

Kaleidoscope

Relief prints are on exhibit at Ackland Art Museum

By Catherine Cowan
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If you think you have to go to New York or Washington to see great art on display, then think again — and take a look at the Ackland Art Museum, located right on the UNC-CH campus. Not only does the museum house a full and diverse permanent collection, but it also features several new and exciting exhibitions each semester.

"The Ackland has a very diverse audience," said Ray Williams, Coordinator of Public Programs. According to Williams, the museum's visitors include students (many with assignments from art classes), people from all over the Triangle area, school groups from as far away as the coast, even two Elder Hostel groups per week this summer. "Our strong point is that we are accessible and very flexible," Williams said.

Unfortunately, students do not use the Ackland enough, Williams said. "Students don't use the Ackland as much as they could. It seems to have a low profile among them. But the ones who do come really like the shows," he said. "Students are especially welcome. We are interested in having them here," Williams said.

The Ackland's current show is "Carved and Inked: Five Centuries of Relief Prints." In relief printing, the artist draws his picture on a flat surface (stone, rubber, metal), then either he or a craftsman carves out around and between the lines in order to make the picture raised above the background. When someone spreads ink over the carved surface and presses it against a piece of paper, like a rubber stamp, it transfers the ink from the raised surface onto the paper, thus printing the picture. Wood cut has been the most common type of relief print for the last five centuries.

The trick of relief printing is to achieve the perception of depth. While the painter can mix color and use shadows and light, the relief printer has only black ink on a white page to work with. Thus he may use such techniques as modelling, curved lines which show a three dimensional surface, or cross-hatching, criss-crossed lines which, depending on how densely they are packed together, show the contrast between light and shadow.

The oldest print in the show is a frontispiece to the book *Der Suesse*, printed in 1482 by an unidentified German artist. Like most early prints, this one appears flat and decorative, with little or no three-dimensional or light and shadow effects. *Der Suesse* is about the German mystic Suso, and pictured with him as a figure representing Eternal Wisdom, along with other truth-seekers David, Solomon, Job, and Aristotle.

The exhibit also features three prints by Albrecht Durer, the late 15th and early 16th century artist considered to be the master of print making. By his time, artists had begun to discover modelling and cross-hatching. Although his cross-hatching becomes dense in patches, Durer never uses a straight black surface to convey shadow. During the Renaissance, Germany was considered primitive by southern

Europe. Durer however went to Italy, learned their techniques for achieving depth and shadow, and then brought them back to Germany. His work has a curious combination of Italian techniques, but with the meticulous detail Germans were famous for.

Another way of achieving depth was to use different colors. The artist would create one wood cut for each color he wanted to use, leaving blank spaces on the block for where the other colors were going. The 16th century Italian Ugo de Capri printed *Diogenes* with four blocks. Rather than cutting more lines as Durer did to give the effect of depth, de Capri highlighted a grey with a white or black.

One of the most famous wood cutters, the Swiss Felix Vallotton, carved *Indolence* in 1896. This print of a nude on a sofa with a cat is a purely decorative study of the way lines and curves fit into a pattern.

Modern printmakers such as the German Expressionists Nolde or Erich Heckel wanted to exploit what they felt was special about woodcuts as opposed to painting or another art form. Nolde's resulting 1912 print *Head of a Woman* and Heckel's *Among the Dunes* show how powerful a woodcut's effect of light and dark can be.

Among the collection is a Picasso woodcut, *Luncheon on the Grass*. Carved after Monet's famous painting, it caused a scandal because it depicted a clothed male and an unclothed female, both with recognizable faces.

Two extremely modern pieces are Wayne Theibaud's 1983 *Dark Cake* and Joan Snyder's 1983-84 *Mommy Why?*. Theibaud used 24 plates on his print to achieve the effect of watercolors, and Snyder's print is a violent abstraction of a mother and child.

Besides the exhibits themselves, the Ackland volunteer program may also be of interest to students. Volunteers act as guides to the museum, taking people on tours and answering questions. Training starts in January, and undergraduates as well as graduates are encouraged to apply.

The Ackland's largest source for money is the Ackland Fund, left to UNC-Chapel Hill by William Hays Ackland. Ackland, a wealthy Tennessean, wanted to leave money for an art museum at a Southern university, and suggested Duke and Carolina among others. Duke first pursued this and he willed it there, but soon after he died, Duke changed his mind and broke the contract. Ackland stipulated in his will that he wanted to be buried in the museum, and hearsay has it that Duke officials felt the University had too many people buried on campus already.

Another source of funds for the museum is the Ackland Associates. This group raises money for acquisitions each spring. Then they have a party in which they look over what



the staff has brought in for consideration and vote on what they want to purchase. Membership in the Associates costs \$10 and is open to anyone including undergraduates. There is no limit to how many join.

