

THE CALIFORNIA PRINTMAKER

THE JOURNAL OF THE CALIFORNIA SOCIETY OF PRINTMAKERS

OCTOBER 2000



*William Wolff, My Name is Legion (A Certain Man Which Had Devils),
etching, 1975, 12" x 7"*

Inside: Reports from Japan, China, Taiwan, Australia, Canada, New York, Iceland, Eastern Europe, Ukraine, and Israel; Roy Ragle; Pacific Prints; William Wolff; and more...

EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue of *The California Printmaker* has taken on an international flavor, starting from an early suggestion by Linda Boyd, our capable designer and general computer wizard (and long-time CSP member).

It has been my pleasure to correspond with—and in some cases, to speak directly to—all of our authors; and the whole experience from conception to culmination has been greatly stimulating and rewarding. We hope, therefore, that you will find herein represented some fresh and novel viewpoints regarding printmaking and from printmaking societies active in far-away places.

Besides Linda Boyd, of especial help and a source of timely advice was our own Gary Shaffer, who has met some of our overseas contributors in person. And to Professor Arthur Mu-Sen Kao we offer our warmest thanks for his personal intervention and for his indispensable English translation of material from the Republic of China. Finally we wish to extend a handshake in thought to all of our contributors for taking time from busy lives for the always difficult and vexatious task of giving written expression to thought.

—Raymond L. Wilson

JAPAN

Printsaurus and the Nature and Status of Prints: Artist Cooperatives in Japan

By Koichi Kiyono

First of all, I would like to share with you the social background in which the Japanese artist must struggle to express himself. Japanese society, as you may know, encourages conformity and punishes self-expression, and it is in terms of conformity and belonging to the group that the individual achieves selfhood, respectability, and credibility. I feel that it is very difficult for the Japanese artist to justify his position only through his individual activity under these circumstances. Unfortunately our artistic expression is still not appreciated as a social necessity but is seen as economically useless by the general public.

There are two Japanese proverbs which illustrate the negative social attitude toward art works. The proverb “Deru Kugi-wa Utareru” may be roughly translated from the Japanese as “The nail that sticks out must be hammered down.” This proverb expresses the social disapproval of any activity that highlights and emphasizes the role of a single person. In other words, an individual, in order to be accepted, must not stand out. He must conform with others and keep his opinion and feelings to himself.

The second proverb speaks ironically about the need for social belonging, “Yoraba taiju-no Kae.” It may be roughly translated to say that people want to gather and find shelter in the shadow of a big tree. One meaning is that individual life becomes more secure and comfortable if one belongs to a big and stable organization. But another meaning is that a person can't enjoy his life without making an effort and taking a risk.

From the ambivalent meanings of these two proverbs, you can understand that the Japanese artist confronts a complicated situation not only on the social level, but also on the psychological level. In order to obtain the security of belonging in the shadow of a big tree, many groups and cooperatives have been established by Japanese artists. Printsaurus, I must emphasize, is not a big tree that provides the security of belonging. It is completely different from the others in Japan.

Koichi Kiyono is a member of Printsaurus.

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More on Printsaurus

By Yuriko Miyoshi

Our group, the "International Print Exchange Association in Japan," is nicknamed, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, "Printsaurus." The nickname originated from a playful coining of "print" and "dinosaur" to underline the "monstrous" nature of artistic expression in Japanese society.

We are a non-profit association operated by and for printmaker members. In the past thirteen years our membership has grown to about sixty printmakers from all over Japan. At Printsaurus we don't have our own studio, workshop, or gallery space to share with each other, and we don't provide any space, facilities, or goods for our membership. We have concentrated on the realization of our practical objective of organizing exchange exhibitions. All activities are executed with the assistance of member-volunteers, and through the telephone, the fax machine, the post, and now e-mail. Each member is required to volunteer actively in the organization in addition to contributing his or her art works.

Since 1987, Printsaurus has organized many international print exchange exhibitions in both Japan and many foreign countries. We have established good relationships with artists not only in Taiwan, China, Korea, and Thailand but also in the U.S.A., Canada, Argentina, and in England, Belgium, Italy, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, and Russia in Europe. At the same time we have invited foreign artists to participate in our exhibitions in Japan. We have published catalogues and posters and obtained media coverage for news of our activities, thus helping get our message out to the public. Although we have been confronted with some difficult circumstances and problems in organizing these exhibitions with international artists, we have had many good experiences and memories from our direct contact with them. We believe that the individual relationship and confidence between a member and a foreign artist should initiate the first opportunity for an exhibition.

In fact, most exhibitions have been based on personal relationships and volunteer efforts. After initiating contact, we then have had to deal with the problem of securing exhibition space and necessary financing. We have involved museums, galleries, community groups, government funding agencies, and embassies as supporters. We set up different executive committees for each exhibition or country, and we have an office where we work on the general affairs and organization at the same time. So all members are expected to act as representatives of Printsaurus, and they can take the opportunity to be project leaders with the decisive power and responsibility to manage these exhibitions.

I am a member of Printsaurus. I have had an individual web page on the Printsaurus web site since 1996. The site of Printsaurus is not an official one, but artists from foreign countries visit my site and frequently have questions about Printsaurus. In October 1997, I linked up with Russia via e-mail; from Japan to Novosibirsk and Kaliningrad. This funny link made my dreams come true. In cooperation with Russian galleries and artists, I organized the exhibition of Japanese graphics, "40+1 Living Faces," as a part of the Fifth International Biennial of Easel Graphic Art, "Kaliningrad-Koenigsberg 98," in Russia. As a next step, I want to invite them to show in Japan in the near future.



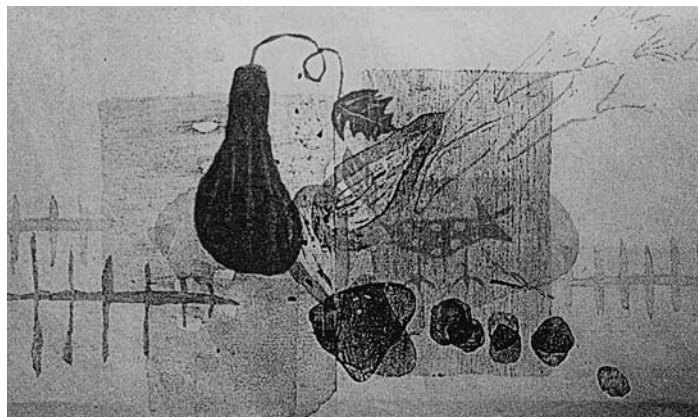
Yuriko Miyoshi in front of work from Printsaurus artists at the "5th International Biennial of Drawing and Graphics," Gallery of the Municipal Museum of Art, Győr, Hungary.

In October 1999, I visited Győr, Hungary for the "International Biennial of Drawing and Graphic Arts Exhibition," which included an exhibition of Japanese prints. I saw many print works by our international friends, for instance Claude Sinte (Belgium), Veerle Rooms (Belgium), Maurice Pasternak (Belgium), Walter Jule (Canada), Ryszard Otreba (Poland), Vladimir Zuev (Russia), Suwan Methapist (Thailand), and others. Now that I have contacts with many artists, it is very interesting to know not only their works but also their faces and characters. When Printsaurus members see the works after meeting with international artists, they are able to understand their works more deeply. Otherwise it is sometimes difficult for us to understand them.

In celebration of our tenth anniversary in 1998, Printsaurus organized a major art exhibition of Japanese folding fans supported by Ibasen, which is a Tokyo printer and publisher. The shape of the folding fan is very special and very definite, but the artist is free to use his or her creative skills and ideas to work within this space. This exhibition of international folding fans has been traveling through several countries.

This year, the Printsaurus has organized, in cooperation with Amsterdams Grafisch Atelier (AGA), a traveling exhibition of original prints, entitled "NL-JP Printmaking Today." This cultural exchange between The Netherlands and Japan is being held in the celebration of four hundred years of cultural and business relations between the two countries. We are very much looking forward to meeting new friends in both Japan and Holland.

Yuriko Miyoshi is a printmaker and a prominent member of Printsaurus. Her e-mail address is yuriko@cmpk.or.jp.



Mashimi Takimoto, Day by Day, woodcut, 1998, 60 x 90 cm

CHINA AND TAIWAN

A Brief Introduction to Modern Printmaking in China and Taiwan

By Arthur Mu-Sen Kao

The Chinese are proud of the achievements in printmaking, skills that they have explored over the past four thousand years. The technique of carving pictures on a flat surface can be traced to the jade carving and clay engravings of the new stone age (ca. 2500 - 2000 B.C.) and the oracle-bone engravings of the bronze age (ca. 2000 - 500 B.C.). The Chinese started to use carved media to duplicate pictures and characters in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - A.D. 220), and the technique was then used to duplicate Buddhist sutras in the Buddhist age (ca. fourth to tenth centuries). Further developments were the inventions of galley printing in the Sung Dynasty (A.D. 960 - 1279) and multi-color printing in the Ming Dynasty (A.D. 1368 - 1644).

In the long process of development, Chinese printmaking kept, until the 1930s, in line with two principles: practicalism which meant that printmaking was a kind of practical art and linearizationalism which meant that all prints were executed with thin fluent curved lines. Traditionally, they used carved woodblocks to print books, illustrations, and folk art pieces such as new year pictures. In the seventeenth century, this type of practical art found some seminal inspiration from realism in European prints (engraving, lithography, and metal plate lithography) brought to China by Jesuit missionaries. Therefore in a period of about 250 years, from late Ming to the end of the Qing Dynasty, though the two principles mentioned above had not been changed, the expression of print became more realistic. Some prints even adopted European single vanishing point perspective and chiaroscuro techniques.

A more radical change occurred in the 1930s when Russian and Eastern European woodblock prints, as a vehicle of Communism, were introduced to China. The new style of woodblock prints posited a sharp contrast to the traditional Chinese prints by its solid structure of facets and planes, powerful realistic details, strong formal structure, dramatic action,

and everyday subject matter. Due to its cheap production and formal power, it won the favor of both political camps—Communists under Mao Zedong and the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek. A tremendous number of prints of this genre were produced during the Second World War and the following civil war.

In mainland China, during the past fifty years, despite the unceasing political upheavals, no dramatic change occurred in printmaking and woodblock media, and realism remained in the mainstream. While most people are still tightly reined by conventional prejudices and Communist ideology, printmaking, in general, is classified as *gong'i meshu*, which literally means "craft art," not "fine art," and "real" artists stay away from it. In the 1980s, some avant-garde artists in Shanghai and Beijing tried to apply techniques of printmaking to their "fine art" creations. New techniques, new media, and new ideas were experimented with. Unfortunately, after the 1989 Tiananmen Square events, these artists were either forced to be silent or to leave the country. For instance, Xu Bing, an artist who is known for his print work, "Books from the Sky," is now living in exile in the United States.

What is significant is the fact that after 1950, to meet the new political atmosphere under the Communist government, Socialist Realism with its mission of depicting beautiful landscapes and the people's happy life has run along side the Social Realism that flourished before 1950 as a means of bringing to light the dark side of society. This was a good opportunity for the confluence of printmaking and mainstream art in China so as to raise the position of printmakers in the realm of art. Some artists who could employ the printmaking techniques in the creation of beautiful pictures have received high commendation from the populace in the mainland today. Their works are often full of romantic lyricism that is strengthened by beautiful composition and color.

Printmaking continued to serve as



Chen Chi-mao, Summer Evening, woodcut, 1988, 56 x 47 cm

political media in Taiwan in the first decade after Chiang Kai-shek and his army settled on the island in 1949. However, the situation changed dramatically at the end of the 1950s when the walls built around art in Taiwan by the military government under Chiang fell apart due to the forceful strikes of American culture in Asia. The Tung-fang Hua-lui (East Art Association) and the Wu-yueh Hua-lui (May Art Association), both led by young artists, were founded in 1957 to challenge the old traditions. These young artists imported the ideas and techniques of modern American art, especially that of the Abstract Expressionism of Hans Hofmann, Willem de Kooning, and Jackson Pollock. Following the waves of modernization, the Chinese Modern Printmaking Association was organized to lead forward the train of printmaking. Many outstanding printmakers arose in Taiwan.

To them printmaking was no longer a kind of practical art or craft; it was a part of fine art. They experimented with new media and techniques and pursued personal styles. For example, Wu Han continued to use woodblock print method, Chin Sung and Han Hsiang-ning used rollers to

apply oil colors on paper, Yang Yeng-feng finished his works by pressing paper onto a piece of glass that was covered with wet pigment, while Chiang Han-tung's prints were finished by hand-coloring on the printed outlines. They soon won recognition in various national and international exhibitions.

Interestingly, they later found that their monotype prints were not accepted by international printmaking societies, and their "relief plate" printing method was out of date.

They realized that in order to enter into the mainstream of art, they had to further internationalize their art. Printmaking thus moved quickly into a new era in the 1970s. The Republic of China Printmaking Association with fifty-two initial members was founded in March 1970 to further promote the art of printmaking. Many international exhibitions were held; many outstanding overseas Chinese printmakers, such as Liao Hsiu-p'ing and Hsieh Li-fa, were invited to lecture or teach in Taiwan colleges, and many outstanding Taiwanese printmakers went abroad to study. Taiwanese printmakers soon mastered various techniques, including traditional European engraving and lithography, and new skills to handle metal plates, silkscreen, and intaglio. After 1988, high-tech media added a new dimension to the scene of Taiwan printmaking. The present situation of printmaking in Taiwan is, therefore, not much different from what we see in the United States. It is an internationalized, multi-cultural, and multi-media platform. To lead Taiwan toward the international mainstream, The Council for Cultural Planning and Development of the Republic of China has held biennial printmaking exhibitions since 1983.

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Important Exhibitions of Printmaking by Taiwanese Artists in 1999 and 2000

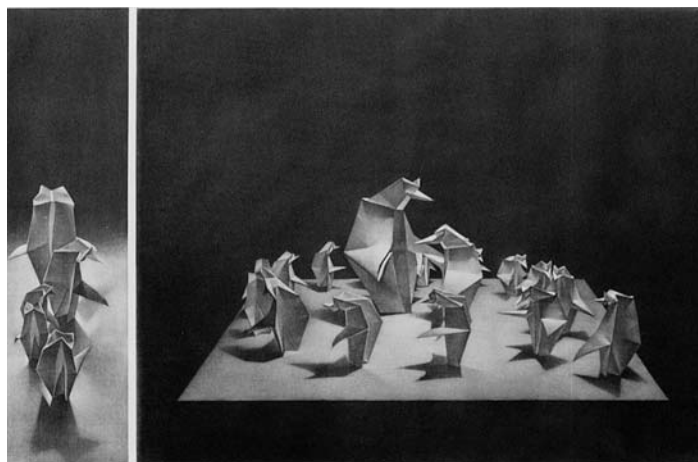
By Chung You-hui (Translated by Arthur Mu-Sen Kao)

Taiwan Japan Modern Printmaking Exchange Exhibition

In 1999 the most important exhibition for Taiwanese printmaking artists was the "Taiwan Japan Printmaking Exchange Exhibition" in Tokyo. Thirty-nine Taiwanese artists and forty-one Japanese artists participated in the exhibition. Media included silkscreen, intaglio, woodcut, mezzotint, collagraph, etching, wood engraving, mixed media, drypoint, deep etching, and lithography.

As most printmakers in Taiwan today have spent some time studying in Japan, Japanese influence is inevitable; and this is very evident in the techniques of creating images and using colors. Japanese prints are particularly admired for the subtle decorative color and visually enchanting composition, which skillfully combines geometric components and free touches of color. Among Taiwanese artists, Chung You-hui, Gung Jyh-ming, Chen Hui-chen, and Hwang Shyh-twan are keeping themselves well in this line.

