



JOHN ARMSTRONG

ENGAGED ABSTRACTION



All of the recent prints shown in this catalogue are untitled

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN ARMSTRONG

Stephen Glueckert: Can you tell me something about your background, how you became involved in art, and who tutored and influenced your interests in printmaking?

John Armstrong: I was one of many children and art was my way of defining my personality or territory. Before grade school I was involved with the constructing of things. In the first grade I was told by my teacher that I painted the best “vegetable people.” That established, in my mind, that I was the class artist.

Until Graduate School I had no real printing experience that wasn't fraught with frustration and insecurity. At the University of Montana I was told that I must take printmaking. Although discouraged, I relented and found that, artistically, printmaking was to be my secret door to visual expression. Other than everyone that I've curated an exhibition for or worked directly with in the studio, James Todd has been my main printmaking influence.

SG: You've worn many hats, including stints as an arts administrator, art educator, businessman, museum board





grinding tools, plasma cutters, epoxies, and the like are increasingly important to me, but always used in conjunction with typical printing equipment, methods, and materials.

SG: What are your observations about both formal and informal art education?

JA: It seems to me that formal education in the arts, like other fields, has become financially based. That is to say that the bottom line is more important than the education provided. In addition, most of us, by nature, are a bit lazy. I think that most schools cater to this and are, to our detriment, trying to offer easier pathways to “excellence.” As I talk to professors



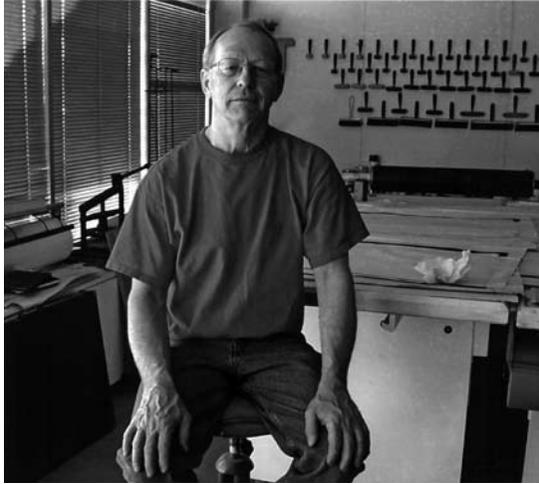
Dodge Girl



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skills of these artists, I might have dismissed their efforts as empty experimentation, but I saw the same formal talent in their works that I admired in Rembrandt, Goya, and Homer, and I have learned that while different schools of art are a matter of personal preference, artistic skill transcends style. Any art style can be done very well or very badly, and even though I am not primarily a non-objective artist, abstract art opened an aesthetic perspective in my education that allowed me to see the full purity of visual form, color and design unhampered by worldly content. I knew when looking at John's recent abstract work that I was looking at non-objective art that is beautifully and imaginatively executed.

I noted at John's Great Falls exhibition how varied



JOHN ARMSTRONG: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

John Albert Armstrong was the fifth of ten children born to Louis and Doris Armstrong on May 14, 1943. Raised in Laurel, Montana, John attended public schools and involved himself in art, athletics, various clubs and student government.

After graduating from high school he enrolled at Eastern Montana College, now called the University of Montana-Billings, where he received his B. S. Degree in 1965. He taught stagecraft in high school until 1968, when he was accepted by the MFA program at the University of Montana-Missoula.

Having received an MFA in painting and printmaking, Armstrong won appointment as art instructor at South Dakota State University-Brookings. The following year he decided to work on a doctorate in Comparative Art at the University of Ohio-Athens, but changed his mind and accepted instead the Director's position at the Yellowstone Art Center in Billings.

There he realized his ambition to work with artists, and the possibilities exhibitions could provide for broad



public education. Three years later he continued in the administrative field at the Arizona Commission for the Arts as a curator. In 1976 he was appointed Visual Arts Manager for the Scottsdale Center for the Arts.

Leaving the museum field in 1980, he started a partnership with his future wife, Joan Prior. Over the years Armstrong-Prior, Inc. has become a vertically integrated business that operates a print studio, creates collections, and offers framing, installation and other services related to the arts.