

The Print Club of New York Inc

Fall 1996

President's Greeting

Julian Hyman

I hope that all of you have had a pleasant and productive summer. The Print Club of New York is about to start its sixth year, and it promises to be an exciting one. The Program Committee worked throughout the summer to schedule a number of interesting and educational Fall programs including artists' talks, showcase events, receptions, gallery visits, conservation information, and a new Print Swap, Sale, and Appraisal event that we hope will become a yearly Holiday tradition for our members. In particular, our annual Artist's Showcase will again be held at the National Arts Club on October 1, and it promises to be an exciting evening. One of the major goals of the Print Club of New York is to encourage artists to present their work to a knowledgeable and appreciative audience. This meeting with the artists not only will give us pleasure but also it will widen our horizons in art appreciation.

The response of members to renewal of their dues has been most gratifying. Should there be any open positions, there is a waiting list for membership. By the time you receive this Newsletter, you will have received, or will shortly receive, the exceptional color woodcut by Richard Bosman, entitled "Brooklyn Bridge," which is our Presentation Print for 1996. The quality of this print upholds the outstanding reputation of the Print Club of New York. Discussions are already underway toward the selection of the 1997 print, and the Print Selection committee plans to add new members in order to gain a broader perspective on this important choice.

In order to reach out to other Print Clubs in neighboring cities, we are planning to host a reception for their members as well as for our own who plan to attend the International Print Dealers Fair at the 67th Street Armory in November. The reception will be held at the Armory, Friday evening, November 8, and we hope to make new friendships with other print club members as well as to share our experiences in collecting. This meeting could be the beginning of an important relationship which would be beneficial to all of us. We urge our members to attend this important event.

I look forward to each of you actively participating in the programs of the Club, and I hope that you will submit any suggestions or recommendations that will help us tailor our events to the interests of our members.

"Brooklyn Bridge" by Richard Bosman

The Print Club's 1996 Presentation Print

"Brooklyn Bridge", a color woodcut by Richard Bosman, is the 1996 Presentation Print of the Print Club of New York. Mr. Bosman is particularly renowned for his important role in the revival of the woodcut in the 1980's and his expressionistic use of the medium. In this print the artist achieves great sensitivity in the gradation of blues depicting the East River at night.

Born in Madras, India, 1944 to Australian parents, Mr. Bosman came to the United States in 1969. He has had a distinguished career as a painter and printmaker, using woodcut as the primary vehicle for his prints. Since 1980 his work has appeared in over 45 solo exhibitions as well as numerous group exhibits. He is represented in numerous permanent collections both in the United States and abroad. Most recently Mr. Bosman appeared in the extensive MOMA exhibition of contemporary printmaking entitled *Thinking Print: Books to Billboards, 1980-95*.

Writing in the catalog for the exhibit *Prints by Richard Bosman, 1978-1988* at the Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin, the artist discussed the significance of woodcut as a medium for his art:

In 1980 when I started making woodcuts, there were few contemporary woodcuts to look at. The preferred printmaking processes at that time were lithograph, silkscreen and etching. But I thought that woodcuts had a certain roughness, a "handmade" quality that contrasted with the fluidity of the other print forms.... I was also very impressed with traditional Japanese woodblock prints and their stylized figures and discovered how the speed and crudeness of the cutting became part of the emotional content of the print.... For me painting is an additive process, a kind of image building. But woodblock printing involves a great deal of subtracting. The process of making the images requires breaking up the image into abstracted parts. The making of color separations and cutting the blocks is a reductive process. At the end, the blocks resemble nothing so much as jigsaw puzzle parts that magically fit together with the key block to create the final image.

We are indeed fortunate in having the opportunity to add a Richard Bosman print to our collections.

We also would like to thank Mr. Bosman for agreeing to speak to Club members at the September Club meeting.

Upcoming Print Club Events

October 1, 6 p.m.

Annual Artist's Showcase Meeting
National Arts Club Sculpture Garden
15 Gramercy Park South

November 8, 6-7:30 p.m.

Reception for Print Club members and those members from out-of-town Print Clubs who are attending the International Fine Print Dealers Association Print Fair at the 67th St. Armory. The reception will be held at the Armory, 67th St. and Park Ave.

November 21, 6:30-8 p.m.

