

# ROBERT COTTINGHAM - AN AMERICAN ALPHABET

2 March - 12 April 2018



TANDEM PRESS APEX GALLERY

When Robert Cottingham was twelve years old, he had an epiphany. He calls it a “seminal moment,” a major experience that set the course for what he has been doing ever since. The moment took place at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York when, wandering through the galleries, he encountered Edward Hopper’s painting, “Early Sunday Morning.”

Cottingham recalled the experience during a lecture he gave in conjunction with a visit to Tandem Press. He stated: “It was the first time I realized that a painting could talk to you. Here was something that was feeding back to me. I had discovered another language - a silent language. It not only determined how I would paint - that I would be a realist painter - but it determined what I would paint.” He later found further influence and inspiration in the graphic styles represented in works by Piet Mondrian, Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, Stuart Davis, and the urban atmosphere of George Tooker.

Over the years, he arrived at a conclusion about the direction his art would take. It harkened back to his encounter with Hopper as well as his professional experience. “I had decided by now that I was interested in the urban subject matter. I would stay in the city because that was where I was from. Basically, I’m an American landscape painter, and this is my landscape.”

It also was at this time that Cottingham, recalling his childhood visits to Times Square, began to sense that there was something going on above eye level on the streets. It manifested itself in the signs above the storefronts and building entrances. It was a whole world of communication, “messages being fired back and forth above the store windows.” It reflected what he characterizes as “a golden age of outdoor signage,” something that is an integral part of the American experience. It led to the series he calls “An American Alphabet.”

He gathered material for the series after he was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 1974. He took a Greyhound bus excursion through the Northeast, photographing in 27 cities and gathering thousands of slides in the process.

The slides provided the visual text for the alphabet series. Cottingham initially did two sets of the series, paintings in oil, and then gouache. At Tandem, he approached his “An American Alphabet” series in a gradual way, anticipating that he would work on the project over a period of years. While he has focused on other media throughout the course of his artistic career, Cottingham is no stranger to printmaking. Since 1972, he has created nearly 80 prints. He enjoys the collaboration that comes with making prints and the fact that it allows him to get out of his studio.

For Cottingham, “An American Alphabet” is a cultural and historical document, something that captures a part of the man-made environment. “I’m not interested in the age of things,” he says. “I’m interested in the fact that they’re disappearing.” He also sees an aesthetic dimension in what he is doing with the letters in the series. “I think of them as formal arrangements. They’re almost an excuse to make an image and play with form, color, and line.”

Fourteen years in the making, Tandem Press completed this incredible project with Robert Cottingham in 2012. In addition, Robert Cottingham wrote about the signs of which each letter originated. Both his writings and images of this remarkable series of prints appear in a separate catalogue which accompanies the exhibit.



**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: A, 2001*

Lithography  
Edition of 40  
32 x 23 inches



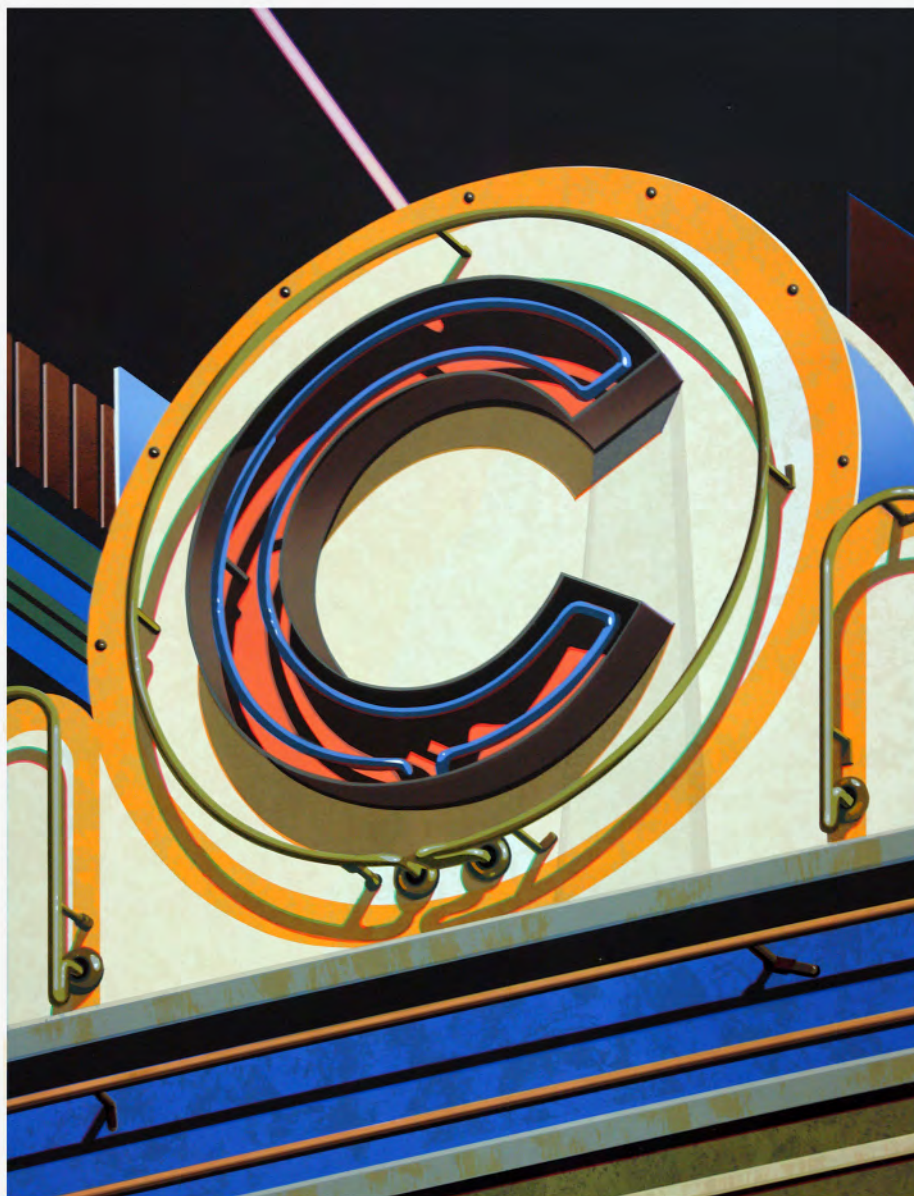
**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: B, 2008*

