

Print masters at Corcoran

By Joanna Shaw-Eagle
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Eric Denker holds the title of curator of prints and drawings at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. He organizes shows, cares for the works-on-paper collection and undertakes detective-like searches for works to add to the Corcoran's collection. The Sherlock Holmes-dimension of his position is not often known.

The fruits of the curator's sleuthing go on view today at the Corcoran in the exhibit "Lichtenstein and Beyond: Recent Acquisitions of Modern Prints."

The show of 50 prints features work by famous artists such as popsters Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist, abstract-expressionist Robert Motherwell and humorist William T. Wiley. Mr. Denker also chose works by lesser-known artists, including Anil Revri, Igor Makarevich, Milos Cvach and Jorg Schmeisser.

The Lichtenstein prints are, of course, the stars of the show. Planned to coincide with the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation's recent gift of 17 important prints, the show at the Corcoran presents Mr. Lichtenstein's development during a 25-year span.

Mr. Denker begins the display with the 3-D "Pyramid" of 1968. He finishes with "Composition # 3," which Mr. Lichtenstein created shortly before his death in 1997. The selection demonstrates the artist's versatility with prints such as "Reflections on Soda Fountain" (screenprint, 1991), "Virtual Interior: Portrait of a Duck" (screenprint, 1995), "Les Nympheas," a play on Henri Matisse's water lilies (linoleum cut, woodcut, lithograph and screenprint, 1993) and "The Oval Office" (screenprint, 1992).

Mr. Lichtenstein, who emerged with other pop artists in the 1960s, delved into the graphic arts more than any of his fellow popsters. He used printmaking to explore ideas he used in painting and to experiment with new materials and painting surfaces. "Les Nympheas" shows his genius for design in using bold outlines, empty white spaces, electric colors, stripes and Ben Day dots.

Although Mr. Lichtenstein made "Nympheas" powerful through hard-edge composition, the work conveys a soft poetic lyricism.

Another interesting work in the show is Mr. Revri's decorative "Cultural Crossings: Islam #4." The curator met Mr. Revri, a transplant from India, at the Arts Club of Washington. Mr. Revri's gripping "Cultural Crossings" series, started three years ago but especially relevant today, conveys images of the world's great religions. "He began the project to find shared beliefs as well as differences and problems," Mr. Denker says.

The artist's gift of "Cultural Crossings: Islam #4" reveals his rectilinear, richly ornamental approach. The viewer looks at a vertical rectangle that Mr. Revri delineated with gold and silver oil metallic markers, graphite pencils and gold and silver pencils.

He placed round objects around the rectangle, which could be a watery pool or shaped mound of earth. Viewers may conclude that the objects' identities do not really matter because they support the balanced beauty and harmony of the work.

Mr. Revri integrates writing with the Christian, Buddhist, Judaic, Sikh and Hindu

religious images he draws so expressively. The quote he chose from the Koran 49.9 for the Islamic one would be news to Osama bin Laden: "If two parties of believers fall to fighting, then make peace between them. And if one party of them does wrong to the other, fight that wrong-doer until it returns to the ordinance of God. Lo. God loves the equitable."

The curator calls a lithograph by Lee Bontecou in the show "a real find."

Mr. Denker's route to finding the astonishing work was through an art dealer who had visited the Corcoran. Exhibit visitors will see how the artist propelled swirling white inked lines upward on black paper to create an apocalyptic maelstrom. The work is eerily reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci's black chalk sketches of the "deluges" owned by Windsor Castle.

Although Miss Bontecou was important in 1950s and 1960s New York as an elegant abstract sculptor who stretched and sewed laundry bags over wire armatures, she moved to rural Pennsylvania and now produces little work.

Sometimes wonderful art finds Mr. Denker. Dr. Robert A. Seder and Deborah Harmon from Bethesda brought their children to a Corcoran "Family Day" last February. The couple, who had begun adding photography to their collection, liked the Corcoran and donated seven prints to it. "I liked the spirit of the gallery. We felt the prints would be good for the Corcoran and for students at the school," Dr. Seder says.

Among the seven are a colorful, hard-edge intaglio print of the mid-1980s, Al Held's "Almost There," and Mr. Wiley's enormous, blue-lined "Now Who's Got the Blueprint?" of 1989. San Francisco's 1960s underground magazines influenced Mr. Wiley's hip, quirky style used in complex designs such as "Blueprint." Dr. Seder says Crown Point Press printed both the images.

