



An Interview by Loren Sedgebear
with **World Printmakers** Founder
and Publisher, Mike Booth

"An artist who's not on the web doesn't exist..."



Mike and Maureen Booth, founders
of the World Printmakers website.

Question: How did you get into Internet publishing and why did you choose printmaking as your subject?

Answer: I've always been a freelance journalist, though I have strayed into other things over the years. A couple of years ago I had just sold my telephone-wine-sales business and was looking for something new to do. I was fascinated with Internet and was casting about for a suitable subject around which to build a Web business. Maureen, my wife, partner, printmaker and muse, suggested I do something on the subject of printmaking. So, here we are today.

If you're American, how is it that *World Printmakers* is produced in Spain? Do you think a southern European location offers a good vantage point from which to observe printmaking worldwide?

I grew up in Michigan, but I left the States when I got out of the Army, hitchhiked around Europe a bit, then discovered Spain. It was like coming home, and I've been here ever since. I met Maureen (who's from Manchester, U.K.) here, made a home and today we've got Spanish friends, kids, grandchildren, dogs, cats, the works. We actually adopted Spanish nationality back in the eighties, so we've got Spanish passports, too.

As for the vantage point, I may be the wrong person to ask that question. I think a "southern European location" is good for everything! The world is big, it's only the Internet which permits us even to try to get a grip on it. **World Printmakers'** greatest strength is its network of collaborators and three quarters of them come from the World Wide Web. I also like the European location for establishing a truly worldwide orientation. I don't think a truly universal **World Printmakers** could have arisen or prospered in New York or California. I think the traditionally endogenous (from the Greek "endogama," "bellybutton") American point of view obviates that possibility.



How does *World Printmakers* find the artists who participate in the site?

The truth is that nowadays, with very few exceptions, they find us. In the beginning we sent out some e-mailings to artists we found on the Web, but now that we're well known, printmakers write asking how to participate. Actually the submission procedure is published on the site (<http://www.worldprintmakers.com/english/imaprin.htm>) but everybody seems to write and ask, nevertheless.

What countries are they from?

At last count they were from thirty-some countries. The largest representation of artists is the Americans because they were the first to understand and use the Internet. But we also have Brits, Scots and Irish, Germans, Canadians, Spanish, Australians, Chinese, Turks, Japanese...

You also sell prints on the site. What countries are your print-buying clients from? What kind of people are they?

World Printmakers currently receives visits from more than 130 countries. Again, our most important print-buying client country is the U.S.A. for the same reason. But we also receive orders from all over Europe and the Americas, as well as Australia, Hong Kong and Japan. As for types of people, it's a mix of the general population, though we do receive a surprising number of orders from artists themselves.

What's the most rewarding thing about publishing a printmaking website?

I think it's the contact with the artists. I get the satisfaction one gets from building an art collection, but with the added incentive of getting to know the artists and actually working with them. That's a tremendous privilege.



What is the down side?

The "down side," as you put it, is largely past. It was the long period before **World Printmakers** attained critical mass in terms of visits, activity, credibility and sales. There was a time, round the end of the first year, when I was feeling the way Columbus must have felt the day before he sighted land at San Salvador.

What do you consider to be the role of Internet for printmakers and other artists?

Potent question this, and I should preface my answer by admitting that I'm biased. I'm an Internet tent-revival preacher, have been from the early days. I know in my heart that the Internet will set you free, brothers and sisters. I think a Web presence for visual artists is essential. At the very least it's a catalog of an artist's work which can be accessed from anywhere in the world at any time of day. Think for a minute of the implications of just that one feature. It's ubiquitous and instantaneous, as well as ridiculously cheap.

People used to think that the Internet was about computers. It's not that at all, any more than automobiles are about pistons. (When's the last time you saw your car's pistons?) Just as automobiles are about travel, Internet is about communication and, coincidentally, that's what the visual arts are all about. Artists and Internet are condemned inexorably to understand one another.

What changes do you foresee for the role of Internet in the next three or four years?