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 1/2 x 25 inches



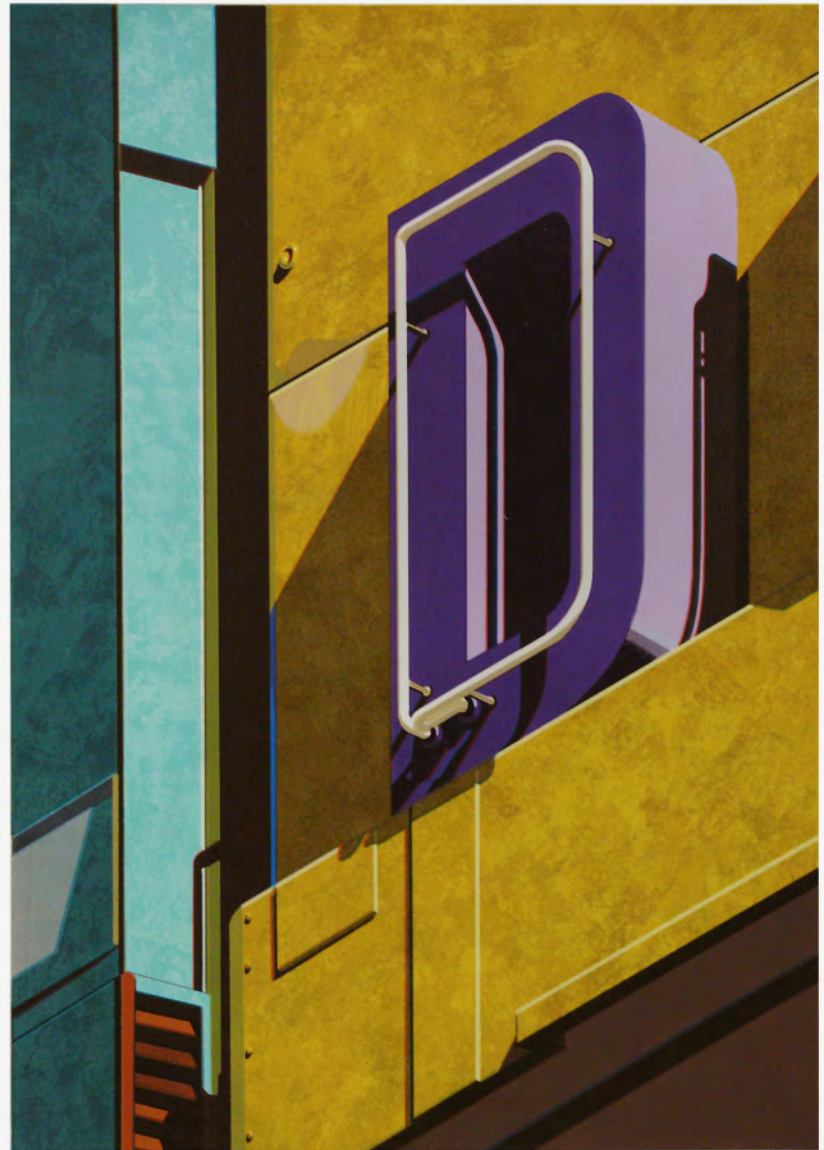
**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: C, 2010*

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 3/4 x 24 1/2 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: D, 1998*

Lithography  
Edition of 40  
32 x 23 inches



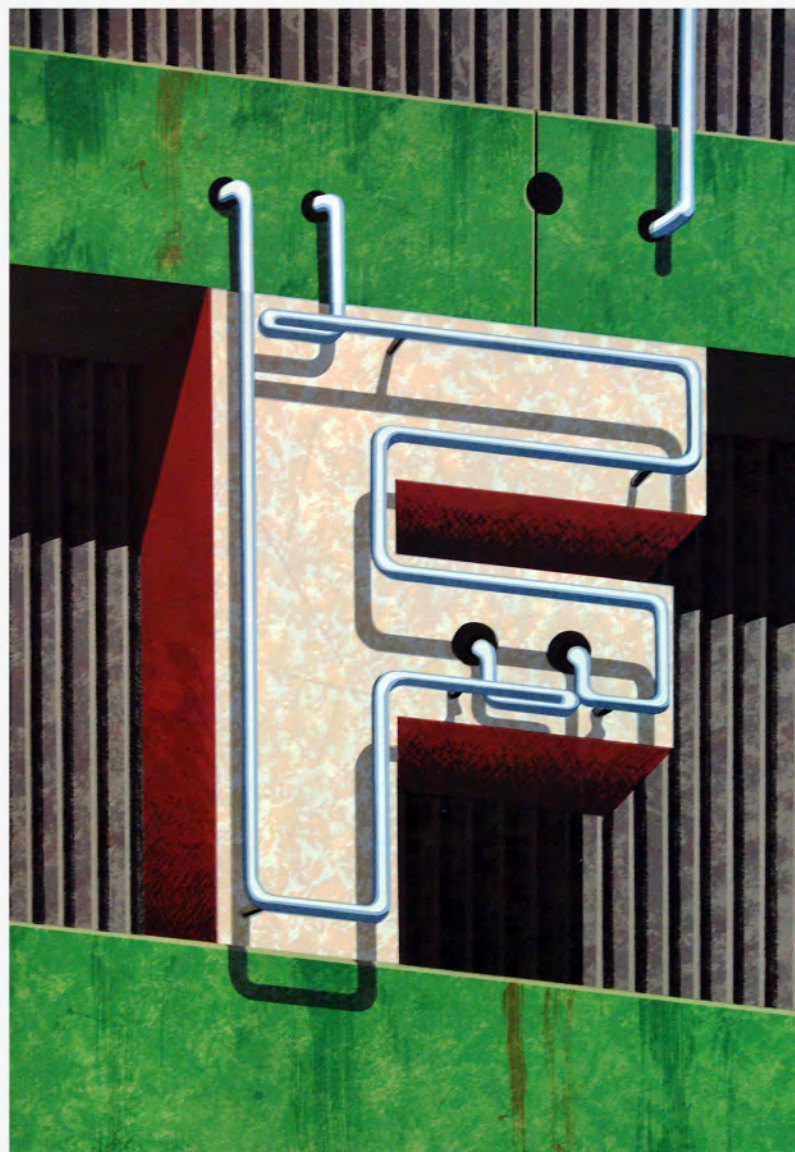
**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: E, 2008*

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 1/2 x 25 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