Indeed, there is a great variety among these works, and Taiwanese artists have displayed their own characteristics. For example, Wang Jenn-tai uses surrealistic compositions of landscape, mirage-like bubbles, and modern buildings and mechanical gimmicks to express humankind's getting lost in history. Lu Yen-ching's "Flower Series" retains the free brushwork of Chinese painting, while Huang Kuen-bo's *Wedding March Song* stages a



Huang Kuen-bo, *Wedding March Song*, lithograph, 1999, 40 x 60.5 cm

group of paper penguins singing on a three-dimensional platform. Most interesting is possibly the fact that none of the Japanese works imply political issues, but a few Taiwanese works, such as Lin Hsueh-ching's *Day and Night*, Mei Dean-E's *The Completed Picture of the Republic of China*, and Lo Pin-ho's "Taiwanese Series" touch on the present political situation in Taiwan.

Printmaking and Life Exhibition for Year 2000

Taipei Municipal Social Education Hall held the "Printmaking and Life Exhibition for Year 2000" at its First Gallery and the Citizen Playground between June 24 and July 6, 2000. The exhibition was sponsored by The Printmaking Society of the Republic of China and the Printmaking Center of the National Taiwan College of Arts. Forty Taiwanese artists and eleven foreign artists participated in the exhibition.

Among the exhibits were printed works from everyday objects such as banknotes, newspapers, tomb tablet rubbings, radio plates, books, birthday cards, and so forth. Additionally, the methods and materials of printmaking were made a part of the exhibition. The audience, therefore, could take the opportunity to learn more about this most fascinating part of life—the fantastic world of printmaking. In connection with the exhibit, there were a series of activities, including workshops, discussions, demonstrations, prize-award questions, and "do it yourself" events. Parents and children were encouraged to participate in the activities.

This exhibition was different from other exhibitions, as the exhibition flyer said, for it emphasized social and art education, demonstrating the close relationship between printmaking and our everyday lives.

Professor Chung You-hui is the President of the Printmaking Society of the Republic of China. His e-mail address is



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Lu Yen-ching, *Flowers 8*, lithograph, 1998, 47 x 58 cm

AUSTRALIA

The Australian Print Workshop

By Anne Virgo

About the Australian Print Workshop

The Australian Print Workshop, Inc. (APW) is a not-for-profit organization that provides both emerging and established artists with access to a wide range of printmaking equipment and expertise. It is a unique center, offering the most comprehensive printmaking facilities in Australia. Situated in the inner Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy, the workshop began in 1981. Over the years the workshop has rapidly expanded its activities, attracting many of Australia's leading artists based on its reputation for high quality work and professional support facilities.

Projects actively encourage cooperative ventures with artists and other arts and business organizations, both locally and internationally. The creation of these partnerships results in the production of new and challenging works in the print medium, maintaining for the workshop a reputation that is acknowledged worldwide.

The workshop is recognized as a key authority on contemporary Australian printmaking and attracts the support of numerous individuals, foundations, and corporate sponsors. The workshop also receives annual funding from the State Government of Victoria and project funding from the Australian Federal Government.

In summary, the printmaking activities of the APW fall into five main areas, best described by the following categories; Projects, Custom Printing Workshop, Access Studio, Education Program, and Exhibitions.

Projects

Each year the Australian Print Workshop undertakes a number of innovative and challenging printmaking projects. The APW fosters collaborative projects with established and emerging artists in a variety of ways. In recent years, some of these projects have included working on a range of print commissions, including a recent project that involved working with a commissioned artist on a major public artwork that utilized printmaking techniques to produce a fifty-meter long etched zinc wall designed for the interior of the new Melbourne Museum. Other projects have involved administering a program of scholarships for Australian artists and initiating a series of print publishing projects.

However, perhaps the most significant projects undertaken by the APW have been those developed since the early 1990s with a number of aboriginal artists and artist communities—initially, with artists living in remote communities in the north and the northwestern regions of Australia and more recently with artists living throughout Victoria and Melbourne region in the south-eastern parts of Australia.

Over this period a number of exciting and highly successful projects in partnership with aboriginal artists have been completed. These projects have focussed on providing an opportunity for the artists to work in the print medium for the first time, particularly important for artists who don't have access to printmaking equipment and skilled printers. We take the APW from its city



Exterior of the Australian Print Workshop

base to artists who are unable to access the professional print facilities and services offered at the workshop in Melbourne.

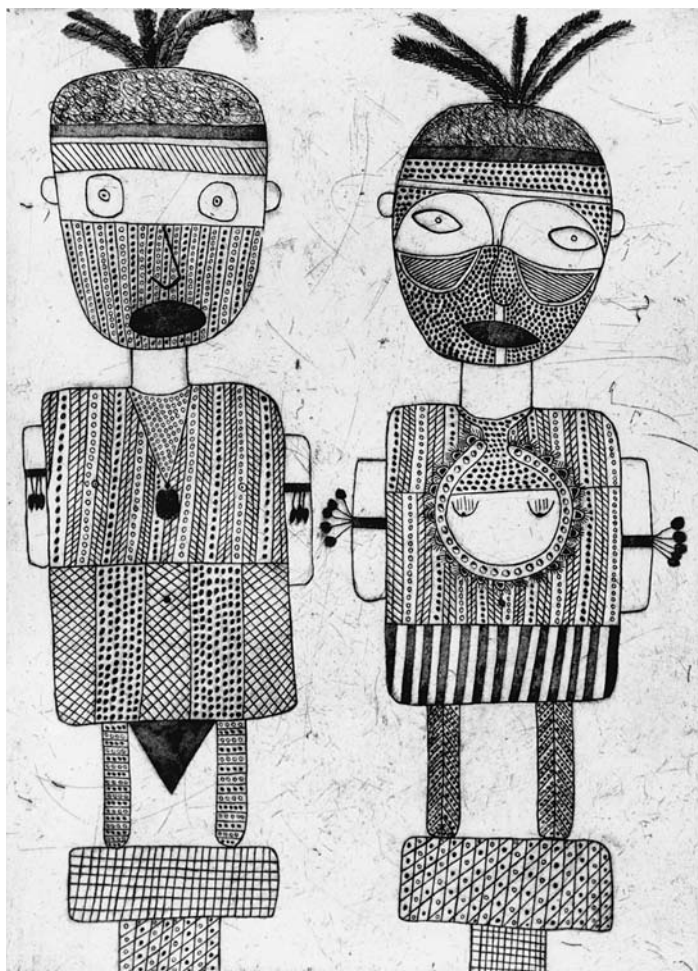
These projects usually involve workshop printers visiting the artists in their communities for a period of one to two weeks and establishing a temporary "bush workshop." Often these projects have meant travelling vast distances—from one part of Australia to another—sometimes travelling 6,500 kilometers by air for each of the projects. These projects have been very successful. Many prints have been produced—with the result that many of the artists now view the medium of printmaking as central to their art-making. Over the years the Australian Print Workshop's relationship with the artists has grown and developed in exciting new directions.

During the past eighteen months, the workshop has undertaken a number of highly significant projects with aboriginal artists that have used the medium of printmaking as a tool to research, record, and reclaim indigenous cultural material contained in museum collections.

Custom Printing Workshop

The Australian Print Workshop Custom Printing Workshop provides artists, who may not have a detailed technical knowledge of printing processes, with an opportunity to produce limited edition prints in collaboration with highly skilled APW printers using the workshop's facilities and equipment.

Artists using the Custom Printing Workshop collaborate with APW printers, who manage the technical aspects of printing and assist them to realize their particular visual language in the print medium. Printmaking services are offered in a range of print techniques including etching, direct stone lithography, direct and offset plate lithography, relief printing, and monoprinting. The reputation of APW Custom Printing Workshop, based on its facilities and on the skill and expertise of APW printers, attracts artists from around Australia and overseas. A number of these artists have an extensive background in printmaking, while others visit the APW to make prints for the first time.



Maryanne Mungatopi, Murrakupwara and Malakaninga (Young Man and Young Woman), etching, 1998, 51.5 cm x 37.5 cm

Fees for custom printing are calculated on a job-by-job basis and are set at a level that allows the APW to recover labor, materials, and overhead expenses.

The APW Custom Printing Workshop offers a wide range of printmaking equipment and facilities for use exclusively by artists utilizing the custom printing service. Custom Printing Workshop artists have exclusive access to the following:

- Private studio for the duration of the artist's project
- FAG offset lithography press (bed size 78 x 107 cm)
- Mailander 1959 offset lithography press (bed size 60 x 70 cm)
- Takach-Garfield motorized lithography press (bed size 82 x 140 cm)
- Hilton manual etching press (bed size 100 x 168 cm)
- Process room with ferric chloride baths for etching copper
- Aquatint box

Artists working in the APW Custom Printing Workshop are also able to utilize the printmaking equipment and facilities housed in the APW Access Studio.

Access Studio

The Australian Print Workshop Access Studio provides artists with access to a wide range of professional printmaking equip-

ment and facilities at a modest rental. The Access Studio offers facilities for etching, lithography, relief printing, monoprinting, and printing with photopolymer plates.

The APW Access Studio is well ventilated and air conditioned, and provides a friendly and relaxed environment in which to work and to meet other artists. Skilled APW staff are available at all times to offer advice and technical assistance.

The APW Access Studio offers a range of printmaking equipment and facilities including:

- Three Hilton manual etching presses (largest bed size 100 x 168 cm)
- Guillotine for cutting plates
- Process room with ferric chloride baths for etching copper
- Aquatint box
- Three hot plates for etching
- Takach-Garfield manual lithography press (bed size 100 x 168 cm)
- Takach-Garfield motorized lithography press (bed size 100 x 176 cm)
- Over 100 lithography stones (ranging in size from 18 x 30 cm to 73 x 102 cm)
- Graining sink and two levigators, for graining lithography stones
- Albion press for relief printing (platen size 44 x 59 cm)
- Olec Ovac upright vacuum exposure station (screen size 50 x 60 cm)
- Over 25 rollers, including two leather nap rollers (ranging in size from 9 cm to 90 cm wide)
- Large stainless steel sink for soaking paper

Artists who can demonstrate that they have had experience with printmaking and are reasonably proficient in handling printing equipment and materials are eligible to use the Access Studio to produce their own work.

Education Program

Australian Print Workshop's comprehensive education program aims to provide artists and members of the general public with an opportunity to learn more about the art of printmaking. Printmaking classes conducted by the APW provide a unique opportunity to work with experienced artist-printmakers using the workshop's world-class facilities. Classes are offered throughout the year.

The APW also conducts a Summer School each January. Classes offer a unique opportunity for participants to undertake an intensive week of instruction in a particular printmaking technique.

The workshop offers instruction in a variety of printmaking techniques including etching, relief printing, lithography, monoprinting, wood engraving, book binding, and printing with photopolymer plates.

Exhibitions

The Australian Print Workshop maintains a very active exhibitions program that provides a showcase for limited edition prints produced at the workshop by leading contemporary artists. The workshop's gallery showcases limited edition prints by artists who have used the printmaking facilities and services of the

CANADA

The Printmaking Scene in Manitoba

By Dan Dell'Agnese

"...artists who learn to adapt to technology and develop hybrids will succeed, while craftsmen steeped in archaic traditions, with both feet in the past, will die."

—Kenneth Tyler

The printmaking scene in Manitoba reflects the cycle and events of printmaking worldwide. The medium has gone in and out of vogue with artists in general, but throughout has remained an interesting area of expressive exploration.

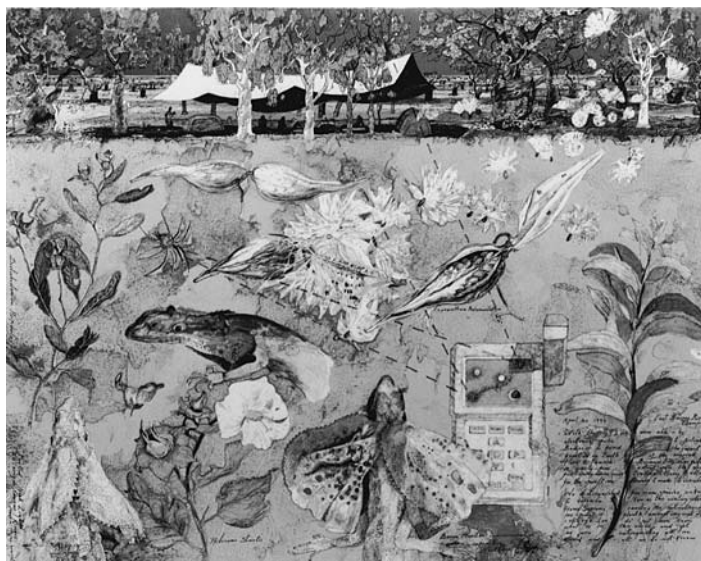
In Manitoba the medium has recently been at a low ebb, as far as its actual practice. This was due more to a lack of facilities than a turning away from the medium. Nevertheless, it is one of the province's most dynamic and active art forms. This dynamism comes from the need of the practicing and emerging artist to diversify his or her areas of expression. In some cases this is a discovery that, in combination with newer technologies, is a form capable enough to represent the diverse philosophies and artistic visions of those who choose to create. The shared technique of printmakers has not in any way limited the personal image making of the artist.

Any discussion of printmaking in Manitoba must touch upon those bodies that have been nurseries of the art form. At the turn of the century it would have been commercial print houses such as Brigdens of Winnipeg and the Stovel Print Company. Brigdens in particular allowed artists to apply their skills as fine artists in the commercial art world. Its connections to larger centers in central Canada allowed the print artists and others working for them to interact with artists of note. Many of those artists of record were influencing the direction of Canadian art as well as Manitoban art. Later on in the 1960s and 1970s printmaking really started to come into its own here in Manitoba as a legitimate fine art form.

The founding of the Grand Western Canadian Screen Shop in 1968 gave a place for local artists to access the serigraph expertise of its founders. In 1977, Moosehead Lithography Press was formed around the concept of a master printer. Also in 1977 a group of former art students from the University of Manitoba joined together and founded the North Nassau Printmakers Co-operative etching studio. In 1985 the Manitoba Printmakers' Association (MPA) was formed. Of all these, only North Nassau and the Manitoba Printmakers' Association still operate.

The School of Art at the University of Manitoba has throughout the years been a bastion of traditional and promoter of explorative printmaking techniques. The School of Art Printmaking Department has in the past turned out annually on average two to four bachelor of fine arts graduates who specialize as print artists. Along with other graduates specializing in other forms of the plastic arts, they have found printmaking a viable companion to their art making practice.

The printmaking scene in Manitoba has in the last few years been preoccupied by the need for the re-establishment of an open printmaking studio. This has been the primary goal of the MPA, representing the body of Manitoba's printmakers. The need for a studio has not only affected the membership of the MPA but



John Wolseley, Botanist's Camp, lithograph, 1997, 74 x 93.5 cm

workshop to produce their work. A new exhibition opens approximately every five weeks. Works in these exhibitions are selected to represent the practice of individual artists and to demonstrate a wide range of printmaking techniques. The Australian Print Workshop also curates and organizes exhibitions that are displayed at other venues.

Our exhibitions have been displayed in numerous galleries, both within Australia and overseas, and include the recent exhibition at the Cultural Center of the Philippines in Manila, "People In a Landscape: Contemporary Australian Prints" (April-June 2000).

