



TITLE: *The Death that came for Albert Camus*



ARTIST: Arthur Deshaies

DATE: 1960

SIZE: 20 1/4" x 32"

MEDIUM: Lucite Engraving

ACCESSION #: 2002.6.170

Additional works in the collection by the artist?  
Yes  No

### ARTIST'S STATEMENT

"Even as a child, I wasn't interested in drawing people or things. I was putting colors together and making designs."

### ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

Arthur Deshaies was born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1920. He began experimenting with art by age ten, and continued his studies at the Cooper Union in New York, as well as the Rhode Island School of Design. He eventually received his Masters of Fine Arts from Indiana University.

Early in his career, Deshaies used stencils to create his "biomorphic, surrealist fantasies" but later switched to wood-block, then large sheets of Plexiglas and Lucite, which he used in this piece. Deshaies was renowned for his printmaking but also painting and other art media. He was the first to use a large block of plaster as a plate for printing. He has been recognized internationally and received awards such as the Fulbright Grant for painting and the Guggenheim Foundation Grant for Creative Printmaking. Deshaies also shared his knowledge and expertise with others. His teaching career encompassed four different universities, including Florida State. His work has been featured in numerous museums, such as the Brooklyn Museum, the Wright Museum of Art in Beloit, Wisconsin, and Tallahassee's LeMoyné.

### CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Albert Camus was an early 20th century philosopher and Nobel Prize winning writer. His work was closely linked to the existentialist philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre, but Camus referred to himself as an absurdist. The tendency for humans to seek meaning in life, and his or her inability to find any, is the absurd condition that a person must recognize to be free. Every individual is unique, but the absurd hero realizes there must be a revolt against inescapable death and the hero must choose to live with passion. Camus describes some of the most common absurd heroes as actors, conquerors, and artists. He said that "in art, rebellion is consummated and perpetuated in the act of real creation." It is possible that Deshaies, born in the same decade as Camus, felt a kinship with both the man and his philosophies. When Deshaies described his abstraction he did so with the words of a philosopher, "[The confusion] is all around us and our only chance is to let it in—the only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess."

In 1960, the year this work was done, Albert Camus died in a car accident. The death was rather ironic because Camus, who typically distrusted automobiles, only took the car on his friend's insistence. A return ticket for the train was still in Camus's coat pocket after the crash. This print seems to confront and confirm the imminence of death for everyone, including Camus and Deshaies, as expressed in absurdist philosophy.

### MEDIA DESCRIPTION

*The Death that came for Albert Camus* is a lucite engraving. Lucite is a chemical compound used to create a hard acrylic resin plastic. An engraving incorporates the process of making a replicable design by cutting hard lines into a surface, in this case a lucite sheet. This process was used by Deshaies for printmaking, a means for creating original prints by transferring ink from a matrix (like an engraving) to a sheet of paper.

### REFERENCES

"Arthur Deshaies." *Digital Media Repository: Home*. Web 07 Apr. 2011. <[www.libx.bsu.edu/cdm4/item\\_viewer.php](http://www.libx.bsu.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php)>.  
Robert Carleton Hobbs. *Arthur Deshaies*. Florida State University Gallery & Museum, 1990.  
"Existentialism and the Absurd Philosophy Index." Philosophy Index. Web. 07 Apr. 2011. <[www.philosophy-index.com/](http://www.philosophy-index.com/)>

### Related Terminology

ABSURDISM: existential philosophy that proposes life should be led with passion despite its absurd meaningfulness  
EXISTENTIALISM: 20th century philosophy that asserts one's independence of action and thus his or her responsibility for life

Completed Fall 2011, Blanche Brown

*Horizontal I*,  
1962,  
Morris Louis,  
print,  
37" x 10.2"



**Session Activity:**

Young students do not usually appreciate the intricacies of printmaking, and typically characterize abstract art as “easy.” Yet, both require skill and can express a depth of emotion. This art project teaches students the basic procedures of printmaking as well as the creative emotional possibilities of abstraction.



**Materials:**

Small cut blocks of Styrofoam (at least 3 per student), ink, white paper, paint brushes, plastic knives (at least 1 for each student)

**Activity Procedures:**

- 1) Explain the engraving process to students; refer to [www.edinphoto.org.uk/1\\_EDIN\\_V/1\\_engraving\\_and\\_engravers\\_processes.htm](http://www.edinphoto.org.uk/1_EDIN_V/1_engraving_and_engravers_processes.htm) for in-depth information. The students will be using styrofoam as a model for engraving, which uses raised areas to print rather than the recessed areas used by the engraving process.
- 2) Examine both of Deshaies’s pieces as well as the contrasting Louis work. Discuss the meaning of “abstract” and “expressionist.” To clarify the students’ understanding, show a slideshow of other Abstract Expressionist works.
- 3) Contrast the different emotions expressed in the Deshaies and Louis works. Ask the students to explain Deshaies’s feelings when he made his print. Look at the mood evoked by the juxtaposition of light and dark. Have the students make a word wall of different emotions and then allow each to choose one on which to focus for his/her print.
- 4) Distribute materials. Under supervision allow students to cut abstract designs into the styrofoam, creating stamps or engravings. Using one color per stamp, students will coat the engravings with ink and make replications on paper. Students may make as many prints as time allows, but they must clean each engraving after each use.

**Objectives**

1. Student will develop an understanding of an engraving.
2. Student will explore creative emotional possibilities of abstraction.

**Vocabulary**

**Abstract:** artistic break from traditional representation  
**Expressionist:** exaggeration of form and intensification of color for emotive purposes

**SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS: K–5 Art**

**Big Idea:** Critical Thinking and Reflection  
**Enduring Understanding:** Cognition and reflection are required to appreciate, interpret, and create with artistic intent  
**Benchmark:** use the art-making process to develop ideas for self-expression

**SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS: 9–12 English**

**Big Idea:** Literary and Aesthetic Analysis  
**Enduring Understanding:** Topics, Development, and Focus  
**Benchmark:** interpreting literature and using knowledge of genre and context to enhance interpretation

**Connecting Art and Literature: Arthur Deshaies and Albert Camus Lesson Plan: 6-12**

Left: *Sisyphus*, 1548,  
Titian, oil on canvas



Right: photo of Albert Camus  
 Center: his book *the Myth of Sisyphus*.

**Session Activity & Objectives:**

This print by Arthur Deshaies is a commentary on the death of Absurdist philosopher and writer, Albert Camus. In order to develop the students’ understanding of Camus’s philosophy, have them read the philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Then, as a class, discuss the way the artwork relates to the tenets of Absurdism and what possible message Deshaies may be conveying.

**Discussion:**

- Deshaies is known as an abstract artist. How does this style connect with Camus’s philosophies?
- Look at the color choice, or rather, the choice to remove color. Does this affect the mood of the work? How so, and why might this have been done?
- This print was made in 1960, the same year Camus died. What else was going on in the world? Does this piece comment on current events? If so, what sentiment might Deshaies be expressing?
- Why does it seem Deshaies felt connected to Camus and Absurdism? Are Camus’s tenets reflected in Deshaies’s depiction of death?

**Activity:**

**Writing Prompt:** Imagine that both Camus and Deshaies are drinking coffee at a café and discussing their beliefs. Based on their works, on what might they agree? What would be points of disagreement? Now, write an analytical essay that relates Camus’s work to Deshaies’s interpretation.

Pay attention to 1) use of color 2) subject matter 3) use of abstraction (to what extent) 4) all of these in regards to Camus’s attitude towards death.