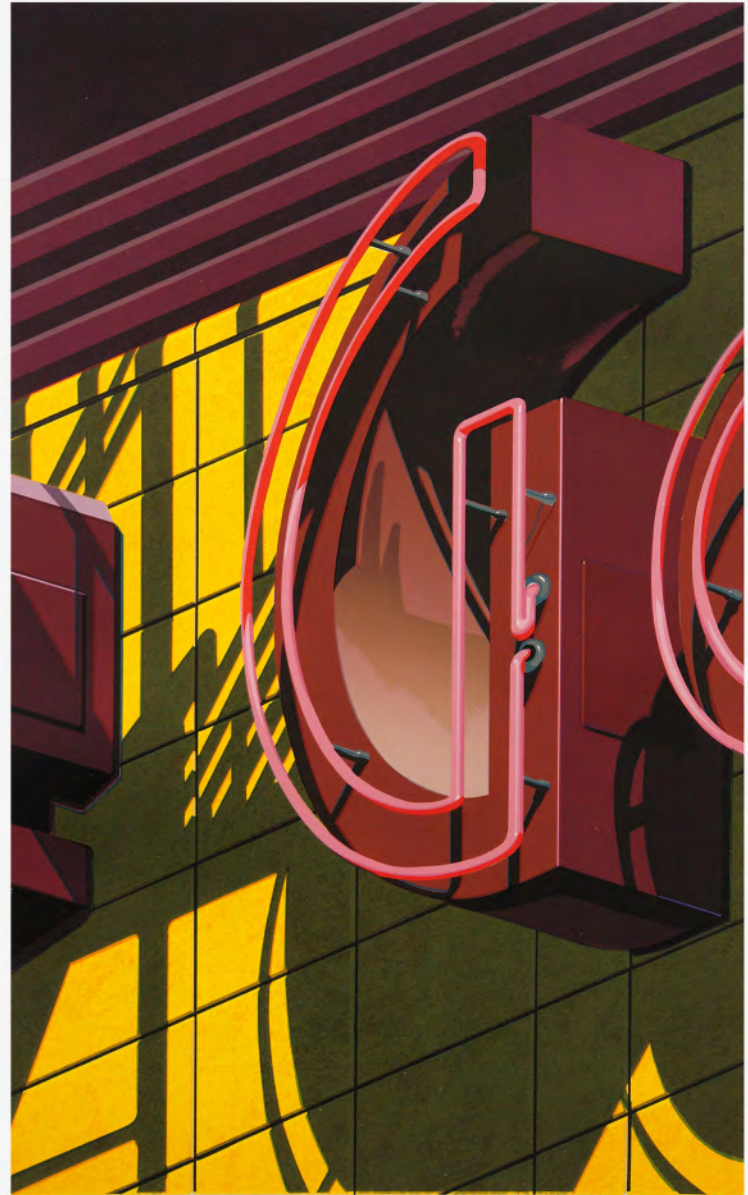
*An American Alphabet: F, 1997*

Lithography

Edition of 60

32 x 22 3/4 inches





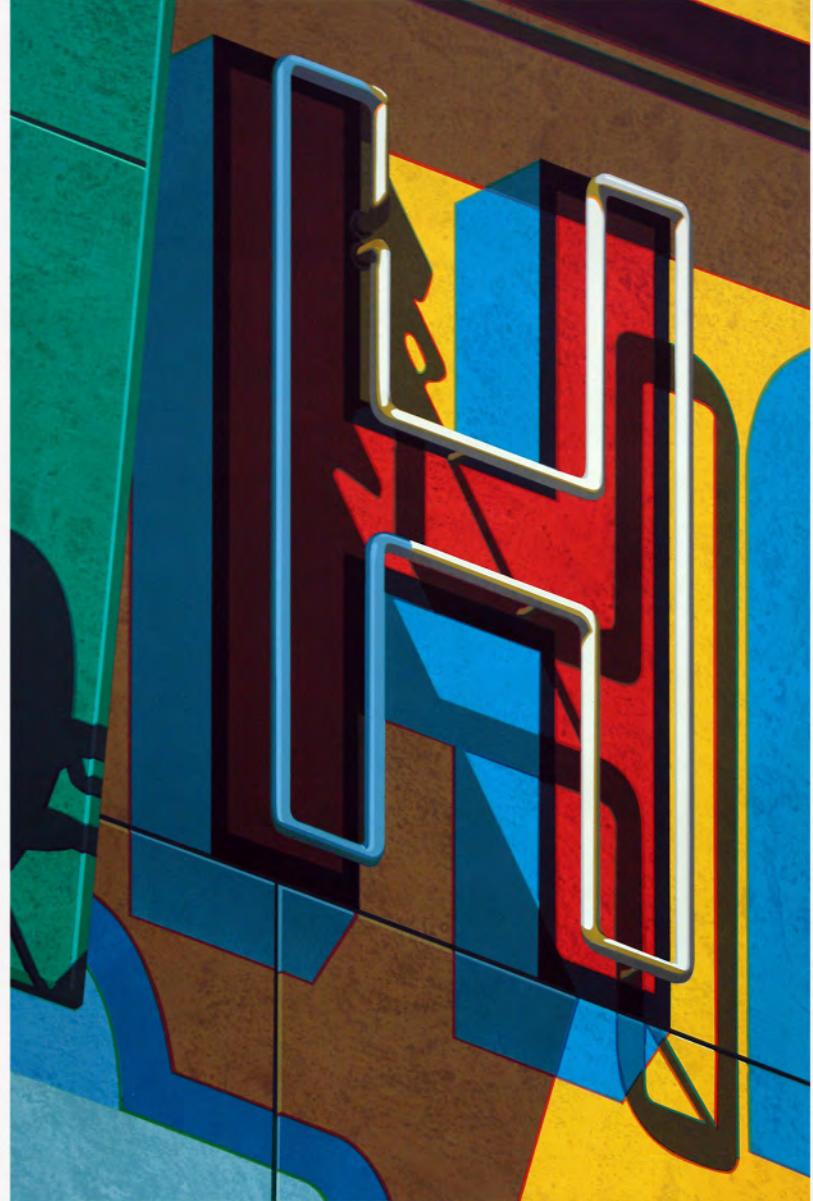
**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: G, 2009*

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 3/4 x 20 3/4 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: H, 2010*

