

Print Acquisition Program

RENDERED IN A FRENZY of energetic swirls and hatch marks, the hulking form of what appears to be a 2-6-2 steam locomotive floats weightlessly above (or, depending on one's level of pessimism, is perhaps in the process of falling upon) the winding and unsuspecting trails of New York's Central Park below. Surreal, confounding, and maybe even a little cheeky, the imagery from famed photographer and visual artist Man Ray's 1937 lithograph *Untitled (Locomotive)* is not perhaps typical of what one would expect to see in the Center's collections. After all, the Railroad Heritage Visual Archive's documentary views of railroad history have won us many followers among railfans, photographers, and the general public. However, while less represented in the Center's collections, artistic work like Man Ray's is just as integral to the Center's mission: to build a representative collection of significant railroading images across genres, media, eras, and contexts.

Developing the Center's fine art holdings is so critical to our mission that in 2021 our Board of Directors allocated a special fund (now formally called the Print Acquisition Program) for the purchase of works to augment the media and genres already represented in our permanent collections. Under the direction of CRP&A board member and Collections and Acquisitions Committee co-chair Peter Mosse, the Center has acquired thirty-two prints and photographs by the likes of artists such as Thomas Hart Benton, Louis Lozowick, Joseph Pennell, and Reginald Marsh over the last two years. For more insight into the Print Acquisitions Program and railroad art in general, please read on for a Q&A between myself (AE) and program principals Betsy Fahlman (BF), Peter Mosse (PM), and Jeff Brouws (JB).

AE: *First, what would you like members to know about the Print Acquisition Program?*

PM: I would like to offer a brief explanation of how the Program works, so that readers will be aware of how the Center's funds are being deployed.

The Board has authorized the Collections & Acquisitions Committee on a year-by-year basis to spend up to a budgeted amount on purchases for the Program. Recognizing that decisions may need to be made quickly, the Committee has delegated its authority to C&A Committee co-chairs Jeff Brouws and myself, together with professional art historian and committee member Betsy Fahlman, to agree on

acquisitions, with Executive Director Scott Lothes being kept informed and able to vote on decisions.

For 2021, the budget was set at \$2,500 and, in view of the program's initial success, this was increased to \$10,000 for each of 2022 and 2023. Now, in an act of great generosity for which we are profoundly grateful, long-time Center supporter John Mellowes has underwritten the Program's budget for 2024 and 2025 in the increased amount of \$12,500 per annum.

Almost all acquisitions so far have been made through placing absentee bids at auction, a mechanism for which I personally have a strong preference over purchasing from dealers or by private treaty. I like the fact that auctions provide price guidance through auction house estimates, and then price transparency through the publication of sale results. It is true that an outlier price needs only two aggressive bidders, but whatever the result, successful bidders know that there was someone else who valued the lot almost as much as they did.

The emergence in recent years of internet search engines using keywords has made it very easy to find potentially interesting lots coming up for sale at a wide range of auction houses and almost all of the Program's acquisitions have been found this way. We track our expenditures carefully and we certainly take our budget seriously. Our expenditures in 2021, 2022 and 2023, out of budgets of \$2,500; \$10,000; and \$10,000, have been, respectively: \$2,463.07; \$9,920.24 and \$9,843.36.

AE: *What inspired you to support the Print Acquisition Program as a major collecting initiative at the Center?*

PM: I'm an inveterate collector and have been since childhood when I first started trainspotting in England and recorded seeing just over 10,000 British Railways steam locomotives before the last ones were withdrawn in 1968. Less than fifteen years later I was collecting paintings of railroad subjects and had decided that, with very few exceptions, I would only collect original works of art. My subsequent involvement with the Center and my exposure to the expertise of its directors and members has opened my eyes to the artistic merits of many fine art prints, eroded what I now see as a prejudice against "multiples," and given me the realization that they are an important component of railroad art. This has made the opportunity to work with Betsy, Jeff and Scott in

