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Coverage on Celebrating Prints Festival
"Fine prints: A regional celebration"
By Edward J. Sozanski

Dox Thrash at the Art Museum is just the tip of the iceberg. Beginning this weekend, a cornucopia of 56 exhibitions celebrating Philadelphia's traditional eminence as a center for printmaking will spill out all over the region.

The festival of graphic art – etching, lithography, woodcut, screenprint and ink-jet – by about 150 regional artists embraces history and today.

Besides the exhibitions, it includes 33 programs of various kinds related to printmaking, themed tours, and a commissioned portfolio of seven contemporary prints by local artists.

The engine driving the event is the Philadelphia Print Collaborative, a new umbrella organization of 35 museums, galleries, studios, schools and workshops.

The collaborative is the brainchild of Robert Brand, a businessman who has been collecting prints for 30 years. For now, it is being run from his Center City consulting firm, Solutions for Progress.

Brand says the collaborative aims to bring together people who love prints and to encourage collecting, with the long-term goal of creating a community that's economically viable for printmakers.

At the collaborative's inception last year, Brand engaged artist and arts administrator Teresa Jaynes to direct everyday operations, particularly coordinating the various strands of the festival, which runs through Dec. 14.

The Greater Philadelphia Tourism and Marketing Corp. gave the collaborative a \$10,000 grant for marketing the festival, Jaynes said. So far, 20 collaborative members have chipped in \$100 each toward that effort.

"This organization sinks or swims on the generosity of its members," Brand said. "Part of what I think brings the group together is the opportunity to help people learn about prints and to put their taste on the wall, at just about any income level."

One tangible result is the suite of seven commissioned prints in an edition of 50. Seven print publishers, all collaborative members, each selected an artist with whom to work.

The artists and workshops are Bruce Pollock (Borowsky Center at University of the Arts); James Dupree (Brandywine Workshop); Astrid Bowlby (C.R. Ettinger Studio); Willie Stokes (Fabric Workshop and Museum); Virgil Marti (Silicon Gallery); Jim Houser (Space 1026) and Judith Schaechter (Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper).

The portfolio is selling for \$2,500 through tomorrow; the price goes up to \$3,500 on Tuesday. It can be ordered through the Print Center and Sande Webster Gallery, and is on view at Moore College of Art and Design through Thursday.

Moore is the site of a reception tomorrow from 6 to 8 p.m. at which the collaborative will formally begin the festival, called "Prints and Printmaking: In Homage to Dox Thrash."

It's built around Thrash, whose Art Museum retrospective exhibition runs through Feb. 24, for several appropriate reasons.

He earned his reputation primarily as a printmaker, and in Philadelphia. He was prominent in the local graphic arts workshop of the Depression-era Federal Arts Project, an activity that burnished the city's standing as a printmaking center.

At the workshop, he led the development of an intaglio process called the Carborundum mezzotint.

He was also active in the Print Club (now the Print Center), founded in 1915, another longtime gathering place for artists and collectors. And he took classes and exhibited at the Graphic Sketch Club (now the Fleisher Art Memorial), founded in 1898.

Both the Print Center and the Fleisher are contributing to the festival with major exhibitions opening Friday.

The center will exhibit prints made over the last half-century by New York artists Nancy Spero and Leon Golub. The Fleisher's show will examine printmaking in the city during the 1930s. It will inaugurate the Fleisher's new Center for Works on Paper at 705 Christian St.

While most of the exhibitions are or will be in Philadelphia, the festival will reach to Philadelphia International Airport (three shows in Terminal F); to the Main Line (Main Line Art Center in Haverford, St. Joseph's University on City Avenue, American College in Bryn Mawr); to the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts in Wilmington; and into New Jersey, at Rutgers University-Camden, Perkins Center for the Arts in Moorestown and the Noyes Museum of Art in Oceanville.

Special itineraries have been developed from the exhibition schedule for people interested in specific subject areas, such as African American prints and contemporary prints.

After the festival ends Dec. 14, the Philadelphia Print Collaborative will be challenged to maintain the enthusiasm that it's expected to generate. One possible activity, Jaynes said, is a trolley tour of the city's print workshops.

"We want all the stakeholders to see the collaborative as making a friendlier world for printmakers," Brand said. "Everyone is trying to figure out what they can do to value prints and to work together."

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