



Past Tense: Exploring Two Print Portfolios from RAM's Collection

June 14 – August 5, 2023

Past Tense is inspired by RAM's Twentieth Anniversary in 2023 and the concurrent Wustum exhibition, *Futures Reimagined: RAM Community Art Show*. Whether as a source for memories, inspiration, an accounting of events and people, or lessons learned, both an anniversary celebration and an exhibition with artists considering the future encourage looking at what has happened in the past.

RAM's extensive works on paper collection includes two print portfolios that address time in different ways — each way connecting place to time and space. *The Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Portfolio*, is a gathering of the work of multiple artists while *The Builders*, *The Great Human Race* reflects the investigations of a single artist, John Doyle.

More about *The Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Portfolio*:

Commissioned in honor of the State's 150th Anniversary, this portfolio combines the work of various contemporary artists—many of whom have or had connections to Wisconsin. Visually and thematically wide-ranging, the prints reflect artist responses to the history and character of the State of Wisconsin. Among the featured artists are Nancy Ekholm Burkert, Warrington Colescott, Frances Myers, Gladys Nilsson, Fred Stonehouse, Tom Uttech, William T. Wiley, and John Wilde.

Taken from *The Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Portfolio's* introduction page:

The Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Portfolio celebrates the traditions of excellence found in Wisconsin's printmaking history. Truly a heroic effort, this Portfolio leaves an artistic legacy for generations to come.

The Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Portfolio is the third publication of Andrew Balkin Editions printed at A.G.B. Graphics Workshop in Madison, Wisconsin, from October 1998 through October 2001. Fifteen nationally renowned artists with significant ties to Wisconsin were commissioned to create fine art etchings in collaboration with Master Printer Andrew Balkin. Artists participating in this project included Andrew Balkin, Nancy Ekholm Burkert, Warrington Colescott, Michelle Grabner, Susan Hunt-Wulkowicz, Martin Levine, Munio Makuuchi, Frances Myers, Bruce Nauman, Gladys Nilsson, Ed Paschke, Fred Stonehouse, Tom Uttech, John Wilde, and William Wiley. Together, they have made a significant contribution to the art of printmaking in this State and beyond.

The only restriction placed upon the artists was one of scale — a paper size of 22" x 30." The papers selected include Rives BFK, Sommerset, Hahnemuhle, and German Etching. Two of the fifteen artists were asked to create special images: Martin Levine to create a cityscape of Milwaukee; Frances Myers to honor Frank Lloyd Wright.

Rick Love, Susan Walsh, and Nikki Schneider applied their talents to print the editions with the assistance of Jason Engelhardt, Karl Nelson, Lydia Diemer and Connie Janousek. The Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Portfolio was printed in an edition of 125 and signed in Arabic Numerals. Each artist received 30 Artist Prints in Roman numerals. There are 30

edition artist presentation portfolios signed in Roman numerals, including the State of Wisconsin Presentation Portfolio.

In fulfilling the odyssey inspired by Justice David T. Prosser Jr., the Balkins want to express sincere appreciation for the efforts of John Anderson, Dana Lytle, Pat Blankenburg, Ellen Koch and Dean Amhaus. As well as his colleagues of the Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Commission. Without their talents, wisdom and encouragement, the gift of The Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Portfolio would still be just an idea.

In addition, our thanks to American Printing for the generous support of our promotional efforts and to Etherington Conservation Center for their outstanding work on the hand-crafted portfolio cases.

In memory of his genius, we acknowledge the passion of Munio Makuuchi who dignified us with his masterful etchings, illuminating our imaginations.

The Balkins take the opportunity to thank the pre-publication patrons who embraced a grand idea, The Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Portfolio, and gave it life.

In a limited edition, this portfolio is number 87/125.

More about John Doyle's *The Builders, The Great Human Race*:

Selections from John Doyle's *The Builders, The Great Human Race*, show how the artist looks at the past as a point on a continuum of civilizations. After intensely studying various societies across the globe, Doyle has visually linked architectural achievements of different eras and cultures to community building.

The introduction in *The Builders, The Great Human Race* states:

This portfolio of prints, entitled Builders, is a visual interpretation of mans' most enduring record of civilization: Architecture.

These structures reflect mans' hopes and aspirations, both physical and spiritual; in addition, echo the social, cultural and religious forces that led to their design and construction.

The buildings, be they houses to live in, palaces to govern in, shrines to worship in, or tombs to be buried in, become an extension of man.

