

## ART

## An Apt Title

**Reynolds Gallery's "Great Prints" live up to their name.**

by Jenny O. Ramirez

More than a dozen meanings are ascribed, per the dictionary, to the word "great." From the archaic term for pregnancy to designating one generation removed (great granddaughter) to simply very large in size, "great" encompasses a multitude of meanings and connotations. "Great" has been applied to historical moments (Great Depression), people (Alexander the Great) and geography (Great Britain). The word often conjures up a type of egotistical meaning, a designation proclaiming a person, place, or time as eminent, grand and superior.

It is with some trepidation then that I approached the current exhibition at Reynolds Gallery, succinctly titled "Great Prints." Fortunately, my "great expectations" were not crushed. This is indeed a noteworthy exhibition of master prints by some of the most important artists of the 20th century: Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, Lucian Freud, Jim Dine, Sol Lewitt and Chuck Close, to name a few. Regardless of the name-dropping, the prints clearly speak for themselves.

First, a quick refresher on what prints and printmaking is all about. Prints, or pictorial images inked onto paper, were created as long ago as 100 A.D. in China. Printmaking flourished in Europe from the 15th century onward and from that time has been considered one of the fine arts.

The two common methods of printing are

relief and intaglio. In relief works, the material employed, woodblock for example, is cut away so that the desired image remains as a printing surface. Intaglio printing is the opposite, in that the image is cut into the surface, a metal plate say, with tools or acid. In both processes, ink is applied to the surface and transferred to paper. Aquatints, drypoint, lithography, screen printing, and monotypes — these are all further variations of the printing process. It is key that the artist think through and understand the discrete steps of the printmaking process in formulating his art.

A key benefit for dealers and buyers alike is that identical images can be made from one plate, making works more readily available and obtainable. There is not a single unique object, but perhaps as many as 75 images from one plate.

It is important to bear the complexity of the printing process in mind when viewing the prints at Reynolds Gallery. Take Roy Lichtenstein's 1990 "The Living Room." The work has all the signature Lichtenstein elements: screenprinting, Benday dots, primary colors, 1960s pop culture, but, in addition, he has employed woodcut printing. This is evident in passages of the work where there is a raspy quality where the ink did not fill in completely — quite a difference from

his typical polished, slick graphic style.

Lucian Freud, the grandson of the famous psychoanalyst, is known for his technical precision and talent for representing the human figure in paint. His "Ali" (1999) demonstrates the artist's etching skills as equally competent.

Ali's face is built up with hatch and crosshatch marks that swirl in patterns, like fingerprints, to model his face. His large, bumpy nose projects from the surface through the density and quality of the marks that Freud is capable of achieving.

One of the most fascinating and utterly beautiful works in the show is Yukinori Yanagi's "Wandering Position." Yanagi, a native of Japan, relies on the ant to assist him in his printmaking process. An ant is placed within a boxlike frame and wanders about while the artist follows closely behind with chalk or pencil. He then creates etchings of the ant trails using red ink printed on a type of rice paper. The results are exquisite squares, rectangles, and trapezoids, filled in with the random wanderings that float on the space of the paper. Formally, there consists an interplay of the arbitrary curving path of the ant constricted within the straight geometric shape of the box. A colleague of mine understands the ant as a metaphor for the Japanese citizen, working tediously and endlessly within the strict confines of societal boundaries.

This is only a brief skimming of the current works at Reynolds Gallery. There are 26 in all — an impressive accumulation of some of the most significant artists' prints of this century. As we stand on the brink of a new century of art, looking at the prints of this century's artists offers one fulfilling and affirming method of celebrating what made the 20th century great. **S**

**"Great Prints" and David Freed: "Portraits of Friends"**

Reynolds Gallery  
1514 W. Main St.  
Through Jan. 29  
355-6553



Lucian Freud's "Ali" demonstrates the artist's etching skills.



Roy Lichtenstein's 1990 "The Living Room" combines all the signature elements of his work paired with the unique characteristics of woodcut printing.



## Portraits of an Artist's Friends

Speaking of printmaking, while visiting the "Great Prints" show at Reynolds Gallery, be sure to go upstairs to see another great printmaker — Richmond's own David Freed. A longtime professor of painting and printmaking at Virginia Commonwealth University, Freed moves beyond pedagogy to reveal his skills as an artist. This show focuses on his portraits of friends, colleagues and mentors largely in the Richmond area. It is an intimate display of the significant people in the artist's life. And what he has to say about them is amazingly distilled through the visual method of etching and aquatints.

One senses that Freed is capable of capturing the very essence of the individual. There is Tom Chenoweth's almost demonic face emerging out of an eerie blackness with welding mask pushed back on his head and one glaring pupil accented in red. Or "Miss Pollak," a figural portrait of Theresa Pollak where each line confidently brings the subject into view. Freed's etched lines become vision itself, retracing by hand what the eye is capable of seeing.

"Richard's Routine" places the viewer behind Richard Carlyon's figure as he stealthily walks alone down a corridor. Despite the large, loose tonal areas derived from the process of aquatinting, the very essence of the subject has been extracted in the signature black clothes and dutiful stride of the former VCU art history professor.

Perhaps most telling is Freed's portrait of himself. In his typical format — neck and head severed from the body below — the artist's face of muddled gray wash is thrown in high relief against the velvety black background. With his shock of white hair, curling mustache and searching, bespectacled eyes, the artist probes the personality and physical makings of perhaps the most difficult subject of all — oneself. — J.O.R.



David Freed's portrait of Tom Chenoweth