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Williams College Museum of Art Presents
The Long Night and the New Day
Lithographs by Benton Spruance
July 12 – October 5, 2008

Williamstown, MA—Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) presents The Long Night and the New Day, an exhibition featuring 24 lithographs by the artist Benton Spruance. The Long Night and the New Day spans Spruance’s long career, charting the major shift in his style from the more specific and naturalistic renderings of the Depression era through World War II to his later, more abstracted and evocative work of the 1960s. The exhibition is a celebration of a major gift of these works and approximately 50 more from Sigmund R. Balka, Williams Class of 1956, to the museum. John Stomberg, Deputy Director at WCMA and exhibition curator, will be joined by Mr. Balka on Tuesday, August 5 at 2:00 pm for a gallery talk on these works. This is a free public event and all are invited to attend.

The Long Night and the New Day tells two stories, both of which are alluded to in the title. The Long Night is the name of one of Benton Spruance’s signature lithographs—it is an impassioned protest of the dehumanizing effect of McCarthyism in 1950s America. The New Day refers to the advances that Spruance achieved with color lithography during his career, bringing about a revival for a medium that had not flourished since the turn of the century.
In his work, Spruance often used biblical stories and classical myths to evoke individuals struggling with enduring moral dilemmas. Whether the subject was Job or Odysseus, Spruance focused on humans wrestling with the metaphysical meaning of life.

Through his diligence and experimentation, Benton Spruance was able to push lithography to new levels. He developed techniques that are still in use today, including subtractive lithography, a practice which allows the artist to use a single stone for several colors. During his later years, Spruance received non-stop awards for his innovation, including a then unprecedented two Guggenheim Foundation awards.

"The Balka gift of Benton Spruance's lithography will significantly enhance both the museum's collection and its curricular potential," says John Stomberg, Deputy Director of WCMA and the exhibition's organizer. "Mr. Balka has carefully selected important works from throughout the artist's career, allowing us to demonstrate in great detail the evolution of one of the last century's great printmakers. As well, the gift includes several lithographs in multiple states, encouraging the careful study of his working technique and the properties of the medium."

Sigmund Balka graduated from Williams in 1956 and went on to receive his J.D. from Harvard Law School. Mr. Balka considers art to be a lifelong focus complementing his professional, community, and environmental passions. “Collecting art, curating exhibitions, and serving on museum boards,” says Balka, “is for me as natural as breathing. In this past century of holocaust and destruction it is my link with man’s creative spirit, which in the end must prevail or we will extinguish ourselves.”

Mr. Balka has been associated with Krasdale Foods, White Plains, NY since 1980—he is currently Vice President, Public and Cultural Affairs and General Counsel. Krasdale Foods is sponsor of the Krasdale Galleries, established in 1986, in White Plains and New York City. The Galleries are home to exhibitions that feature modern and contemporary art in all media by artists from all over the
world. Mr. Balka is the Director and Chief Operating Officer of the Krasdale Galleries and has curated over 115 exhibitions in that capacity.

Mr. Balka chairs the Exhibitions and Acquisitions Committee of the board of trustees of the Queens Museum of Art, serves on the Advisory Council for Visual Arts at Rutgers University, Mason Gross School of the Arts, Center for Innovative Print and Paper. He also has served on the board of directors of the Bronx Council on the Arts, as well as having chaired the Hunts Point Sculpture Park Task Force. He serves currently as President of the Print Connoisseurs Society of New York and on the boards of the Judaica Museum, the Longwood Arts Project, and the Bronx Museum of Art in New York. At WCMA, Mr. Balka has been Chairman of the WCMA Fellows Council and was a member of the Visiting Committee from 1996 to 1999. He is currently a WCMA Fellow and Vice President of the Williams College Class of 1956. He has been the board Chairman of the Jewish Repertory Theater of New York for many years. Mr. Balka’s professional legal associations are also numerous and include holding important offices with the American Bar Association and the American Corporate Counsel Association. He has also played a major role in promoting pro-bono activities among corporate attorneys.

The Williams College Museum of Art is open Tuesday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. Admission is free and the museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information, please contact: Suzanne Silitch, Director of Public Relations and External Affairs, 413.597.3178; WCMA@williams.edu; <www.wcma.org>.