

Overview

West Goes East—Crown Point Press in Japan



Judy Pfaff, Karen McCready, Tadashi Toda, Hidekatsu Takada and Al Held (counter-clockwise from front left) at the oldest noodle shop in Kyoto.

The exoticism of the East has fascinated Western people since the 13th century when Marco Polo and his father and uncle returned to Venice from China with exotic treasures and tales of unusual customs. Thus began a seven hundred-year love affair between West and East, a love affair in which Crown Point Press is now involved.

Historically many Western artists have looked to the Orient as a source of both inspiration and methods. Japanese woodblock prints for example, which flourished from the 17th through the 19th centuries, had a profound influence on the way French Impressionists abandoned realistic perspective: "Hiroshige," Pissarro wrote, "is a marvelous Impressionist."

The techniques used to create the work of Hiroshige and other ukiyo-e artists are still practiced in Japan. This along with fascination for the country itself—its extraordinary present as well as its past—inspired Kathan Brown to invite Western artists to make woodblock prints in Kyoto.

The idea for the project was a good one, but not as easy to implement as it might appear. With the help of project coordinator Hidekatsu Takada, a Crown Point Press etching printer and native

of Kyoto, we have been able to overcome many of the barriers to efficient working in Japan. With each subsequent project—the first was a print by Pat Steir in 1982, followed by works by William T. Wiley, Francesco Clemente, Wayne Thiebaud, Helen Frankenthaler, Richard Diebenkorn, Al Held and Judy Pfaff—these problems, including that of language, have become less formidable.

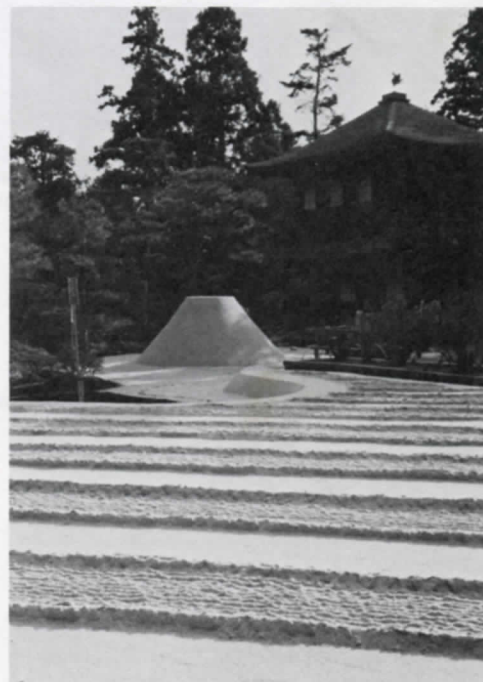
I had the privilege of observing Judy Pfaff and Al Held in Tadashi Toda's studio in April 1984. Using the artist's maquette the preliminary blocks for each print were carved by Reizo Monjyu in anticipation of the artists' arrival. The artists' initial reactions when the proofs were unveiled were of awe: how can this process of printing with transparent watercolor pigments be so rich and detailed? How can so much be accomplished by only a single woodcarver and a single printer in a tiny studio setting? After admiring the initial proofs, the artists began to make the prints truly their own: new blocks were added, colors changed and paper selected.

When I commented on Toda's unique ability as a printer, Kathan said, "It's in his bones." He follows techniques that

have been handed down in his family since the 18th century: making the bamboo printing pad, extending the watercolor inks and sizing the hand-made paper, which he orders from a papermaking village. It is also traditional in this style of printmaking to leave none of the paper exposed. (However, in *Untitled*, a recent self portrait by Francesco Clemente, a small wedge of paper in the pupil of the eye was left unprinted.)

The contrast between old and new is striking in Japan, yet the two forces inhabit the same terrain without substantively diminishing each other. With the Crown Point Press woodblock program we have initiated a collaboration that parallels this harmonious coexistence—late 20th century artists use a technique that has been nurtured by tradition for hundreds of years.