The Australian Print Workshop is a very active advocate of the art of printmaking. Central to the workshop's annual program is the production and promotion of printmaking. Through the art of printmaking, the Australian Print Workshop has successfully developed many projects with artists in Australia and, increasingly, overseas. The APW is very keen to further develop networks with others involved in the art of printmaking and welcomes suggestions for possible international exchange projects.

Printmaking is an important aspect of Australia's contemporary visual arts language. Limited edition prints are collected and displayed by all major Australian public art museums. Leading contemporary Australian artists continue to produce limited edition prints in a range of print mediums, producing some of Australia's most exciting visual art. The art of printmaking is alive and flourishing in Australia.

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those artists wishing to avail themselves of the services provided in an open print studio.

The MPA was incorporated in 1985 as a non-profit artist-run co-op dedicated to encouraging artistic and technical excellence in the fine art of printmaking. Its membership, which is open to anyone wanting to support or who may be interested in working in fine art printmaking, fluctuates from 100 to 140 members. From the beginning the association has promoted the work of Manitoba print artists working in all of the disciplines of printmaking. This was done by establishing and maintaining links with other printmakers both nationally and internationally, continually sponsoring lectures, workshops, visiting artists, and exhibitions along with instruction in printmaking.

Back in 1989 the MPA established a large and well-equipped open printmaking facility in Manitoba's largest city, Winnipeg. This, it must be noted, was the only open print studio between Edmonton, Alberta and Toronto, Ontario—a distance of some 2,108 miles. In 1996, as a result of overall budget cutting by government funding bodies, the core funding of the studio was reduced by 85 percent. This forced the MPA to close the studio in 1997 and place the majority of the equipment in storage until stable financing could be secured to reopen the studio facilities. The pursuit of financing resulted in the MPA receiving charitable tax status from the federal government.

Though the studio was closed, the MPA continued on as a purely volunteer organization. The MPA newsletter and edition series was and remains an opportunity for the MPA to maintain a presence in the art making community. The edition series also has offered MPA members a way to sell editions of their work and raise funds for the reopening of the printmaking studio.

As of this writing, the MPA board and members along with its benefactors have begun the process of acquiring a building in the nationally recognized historic Exchange District of Winnipeg. The MPA will take possession of a 6,800 square foot building at 11 Martha Street on August, 1, 2000, have the place operational by October 1, 2000, and fully functional by December 2000. The Martha street building will give established and emerging printmakers along with artists of all disciplines a place to work. With the reopening of the studio the print artists of Manitoba, as well as western Canada, will once again have a dedicated place to work, exhibit, socialize, produce art, and exchange ideas.

There is truly no predominate stylistic school, theme or ism that dictates the practice of artists working here. That may sound rather utopian but it nevertheless is true. That is not to say that particular idioms don't come to the forefront from time to time. It just seems to be more idiosyncratic than some print centers. I believe that has to do with our geographical isolation and a very strong desire to maintain a cultural scene. This extends to all the arts. This desire has pushed the local citizenry to recognize and foster its artists. Some artists have defined their work by their reaction to the physically vast and isolating climate that we reside in. Others look outward to other centers for inspiration but choose to remain and work here. In the past an exhibition of Manitoba artists in London, England brought the comment by one wag, that it was refreshing to see work that did not try to be the champion of the latest idiom. What that pundit wished to see was a different sort of "bringing coals to Newcastle." From high realism to non-objective images, the work is a microcosm of the greater art scene. As printmakers tend



Members of the Manitoba Printmaker's Workshop working on a print.

to work in co-operation with one another rather than in isolation as such, an acceptance of diversity is always balm for the soul.

As to exhibition venues, print artists here have no dedicated venue but are shown in a variety of public and private galleries. These include the province's numerous public galleries with the two largest being the Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, located in Brandon (currently host to large solo print exhibits by Canadian artists); The Winnipeg Art Gallery, Canada's oldest civic art gallery, located in Winnipeg; and the parallel galleries, usually publicly funded non-profit artist-run centers whose mandate is to promote and disseminate the work of Manitoba artists. The more famous of these is the Plug-in Inc. Gallery, located in Winnipeg.

The Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG) has supported Manitoba print artists by continually acquiring prints through regular acquisitions of art and with specific bequests of printworks. The print collection of the WAG contains representation from every period and movement in art but is primarily made up of Inuit works. In January 2001, WAG is presenting a overview of the influence of Brigidens of Winnipeg's aid in the support of Manitoba's visual arts in particular printmaking. The many commercial galleries such as the Leonard Marco Gallery, the Upstairs Gallery, the Medea Gallery and <SITE> Gallery have always maintained a significant proportion of their spaces for prints and works on paper. One of the newest, The Addele McDermott Gallery, has been a venue that has showcased print artists, such as the "Printmakers Ten."

The most significant exhibition of print works in the last couple of years has to have been "Intimate Impressions" work from the Americas. This forum for an international print point of view was held in conjunction with the 1999 Pan American Games held in Winnipeg. This exhibition was organized by members of the MPA to showcase for our community and our international visitors the vibrancy and depth of expression that printmaking takes in the Americas. This exhibition was so well received that the MPA hopes to make it some form of an annual event.

More recently, in spring 2000, the MPA along with the Franco Manitoba Cultural Center, sponsored "In-Relief, Early Quebec Prints." This exhibition was an historical look at prints originating and influenced by the oldest and strongest print communities in Canada, those located in Quebec.

Printmakers have at times been jokingly viewed as “hide bound.” The reality is that like all artists, printmakers will explore any technology that they believe will enhance and strengthen their art making. Some areas that have been explored by local printmakers evolved from the need to be able to produce work independent of the traditional machinery of a studio. These have included artists exploring reduction printing using light, inexpensive materials such as Styrofoam. Others have turned to digital images that are then manipulated by the various tools inherent to the computer programs available. The end result may not always meet that strict dictum of “hand pulled,” but it does reflect the unique artistic outlook of the individual.

The overall print scene in Manitoba is, as everywhere, one of evolution. Artists have assumed a radically different form than what was first intended at the turn of the century. These artists who have chosen to define themselves as printmakers know that the print has never served a single unified function. They reflect as Carl Zigrosser declared, “...the power of evocation and inspiration with other great forms of visual art, but with the added virtue that, the print being a democratic form, it can be owned and enjoyed by many instead of a few.” It is the diversified democratic outlook of art-making that is the strongest visible characteristic of the printmaking community in Manitoba.

Dan Dell-Agnese is an etcher and lithographer and a former program director of the Manitoba Printmakers Association. His e-mail address is SelinaDan-Ing@aol.com.

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NEW YORK

A Brief History of the Print Club of New York

By Marvin Bolotsky

The Print Club of New York was started in 1990 when a print collector, Morley Melden, began exploring the possibilities of forming a print club for collectors in the metropolitan New York area. Surprisingly, given the large numbers of print collectors, major dealers, important museum print collections, print fairs, and other print shows, there was no group in the New York area similar to print clubs in Washington, DC, Cleveland, Albany, and Rochester dedicated to the purpose of meeting and sharing their collecting expertise and experiences.

A questionnaire was designed and distributed to print collectors. Those collectors who expressed an interest in helping to organize a club were invited to a preliminary meeting where a large founding committee was formed, and the Print Club of New York was established as a not-for-profit organization. A board of trustees held monthly meetings in the living room of a founding member.

From the beginning, it was the intention of the founding members to sponsor an annual presentation print for distribution to the membership at no additional charge over their annual dues of \$75. The first presentation print, commissioned in 1992 and limited to 150 impressions, one for each member, was by the New York artist Frederick Merschimer. Entitled *Passages*, a mezzotint of a New York street at night, it was very much admired by the membership. Also, immediately upon the formation of the club, the board energetically developed a number of varied programs at museums, galleries, print workshops, and library print rooms. These educational meetings became and remain an integral part of the club's activities.

After the success of the Merschimer print, the board decided to increase the membership to 200 in order to accommodate the many disappointed collectors who had applied too late. Karl Schrag's color lithograph, *My Room—Bright Night* was the presentation print for 1993. When Alex Katz's color woodcut *Jessica* was announced in 1994, a membership waiting list was created. April Gornick's intaglio landscape *Loire* was presented in 1995.

Continuing the tradition of varying the media, Richard Bosman's color woodcut *Brooklyn Bridge* was published in 1996. Stanley Boxer's color etching with aquatint *Berkshire Glory* was the choice for 1997, and Will Barnet's *Between Life and Life* was the presentation print for 1998. Paul Jenkins created the color lithograph in Paris *At the Stroke of Twelve* for 1999, and *Fireworks in Central Park*, an etching by Bill Jacklin, is our millennium print.

A major commitment of the club since its founding has been to further educate and share expertise in collecting. Membership meetings have covered a variety of subjects; among them, Old Master prints, poster art, Japanese woodcuts, contemporary Cuban printmaking, print conservation, gallery, museum and library lectures, and visits to artist's studios and print workshops.

New York Print Club, continued on page 11

New York City Commercial and Non-Profit Printers and Publishers for Printmakers

Compiled by Roberta Waddell

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Harland and Weaver Intaglio
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New York, NY 10014
212/243-0439

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New York, NY 10001
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book arts, relief prints

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New York, NY 10014
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lithography, monotype, relief

Solo Impression, Inc.
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New York, NY 10001
212/229-9292, fax 212/229-9595
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press, laminating, pochoir, stencil,
photolitho

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New York, NY 10011
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made paper

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212/947-4235
intaglio

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New York, NY 10028
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intaglio

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digital applications

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imaging

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e-mail orlcon@interport.net
etching, monoprnt

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New York, NY 10011
212/594-9662
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Japanese waterbased woodblock,
linocut, mezzotint, monotype, silk
aquatint, pochoir

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Stephen and David Procnar
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Maurice Payne
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New York, NY
212/766-1348

Brooklyn

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Brooklyn, NY 11206
718/624-3655

Peter Kruly
85 North 3rd St, Studio 1B
Brooklyn, NY 10211
718/387-5168

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718/622-7944, fax 718/622-7946

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e-mail ddpaper@cybernex.net

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59-61 East 4th St., 6th Flr.
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212/673-5390, fax 212/979-6493
e-mail info@printshop.org

Manhattan Graphics
481 Washington St.
New York, NY 10013
212/219-8783

The Printmaking Workshop
(Bob Blackburn)
19 West 24th St., 9th Flr.
New York, NY 10010
212/989-6125

*Roberta Waddell is the long-time
director of the Print Room at the
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New York Print Club, continued from page 10

Two membership meetings have become annual events and highlights of the club's activities. These are the introduction of the presentation print by the artist and the "Artist's Showcase" which provides a group of emerging artists the opportunity to show and discuss their work with club members as well as to sell their work on the spot.

Along with the presentation print and the educational activities, the club added a newsletter for the membership. The newsletter has drawn on the knowledge of some of the members as well as experts in the world of printmaking. Although only ten years old, the club is solidly established in the contemporary print scene.

*Marvin Bolotsky is an art dealer living in Scarsdale, New York, with
a special interest in Eastern European prints.
His e-mail address is fourwindsfineart@dellnet.com.*

ICELAND

The Icelandic Printmakers' Association

By Valgerdur Hauksdottir

The Icelandic Printmakers' Association (IPA) is a collective of artists/printmakers with a workshop and gallery belonging to the association. This is a non-profit organization and is run entirely by the artists themselves. Founded at first in 1954, the printmakers association was revived in its current form in 1969.

Over the past years the artists of the association have made an invaluable contribution to fulfill the aims of the society which are:

- to represent the interest of graphic artists
- to promote graphic art in Iceland
- to organize joint shows by members and invited guests
- to publicize the work of foreign graphic artists in Iceland and of Icelandic artists abroad.

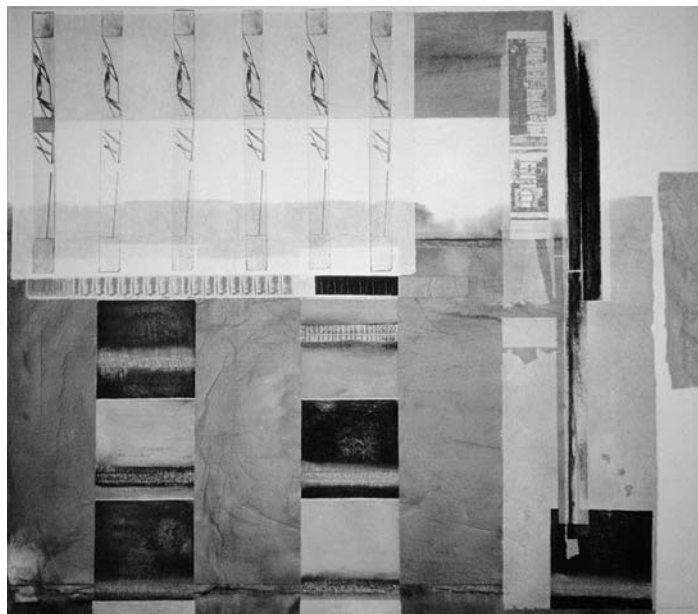
The IPA is a member of the Icelandic Federation of Artists and of other Scandinavian artist organizations. Today in the Association of Icelandic Artists there are about four hundred artists, and, of these, some seventy or so are members of the printmakers association.

The collective workshop and gallery is the most recent addition to the IPA, only brought into being after years of preparation. The workshop is now located in a very good location, the center of Reykjavik, by the harbor, and it is in the same building as the new City Museum of Reykjavik. The workshop is open to artists outside the association as well (if the artists have a good knowledge of printmaking practice, and foreign printmakers are welcome as well). Fees are based on duration and are calculated per day, week, month, or year. There are facilities for intaglio, lithography, relief, and photographic methods.

The IPA has three intaglio presses, two litho presses, special etching and solvent rooms, a darkroom, and equipment for making frames. The gallery is mainly for works on paper and has flat storage cabinets for prints by members of the society which are for sale. The works in the gallery, from both the archive and shows, will be visible in the future on the web site of the association (at present under construction).

The association is run by several committees which are selected at the annual meeting each spring. A chairperson is selected who can serve for the maximum of three years. The chairperson and the main committee decide on all the general issues of the association. In addition a special committee is selected as an exhibition committee in charge of the gallery and the collective exhibitions that the association is participating in or organizing. A third committee is in charge of the workshop. (I served as the chairperson of the association for three years from 1987 until 1990 and chaired the establishment of the workshop from 1987 until 1995.) At the moment the chair of the association is Kristebergur Petursson, but as he does not have an e-mail address, you may want to contact another member of the general directorship, Irene Jensen. Her e-mail address is makki@isl.is.

If you are interested in working at the workshop, it is very simple: apply in writing and state the time you would like to be there. If you are interested in the gallery, then it is the same



Valgerdur Hauksdottir, *Waiting*, intaglio, lithography, chine collé, mixed media, 2000

except the exhibition committee will select what they wish to show. This procedure is quite common in all of the galleries in Iceland. In addition most artists must pay rent for the exhibition space, and this varies depending on location. Normally it takes one to two years to get a space for an exhibition in a good location, and some of them show by invitation only.

Most of the Icelandic printmakers have studied printmaking in Iceland and abroad—in Iceland at the printmaking department of the Icelandic College of Art and Crafts and abroad in Europe, North America, and other countries. Now the Icelandic College of Art and Crafts has become part of the visual department of the Iceland Art Academy (web site [mostly in Icelandic at the moment]: www.lhi.is). The Academy offers education in art at the highest level in Iceland leading to a bachelors degree.

