

THE PERIPATETIC PRINTS

By [Michael O'Sullivan](#)

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The idea was born in 1991. Six years, 14 countries, 23 cities, a hundred docents, half a million dollars and 124 works of art later, "Crossing Over/Changing Places" -- a group printmaking exhibition -- has finally made its way to the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

"It's been a 27-ring circus, if you want to know the truth," says Jane M. Farmer, the local curator and impresario who rattles off these figures while strolling through the show of prints and handmade paper works that is just back from a four-year world tour and is on view through Nov. 23. As she points out work by art world elder statesman Leon Golub, local painter Tom Nakashima and cartoonist Art Spiegelman, Farmer looks remarkably calm and well rested, considering she was awakened at dawn to take a call from Finland.

What exactly is going on here (and what do all these numbers have to do with art)? The answer is not simple, but here goes.

"Crossing Over/Changing Places" began in 1991 as a showcase for work that came out of four mid-Atlantic print shops and a series of collaborative residencies between artists and master printers. It involved artists with years of experience at printmaking as well as those who had never ventured into the medium. In the early days, the participants were few: New York's Lower East Side Printshop, the Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper in New Brunswick, N.J., the Print Center of Philadelphia and our very own Pyramid Atlantic, the Riverdale center for prints, papermaking and the art of the book founded 17 years ago by Helen Frederick.

The show and its theme of collaboration soon caught the attention of officials at the U.S. Information Agency, whose now-defunct Arts America program began sponsoring an international tour of the exhibition in 1993. One of the early stops was the Zagreb Museum of Contemporary Art in Croatia, where more collaborative workshops were conducted at the Academy of Fine Arts. While there, American artist Robert Cumming encountered a bit of culture shock: The art school's sole pencil was kept locked in a cabinet at night.

"We were ambassadors to the world," says Frederick, who, in addition to running Pyramid Atlantic, is an artist with two pieces in the show. She adds that many of the Europeans were not used to the democratic process of artistic collaboration. "Their method is much more of the master-pupil hierarchy." As the exhibition roamed the planet, a stateside organization was formed to encourage such cross-pollination. The group, dubbed the Crossing Over Consortium, began raising money from such disparate sources as the National Endowment for the Arts and Finnair. The funds not only would help pay for the tour and its spinoff residencies, but also would allow for foreign artists to come to work in the United States.

It's nearly over now. The tour is making its last stop at the Corcoran, in the Hemicycle Gallery and adjacent Gallery 16.. Franklin says she's hoping that some corporate buyer will step forward and purchase the collection whole. Since 1993, this traveling exhibition has, like a snowball, expanded from the original 77 pieces to 124, now including works that were produced during its travels. (The Corcoran has declared this "The Year of the Print," and there certainly have been a lot of them in town. The Universal Limited Art Editions show at the Corcoran and the Crown Point Press survey at the National Gallery of Art were two of the biggest.)

If, as Frederick and Franklin say, printmaking is the most collaborative of the visual arts, a group show organized around that theme normally would feel a bit like the detritus and confetti from a long-dead party. The guests have all left and there's nothing left to look at but the art, even though, in this particular case, much of it is excellent.

That's why a printing press went up yesterday in the Hemicycle. During the next month, there will be weekly talks, demonstrations and satellite exhibitions on printmaking at embassies throughout the city.

Franklin and Frederick refuse to admit the celebration's over. "This show is about process and the process is fun," says Frederick. "We feel the best way for people to learn about printmaking is to actually see it being done."


In addition to ongoing demonstrations of printmaking, upcoming programs include a free discussion with feminist painter and book artist Despina Meimaroglou of Athens, next Thursday at 6:30 p.m. in Gallery 16. For information or a complete listing of events, call Scott Habes at 202-639-1805, the Crossing Over Consortium at 202-966-4828 or Pyramid Atlantic at 301-459-7154. Art Bit

On Dec. 1 at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater, there will be a benefit dance concert for Eric Hampton, the longtime local dancer, teacher and choreographer who is ill with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's disease. The concert, which will feature performances by the Washington Ballet, CityDance Ensemble and Maryland Youth Ballet, was organized by Hampton protege Tony Powell, who's not only a dancer but also a composer, choreographer, filmmaker, sculptor and photographer.

To offset the cost of renting the Kennedy Center, Powell is hoping to sell a few of his pictures during a brief exhibition of his portraits of celebrities and artists at Gallery 2000, 1529 17th St. NW. The show opens tomorrow night with a cocktail reception from 7 to 9 p.m. and a screening of Powell's latest film, "16mm Movement Study." The artwork will remain on view through Nov. 1. For information about the photo exhibit, call 202-232-2000. For information and tickets to the dance concert, call 301-565-0148 or 202-467-4600. CAPTION: Jane Farmer, local curator of the globe-trotting print exhibit now at the Corcoran, with a featured printing press.

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Michael O'Sullivan has covered the arts for The Washington Post since 1993, contributing reviews and features on film, fine art, theater and other forms of entertainment to Style and Weekend. [Follow](#) 

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