AT MAG, WORKS BY 20TH-CENTURY MASTERS CELEBRATE POET JOHN ASHBERY
Ashbery, Rochester Native, Speaks Here June 2

ROCHESTER, NY, March 16, 2011 — A limited-edition artist’s book celebrating John Ashbery, considered by many to be America’s greatest living poet, will be the subject of an exhibition opening April 1 at the Memorial Art Gallery. *John Ashbery and Friends* includes prints by eight 20th-century masters, among them Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Jim Dine, Larry Rivers and Richard Avedon (lithograph shown). The book, published in 1984 by Arion Press, was inspired by Ashbery’s 1975 poem *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, part of a collection for which he won the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. That poem, in turn, is a meditation on a 16th-c. painting by Italian artist Francesco Parmigianino.

*John Ashbery and Friends: Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* remains on view through June 12. Offered in conjunction with National Poetry Month, the exhibition marks the first time that the book has been shown at the Memorial Art Gallery.

*This exhibition is presented in honor of the 30th anniversary of Writers & Books*

**Special event**

John Ashbery is no stranger to Rochester, where he was born, or to the Memorial Art Gallery, where as a young boy he took art classes. **Tuesday, June 2 at 7 pm**, he returns to speak on his life and work. Joining him on stage will be James Longenbach, a poet, critic and professor of English at the University of Rochester. The program is included in Gallery admission and followed by a reception. *This lecture is offered in collaboration with Writers & Book and supported by the Dr. Robert Lewis Berg and Florence Foster Berg Memorial Fund.*

**More about Ashbery and friends**

After graduating from Harvard College in 1949, John Ashbery lived in New York and Paris, where he wrote art criticism as well as verse. His career since then has been marked by a prolific output of what major critics consider to be the most important poetry of our time.

In 1984, Andrew Hoyem, founder of Arion Press, decided to published a limited-edition artist’s book of Ashbery’s masterpiece *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*. Hoyem typeset radiating lines of verse, echoing the shape of Parmigianino’s painting, and invited eight artists, friends of Ashbery, to contribute prints. The choice of artists was quite deliberate: the eight plus Ashbery were informally linked in the 1950s and 60s to the avant-garde group of poets, painters, dancers and musicians that would become known as the New York School.

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Excerpt from *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*

“As Parmigianino did it, the right hand
Bigger than the head, thrust at the viewer
And swerving easily away, as though to protect
What it advertises. A few leaded panes, old beams,
Fur, pleated muslin, a coral ring run together
In a movement supporting the face, which swims
Toward and away like the hand
Except that it is in repose. It is what is
Sequestered. Vasari says, “Francesco one day set himself
To take his own portrait, looking at himself from that purpose
In a convex mirror, such as is used by barbers….”


**MAG on the web:**
mag.rochester.edu

**More about John Ashbery:**
www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/238