Karen McCready
Sales Director



The Garden at The Silver Pavillion, Kyoto.
(Karen McCready photo)

Dear Friends,

Big News! Crown Point Press is expanding! We have just signed a lease on a new gallery space in New York at 568 Broadway. This is a Landmark Building in Soho at Broadway and Prince, almost across from the New Museum. We will be on the second floor, which is entirely filled with galleries; we have a large (about 3000 square feet) corner space that we will use for exhibition space, offices, and accessible storage. So if you live in New York, or if you visit there, you'll be able to see all of our editions in a comfortable, easy-to-find place. We're beginning renovation now, and we hope that Karen McCready and her

assistant, Stephanie Bleacher, will be able to move from our 545 Broadway office in early December.

Our California gallery, under the direction of Fredrica Drotos, will remain unchanged. We plan, however, to do more prints next year than we ever have done before, so we expect to be busy both in New York and in California.

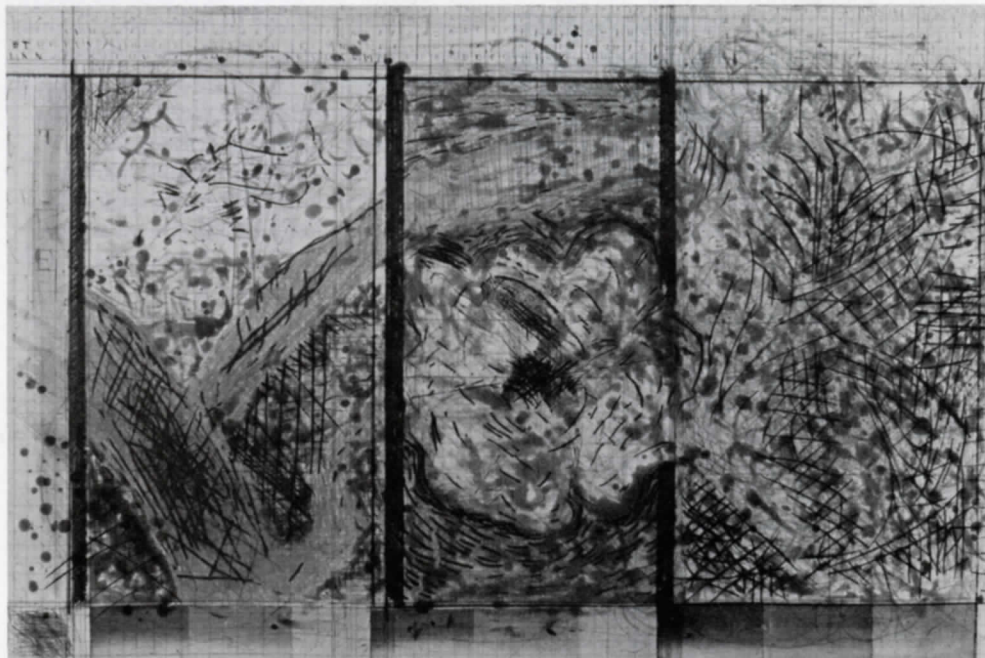
One way that we will increase the number of prints we produce is to do some etching editions in New York. We've made an arrangement with Jeryl Parker so that we can do this and maintain our approach and our level of quality. Back in the early 1960s Jeryl and I worked together for about two

years in developing Crown Point Press, and again for a year in the 1970s he worked with us as a printer in our Oakland studio. In 1981 he moved to New York and set up Jeryl Parker Editions there; he has produced a number of very fine etching projects, most of them with Parasol Press as publisher. Last year Jeryl Parker moved his shop out of New York, but now he is moving back, in cooperation with us, and he will work this year on Crown Point published projects with at least four artists: Francesco Clemente, Chuck Close, Elizabeth Murray and Rackstraw Downes.

