

Carved  
Erasers  
Collective  
Erasers







## **ERASER-CARVING: The Rubber-Stamp Connection.**

### **From the first rubber-stamp to the eraser-carving of the Nineties**

Eraser-carving is an engraving technique that uses the same method which was used by the old xylography (wood-carving). Xylography, started around 1360 in France (Jules Brotat in Maçon). This printing method uses the raised areas to get the ink that will be hence transferred to the paper. Press-printing was created in 1450 and uses the same xylography method, but using a metal-matrix (instead of a wood one) for better durability when printing long runs.

Both xylography and the press-printing tradition of Europe have their precedents in China.

The Chinese had the three basic elements: Paper (from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.), ink (the first formulas were known 25 centuries earlier) and the first seals (engravings of texts of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.). Hence, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., they started to use wood blocks to print texts. They covered the wood plate with a thin layer of rice paste which was marked with the contact of the ink of the original text drawn on paper. Once the text was transferred to the wood, the areas not inked were carved. Finally, ink was applied to the wood-matrix with a brush and it was printed on a new sheet of paper. The older works that have been found belong to 764-770 A.D.

For an introduction to the world of eraser-carving, I have to mention about the story of art-rubber-stamps and about some art-movements which used these tools and that were the seed of what has reached our present days.

Rubber is an elastic stuff obtained from the exudation of certain tropical plants (natural rubber) or from petrol and alcohol (synthetic rubber).

The Maya culture knew this stuff well. They used it to seal pottery and as glue to fix their sandals. So, we can be certain about the human

knowledge of this material, at least, since the XII century A.D. In the city of Tenochtitlan, Hernan Cortés assisted to a party organized by the king Mochtezuma II. He saw a rubber-ball with which they played a sort of sporting-game. The bouncing of the ball was extraordinary to the eyes of an European of that time. The Maya people named the stuff "catuchu" (the tree that cries), and from this expression was derived the Spanish word "caucho." It seems that the Spaniards didn't find any practical use for the new material.

After an expedition to South-America in 1736, two Frenchmen first transported some rolls of rubber to Europe and described this new primal matter. A practical use for it was not immediately found.

In 1759 another shipping of the stuff, called "tears from the caucho-tree," arrived to Europe.

In 1770, Edward Naime, a mechanical, found out that the stuff -when cut in small blocks- was great to erase pencil traces from the paper surface. The British Encyclopedia claims that it was the well known chemist Joseph Priestley who made this discovery and who named it "rubber" (from the action of rubbing it on the paper surface). We should keep in mind that, previously, pencil traces were eliminated from paper using breadcrumbs.

Rubber was becoming useful for different purposes, but it was highly affected by heat. It got soft with the summer heat and stiff and brittle with the winter cold. It was sticky when mixed with some dissolvents. Anyway, new uses were found and in 1803, in Paris, the first company manufacturing rubber-bands was established.

In 1823, a Scottish man named McIntosh patented his raincoats made with laminated rubber.

Vulcanization, a system which implied sulfur, white lead and heat, improved the properties of the new material.

In 1844, Charles Goodyear patented the rubber-vulcanizing method that he had invented and been using since 1839. The first rubber-stamps were made in 1865. By 1880 there were 400 manufacturers of rubber-stamps in the USA, 12 years later their number had raised to 4000. Rubber-

stamps were tools of bureaucracy; they carried associated the concepts of legality, authenticity, control, acceptance... But, soon the artists started to play with them to create images. As early as 1914, the Futurists started using them in their collages and, 3 years later, the Dada movement adopted rubber-stamps for an even wilder expression of “mixed-media-art”, putting together in their collages: Photography, typography, rubber-stamps and “clip-art” (copyright free images).

Kurt Schwitters (creator of “Merz-Art”) is considered the father of “the art of rubber-stamping.” He used rubber-stamps in a series of works from 1919 to 1923.

In the 30ies, rubber-stamps also became toys for kids who enjoyed printing famous cartoon characters like Popeye or Mickey Mouse.

The easiest methods for kids to create printing-images were linoleum and eraser-carving. The second method had two big advantages: Easier cutting and water-based ink.

Xylographies, and other following engraving methods, were -at first- mere reproduction systems that copied famous paintings and drawings of reputed artists. Anonymous illustrations were created by artists (or artisans) who did not sign their works. It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the engraved works were signed. This meant respect and recognition towards the artists using these techniques. Goya was one of the first “big and famous” painters who used etching techniques. It must be underlined that avant-garde artists did not start to use xylography until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Paul Gauguin was one of the pioneers with his book “Noa-Noa,” based on his travels to Tahiti (1892-1896). Photography took over the role of reproducing paintings and drawings for publications. The etching techniques were free of this burden and aimed towards a -perhaps unexpected by the traditionalists- future as new media of creation and expression.

The short-story of eraser-carving, which runs a parallel path to the story of art-rubber-stamps and linoleum-carving, started with the need of

those artists who used rubber-stamps to create their own designs in an inexpensive and friendly way.

During the 50ies and the 60ies, some other artists like Ray Johnson, Arman, Andy Warhol and Vostell used rubber-stamps in their art-pieces. The Fluxus period of 1958-1963 opened a new era with a wider customizing of rubber-stamps and their “conceptual” use.

In 1972, Kocman (from Brno, Czechoslovakia) assembled the first international anthology of rubber-stamp art (“Stamp Activity”), which contained the work of 25 artists. In 1978, Lowry Thompson (1954) and Joni K. Miller (1945) published “Rubber Stamp Album” and two years later Thompson created the zine *Rubberstampmadness*. This publication helped to expand the hobby of collecting rubber-stamps and often offered tutorials about how to create unique images from erasers.