The only masters degree that has been offered is an experimental program that I have been directing. It comes to completion in its experimental form this autumn. This is a European master program titled Printmaking, Art, and Research and is a joint program run by five art universities in England, France, Spain, Germany, and Iceland. I started this experiment when I was the head of the printmaking department at the Icelandic College of Art and Crafts and have been working on it since 1994. Now, as I said, it is in its final stages. We have already graduated two groups of students as part of completing the curriculum phase of the program. The future of PA&R is yet to be decided. We may very well look for a new mode of its continuation based on our experience. If you are interested in getting more information, contact me by e-mail or visit www.par.lhi.is.

Another web site for you to look at that could give you an idea of the Icelandic art scene is www.umm.is. This is a web site run by the Federation of Icelandic Artists and lists information mostly in Icelandic but also in English. You will be able to find links from this site to Icelandic galleries and museums as well.

Val Hauksdottir is a professor at the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts in Reykjavik. Her e-mail address is hauksd@ismennt.is.

EASTERN EUROPE

Eastern European Printmaking Trends

By Ondrej Michálek

I was asked to write about trends and tendencies in contemporary Central European printmaking. With the first ideas on this topic coming to mind, however, I realize how difficult the task is. Whatever aspect you focus on, you find out after a while, how fluid is this theme, and how relative is any statement in this field. If we take for the point of departure today's most frequented word, "globalization," and if we try to view the local specificities through the consequences of globalization, we can observe that the art of printmaking had already anticipated this phenomenon in bygone history thanks to easy propagation of its products. In this connection we could mention, with light hyperbole, the first recorded collegial exchange of prints between Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden, the importing of Japanese color woodcut into Europe, or the application of European intaglio techniques in Japan. As far as recent events are concerned, all contemporary international print shows, symposia, and workshops are both subjects and objects of cultural globalization. To criticize this fact would mean to stop organizing these kinds of encounters. The interference of world trends and local specificities has a very subtle form today. It is interesting, however, to interpret this changing form since globalization represents firstly an appeal for reflection and not a goal in the shape of a kind of final adaptation.

If we have answered the question: what is the contemporary Central European print scene like, by saying, "the same as everywhere else," we would possibly be right. A case could be made for a special character of printmaking in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech or Slovak Republics, but that point is starting to fade somewhat, since the national viewpoint is losing its significance in the current pan-European flurry. There are some aspects, however, from recent history that I would like to mention in this context.

The cultural situation in Poland, Hungary, and the former Czechoslovakia has evolved quite differently in postwar history. For instance, the Polish socialist regime had never imposed on the artistic community such an inferior status as in my country (the Czech Republic). In Prague, it would have been inconceivable to organize international exhibitions, such as the open Cracow print biennale or the shows of small sculpture in Budapest. Without having illusions regarding communist cultural policy in Poland or Hungary, Czech and Slovak visual artists seemed to have to live and work in greater isolation than their colleagues southward and northward. Printmaking was the only medium through which it was possible to escape this isolation. I remember how we appreciated the chance at the Cracow print show and other exhibitions where, besides the participation through official national curators, the involvement of individuals was also accepted. At that time, many painters, sculptors, and other artists also pursued work in printmaking, but after the fall of the iron curtain and the subsequent access to more opportunities for international communication in their own domains, their interest in print subsided.

The above mentioned isolation provoked, however, an intensive need for meeting each other, for both the artists and the

audience. So-called "non-official" art functioned in the society not only as vehicle of aesthetic, but also ethical values, as coded political messages or as an expression of hidden or open personal attitude vis-a-vis power. This art represented an alternative social communication because the normal communication was disrupted. That is probably why so much significance was attributed to artistic expression (more than it was really able to convey). People were coming to improvised exhibitions in barns and gymnastic halls not only for fresh artistic impressions and experiences but also for the satisfaction of seeing that their common adversary—state cultural bureaucracy—was not omnipotent yet. Even though we are fortunately already far removed from this reality, I think this shared and lived-through experience is still present in intellectual and spiritual points of departure in the artists of the older and middle generations. This experience represents for the eyewitnesses of communist cultural practice not only a source of tragic or funny stories by which they can now move or entertain each other, but also it gives them the opportunity to see the current situation in its real dimensions and the tension between the rather romantic "old" vision and the rather "indifferent" present.

Besides Poland, which is still unmatched in the number and quality of various print shows, in the last decade, international exhibitions of graphic art have appeared also in Gyor (Hungary, under the direction of Julia N. Meszaros), in Banska Bystrica (Slovakia) and in Prague (Czech Republic). In the Slovak Republic, the capital of printmaking is definitely Banska Bystrica where there are organized not only international exhibitions of woodcut and wood engravings but also annual shows of Slovak prints. A catalogue of a recent exhibit shows how large is the field in which Slovak printmakers create. There are works of imaginary "stories," executed in a *minutia virtuosus* artistic craft. We can also find there, however, the strong tendency to distance the printed image from technical virtuosity by communicating meaning through simple graphic techniques. This approach is represented by the artists who work in other media as well and bring to printmaking new views and attitudes. What is important is that their innovative and "disrespectful" conduct within the domain refreshes its contact with other branches of visual art. The director of these interesting shows in Banska Bystrica is Alena Vrbanova.

In the Czech Republic, nobody has been systematically dealing with printmaking as a field for international exchange. This negative situation, however, could also have positive consequences because prints have been shown with paintings, sculptures, and installations. The prints are thereby passing through their natural "trial of prowess." They are an organic part of a larger context and do not become isolated. This might be one of the reasons why only a few theoreticians are capable today of writing on printmaking with erudition. It could even be said that critics and curators rather eschew these printmaking events because, as they confess in intimate moments, they are finding in the art of the print only a few interesting themes for contempo-

rary discourse on visual arts. They see printmaking as not very path-breaking, too compromising, and probably as something that is, in its multiplicity and orderlessness, hardly convertible into the system of "big and new names." That is why, if we agree that contemporary art has been caught up in the role of globalized output and virtually into certain defensiveness, due to the unconcern of large audiences, then printmaking would have to experience today a double defensiveness: one vis-a-vis priorities of contemporary visual arts and the other in view of the indifference of the audience.

In the Czech Republic, there are several societies which organize and support printmaking activities. One of them, Hollar Society, has a long history and operates its own gallery in the center of Prague. After 1989 many clubs, fellowships, and associations of artists were founded with the vision of decentralization and independence. It is unfortunate, albeit symptomatic, that after ten years, many of them are no longer pursuing any activity. The reason for this might be the previous generally prevalent individualism adopted by artists, during the long years of the communist regime, as a defensive attitude and a reflex against the official associations controlled by the establishment. Another individualism, the one of today, is when colleagues easily and quickly become rivals. By the way, it has always been, more or less, like this, but the fact that no Czech printmaking society has so far generated enough energy to establish its own printshop is a substantial limiting factor for the development of printmaking as a medium through which an artistic community can be formed.

The situation improved when the foundation Inter-kontakt-grafik (currently directed by Simeona Hoskova), began to work in 1993. Thanks to its effort, it was possible to connect previously fragmented local activities. The contacts with the centers of Polish and Hungarian printmaking allowed important international print shows such as the "Triennale Inter-kontakt-grafik" (subtitled "Labyrinth") in 1998. It turned out that thematic shows are one of the best options for the concentration of energy in the discipline. The association Inter-kontakt-grafik also organizes the annual national competitions, "The Print of the Year," in which not only professionals but also students participate (each artist with only one print). Prizes are awarded in several categories. Part of this event is the awarding of the Vladimir Boudnik Prize in honor of V. Boudnik (1924 - 1965), who was an experimenter and inspiring personality and whose work represents an original contribution to the art. The laureates are the artists who have made significant contributions to national graphic art.

"The Print of the Year" is an opportunity to realize how we judge one single work. There is no longer the possibility to refer to the whole body of our work, nor to explain anything additional. Briefly, no extenuating circumstances: those few square inches of the paper have to have their properly strong speech! But, can they really have one? Let me extend this rhetorical question to all contemporary printmaking as such.

Ondrej Michálek currently teaches printmaking at Palacky University in Olomouc and is on the faculty of Visual Arts of the Technical University in Brno, Czech Republic. His e-mail address is michalo@risc.upol.cz.

The Alchemy of Oleg Denisenko or the Knight of the Silver Key

By Oleg Dergachev

Oleg Denisenko was born in 1961 in Lvov, Ukraine and studied at the Ukrainian Academy of Printing.

The more I get to know Oleg Denisenko, the more I am amazed at his polish and the depth of the work he creates, whether book, drawing, or etching.

It is difficult to be an artist, especially in a time of change, of unending changes, of unending catastrophes and problems, when no one has any interest in browsing through engravings and collecting charming drawings—in a time when it is hard even to find the bare means for existence.

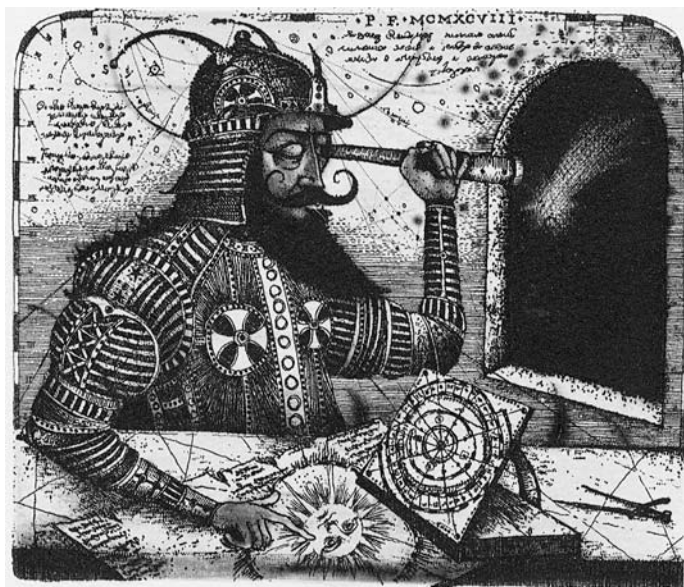
Artists have always struggled to keep their heads above water to avoid becoming victims of a raging malevolent age. It is still more difficult for them to acquire an individuality and a style by which experts will unmistakably recognize them in collective exhibitions thousands of miles from provincial Lvov. Denisenko is one of the few Ukrainian printmakers to attract international interest. It is a pleasant surprise to find his etchings represented in prestigious museums in Poland, Belgium, and the United States and in the catalogues of international print exhibitions in Sweden, Norway, Slovakia, Japan, Great Britain, and Germany. Denisenko amazes by his fidelity to an invariable style, by the extent of his themes and in particular by his inclination to the classic technique of etching. But more of this later.

Denisenko's career has not veered from dazzling rises to tragic descents. His muse leads him slowly but faithfully from one exhibition to another, from one award to another.

It could be compared to the destiny of a fruit grower who knows and loves every tree in his garden and understands by instinct when to harvest its fruit. It is love of the sheet of paper which guides Denisenko in his life—love of the classic etching, and however banal it sounds, love of his work; lasting, concentrated, and daily work. He controls an amazing ability to attract the viewer by the images of his fairy tale; an unending theatre of delightful magic puppets rises up from the sheets of paper, strange clowns, self-sacrificing knights, comical kings and queens from the world of toys. All of them move on a stage decorated with ambiguous pseudo-historical inscriptions; old church symbols, which glint on high like constellations and flutter in the wind like unselfconscious plants. They create an eternal labyrinth of shapes and masks, of seductive and naive smiles, of entrances and exits, behind which hide new mysteries.

The most popular of Oleg's motifs are the Mystery and the Labyrinth. We each have our own labyrinth of life and our own mystery: be it important or insignificant, where, as in the puppet theatre, everything moves and changes, reminding us of our own dreamt-up enigmas. Mystery is precisely what makes our life interesting, changing it into a game, forcing us to seek and find ourselves. Life without mystery is sad and one-dimensional and it would be so without eccentrics such as Denisenko.

Art, just like life, resembles an ocean where everyone has his own place, depth, and space. One may hunt in the light below the surface for teeming insects, another may dive into the cold dark waters of secret abstractionism. Hidden behind a heap of trea-



Above: Oleg Denisenko, *Comet*, etching, 3" x 3 1/2"

Left: Oleg Denisenko, *Two Amulets*, etching, 5 1/4" x 3 1/2"

sure he patiently waits for the rare admirer. Denisenko's Muse lives somewhere in the middle, in the waters of the North Sea, whose bed is strewn with shipwrecked sailing boats, spilt coins, jewels, and old weapons. Oleg's love for the past, for numismatics, for the classic form, is evident in his work. The profiles of his numerous etchings are precise and sharp like old Roman coins.

The figures of his dignified elders, wise men and astrologers, are engraved into metal plates slowly and without haste and then transferred to a dampened sheet of Hahnemühle paper.

Unusually important is the combination on paper of metal with ethereal pencil drawing. The copper and zinc which are in contact with the future print leave on it the stamp of time. For within the metal is clenched that materiality and strength of subterranean hiding places and treasures which continually lure and delude those who collect old coins, orders and medals. Inscriptions and reliefs blurred beyond recognition on these tiny little discs coldly breathe a mystery of victories and defeats. The magic of the etching does indeed spring from the metal. Pen drawing in itself carries a quite different energy—the light directness of the master's hand. The pen does not know the joy of the victory over the metal, of that overcoming of resistance which the plate presents to the etching tool and the drypoint. Without a doubt everyone comes to feel all that from the print. Only the expert is capable of appreciating the bravura of the etching and the mastery of the mirrored shine of the copper plate, but even an

observer uninitiated in this ancient craft can, with some sort of sixth sense, perceive the strength of a good etching.

Etching demands profound thought. If you wish to express something, you have to think it all through well before you take hold of the etching tool. The technique requires perfect concentration and complete, almost monastic enthusiasm. You may be able to write your life story with a glass of good wine in your hand, but you won't be able to make an etching!

That apparent ambiguity of Denisenko's etchings is one of the masks, one of the rules of the game we play our whole life through. As he told me himself, the game is very important for Oleg. It does not allow us to stop, to drowse, to drown in the whirlpools of our own life. The most important rule of our game is honor. Only it is not so simple to open oneself to the judgment of thousands of spectators in works sent to many countries, lodged forever in the collections of great museums... There is always the enticement to shock, to astonish with "beauty" and with effect, with sophistication. Oleg solved this problem long ago—he decided to remain himself, with his heroes, and it seems he has not lost the game. He oriented himself exactly in the world he had thought up, with the help of his own pictorial, symbolic system of taboos and rules. In our time such a system is truly rare. The resonance of his etching is not vociferous, it is like the flute in a chamber orchestra, both sharp and flat in the context of one composition. Art is a beautiful, enticing deceit which can attract the spectator through weary banality and vanity. The desire to become the owner of a small paper print is perhaps explained only as a desire to find in life just another inducement that will enable us to stand and think, just another reason to catch a glimpse of a world so unlike our own. Nothing shocking, nothing eccentric or disturbing, just the tenuous profile of a Knight and his Lady. That is the style and trademark of Oleg Denisenko. Subjects—symbols. Gestures. Ideas. We must not let ourselves be confused by the simple and prosaic titles of his works, which directly express his main idea—Clown, Mask, Event. It is always one and the same Player changing masks

which moves us, trusting, naive and uninitiated. He has seen and understands grief and joy.

Denisenko's first love and dream was archaeology, the science of enthusiastic individuals—the seekers of treasures which, when they mature, store pictures of the past. The past attracts us by its mysteries; there is still a temptation to uncover them. It resembles an unspoiled bronze key from which it is possible to draw the outlines of a lock destroyed long ago; from one masterly image it is possible to read the breadth of his talent.

