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FROM THE HAND OF DON HERBERT
1987-2014



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Don Herbert, master lithographer

From the Hand of Don Herbert 1987-2014 is a tribute to the man, the artist and above all, the master lithographer.

Don funded and ran the lithography workshop at Arteleku, from its beginnings in 1987 until it finally closed in 2014. During that time hundreds of people passed through its doors, including some well-known names from the art scene, each with their own interests, needs and creative options; and there they learned, experimented and produced, all through print. Under Don's guidance, they grew — personally and artistically.

Over a period of nearly thirty years, from the personal and professional stronghold that was his workshop, Don offered an experience of printmaking and life that many remember as being deeply enriching. Don Herbert is still a key name in the printmaking world today.

This exhibition seeks to recreate the atmosphere of that workshop: an area of knowledge and artisan skill. And in this homage, Don's hands are the perfect metonymy of his knowledge, his craft and his humanity.

His studio combined knowledge and experimentation and the watchwords his teaching style were observation, making and practice.

Ainara Martin

Curator and coordinator

Biography

b. Detroit, 1942 - d. San Sebastian, 2020.

Painter and lithographer, master printmaker from 1972, he studied at Morehead State University and completed his PhD at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, California. Between 1969 and 1972, Herbert worked as an assistant to Californian artist Kenneth Price and as a lithographer at Lakeside Studio in Michigan. Later, between 1974 and 1980 he joined Grupo 15, working as a printmaker.

From 1980 to 1983 he ran his own print studio in Madrid and in 1987, took charge of the lithography workshop at Arteleku in San Sebastian.

As a guest professor, he lectured in numerous centres and universities, including the art school at the University of the Basque Country in Bilbao; the art school at the Polytechnic University of Valencia; the art school at the University of Barcelona; the Árvore Contemporary Art Centre in Porto, Portugal; the School of Arts and Trades in Oviedo and the Fundación Joan i Pilar Miró in Palma de Mallorca.

He printed and published works by artists from over 40 countries. His paintings can be found in the collections of the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid, the Museum of Abstract Art in Cuenca, the Fine Art Museum of Álava, Fundación Joan March in Madrid, the Plácido Arango Collection, the Francisco Betancourt Collection...

The ritual printmaker

When I first became director of Arteleku in autumn 1987, Don Herbert had already given his first lithography class; when I left the post in 2006, he was still there, in charge of the workshop, where he stayed until the centre finally closed in 2014. He was Arteleku's most faithful denizen. Hundreds of artists passed through "his" workshop; others of us shared a few years of his personal and professional voyage, but Don was always the centre's most enduring witness. He could have told the history of Arteleku from start to finish, no doubt railing at some of the changes (Don was particularly grudging in his acceptance of the move of his workshop from the first storey to the back yard of the building). Don disliked change and innovation and he had even less time for conceptual speculation. He was a modern classic and an inveterate formalist. For him, aesthetic values could stand up for themselves and had no relation to other ethical or political considerations. Sometimes, then, we argued over different ways of understanding the role of art and the artist's function in society. Despite our differences, though, I always saw Don Herbert as an essential, irreplaceable figure within that open and welcoming approach I always defended for the institution. The last time we met I told him that he deserved to be its honorary dean.

He told me that he still kept up his everyday routine. Those same everyday habits and rituals remained unchanged. They held him to life, to that way of life he had chosen, and they were governed by strictly coded rules, as was his work in the studio. The word *rite* comes from the Sanskrit and means something that is subject to an order, a succession of gestures, in accordance with certain basic and essential requirements and a repetitive norm. Herbert's life and work, in his work as both an artist and a master printmaker, were governed by the (un)conscious repetition of certain habits and his constancy in reproducing them. That same determination also helped him overcome the emotional setbacks he—like anyone—suffered, enabling him to retain a certain stability in his life, anchored in the security of method, like an artisan at work.

Yet Don did not view himself as a craftsman, in the traditional sense of the term, but as a lithographic artist. To paraphrase Richard Sennett in *The Craftsman*—the first volume in his extraordinary trilogy on "material culture"—Herbert's work to some extent involved the development of certain skills, which though undoubtedly specific, were never subject to simple imitation or repetition, but rather to an artistic skill that is always best expressed in the development of forms and in the meticulous care of graphic printing. Don was a perfectionist; like a craftsman, his essential tool was his

expert hand, but his sense of touch, his fingers and his eyes were channelled through his often stubborn personal creative sensitivity.

He handled the objects of his work with extreme neatness, meticulously cleaning the press, looking after the papers and inks and making the prints with a scrupulous determination. It was like some form of liturgy in which Don was the master of ceremonies. Roland Barthes said that any ceremony protects like a house, allowing one to live *in* one's feelings. Don's lithography workshop also, unquestionably, had something of a "home", providing shelter for all.