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 1/2 x 22 inches



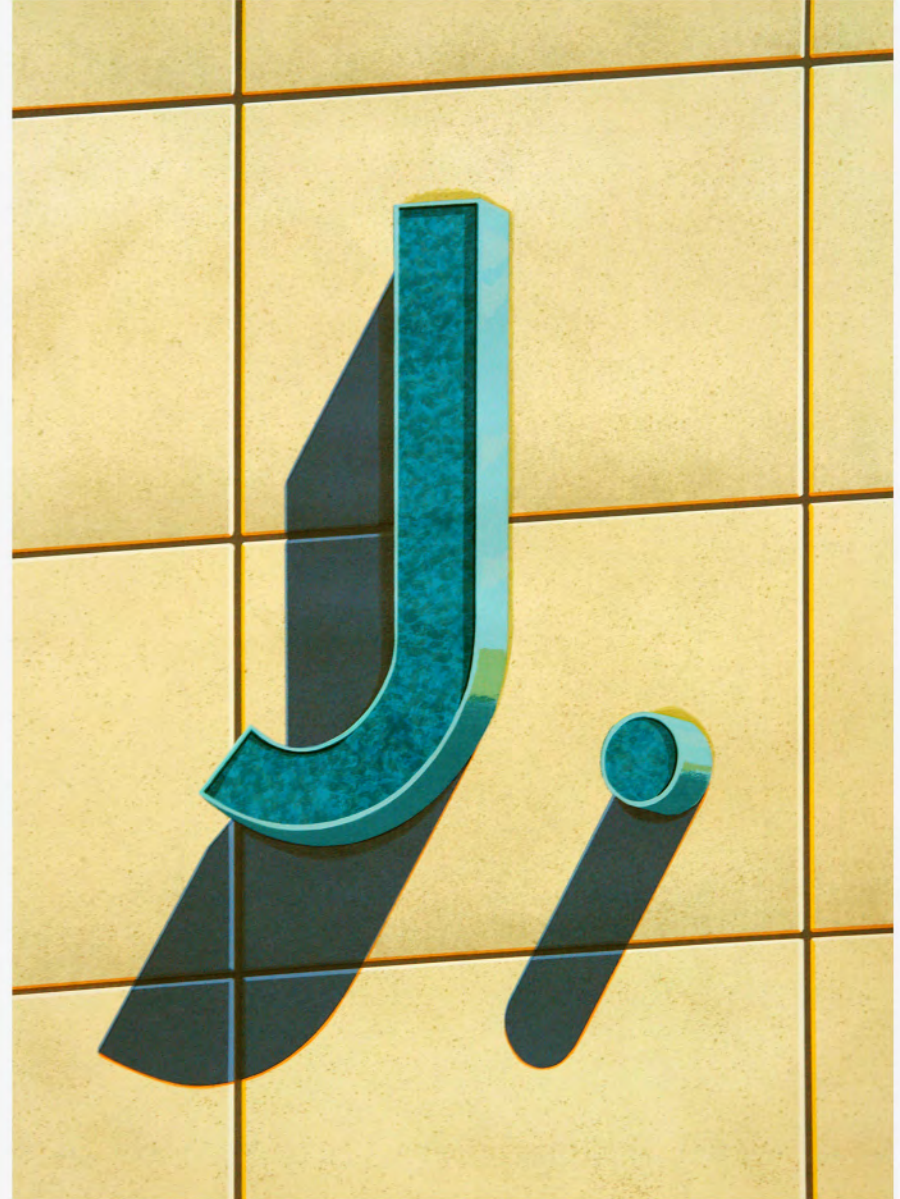
**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: I, 2009*

Lithography

Edition of 40

31 x 22 5/8 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: J, 2003*

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 1/2 x 23 5/8 inches



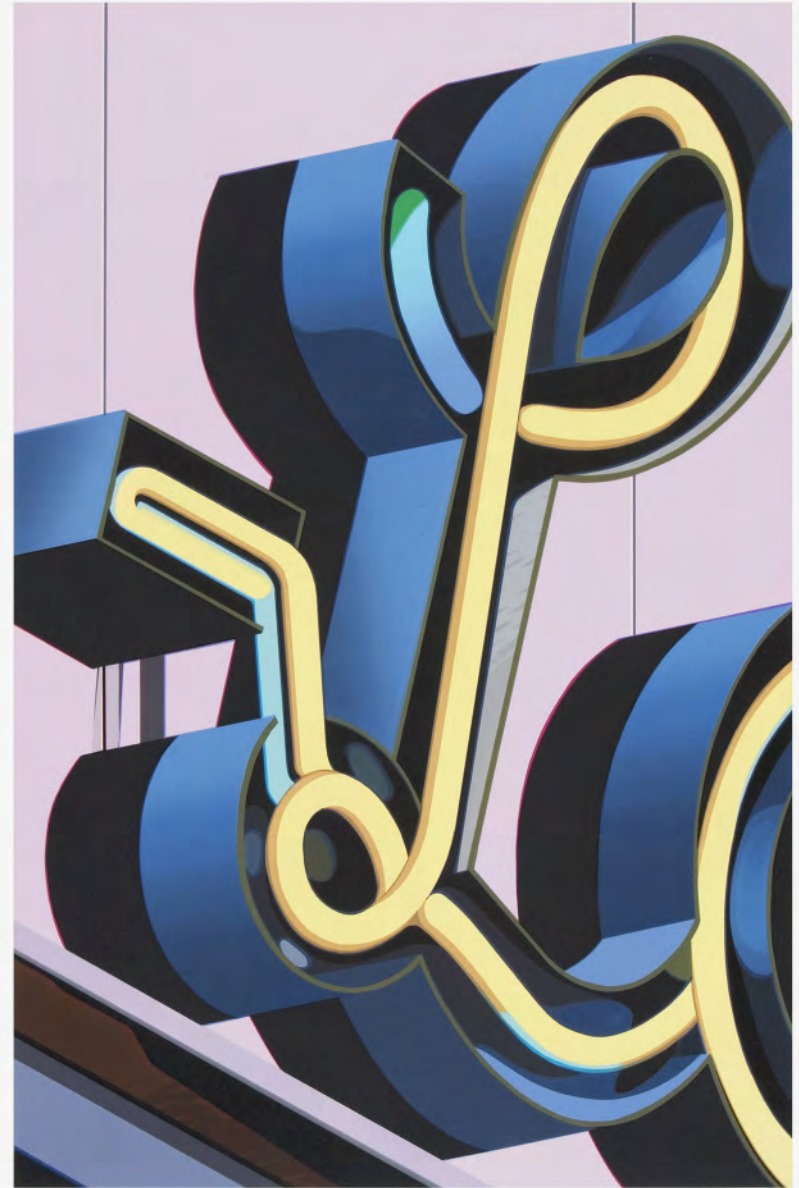
**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: K, 1997*