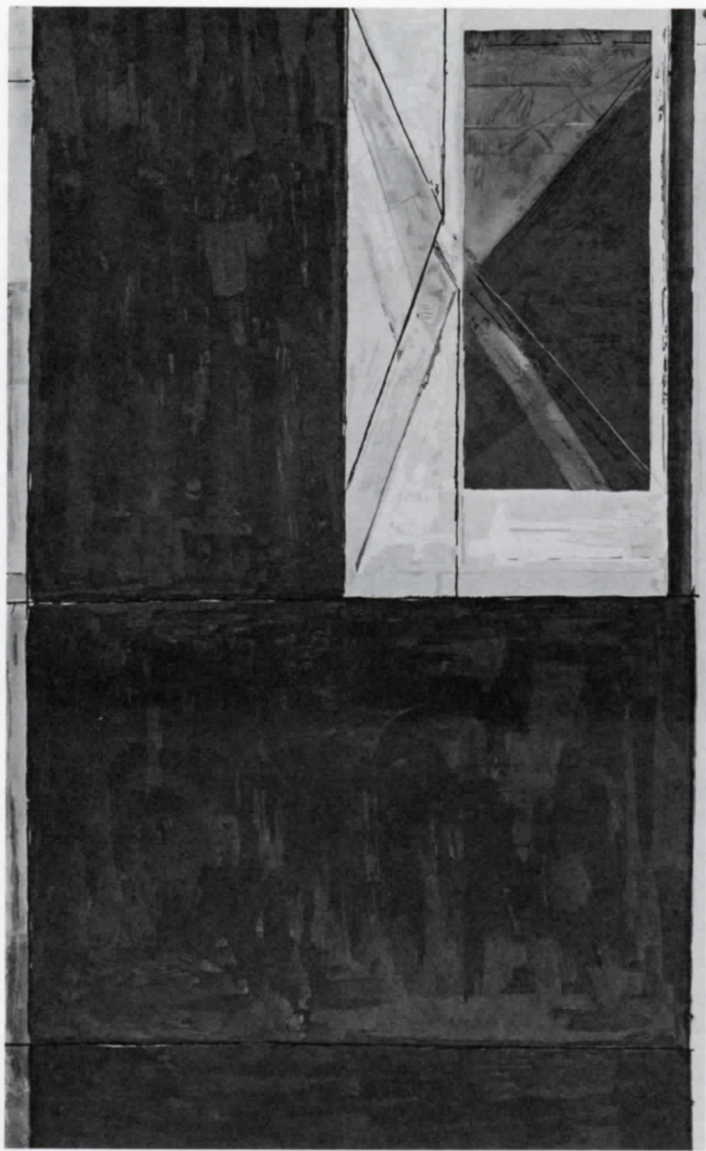
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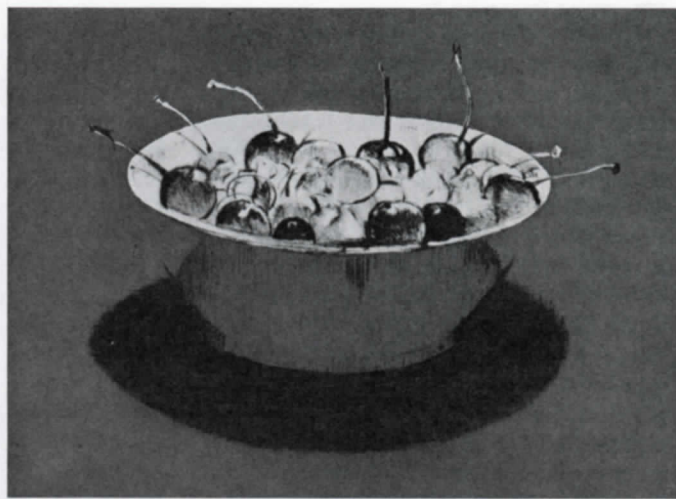
Joan Jonas, *Rose*, 1982. Drypoint etching, 11 x 12", edition 18.



