter inch between listed dimensions and those of individual prints due to paper expansion and contraction.

1938-39

1. LINCOLN LOG
linoleum cut
11½ x 8¾ inches
black on red paper

1946

2. BLESSED ARE THE MEEK
intaglio (tin can etching)
4 x 2⅞ inches
3. ANIMULE
etching
5 x 4 inches
4. ADAM AND EVE
etching
4 x 3 inches
5. CHINESE CIRCLE
etching
4 x 3 inches
6. FRANKIE AND JOHNNIE
etching
4 x 3 inches

7. SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY
intaglio
5⅞ x 8⅞ inches

8. THE THRICE BORN

drypoint
4 x 4¾ inches

9. CRUCIFIXION

intaglio
5 x 6⅞ inches

10. ADAM AND EVE

zinc etching and wood block
6⅞ x 4⅞ inches

11. SELF PORTRAIT I

intaglio
5 x 1 inches

1947

12. SEASONS THAT ARE PAST

drypoint
7 x 5 inches

13. FAREWELL, THE WAR

drypoint
10 x 7⅞ inches

1949-50

14. CHRIST AND THE FISHERMEN

intaglio
10 x 14 inches

15. SALOME
intaglio
9 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches

16. SELF PORTRAIT
intaglio
11 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 9 inches

1950

17. SPANISH INDIAN
intaglio
11 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 8 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches

18. SEEKING
intaglio
18 x 12 inches

19. PIGEONS IN THE GRASS
intaglio
8 x 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches

1951

20. THE BETRAYAL
intaglio
17 x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

21. PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN
intaglio
20 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 16 inches

22. METAMORPHOSIS
intaglio
7 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 24 inches

23. SIMEON'S PROPHECY
intaglio
7 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 24 inches

24. FAMILY DEATH
intaglio
28 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 20 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches

25. DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST
intaglio
18 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

26. ADAM AND EVE
intaglio
23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 29 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches

27. JOSEPH
color intaglio
12 x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

28. THE DEAD MAN
color intaglio
11 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 9 inches

29. ADAM AND EVE
intaglio
28 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

30. THE DEPOSITION
intaglio
14 x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

1951-52

31. THE DEAD
color intaglio
17 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

32. VISION ON PATMOS
color intaglio
19 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

33. THE FAMILY
intaglio
about 60 x 48 inches

1952

34. SELF PORTRAIT
color woodcut
13 x 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

35. RED COMPOSITION
color woodcut
13 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

36. AMSTERDAM WOMAN
color woodcut
22 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches

37. CLOWN
color woodcut
18 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches

1953

38. THE TEACHER
color woodcut
22 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

39. HOLY FAMILY
color woodcut
22 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches

40. THE CONSISTORY
color intaglio
19 x 26 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

1953-54

41. THE ENTRY
color intaglio
23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 18 inches

42. CONSUMMATUM EST
color intaglio
12 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

43. MONREALE CATHEDRAL
color intaglio
21 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 23 inches

1954

44. I STRETCHED FORTH MY HANDS
color intaglio
18 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

45. SALUTE TO MARTHA
color woodcut
48 x 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

46. HOMMAGE À BECKMANN
lithograph
16 x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

1955

47. THE FISH
color intaglio
23 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

48. CRAW DADDY
color intaglio
23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

49. CRAY DADDIES
color intaglio
21 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

1956

50. SWIMMING FISH
color woodcut
18 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 30 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches

51. GREEN NON-OBJECTIVE
monoprint (intaglio)
21 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

1957

52. BLACK BIRD
color intaglio
23 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

53. ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON
color woodcut
31 x 23 inches