"Conserving Your Prints," reception and talk at Bark Frameworks, Inc., 85 Grand St. Bark Frameworks has played a leading role in conservation framing and setting standards for preservation of works of art on paper.

December 3, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

"Swap, Sale, and Appraisal" at the Liederkrantz Club, 6 East 87th Street. Club members are invited to bring a limited number of prints to sell or to swap with fellow members. Appraisal services will also be available. Details to follow.

December 17, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Reception and tour of The Moscow Studio print exhibition at the Mimi Ferzt Gallery, 114 Prince St. This exhibition is being held in conjunction with the Corcoran Museum in Washington and features the work of 20 Russian printmakers.

The Print Club of New York, Inc.

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A Chat with Andree Ruellan

Peter Heller

Andree Ruellan is the reigning matriarch of the Woodstock, New York art colony. She and her artist husband, John Taylor, first settled on a fifty acre farm in Shady, NY in 1929, and she continues to be productive and very engaging at 91 years young. She is actively involved with the Woodstock Artist Association, and she most recently exhibited a large body of drawings and monoprints at the Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, Ohio. She continues to be an inspiration for many younger artists.

Her work can also be found in the Philadelphia Fine Arts Museum, the Virginia Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and in many private collections across America.

The following excerpts were taken from an interview conducted by Peter Heller on June 23, 1996.

Peter: Andree, you are really the matriarch of the Woodstock art colony.

Andree: I am. I'm joined by two others: Jane Jones and Carolyn Haeblerly. We were declared the Woodstock treasures.

Peter: Andree, what part has printmaking played in your long and illustrious career?

Andree: While in Paris during the Twenties, I met many important American artists who came there to do printmaking. The French lithographer-printer, Edmond Desjobert was a great influence and encouraged us to be very free on the lithographic stone. He was a very inspiring printer and attracted such people as Adolf Dehn and Yasuo Kuniyoshi. Dehn encouraged me to work with lithography. He was so creative as a print maker.

When I returned to America, I did some lithographs with George Miller who did not encourage me to experiment. In 1931 I returned to Paris and did a whole series of lithographs with Desjobert. These were chine colle prints.

After winning a Guggenheim Fellowship, I began to work with Lacouriere, and he introduced me to the sugar-lift method with aquatint. It was a wonderful medium for an impatient artist like myself. I never had Kuniyoshi's patience to build up a lithograph with sugarlift. If I didn't like the drawing on a copper plate, I could wipe it off and start again, so I did a whole series of aquatints.

Peter: What images did you choose?

Andree: Most came from color sketches on the scene. I then would enlarge on the drawings. They were always thought out and most were figurative things of the circus, street singers and players. I also did a series related to Southern jazz.

Peter: Andree, you printed from the Twenties to the Fifties. Did your style change?

Andree: My drawings changed stylistically in the Fifties. Albert Heckman brought me Sumi ink tablets with such a wonderful range of blacks and blue-blacks. I fell in love

with the medium. One had to work on delicate rice paper, and it was wonderful experimenting with different textures.

Peter: It seems that many of your prints came to life through sketches and preliminary drawings.

Andree: That's right. I was so engrossed in oil painting and mural work that it took a lot out of me. I found print-making so much more complicated. Also, I was not terribly adventuresome with prints.

Peter: What about your monoprints?

Andree: Oh, yes! I was liberated through the monoprints. You had to do it spontaneously. Here you took a real chance. You could even spoil a few in the process. It impacted on my painting and really freed me up to be more spontaneous.

Peter: Did you ever regret not doing intaglio prints?

Andree: I'm afraid I am an impatient person. Except for the years in Paris, I could not afford them, to tell you the truth. It had only been through Adolf Dehn who found a patron to back me that I was really able to do prints. When Margaret Lowengrund was printing in Woodstock, I should have taken more advantage of it, but I didn't. I guess I always felt there was more of a demand for oils.

Peter: Were there patrons who supported the artists of Woodstock?

Andree: Yes. Herman Moore, the head of the Whitney Museum, and Eugene Speicher were very supportive of my work. In those days if you had successful artists who admired your work, they went all out for you. Eugene Speicher who was on many juried shows was responsible for helping me get a Guggenheim fellowship.

Peter: Who promoted your work as a printmaker?