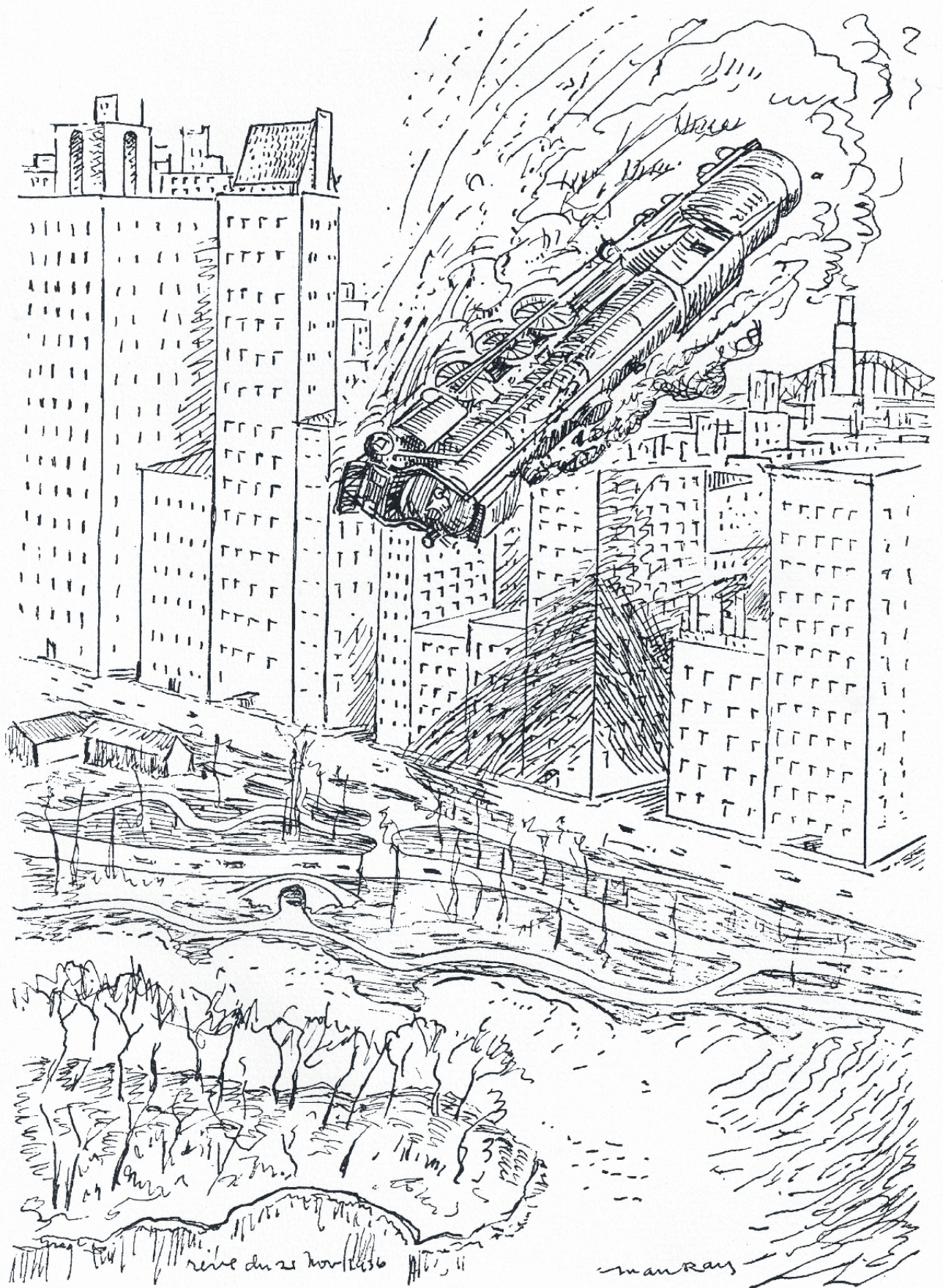
INTERVIEWS

Adrienne Evans

ARTWORK

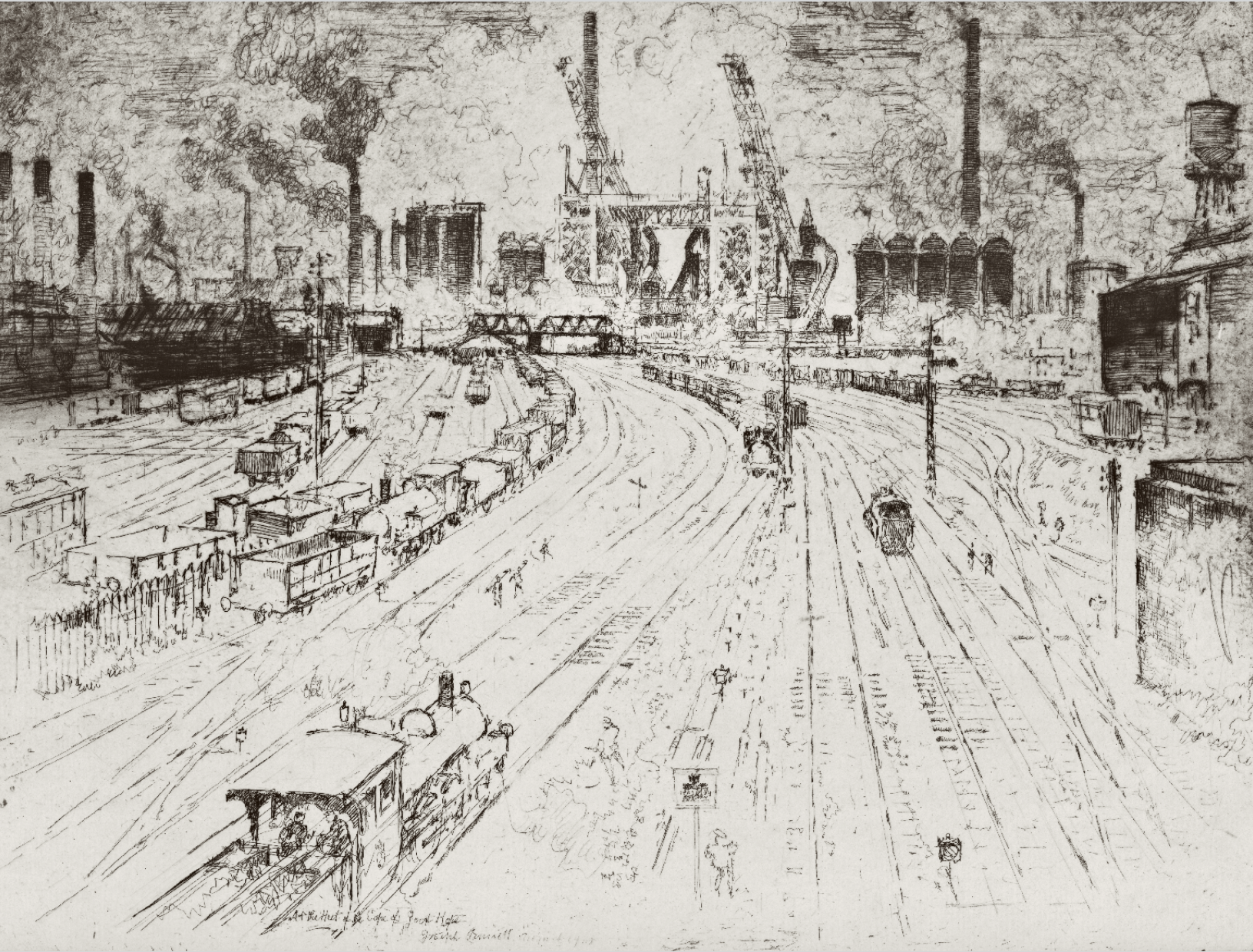
Collection of the Center

Man Ray (1890–1976).
Untitled (Locomotive), 1937,
lithograph, 11 x 8¾ inches.
Writing at lower left reads,
"Dream of 21 Nov 1936."
PAP-01-020



rive du 25 nov 1956

man Ray



Joseph Pennell (1860–1926).
Tracks, Oberhausen, 1910,
etching, edition of fifty, 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ x
12 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches. PAP-01-013

building a collection for the Center from the ground up enormously appealing, as well as educational.

