



U.S. ART GALLERY

ALL THE NEWS THAT FITS PRINTS
VOL. 4, NO. 9
SEPTEMBER 1998 \$4.25

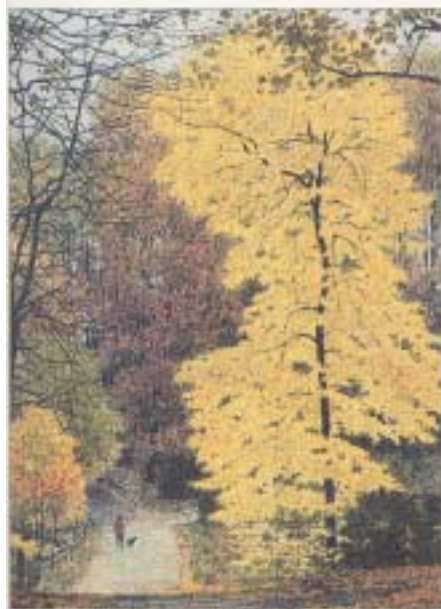
A preview of
what's new
in galleries
this fall.

Gallapalooza

Original Work

Although original lithographs may not always seem much different than photo-offset reproductions, the way they're made sets them apart.

by Jennifer Amie



"Elephant's Child" by Dennis Curry and
"Yellow Tree" by Carl Hoffner.

Not all lithographs are created equal. There's a world of difference between original prints and offset reproductions, although it can be hard to distinguish one from the other. Both can be called limited editions, both may be signed and numbered by the artist and both may be printed on high-quality paper. The difference is that original lithographs are actually handcrafted, while fine-art reproductions are made on automatic presses in commercial printing shops.

Offset reproductions are almost always copies of something that was first an original painting, which is photographed, color separated and reproduced using offset lithography—the same method used to print this magazine and your daily newspaper. In original lithography, the edition is not meant to mimic an original painting. Wildlife artist Dennis Curry says that what makes original lithographs unique "is really a matter of the artist's intent." The artist is starting from scratch and composing a work that has never been seen before. The original

lithographs are created by the artist right in the printmaking studio. "You wind up with what they call a 'multiple original,'" Curry says. "The whole edition is a work of art."

Original lithography is a complicated process, and many artists choose to collaborate with highly skilled master printers who help produce their work. "A good relationship between a master printer and an artist is one where the two work in tandem toward realizing the artist's vision," says master printer Kent Lovelace.

"An artist finds a printer who understands his work and what he wants to present," says Oregon-based master printer Mark Mahaffey. "As a printer, I know all the technical aspects of the different printing materials, and I help the artist get his information across."

To create the image, artists draw directly on an aluminum printing plate, a piece of Bavarian limestone or, like Curry, on sheets of mylar, in which case the drawings are then transferred to a printing plate. Each separate color requires a separate drawing on a separate stone or plate, so a five-color print requires five separate plates.

The master printer rolls ink onto each of these plates by hand, using colors mixed to the artist's specifications. Each color is printed one at a time. For a five-color print,

the same piece of paper will be run through the press five times.

To get a print to look just right, the artist and printer conduct a series of test runs, known as "proofing." As each color is laid down on the page, the artist scrutinizes the results and adjusts the inks. When the perfect version is achieved, that print is dubbed the "bon à tirer," or "right to print." The bon à tirer guides the printer through the editioning process. Each print in the edition must match the bon à tirer as closely as possible, and those that don't are destroyed. When the edition is complete, the artist signs and numbers each print and cancels the edition by destroying or defacing the printing plates.

Because creating each print is so labor intensive, editions of original lithographs often number less than 500. The craftsmanship and time involved in printing original lithographs contribute to their cost, which is most often higher than fine-art reproductions. Collectors who purchase original lithographs are buying prints that were guided, at nearly every stage, by the artist's hand.

As an artist who takes pride in the hands-on quality of his own prints, Curry says, "My hope is that in a more discriminating market, original graphics are going to get the recognition they deserve." ●