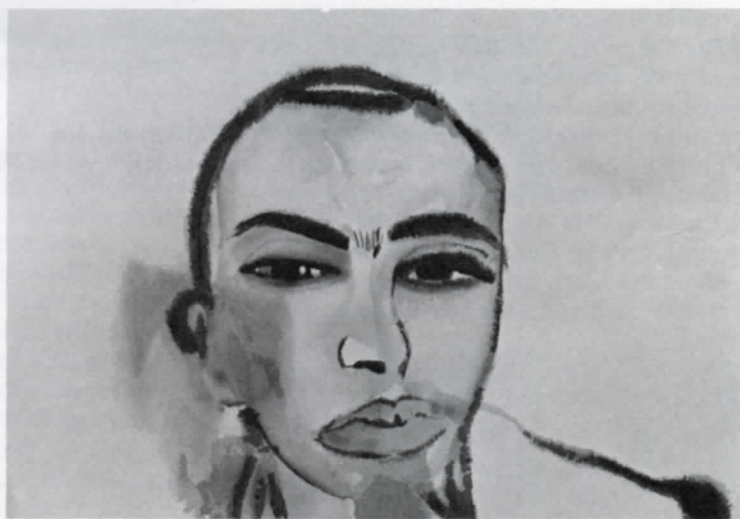
Pat Steir, *The Tree After Hiroshige*, 1984. Spitbite aquatint with hardground, softground and drypoint etching, 32 x 42", edition 30.



Richard Diebenkorn, *Blue*, 1984. Color woodblock, 42 1/4 x 27", edition 200.



Wayne Thiebaud, *Dark Cherries*, 1984. Drypoint etching with aquatint, 14 x 17", edition 25.



Francesco Clemente, *Untitled*, 1984. Color woodblock, 17 x 23", edition 200.

New Editions

Here are a few of the editions we've been working on over the past few months. The woodblock prints by Richard Diebenkorn and Francesco Clemente represent each artist's further explorations in the ukiyo-e medium. Wayne Thiebaud's *Dark Cherries* is his most recent etching, and it shows a particularly masterful use of the dry-point line. It is a re-working of the plates used in the earlier *Cherries*. Joan Jonas' *Rose* is a delightful and gentle black and white image that we thought you may not have seen before. In *The Tree After Hiroshige* Pat Steir has used a wide variety of etching techniques to bring out this softly colored work, which has just been editioned in our studio in Oakland.

Prices are available upon request. (Due to unanticipated demand Dark Cherries and Blue are unavailable.)

Friends...

(Continued from page 2)

In our California studio we're working now on some etchings by Tom Holland, and in November the young New York artist Rammellzee is scheduled to work. As 1985 progresses we expect to work in California with Elaine de Kooning, Richard Smith, John Cage, David True, Wayne Thiebaud and Richard Diebenkorn. It will be a very full and very interesting year.

We are a little bit behind in our Japanese woodblock program, as those of you who have ordered Judy Pfaff prints are aware. Judy has decided to release her woodblock print, *Yoyogi*, in two versions, one like the proof we have been showing, the other with some additional blocks. We hope to have both versions before the end of the year. Al Held has done a large print which we have not yet released, but which should be ready in early 1985. The Clemente *Untitled* has been printed, and we expect the artist to sign in mid-October. We have plans for a project with Alex Katz next spring. Tadashi Toda, our printer, is coming here for a brief visit—his first trip outside Japan. He'll do a demonstration in our gallery in Oakland on October 27. All of the work on our projects, of course, will continue to be done in Japan.

Two prints illustrated in this newsletter under "New Editions" are already sold out. We did expect the newsletter would be a kind of advance notice for you—but because there are three months between issues sometimes that doesn't work. I'll try in my letter-column, however, to continue to give distant warnings of what we're planning. That way if there's something coming up you'd especially like to know about, you can tell us and we'll contact you personally when it's ready.

We at Crown Point are all very excited about our 1984-5 plans, which are extremely varied and ambitious. Please wish us luck, and keep in touch!

