

Collection News

NEWS



American painter, sculptor, and printmaker Jasper Johns turns 84 today. Throughout his career Johns has revisited symbols, motifs and at times, entire compositions, of earlier works. He repeats images in different media to “observe the play between the two”¹ and explore the ways that subtle variations give rise to new interpretive possibilities. One such example, *Souvenir I*, 1972, based on Johns’ 1964 painting, *Souvenir*, is represented in the Haggerty’s permanent collection.

The original *Souvenir*, 1964, is a monochromatic gray encaustic on canvas that incorporates various objects: a flashlight, which had been the subject of one of Johns' earliest sculptures; a rearview mirror from a bicycle; and a plate bearing a transfer-printed photograph of Johns, a memento of a trip to Tokyo. If turned on, the flashlight would reflect in the rearview mirror and illuminate Johns' image, thereby making the artist himself a focal point of the work. Created at a pivotal moment in his career – on the heels of a retrospective exhibition at The Jewish Museum and a return trip to Japan, where he had been stationed during military service – this self-portrait represents Johns' engagement with his personal and professional past.²

In the lithograph *Souvenir I*, 1972, a gift to the Haggerty of Dr. Sheldon Burchman in memory of his precious wife Hinda Z. Burchman, Johns alters the composition to address a new set of concerns. Heavily influenced by the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose writings investigated language, perception, and intention, Johns became interested in ways that signs communicate meaning. In his print version of *Souvenir*, the artist replaces the flashlight, mirror, and dish with words that describe, or stand in for, these objects, thereby subtly introducing the idea of semiotics.

Souvenir I will be on view this summer in the exhibition *Scrutiny After The Glimpse*, opening June 4.

1 "Interview with Jasper Johns," in *Jasper Johns: Working Proofs*, by Christian Geelhaar (Basel: Kunstmuseum Basel, 1979), reprinted in *Jasper Johns: Writings*, 191.

2 Gary Garrels "Souvenir" in *Jasper Johns: Seeing With the Mind's Eye* (San Francisco, California: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in association with Yale University Press, 2012) p. 100-105.

Souvenir I, 1972, by Jasper Johns, Collection of the Haggerty Museum of Art



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