Janet Solinger, a Corcoran Gallery vice president specializing in public programs and former director of the Smithsonian's Resident Associate Program, has bought prints in New York and Washington for 40 years for her own collection. Her friendships with artists have been helpful. Abstract-expressionist Adolph Gottlieb gave her a dynamically brushed litho — black lines exploding into a red sun — in 1966. Her friend Mr. Rosenquist gave her a "Living Room Furniture for E. Rubin" lithograph in 1976. She bought a Sonia Delaunay combination etching-aquatint-mezzotint print because she liked it. These are all part of the Corcoran show.

"I'd like for most of my collection to go to the Corcoran. I believe in the museum," Mrs. Solinger says.

Printmaker Charles Ritchie works as curator of modern prints and drawings in Mr. Denker's "back yard," the National Gallery of Art. (Mr. Denker and the artist started together in the gallery's education department about 20 years ago.)

The artist gave "Blue Twilight," one of the exhibit's standouts, to the Corcoran. "I work with twilight and night a lot. I especially like the qualities of the 'suburban night' where I live. There's a lot of beauty and poetry in little houses under trees that's overlooked," Mr. Ritchie says.

"Blue Twilight" is the view from the artist's front yard looking across the street. He describes it as a "dark-mannered aquatint" inspired by a Pablo Picasso aquatint of a little girl leading a blind minotaur through the night.

At first glance, "Twilight" has the quality of flocked velvet. Mr. Ritchie works on special raised surfaces like the one for "Twilight" with James Stroud of Center

Street Studio in Boston. "I send him the plates, and he pulls the prints. Then the close collaboration and changes begin," Mr. Ritchie says. The two work together on the artist's challenging mezzotints and aquatints.

Work by artists Andrew Krieger, Jack Boul and Mr. Revri fill out the local section of the exhibit. Mr. Krieger used a heady, plunging perspective to show "The Celebration Procession Carrying the Maesta From the Studio of Duccio to the Cathedral of Siena, 1311." Mr. Denker recently mounted a retrospective of Mr. Boul's often mystical work and purchased two prints from the show for the Corcoran.

Other appealing entries in the show include Mr. Makarevich's imaginative "Buratino," a humorous Russian variant on the long-nosed Pinocchio. Mr. Makarevich, a Russian, worked with Dennis O'Neil's Hand Print Workshop International in Alexandria as part of an earlier exchange program. Mr. O'Neil, a teacher at the Corcoran school, developed extraordinarily expressive possibilities with silk-screen that's evident in Mr. Makarevich's whimsical and colorful work.

Few Washingtonians will forget the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden's exhibit of South African William Kentridge's work early this year. The artist's "Atlas I" and "A Nicely-Built City Never Resists Destruction" prints give a special bite to the alienation and loneliness conveyed by his paintings and sculptures.

Mr. Denker met Mr. Schmeisser — a German who lives in Australia and travels widely — by chance at the National Gallery in 1980. They struck up a conversation about prints, and the curator became interested in Mr. Schmeisser's work.

The artist's prints are the closest to those of the legendary Albrecht Durer in the exhibit. Mr. Schmeisser beautifully and meticulously delineates such things as conch shells, crab claws and banksia pods. He sets them in the middle of exquisite Leonardo-like writings that serve as the prose of the prints "Diary and Magpie" (1978) and "Diary and Box" (1999).

WHAT: "Lichtenstein and Beyond: Recent Acquisitions of Modern Prints"

WHERE: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 17th Street and New York Avenue NW

WHEN: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily except Tuesday; until 9 p.m. Thursday; through Feb. 4

TICKETS: \$5 general admission, \$3 for senior citizens and students, \$1 for students ages 13 to 18, and \$8 for family groups of any size. Members and children under 12 are admitted free. Admission is free on Mondays and on Thursdays after 5 p.m.

PHONE: 202/639-1700



Charles Ritchie

Blue Twilight, 2000-2001

2001.2.1

dark-manner aquatint on heavyweight Rives BFK paper

image: 10 15/16 x 14 7/8"

sheet: 15 1/4 x 18 1/4"

collection of the artist

From the Saints and Sinners Portfolio, in honor of the University of Georgia Studies
Abroad Program in Cortona, Italy.