

by Kathan Brown

Finally, he made another plate for the image and put in some



William T. Wiley, *Charmin Billy Monoland* #17, 2006. Photogravure printed in sanguine with hand coloring by the artist, from a series of 23. Paper size: 41 1/2 x 34"; image size: 32 1/2 x 26". Printed by Catherine Brooks.

writing: "So, CB, when's your birthday? 10/21/. What year? Every Year!" Underneath he drew a birthday candle and a cherry pie. "My mother asked me what kind of cake I wanted for my birthday," Wiley mused, "And I said a cherry pie."

*Oh where have you been, Billy Boy, Billy Boy?
Oh, where have you been Charmin Billy?
I've been to seek a wife, she's the apple of my life
But she's a young thing and cannot leave her mother.*

*Can she bake a cherry pie, Billy Boy, Billy Boy?
Can she bake a cherry pie, Charmin Billy?
She can bake a cherry pie in the twinkling of an eye
But she's a young thing and cannot leave her mother.*

Wiley often sings while he works. He brought in his didgeridoo and played it for us. The people from KQED who do a local art

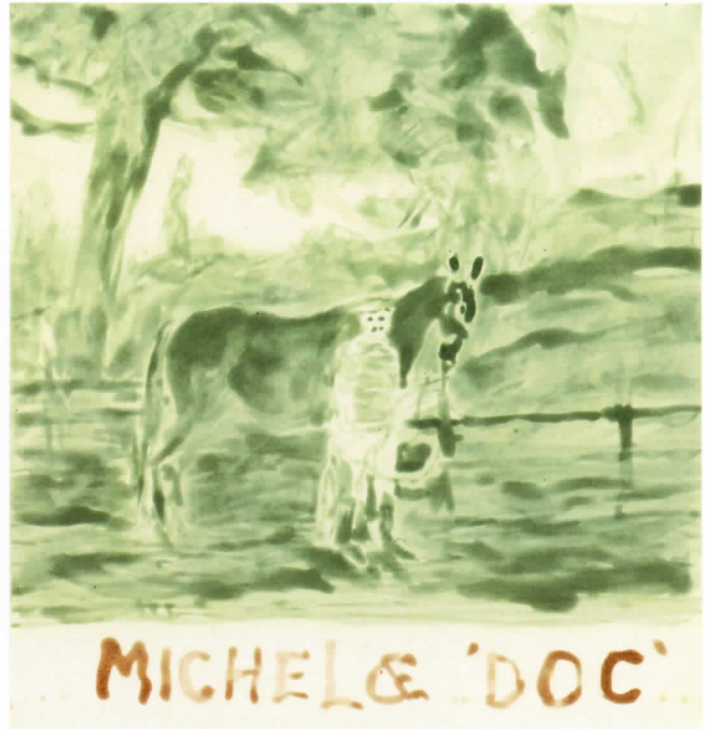
program called *Spark* came in and filmed him. We were all having a great time. It did cross my mind to wonder if the art was going to get resolved, but I've worked with Wiley before (several times, beginning in 1978) and I wasn't worried. We ended up with four small etchings drawn directly on plates (three of them in two versions) and two versions of the photographic Billy: a group of 23 unique hand-colored prints (titled *Charmin Billy Monoland*), and an edition of ten (titled *Charmin Billy*) printed from worked-on plates.

"Charmin Billy as Potential Soldier of Fortune," Wiley said as he made one of the *Monoland* prints. "Remember that Willie Nelson song, *Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to be Stupid*?"

"Charmin Billy as A. Jarry." He hand-lettered that title onto *Monoland* #17. Often, in the hand-colored series (and later in the plates for the edition), Wiley made Billy into art by painting his face in a red-yellow-blue design. But here, Billy's face is detailed realistically, and on the floor by Billy's chair is a little *Ubu Roi* figure with a spiral on his belly, just as Alfred Jarry, the French writer,



William T. Wiley, *Michel & Doc*, 2006. Spit bite aquatint on gampi paper chine collé. Paper size: 20 x 19"; image size: 12 1/2 x 12". Edition 15. Printed by Catherine Brooks.



William T. Wiley, *Michel & Doc Go Green*, 2006. Spit bite aquatint printed in green and brown on gampi paper chine collé. Paper size: 20 x 19"; image size: 12 1/2 x 12". Edition 15. Printed by Catherine Brooks.



William T. Wiley, *Rex & Bill*, 2006. Soft ground etching on gampi paper chine collé. Paper size: 20 x 19"; image size: 12 1/2 x 12". Edition 15. Printed by Catherine Brooks.



William T. Wiley, *The Rex & Bill Story*, 2006. Soft ground etching with photogravure printed in gray and umber on gampi paper chine collé. Paper size: 20 x 19"; image size: 12 1/2 x 12". Edition 15. Printed by Catherine Brooks.