The essence of Internet is, of course, change, and rapid change at that. So it's not easy to make predictions. I do think that the Web will re-inforce its credibility as a marketplace; a lot more goods will be sold online. A tremendous amount of art has always been sold sight unseen even before the Internet appeared on the scene. Dealers relied on solid guarantees of provenance and reliable business relationships to put their money down. The same thing will happen overwhelmingly on the Web, I think.



How necessary is it for an artist's career for him or her to be present on the Web?

This question is easy to answer: An artist who's not on the Web doesn't exist. It's as simple as that.

What's the most important lesson you've learned about Internet publishing in your *World Printmakers* experience?

I've learned that a Website is very much an ongoing affair, like horticulture. When you stop fertilizing, pruning, cultivating, treating and irrigating your trees they wither and die. It's the other side of that coin which is beautiful, almost miraculous: when you care for them lovingly they appreciate it immensely and grow lush and decorate and enrich your life. This goes for a website, just as it does for an apple tree.

How do you feel about digital art. Is it proper printmaking?

I think the best answer to this question is a citation from Ralph Lombreglia which our friend, [Raymond St. Arnaud](#) quotes at the bottom of all his e-mails: "The proper artistic response to digital technology is to embrace it as a new window on everything that's eternally human, and to use it with passion, wisdom, fearlessness and joy." I can't think of a better way of expressing it. Of course printmaking is going to have to create a space for digital work, just as it created a space 500 years ago for intaglio work. ***World Printmakers*** dispenses equal treatment to both traditional and digital prints, and I think they both enrich the site enormously. I find it interesting that some of the most wonderful work we're seeing of late is that which mixes traditional and digital techniques.

What do you consider to be the main issues in printmaking today?

I think the main issue is authenticity, and I'm adamant on the subject. Try doing a search on Google for "fine art prints," and out of the first 50 results there probably aren't three who are offering a genuine fine-art print! This is outrageous and intolerable. That unscrupulous and half-scrupulous dealers should so freely apply the

term "fine-art print" or even "print" to their posters and reprographic reproductions is a terrible offense to true printmakers, both traditional and digital. As if the art-buying public weren't confused enough already, they have to confuse them even more! It's plain fraud and should be dealt with as such.



What recommendations do you have for people who are interested in starting a collection of contemporary fine-art prints?

I think the only way to get to know and love prints is to look at as many of them as one can. It's like any other learning process: [get a book on it](#). Start frequenting art museums and galleries. Consult people who are already involved. Internet, of course, simplifies this process greatly; there's a lot of information on fine-art prints instantly available there. The upshot of this process will be your first print purchases. Don't be in a hurry. Once you form a relationship with a reliable dealer, whether on the street or online, and you find that he informs you properly and treats you right, stick with him. If he's honest and knows his business he's your best guarantee. I'd like to think that honest reliable print dealer is **World Printmakers**, and you are invited to our site at: <http://www.worldprintmakers.com>, but in all fairness, there are lots of others out there.

How important do you think art is in our day-to-day lives.

Answer: It's a question of what one thinks is important, isn't it. I don't think money or possessions or power are very important, but I think art is essential to a meaningful life. I actually wrote an article on what I thought was important and called it "[The Lap of Luxury](#)." It was unabashedly self indulgent to publish it on a fine-art-print site, as it's probably grossly out of place there, but one of the very basic luxuries is self indulgence, isn't it?

Why prints as opposed to painting or sculpture?

Lots of reasons. Prints are less expensive and therefore more democratic. Prints are magical, subject to what [German printmaker](#),

[René Böll](#) calls "the alchemy" of printmaking, which never ceases to bewitch and surprise even printmakers themselves. Then too, Maureen, my muse and helpmate is a printmaker.

Do you have other projects in the offing?

I always have "other projects in the offing." My dream for the last 10 years has been to promote a televillage here in southern Spain with homes and offices designed for distance working. I see it as combination campus/laboratory for business and technology projects in a rich-life setting. Contrary to popular belief, Thomas Edison's most important invention wasn't the electric light bulb, it was the industrial pure-research laboratory! I have always been fascinated to see what would happen if one got together a group of brilliant kids in a propitious setting. We shall see.

Is there anything you'd like to add to these comments?

Yes, one: ¡Viva el grabado!

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