

Shades of Black

New Jersey's Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum presents artists' renderings of the beauty of darkness.

As night approaches and darkness envelops us, our first instinct is to turn on a light, burn a candle or flee to a brighter place. But some artists are compelled to capture the images and moods darkness creates.

At Rutgers University's Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum in New Brunswick, New Jersey, an exhibition, "The Color of Night: How Artists Work with Darkness," encourages us to look into the shadows and relish the variations we find inside the luminous areas of darkness, says Julie Melby, Zimmerli Art Museum's associate curator of Prints and Drawings.



"Color of Night" includes a special work, *The Face of Night*, by prominent printmaker and businesswoman Marion Rosenfeld Behr. A resident of Edison, New Jersey, Behr and her husband, Omri, invented the environmentally friendly printmaking process patented "Electrotech." Behr used the non-toxic printmaking method to create *The Face of Night*. "[It's] a wonderful example of what can be accomplished without acid, which used to be the common element in etching," Melby explains.

On the day Behr created *The Face of Night*, she'd been experimenting with tones—light, middle grey and dark—using the non-toxic acid on several images. "That particular day was a celebration," Behr recalls, because she'd finally created the color black, essential in printmaking. So she etched an image of a face in fear.

"Night can be a frightening time, because of the dark, bad dreams, loneliness or emptiness," Behr says. "Equally, night can be an extremely stimulating, exciting time. It allows the imagination to wander anywhere uninterrupted by visual realities." Look into the eyes of the subject, she advises viewers of her painting. Detail is vague, so you can create your own images.

Edward Hopper often lengthens the shadows in his compositions to heighten the drama and isolation of his human subjects. Artist Martin Lewis spreads multi-colored rays across his urban nightscape using crystalline prisms of cast shadows. Meanwhile, Winslow Homer painstakingly adds hundreds of parallel lines to increase the shade and dimension of his wood engraved scenes. Viewers then fall helplessly into the dark depictions of infinity created by contemporary artist Vija Celmins, who fills her picture planes with deep, starlit skies.

"It is through the darkness that these artists reveal the subject and emotion of their works of art," says Melby, who will offer a lecture tour of the exhibition. "The Color of Night" will be on display January 14 to July 31. Call 732/932-7237 or visit www.zimmerlimuseum.rutgers.edu for information.

—Allison Brunner Medeiros

The information in this story was accurate when it was published in the January/February 2005 issue of AAA World, but details such as dates, times and prices may have changed since then. We suggest you verify such details directly with the listed establishments before making travel plans.