

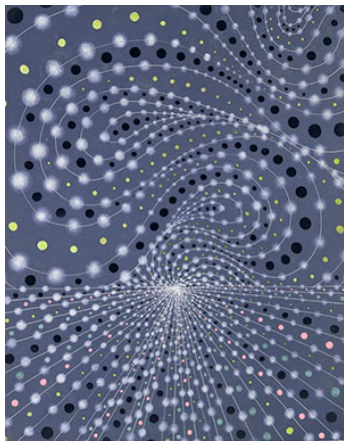
Wingate Studio

Wingate Studio Retrospective
BU Today, November 2015
By John O'Rourke
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Three Decades of Master Printmaking

Stone Gallery show celebrates Wingate Studio

11.30.2015 | By [John O'Rourke](#)



Day for Night, State II (2012), aquatint, sugar lift, white ground, burnishing, and hand painting, by Barbara Takenaja. Courtesy of Wingate Studio

When Peter Pettengill moved to the San Francisco Bay area after graduating from UMass in the late 1970s, he planned to become a librarian. But a chance encounter with a bookbindery around the corner from the café he worked at changed the trajectory of his life. He soon began working at the prominent Oakland studio Crown Point Press, where he learned to print, and where he first encountered artists like Sol LeWitt. Today, Pettengill is one of the most respected master printers in America.

In 1985, Pettengill founded [Wingate Studio](#), a professional print workshop and publisher sited on his family's farm in Hinsdale, N.H. Since then, he has

worked with such renowned artists as LeWitt, Louise Bourgeois, Walton Ford, and Robert Rauschenberg. The studio is renowned for its intaglio printing, a painstaking process that starts with incisions on a copper plate. Ink is forced into the incised area and the plate surface wiped clean, put on a press bed, and covered with a sheet of dampened paper and then a felt blanket. The plate is run through the press rollers under heavy pressure and the ink is pulled from the plate, leaving an impression printed on the paper.

Wingate is known not only for its technically virtuosic prints, but also for its close collaborative relationship with artists. The studio's work is the subject of a dazzling new retrospective, *Printers Proof: Thirty Years at Wingate Studio*, on view at BU's Faye G., Jo, and James Stone Gallery through December 13.

The show, which chronicles 30 years of production, features more than 50 prints, chosen by exhibition curator Joshua Buckno (GRS'05, Questrom'14), managing director of BU Art Galleries, because they reflect the personality of the studio. "The studio has a very inclusive feel, mostly due to Peter's very engaging and thoughtful personality," he says. "We wanted great work and also wanted prints that would inform the historical narrative of Wingate."

Buckno came up with the idea for the exhibition after coming across Wingate Studio while researching an artist. He was struck by the range of artists Pettengill had collaborated with. He also discovered that Wingate had a relationship with a number of College of Fine Arts faculty and alumni, among them Gideon Bok and

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Dana Frankfort, former CFA assistant professors, and Richard Ryan, a CFA associate professor, who all have work in the show. "It felt like the perfect time for a print exhibition," Buckno says, "especially since Lynne Allen, dean ad interim of CFA, has worked so hard to create a printmaking major and to upgrade the printing facilities at BU."



Untitled, Image #5 and *Untitled, Image #6*, (2006), hard ground etching, spit bite aquatint, by Benny Andrews. Courtesy of Wingate Studio

Among the exhibition's many standouts are two plates by Benny Andrews, created for a special edition of Flannery O'Connor's short story collection *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. They are particularly striking, both because they are vastly differently stylistically and because they capture the moral overtones of O'Connor's stories so well. In *Untitled, Image #5*, a white woman is attempting to give a young African American boy a penny. In the print, the penny appears as a red stain, a symbol of the woman's racism and condescending attitude. *Untitled, Image #6* is something altogether different: a mother and son are rendered in simple black outline, as shells. The mother has collapsed on the ground after the son has lectured her about her ignorance. A dark purple haze envelops the son, symbolic of his grief as his mother lies on the ground.