JB: I was well aware of Peter’s painting collection, and while I can’t recall the exact chain of events, it became obvious that to fulfill our CRP&A mission we had to grow beyond just collecting photography. It was a natural when Peter suggested that we do so. I also know that Peter loves to peruse auction sites to see what’s available, so I was more than happy to help him indulge his passion by agreeing that it was a good direction for the Center to head. And now with Betsy on board we have two experts in that area of interest. We’re lucky. But I want to chime in here about nomenclature, since my major interest is in photography. Photographic prints can also be “fine art.” There are innumerable “fine art photographers” out there. The Print Acquisition Program to my mind is not just about lithographs, etchings, and limited edition prints, but also included in the scope are vernacular photographs and fine art photographs.

AE: *For people who are a little less than familiar with art collecting, can you draw a distinction between limited edition prints like those in the Print Acquisition Program versus open edition prints and/or mass-produced images, etc.?*

BF: Fine art prints are multiple originals, sometimes signed in the plate (from which it is printed) and more often signed on the print and “editioned.” It is customary to note what number each print is (one, two, three, etc., out of the total number in the edition). Small editions are best as the plate can degrade if too many prints have been pulled. These prints are in contrast to mass produced prints, which are often low-quality inkjets produced in editions up to 300-500 prints.

JB: Many fine art photographers make multiple prints, usually in very small editions—say in the range of just three to nine. Most fine art photographers these days are making archival pigment prints (also known as giclée) and their quality and permanence, especially on 100% cotton rag papers, rivals or even exceeds black-and-white silver gelatin prints, which were the former gold standard. It’s worth noting that if a photographic print was made around the time the negative was made, that’s considered a “vintage” print and commands a higher price than a later print made from the same negative. Editioning became a marketing ploy in the



Whitehall tunnel, north portal,
1932, photographer unknown,
gelatin silver print. PAP-01-014

fine art photography world say around 1985; name the size of the edition to create scarcity and to help keep prices up. These days editioning is de riguer and small edition numbers prevail.

AE: *Images in the Center's permanent holdings range from straight, documentary photography to stylized, in some cases almost abstract, photographs, paintings, and prints. I think the majority of us at the Center agree that most approaches to depicting railroading have merit. But what do these more creative depictions have to teach us about the place of railroading in culture and history?*

BF: What people thought of railroads can be as important as the more specific documentation with detailed measurements and extensive technical explanations.

PM: I think these depictions show just how pervasive railroads and trains are in culture and history around the world. This may fade to a degree with the passage of time and as railroads become less central to people's lives in many countries, but I think they still possess an elemental appeal which invites artistic depiction and which will not disappear. I note that barely an issue of a mainstream art magazine goes by without including at least one illustration of a painting with some railroad content, and also that my own collection now includes works from over twenty-five countries and in a wide variety of styles.

JB: Its importance—the railroad has played a major role in shaping history, geography, economics, and culture overall.