William T. Wiley, *Charmin Billy Monoland #5*, 2006. Photogravure with hand coloring by the artist, from a series of 23. Paper size: 39 1/2 x 32"; image size: 32 1/2 x 26". Printed by Catherine Brooks.

drew him a hundred and ten years ago. "And so, Ubu," Wiley wrote under the figure. "Zat Chew?" Billy has a spiral on his stomach in the editioned prints and in most of the hand-colored ones. He has acquired a prominent heart by the time the plates are finished, but nevertheless the spiral remains. Apparently Billy, like all of us, potentially has Ubu's characteristics: "pompous, vain, cruel, murderous, cowardly, greedy, and authoritarian" according to the introduction to the Dover edition of *Ubu Roi*. (The great poet William Butler Yeats is said to have attended the first performance of the play in 1896 and commented, "What more is possible? After us, the Savage God." Some people in the San Francisco Bay Area remember 1963 when the SF Mime Troup performed *King Ubu* with music by Steve Reich and sets and costumes by Wiley.)

After all the activity of hand coloring, Billy settled down in the finished print as a blue boy. "& So Charmin Billy Supported by Various Symbols and Attacked by Spoonerisms," Wiley wrote in the bottom left corner, and in a margin on the left side he lined up

symbols for the seasons (the passage of time), and for copper, the material he was using. There is even a crown with a hand pointing to it.

The Spoonerisms float in on little clouds: "Naughty Huns—Haughty Nuns," "Letter Buck—Better Luck," "Buns & Gutter—Guns & Butter," "Sunny Boy—Bunny Soy." Spoonerism form comes from the Rev. W. A. Spooner who at the end of the nineteenth century lectured in history, philosophy, and divinity at the New College in Oxford, England. He spoke of Tingles Errors for English Terrors, and appeared at the office of a superior asking "Is the bean dizzy?" Once, before leaving the pulpit, Reverend Spooner said to his audience, "In the sermon I just preached, whenever I said 'Aristotle' I meant 'St. Paul.'"

"Yo Lil Dude, What Time is It?" Wiley has written on the plate near Billy's knees, and added a big hourglass flying by on golden wings. "You Mean Then?"

William T. Wiley was born October 21, 1937 in Bedford,



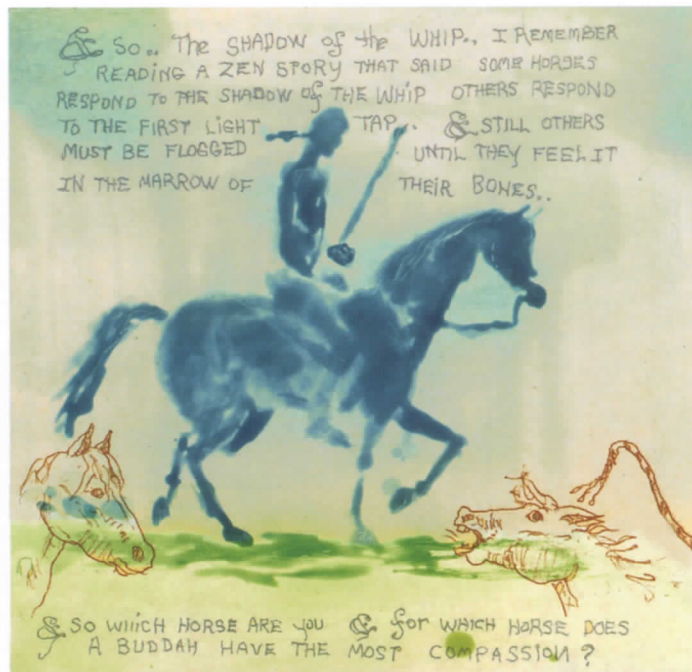
William T. Wiley, *Equestrian*, 2006. Spit bite aquatint on gampi paper *chine collé*. Paper size: 20 x 19"; image size: 12 1/2 x 12". Edition 15. Printed by Catherine Brooks.

Indiana. The "T" is for "Thomas." William and Thomas were the names of his grandfathers, one of whom was a blacksmith who made tools for a living. The child Wiley traveled by car nearly every summer with his family. He still loves maps. He was always trying to figure out where he was, he says and where he was going, and metaphorically he is still engaged in that activity. The Burma Shave signs fragmented sequentially along the roadsides of his youth are unforgettable to him, and once Billy had made his way into the Crown Point studio it was probably inevitable that a print called *Billboards* would appear. "& So Eternal Life, Is It for YOU?" "& So R-U Keeping TIME or Is It KEEPING YOU?"

Billy's father makes an appearance in *Rex & Bill*, along with the family's two horses (the horse named Bill was already named when the Wileys acquired it), and in a second version, *The Rex & Bill Story*, we learn something about Billy's life in Indiana. The remaining prints, *Michel & Doc*, *Equestrian*, and *Shadow of the Whip* also have horses as their star players (yes, Wiley did write the text for *Shadow of the Whip* backward on the plate).