“Graphic Life” in the Ukraine

By Oleg Dergachev

A brief note about “graphic life” in my native community: We have one official national Ukrainian Artist's Union including a graphic section as well as several creative groups of artists, such as “Griphon” group. There are eight members from Kiev, Lvov, and Lugansk in that group. Last year we had quite a big biennale of graphic art in Kiev. Two years ago, together with my colleagues, we managed a portfolio, “Dreams from Ukraine,” which included ten engravings by ten Ukrainian printmakers. Now the next portfolio, “Bestiarium,” is in progress, and we plan for forty copies. In the middle of October 2000, I'll manage an international cartoon workshop in my town supported by the George Soros Foundation called “Crazy and Witty Millennium.” I want to show the best European cartoonists, working on graphic art. Cartoon is a real art and one of the best visual links between people and nations.

A resident of Lvov, Ukraine, Oleg Dergachev is a graduate of the Ukrainian Print Academy, widely exhibited internationally, and a member of the California Society of Printmakers. His e-mail address is dobook@LiTech.net.



Oleg Dergachev, Untitled, lithograph, 2000, 7" x 4"

ISRAEL

Prints and Printmaking at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem

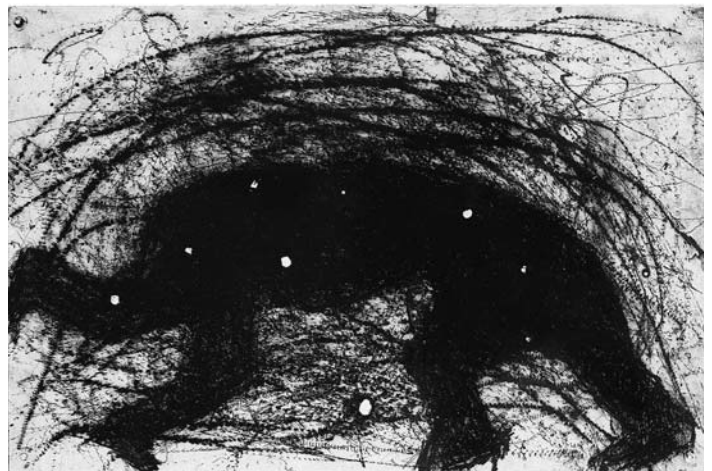
By Meira Perry-Lehmann

At the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, we try to further the interest and understanding of printmaking in various ways. We have a small permanent exhibit explaining the various printmaking techniques which also include printmaking tools. We give lectures to university classes and, since last year, high school students majoring in art history, on printmaking techniques using examples from our collections. Among our activities we recently had a show titled, “Painted in Stone: 202 Years of Lithography,” which included some 90 lithographs from our own collection tracing the development of this printmaking technique. On exhibition was also a lithographic printing press and once a week it was used to demonstrate the technique.

In March Jim Dine spent ten days in Kibbutz Cabri up north, together with twelve Israeli artists under the auspices of the Israel Museum and with support from the Gottesman Foundation. It was a very rewarding exchange of creativity. The artists produced a number of prints and the best example from each artist will be included in an album summing up that experience which will be published soon. The closing event of the workshop included a presentation of the various works and a symposium at the Israel Museum followed by the same exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. Participating artists included Jan Rauchwerger, Ofer Lellouche, Michal Goldman, Yigalo Ozeri, Sharon Poliakine, Dganit Berest, Alex Kremmer, Philip Rantzer, Zadok Ben David, Asaf Ben Zvi, Dina Kahana Gueler and Yehiel Shemi.

There is ongoing cooperation between the Jerusalem Print Workshop, directed by Arik Kilemnik and the Israel Museum. We try to acquire from them as much as possible. In 1994 we organized a large exhibition of their production on the occasion of their twentieth anniversary.

Meira Perry-Lehmann is senior curator of prints and drawings at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Her e-mail address is meiraple@imj.org.il.



Alex Kremmer, Untitled, etching and drypoint, 1999, 27.5 x 40.5 cm



Photos on this page from
the Jerusalem Print Workshop:

Upper left: Asaf Ben Zvi,
India, Nuclear Experiments Site,
aquatint, 1999, 76.5 x 68.5 cm

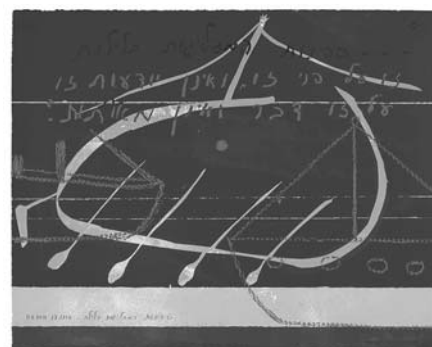
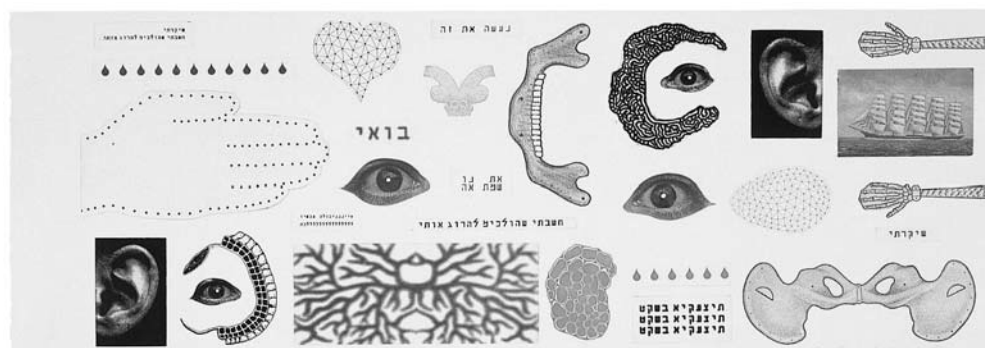
Upper right: Larry Abramson,
Sun (Ten Etching to a Poem by Zali
Gurevitch), etching, 1989, 10 x 10 cm

Left: Moshe Gershuni,
Thirteen Etchings Illustrating Poems
by Haim Nahman Bialik, intaglio, 1987,
208 x 138 cm

Lower left: Hilla Lulu Lin,
I Can't Go Nowwww, photo-etching,
1996, 37.5 x 106 cm

Bottom left: Asaf Ben Zvi,
Illustration to poem by Fernando Pasua:
Barcos que pasan no norte, silkscreen,
1999, 56 x 70 cm

Bottom right: Shosh Kormosh,
Untitled, photo-etching, intaglio, 1997,
49.5 x 98.5 cm



REVIEWS

Of Pressure and Printmaking

By Herlinde Spahr

What is the most important moment in the making of a print? Is it the moment just before printing, when a last highlight is scraped into the lithographic stone, or is it the surprised look at the printed version, with the image now reversed, signed, numbered, and housed behind glass in a white, public setting?

The quintessential moment in the making of a print takes place without witnesses. It is a stage of blindness and pressure, a forcing together of two foreign worlds in utter darkness, the result of which has been labeled “a print.” Without that transient moment of union, there would be no printmaking. However slight the pressure, however brief the period in which both surfaces come together, interpenetrate, this blind moment is the pinnacle in the process of printmaking. And if the language of printmaking seems to be an endless concatenation of offprints, copies, clones, shadows, relics, distant cousins, and false simulations, all claiming a certain status as “an original print,” it is only because they still feel connected to that singular moment of union and transfer, however distant that memory may have become, however faint and transformed the sound of that echo.

The one print emblematic of that indelible instant of complete unity under pressure was created by a woman, a legendary figure whose unusual act of printing in turn gave rise to a long and variable edition of imitations. Saint Veronica, in a moment of empathy, pressed a piece of cloth against the face of the suffering Christ on the way to Calvary, and instead of the illegible smudges of sweat and blood, she produced on the cloth a truthful image of his features. This “Vera Icon,” true icon, printed by Christ himself, broke the iconoclast’s verdict against any representations of God. The impact of this image can be fully grasped only in the medium of printmaking.

Dürer’s engraving of 1513, *The Holy Cloth of Veronica*, is especially compelling. The image of Christ, crowned with thorns and his face bloodied but serene, stares back at the viewer from the very center of the print, the smooth cloth held aloft by two angels in heavily folded fabric. The insistent symmetry of the print, with the two flanking angels, one on the left and one on the right, then each angel in turn sprouting two large wings, one on the left and one on the right, and so on fractally down to the smallest barbs,

barbules, barbicels of the smallest feathers of those wings, speaks of a printmaker whose eye zooms in on the unrelenting process of unfolding, the slow bifurcation from a center, where darkness blurs the difference between the two sides of the mirror.

It is strange that Clement Greenberg would pick the medium of painting to speak about the flatness of art, about the false illusion of a third dimension. The picture plane in a print is more complex, deceiving, and always double glazed: it is the threshold where pressure once held two separate bodies together, the borderline where contact is made and remembered. It is a blind alley of passage in which images travel in silence from one world to another.

Dürer’s engraving, with the cloth upheld, as if just pulled off a plate, captures more than just the moment right after the transfer. The unfolding symmetry that expands outwardly to the angels, their hands, their wings, the structure of their wings and feathers and barbs, also moves inwardly, infecting the vernicle itself. One

must only fold the cloth at the place indicated by Dürer himself—up above, where the angels’ innermost wings touch—to realize how Christ’s features and the shape of his beard are depicted as if created by a perfect Rorschach print. This second picture plane, vertically slicing the entire engraving in two, divides the print into two halves, which, if pressed together would reenact that miraculous moment. *The Holy Cloth of Veronica* with its two intersecting picture planes is the result of an imagination which has crossed through the first zone of the threshold and is already at work trying



Albrecht Dürer, *The Holy Cloth of Veronica*, engraving, 1513

to visualize, in the medium of reversals and separations, a world in which we can travel across the next divide without blemish, unharmed. It is, as if that second picture plane, of a natural world serenely unfolding in perfect symmetry, is the reward for making it through the first gate intact, without distortions.

The miraculous nature of that serene and balanced face imprinted on the cloth is the miracle of any artist who stands up under pressure, and translates the blur of pain and doubt into a memorable, lasting impression. This capacity of bringing to light a world usually kept in the dark is to Goethe the burden and calling of the artist. I quote from Tasso:

And when man, overcome with pain, turns mute
A God gave me the power to say how much I suffer.

Look again at Dürer’s print: what is shocking is those wide open eyes. Though we may think they look straight at us, in fact they speak of an artist holding on to a vision even when darkness closed in. There is a reason why a mask has holes instead of eyes.

Artists who express themselves through the dense language of printmaking have little opportunity to stand in a room and sur-

vey from a distance the territory they have covered. Group shows and theme shows are the worst way of gauging the achievements of an artist.

Tucked away in the back of a large shopping mall, the small Fetterly Gallery, sponsored by the city of Vallejo, offered Roy Ragle that rare opportunity of looking back. Curated by friends (Art Hazelwood and Dan Robeski), and attended by an inner circle of friends, the exhibition allowed one to walk along from work to work and witness the slow and difficult process of transformation under pressure. A small brochure accompanied the show with an introductory essay by Karin Breuer, curator of the Achenbach Foundation, in which she points out how Roy, with control and precision, has left a creative record of the illness (Crohn's disease), that has progressively weakened him and transformed him.

Divided into two rooms connected by a small door, the space itself served to highlight the moment when the artist first came into contact with the threshold. His most ambitious print, the woodcut triptych *Self Examination Series II: Portrait of Susan S. Dunn, Ph.D; Portrait of Roy; Portrait of Carol Simonszky Ragle* itself spans a work period of seven years (1983-1990), and was created by the weight and the pressure of the body, inked up and lowered with ropes onto a plank of birch plywood, the white areas then chiseled away with a Dremel. Although the bodies are already pressed flat against the picture plane, the faces are still spared that fate and the result is a hybrid portrait: while the hands and bodies are seen to touch and point to that invisible plane of separation, the faces still come across undistorted, keeping all illusions intact. Even with the dancing skeletons surrounding the figures, this work still breathes balance and composure.

The second room chronicles extreme feelings of pain and pressure through the language of printmaking, so much so that the act of printing becomes a metaphor rather than a medium. If the images within the print portray distorted, twisted skulls, teeth stretched and straightened into rows, inner organs flattened into spidery backgrounds, noses pressed against glass or sliced off; also the method of making the prints shares in the process of transformation through pressure. Gone is the flat, sweet-smelling birch plate and gone the numbered editions. Instead, plain kitchen foil is pressed and molded against the face, its heavily folded, crinkled surface then inked and trampled, flattened against paper—again with the weight of the body—then further

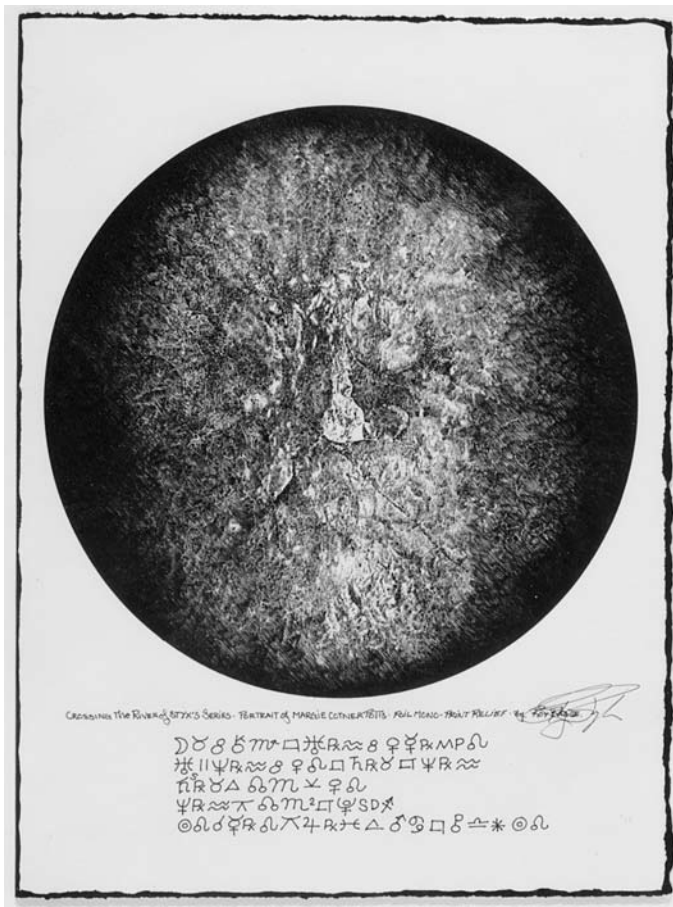
distanced from the original contours of the face by extensive overprinting with more foil plate and finally finished with pen and ink drawing to contain and shape some of the contours: all of these steps lead to a print in which the matrix is crushed in the act of creation and the image, the portrait itself, must share in that fate. These unique prints compress in their surface a number of printmaking steps, each successive layer doubling the distance between the original mask and its final copy.

Roy is a friend. I have witnessed the making of these contorted, compressed and warped surfaces. Though his method of printing may reflect and duplicate what the body experiences in reality, I also know that his work transcends the plane of matter and blood. We should not reduce these works to expressions of a

body in pain, a signal that points back to its own source. The artist who translates personal anguish into a work of art provides a platform which is not intended to be disassembled in a misguided quest for understanding. Technique and innovation are engendered by need, an inner need that often precedes the subject matter. In each of these unique prints there is an widening gap between the matrix foil that hugged real skin and the final distant copy of a copy of a copy, reflecting the long and twisting journey which the artist must travel to reach through to the other side, in the end barely holding on to that inner connection. His titles to the series—"Dia de los Muertos" and "Crossing the River Styx"—may suggest death and decay, but in the world of prints, how do we know on which side of the river we are? On the far wall of the second room, his very latest prints were on view. One step in the process of making these portraits was different: the foil mask, instead of being literally trampled to be print-

ed underfoot, was instead placed on a copy machine and flattened photographically, the photocopy then transferred onto paper with lacquer thinner and finished with more foil printing and drawing. The foil matrix that once touched the human face now survived the printing process intact, and it leads to a world in which the artist finally emerges, transformed, on the other side of the picture plane.

