

Golf has its art gallery, too

Prized pictures are rare but good prints are available in both black-and-white and color.

By JACK ZANGER



Like almost everything else in our firmament, golf has been reflected in art. Old reproductions, prints, engravings depict the game's rich history, humor and lore, and some of it has found its way to the clubhouse walls of our golf and country clubs. Operating on the premise that many more clubs have the same decorating idea in mind but don't know what's available or how to obtain it, GOLFDOM sent its part-time art critic on a shopping tour of New York galleries.

The best golf art, obviously, is dated, and probably would be described by the hippies of the art world as something between "pop art" and "camp." It is also pretty rare. According to Jack Level, a well-known collector of old golf books, prints, golf clubs and balls, as well as other memorabilia, "very little golf art has been turned out in all these years. There are perhaps only about a half-dozen standard prints in circulation."

But this does not mean there is not an ample supply of what golf art has been produced, and actually, of seven print shops and stores visited, literally

dozens of different pieces of art were unearthed. To bear out Level's point, however, there is a great deal of duplication; a same few standard reproductions cropped up at each store. Their prices varied, depending on quality and size (or if in color or black-and-white) but they are relatively inexpensive. For example, most of the golf art we saw (which constitutes virtually all that is available) was in the \$15-\$50 range, but you can pick up some interesting old color prints for as little as \$5 apiece or splurge on a handsome old engraving priced at \$500.

Golf art has been produced at scattered periods in history, with long drought spells in between—which accounts for its scarcity. Prior to the 19th Century, almost all of it was turned out by the Dutch and Flemish artists. The English then were mostly involved with writing about golf, but their artists initiated a renaissance that ran roughly from 1890 to 1915. When golf crossed the Atlantic to this country, American artists and illustrators went to their easels for their own interpretations of it.

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Some of the best examples were done by such famous turn-of-the-century illustrators as James Montgomery Flagg, A. B. Frost and Charles Dana Gibson, creator of "The Gibson Girl." Their themes were mostly humorous, dealing with the vexations of duffers, or they would show slim-wasted, long-skirted women of style delicately addressing the ball. These and other artists appeared in such magazines of the day as *Harpers*, *Vanity Fair* and *The American Golfer*.

By contrast, the golf art conceived by the Dutch masters of the 16th and 17th centuries was far more classical, and may well be the most elaborate and decorative ever turned out. In rich color portraits reminiscent of Rembrandt, flaxen-haired children in period dress stare out at you, each, in one way or another, holding a golf club. Despite the dates of these pieces, they are among the easiest to obtain, and surprisingly, the most reasonably priced.

But it took the English to bring out much of the flavor of golf, and some of their prints rank among the most popular with collectors. Perhaps the most famous golf print of all time is the one titled, "The Golfers." This fine old classic painted in 1847 by Charles Lees depicts a match played over the 15th (or Ginger Beer) hole at St. Andrews, and in addition to the four golfers there are 53 spectators; some of the better prints identify each of them by number on the back.

Another familiar engraving is of William Innes, captain of the Royal Blackheath Golf Club in 1778, which was painted by Lemuel Abbott. The work, known more commonly to collectors as "The Blackheath Golfer," shows the red-coated Innes regally holding a golf stick over one shoulder, while his drab-dressed caddie (looking remarkably like an American revolutionary) stands in the background holding the remaining clubs.

One more well worth mentioning is the elegant portrait (also done by Lemuel Abbott) of Mr. Henry Callender, evidently a golfing gentleman of the 18th Century. The painting catches him in an heroic pose, wearing tight white breeches and red cutaway coat, leaning on a club. He's just perfect to go over the fireplace.

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at some club. And there seems to be no scarcity of Henry Callenders around, though the price of a replica can stretch anywhere from \$5 to \$150.

For the club in the market for golf prints, here is a brief tour of the shops and a sampling of the most interesting art we came across. At the Old Print Shop, there is a charming set of wood engravings entitled "A Gallery of Golfers." These are mild caricatures of turn-of-the-century golf enthusiasts, among them John D. Rockefeller I, who is shown in an awkward address squinting down at his ball as though it were a shiny new dime. Mr. Rockefeller goes for \$15. There are others of Gilman Tiffany and Findlay S. Douglas, former U. S. Amateur champion (\$12), and one of Johnny Graham, Jr., described as "one of England's crack players."

Many of the Dutch portraits described earlier can be found here, too, for as little as \$10 and \$15. A half-dozen or so would make an interesting wall panel. The artist in many cases is Jan Steen, who also went in for large family scenes at Christmas time. His "St. Nicholas Day" painting shows a family gathered around a fireplace, with one of the children holding a golf club aloft. Another good scene, called "Winter Landscape," by Esaias Van De Velde, shows some Dutch people playing *kolven*, a fore-runner of golf which often was played on an ice pond. This beauty is priced at \$15 at the Old Print Shop.