Andree: Back in New York, during the Thirties, Carl Zigrosser of the Weyhe Gallery and Sam Golden published unlimited prints at very modest prices. They worked with me and others such as Emil Ganso and Wanda Gag. Their vision, through the American Artist

group was to get prints out to a larger segment of the American population. They wanted to use the most distinguished American artists. Sam first produced Christmas cards by top artists, and they were very popular. He then graduated to lithographs.

Maynard Walker and the Kraushaar Gallery were able to sell my prints. I've been very lucky. I've been with the Kraushaar Gallery for over fifty years.

Peter: Your name is known far and wide, and you've had many exhibitions. Have any of your prints been included in a recent show?

Andree: Yes, at the University of Georgia Museum show I did include a few prints, even though I featured the drawings.

Peter: Were the artists of Woodstock supportive of each other.

Andree: Yes. Back then the Woodstock Artists Association was very small. It was a volunteer organization. We were poor and had no money to speak of. Many of the artists were having a very difficult time through the depression. There were special funds and Christmas sales to help out the artists. There was a great deal of generous help from all the artists, and things were more controlled by the local artists and not by the dealers.

Peter: Did you ever go down to the city for openings?

Andree: Yes. When I first came here, Jack had a Model T Ford. We used it to go down. In 1928 Mrs. Force made me a member of the Whitney group. When the Whitney was formally opened, many of us would go down. Unfortunately, many openings were in the middle of the winter. We got dressed like Eskimos because the trip was long and it took about four hours. If the weather was bad, it would take even longer.

There was an inexpensive hotel across from the Whitney. We brought a valise of clothes and would change for the party. I already knew Emil Ganso, Ernest Fiene, Alexander Brook and others. I must say we all had a wonderful time together. It was a very exciting period in my life.

Spring Membership Event

Print Club Symposium on WPA Artists and Their Prints

A large and enthusiastic membership turnout marked the Symposium on *WPA Artists and Their Prints* held at the Liederkrantz Club in New York City on May 21. Panelists included: Grace Glueck, art critic for the New York Observer who acted as moderator; Will Barnet, artist and printmaker whose work is in many important museums and private collections; Sylvan Cole, well known art dealer and friend to many artists and collectors; Elliot Davis, Assistant Curator of Drawings and Prints at the Metropolitan Museum of Art who organized an exhibition of WPA color prints shown concurrently with the Symposium, and Susan Teller whose gallery spe-

cializes in American prints including WPA artists.

The program provided a fascinating overview of the history and artists participating in the Federal Art Project which was funded by executive order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and received support of \$84 million from the federal government over the course of the New Deal. Sylvan Cole began the Symposium with a history of WPA printmaking projects which were generally printed in editions of 25 and loaned to libraries, schools and other public institutions. He also commented on the sorry picture of what has happened to these prints. The project was dissolved in 1942-43 and works were thrown away,

put in closets, trashed and lost.

Will Barnet shared his experiences with the WPA project when as a printer at the Art Students League he acted as advisor and printed for WPA projects. He pointed out that these projects were the crucible for the development of art in the United States by sustaining artists who could not otherwise find work. His personal experience with the WPA projects convinced him that this era was one of the great moments in art history in America as well as raising a question for artists which is still with us today. Should the purpose of art be self-expression or social advocacy?

Elliot Davis, who organized the exhibition of WPA color prints at the Metropolitan Museum, pointed out that every facet of American art was represented in the medley of styles and subjects represented in these printmaking projects. We tend to think of WPA art as post office murals, social realism paintings or Walker Evans photographs of depression-era subject matter. However, in addition to the prints celebrating American regionalism and concentrating on worker solidarity, a rich and varied group of abstract and surrealist prints were also produced. Most WPA sponsored prints were in black and white, but the projects were also the impetus for the popularization of the silk screen technique which Anthony

Velonis had developed in the 1930s. WPA funding provided the means by which artists could develop this technique into a popular medium for color prints.

Susan Teller focused on the changing reputation of WPA prints and printmakers. She pointed out that the 30's artists dealt with the problems of American society such as workers who might never work again, the "gloomy" subjects which the optimistic 50's, 60's and 70's didn't want to hear about. Today a striking change of attitude has occurred. WPA art is becoming increasingly popular because again we are coming face to face with similar problems in American life. We have also recognized the importance of these artists as pioneers using surrealism and abstraction in their prints as well as experimenting with the silkscreen technique. However, as Ms. Teller pointed out, although the market for these prints is strong, because so many were destroyed and lost, the prices are high when they do come on the market.