These prints, of which I duplicate one, are to me the most moving work Roy has done. If we did not know how and where this image originated, we could imagine ourselves high in the sky looking down onto a snowcapped mountain, a tranquil, shimmering sight radiating out in all directions. The fading edges of the foothill forest taper off into a darkened circle, the circle in



Roy Ragle, Crossing the River Styx Series: Portrait of Margie Cotner Potts, foil monoprnt relief (Photo: Joe Schopplein)

turn squared and held in check by the blackened edges of the paper. A glistening portrait facing toward us is translated into a wintery summit seen from above.

From where this sudden transformation? What kind of picture plane can hold on to this twinning view? How can an eye migrate through space?

When we, for the first time, use the press, not knowing of its force, how far do we dare turn the wheel? Where is that point of no return between the perfect transfer of the image and the tragedy of a stone that cracks under pressure?

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the moment of transformation is always a moment in extremis. Only when the pressure has reached its peak, when our mortal frame has been strained to its limits, will the gods grant the gift of escape, a release from suffering in the shape of a bird, a star, a stone, a blindcapped mountain. The moment of breakdown in one world signals the moment of breakthrough in another; two intersecting, crosscutting planes in which transformation takes place when coincidence coincides with necessity. If red is the color of blood in one world, in another it becomes the color of paint, of feathers, of garnets in stone. The imagination that pierces that blind spot and reaches the vanishing point with vision intact, crystallizes. The upper and lower realm are fused into one, the natural world reflecting all human endeavors, the world of the gods brought back down to earth. But an artist must be soft and malleable as wax within, for the heart, the hand, and the head to survive that blinding moment of insight and insight.

A work of art that has gone this far speaks softly. It ignores the clamor and the din in the valley. If its words of wisdom are encrypted and hidden behind veils and seals, it is not so by design. It is in the nature of a printmaker to leave tracks, and the distance the imagination has traveled is reflected in a coiling, rotating, migrating trail. Masterpieces that have captured that moment of transformation are guideposts to artists on the verge of new vision. These works will whisper to the distant climber lost on a mountain, the summit shrouded in fog. They will highlight the edge of a risky ravine. They shield the sight of those not ready and blind the few that have seen too much.

Every work of art contains the signs of these passages through time and space. When the imagination passes through the third threshold, the eye breaches the last invisible picture plane. It is a plane which looks down onto the two intersecting, crosscutting planes below. From such a perspective, vision becomes gentle and distant, and the imagination a central force in a fused and seamless universe. Here, in this realm, a face descending into darkness with eyes wide open is also a mountain translucent with light.

With special thanks to Professor Rudy Wenk at the University of California at Berkeley, whose lectures on metamorphic rock inspired these thoughts on change through pressure.

References: Breuer, Karin, "Roy Ragle: An Appreciation." In the brochure to the exhibition: *Crossing the River Styx. Woodcuts and Monoprints by Roy Ragle*. January 15—March 4, 2000. Fetterly Gallery, Vallejo Community Arts Foundation.

Parshall, Peter, "Albrecht Dürer and the Axis of Meaning," *Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College Bulletin*, 50, 2 (1997): 3-31.

Weisberg, Ruth, "The Syntax of the Print. In Search of an Aesthetic Content," *The Tamarind Papers*. 9, 2. (Fall 1986) 52-60.

Herlinde Spahr's primary medium of expression is lithography. In her latest body of work, "Fulgurite," her prints take on the shape of lithographic stones cast in wax.

Pacific Prints 2000

By Edith Smith

The Tenth Biennial Exhibit "Pacific Prints," juried by Karin Breuer, Donald Farnsworth, and Beth Van Hoesen, was held at the Pacific Art League, Palo Alto, during May and June. Drawing printmakers from California, Oregon, Washington, and Hawaii, it is always an exciting, cutting-edge show, and this year it was graced with many awards from corporations and private patrons, many sales for printmakers, and a fully-illustrated catalogue.

Karin Breuer acknowledges a meeting of minds among the jurors. They responded to "individuality of expression with technical excellence." Breuer notes that "intaglio processes, especially mezzotint, are a major component of the exhibit...with few abstractions and little use of photo images." Donald Farnsworth praises the variety of techniques and tools, "being able to explore the new, and to rediscover old techniques and to combine the two is where mistakes and therefore creativity can and will happen."

Out of a total of 96 exhibited prints, I was surprised to find nine mezzotints, eight lithographs, ten woodblocks, one dry-point; the rest a variety of intaglio, monotype, and other experimental print methods, many in tandem. Of the 96 printmakers, 72 are from California, and 27 are members of the California Society of Printmakers.

Does "Pacific Prints" contain some surprises? Yes! Mere technical brilliance is out, but it is there, harnessed to sentience, drama, and emotion. Monotype is less in evidence, and when displayed, it is less non-objective; it's charged with mystery and enigma. Mezzotint, one of the most laborious and exacting media, is demonstrated to perfection, even in its most difficult rendering: color mezzotint. Figurative work is again a part of the avant garde, even in traditional media such as etching. Some of the most beautiful work shows mastery of two or three print media. The qualities I find most evident in this show are the soul-searching questions about the meaning of life and death—hints at the absurdity of the human condition—frail fragments of myth—angst, fear, surprise:



Regina Kirchner-Rosenzweig, *Journey, The Search for Sinners*, monotype, 20" x 26"

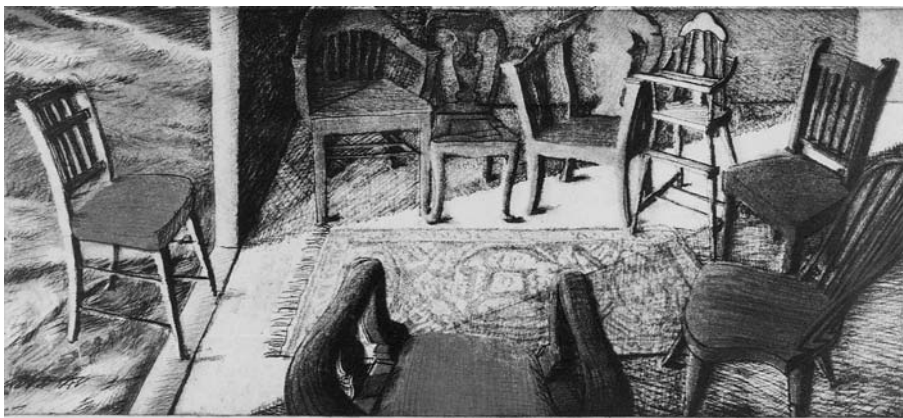


unanswered questions in a post-modern, and post-surrealist world.

Prizewinner and CSP member Barbara Foster had three entries accepted, all beautiful prints. I preferred her *Navigating Paradise*, woodcut on C-type print, to her other honored work, but all three were almost Goyaesque in their impact. Here we find a ghost-like jester trying to navigate a linearized antiquated boat with a bizarre sail in a "real" landscape. How dangerous and absurd a position for humanity! The blue-green ship appears behind foreground trees even though the block is impressed on top. The overlay produces a dramatic formal and color composition.

Also honored with three entries and three purchase prizes was CSP member Margaret-Ann Clemente. *Walking Cougar*, *Cougar Looking Back*, and *Reverance*, all monotypes, are all strong, direct, expressionistic, close views of threatened species. In my opinion, these new works, with their delicate textures and cropped focus, are Clemente's strongest statements on animal rights yet—and they have aesthetic value far beyond popular photos of these subjects. Textural effects—bristly or scratched—or with viscosity changes—create strong prints with a very limited palette.

A favorite print of mine, in a similar vein to *Navigating Paradise*, was Victor Cartajena's award-winning *La Carta*, monoprnt and chine collé. It shows man trying to be angel as well as animal, searching for meaning but with his head unfortunately upside-down—navigating



Above: Susan Varjavand, *The Newcomer*, softground and aquatint, 9" x 20"
Left: Inge Infante, *May Fest*, monotype, 1998, 25" x 19"

life with embarrassment and frail health. The fragmented text in Spanish indicates a clinic and an instance of hemorrhaging; indeed, the person seems to be holding in his revealed intestines. Another print with a similar spirit was Oregon artist Laurie Dania's etching *Obsessive*, with a seemingly seriously-working monkey flanked by a more lightly bit human skeleton, falling, flailing, and perhaps failing. Printed in three-color plate registration with different levels of biting, it yields to the viewer partial views of barbed wire and akimbo bodies. Spookier still is Regina Kirchner-Rosensweig's monotype prize-winner, *Journey, The Search for Sinners*, in which we view a contemporary woman in shades with her partner who seems to be a skeleton, flanked by a guy who must be the devil, and two skeletons riding fleshed-out donkeys right out to the viewer. It glows with primary colors and bold Expressionist brush and crayon work.

Everyday scenes are featured by Susan Varjavand and the CSP's Linda Lee Boyd. Varjavand's print, soft ground and aquatint, *The Newcomer*, is at first an ordinary interior scene with slightly old-fashioned furniture, executed with flawless three color plate printing. Then, we see the less patriarchal chair—a spindly high-chair. All chairs are emptied of humans. Boyd's two-color woodcut, *At the Kitchen Sink*, features an elderly woman hard at work: it is reminiscent of prints stressing the dignity of labor from the 1930s. A two-block print in blue and black, the blues show us pattern, the blacks provide volume, wrinkly folds, textures, and portrait character.

Even the most abstract works may have hidden agendas. Inge Infante's

monotype with chine collé *May Fest* includes, in addition to a fragmented image of the servant woman from George de la Tour's *Cheat with the Ace of Diamonds*, ancient engravings of bugs and a human eye, all accomplished with chine collé. C.C. Chapman's cool blue monotype *The Blue Pearl (Earth)* seems to indicate both atmosphere, coded language and perhaps the fragile globe. Minimized calligraphs are echoed across the color field.

Two fine examples of intaglio technique are CSP member James Groleau's color mezzotint *Concienitia Compassionata* and Julie Gaskill's hard and soft ground etching *Man in Swim Cap*. The Groleau five-plate color mezzotint is superbly printed. Here is a beautifully-rendered frontal portrait of a melancholy, and perhaps sickly child dressed in a costume of the Middle Ages. He seems to be trying to reach us with his sad story. Another hint at the surreal message is a small bird speaking or inserting something into the child's ear. Gaskill's etching, on the contrary, is a good example of direct bravado drawing of a healthy *Adonis* subject. Expert wiping produces plate-tone to increase muscle modeling. Both prints prove that drawing is still strong in the Pacific Region. Readers may check the exhibit as well as other Pacific Art League exhibits and class information on line at www.bayscenes.com/np/palpa/pp.

Edith Smith is a printmaker and long-time CSP member who frequently writes reviews for The California Printmaker.

CSP members in the show: David Avery, Linda Lee Boyd, Margaret-Ann Clemente, Jessica Dunne, Barbara Foster, Stacy Frank, James Groleau, Diane Jacobs, Barbara Johnson, Ellen Kieffer, Tom Killion, Regina Kirchner-Rosensweig, Evelyn Klein, Marianne Kolb, Inya Laskowski, Jimin Lee, Ann Lindbeck, Elizabeth McCallie, Gail Packer, Carol Schiffelbein, David Smith-Harrison, Maryly Snow,

CSP ARTIST PROFILE

William Wolff

By Louis Girling

As a relative newcomer to the ranks of the CSP, I frequently feel as if I am unearthing treasures—precious gems and occasional marvels that I have the pleasure of “discovering” as they come to light at shows and in artists’ studios. In the case of William Wolff, I feel like I’ve stumbled upon the Mother Lode. Here in our midst, and surprisingly little known to many Bay Area printmakers and collectors, dwells a humble spirit who has poured forth richly expressive prints, drawings and paintings from block, pen, and brush for nearly half a century. Last year at the Fetterly Gallery in Vallejo, California, Wolff’s artistic visions, powerfully expressive like the voices of poets and prophets, invaded my consciousness, where they have remained and multiplied, insisting that I attend to the spiritual, social, and artistic wisdom they so eloquently embody.

In preparing this tribute to Bill Wolff and his work, I hope to draw the attention of other artists and collectors who might benefit from listening to the voice of this great figurative master emerging from the age of abstraction.

While others of his generation went about the business of radically altering the artistic landscape with conceptual productions and abstraction, Wolff quietly engaged in the making of art that seems radical in its context—having its inspiration rooted in Judeo-Christian mysticism, literary sources both classical and contemporary, and a deeply experienced social consciousness. Considering Wolff’s artistic heroes, if one can judge from the artists whose prints adorn his living room—William Blake, Georges Rouault, Hogarth, Jacques Callot, and Ben Shahn—one may appreciate Wolff’s highly personal images and mature iconography as works having a distinguished artistic lineage. Like the late and marvelous Leonard Baskin, who shared similar sources of inspiration, Wolff bucked the artistic trends of the mid twentieth century, wherein many artists deliberately worked to sever links with the cultural past in order to bring something entirely new onto the artistic landscape. However, unlike Baskin, Wolff went about his business in his characteristically unassuming and humble way, speaking with a quiet but profoundly resonant artistic voice.

Biographical data

A genuine native of San Francisco, born in 1922, Wolff recently showed me a photograph of himself at the age of ten, taken with his classmates, he says, only a few blocks from his current home in Cow Hollow. From 1939 to 1943, Wolff studied at the California School of Fine Arts, before serving with the Compass Corps in Europe during the Second World War. In 1951, he graduated from the University of California at Berkeley with an M.A. in art, having focused his studies on painting and drawing. He shared a studio on Magnolia Street with James Weeks, an important Bay Area Figurative painter, from 1949 to 1955. As early as 1950, Wolff won the Artists’ Council prize of \$75 for a drawing shown in the fourth



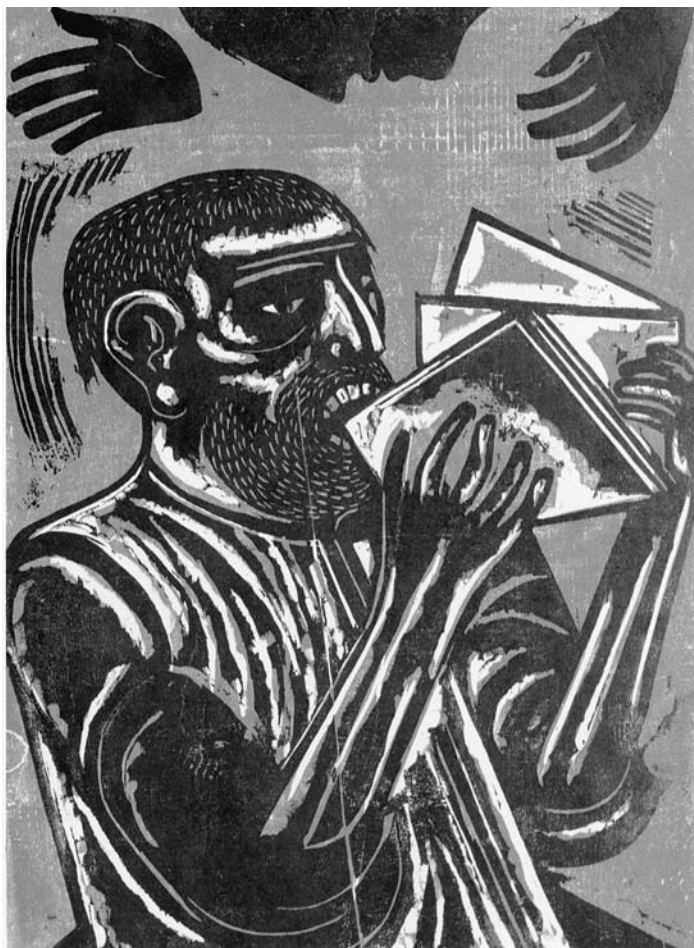
William Wolff, *Christ Mocked*, woodcut, 1972, 17 1/4" x 22"

annual exhibition of prints and drawings sponsored by the San Francisco Arts Commission. A 1966 exhibition pamphlet from the Oakland Museum chronicles his growing passion and facility for the woodcut, noting, “he was introduced to the medium through a friend and was inspired to master its subtleties without seeking professional instruction.” In this exhibition Wolff’s color woodcut *Landscape*, which had been exhibited at the San Francisco Museum in 1965, was featured alongside works by several other quite famous printmakers, including Wayne Thiebaud, Nathan Oliveira, Richard Diebenkorn, Kathan Brown, Roy de Forest, and Beth Van Hoesen. The exhibition left Oakland to spend two years touring the world as part of the U.S. State Department’s “Art in the Embassies” program. (One wonders whether his participation would have been allowed had Wolff’s socialist leanings been general knowledge, but these were the late 60s so perhaps the memory of McCarthy had faded sufficiently by then.)