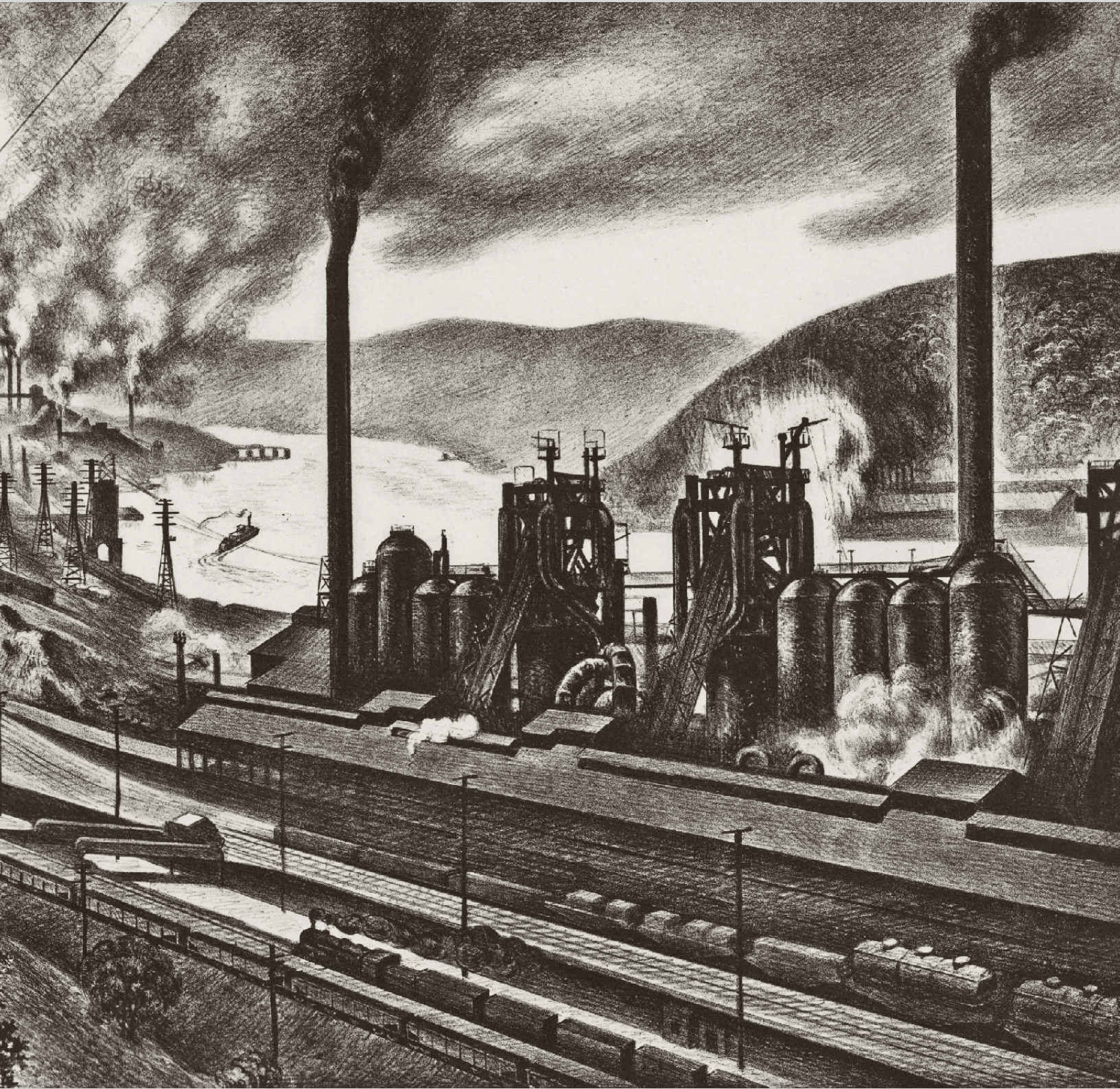
AE: *Do you have a favorite work or artist among the prints we have acquired thus far? If so, what or who?*

PM: Yes, I do—*Steel Valley* by Louis Lozowick (1892–1973). It was the first print we bid for at auction, in September 2020, and we were outbid for it on four subsequent occasions before finally being successful in February of this year. It is a truly heroic and beautifully composed portrayal of American industrial might and the place American railroads occupy in that space.

BF: I love the Joseph Pennell prints! I have published several articles about his work, and in addition to railroad images, he broadly engaged the subject of

Louis Lozowick (1892–1973).
Steel Valley, lithograph, edition
of 250 published by Associated
American Artists, 9½ x 12¾
inches. PAP-01-009







industrial archeology, favoring themes he called “The Wonders of Work in Europe and America.”

