



Magenta, 1990. Color aquatint with spit bite aquatint. Image size: 40-1/2 x 54-1/4"; paper size: 35-1/2 x 44-3/4". Edition 50.

Al Held 1928-2005, In Memory

Al Held died on July 26 at his home in Todi, Italy, at the age of 76. Among the nineteen prints he created at Crown Point Press are the largest, most colorful and complex works we have ever done. When I invited him to work with us in 1985 he told me he could not be successful in printmaking because his paintings were so large and the surfaces in them so smooth. As he worked with aquatint, however, he was delighted with what he called "overlays of color that model and capture a kind of light that I wouldn't have gotten any other way." He deliberately broke up his surface smoothness, using spit bite aquatint in a painterly way that he later continued by taking up watercolor in his own studio.

Whenever Held came to Crown Point, he would use all our printers, our largest plates, and the largest number of plates we could possibly print one on top of the other. The resulting images create amazing floating worlds of color, form, and light. "I believe intuitively that there is such a thing as structure in the world," he said, "But it is like a three-and-a-half legged stool. It is not totally logical or reproducible. It is full of paradoxes and contradictions, but that's part of the structure."

In the 1950s, after studying art in Paris on the GI Bill, Held lived in New York and hung out with the Abstract Expressionists. By 1960 he had begun to use geometric shapes in his paintings, and by the end of the 1960s, a time when the most sought-after painters were emphasizing flat space, he had already begun to create deep space, dizzying in its proportions. "All formal elements—geometry, asymmetry, light, color, gravity, form—have metaphori-

cal meaning," he said. "They aren't design elements. They're about an abstract feeling of being in an environment where everything is relative."

Al Held's paintings are in the collections of most of the world's great museums, so his immortality is in some measure assured. It seems odd, however, that he himself is no longer in the world. He was vital, honest, and energetic—a friend. During his visits to Crown Point Press everyone worked very hard, but we were all sorry when he left. Now, we miss him very much.

—Kathan Brown



Al Held in the Crown Point studio, 1989.