Very best regards,

Kathan Brown

Kathan Brown
Director, Crown Point Press



Tadashi Toda working on Judy Pfaff's *Yoyogi*.

Overview

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Crown Point Press

Crown Point Press Woodblock Program

Kyoto,

J A P A N



Japanese style woodblock printing is an ancient art. Introduced into Japan from China in the seventh century, it was originally used for book printing. The Japanese woodblock print flowered during the Edo period (1614-1868) in a style called **ukiyo-e**, meaning "pictures of the floating world." The prominent artists of the day, from Moronobu to Hiroshige, created works expressly for the medium based on everyday scenes. Many of the prints depict the world of courtesans and Kabuki theater, subjects too mundane and daring for traditional academic artists. By the eighteenth century, the style had evolved into a colorful and decorative manifestation of the daily life of the growing merchant class. Ukiyo-e prints were immediately popular in Japan (they were issued in unlimited editions and sold door to door) and, following the opening up of trade between Japan and the West in 1860, were appreciated and collected by Western connoisseurs and artists. Several of the leading French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists—Degas, Van Gogh and Toulouse Lautrec, to cite some of the best-known—were fascinated and influenced by the bold compositions and flattened space typically found in ukiyo-e prints. Hokusai and Hiroshige in turn assimilated many Occidental concepts in their works.

Woodblock is a relief process, that is all areas that are not to be

printed are cut away. In general, a separate block is used for each color. We follow the same method today that was employed in traditional ukiyo-e woodblock printing. First the artist provides the design in the form of a watercolor drawing. The watercolor is traced and the tracing is pasted on a smooth, hardwood slab. Then the professional woodcarver cuts away the portions of the woodblock not to be printed. The printer then applies a thin coat of transparent water-based pigment on the block and lays on it a sheet of handmade paper. He rubs the back of the paper vigorously by hand with a round pad called a baren to transfer the pigment to the paper. No printing press is used. When the printer has arrived at an initial proof of the image, the artist travels to Kyoto to adjust the image. This is the opportunity for the artist to request that blocks be added or subtracted or that colors be altered. The printing of the edition occurs after the artist leaves.

Japanese woodblock printing is highly refined and requires precision and technical expertise. It has always been executed by skilled professional artisans who learn their craft through apprenticeship to a master printer. This distinguishes ukiyo-e woodblock printing from modern woodcut printing such as the type that flourished in Germany during the early part of the twentieth



century. In woodcut prints, artists themselves carve the block in an intentionally crude and direct manner, lending the western-style woodcut its expressive power. For a Japanese woodblock print, on the other hand, it is not unusual for the carver to prepare up to 50 blocks, each one of which might be printed several times before the print is finished. A ukiyo-e-style woodblock print usually has the quality of watercolor painting.

Kathan Brown conceived the idea of inviting contemporary artists to create works using the traditional Japanese woodblock medium. Through our program, artists have been able to nourish their ideas through the challenge of working in a new (to them) process and in so doing have also expanded the range of the ukiyo-e print.

We inaugurated our Japanese woodblock program in 1982 with a print by Pat Steir. Artists who have since participated in the program

include William Brice, Francesco Clemente, Chuck Close, Richard Diebenkorn, Eric Fischl, Helen Frankenthaler, April Gornik, Al Held, Bryan Hunt, Shoichi Ida, Anish Kapoor, Alex Katz, Robert Kushner, Sol LeWitt, Robert Mangold, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, Robert Moskowitz, Judy Pfaff, David Salle, José Maria Sicilia, Wayne Thiebaud, David True, and William Wiley.

Our printer, Tadashi Toda, has worked with us from the inception of the project. He is a third-generation ukiyo-e style printer. The woodcarver is Shunzo Matsuda and the coordinator of the project is Hidekatsu Takada, originally from Kyoto and a former etching printer at Crown Point Press.

Constance Lewallen

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Photographs of Tadashi Toda, Kyoto

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