Report from University of Calgary-Three Week Workshop in Lithography and Serigraphy

Shirley Raphael
held in July 1969 with Andrew Stasik, Pratt Graphic Centre, New York
by Shirley Raphael

An important factor on the art scene today is Canadian universities. They are providing the logical place for experimental university galleries where famous and not so famous or promising artists can show their work, and many have started to build impressive permanent collections. They are also employing strong painter-teachers, who, although they may have a relatively short tenure on campus, leave a strong and contributory influence on their students. The universities, for the most part, are in new suburban developments, and the newer ones have bright, airy studios in newer suburban developments, and the newer ones have bright, airy studios.

The objectives of the recent print workshop held during July 1969 were to provide all those seriously and deeply interested in printmaking, the opportunity to work in close conjunction with, and under the direction of, the leading international printer, Andrew Stasik (Director, Pratt Graphic Centre, New York) who was assisted by two professional printers, Robert Bigelow and Mahen Patel. Both workshops were extremely well-equipped, and afforded those with a desire to learn extremely professional direction, new valid techniques and processes and helped to iron out any problems. The hope was that a high standard of excellence through creative productive work, seminars, exhibitions, etc would instill a greater depth and direction for professional printmaking. Since enrollment was limited to 30 for both workshops, it meant that those who attended would benefit from the small group and would, thus, be able to get quite a bit of personal attention.

Workshops of this kind are unique in both Canada and the U.S. There are never any "professional" workshops held for a period as short as three weeks. Full credit for organizing and seeing it realized belongs to Helmut Becker, the assistant professor of Fine Arts and Fine Art Education, at the University of Calgary. He was responsible for the ten-day workshop in wood-block printing in 1967 where Toyo Yoshida of Japan was the visiting artist, and in 1968 a three-week etching workshop was held with Shane Waare from England. So, I must say, that although the University of Calgary, Dept of Art and Division of Continuing Education with the assistance of a Canada Council Grant were the sponsors of the workshop, full credit must go to Helmut Becker, who was the energetic force that got it going and kept it going.

Mr. Andrew Stasik is highly regarded throughout the art world for his outstanding prints. He has exhibited both in North America and abroad and has been associated with the Pratt Graphic Centre in New York for several years. Besides being a top printmaker, he is also an excellent teacher and administrator. He did not "hold back" any information, but shared his knowledge with all of us. Slides were shown and discussions evolved. The establishment of a communal workshop in each city was discussed, how to go about establishing it, how it would function best, i.e., the "business." End of a workshop was also looked into. On the creative side, each of us was given personal instruction and guidance so that we could develop our artistic potential to the fullest, i.e., to have something of OUR OWN GOING!

The attitude of Mr. Stasik, that of a "true professional," rubbed off on all of us. There were no excuses for sloppy work, for prints that weren't perfect. We were there to learn the fine points of a professional printmaker.

Robert Bigelow, formerly associated with the Threadneedle Lithographic Workshop and Gemini studios in Los Angeles, and now an instructor at the Vancouver School of Art was the professional printer (lithography). He was there to aid artists in printing perfect editions and to solve any technical problems they might have. He also printed editions of the international English artist, Anthony Benjamin, who is now on staff at the University of Calgary.

What was it like? The participants, including myself, were for the most part from Canada, with the exception of one U.S. artist who had attended the workshops held previously. Classes were officially from 9 to 4, but a typical day was more like 7 a.m. to midnight seven days a week. Most of us had never worked so hard in our lives for a full three weeks. But once we got going, it was hard to stop! Enthusiasm ran high—where else could one test everything, explore, ask, do, learn, question, compare, discuss, argue, offer advice, criticize and be criticized by other people with the same interest? A fantastic "camaraderie" sprung up, and if there were any rivalries, it wasn't evident. Each was left to do his own thing.

However, it wasn't all work and no play... someday, parties and sightseeing excursions were organized and everyone was included. For three weeks most of us slept very little, indeed.

Each artist left behind some finish prints which are for the university permanent collection. A number of the works produced will be held until during the coming year. It is hoped, that these prints will be exhibited in other universities from coast to coast. It is also evident that art in printmaking is going to have something of OUR OWN GOING!

The University of Calgary has tentatively scheduled another workshop for 1970. Let's hope that it materializes, and let's also hope that it will inspire other universities and art schools across Canada to open their doors and invite outstanding printmakers as guests.

No artist can operate in a vacuum or in solitude all the time. This "group" workshop is ideal for developing, for contact, for exchange of ideas. Most important, it is the fact of being able to indulge in the luxury of devoting time, energy, and concentration on prints for three solid weeks. Since most of those attending held other jobs and had to sustain themselves, these three weeks were a real luxury. Printmaking is...