54. THE BURIAL
color woodcut
21 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 48 inches

1958

55. TWO SAINTS IN FOUR BLOCKS
color woodcut
50 x 30 inches

56. AMBROSE AND AUGUSTINE
color intaglio
16¾ x 16½ inches

1959

57. A HAND FOR HOWARD
color woodcut
48 x 32 inches

58. THE VERONICA I
color woodcut
25⅞ x 20⅞

1960

59. SPECTRUM
color woodcut
11 x 8¾ inches

60. M.M. et J. le B.
color woodcut
61 x 26 inches

1960-61

61. DEAD BIRDS
intaglio
23½ x 32 inches

1961

62. TORSO
color woodcut
31 x 25¾ inches

63. THE BRIDE AND GROOM
color intaglio
26½ x 17¾ inches

64. THE VERONICA II
woodcut
26¾ x 21⅞ inches

1962

65. SPRING
color woodcut
70¼ x 18¾ inches

66. THE GOLDEN EGG
color woodcut
18 x 24 inches

67. SELF PORTRAIT
color intaglio
17⅞ x 23⅞ inches

68. VERONICA III
color woodcut
26 x 20¾ inches

69. BEGINNING AND ENDING (tentative title)
intaglio
Series of 12 begun 1962. Work still in progress.
each plate 20 x 24½ inches

1963

70. AFTER THE CREATION
color woodcut
24 x 36 inches

71. FLIGHT I, II, III
color woodcut
triptych, each panel 48 x 36 inches

72. QUILL
color woodcut
16¾ x 11½ inches

73. GREAT HIPPO
color intaglio
20⅞ x 23⅞ inches

74. A WALK IN THE GARDEN
woodcut
7¼ inches diameter

1964

75. VARIACIO
monoprint (woodcut)
14½ x 19½ inches
76. SELF PORTRAIT IN SUNGLASSES
color woodcut
11¾ x 11⅜ inches
77. FINAL SCENE
woodcut w/gold leaf
20 x 29 inches
78. BENJIE AND FRIEND
color intaglio
23¾ x 19½ inches
79. SPECIAL MOMENT
color woodcut
48 x 36 inches
80. BENJIE RUNNING
color intaglio
15½ x 22¼ inches
81. SELF PORTRAIT IN CAP
color woodcut
27 x 19⅞ inches

1964-65

82. THE PHOENIX
color intaglio
35¾ x 23¼ inches
83. THE PROCESSION
woodcut
26½ x 53 inches
84. BLUE HORIZONTAL
color woodcut
22⅞ x 31 inches

85. OPENING
color woodcut
48 x 23 inches

86. DE CHIRICO AND REDON TALKING
woodcut
7¼ x 14½ inches

87. MOONSONG
color woodcut
45½ x 26½ inches

88. VARIACIO
color woodcut
23 x 31 inches

89. RAIN GOD
color woodcut
29¼ x 24 inches

90. BLUEBOMBER
color woodcut
22⅞ x 18⅝ inches

91. SEAPORT AT NIGHT
color woodcut
23 x 31 inches

92. LARGE CRUCIFIXION
color woodcut
47¾ x 36 inches

93. BLUE CIRCLE MACHINE
color woodcut
48 x 36 inches

1966

94. VICTIM
color intaglio
17⅞ x 19¼ inches
95. FLOATING TORSO
color woodcut
35 x 47½ inches
black and red w/graphite

96. TWO TORSOS
color woodcut
26¼ x 20 inches
97. TALLEUR, RECENT WORK
woodcut
23 x 18½ inches
98. FLOWER
color woodcut
28 x 21½ inches
99. SITTING TORSO
color woodcut
24 x 21 inches
100. COMMENCEMENT EXERCISE
color woodcut
42 x 23½ inches
101. THE BLESSING
color woodcut
25¾ x 23½ inches
102. WOUNDED
color intaglio
17⅝ x 24 inches
103. VERTICAL TORSO
intaglio
35½ x 23½ inches
104. LES PETITES DE GEORGES
intaglio
18 x 24 inches
105. FLYING BISHOP
color woodcut
37 x 54 inches
106. DAMNED LOT OF FUN HERE'S TO 25
MORE LETTERS—POSSIBLY, YEARS
CERTAINLY
color woodcut
18 x 26 inches