After living in Indiana the first ten years of his life, Wiley's family lived a year each in Washington State, Texas, and California, and then moved back to Washington State where he spent his junior high and high school years. During his youth he was always drawing, often lying on the floor and listening to the radio at the same time. He still listens to the radio while he works.

At the suggestion of a high school art teacher, he applied to the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute), was accepted, and moved to the Bay Area. Immediately on graduation from art school in 1962, he was hired to teach at the University of California, Davis, a new campus at the time and full of ferment. Bruce Nauman was a student there and has said that Wiley is "the strongest influence I had. It was in being rigor-



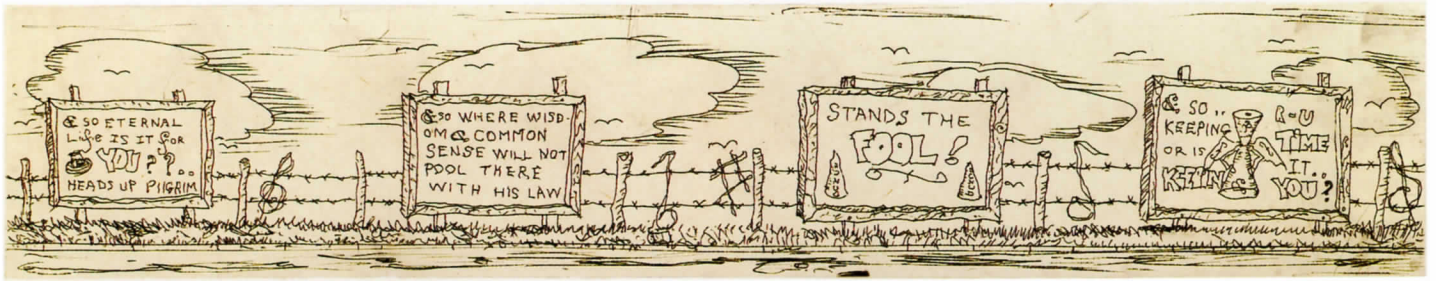
William T. Wiley, *Shadow of the Whip*, 2006. Color spit bite aquatint with burnishing and soft ground etching on gampi paper *chine collé*. Paper size: 20 x 19"; image size: 12 1/2 x 12". Edition 15. Printed by Catherine Brooks.

ous, being honest with yourself, trying to be clear, and taking a moral position."

The 1967 Funk Art show, organized by Peter Selz who had just come from New York's MOMA to direct the Berkeley Art Museum, put Wiley and his friends Robert Arneson, Joan Brown, Robert Hudson, Manuel Neri and others on the international art map and their art has defined the Bay Area for many people ever since. Right after that show, Wiley stopped making art. "I couldn't work any longer," he remembers. "Each time I tried to make something, there wasn't anything there." He thought that he was going to get fired from his teaching job at Davis because "they would see I was no longer an artist," but instead they gave him a grant to travel for a year. He went to Europe, where he had never been, and spent a semester teaching at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. "I always thought that if I couldn't be an artist I'd die,



William T. Wiley in the Crown Point studio, 2006.



William T. Wiley, *Billboards*, 2006. Hard ground etching on gampi paper *chine collé*. Paper size: 11 1/2 x 27"; image size: 4 x 20 1/4". Edition 15. Printed by Catherine Brooks.

but I didn't die. I got curious. If I wasn't supposed to be an artist, what was I supposed to be? I took the pressure off myself, to where it just didn't matter, and that's when the natural flow of wanting to do art returned."

Wiley has had two retrospectives of his paintings and sculpture, one in 1971-2 organized by the University of California Art Museum, Berkeley, and traveling to the Art Institute of Chicago; the second organized in 1981 by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and traveling to SFMOMA, and to Dallas, Denver, and Des Moines. The Corcoran Museum, Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC has scheduled a traveling exhibition of his work for 2009. Later this year, in September 2007, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco will open a William T. Wiley print retrospective at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor.

In the Crown Point Gallery:

William T. Wiley: Charmin Billy

March 10 – April 28, 2007

Please join us on the evening of Friday, April 13 at a reception for the artist, from 6-8.

Just published! Announcing the second title in our series of *Magical Secrets* books: *Magical Secrets about Line Etching & Engraving: The Step-by-Step Art of Incised Lines*, by Crown Point Master Printer Catherine Brooks, with an appendix on printing by Kathan Brown. **Join us for a booksigning Friday, April 13, from 6-8.** Visit www.magical-secrets.com to order the book, or telephone (415) 974-6273.

Watch William T. Wiley at work in the Crown Point etching studio on SPARK*, KQED's weekly television show about Bay Area artists and arts organizations. The segment, Episode 503, will air on April 4, at 7:30 p.m., on Channel 9.

In New York:

William T. Wiley

Charles Cowles Gallery, 537 W. 24th Street
through March 31, 2007

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