

Printmakers studio, also known as WhitPrint, at 1328 W. 2nd Avenue. (WhitPrint is holding its annual holiday sale from 2 pm to 8 pm Friday, Dec. 8; 10 am to 8 pm Saturday, Dec. 9; and noon to 6 pm Sunday, Dec. 10; more info at WhitPrint.com.)

Halpern says some of the new interest in printmaking comes from the fact that it's easy to see other artists' work on the internet — but it also grows from a reaction to the soullessness of technology.

"In earlier times, I think fascination with printmaking came in waves with popular artists, instructors, and gallery shows," she says. "The surge in traditional printmaking is also a reaction to being bombarded with technology. People take pleasure and pride in originality, creativity and rediscovering lost arts. Lots of young people are picking up knitting, canning and other activities that were largely abandoned when the industrial revolution no longer required individuals to possess such skills."

Doyle agrees. "Despite all the digital technology, a lot of artists are doing these very traditional methods of art making. A hand-pulled print that has the hand of the artist visible — you're never going to get that quality with digital. Digital has no soul."

No one seems to be keeping track of how many printmakers are making art, whether here in Eugene or around the country. But Oregon has a number of substantial printmaking communities, including Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts in Pendleton, founded by Native artist James Lavadour 25 years ago to teach printmaking to Native artists.

An exhibit running through Dec. 22 at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art in Salem celebrates the work of Crow's Shadow artists, who include such luminaries as Lillian Pitt, Wendy Red Star, Marie Watt and the late Rick Bartow.

"The print community in Eugene is incredibly strong," says David Hilton, a long-time Eugene collector of fine

art prints. His collection includes work by Rembrandt and Picasso as well as more contemporary artists.

Off the top of his head he names off Tallmadge Doyle, Susan Lowdermilk, Lynda Lanker, Margaret Prentice and Ken Paul as just a few of the artists producing work here. "They are all people who at one time or another were associated with printmaking at the UO," he says.

And that, he says, comes back to Gilkey. "You can't talk about Oregon printmaking without putting Gordon front and center."

Prints, Hilton says, are "the people's art form." That goes back to late medieval Europe, when the invention of the printing press was the equivalent of today's internet revolution.

Artists who were creating work only for wealthy patrons such as royalty and the church suddenly found a much broader audience when they were able to make multiple prints. And that, Hilton says, allowed artists to explore more personal themes in their work. "Artists could do work about what they're seeing and experiencing day to day because they suddenly had a whole new venue to distribute their work."

Similarly, he says, the rise of Modernism was driven by a multitude of printmakers. "They understood the mass market," he says. "And Andy Warhol was the pre-eminent example of that. He saw the art in the everyday thing."

Another democratization of art may be happening, at least locally, by way of printmaking.

Halpern, at WhitPrint, says printmaking here is led by women. Like most areas of art, printmaking was long dominated by men.

"I have encountered many more women than men in the field," she says.

"Historically, the opposite was true. Even in the late '80s, I was steered away from a college printmaking

department full of chauvinistic men and intimidating equipment. Now, most of the printmaking studio directors I encounter are women, like myself."

Halpern says she checked the member gallery on the website of Print Arts Northwest to verify her impression. She found 45 women and 13 men represented there.

"At WhitPrint, most of our members have also been women — about two to one."

She suspects a number of reasons lie behind the change. "Automated printmaking made certain jobs obsolete so men changed occupations," she says. "Women got better access to facilities and instruction, women gained acceptance as artists, etc."

Halpern herself got into printmaking in a roundabout way. "I had been drawing, painting and sculpting since early childhood, but was discouraged from printmaking by then-respected instructors and peers," she says.

Later one fall she was painting in encaustic — thick wax — and was looking for ways to incorporate images on transparent paper in layers in the wax.

"I experimented with block printing, but wanted more detail," she says. That meant etching.

Etching wasn't offered until spring term at Lane Community College so she took fall and winter classes in monotype, collagraph and relief printing. "By the time I completed my training in etching and aquatint, I was so enchanted with printmaking and the community it connected me with that I haven't returned to encaustic painting. Yet."

That was the beginning. What has kept her making prints is the charm of the slightly arcane process.

"Creating unique works of art is extremely satisfying. Most printmaking processes are time-consuming and absorbing, providing a beautiful respite from a stressful world," she says. "For many, it's a type of meditation." ■



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT)
HEATHER HALPERN, WIPING A
MEZZOTINT PLATE;
LYNN PEDERSEN, WORKING ON A
MOKUHANGA (TRADITIONAL
JAPANESE WOODCUT) BLOCK;
JOSEPH DAVIS, HAND-COLORING
AN ETCHING WITH WATERCOLOR;
HALPERN'S LINOCUT OF
EUGENE SKINNER