Lithography

Edition of 60

32 x 23 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: L, 2005*

Lithography

Edition of 40

31 x 21 3/4 inches



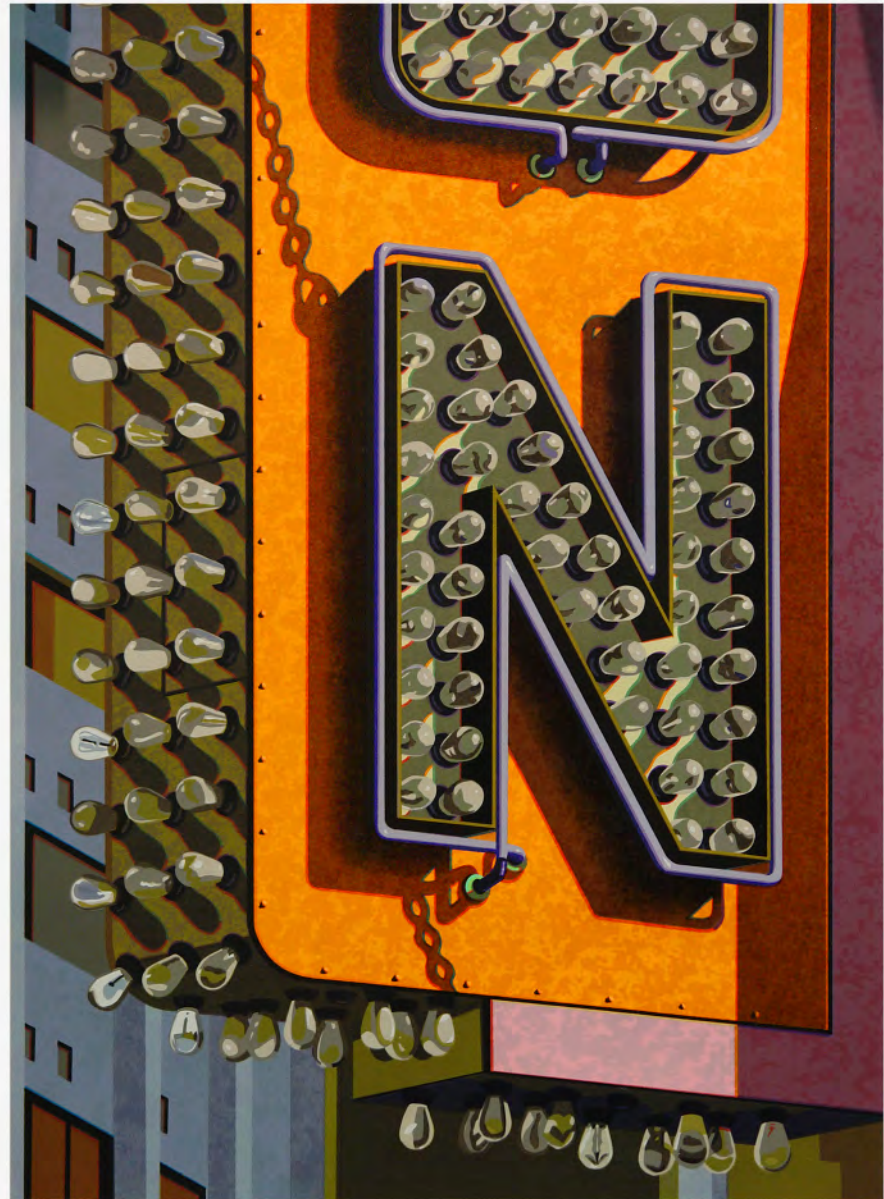
**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: M, 2002*

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 1/2 x 21 7/8 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: N, 2012*

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 5/8 x 23 1/2 inches





**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: O, 2007*

Lithography  
Edition of 40  
30 3/4 x 21 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: P, 2005*

Lithography

Edition of 40

31 x 22 1/8 inches



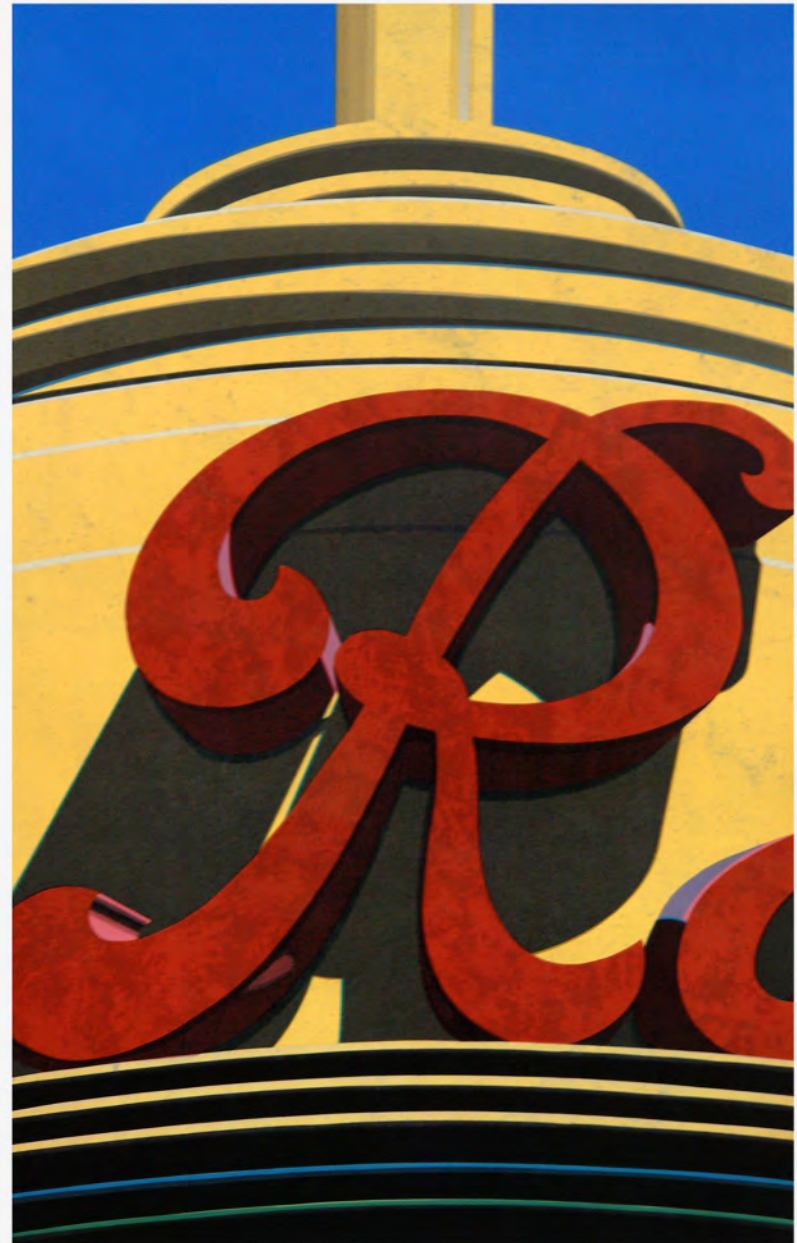
**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: Q, 2012*

