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Printmaking, the Collaborative Art

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Source: *Art Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 3, Printmaking, the Collaborative Art (Spring, 1980), p. 167

Published by: College Art Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/776348>

Accessed: 21/01/2009 11:37

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# *Editor's Statement: Printmaking, the Collaborative Art*

**Donald Saff, founder and director of Graphicstudio, is a professor of art at the University of South Florida.**

Often one conceives of the artist as a solitary soul, working independently and alone in the privacy of his studio. This somewhat romantic and stereotyped view of the artist and his work does not reflect the fact that art and life do not take form in a vacuum. For the most part, artists do not live in monastic circumstances, nor do they do their work independently of the help, interest, and influence of others.

This is particularly true of the artist as a printmaker. With the emergence of a kind of renaissance in printmaking, the word *collaboration* has gained global prominence as a term referring to a myriad of relationships between the artist and those around him who in some way contribute something to the finished product. While the words *collaboration* and *collaborator* do not have precise definitions in contemporary usage, they do indicate a growing importance being attached to individuals other than the artist who, in the end, signs the print.

The recent focus on publishers, dealers, and individual master printers with their vast technological know-how has brought forth a new elite that, in some instances, takes on an importance almost equal to that of the artist himself. Although this period in printmaking could well be called "The Age of the Collaborator," the particular nature of the relationship between artist and collaborator, and collaborator and final product, cannot be generalized. Instead, the kinds of collaborative forces at work in contemporary printmaking are so diverse, and unique to each individual artist and special circumstance, that only a broad inquiry can give us a feel for what is meant by "collaborative process."

This issue of the *Art Journal* contains a cross section of viewpoints on collaboration, as it occurred historically and as it now affects contemporary printmaking.

Jim Dine, one of the world's foremost printmakers, discusses his varied involvements with publishers, printers, and the marketplace in an insightful interview with Susie Hennessy. His statements reflect his determination to do his work and maintain his autonomy and independence as an artist regardless of the external forces that necessarily impinge on the printmaker's world.

The benefits and liabilities of print collaboration in the modern world are explored in a probing manner by Garo Antreasian. He reviews the genesis of major contemporary ateliers and their impact on printed art and the marketplace and discusses the import of these forces for the artist who creates and prints his work himself.

A personal statement by Kathan Brown reveals one publisher's attitude, philosophy, and methodology for preserving the artist's integrity and control of the authorship of his work. A process of collaboration without intrusion is the object of her working method.

Alison Stewart comments on the lack of reliable data needed to form an accurate historical view of collaboration. Her speculations are revealing as to the contributions of guild artisans, monastic printers, blockcutters, and artists who cut their own blocks. This division of labor and responsibility in the production of woodcuts seems to underlie our lack of understanding of the extent to which the artisan has intruded upon, enhanced, or otherwise altered the artist's vision.

Finally, Karen Beall reviews the histor-

ical development of lithographic workshops, for which there is a reliable, documented history. She shows there was a complex and extensive relationship between artist and artisan from the beginning of lithography. In almost every case it was the artisan who extended the medium through technological innovations that made new artistic approaches desirable and accomplishable.

These articles focus on the many contributions of individuals other than the artist to the development of printed art. The dangers of overzealous editorializing by publishers and the potential for the usurpation of the artist's prerogatives by a new technically oriented elite of artisans and atelier management are not to be overlooked. Each artist who would make prints must determine for himself his own best way of working—and the collaborator must inevitably adjust and conform to the artist's vision if the vital connections between the artist and his work are to be preserved. **End**