In addition to adding lithography, under the tutelage of Dick Graf, and some early experiments with serigraphy to his oeuvre, in the late 60s Wolff studied intaglio with Gordon Cook at the San Francisco Art Institute. Cook had himself been a student of Mauricio Lasansky, carrying Wolff’s artistic lineage back to Hayter’s Atelier 17. However, while many of the mature lithographs and etchings are wonderfully subtle and spontaneous or highly developed and charged with energy, it seems Wolff’s passion eventually led him to leave painting, lithography, and intaglio behind in favor of woodcut and drawing, both of which afforded means of powerful and direct expression which he has continued to practice to this very day. He has survived two wives and now daily copes with the ravages of Parkinson’s disease, but new drawings appear daily and no block of wood rests safely in his presence.

Mystical images

Consider this remarkable 1985 statement by Thomas Albright: “[Wolff works] in an expressionistic style, often using mythological themes in a way reminiscent of William Blake.”¹ While I am not prepared to claim that Bill Wolff makes his art in the style of William Blake—his work is far too original and exudes too many additional influences for such a claim to hold up—nevertheless,



William Wolff, *I Took the Book...*, woodcut, 1983, 24" x 17 1/2"

some key similarities to Blake's work, I think, are rather telling. Particularly in his early paintings, Wolff's frequent placement of figures in a single plane, as on a classical frieze, with relatively little attention to the surrounding landscape, certainly bears a likeness to many of Blake's finest works and seems linked as well to the aesthetic of the Magical Realists in the twentieth century. His use of figures as symbols in the metaphysical works also reminds one of Blake. And like Blake, Wolff has mined classical texts, and in particular the Bible, for sources of artistic inspiration. Or put another way, like Blake, Wolff has employed his art as a means of expressing his profound relationship to texts holding deep personal significance for him. Like Blake, his readings of these texts are both detailed and highly personal. In the finest instances, the art arising from these readings goes beyond illustration to the level of inspired interpretation, standing quite on its own in its ability to engage and to enlighten the viewer, but revealing deeper meanings when considered in relation to the text that inspired it.

Mainstream artists of the latter twentieth century have largely avoided serious religious, and particularly Christian, subject matter. While there are notable exceptions to this generalization—as, for example, the late works of Andy Warhol—Wolff I believe is decidedly unusual and bold in his confident and sustained exploration of Christian mysticism over the course of his career.

Wolff's *Emmaus*, one of many color woodcuts interpreting Christian texts, provides an example of his deeply spiritual, purposeful art making. The Biblical text upon which this woodcut is

based (Luke 24:16) describes a journey made by two men on a desert road from Jerusalem to the town of Emmaus—a journey made in the presence of a stranger. Along the way the unrecognized Christ discusses the Scriptures with the travelers, preparing the men to receive the revelation that the stranger is in fact the resurrected Christ, whom they had thought dead and buried.

With marvelous economy of design, Wolff manages to depict the moments just before the spiritual eyes of the travelers are opened. Against a background of deep blues conjuring the cool quietude of the desert night, stand the busts of the men, in profile, eyelids shut. Surrounding their heads, apparently in the sky—like stars—a network of dots and lines inexplicably creates the unmistakable sense of marvelous anticipation, depicting nothing less than the mystical power of the risen Lord about to open the eyes of his unseeing friends. Conveyed with the absolute absence of theatricality, this profound artistic expression is, I believe, characteristic of Wolff's greatest works.

According to Bill, R. E. Lewis, a friend, admirer and occasional collector of his prints, reportedly once levied as criticism Bill's use of "symbolic heads" in works such as *Emmaus*. Lewis apparently felt that the failure to use actual models, with their unique and realistic features, rendered the works weak. Given Wolff's consummate skill in portraiture in several media (which we shall come to later), I have no doubt that the use of stylized or generalized figures in these mystical works was deliberate, and in fact contributes to their considerable power. Like William Blake, whose work suffered similar criticism, Wolff translates spiritual and subconscious realities into visual images. Wolff, like Blake, uses symbolic figures as means to cleanse "the doors of perception" so that we may "see everything as it is: Infinite."² Details of facial features become unimportant—and might actually distract the viewer from the vision Wolff intends—as these images function as windows into realms of spiritual and mystical reality, seen "through a glass darkly."

Nowhere is this technique more clearly realized than in Wolff's 1972 woodcut, *Christ Mocked*. Surrounded by a din of contorted and horrible faces, all teeth and tongues, stands the figure of Jesus—but in fact there is no figure at all. As if in deference to the holiness and spiritual beauty of the enduring Christ, a beauty perhaps too powerful to behold, Wolff has placed a veil, a symbol, of entwined lines inspired by the crown of thorns. (Only in the twentieth century, with Blake, Redon, and Rouault embedded in our collective artistic consciousness, could such an image be understood as the profound and poetic expression that it is.)

Wolff's careful reading of text and considerable facility at cleansing the doors of perception empowered his numerous illuminations of that most obscure of Biblical prophecies, Revelation. Among the most arresting images sharing this inspiration are the 1983 color woodcut, *I Took the Book...*, depicting St. John at the angel's command devouring the book that he has been given (Revelation 10:10), and the fantastic color woodcut from 1970 depicting *A Great Red Dragon with Seven Heads* (Revelation 12:3). Wolff's fascination with Revelation and the visual material it offered led him to produce the highly energetic series of eight woodcuts, *The Witnesses of the Apocalypse*, which audiences enjoyed at last year's Fetterly show.

Likewise, his enchanting etching *The Woman Clothed with the Sun*, a work of mysterious and powerful beauty and one of the artist's personal favorites, is inspired by Revelation 12:1 ("And

there appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet..."). Here the nude figure of the woman is clothed in swirling etched lines which have the peculiar quality of becoming more luminous, the blacker and more heavily inked they are—a phenomenon shared with the sinking and inky blacks of the lithographs of Odilon Redon.

Wolff's visions of spiritual realities extended into other graphic media, and were not strictly confined to the representation of the mystical power of Christ or the mysteries of the Revelation. His etching, *My Name Is Legion* (A Certain Man Which Had Devils), depicts the spiritual turmoil of a man possessed by demons using energetic lines to describe his naked body as a disjointed jumble—arms, legs, penis, head to one side—a pathetic vision of a man disintegrated. Wolff appears to have taken an intense interest in this particular subject. The figure appears both as an etching (one of his very best) and as a woodcut. In the medium of lithography, the story expands to include Christ's appearance to the man among the tombs, where he would be healed as the Master cast the demons into a herd of swine. The swine also appear, in dramatic color lithography, as a jumbled mass stampeding toward the viewer and into the lake where they will be drowned.

Art Hazelwood has suggested that Wolff's interest in this subject and its interpretation may have been informed by his years of work with youth, in particular troubled youth, as an art teacher at the Youth Guidance Center in San Francisco. In *Glass Door*, a lithograph of 1969 (similar to the woodcut version of *My Name Is Legion*... in its use of red and black) Wolff memorializes the story of a young man who apparently leapt through a glass panel. Pen and wash drawings, together with a series of preparatory proofs, preserved in his studio, seem to document the artist's struggle to comprehend the young man's anguish. Here is artistic empathy at its best.

Social concerns

Glass Door is one of many important art works informed by the compassionate and active social consciousness that characterizes the artist's private life. The early figurative paintings, strangely, combine the aesthetics of parallel artistic movements—social realism, neoclassicism, and even abstraction—to achieve a sort of spirit that I might term "social mysticism." For example, a series of images of "rock breakers" seems to employ the bodies of quarry workers, as well as the shapes of broken stones, as abstract formal elements in compositions which nevertheless celebrate sweat, muscle, and sinew as foundations of an imagined liberal Utopia. One of the paintings in this series, *Landscape with Stone Cutters*, remains in the collection of the Oakland Museum. In 1971, Associate Curator Terry St. John wrote to Wolff to thank him for a related print, referring to *The Stone Cutters* as one of his favorite paintings and proposing an exhibition of the entire series. (The exhibition never materialized.)

Wolff's socialist tendencies and abiding concern with social issues reflect his compassion for the suffering of others. This compassion achieved high artistic expression in his many renderings of Veronica performing her act of mercy for the suffering Christ, the best of which radiates with the energy of a great expressionist print. Perhaps the most challenging of his prints, a little etching with aquatint entitled "*As You Did It to One...*" possesses the visual and spiritual intensity of Rouault's images from *Miserere*. Inspired by the words of Christ (Matthew 25:40—"Inas-



William Wolff, *Chinese Actors* (after Bertolt Brecht), color lithograph, 1969, 13 3/4" x 17"

much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."), this image features prisoners bound and seated in a desolate plain. Their abandonment serves both as indictment and invitation, not only to the viewer but also to the larger society in which he participates.

It would seem no surprise, then, that in recent years Wolff has lent his prints to adorn the local homeless newspaper, the *Street Sheet*. Here again he continues the marvelous tradition of so many artists as social observers and compassionate supporters of the disenfranchised, stretching backward from the American artists of the WPA to Daumier's satirical images of nineteenth century French society published in *Charivari*, and even to my personal favorite, William Blake, whose images for *Little Tom the Sailor* were published and sold to benefit an English orphanage.

Theatrical and Literary

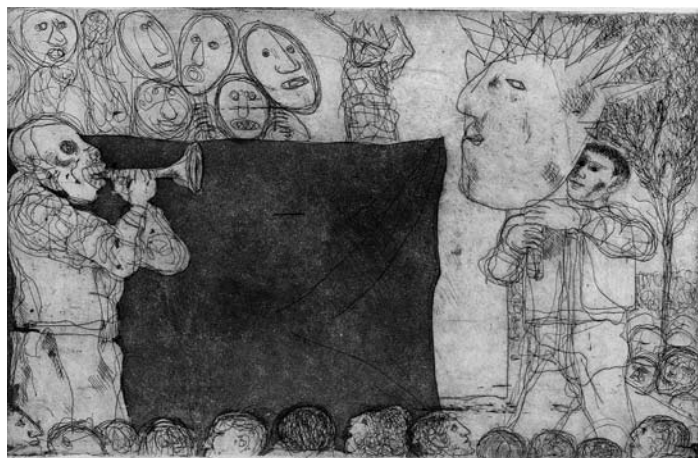
In the tradition of a number of great twentieth century artists, most notably Chagall and Rouault, but under influences stretching back even further to the likes of Jacques Callot and William Hogarth, Wolff accepted literary, and particularly poetic and theatrical, subjects as major sources of inspiration. In Wolff's case, these sources are exceptionally broad ranging—from Shakespeare and Homer to Steinbeck and Machado, from the *Commedia del Arte* to contemporary street theater. His remarkable renditions of the hideous Stymphalian Birds and Shakespeare's Caliban inspire a desire for intimacy with Greek mythology and *The Tempest*. Hogarth's *Southwark Fair*, leaning in its frame atop Wolff's living room bookshelf, seems a fitting presence among his theatrical etchings ranging from the fabulous *Commedia* stage to the intimate *Puppet Theater in Mission Park*. Particularly curious about this latter work, which seems to have been inspired by theater companies performing in the 70s—in the same Dolores Park where I run my dog, Blake, and where contemporary San Francisco residents may be alternately found sunning in their underwear or getting in touch with primal energies through drumming—I asked Bill about its sources. His confusing reply, disjointed by the neurological effects of Parkinson's disease



William Wolff, *Pulcinella*, etching, 1970, 8" x 6"

which force the artist to "chase thoughts around in [his] head, trying to pin one down," served only to intrigue me further: mixed references to a traveling theater company from Vermont and the Vietnam War ended with the final emphatic statement, "a lot of people got arrested that day."³

I am fascinated by the way a tiny Callot etching in the artist's personal collection, featuring stock characters of the Italian *Commedia del Arte* street theater, provided seemingly endless inspiration for a remarkable variety of prints in various media. No fewer than six lithographs, five woodcuts, and twenty-four etchings feature, singly or in combination, the familiar yet enigmatic *Il Dottore*, *Pantalone*, *Il Capitano*, *Pulcinella*, and *Arlecchino*. In 1969 he even editioned a series of five serigraphs featuring the *Commedia* characters. (The artist immediately abandoned the medium after this experience, owing to its extremely smelly and messy nature, which he found unpalatable). While the humor, pathos and visual interest of the characters provide rich material indeed, as I have surveyed Wolff's work I have become convinced that it is their masks that provided the essential element which stirred his imagination in so sustained a fashion. As the "symbolic heads" in his mystical works focus the mind of the viewer upon a spiritual reality, so masks in theatrical and spiritual practice may provide a window through which other realities are illuminated: consider the mask of the fool, which provides a mirror for our own failings; the mask of the shaman which summons the particular spirit it depicts, whose qualities are required, into the midst of a community. Wolff's studio is absolutely littered with images of clowns, actors (with and without masks)—comic actors,



William Wolff, *Puppet Theatre at Mission Park*, etching, 1970, 7 1/2" x 11 3/4"

tragic actors, Chinese actors, actors declaiming—mime troupes, gladiators, puppet theaters, and the like.

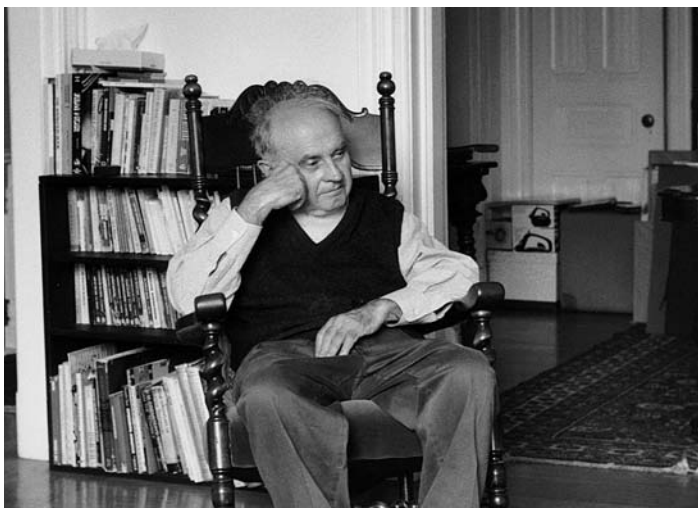
Wolff's rich courtship with the theater and its masks, whose artistic practice rests so close to his own heart, reaches a sort of pinnacle in a handful of masks produced over several decades and approaching abstraction in their pure exploitation of visual symbolism. Several of these works—*Atomic Mask* (1971), *Guerrero* (*Mask of War*) (1985), and *Enclosed Thought* (1990)—seem to be the results of highly distilled, profound meditations upon particular concepts or clusters of ideas. Particularly moving is Wolff's *Atomic Mask*, a sort of jumble of vectors and nodes subtly constructed to form a metaphysical head now devoid of all empathy. Its small scale and humble presentation seem paradoxically to reinforce this woodcut's brilliance as a work of protest art.