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 1/2 x 24 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: R, 2002*

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 3/4 x 21 3/4 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: S, 2007*

Lithography

Edition of 50

30 1/2 x 23 3/8 inches



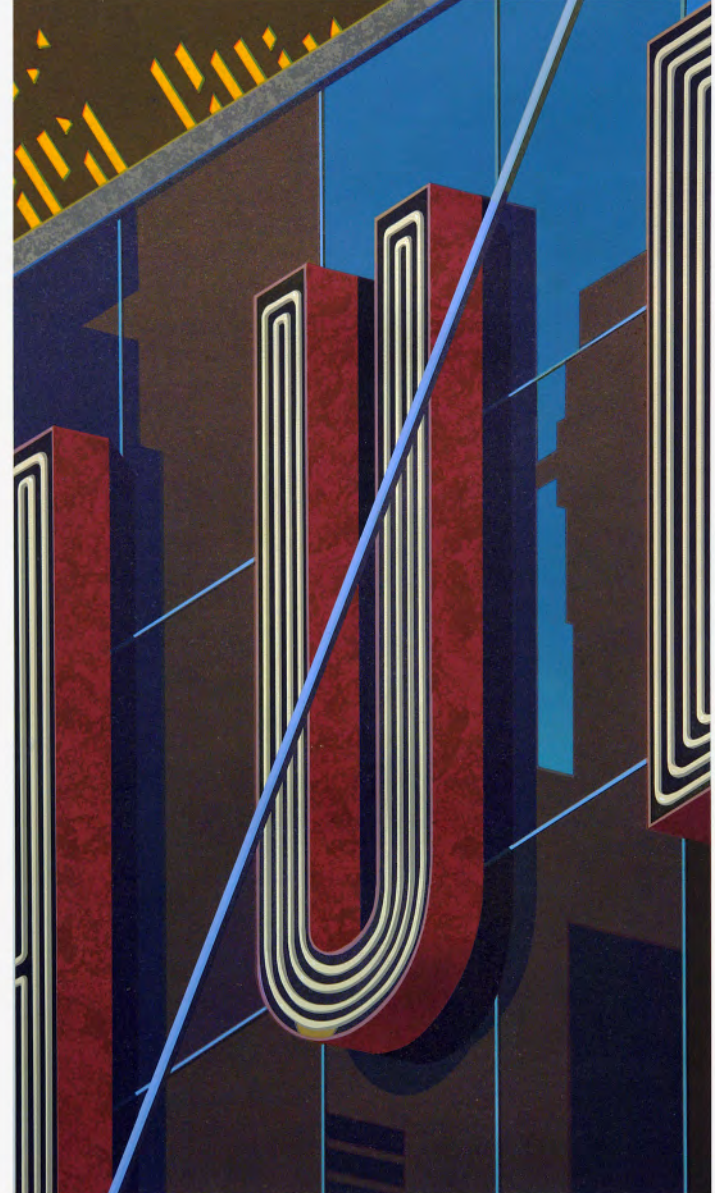
**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: T, 2002*

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 1/2 x 22 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: U, 2012*

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 5/8 x 20 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: V, 2004*

Lithography

Edition of 40

31 1/8 x 23 inches





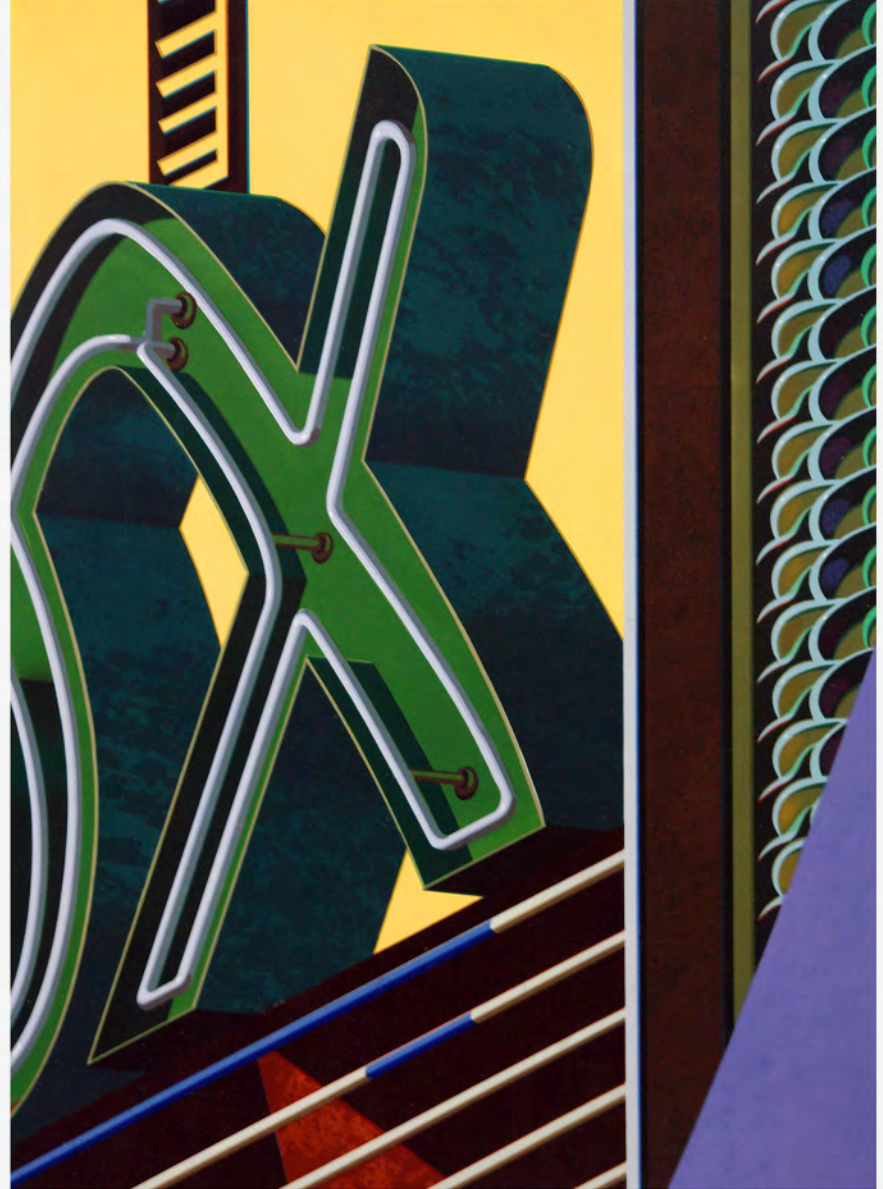
**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: W, 2010*