But the largest selection here was found among the old humorous illustrations of Flagg and Victor Venner. One Flagg (priced at \$20) shows a quizzical male rubbing his chin while his girl friend in long skirts lines up a short putt. Two caddies are stifling chuckles in the background. The caption reads: "Has It Ever Happened To You? He had offered her a stroke a hole. He is now five down, playing even—and he did so want to make an impression." They just don't make them that way anymore.

At the nearby The Old Print Mart we found two fine A. B. Frost illustrations, "The Duffer," showing a player, with one leg in the air, taking a hefty swipe at

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GOLF ART

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the ball, and another of a caddie taking flight while his knickerbockered client attempts a wild swing at the ball in a bunker. Both were tagged at \$9.

One of the best reproductions we saw of "The Golfers" was at The Old Print House, and it was modestly priced at \$42.50. This shop also has a remarkably fine restrike of "The Blackheath Golfer" at only \$19.25. A restrike, it was explained by Mrs. Oscar Imber, is a reproduction that is struck from old plates and colored by hand on good quality paper. "Old prints in golf are very hard to come by," she explained. "There is a certain exclusivity in having them and we find the supply does not equal the demand."

The Old Print House also has on hand a few members of "A Gallery of Golfers" (\$15), the Dutch *kolven* scene, some illustrations from *Vanity Fair* and Flagg's "Has It Ever Happened To You?" (\$35).

One of the largest and most impressive collections we found was at the Old Print Center of Phyllis Lucas. A rare item found here was an old poster entitled, "The Golf Girl," which shows a pretty maiden in an orange-and-black turtle-neck sweater and a green skirt. In addition to other hard-to-find golf prints, Mrs. Lucas has most of the standard works, all modestly priced. These include a fine assortment of the Flemish scenes; "The Blackheath Golfer"; an extraordinarily beautiful reproduction of Bobby Jones defeating Cyril Tolley for the British Amateur Championship at St. Andrews in 1930 and an unusually good reproduction of "The Golfers," a real value here at only \$10.

You can also spend a worthwhile hour or more browsing through the golf art at the Argosy Gallery, which has a remarkably fine assortment. From "A Gallery of Golfers," you can select drawings in color of H. H. Hilton and Findlay S. Douglas for \$25 apiece; there are some old Harper's covers from such years as 1897 and 1911, a wide selection of A. B. Frost's for \$22 each, drawings from *Vanity Fair* by Spy, at \$15 each, the Dutch scenes painted by Steen, Van De

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Velde and Wybrand de Geest, including the famous "Golfing Lady" and a real bargain in a Henry Callender at \$25. Many of the prints go for only \$5 and they look as though they were worth much more.

There were more than 100 individual pieces of golf art at The Crossroads of Sport, and they ran the gamut from the standard and moderately priced old prints to original and contemporary oils. On display here is the work of present-day artist Arthur Weaver, who has set himself to the task of painting the world's most-famous golf holes. Already achieved are the seventh at the Augusta National, the 18th at Pebble Beach and the 18th at St. Andrews, and we were informed that Weaver is hard at work on others. You can buy either reproductions or originals at The Crossroads. An original runs \$200.

Among the standard scenes, one of the best we came across was "The Sabbath Breakers," a painting executed in 1896. It depicts an actual occurrence in Great Britain back in 1592, the discovery by clergymen of two golfers swinging on the Sabbath. The inscription reads: "In 1592 John Henrie and Pat Rogie were prosecuted for playing Gowfff on the Links of Leath on Sabbath during the time of the sermones."

Others in the collection include a good print showing the first amateur golf championship played in this country, at St. Andrews in Yonkers, N. Y., in 1894, from an original drawing by Everett Henry (\$30); the "First International Foursome," played on the Links of Leith in 1682 between England and Scotland (\$24); some A. B. Frost's, a second edition of a Currier & Ives original of Jones winning the British Open at St. Andrews in 1927 (\$30); some rare English golf scenes (\$85 for a set of three); a Henry Callender at \$95 and "The Blackheath Golfer" at \$52.

Over at Abercrombie & Fitch, the collection is quite limited but what there is merits attention. Weaver reproductions of the famous golf holes are priced at \$52 framed (\$35 unframed); there are a few A. B. Frost's, and there is a

wonderful set of three by artist Douglas Adams titled, "The Drive," "Putting," and "Bunker Play."

One of the best sources for would-be collectors remains Jack Level, who has created some form of art by the manner in which he gathers golf memorabilia. His supply of golf prints is phenomenal. Examples: "The Sabbath Breakers" can be obtained for \$25 and \$10, "The Golfers" at \$28, \$15 and \$5, there are Frost's at \$15 each, "The Blackheath Golfer" at \$18 and \$15, prints of Bob Jones winning at St. Andrews in 1927 and 1930 at \$20 and \$15, "The First International Foursome" at \$20 and \$15 and the famed old "Apple Tree Gang" at \$20. And his collection goes on and on. As with each of the other galleries, you can write to Level for further information regarding his collection. He distributes an excellent brochure describing it. •

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