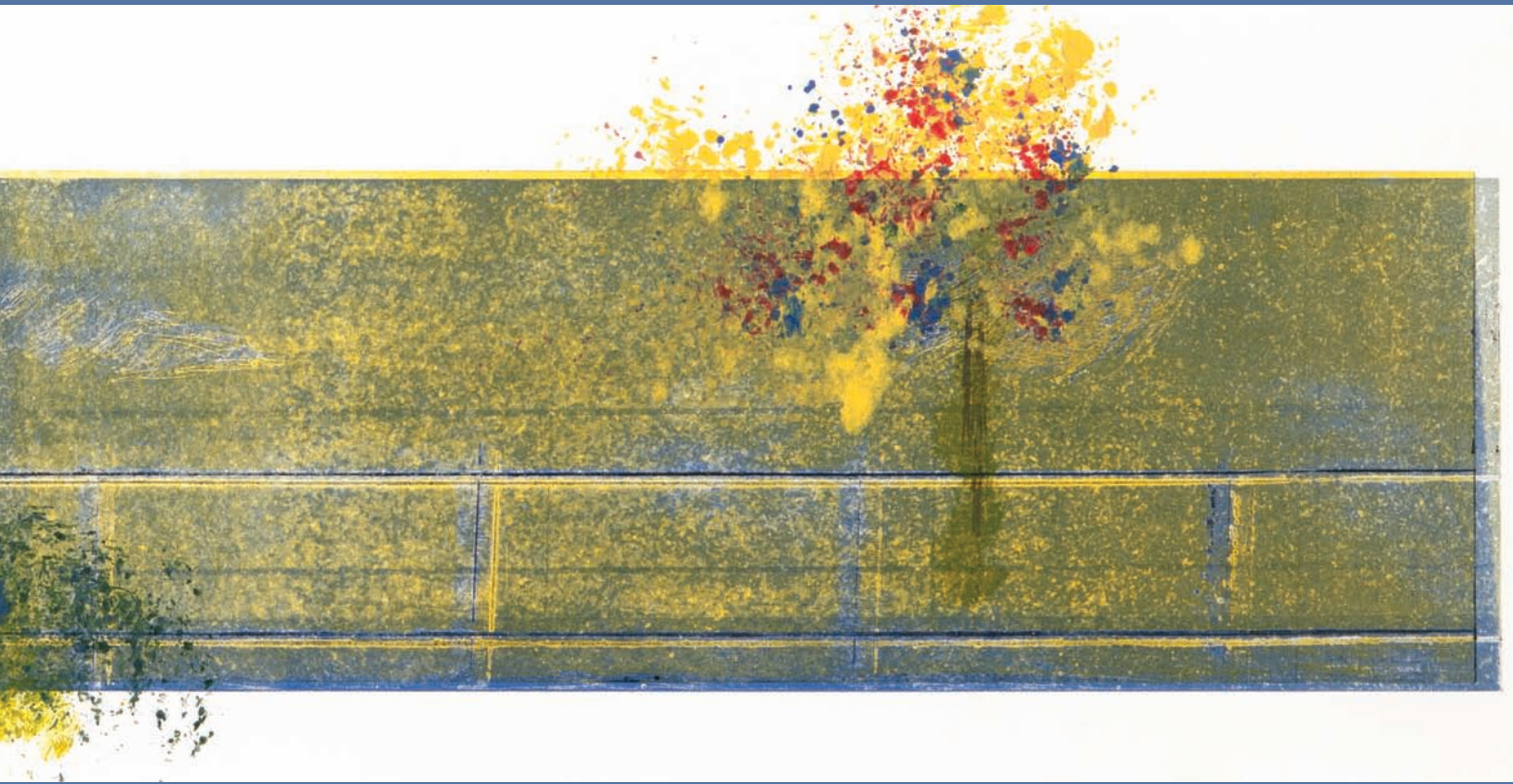


A Lasting Passion



A Monograph | France Brodeur | Printmaker

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Saint-Hilaire

Jane Jordan 2003

'Saint-Hilaire' 2003

Etching, 15 x 23 cm

Foreword

“France Brodeur’s etchings seem suggestive of natural forms and surfaces. Worn, softly scarred and evocative of shifts in time, they have a quiet poetry.” Tom de Freston

“I want to be remembered as a strong person fighting for, seeking, joy.” F.B.

As a practising artist, France Brodeur did not often discuss her art except in technical terms. She laid great store by the necessity of an artist mastering the technical tools of her trade and was fascinated by technical possibilities and how they could be combined to achieve the textural visual effects that translated her images and ideas, as she sought to ‘stop the momentary being momentary’. However – as this monograph makes clear, especially in the ‘Inspiration’ chapter – the technical was the enabling and formative means and not the end of her art.

