

# Christy Wyckoff

Christy Wyckoff's masterful control of printmaking processes results in prints of such nuanced variations in tone and expression that he is sometimes referred to by colleagues as a 'printmaker's printmaker.' As chair of the printmaking department at the Pacific Northwest College of Art, his technical proficiency is taken for granted, although he is quick to say that teaching stimulates versatility and innovation, both of which contribute to the scope of his work. In the course of his career he has created prints in all the traditional processes, and since the advent of computers, has become proficient in digitized imagery as well. Nonetheless, lithography, with its great flexibility, is the process he finds most satisfying. The ability to draw freely in the flowing, soft lines that tusche makes possible, and the texture of the stone as it breaks up the mark, contribute to a surface he finds uniquely beautiful. Surprisingly, screenprints, in which flat, opaque color areas are the norm — quite the opposite of lithographic surfaces — are also an important part of Wyckoff's output. Monotypes are yet another interest, one that he explores in connection with his paintings, sometimes exhibiting them together in order to compare their differences as well as similarities.

While he is a longtime resident of Portland, Wyckoff has traveled extensively, in Thailand while in the Peace Corps, in Europe, and in Brazil where he was an artist-in-residence in Curitiba, Brazil. Nonetheless, he is psychically rooted in Oregon's rural environment. He grew up in the dry, open land of eastern Oregon, and its vegetation, spacious sky, and massive land and rock formations are intimated, even when not specifically depicted, in his art. Many of his compositions, like that of *Look Out*, 1991, are so spare they verge on abstractions, but invariably they are related to the artist's deep sense of the land. The forces of fire, water, and erosion are translated into shapes and color areas that affirm the effects of such forces. In writing an artist's statement he described his longstanding interest in this theme: 'I am conscious of both creation and destruction

when I see the odd faces of rock brought to the surface by the upheaval of the earth or submerged and eroded in canyons created by the force of the rivers. I feel my work to be successful at those moments when I am able to represent that power.'

*Look Out* is a screenprint, a medium characterized by flat shapes and opacity, but Wyckoff achieves an animating play of light through many passings of the squeegee, one for each of the subtle variations in tone. He created the imagery with watercolor painted on mylar. It was then photographically transferred to an emulsified screen, which was exposed briefly for each of seven runs. Aesthetically, the print's spatial configuration of rock, land, and sky images creates both a sense of monumentality and distance. Typical of his work of the early 1990s, *Look Out* is a landscape of mythic propensities in which the earth is seen as a raw, living force.

*Slope II*, 1995, represents a shift in Wyckoff's use of landscape. He is no longer dealing with centuries of time and the earth's interior forces but with daily changes in the earth's thin skin. Rather than functioning as a representation of awesome forces, recent prints, like *Slope II* and *Wizard*, 1996, invite intimacy. No longer concerned with geologic time, they capture a particular moment in the fast-changing light. As graphically precise as a photograph, their close, downward perspective and unnatural color lend a surreal presence to an otherwise unremarkable desert slope.

To create *Slope II*, a lithograph of 1995, Wyckoff began by drawing with tusche on a transfer paper that has a water-soluble emulsion base. More flexible than working on stone, the method permits the spontaneity usually associated with monotypes. A more radical departure from traditional printmaking has come about with his use of a computer. The imagery for *Wizard* was created by scanning an original photograph into the computer and then manipulating it digitally to alter the composition and intensify the reddish color. It was then printed on *hosho* paper by means of an ink-jet plotter.