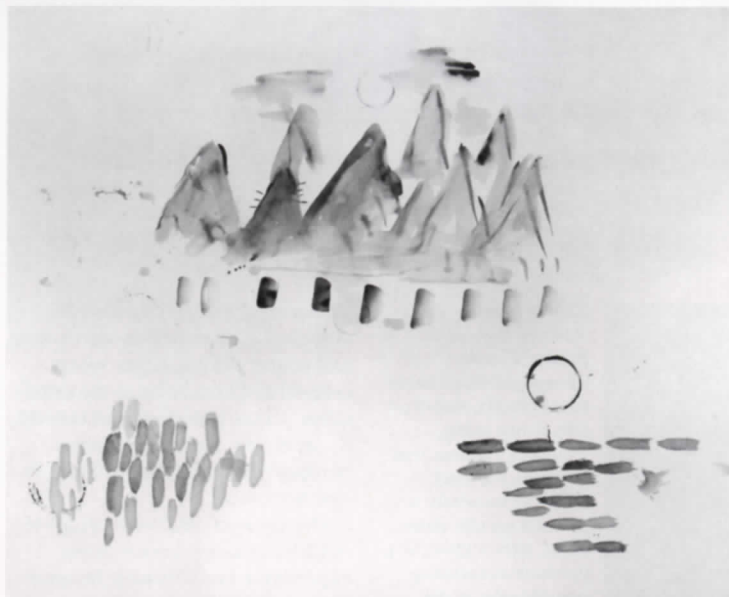


Crown Point Press in CHINA



In the People's Republic of China—despite political upheavals and an attempt, during the Cultural Revolution, to destroy old culture—printers and carvers still quietly and methodically work in printing workshops in the cities of Shanghai, Beijing and Hangzhou. Working with a preliminary maquette that an artist has created, carvers cut small blocks out of fine-grained pearwood which correspond to various areas of color; the number of blocks composing a single print may vary from one block to over a hundred, in a variety of sizes. Surrounded by a myriad of porcelain ink bowls, printers grind watercolor pigment and then ink the blocks with round brushes of bear or deer hair, gracefully applying the ink so that the essence of the artist's original watercolor stroke is preserved in the finished print. The work is precise, hands swiftly and deftly move from bowls to blocks. Often color is applied in various thicknesses, wiped away or is permitted to run. Silk sheets, pre-mounted on thin paper, are then printed by hand pressure with



Top left: The Kweilin mountains in the Guangxi province; top right: A printer in Hangzhou working with Tom Marioni's prints; above: Pat Steir,

Kweilin Dreaming, Part A (#4), 1989, Chinese woodblock printed on silk chine collé with hand-painting, 37½ × 42¾"; right: "beauty + skill = art"

a flat palm-fiber brush, stroked over the back of the paper. The same sheet is printed twenty or more times to build the color image from numerous blocks: the translucent quality of the water-based ink printed on silk is almost indistinguishable from watercolor.

Art is a manifestation of experience: physical, intellectual, emotional. The goal of the Crown Point Press woodblock program in China is to provide experience to artists through artistic and cultural involvement. The artist's experience begins as he/she creates the imagery for the print before traveling to China, using silk as a surface and
(over)



CHINA



(continued)

watercolors of a Chinese palette. Starting with these materials, which are the same materials that will be used in printing, the artist enters another aesthetic realm. The actual journey to the printmaking studio is the second step—none of the craftsmen in China has ever worked with Westerners before. The final result is a contemporary vision which becomes evident through a time-honored yet unfamiliar tradition.

Tom Marioni, Robert Bechtle and Pat Steir were the first artists to travel to China as part of our program. Their different approaches to the materials and process begin to illustrate the wide range of possibilities of this project. Marioni's imagery—symbols referring to culture and place—was drawn with a feather, giving his prints a gestural and calligraphic quality. In Bechtle's representational image, the texture and glisten of the silk produces an effect similar to a photograph taken in bright sunlight. Steir's woodblocks, some of which she later hand-painted, were inspired by the landscape she found in China. Her



Robert Bechtle in the Forbidden City, Beijing

in China as early as 600 A.D. Today, this process—called *douban* (assembled blocks) or *muban shuiyin* (woodblock water print)—remains almost unchanged since China's "Golden Era of Pictorial Printing" in the sixteenth century. Exploring this ancient tradition, in the country where ink and paper originated almost two thousand years ago, we hope to merge Eastern and Western cultures and aesthetics, contributing to the evolution of an art form.



Top: Robert Bechtle, Potrero Houses—Pennsylvania Avenue, 1989, Chinese woodblock printed on silk chine collé, 27 × 26¼"; above: Tom Marioni, Pi, 1989, Chinese woodblock printed on silk chine collé, 22½ × 23¼"; left: Pat Steir examining woodblocks in the Duo Yun Xuan Studio, Shanghai

prints depict the steep Kweilin mountains, shimmering water, mist, and round moons. These works created in China refer to the artists' other prints, paintings and installations: colors, themes and ideas reappear, manifesting each artist's distinct vision.

The Crown Point Press program in China is an extension of our experience in publishing Japanese Ukiyo-e style woodblock prints: since 1982 we have been bringing contemporary Western artists to Kyoto to work in this traditional method with a master printer. The Japanese technique, which flourished during the Edo period (1614–1868), is based on the watercolor woodblock printing practiced

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