

Exhibit looks at the artist, printmaker relationship

BY KATHALEEN ROBERTS MARCH 5TH, 2022



“Profile in Blue,” Ron Adams (artist), Michael Costello and David Panosh (printers), 1989, 6 color lithograph on Arches white cover paper. (Courtesy of the Albuquerque Museum)

During the 1960s and 1970s, a cascade of artists and printers coalesced in New Mexico, driven by the urge to place carved lines on paper.

“The Printer’s Proof: Artist and Printer Collaborators” explores that process at the Albuquerque Museum through May 15.

The show focuses on printers based in New Mexico. These artists orbited around Albuquerque and Santa Fe through the Tamarind Institute and centers such as Lynch Pin Press and Hand Graphics.

The exhibition features works by more than 120 artists with prints spanning from the 1970s to the present.

The artists include Donald Judd, Harmony Hammond, Nick Cave, Jim Dine, Susan Rothenberg, Hung Liu, Nicola López, Luis Tapia and many more. The techniques displayed range from lithography, monoprints, etchings and block printing to photogravure.

"I wanted to tell the story of printmaking here in New Mexico," Albuquerque Museum Curator Josie Lopez said. "Around the '60s and '70s there was all this energy around printmaking."

Printmaking is a collaborative process. Its technical nature usually demands the help of a skilled printer.

"It's very difficult to do, especially lithography, even monotypes," said master printer Michael Costello, owner of Santa Fe's Hand Graphics. "The depth of knowledge you need to etch a stone is very extensive. A print shop has very specialized tools – big presses, rollers, floor space.

"To make a lithograph you have to be able to break down colors in your mind," he added. "That's not simple."

Lopez visited each printer's studio to learn about their different materials, approaches and techniques. Master printers represent decades of experience. Each occupies his or her own section of the exhibition. Other segments address color and light, storytelling and visual experimentation.

The late Ron Adams' "Profile in Blue" (1989) is an ode to printmaking. The six-color lithograph pairs him with Costello and David Panosh. The self-portrait shows the artist showered in sunbeams, surrounded all of his printmaking tools, including a lithographic press and roller.

"Ron did the drawing," Costello said. "He would do sketches on paper, then you would translate that to the stone and then onto every plate. So you have five different runs; five different colors and they all have to line up and be registered exactly. We built up the print layer by layer by layer."

Santa Fe's Dan Namingha produced the lithograph "From Polacco," in 1991 with the help of Tamarind Institute printer Steve Britko.

"What I love is the exploration and intensity of the color," Lopez said. "He brings that rich color to abstract a landscape."

Ken Price's 2003 "Unreported Sighting" shows flying saucers soaring over a mountainscape. Jennifer Lynch was the printer on the photo polymer etching.

"That really shows you how the artist and printer are experimenting with techniques they had to have to create these little circles," Lopez said.

The late Marfa, Texas, artist Donald Judd had completed the designs for his "Untitled" exploration of geometry and line just before his 1994 death. Tamarind master printer Robert Arber gained permission from Judd's estate to complete the project in 2020.

University of New Mexico professor Karsten Creightney created his lithograph "Dot Flower I" (2015) with Costello. The pair produced flower petals like the Ben-Day dots famous in comic books and appropriated by the Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein.

"The dots were done with plates," Costello said. "Karsten made transparencies and we shot them on photo-litho plates. He drew directly on the litho stone. We had a number of plates for the colors. His aesthetic is to use more dots."

When an artist pulls the first print off the press, he or she usually gives it to the printer; hence the term "printer's proof."

"It signifies the relationship between the artist and the printer," Lopez said. "We really wanted to bring that out," Lopez said.