

THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN GRAPHIC ARTISTS' ANNUAL BENEFIT DINNER
HONORING ROBERT KIPNISS & MARVIN BOLOTSKY



October 26, 2007
The National Arts Club, New York, New York

Lifetime Achievement Award Acceptance Address, Robert Kipniss

The path to my being here tonight is indeed circuitous. As a young artist in my late teens, I was hardly aware of what a print was, or of how many different ways there are of making them. And even if I had known what prints were, I was so anxious to make images, with such a large crush of feelings and thoughts swirling in my head, that I would never have slowed down and set myself to learn craft and technique. As a painter I was entirely self-taught, too stubborn and too much in a hurry to be otherwise.

And so it went for the first sixteen years of my professional career (having had my first one-artist show on 57th street at the age of 20 in 1951). I must credit a relationship with an early dealer of mine for stumbling into an obsession with printmaking. Prints had just begun to get my peripheral awareness when Murray Roth, of the old FAR gallery, began coaxing and urging me to get involved. He was quite a salesman and he eventually sold me on giving printmaking a try.

In 1967 I enrolled in a six-week introductory course at Pratt Graphics Center which some of you may remember was on 13th street off Broadway, with the instructor Roberto de Lamónico, a very rational and lucid man whose explanations were excellently clear, even to someone like me who was basically resistant to this whole undertaking. That short course intrigued me enough that I spent a huge \$100- buying a small press with a 12-inch bed from Charles Brand, and I made my first print, an etching. That seemed too indirect

so I turned to drypoints. The richness of the medium knocked me out and I made seven or eight images, all 9 x 12. I began printing editions, quickly learning that as much as I was entranced by this new experience of making prints, I also learned that I hated printing them. What a chore. Proofing was okay, but editioning was tedious. I knew artists hired master printers, but I was too poor for luxury.

So I printed my drypoint editions and brought them to the gallery. Murray was very pleased, but he said he had meant for me to make lithographs. Next, I took a portfolio of several of each of my prints and went to see Sylvan Cole at AAA. His reaction was strongly positive, and he said he would like to have them, and that I should see Bob Koo and get a consignment memo. I told him I didn't want to do that; that they were printed on German etching paper which was very fragile, and I would rather he bought them. "Oh, no," he said, "we don't buy prints." And he rattled off the names of very famous artists and told me all of their work was on consignment. I said I wouldn't do that and besides my work is so very cheap. At this he perked up and asked, "How cheap?" When I replied they were \$15- each he said, "I'll take them all!"

I was thrilled, and I walked out of there with a much appreciated and needed check, plus now I had a dealer who was invested in me, a little extra motivation for him to promote my work, and it worked out well for the both of us with his re-ordering many times.

But Murray was determined to get me into lithography, and in 1968 he called me with the news that he had gotten me a commission to do five lithographs. "Are you crazy? That's complicated." "Don't worry, you'll go to the Bank Street Atelier, you'll watch for fifteen minutes, and you'll pick it right up." And he was right, except neither he nor I could foresee how obsessively lithography would get into my blood, and how this printmaking thing would take hold of me to the point of my camping out at Miller's, my subsequent printer, between 3 and 4 months a year. My experience at Bank Street was not so good, they being not nearly as competent as their reputation would have you

believe. But Sylvan commissioned me to do some prints for AAA and he got me into Miller's workshop where I worked summers for the next 22 years, when I quit lithography for mezzotint.

I must say for all the excitement and pleasure of making prints one of the best things about printmaking is meeting other printmakers. We are not at all like painters because we share. We share knowledge of technique, tips on opportunities to exhibit, and in general we regard each other as colleagues rather than as competitors. SAGA has always been dear to my heart because it embodies and exemplifies this tradition of camaraderie, and to stand here tonight and receive this honor is a moment I will always treasure. Thank you.