Lithography

Edition of 40

31 x 24 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: X*, 2009

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 3/4 x 23 1/2 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*An American Alphabet: Y, 2012*

Lithography

Edition of 40

30 1/2 x 22 inches



**Robert Cottingham**  
*An American Alphabet: Z*, 2008  
Lithography  
Edition of 40  
30 1/2 x 23 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*Empire, 2012*

Lithography

Edition of 40

35 1/4 x 35 inches



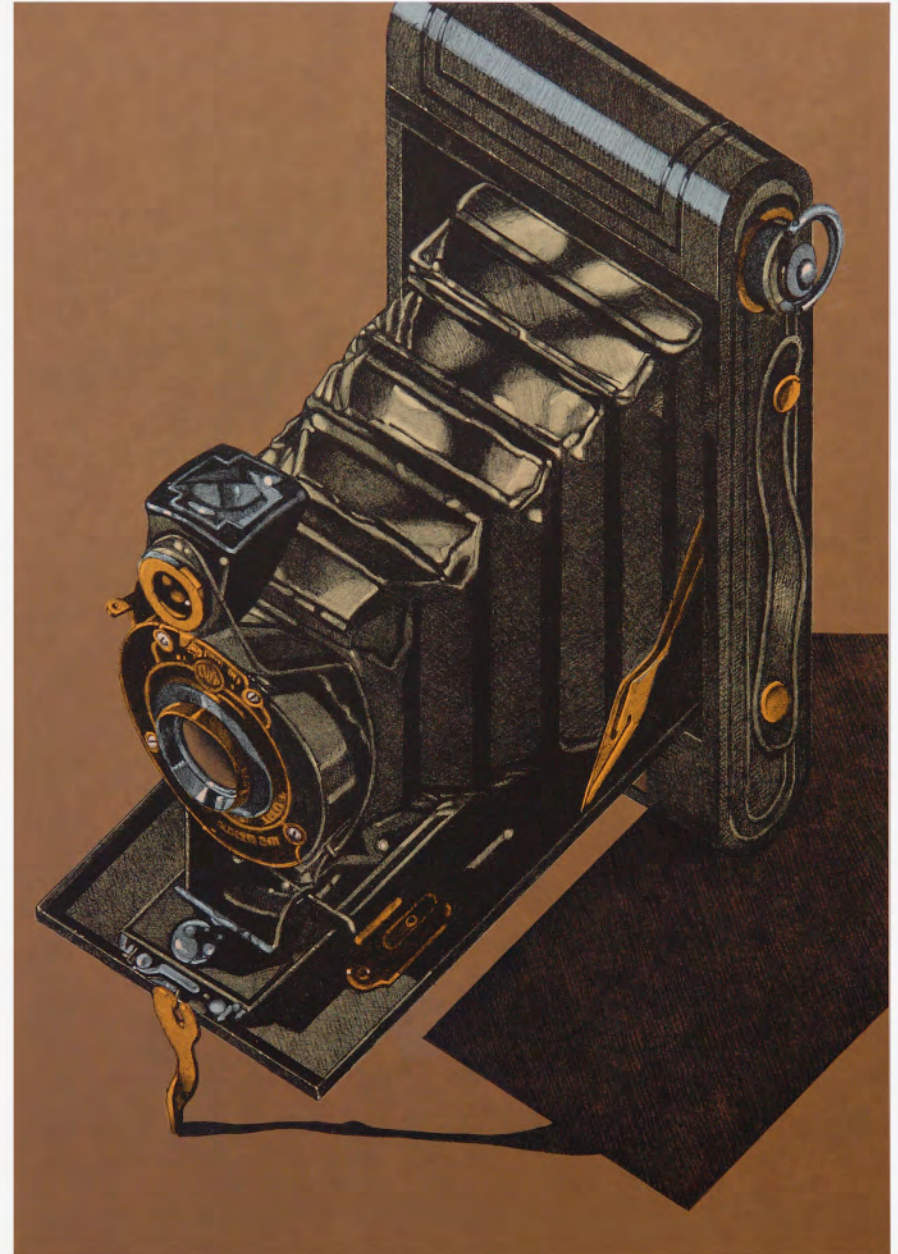
**Robert Cottingham**

*Empire (vertical)*, 2012

