



IDA SHORT AND HEATHER HALPERN,
PULLING HALPERN'S MONOTYPE
ON WHITPRINT'S FAMOUS 4'X8'
RAY TRAYLE ETCHING PRESS

PRINTMAKING EXPLODES IN OREGON

FROM GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS TO ARTIST STUDIOS,
PRINTMAKING MAKES GENUINE ART ACCESSIBLE

Words by Bob Keefer ♦ Photos by Todd Cooper

Say the word “art” and most people imagine a painting — an original, unique work, done with oil paints on canvas, usually by an artist standing at an easel.

But it’s possible that more artists in Eugene produce fine-art prints than make easel paintings. Printmaking is flourishing here in Eugene and around the state. It’s hard to visit an art gallery in Oregon without seeing examples of contemporary printmakers’ work.

For the uninitiated, “printmaking” in the art world refers to making reproductions of images using traditional hand-crafted processes such as woodcut, etching or stone lithography, all of which require substantial hand work and artistic skill.

“There are so many people in the world of printmaking,” says Eugene printmaker Tallmadge Doyle, whose delicate, nature-inspired etchings have been shown here and around the world. “If you go to the Portland galleries you see a lot of prints.”

The Portland galleries that show the most prints are probably Augen and Froelick galleries, which happen to be next door to each other in the Pearl District.

Printmaking’s deep hold on Oregon goes back nearly

a century. The godfather of printmaking here is Gordon Gilkey, an Oregon native born in Scio who received the very first master of fine arts degree awarded at the University of Oregon, in 1936. It was in printmaking.

Gilkey taught art at Albany College, now Lewis & Clark College, before going to New York to make 35 official architectural etchings for the New York World’s Fair of 1939.

With the arrival of World War II he joined the Army Air Corps, where his job was to identify landmarks in Europe that should be spared from Allied bombing.

At war’s end, Gilkey served as head of the War Department’s German War Art Program, sleuthing out and seizing troves of Nazi propaganda art, working in parallel with the more-famous Monuments Men, documented in a 2014 George Clooney movie of the same name, whose job was to locate and rescue historic artworks that had been looted by the Nazis in their sweep across Europe.

In the process Gilkey made friendships with international artists that would last the rest of his life.

When Gilkey came home to Oregon after the war, he became dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Oregon State College, was the first chair of the Oregon Arts Commission and later served as curator of prints and drawings at the Portland Art Museum, where he had donated his massive collection of prints and drawings, which eventually numbered 25,000.

Gilkey died in 2000.

“We’re in a room that’s named for Gordon Gilkey,” Anne Rose Kitagawa says, looking around a small study center inside the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art in Eugene. She’s the museum’s chief curator. “He casts a broad shadow over the rest of this institution, and in Portland, as well.”

The museum itself is named for arts patron Jordan Schnitzer, a Portland businessman who has amassed a large collection of contemporary American prints since he began collecting in 1988. His personal collection and that of the Schnitzer Family Foundation count, between them, more than 10,000 prints and other multiples.

The UO has its own collection of prints that have influenced artists here and elsewhere. The Schnitzer was originally built to house 3,700 pieces in the Murray Warner Collection of Oriental Art, which was donated to the university by Gertrude Bass Warner. Many of those were Asian prints.

The museum also houses a separate Asian print collection donated by the late Yoko McClain, whose husband was a printmaker and collector.

All that background may or may not have had an impact on the current state of printmaking in Eugene and around Oregon. Certainly most Northwest art is highly influenced by Asia, going back to the look of such Northwest School mystical painters as Guy Anderson, Mark Tobey, Kenneth Callahan and Morris Graves.

“I have also noticed an uptick in printmaking in recent years,” says Heather Halpern, a Eugene printmaker who, with her husband Paul, runs the nonprofit Whiteaker