

## THE ENGRAVING STUDIO

It is not an easy task to write about friends. But we only know well what we love or what we hate. The rest does not matter. In any case, I write according to my mood.

What is this lithography and intaglio studio in this pretty village on the Léman lake ? What makes it original ? I don't know any other place dedicated to engraving, where so many competences are gathered in so few hands. Not only engraving and books are printed, but we also publish, organize demos, traineeships and high-level exhibitions. In short, we produce and teach without wanting it. We could speak later of a School of Saint-Prex, such as a School of Fontainebleau, an Academy of Bologna and so many others which, in times of complacency, brought back the work of artists on the most elementary basis. In any case, in the engraving studio, there is no such thing as ink fabrication, or since long-gone technique that we don't do, rediscover or invent. The notion of lack of time is not familiar. We realize that "take the time needed" is the first step to obtain a good result. If measured according to economic rules, such as those of a firm, the engraving studio is a disaster. Its founding father himself says that "the studio is a challenge to healthy management" and invokes the patronage of Bakounine and of Breton and this principle from the Manifesto : "to everyone according to their needs". Provided that one doesn't have too many.

When one knows the dislike of artists for the constraints of common life, one is surprised to see here that artists, painters and engravers get along. And also interns, generally two, also engravers, drawers, often coming from art academies. One can feel here the famous lines of force of the group dynamic that works well without the studio having any status and that holds together through the involvement and mutual attraction of elements.

As Sarto says in his Curriculum Vitae : 'what we call studio is an undefined set of printing presses and engravers. Not those who want but those who can belong to it'.<sup>1</sup> However, in his big house, there is always a place to work for those who want to develop their brass plate, draw their stone or work on their project. And I say this from experience : the atmosphere of the studio is rousing. One can often find the piece of advice that will unlatch a barred momentum and the skilled knowledge that takes the maximum out of a printing substrate.

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### *A little owner's tour*

- Ground floor : Lithography and intaglio studio and storage facility of papers, stones, to dry and tidy the prints.
- The first floor is dedicated to social life. Meals are taken all together and are one of the most important part of the community life. Pulling the baler can make you hungry. There is not a day when the table only welcomes the artists of the studio. There are always visiting friends. Conversations, that no social media can interrupt, concern all the problems of artists in the town, the on-going work, the engraving as well as the meal cuisine.
- The two floors, which are full of engraving books and documentation, are dedicated to the living and the painting studio of Sarto.

### *The environment*

Switzerland is said to be prosaic, turn in on the affairs of its own territory, not concerned by cultural and artistic questions. To that I answer that, firstly, this small country was able to stop the appetite of its promoters and can therefore show us pleasant towns and villages. Secondly, its cuisine and wines are everywhere respected. Thirdly, local authorities, companies and individuals support artists by placing orders.

Among the artists that are in the studio of Saint-Prex, I would firstly introduce Albert Yersin, whose long rise is directly linked to his friendly collaboration with the studio. A considerable part of former and current members of the studio were his students. Nowhere else, I think, Yersin could have found this "Einführung", empathy, artists who are able to translate precisely the richness of the engraved substrate by the subtlety of the colourful range, sometimes transparent, sometimes embossed, with one way in the press. What is particularly true for Yersin is also for all those who come here to print. People come here from all over Switzerland, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece, Americas to spend one hour or a long time, to do a traineeship, help or realize an idea. There is no rule nor obligation. Here only exists good chemistry.

The studio produces a lot : more than a hundred of books and albums, around two thousand engravings. This production took place in the Foundation Willian Cuendet & Saint-Prex studio<sup>2</sup>, which is accessible since the inauguration of the Print department in Lausanne.<sup>3</sup>

Exhibitions and demos play an important role as it is at these moments that the studio comes towards its audience, spread the good word and makes in general people smarter. Be it about visiting a professional school in the locations of Saint-Prex, about the biennial of Venice, about an invitation to the Pratt Institute in New York, the Academy of Arts of Lausanne, our printers explain, demonstrate individually or collectively with enthusiasm, the mysteries of engraving. I take the example that I know : the exhibition of the Castle of the Sarraz during the summer of 1974. It was composed of 65 engravings made since Dürer that the studio considers important : a *Shell* by Rembrandt and not the *Hundred Guilder Print*, a Piranesi from the *Vasi-Candelabri* and not *The Prisons* because the most famous works suffer almost always from banalization of cultural hype.

