

TOP

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— *Matthew Good Band*
- The Fragile
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Non-Fiction

ARTS & LEISURE

Revolution

Printmaking innovation
in Holman

by Michele LeTourneau
Northern News Services

Holman, a long-time mecca of printmaking, has been producing prints for over 30 years.

Since about 1960, the Holman Eskimo Co-op has been producing a collection and a catalogue. Their prints have been exhibited throughout the world.

"The very first ones they did with, believe this or not, they did with a toothbrush and seal-skin for the stencils," says manager Bill Simpson.

"They've gone through wood carvings and stone prints. Last year we had a fellow come in from Montreal to teach us how to do etchings using a system that involves a lot of caustic chemicals. We want to get away from that. I found these people from New Jersey and they had invented a new system for doing etchings where these caustic chemicals weren't involved. I phoned them and we went from there."

Indeed, the husband and wife team of Omri and Marion Behr are the inventors of an acid-free method of etching, which they've called ElectroEtch.

Marion Behr is an artist. About 10 years ago she was

working on a type of etching called embossing.

"After three days of breathing in the acid vapours, I got sick," she says.

Between environmental concerns, obvious health risks and dangers and an inherent unpredictability, the Behrs had more than enough reason to become "more and more determined to find another way."

Omri, though a lawyer, has a background in chemistry. Together, over 10 years, the couple created the alternative technique, which involves using a very low voltage direct electrical current in an etching bath of zinc and copper sulphate solution. The solution can be used indefinitely.

With an acid bath, the acid eats away at the metal. With ElectroEtch the solution is a carrier for the metal that moves, as a result of the electric current, from the etched plate to a collector plate.

"It's really impressive stuff that they (Holman printmakers) have done now (with the new system)," says Simpson.

The new style of etching, ironically, gives a result very similar to the very old style

Please see **Two-way, B8**



photos courtesy of Omri Behr

Louie Nigoyok and Marion Behr on press with Louie's first two-colour print.



Marion Behr, Susie Magokak and Mabel Nigoyok.

ARTS & LEISURE

Two-way street

Revolution, from B7

originally created by the printshop.

"The art connoisseurs are more receptive to it than the stencils. We've gone back to a lot of the traditional styles. Over the last several years it's been a lot of coloured prints that use pastel (colours). But the people that are collecting this type of art — that's not what they're looking for. The old style, the traditional style is just two colours, black and white."

Black and white is what etching produces.

"That's what made them famous in the first place. If we have people who come to town

that want to buy the art that we have — and we probably have \$275,000 worth of prints here — that date back to the '60s and '70s some of them. When they get to looking at that stuff, those people buy the really old stuff."

Recently a buyer went through the Holman archives and bought 15 prints — all old style black and white.

"The message hit home. So, this year for our collection, I've asked the artists to do one that they like to do in the colours, but do one in the traditional style, in the black and white."

According to Simpson, an old-style print might be worth about \$1,200 US in New York, while the new-style print might sell for about \$400 Cdn.

Peter Palvik and a grounded, etched plate showing a rawing/etching of a dog he created.



Another difference that the artists must keep in mind are the images they set to paper. Lately, in colour, snowmobiles, boats and motors have been finding their way into the art.

"Those do not sell well. The other thing that doesn't sell well is killing of caribou or musk ox or bears or wolves. Anything like that doesn't sell well. But a bear killing a seal is OK. Or a wolf killing a caribou is OK. But a man killing a wolf or a bear, or the use of a rifle in a picture, those don't sell well."

The group of printmakers — Louie Nigoyok, Peter Palvik, Mabel Nigoyok, Susie Magokak, Mary Okheena, Roberta Memogamak, along with manager Bill Simpson — took quickly to the new method brought up from New Jersey. The Behrs taught a workshop in Holman after sending up a processor in advance.

"Omri Behr and his wife Marion could not figure out how come these people caught on so fast. They only had to show them once and they knew what to do. And they've been teaching classes at Princeton and Ivy League universities..."

Simpson attributes this to basic capability and close listening skills.

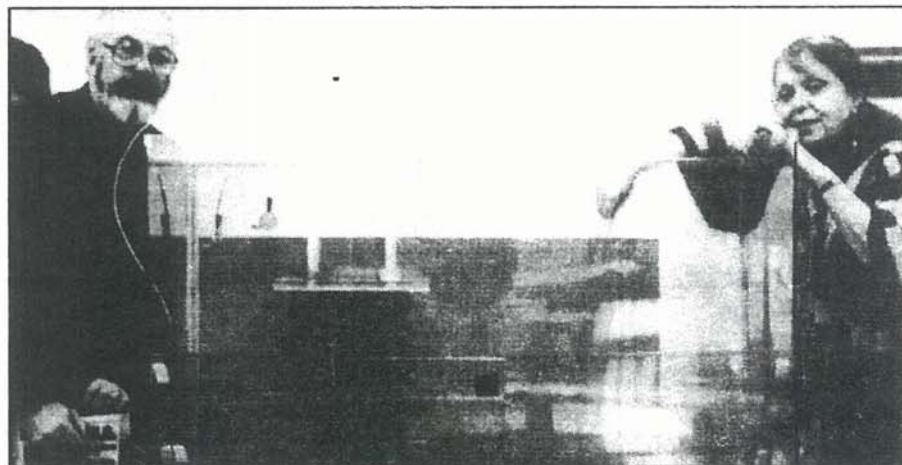
"And they also have been doing this print business for a lot of years now."

"We went there to teach," says Marion Behr. "But there was so much there to learn."



photos courtesy of Omri Behr

Susie Magokak, Louie Nigoyok, and Marion Behr.



Marion and Omri Behr and the ElectroEtch processor tank they invented for acid-free etching.