JB: I agree with Betsy; my favorites are the Pennells we’ve recently acquired. Industrial archaeology, indeed. We need more art works in our collection—across the painting / photography spectrum—that deal with this theme.

AE: *If the budget of the Print Acquisition Program was unlimited, what would be your dream acquisition?*

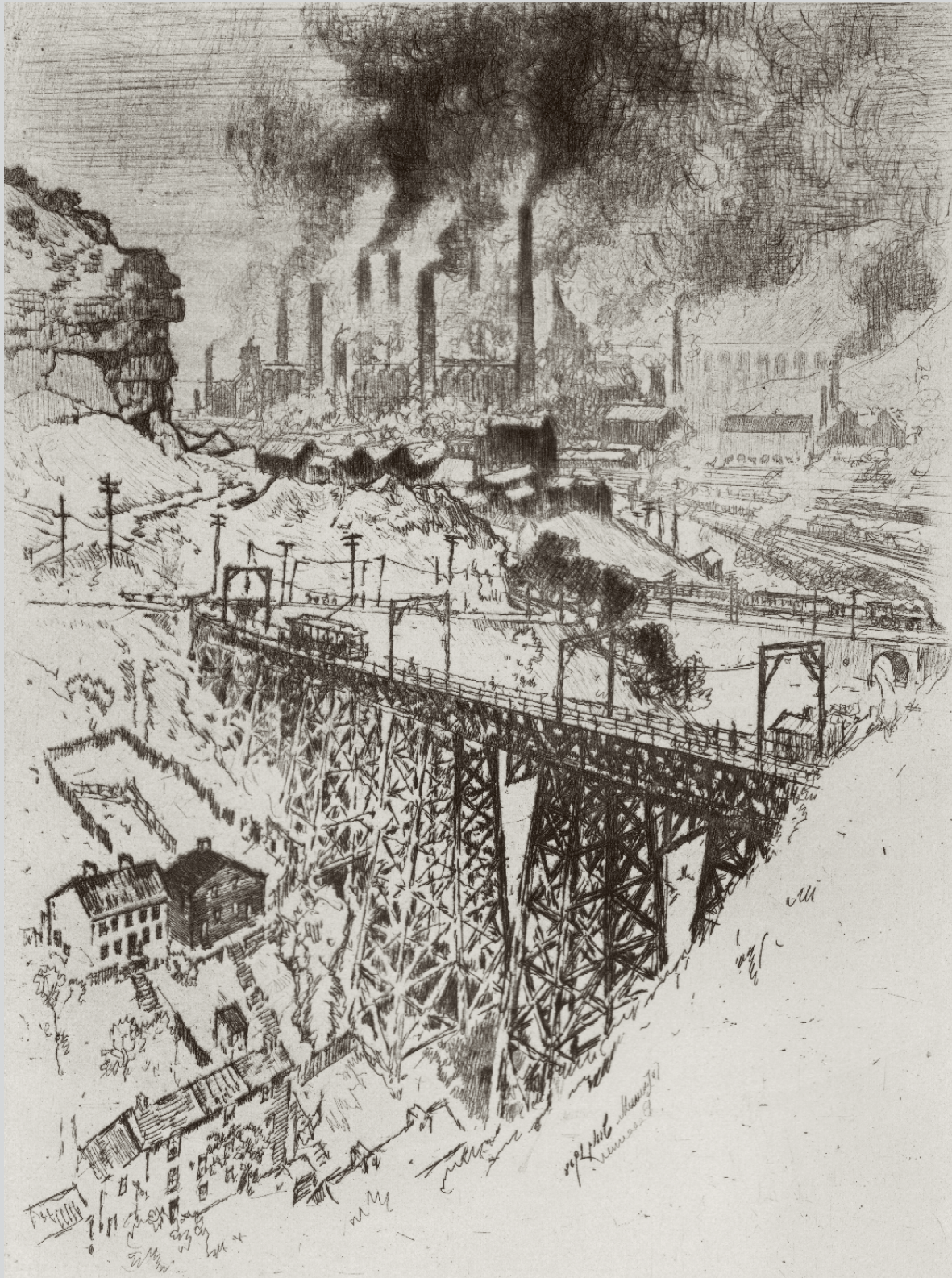
BF: A full suite of Joseph Pennell’s railroad prints would be wonderful! Or a full run of Griff Teller’s calendars for the Pennsylvania Railroad along with the other artists who were hired by this railroad as well.