Among the pieces carefully chosen appear such banknote and such postage stamp for the perfect use of the tool. The catalogue designed by Sarto is a good reminder for the expert : "This exhibition was made of the sense of dissatisfaction that the reading of the history of

engraving and the definition offer by today's market give us". Jacques Mathyer, the expert in intaglio, in his contribution to this pamphlet, focus on intaglio and strip it from the embellishment of the discourse. The poster of the exhibition shows an expansion of the *Holy Face* of Mellan, this sacrilege prowess. The masterful part of the exhibition is completed with a sale of the production of the studio and with a part of studio where one can print. Two years later, a similar exhibition will be dedicated to lithography, from Senefelder to today.

The studio often goes forth, the mountain goes to the prophet in order to provoke, initiate (initium : beginning), convert an always-growing audience. The studio doesn't like schools, even less schools of fine arts as only common assumption are said to be taught. To that I answer : these demos are best-quality teaching, but I also add, teaching is in the nature of things and living beings where initiation is the rule, invention is always a sin against necessity and routine, the start of the revolution.

### *The origins*

We are in 1951, in this green and peaceful backyard in the Saint-Jacques street at Georges Leblanc, where I had just organized with Johnny Friedlaender a printmaking class. *The Studio of the Hermitage*, that we called "experimental facility" and the goal of which was to "give, in a fraternal collaboration, the taste of research and precise knowledge needed in order to engrave on one's own"<sup>1</sup>. The year after, my friend Yersin sent us a young man from Lausanne, Pietro Sarto, one of those who really wanted to learn. He will later say that he found in the studio "poetry and humor in geometry". After his years in Paris, he came back to Lausanne and opened in 1959, on behalf of Pierre Cailler, the *Artistic presses*, an intaglio and lithography studio where he hired two former students of Yersin.

Yersin and Prébandier, former artists of the group *Graphies*<sup>5</sup> and main participants to the book *A la gloire de la main*<sup>6</sup>, their friends and students would become the central core of the Presses and their organization of engravers *l'Epreuve*, just as the deceased *Graphies* where they were active members, would continue a few more years to spread the well-done engraving. Like *Graphies*, *L'Epreuve* dies from its success.

In 1968, Sarto and his friends open in Vilette, a small village in Lavaux, a studio which would soon become too small, the engravers of the *Presses artistiques* stayed loyal. And, three years later, they would install their equipment in the Grande rue (Big Street) of Saint-Prex where the adventure continues.

I am telling this story because I find it remarkable, as only outsiders are still able to produce this little oxygen, these few authentic objects which allow us not to suffocate in the atmosphere of our routine. As Sarto says, "The death of a civilization is not the death of humans...."

Paris, 1979

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Curriculum Vitae : Pietro Sarto-Jean Lecoultre, published in the Musée des Arts décoratifs de Lausanne, 1976, at the occasion of a manifest exposition.

<sup>2</sup> William Cuendet has gathered an important collection of old engravings.

<sup>3</sup> is now the host of the Jenish Museum in Vevey (note de l'éditeur 2008).

<sup>4</sup> *Atelier de l'Ermitage* Paris, juin 1950.

<sup>5</sup> *Graphies* is a group of engravers who met between 1949 and 1951. For its first exhibition at the Galerie des Deux-Iles in Paris, the invitation was composed of a text of Gaston Bachelard, *À la gloire de la main*.

<sup>6</sup> Collective book , eight writers : Bachelard, Eluard, Lescure, Mondor, Ponge, de Solier (inédits), Tsara, Valéry and sixteen engravers : Boumeester, Chastel, Courtin, Durand, Fautrier, Fiorini, Flocon, Goetz, Prébandier, Richier, Signovert, Ubac, Vieillard, Villon, Vulliamy and Yersin, Paris 1949. Published in 135 copies, among which the 26 first ones are signed.

*This text was published for the first time in les Nouvelles de l'estampe, revue de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, de novembre-décembre 1979, N° 48. Since then, it has been used wholly or in part in various books in the Saint-Prex studio.*

*Albert Flocon, born in Köpenich/Berlin in 1909 died in Paris in 1994. He was a student of Oskar Schlemmer at the Bauhaus of Dessau, and left Germany in 1933 in order to settle in France. Engraver, theorist of perspective science, he taught in Paris at the l'Ecole Estienne et à l'Ecole d'architecture. He published, among others, "Le Traité du burin", Blazot, Paris 1953 with a current edition at Pierre Cailler, Geneva and "Perspectives curviligne" with André Barre, Paris, Flammarion 1968.*

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