Charles Taylor, in *The Ethics of Authenticity*, says that to be faithful to oneself means being true to one's own personality. In Don Herbert's case, that inimitable singularity manifested itself in opposition to any trace of narcissism; on the contrary, he was always ready to offer hospitality indiscriminatingly, to recognised artists and incipient students alike. Like the print studios of old, his relationships with people with an interest in lithography and the artists we invited to coproduce publications, turned his workshop into a social space where he, as the Master, observed a sort of oath to improve the skills of the apprentices in his charge. It was a way of going about things, whereby —as Don himself often said— all humans share some fundamental skills which we can improve until we achieve expertise; even mastery is a question of motivation, effort and training. In Arteleku he found an ally with which he could implement that programme with complete independence and respect.

Santiago Eraso



Don H Kasua

El caso Don H

The workshop

The centre of the exhibition space depicts the print workshop and reflects the idea of nearness, assimilation and mastery of the technique — in short, learning by doing.

The studio had three different formulae of work and print production: workshop exercises, artists' editions and co-editions published by Arteleku in collaboration with guest artists.

Each of these formulae contained the idea of nearness, assimilation and mastery of the technique, through the approach of “learning by doing”.

In the case of the exercises, participants at the workshops left their prints as a testimony of the process and the learning experience.

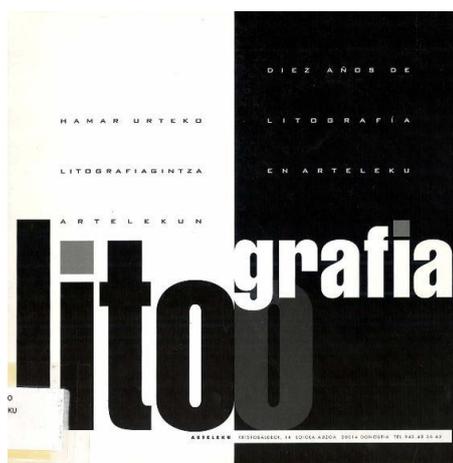
In the case of the artists' editions, the artists printed their own work, making use of the facilities and resources, generally with Don's involvement.

In the case of the co-productions, Arteleku met the costs of the production and the artist gave part of the print run in payment for their use of the workshop and the publication by Herbert. The editions bore the Arteleku stamp

Most of the prints from these three lines of work are now held at [Gordailua, the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa Centre for Heritage Collections](#). The entire oeuvre is currently being catalogued and restored, since some pieces were damaged in the floods at Arteleku in 2012.



Desartxibo, 2005



10 años de litografía

Don and OKUPGRAF: graphics on the street

One morning I was working with Don in his workshop at Arteleku when he asked me; “Would you help me organise an exhibition of the best graphics in Spain?”. And so, the OKUPGRAF adventure was born.

I talked to Santi Eraso and we developed a project for showcasing the work created at the Arteleku graphic workshops in its over ten-year history, as well as reflecting some of the qualities and diversity of print images all around us.

I put together a team with Marian Larzábal and Pablo Donezar —and later Iñigo Royo— and with help from a large number of people, we organised all the activities for the three biennials, whose catalogues are shown here. As you can see, as well as the exhibitions themselves, we also ran street events and promoted other publications and artistic and social work.

In the first edition of OKUPGRAF, I had the great privilege of acting as Don’s secretary and it was he who drew up the list of artists we could invite; most of whom had already printed work with Don and were more than pleased to be involved in the project. For the second exhibition, we turned to Niels Borch Jensen, a former apprentice of Don’s at *Grupo15*. Niels is a master printer and now has workshops and a gallery in Copenhagen and Berlin and with his help we managed to make the move to working with international artists.

Thanks to Don, we also received help from *Calcografía Nacional*. Shortly afterwards, in 1999, this institution awarded Arteleku the National Prize for dissemination of graphic work.

Don often joked about his complicated way of speaking in Spanish and he was particularly amused when people ingenuously thought they might understand him better if he spoke in English — not realising that he was just as unintelligible in both languages. Nonetheless, he had a rare gift, about which I never heard him brag, for listening to the inner voice of the artists and understanding and translating every last nuance. Don’s “ear” was not just a reflection of how good a printmaker he was; it also showed the quality, sensitivity and generosity of the artist.

And when we decided to publish a folder of prints with texts from Jack London —a copy of which is on display at this exhibition— it was that ear and Don’s hard work that enabled Edu López to create some exquisite images and a delicate text: “*The Icy Thread*”. In it, Edu López explains the reasons behind the title of the folder — a title which aptly reflects how we were all affected by Don’s recent death... “*Désolé*”.

Mariano Arsuaga

Coordinator, OKUPGRAF

“Look and learn”

Don Herbert carried a whole world in his hands, the experience of a pivotal moment that helped put Spain on the map of international contemporary art, and he shared it with anyone who chose to come to the print workshop he ran in at Arteleku for nearly 30 years.

He was always succinct in his explanations. He took it for granted that everyone was capable of recognising what they wanted to learn; his answer to almost any question was “be quiet, look and learn”. At Arteleku, Don shaped the rigor and perfectionism that became his hallmark, he developed his understanding of a tradition, learned from the particular interests of those who visited and became their finest teacher.

In 1999, Arteleku was awarded the National Print Prize.

We hope that all that remains alive today, in the experience we gained from him: be quiet.

Nuno Alves Ferreira

Don Herbert's son