PM: My dream acquisition would not require an outlandish increase in our budget. I start from the premise, which I admit may be open to challenge, that the best known, most valuable railroad paintings in the world are the Monet Paris railroad station scenes. It was therefore with a sense of amazement that I discovered, in March this year, that a lithograph of Monet’s *La Gare Saint-Lazare, Arrivée du Train de Normandie* had been produced in a limited edition of twenty-five by printmaker George W. Thornley in Paris in 1894 and had been signed by Monet. Furthermore, one such print was put up for auction that month and it sold for \$15,000, which was the high estimate. I cannot think of a fine art print I would prefer to have in our collection as I believe it would be the star of any exhibition in which it was shown. So my fervent hope is, that if another example comes to the market, we will be able to marshal the resources to acquire it.

JB: Alfred Stieglitz’s *The Hand of Man*, a photograph from 1902 made during his Pictorialism phase.

AE: *How would you like to see the Center’s fine art collecting efforts develop over the next few years? Do you feel like there are any gaps or underrepresented perspectives in the Center’s fine art holdings?*

BF: Because we have a young program, we have lots of gaps and room for growth. It would be nice to have multiple works by the artists already in the collection so we could tell stories that have greater depth. We have done very well with a small budget.



Joseph Pennell (1860–1926).
Edgar Thomson Works, 1909,
etching, 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches.
PAP-01-011

Opposite page:
Joseph Pennell (1860–1926).
On the way to Bessemer, 1908,
etching, 10 x 7 inches.
PAP-01-012

Peter diligently tracks smaller regional auction houses where some very reasonably priced works have been found. Sometimes we have been out-bid, and it has taken a few tries to obtain the particular print we want.

PM: We are in the very early stages of building the Center's collection so there is lots of room to expand its breadth and depth. Several well-known artists are not yet represented (Howard Cook and Woldenar Neufeld to name but two) and others likely deserve additional representation commensurate with their stature (Thomas Hart Benton, for example). In addition, there may be more surprises, like the recent discovery of the 1937 Man Ray lithograph. And then there is the whole area of fine photographic prints (Alfred Stieglitz, Berenice Abbott, Henri Cartier-Bresson, etc.) and historic vernacular photographs, many of which are of considerable interest, albeit while their creators remain unknown.

JB: I would like to suggest that some of our future acquisitions engage the work of photographers who might be interested in railroads (as one subject they look at among many) but who aren't necessarily rail enthusiasts, as I believe they take a different kind of image. One example that's recently become a part of the Center's collection (thanks to a generous donation by Ron Perisho) is a portfolio by Mike Froio from his project *From the Mainline* along the former right-of-ways and landscapes of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Similarly, the work of photographer Mark Ruwedel bears keeping in mind as a possible future acquisition. Like Froio, he works in series and his *Westward the Course of Empire* traces the scars left by nineteenth century railroads on the western landscape.

AE: *What have you learned from your involvement with the Print Acquisition Program?*

PM: A lot, but mainly it has accelerated my acceptance of fine art prints as objects worthy of collection, and enabled me to better recognize the artistic talent of skilled printmakers.

Thomas Hart Benton, *Morning Train*, 1943, lithograph, edition of 250 published by Associated American Artists, 9¾ x 13½ inches. PAP-01-021