Our special thanks to Ms. Glueck who moderated the panel and conducted the question period which concluded the evening. We also wish to thank our distinguished panelists who shared their personal experience and expertise with us during this delightful and informative presentation.

Currier and Ives Course at the Museum of the City of New York

Drawing upon its superb permanent collection of Currier & Ives prints, the Museum of the City of New York organized a major exhibition, *Currier & Ives, Printmakers to the American People* which was held at the Museum from May 10 through August 4 and is now traveling to other museums. The exhibit was drawn mainly from the Museum's Harry T. Peters collection. Mr. Peters was a pioneering collector who assembled a personal holding of 2,800 Currier & Ives prints and preparatory drawings in the 1920's as well as publishing the firm's first history and catalogue in 1929. Focusing on highlights of this collection, the Museum in conjunction with New York University's School of Continuing Education is offering a course this Fall led by Leslie Nolan, Curator of Prints and Photographs, which will explore the range of work created by Currier & Ives.

According to information provided by the Museum of the City of New York, what we think of as Currier and Ives was a partnership begun in 1857 between Nathaniel Currier a lithographer who had opened a printmaking business in New York in 1834 and James Merritt Ives who had been the firm's bookkeeper for five years and was related to the Currier family by marriage. The resulting firm of Currier & Ives was spectacularly prolific, producing an average of three or four new prints every week for fifty years. When Currier & Ives closed in 1907, it had sold millions of prints in unlimited editions from an inventory

that numbered over 7,000 titles.

In the firm's factory, an assembly-line atmosphere prevailed. Artists prepared sketches, lithographers transferred sketches to Bavarian lithographic stones, letterers wrote inscriptions on stone, and colorists handpainted the black and white prints. With some exceptions, most of the Currier & Ives prints were not copies of paintings done by well-known artists. Instead, they were created by staff artists working collaboratively with specialists in a particular area of design. It was for this reason that many of the Currier & Ives prints are unsigned.

Currier & Ives competed successfully not only with other American lithography firms but with other media as well. Its images of news events and political cartoons appealed to readers of the inexpensive dailies of the "penny presses"; its decorative pictures, underpriced engravings and "chromos"; and its celebrity portraits and historical scenes offered color and movement beyond the means of early photography.

Although the firm continued to flourish in the 1880's, its output by then consisted primarily of horse trotting prints and the popular, but scurrilous, "darktown comics" depicting the coarsest stereotypes of African Americans. The firm's decline was due in part to the waning energies of the aging founding partners. Also, by the century's end, competing technologies, especially photography and

chromolithography, overshadowed hand-colored lithography, and as middle-class tastes stratified, the more well-to-do shied away from the unsophisticated charms of Currier & Ives. In 1907, the firm's inventory was sold through auction for little more than the cost of materials. Not until the 1920's with the upsurge of public interest in artifacts of the American past did modern collecting of Currier & Ives prints begin in earnest, and Harry T. Peters, whose collection was donated to the Museum, was foremost among those early collectors.

The New York University course offered in conjunction with the Museum is also entitled *Currier & Ives Printmakers to the American People*. It will be offered on Fridays, at the Museum, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on November 8, 15, and 22 and will feature lectures, print room visits, and field trips. The course is led by Leslie Nolan, Curator of Prints and Photographs who organized the Museum exhibition. For further information about the course, call New York University' School of Continuing Education at (212) 998-7130.

Printmaking Techniques: Mezzotint

Dr. Arthur H. Rossof

Mezzotint is an intaglio printmaking method which was invented over three hundred years ago. The process is laborious and time consuming, appealing today only to a few dedicated printmakers. In the mezzotint process, the surface of a plate (usually copper) is roughened using a serrated, arc-shaped metal instrument called a rocker. Applying firm pressure to the tool's handle, the entire plate is "rocked" repeatedly in many directions until the shiny copper surface is transformed to one bearing innumerable burrs and pits, above and below the surface. Depending on the size of the plate, the number of passes across the plate, and the diligence and energy of the artist, this process can occupy months just to prepare the plate for the image. Usually inked in black, the result is a highly textured, velvety background. The image is produced using burnishers and scrapers applied with varying degrees of pressure from which emerge various tones of grey. Thus, an image is created by drawing light from the darkness. The more scraping and burnishing, the lighter the area. This process permits great latitudes of tone, hence the name mezzotint.

