

What (is) a Relief?

Relief printmaking was the first printmaking process invented, and has its origins in seals in China around 255 BCE. At its most basic, one can think of a stamp as a relief print. The artist uses tools to cut away portions of the matrix (a wood block, linoleum sheet, Styrofoam, etc.), leaving behind a raised image area, which is then printed on a substrate (paper, fabric, etc.). To this day, relief printmaking is still the most accessible form of printmaking because a press is not required to make a print – just the matrix, ink, pressure and the substrate. The process is direct, accessible and low-tech, and allows for bold graphics that can be abstract or representational.

The works in this show provide three avenues into the process, from historical and contemporary perspectives. The ukiyo-e prints provide an opportunity to study the process from a historical perspective. Ukiyo-e woodblock prints flourished in Japan between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, focusing on the pleasure districts of Edo (modern Tokyo). Each individual print was made from a number of separate blocks, starting with the key block which creates the lines of the print. This print is pasted on separate blocks, and these blocks are then carved individually, based off the lines provided by the key block, to carry a specific color. An example of the process creating a wood block print can be seen on the screen behind you. Beginning with an image of the key block, the images outline the process of making a print of Suzuki Harunobu's *Heron Maid*, building up the print using the separate colors, ending with a block that is carved to provide texture to the final work.

These historical works from Augustana's collections have been brought together with two contemporary artists using the relief process to very different ends. Janet Taylor, a contemporary fiber artist from North Carolina, creates matrices out of Styrofoam, and prints directly on silk organza, creating diaphanous, layered compositions. Joseph Lappie is a local artist and professor at St. Ambrose University. His series inspired by the *Nuremberg Chronicles* is on display for the first time in the Quad Cities as part of this exhibition, which combines the prints and their matrices, as a cohesive whole.

Some of the works of art in the show are available for sale. Please see the gallery attendant for a price list.

Ukiyo-e: pictures of the floating world

Ukiyo is a Chinese word that has root in Buddhist thought, referring to the evanescent, grief-stricken world. This concept of transcendence gradually shifted from its original meaning, and by the seventeenth-century, *Ukiyo* came to reflect an emerging urban, modernizing mentality of living in the moment. The “floating world” of Buddhist tradition was re-appropriated to fit an emerging art form. Almost a direct contradiction of its original meaning, the evanescent or grieved *Ukiyo* came to refer to the modern mode, passing scene, or floating world of pleasure. The images of the floating world or *Ukiyo-e* refer to Edo period woodblock prints and they commonly depicted images of ephemeral pleasure and entertainment. The primary audience for this art form was the emerging urban merchant class.

The city of Edo, was the capital of Japan during this period, was a thriving metropolis characterized by a fluid, extremely literate society. This sophisticated middle class created a demand for accessible, entertaining forms of art. Woodblock prints included literary allusions to stories and clever visual puns well known to literate merchant class.

Edo was the largest city at the time, densely populated with approximately forty percent of the population living in one-eighth the area of the city. The production of *Ukiyo-e* art forms was centered in the city, where influence could be spread across art forms and entertainments such as Kabuki Theater, the pleasure quarters, literature, and poetry.

Ukiyo-e prints were limited in subject matter. The government prohibited any critique of political power under punishment of house arrest. Thus, the most common themes showed the modernizing, urban world of fleeting pleasures. Least common at the time, but highly sought after today were *Ukiyo-e* landscape prints. As regulations on subject matter tightened, landscapes become more popular. Genre scenes of the imagined lives of the very wealthy were also common. A product of the entertainment saturated culture of Edo, depictions of everyday life were colored with idealism. Portraits of idealized beauties are characteristic of *Ukiyo-e* imagery. The beautiful women in *Ukiyo-e* prints represented a cross-section of prostitutes, geishas, and courtesans. The most commonly depicted theme in *ukiyo-e* prints was kabuki theater. In much the same way that contemporary society produces movie posters of upcoming films or famous celebrities, *Ukiyo-e* prints were used to circulate images of famous kabuki actors and plays. In prints, actors were often depicted in recognizable exaggerated poses, called *mie*. Scenes from well-known plays were also depicted in *ukiyo-e* prints. These images were meant to serve as advertisements or cheap mementos. They were not meant to be permanent or long lasting.

~Sarah Berndt, '15

Artist Spotlight: Joseph Lappie

Pliny the Elder wrote *Natural History* in the first century CE, finishing sometime around the year 77. Within this massive series of encyclopedic knowledge there contained a travelogue that described not only the layout of foreign lands, but also the people he encountered. Oftentimes these descriptions of the indigenous locals resulted in fantastical and even horrific parodies. Jumping forward 1400 years, the *Nuremberg Chronicle* was published 1493, becoming the first printed history of the world. Nuzzled within Biblical stories, family trees, recounting of battles, events and European geography, there are two pages that reference the exotic people that Pliny encountered on his travels. The artists who created the “monsters” used truncated information that was edited from a document that was over 1400 years old. In essence, the resulting images were created from information cultivated much like that in the children’s game “telephone” only passed down over the course of fifteen centuries. They certainly fall victim to cultural ignorance, personal bias and misinterpretation.