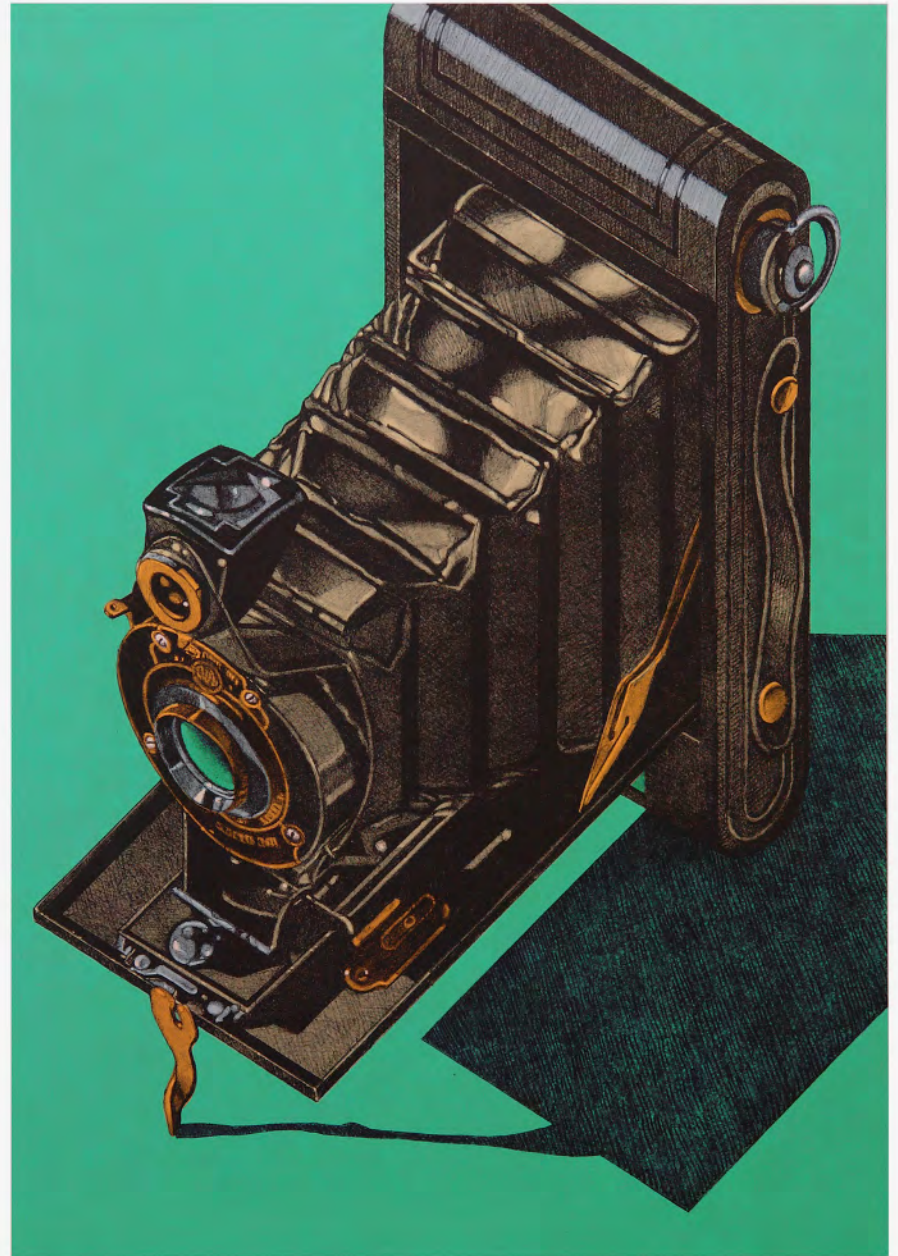
Lithography, chine collé

Edition of 30

38 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches

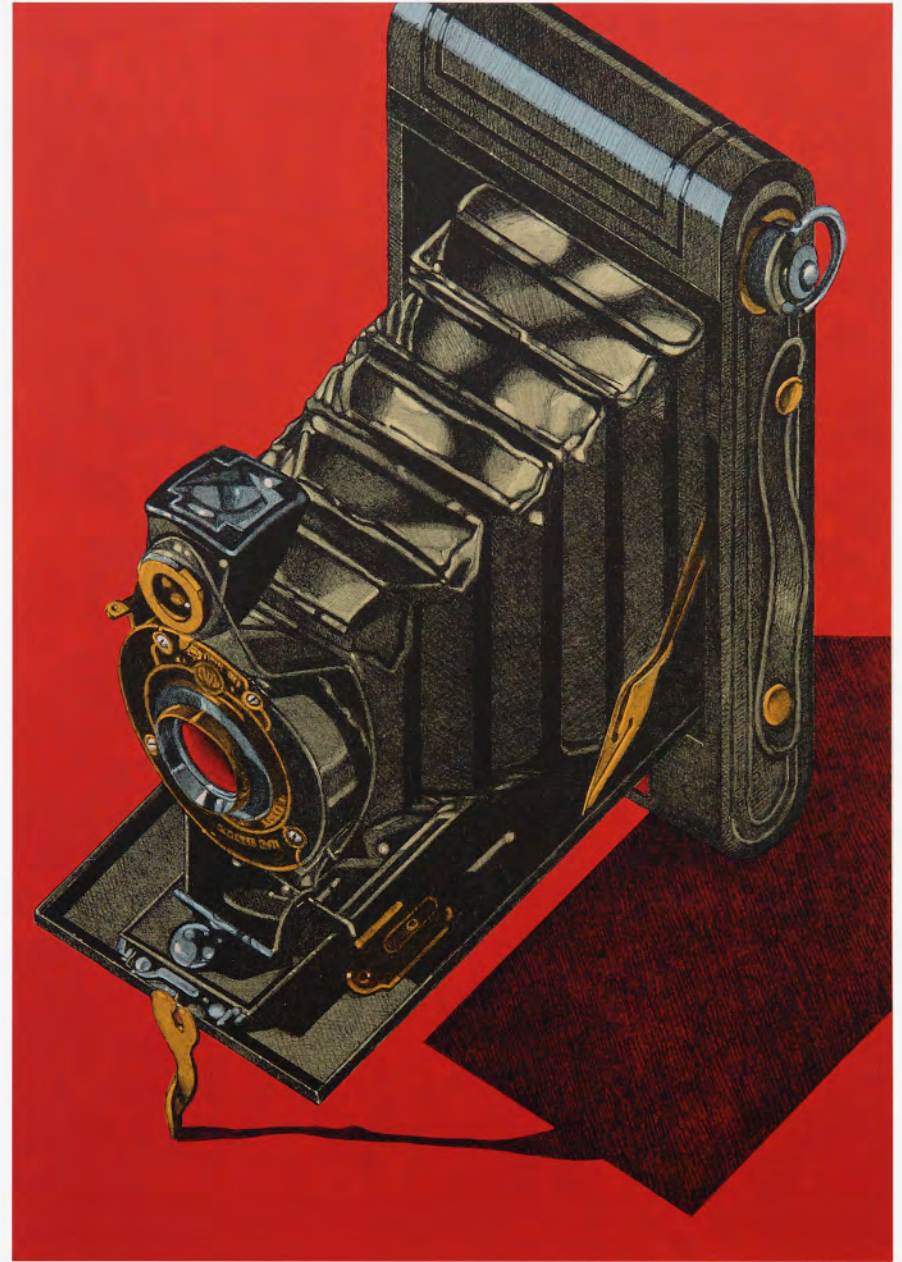


**Robert Cottingham**  
*HAWK-EYE (brown)*, 2014  
Lithography  
Edition of 20  
31 x 22 1/2 inches



**Robert Cottingham**  
*HAWK-EYE (green)*, 2014  
Lithography  
Edition of 20  
31 x 22 1/2 inches





**Robert Cottingham**

*HAWK-EYE (red)*, 2014

Lithography

Edition of 20

31 x 22 1/2 inches



**Robert Cottingham**

*CORONA*, 2015

Woodcut, chine collé

Edition of 40

38 1/2 x 38 1/2 inches