The purpose of the Builders is to show how mans' ideas and concepts relate to the structures of The Great Human Race.

The Builders series consists of 10 four color, hand printed stone lithographs, and 10 monochrome proofs on handmade paper, printed by David Panosh and Roland Poska assisted by Julie Sullivan, with special assistance by Lois Doyle, 200 sheets of BFK and 200 sheets of handmade paper, pulled by Roland Poska, were printed. The Edition is 150.

John Doyle was born in Chicago, Illinois, on March 14, 1939, and died on March 15, 2010, in Burnsville, North Carolina. Doyle received a Bachelor's degree from the Art Institute of Chicago in 1939 and a Master's degree from Northern Illinois University, DeKalb. Doyle's studies of ethnology and anthropology encouraged him to explore humankind through visual representations—resulting in series such as *The Builders*, *The Great Human Race*. Throughout his career, Doyle's work was featured in over 50 solo exhibitions and numerous national and international group exhibitions. He earned numerous awards including an Honorary Mention at the International Printmakers in 1971 and a George Brown Travelling Fellowship in 1962. His work is included in several collections including the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC; University Art Museum at the University of Albany, New York; and the Racine Art Museum, Wisconsin.

Printmaking Terminology

A la poupée—the term derives from the French word for doll (*poupée*) and refers to the application of colored inks to specific passages of a plate by means of cotton daubs called dollies. This is a method for coloring an image without resorting to the more time-consuming method of registering a number of plates, each carrying separate color.

Aquatint—a method for **etching tonality** developed in the eighteenth century in which a fine rosin powder is deposited on the plate and melted. Passages not to be etched are then “stopped out” by painting them with a varnish that does not allow the acid bath to penetrate the metal plate. The fine melted rosin also disallows the acid to bite, but the exposed microscopic bits of metal between the dots of melted rosin are eaten by the acid. The result is a skein of etched dots of varying sizes, which hold ink to varying degrees. The longer the etch, the deeper the dot, the darker the tone.

Burin—a chisel of tempered steel with a sharp lozenge-shaped point, used for engraving furrows in metal, wood, or marble.

Cliché verre—a combination of art and photography to create a print. In brief, it is a method of either etching, painting, or drawing on a transparent surface, such as glass, thin paper, or film, and printing the resulting image on a light sensitive paper in a photographic darkroom. It is a process first practiced by a number of French painters during the early nineteenth century. The French landscape painter **Camille Corot** was the best known of these. Some contemporary artists have developed techniques for achieving a variety of line, tone, texture, and color by experimenting with film, frosted Mylar, paint, and inks as well as a wide assortment of tools for painting, etching, scratching, rubbing, and daubing. Cliché verre also refers to one of the earliest forms of reproducing images before the advent of the camera. As a precursor to photography, it could accurately represent the original scene without the tonal variations available in modern day photography.

Drypoint—a classic printmaking method similar to **line engraving**. A sharp-pointed metal tool (sometimes with a diamond tip) is employed to literally scratch an image into a plate. The plate can be immediately printed (no acid being necessary). The minute and rough metal spurs thrown up on either side of the scratched line hold ink in a feathery manner that provides richness to early impressions.

Engraving—the engraved plate is one that has not been etched in acid. Rather, the lines that will hold ink are “carved” into the plate by a hand-held tool called an engraver. Engraving tools come in many sizes and shapes. A preliminary drawing is usually executed on the plate to be engraved, and then subsequently “cut” into the plate with the tool. Engraving is the oldest form of **intaglio** printmaking (i.e. any kind of printing from lines or marks made by cutting into ‘something,’ such as copper or wood.)

Etching—the generic term “etching” refers to any of the procedures that employ acids to eat into a metal plate for the purpose of creating a printable matrix (e.g. hardground etching, softground etching, sandpaper etching, aquatint).

Hardground etching—to be etched in acid, a metal plate must first have a ground applied. The purpose of the ground is to protect the plate from the action of the acid. Hardground is usually composed of asphaltum, beeswax, and resin. The mixture is then applied hot to the plate and rolled evenly over the surface. While it is hot, it is viscous and can be rolled on to the plate by means of a rubber brayer. When the hardground cools, it becomes hard and immovable. Only those lines or dots that are drawn through the hardground by the sharp point of an etching needle are exposed to the action of the acid and etched into the plate. Once the plate has been etched, the ground is removed with mineral spirits and can be inked.