Memory is one key player in the game of “Telephone”. What do we remember? How do we remember it? Why? Proust is quoted “Remembrance of things past is not necessarily the remembrance of things as they were.” It seems memory is much less a process of recall and much more a process of reconstruction. In this body of work, I use a procession of different characters to explore both cultural and personal narratives. To me, the recall of memory is the afterlife. As long as there is someone who remembers you, you still live; you live in an amorphous, ever-changing cloudy space with everyone else the memory-holder knows. If the memories are pleasant, you are in heaven. If not, you’re in hell. However, thoughts are tricky and fluid. They change. They manipulate. Memory expands and contracts based off of time, hype, fear and love. When first person memory dies, those people become legend, myth, tale or often, nothing. Many characters in this work reference the creatures drawn and printed by the carvers of the *Nuremberg Chronicles*. Creatures that were reconstructed from memory, both historically and personally, from a long dead source and susceptible to the failings that we define as “us.” They are all marching through a process of forgetting, burying, or exalting. Memory isn’t the “Truth”... simply a shade of truth.

We all move slowly forward. We all move step by step. There’s spinning and there’s backpedaling and there’s expulsion. There’s longing and there’s hope. There’s suffering. Through that suffering there is love.

Joseph Lappie is an Associate Professor at St. Ambrose University where he teaches Book Arts, Papermaking, Printmaking and Drawing. He received his BFA in Painting and Graphic Design from Ball State University and his MFA in Interdisciplinary Book & Paper Arts from Columbia College Chicago. His artist’s books are in over fifty collections throughout the world including Yale, the Art Institute of Chicago and Ringling School of Art and Design. For more information on him please visit his website www.pepticrobotpress.com.

Artist Spotlight: Janet Taylor

Janet Taylor is a recognized artist, educator and speaker for over forty years. Janet graduated from the Cleveland Institute of Art and received her MFA from Syracuse University School of Art.

She began her teaching career at Moore College of Art in Philadelphia, then on to Kent State University in Ohio and finally to Arizona State University where she headed the Fiber Arts Department for twenty-three years.

Janet began exhibiting in 1963. Her work has been in national and international exhibitions, featured in magazines and was selected as a prototype for a 1986 television program called Arizona Artforms for KAET in Tempe, Arizona.

Janet moved to Penland, NC in 2000. Her first teaching class was at Penland School in 1968, and she has continued to teach workshops throughout the years. She served eight years on the Board of Trustees at Penland School of Crafts. Her studio is in Spruce Pine, NC, and she continues teaching at Penland and Arrowmont School of Art and Craft in Gatlinburg, TN.

She is currently on the Board of Trustees at Southern Highland Craft Guild.

UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE

Woman from behind Carrying Lantern, n.d.

Color woodblock print

1992.17

The lines in the work are important to its layout, as they form the curve of the ground, the structures and figure in the picture. The central form of the woman is framed by the building on the right and the shadow village in the background on the left. The figure is identified as a woman through her kimono and the large, round bun on her head.

The different shades of grey in the background allow the viewer to question the time of day or night – perhaps just before sunrise. There is a tease of light on the horizon and in the haze of the trees and buildings that make it seem as though it is verging on dawn. Another clue is the birds flying, in the early morning it would be common to see birds flying into the air as a start to their day.

~Erin Runde, '17

UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE

Chûshingura Act IX (Kudanme), from the series The Storehouse of Loyal Retainers, n.d.

Color woodblock print

1973.11

In Hiroshige's print *Kudanme* depicts Act IX from the *Chushingura* (*The 47 Storehouse of Loyal Retainers*). The play would have been well known to an Edo audience. First performed in 1798, *Chushingura* is based on an historic event that took place in 1701 A.D. where two noble men got into a dispute; one accidentally killed the other and committed seppuku, or self-immolation. In this particular Hiroshige print, Honzo, the enemy arrives at the gate of the house, disguised as a monk with a basket concealing his head. His flute playing distracts the two women just as Tonse, the mother, prepares to take her daughter's life.

Without prior knowledge of the plot line, it would be difficult to infer that this is what is going on in the image. The composition is peaceful and serene. Other than the sword hidden under the mother's robes, there is no indication of the pending chaos in the coming scenes. The blue, grey, and white colors of the composition add to the calming atmosphere, and the snow seems to freeze the scene in a sort of stillness. From the contemporary viewer's perspective, the flute playing figure with a basket for a head adds an element of interest. We can see him, but the two women on the other side of the fence cannot. The wall of the house is also exposed to the elements, revealing the interior scene to the viewer. In this way, Hiroshige is exposing the characters to the viewer and foreshadowing the drama to come.

~Sarah Berndt, '15

UTAGAWA HIROSHIGE

Snowy Gorge, n.d.

Color woodblock print

1983.8

This print was published around 1843-44 and depicts massive mountains that dwarf the humans rowing beneath them through the river. Hiroshige created few vertical prints in his life time, and, this print caused quite a stir due to the fact this formatting was typically reserved for figural prints, and has a similar perspective and composition to scrolls.

Hiroshige, like other artists of the time, focuses strongly on how insignificant humans are compared to nature, as they move along the sharp turns of the river wearing sugegassas, hats typically worn by farmers. He builds on this idea by emphasizing the sharpness and contrasts of nature against the minimal houses and people in the scene. In order to see the human touch in this landscape one has to look closely, which displays how small we are compared to nature.

~Colleen (Maggie) Cooper, '15

JANET TAYLOR

Styrofoam matrix

Courtesy of the artist

This piece of Styrofoam functions as a matrix for Taylor's fabric prints. She carves out the negative space on the Styrofoam, and then uses the block to print directly on the fabric, which is combined with a vat dye discharge process to create color and pattern in the work.