This monograph is taken from a talk that France gave to The Association of Midlands Artists (AMA) and later at Ragley Hall, Warwickshire, as part of her last solo exhibition. When it was first proposed to her that she give such a talk, she began by working up her thoughts on techniques. With little persuasion, she then produced a summary personal artistic history. When, however, it was suggested that the piece clearly wanted a ‘why’ chapter to complement its ‘when’ and ‘how’, she hesitated or seemed to; maybe realising this was the right moment to pause and answer this question – as much for herself as for others. Some while later, she came forward with a first draft of what has become this monograph’s chapter entitled ‘Inspiration’. She read it out loud, took suggestions, chose or not to incorporate aspects of these. What she ended with was, in effect, a manifesto or declaration of her artistic intent, thought-provoking and illuminating in its candour and depth. Left to her own healthy devices, she may well have given such a task less consideration.

France was a doer. She seemed to reflect through action. Asked, she would know what she thought, have insightful personal perspectives on matters: but her preference always was to live it, be it. (She had a wonderful eventful year working and travelling, mostly alone, in Europe in the 1970’s, about which, if asked, she could tell great stories. A memoir begged to be written and as a professional journalist and



France at work in the printroom of Concordia University, Montreal, in the 1980s

Introduction

In this monograph, I want to discuss the art of printmaking and what it has come to mean for me. I will start by introducing myself as an artist to you, the reader. I will then discuss different techniques used in printmaking, illustrating these with examples from my own work. My hope is that, while such technical aspects will doubtless interest fellow practising printmakers, they will also engage other readers. Finally, having addressed the ‘how’, I will discuss the ‘why’ – the issue of inspiration and why it is that printmaking has been for me such ‘a lasting passion.’

My artistic history

I was born and grew up in the province of Quebec, the French part of Canada. Art was always present because my mum was herself a painter in oils – not professionally but a dedicated artist for over 60 years with a real natural ability and eye. One of my uncles trained in the Fine Arts in the 1940s. Also I had a maternal great aunt (my grand-father’s cousin), named Rosa Birsk, who was an illustrator and a painter and, in the 1920s, travelled to Europe regularly to further her art and sell it. I did not know her, but have always been under the spell of her eccentricity and sense of adventure.

I, like so many of us, started drawing as a child but then never stopped. As a teenager, I discovered oil painting via my mum. Later, living in Montreal pursuing my studies in translation and linguistics, I became attracted by batik and silk painting. A few years into my training in these media (in the late 1970s) I was invited to participate in a specialist summer class in France on Ile-de-Port-Cros (a small offshore island in the Mediterranean). I returned there for two years in a row to work with renowned artists such as Nicole Decory (whose batiks decorate mansions and hotels in various African countries, as well as Saudi Arabia and France). This batik and silk painting experience was, in many ways, pivotal for me artistically as through it I discovered the world of transparency and extreme subtleties of colour.

Throughout my adult life, I have worked to earn money during the day and dedicated my evenings, weekends and dreamtime to my art. In the early 1980s, I decided to undertake a degree in Fine Arts at Concordia University in Montreal, both to give my artistic profile further credibility and to learn more



'Spirit Waltz' - the dark shapes have been painted with a sugar solution 1999

Etching, 22 x 30 cm

Sugar lift

Sugar lift is a technique where the drawing is created by brushstrokes, using a viscous solution of water saturated with sugar or corn syrup. When the drawing is nearly dry, the entire surface of the plate is covered with a thin layer of liquid hard ground. When this ground has dried, the plate is immersed in a warm water bath which softens the sugar and lifts the ground over it. The metal corresponding to the drawing is exposed, while the rest remains protected by the ground. '*Spirit Waltz*' (opposite) is an example of this.



'Feathers and Fronds' 2010

Monotype, 39 x 81 cm

Inspiration

The foregoing was a brief survey of the main techniques I use and combine to produce my final images. Although all such matters seem purely technical, every tool or material that is used, every step that is followed, is an integral part of the creative process. The biting action of the acid is just as much part of the drawing as is the incising into the ground or plate. The selection of the paper or the method of wiping the plate can completely change the nature and tone of a print.

So where do I get my inspiration?

I could tell you the story about '*Alan the hunter*' – this interesting encountering with a hunter carrying a pheasant on his belt that inspired a whole series in 2010.

Or that I discovered, when driving to-and-from OPC in Oxford and beyond in 1998, that the M40 had a great impact on me and inspired 40 prints from places along this very English motorway.



'Blue Cloud' 2001
Monotype, 18 x 22 cm



'Pause (for thought) II' 2009
Monoprint, 29 x 29 cm