

Muses, Magic & Monotypes: The Art of Richard Segalman

For many, the name Richard Segalman conjures up a vision of colorful, light-infused paintings of women gathered on a beach, gazing out the window of a New York City brownstone, or dressed in costumes from another era. But just as Edgar Degas, approaching his 60th year, surprised gallery goers with an exhibition not of ballerinas or racehorses, but of highly atmospheric monotype landscapes, so too did Segalman surprise with the monotypes he began to produce in 1993, as his 60th birthday loomed.

I reached a sort of a plateau and needed a new direction. It was pure accident that I came across a monotype, took a course, made one—and was hooked. It changed my life and my work.

The significance of Segalman's shift into this medium is most powerfully conveyed through his arresting black-and-white works that feature anonymous crowds on Coney Island beach and New York City streets, or solitary figures lost in private contemplation. This monochromatic focus makes perfect sense: Segalman's first gallery exhibition in New York—a sold-out event that gave him the courage to embrace the life of an artist—consisted entirely of black-and-white charcoal drawings.

To create a monotype, the artist works with oil-based ink on a smooth surface, either glass, Plexiglas, or metal. That surface can be completely inked at the start, after which the artist wipes or scratches ink away to expose areas or lines (the dark field or subtractive method); or, as Segalman does more frequently, the process is reversed: ink is drawn or painted onto a clean surface (the light field or additive method).

In addition to the monotypes on display in this exhibition, many of which are included in the similarly titled 2016 monograph, a few examples of Segalman's work in other media—pastel and oil—are on view. Segalman's work is in many public and private collections, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; the Polk Museum of Art, Lakeland, Florida; and the Fogg Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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