The Ackland houses over 8,000 works in its permanent collection. These range from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman art to contemporary painting and sculpture. The museum is particularly strong in its collection of prints, drawings, photographs, and 19th century European painting. It is also increasing its holdings in African, Indian, Far Eastern, and North Carolina folk art.

The North Gallery holds many of the older works in the museum. One of these, a 1490's work attributed to the Florentine Jacopo Del Sellaio pictures the Madonna and Child surrounded by four saints. John the Baptist is pictured gesturing towards a cross; St. Catherine is pictured with a wheel because of the legend of her death; St. Sebastian holds arrows; and St. Lucy is pictured holding her eyes.

In another part of the permanent collection houses *Cleopatra and the Servant*, a Romantic painting by Delacroix showing Cleopatra looking at the asp which the servant has just brought in. The center of this psychological painting is Cleopatra's eyes, which stare at the small snake as if staring into space as she contemplates what course of action she will take.

The Ackland's East Gallery opened 1½ years ago and houses mostly modern and contemporary art. One of the pieces, *BRM 72* by Velizer Mahich (called Vasa) consists

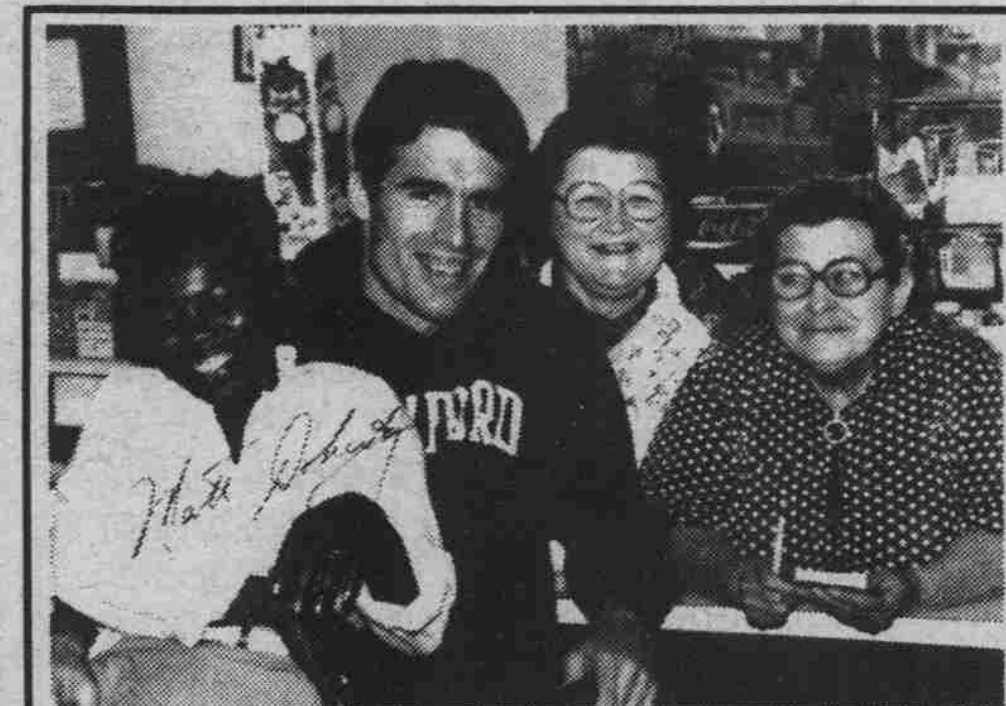
simply of square columns of color. The colors change on each side of the column and are different on top from on bottom, and even change in hue as the light of the day changes. The work even draws the area around itself into becoming part of itself as it projects its colors onto the wall behind it and the floor in front.

Other rooms of the Ackland hold smaller rotating exhibits. For example, the Facets Room currently displays contemporary photographs from the permanent collection. One room now holds works which graduate students in the art department researched and wrote the markers for themselves. Small rooms in the East Gallery hold English paintings, Indian miniatures, or some of the Ackland's vast collection on paper.

Upcoming shows include the

annual "UNC Faculty Exhibition" and "Two Years of Collecting: Acquisitions 1983-1985." The first, on display from September 7 - 29, will feature such faculty members as Richard Schiff, Jerry Noe, and Marvin Saltzman. The second, on display from December 13 - January 19 will feature all kinds of art, from European paintings, sculpture, Japanese paintings, Indian miniature and sculpture, 19th and 20th century photographs, and North Carolina folk art.

The Ackland is located beside the new Hanes Art Center at the intersection of Franklin and Columbia Streets. Its hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday 2 to 6 p.m. (the Sunday hours will change on Sept. 7 to 1 to 5 p.m.). Admission is free.



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