If the exhibition has a showstopper, it may well be Walton Ford's color etchings. Ford is best known for his watercolor paintings in the style of 19th-century American ornithologist and painter John James Audubon, and his prints (three are in the show) pay homage to Audubon's work. But they aren't just a celebration of the natural world, as Audubon's are. In works like *Limed Blossoms*, the artist draws attention to man's destruction of the natural world. Here, ruby-throated hummingbirds are drawing nectar from the blossoms of a trumpet vine. But the blossoms have been laced with lime, designed to kill the birds (a technique Audubon used to obtain specimens for his paintings). Another, *Dying Words*, features the last of a species of the extinct Carolina parakeet, a commentary on the lack of value man assigns to the natural world.

Daughters of the East, a suite of etchings by Ambreen Butt, draws upon the tradition of Indian miniaturists. The prints are rooted in an actual event—a 2007 standoff between students and government forces in Islamabad, Pakistan, that resulted in numerous deaths and hundreds of injuries. In Butt's prints, images of individual or

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groups of women brandishing bamboo stakes are set against intricately patterned backgrounds. The work is infused with symbolic imagery and decorative elements, and like so much of the work in the show, has deep political as well as artistic overtones.

Barbara Takenaja's swirling mass of geometric elements, *Day for Night, State II*, invites comparisons to Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. The print, created with aquatint, sugar lift, white ground, burnishing, and hand painting, gives the sensation of being sucked into a black hole—the whirling patterns akin to what might be found peering into a telescope.



Daughter of the East Suite (2008), six-plate color etching, aquatint, spit bite aquatint, and drypoint, by Ambreen Butt. Courtesy of the artist, Wingate Studio, and Carroll & Sons, Boston

There's also a hard ground etching by Louise Bourgeois, *The Sky's the Limit*. Best known for her sculpture, Bourgeois began her career as a printmaker in the 1930s, but abandoned it in favor of sculpture. She returned to printmaking late in her career and this work—done just seven years before her death in 2010—depicts a giant glass tower completely overshadowing a tiny house. The high-rise becomes a metaphor for ambition. Bourgeois frequently used architecture to express themes of loneliness and alienation—there is no door in this building, no means of entering or escaping.

What all of these prints share is Pettengill's determination to carry out each artist's unique vision: it is the guiding principle of the Wingate philosophy.

"I love the interaction with the artist, learning how to communicate ideas, becoming sensitive to their way of thinking and seeing," he says. His work as a master printer is "less of a collaboration than a teaching role, but you're also trying to spare them the horizon-limiting worry about technical issues. It's important to find a way to help them explore the process unhindered by the inherent limitations. And to allow them to find a work process that feels natural to them." He believes strongly that the artist should be in complete control.

At Wingate, he says, "I try to offer a work environment that puts technique at the service of ideas rather than the other way around. I am attempting to understand the artist's practice, to get inside and experience it with them." The fact that he is not a visual artist with his own practice, he says, separates him from most other printers and perhaps makes it easier to establish a dialogue with the artists he works with. "There's a little less ego to get in the way of things," he says. "Ego is an important muscle for an artist, I think. Not so much for a printer."

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Trees Reflected on Ice (2002), sugar lift and aquatint, by Neil Welliver. Courtesy of Wingate Studio

No single work in the exhibition better illustrates the intense relationship between printer and artist than Neil Welliver's wonderfully atmospheric *Trees Reflected on Ice*, a work deeply rooted in the American landscape tradition of the 19th century. The last print Welliver completed before his death in 2005, it beautifully captures the low, golden light of a winter afternoon. He was in poor health when he came to Wingate to work on the print, and after just a few days he was forced to return home.

But Pettengill and his assistant Catherine Ulitsky went to Welliver's studio in Maine and spent a week working whenever he felt well enough, etching and proofing the color. In the end, Pettengill says. "The combined plates had all of the energy of Neil's hand and eye."

Asked what he hopes visitors take away from this retrospective of his work, Pettengill says he'd like people "to be surprised and challenged by what they see. To enjoy the beauty, but also to be exposed to something unexpected."

Printer's Proof: Thirty Years at Wingate Studio is on view at the Stone Gallery, 855 Commonwealth Ave., through Friday, December 13. The gallery is open Tuesday through Sunday from noon to 5 p.m., Thursday until 8 p.m. The exhibition is free and open to the public.

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