Life Drawing

At least since 1989, and likely since the 1970s, Wolff has actively participated in an artists' group, founded by Charles Griffin Farr and focused on drawing from live models. At the age of 78, he continues this discipline weekly.

While the drawings primarily appear to represent a forum for the development of artistic skill and for the sheer joy of spontaneous expression—many appear on paper scraps, the verso of political flyers, and so on, implying that the artist did not intend their sale or exhibition—many of these marvelous figures, infused with humor, sensuality and at times a monumental quality, succeed as highly developed, sophisticated images. Wolff's definition of space and linearity of design in many of these works recall early Diebenkorn and place them squarely at the center of the post-war Bay Area Figurative art movement. By turns characterized by remarkable economy and a visceral, almost electric energy, Wolff's line has the versatility to define the most delicate of feminine forms or to build structures so totemic in tone as to conjure to mind the sculpture of Leonard Baskin or mid-twentieth-century Inuit stone carvers.

While one expects that this long experience of drawing from life would inform Wolff's printmaking, and while it is no surprise to see these drawing skills put to marvelous effect in Wolff's etched plates, their translation into woodcut gives one serious pause. The profile depicted in his 1975 woodcut *Adela* (*Barbara*) could not employ greater economy of line in defining



William Wolff

the vulnerable feminine form of this character from Federico Garcia Lorca's play, *The House of Bernarda Alba*. By contrast, totemic monumentality weds sensual description of the human form in his breathtaking *Lovers Embrace* of 1988.

Portraits, both real and imagined, but generally drawn from life have provided a vehicle well suited for Wolff's penetrating eye. Historical portraits of Giordano Bruno, John Brown, and the World War I poet Wilfred Owen stand beside the forgotten actors and actresses, a nameless but stylish *Model with Pearls*, and the brilliant *Head of a Black Man*, which populate Wolff's prolific portraiture. The artist's daughter, Maria, and his late second wife, Marguerite, are also here. Above all, beginning with the modest early lithographic portraits of himself and of James Weeks (only one impression of each known to survive), Wolff has contributed a rich visual record of fellow poets and artists. Infamous among these are the variants of the Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti—with and without ears—the earlier version depicting the energetic, blue-eyed figure with pinnae projecting from either side of his ample head, forever listening as a poet ought—the later version with ears amputated à la Van Gogh—at the poet's request, mind you, to preserve his internal self-image. Artists John Connolly, Stanley Koppel, and Roy and Carol Ragle share the considerable distinction of having had their likenesses lovingly, painstakingly carved into the block.

Cross-fertilization among the Arts/"The Invisible City"

As one talks with Bill Wolff and surveys his work, one becomes keenly aware of the community of artists of which he has been a part. One imagines him not only studying at the feet of Max Beckmann and exchanging printmaking tools and techniques with Roy Ragle, but also sharpening wits with Lawrence Ferlinghetti, discussing the fusion of jazz techniques with classical music with Darius Milhaud, and receiving inspiration from the parade of actors who populate his woodcuts. Wolff produced posters for poetry readings and theater openings. In the early 70s, as if to honor and recognize this artistic community from which he drew his nourishment, Wolff produced a beautiful series of woodcuts entitled "The Invisible City." Busts in profile pass from right to left, and left to right, beneath skies filled with forms inspired by Leger, the busts suggesting the shadows of artists at motion in the cultur-

al subcurrents of a city defined not by geography but by ideas.

As a citizen of the "Invisible City"—this mystical place where artists, poets, musicians, and the like converge to create a society largely unseen by the general populace—Wolff has continuously participated in that vital cross-fertilization among the arts which was, to some extent, lost on those radical individualists on the art scene of the 50s and beyond.

Images wrought to complement the poetry of Wolff's contemporaries dwell among the most satisfying of his artistic expressions. Among the best of these I would count Wolff's lovely etching, *Breakfast in the Valley*. Based upon Steinbeck's *Long Valley*, the work features a family of migrant workers at table in an outdoor setting strongly reminiscent of the woodcut landscape that toured the embassies in the late 60s. Wolff's statement to me, as I viewed this etching, that the migrant workers held "such mystical significance for Steinbeck" underscores once again his abiding artistic intent to render images bearing depths of meaning beyond the physical plane. Similarly, his 1988 color woodcut *No Hay Camino*, prepared to complement a poem by Antonio Machado and published in the "Five Printmakers Portfolio" by Paper Crane Press, utilizes simple elements—a hand, a tangle of thorns—to evoke a state of mind and to enhance the experience of the poetry by evoking subconscious associations.

In 1993, Wolff conceived a series of fourteen woodcuts as illuminations for James Joseph Campbell's *Poems*. Strange and marvelously compelling landscapes, rendered sparingly in two colors—turquoise and black—in the company of figures pared down to their simple essentials—a dove, a hand—reach an even higher plane of maturity and artistic sophistication. Of a proposed edition of forty, six copies of this collaborative work were completed. Doug Stow printed the poems in letterpress at Paper Crane Press, and Wolff completed many, if not all, of the prints. Wolff mourns the tragedy of the uncompleted project, recounting how on a Monday he agreed with "Mac," the binder Charles MacArthur Carmen, to meet on the following Thursday to finish the work. Mac had a devastating stroke on the intervening Tuesday. Both men are now frail, and the poet has died. Nevertheless Wolff and Mac are hopeful that the edition may yet come to pass, with the help of their friends.

Inspiration to a Younger Generation

Wolff's work has provided inspiration for a number of Bay Area artists who know him well. Roy Ragle remains a close friend and associate. Ragle notes that his frequent use of Biblical text as a compositional element in his prints may be directly attributed to Bill Wolff's influence. In a younger generation, Anthony Ryan, current president of the Graphic Arts Workshop in San Francisco, has adapted some of Wolff's techniques in the printing of his lyrical color woodcuts.

Art Hazelwood, known to many Bay Area readers for his paintings and relief prints boiling over with social criticism and post-modern intercultural synthesis of artistic ideas, has spent a good deal of his time working for Bill Wolff in his home and studio for the past four years. Such intimacy between an older and a younger artist cannot fail to yield fruit. Steeped in Wolff's imagery, last fall Art began a major public mural commissioned by the Fetterly Gallery in Vallejo, California. Featuring a 110-foot-long tableau of figures in settings combining architectural elements of the Renais-

Continued on back page

EPILOGUE

Where Did They Eat?

By R. L. Wilson

According to Professor Robert Harshe, one of the founders of the California Society of Printmakers, *né* California Society of Etchers, the organization was conceived over dinner at a San Francisco restaurant at sometime, probably early, in December, 1912. We know a lot about what went on at that dinner, but the burning question at issue is: Where Did They Eat? Present at the birth were Professor Harshe, Pedro Lemos, an instructor at the California School of Design atop Nob Hill, Gottardo Piazzoni (whose library murals have been in the news of late), and Ralph Stackpole (who later on became better known as a sculptor).

Piazzoni and Stackpole had adjoining studios at 728 Montgomery Street (where the Transamerica Pyramid now stands). Nicknamed the Monkey Block, the ruggedly constructed building at 728 Montgomery Street was a hive for artists and writers similar in that regard to New York's Tenth Street Studios. Lemos lived in Oakland, taking the ferry across the bay to his job at the School of Design, five or six blocks uphill from 728 Montgomery. Harshe (who later went on to become director of the Art Institute of Chicago) resided in Palo Alto within walking distance of the Stanford campus where he taught art (in those days drawing was a requirement for all undergraduates).

We will presume, for the sake of deduction, that Professor Harshe took the Southern Pacific train up the San Francisco Peninsula to the Third and Townsend passenger terminal. From there he perhaps boarded an electric trolley (the 15 car stopped in front of the station, ran up Third to Kearny a block west of Montgomery and across Pine toward Columbus) or took a taxi in the same direction.

In those days, six years after the devastating San Francisco earthquake and fire, there were many popular restaurants downtown. Some were new, some reincarnations of formerly famous pre-fire eateries such as the Old Poodle dog, Delmonico's, Jack's Rotisserie, and one of the most famous of them all—Coppa's—at 453 Pine Street, around the corner from Montgomery and a short walk down from the crest of Nob Hill.



Coppa's Restaurant at the turn of the century.

Coppa's was a hangout for artists and writers and counted among its regular patrons such luminaries as Jack London (when he was in town), painters Maynard Dixon, Xavier Martinez, the sculptor Robert Aitken (whose work crowns the Dewey Monument in Union Square), poet George Sterling, writers Gelett Burgess, Porter Garnett and Will Irwin and the photographer Arnold Genthe (he of pre-fire Chinatown portraiture fame).

The original Coppa's was located in a long narrow room in the southwest corner of the Monkey Block. Famous for the murals painted by its artist-clientèle, the pre-fire Coppa's attracted not only a ribald carefree Bohemian crowd for whom a center table was always reserved, but eventually a coterie of society groupies wanting to be a part of the scene.

Papa Coppa's regular *table d'hôte* cost fifty cents and included a large tutti salad, a pasta plate, an entrée du jour, lots of crusty sour dough French bread, black coffee and vino—the latter usually from a vintner somewhere near papa's Marin County home.

The Monkey Block survived the fire of April, 1906, but Coppa's moved around the corner to 453 Pine Street. The original Bohemian crowd had scattered with some moving to New York and others to a sparsely settled beachfront village on the Monterey Peninsula later called Carmel. Not long ago I telephoned Mirielle Wood, Gottardo Piazzoni's daughter, and advanced my theory for Coppa's as the site of the rendez-vous. She agreed at once, remembering that Coppa's was her dad's favorite restaurant in those days and mentioned it often in later years. So, then, did the founders convene at Coppa's early in December, 1912?

The evidence is slim and highly circumstantial and even Mirielle's memories, strictly speaking, would be compared to hearsay. What we do know for certain is that Robert Harshe was elected first president of the Society, Piazzoni the first treasurer, Lemos the first secretary and Stackpole alone of the executive committee, "in a ribald moment," wrote Harshe, "after dinner and during coffee and cigars."

Maybe we just have to be satisfied with something like an old faded photograph—or a mental picture—of four friends at dinner a long time ago. We can then imagine that after the plates had been cleared away and coffee served and "in a ribald moment," their creating an organization that, probably to their eternal astonishment, has withstood the many tests of time and survives and even flourishes to the present day.

Ray Wilson is an associate member of the CSP and a principle in a pharmaceutical supply concern with offices in Kinshasa, République Démocratique du Congo.



The bar at Coppa's Restaurant at the turn of the century.

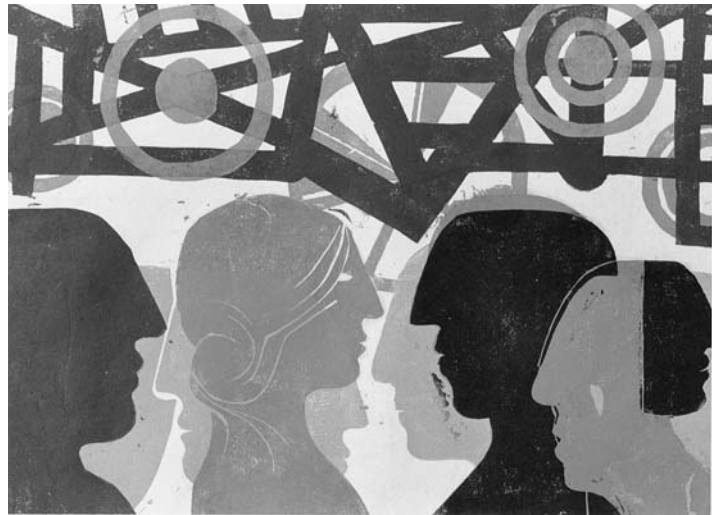
sance with the moving perspective of David Hockney, Art's mural celebrates the arts from painting to music to architecture. Viewers may recognize CSP artists Dan Robeski and Charles Ware as the models for the figures of architecture and painting, respectively. But at the center of this lively array, a scene from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* plays out on the stage, inspired, like the figure of Pantalone at the far left, by none other than Bill Wolff.

The Life of the Block

Collectors and curators be forewarned: extraordinarily few of Bill Wolff's graphic images were formally editioned. The majority bear the designation "Proof" or "Artist's Proof." Actually this designation accurately describes the artist's relationship to the works, which he seems always to view as works in progress. A virtual nightmare for the future author of Wolff's catalogue raisonne, yet for the connoisseur this phenomenon raises a fascinating prospect, as nearly every impression is in fact unique.

In creating his prints, Wolff's view of the plate or the block as a vital, living entity always poised for development and his willingness to interact with his media produce delicious results. Thus an abstract tangle of blocks printed in black and red entitled *Whirlwind* suggested a figure to the mind of the artist, transforming it into his 1994 *Shaman*. Only a careful study of the residual shapes in the subsequent print reveals that it was printed from the same block of wood as the whirlwind. Similarly a large-scale woodcut depicting the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden was subsequently divided into two separate prints, each of which took on a life of its own. The image of Adam and Eve, now isolated from the angel guarding the entrance to the garden, seems even more despairing. Separated from our first parents, the angel now becomes Abaddon, the exterminating angel of Revelation. Thus not only the details of particular images, but even their content and conception remain malleable, fluid in the artist's mind.

A prime example of this organic development of a block may be found in *The Ladder*. Wolff feels *The Ladder* arose from a creative dry period. Nevertheless this living woodcut strikes me as particularly inspired. Despite the deliberate distance he maintained from popular art movements of the time, Wolff allowed a sort of oblique influence by using a cutting board—randomly incised with lines



William Wolff, *Invisible City IV*, woodcut, 1975, 17 1/4" x 24 1/4"

from a kitchen knife—as a sort of "found object" and by interacting with the medium like the best of the abstract expressionists. By this process he produced a profound collage of visual elements, poetically conjuring a meditative vision of Jacob's dream.

In working to catalogue Wolff's graphic oeuvre, Art Hazelwood decided to label each wood block, attaching the label with a staple gun. He noted this procedure made Wolff visibly uncomfortable: the artist cringed as each label was attached, as if it were a nail in the coffin signaling the end of the life of the block. This intriguing view of block, plate and stone as living entities provides an apt metaphor for Wolff's life and contribution, as an artist whose hands and mind have proved fertile ground for seeds of inspiration from diverse artistic heroes of the past, and whose labors in turn have borne fruit to nourish and inspire a younger generation.

¹ Albright, Thomas. *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-1980*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. p. 322.

² The quotation heralds from plate 14 of William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."

³ I believe Wolff may be referring to Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater. This New York company actively supported the anti-war movement in the 60s and 70s. On February 18, 1978 a review of this company's Berkeley show in the *San Francisco Chronicle* described it as a puppet theater from



CALIFORNIA PRINTMAKER

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