Intaglio—a term that can refer to any of the techniques in which an image or tonal area is printed from lines or textures scratched or etched into a metal plate, such as: engraving, etching, drypoint, or aquatint. The plate is covered with ink, then wiped clean, leaving ink in the incised lines or textures of the image. The plate is then printed in a press on moistened paper. The paper is forced down into the area of the plate holding ink, and the image is transferred to the paper.

Letterpress—the oldest form of printing. In this method, a surface with raised letters is inked and pressed to the surface of the printing substrate to reproduce an image in reverse. Typically, metal type has been used, but other possibilities include carved wood or stone blocks. After the **Gutenberg press** introduced movable type to the process in the fifteenth century, letterpress was the predominant printing method for 500 years. The creation of huge rotary presses made industrial printing and newspaper production practical. In the 1950s, **xerography** and **offset** printing began to supplant letterpress. By the end of the twentieth century, **digital** printing and related technologies had become the industry standard for many uses. Nevertheless, letterpress is still used for some specialized commercial applications. The old method is also enjoying a resurgence among modern-day enthusiasts who prize the hand-made qualities and historical nature of letterpress print.

Lithograph (lithography)—a method of **planographic** (flat surface) printing in which an image is created on a stone or thin metal plate surface with incising. Lithography is based on the incompatibility of grease and water. Traditionally, greasy ink was employed to draw an image on a special limestone that was then treated with nitric acid and **gum Arabic**. The solution of acid and gum Arabic made the stone capable of retaining a thin layer of water. The stone could then be wetted with water and rolled with a greasy ink, which would only adhere to the greasy drawing. The inked, greased image could then be printed.

Offset printing — a method of printing that involves the transfer of an inked image from a plate to a rubber blanket, then to the printing surface. Offset printing is used to create newspapers, magazines, brochures, stationery, and books.

Retroussage — a method of enriching the impression possible from an inked plate by means of lightly brushing (often with a circular motion) the surface with a **tartalan** (sized cheese cloth). Retroussaging a plate lifts the ink from the **etched** or **drypointed** line, giving a softer (seemingly fuller) appearance.

Roulette — a **burin-like** device, but with a rolling serrated blade on a little axle that engraves a small repeated pattern.

Screen print — a print created from a technique of **stencil** printing in which the stencil is adhered to a **fine screen** for support. Ink can be squeegeed through the screen onto paper. Screen printing can have a hard edged quality caused by the crisp edges of the stencil. Also referred to as **silk screen** and **serigraphy**.

Spit-bite — a somewhat common, though no longer accurate, term used to describe a method of painting with acid directly onto a copper plate grounded with aquatint. The term was derived from the early use of saliva to break the surface tension of the brushed field, allowing a more even dispersal of the fluid over the passage being painted. The modern substitute for saliva is **gum Arabic**, which is very effective in breaking the surface tension that causes the acid to pool into droplets as it is applied over the aquatint (melted rosin powder).

Woodcut — a relief print usually carved in the plank grain of a piece of wood. After the relief image has been carved in the plank with knives or gouges, it is inked with a **dauber** or roller. It can then be printed by hand—in which case a sheet of paper is laid down on the inked plank and rubbed from the back with a smooth surface, such as the palm of the hand or a wooden spoon—or with the help of a mechanical press.

Compiled from various sources.



Women Artists at RAM

RAM acknowledges the efforts of self-identifying women in the art world consistently and sincerely at all times. The museum highlights how women are inextricably woven—and often the foundation—of creative endeavors and discourse. By current count, 41% of the artists in RAM’s collection are women. This percentage—which is consistently increasing—is already substantially greater than the ratios calculated at other organizations with permanent collections and active exhibition programs. At RAM, work made by different genders is considered for inclusion in the museum’s holdings on equal terms. And notably, because RAM relies on gifts of artwork to build the collection, this policy has been reinforced by open-minded donors who have collected, and then donated, quality work regardless of the gender of the artist. The following is a list of women whose works are included in this exhibition. This effort—similar to efforts to highlight artists of color at RAM—is not meant to single out artists to stigmatize them but to magnify and cast a spotlight on their significance. It reflects intention, goodwill, and an attempt to reckon with years of historical underrepresentation. RAM hopes this provides opportunities for audiences to learn more about these artists and their ideas. Visitors are encouraged to take note and research these artists via the internet to find out more about their biographies and larger bodies of work.

Nancy Ekholm Burkert, Frances Myers, and Gladys Nilsson