

SCULPTOR'S PRINTS INSPIRE SEMI-ANNUAL AWARD

by John Faubion

Rare Western linocut prints by American sculptor Lawrence Tenney Stevens (1896-1972) are the inspiration for a semi-annual award intended to encourage and recognize excellence in the creation of American linocuts.

The first recipient of the Lawrence Tenney Stevens Award for Outstanding American Print is an Oregon artist, Patrick Simon. The crystal award, along with a check for \$1000, was presented to Simon at the 2013 Boston Printmakers North American Print Biennial, which closed in late December.

Simon's linocut, "Splash," was selected from a pool of entries vetted by this year's Biennial juror Dennis Michael Jon, Associate Curator in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. From this select group, Stevens's widow, Bea, made the final selection expressing that Simon "obviously was the most talented and trained in the medium."

Though Stevens was known primarily as a sculptor, his linocut prints are among discoveries that are re-writing portions of American art history. They evolved from sketches he made during a series of big-game hunting expeditions through the Rocky Mountains near Cody, Wyoming, beginning in 1930, and a mountain-lion hunt in the Bradshaw Mountains of Arizona in 1933. In



The Lawrence Tenney Stevens Award for Outstanding American Print



*Patrick Simon, "Splash," Linocut, 2011, Copyright Patrick Simon
www.patricksimonart.com*



"As most of Mr. Stevens's work is monumental, receiving this award truly feels that way to me." Patrick Simon

Stevens archives and propose that the Center acquire the Stevens linocuts, sculptures, and ephemera, to house in perpetuity with its Remington and Russell collections. It hasn't, yet. But studying the Stevens collection in relationship to the work of Remington and Russell is appropriate. The Stevens archives can contribute - in ways current scholarship of Remington and Russell alone might not - to a better understanding of the place the Art of the American West occupies in a broader international and art-historical context.

Born and raised near Boston, Stevens began his art training at a time when American art was viewed as inferior by international standards. He was in high school when the district board, recognizing his exceptional artistic ability, voted to pay for him to attend professional off-campus classes. In the evenings, he studied alongside Harvard students at the Copley Plaza Studios (referred to as The Art World's Hub of the Hub). Sculptor Cyrus Dallin saw a realistic sculpture of an Indian on horseback that Stevens displayed at high school graduation, and convinced him to study at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School. It may have been there, through interdisciplinary art lessons supplemented with study of anatomy and dissection at Tuft's Medical School, that Stevens realized the prints, paintings, and bronzes of his predecessors Remington and Russell, though commercially successful, were derided by critics as being illustrations, not Art. Stevens felt a patriotic obligation, for the good of American Art, to avoid a similar fate.

Stevens eventually won the opportunity to gain an international perspective of art that compelled him to change his realistic style. Study at the Long Island Artist Foundation of Louis Comfort Tiffany helped prepare him for his winning attempt at the Prix de Rome in 1922. The prize provided three years of study at the American Academy in Rome with his own large studio and travel stipends to study the great art of the world. During his travels, Stevens saw firsthand that much of America's art, and art training, was based on a European aesthetic that he felt was too heavy and weak with French sentimentality. Breaking with Academy tradition, he traveled to Egypt shortly after the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb. In an article he wrote for the July 1923 issue of Stone & Webster Journal (a journal of American art and culture), he sang the praises of the quality he most admired about Egyptian art: Simplicity. Forever after, Stevens preached that the simplification of the basic form the Egyptians had achieved was the key to imparting the strength and monumentality he believed American art should be known for.

When Stevens first visited Cody in the spring of 1929, Western art and furnishings were still faithful to the rustic expectation established in the prints and sculptures of Remington and Russell. By applying his simplified style to Cody's Western motifs, Stevens forged a new way of romanticizing the American West that he hoped would advance the international view of American art. As appreciation for the linocuts and sculptures of Stevens grows, so too will the dollar amount of the print award named after him.

www.lawrencetenneystevens.com

John Faubion, Director of the Lawrence Tenney Stevens Trust, has researched, written, and lectured about Lawrence Tenney Stevens since 1995. He was award-winning co-curator of a major 1996 Stevens retrospective exhibition at the Tempe Historical Museum in Arizona. His discoveries in the Stevens archives contributed to the preservation efforts of the 1936 Dallas Centennial Fair site, and led to the recreation of three of Stevens's monumental sculptures there. johnfaubion@basiscisp.net



*Images above, left to right
Lawrence Tenney Stevens, "Bear" Linocut, 1935. Copyright LTS Trust 2014.
Lawrence Tenney Stevens, "Cowboy Camp" Linocut, 1935. Copyright LTS Trust 2014.
Lawrence Tenney Stevens, "Cowboy Sliding" Linocut, 1935. Copyright LTS Trust 2014.*

LAWRENCE TENNEY STEVENS

(1896-1972)



*Lawrence Tenney Stevens, "Moose in the Wyoming Rockies"
Linocut, 1935. Copyright LTS Trust 2014*

From a series of rare linocut prints pulled from his own press by American sculptor Lawrence Tenney Stevens in the spring of 1935. These prints, from the Stevens archives, are strongly suspected of having influenced the western and wildlife silhouettes that Edward Grigware created for the great era of Cowboy High Style furniture produced by Thomas Molesworth's Shoshone Furniture Company. They are among the discoveries in the Stevens archives that have compelled scholars to conclude that Stevens was "an undeniable progenitor of Cowboy High Style."



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