Over the course of its history, a major application of mezzotint was the reproduction of paintings. With the advent of photography and less complicated printing techniques, the labor-intensive mezzotint process was replaced with newer technologies. Only a few hardy mezzotint artists endured during the early twentieth century. However, by mid-century, Yozo Hamaguchi and Mario Avati revived the technique and served as the inspiration for dozens of other printmakers.

Today, interest in the process seems to be growing among printmakers and dealers. New York City, in particular, is the American hub for mezzotint production. Frederick Mershimer's print, "Passage," a mezzotint of a New York City street at night was the first presentation print of the Print Club of New York in 1992.

Mershimer's work generally depicts outdoor city scenes. Superficially, they may seem straight forward and

approachable, but further study reveals the haunting, unsettled chaos of urban life.

Using the mezzotint technique, Carol Wax studies the myriad tonalities of light in her images of machines and objects of an earlier era. Lighted from multiple directions, creating surprising shadows, her images of an apple peeler, a typewriter or a sewing machine spring to life in unexpected ways. One hears the New Orleans rhythms in her "Vertigo Zydeco" image of an accordion, while the flickering light and click-clack of an old film projector leap off the sheet in the "Hollywood" print of 1995.

Master painter Craig McPherson is another New Yorker demonstrating consummate skill in the art of mezzotint. His images are generally large in format, and he chooses bold, outdoor statements such as a nocturnal "F.D.R. Drive" and "Yankee Stadium at Night," capturing the ethereal glow of the bright lights of a night baseball game.

Collecting this esoteric medium provides challenge and stimulates inquiry. The collector must ask, "Is this a reproductive work based on a painting or is this an original image?" He must decide how it was colored and how many plates were used. And most intriguing of all, where do the ideas come from, — Vattinen's shiny railroad tracks to nowhere; the floating shapes and carefully wrapped branches of Katsunori Hamanishi; the beetles of Hachimi Azza in unlikely perpetual balance; the decaying bird carcass by Peebles; moonlight reflections on the water by Susan Jameson; sharing a sea shore beach chair with Anne Dykmans.

More information on the history and technique of the medium can be found in Carol Wax's definitive work on the subject, *The Mezzotint: History and Technique*, published by Harry N. Abrams.

Editor's Note: Many of our Print Club members have asked for information on the various print-making techniques. Dr. Rossof has contributed this fine article on both the mezzotint process and contemporary artists who are using it for their prints. We will continue to provide information on other print-making techniques in subsequent Newsletters, and we welcome contributions on these processes from our members.

News and Notes

This column is dedicated to our members. Let us know when you have interesting news you would like to share. Perhaps you have given a talk, donated a print, written an article or published a book, participated in an exhibition, printed a new edition, won an award etc. We would like to hear from you.

Harriet Burdock, member of the Board of Trustees, has donated "Loire," the Club's 1995 Presentation Print by April Gornick to the Art Museum at the University of New Mexico.

Peter Heller, also a member of the Board of Trustees, spoke on "Skyscrapers and Bridges in American Art" at the Essex County Chapter of Brandeis University National Women's Committee. His talk explored the changing New York skyline as documented by the great printmakers of the 20th century with particular emphasis on the WPA and Federal Works Project era.

Call or write to us if you have interesting news you want to share. Call (212)479-7915 or (201)567-0170 or write to Editor, The Print Club of New York, Inc., 119 Buckingham Road, Tenafly, NJ 07670. We would particularly like to hear from our out-of-town members.

From the Editor's Desk

Several of the articles in this edition of the Newsletter have been written by Print Club members Peter Heller, and Dr. Arthur H. Rossof. We wish to thank them for generously sharing their expertise with us.

The Publications Committee is always searching for articles of interest to print makers and print collectors. Members are welcome to submit articles about artists, books, conservation of prints, museums, exhibits, little known facts, interviews with people involved in the art world etc. Perhaps you would like to tell us about your interests as collectors. You do not have to be a "great writer" as we can edit your work.

Call (212) 567-0170 for further information or mail articles to Editor, The Print Club of New York, 119 Buckingham Road, Tenafly, NJ 07670.

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