The book “*Rubber Stamps and How to Make Them*” (circa 1982, Pantheon Books), by George Lawrie Thomson, helped many enthusiasts of art-rubber-stamps to give a try to eraser-carving. Thomson (1916-2001) was a calligrapher and a linoleum-carver from Edinburgh, Scotland.

Since the early 80ies, eraser-carving has kept growing in adepts, mainly in Central Europe, USA and Canada. It remains pretty much linked to the art-movement of Fluxus and to some Mail-Artists, such as: M.B. Corbett, Hans-Ruedi Fricker, John Held Jr, Cavellini, Rocola, Bill Gaglione, Tim Mancusi, Julie Hagan-Bloch and Solomon LeWitt.

In May 1995, the *Musée de la Poste* in Paris held the biggest exhibit about rubber-stamps ever. There were rooms dedicated to Ray Johnson, to several Fluxus artists, and there was a performance by Bill Gaglione and John Held Jr. (*aka “The Fake Picabia Bros”*).

In spite of the major proliferation of the use of computers and digital-design programs, these old methods of creation of images, such as rubber-stamps and eraser-carvings, keep surviving. Check out the files of “*Predetermined Images*” in your “*Word*” software-program and you will realize the total design-style influence of eraser-carving upon those icons.

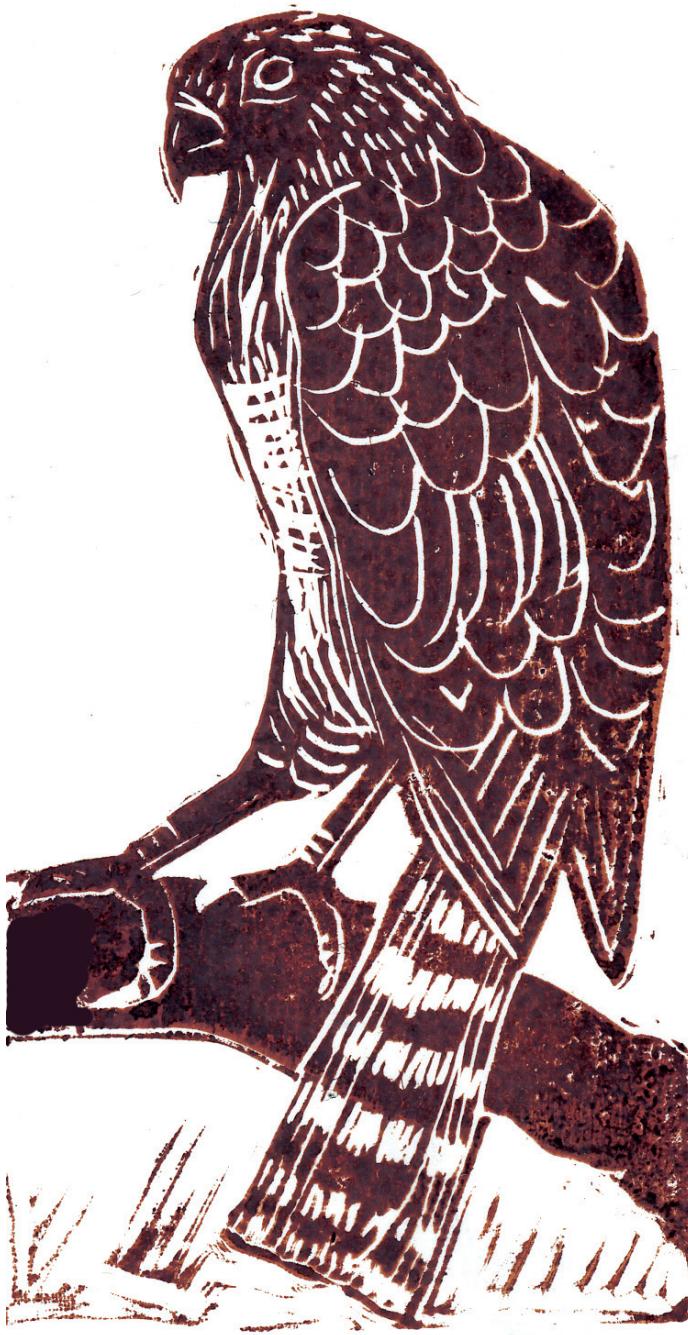
Big companies such as *Speedball* and *Staedtler* produce specific sheets of rubber for the practice of the art of carving. The amount of artists using this technique in USA is much bigger than the amount who is subscribed to linoleum-carving or wood-carving. These are, like the other etching methods on metal plates or lithography, considered more of “professional” printing methods.

Related to eraser-carving, there are associations like “*Rubber Amateur Press Society*” and the “*Carving Consortium*;” and specialized magazines like “*Eraser Carver’s Quarterly*.”

It is not my intention to compare this quite simple engraving system to the other methods which are better for creating images in a bigger scale and which allow the artist to combine several printing-media. It would be unfair to make compete eraser-carving with other more sophisticated techniques, but I think that -against all odds- it remains a remarkable tool for artistic expression. I would not agree with those who believe that professional artists use other more sophisticated methods and that only a few illustrators and “doubtfully skilled” aficionados are the enthusiasts of this simple technique. Time will put every work of art and every artist in their deserved place of modern-art history (...or oblivion).

John Mountain

January 2004.



© Darlene Altschul



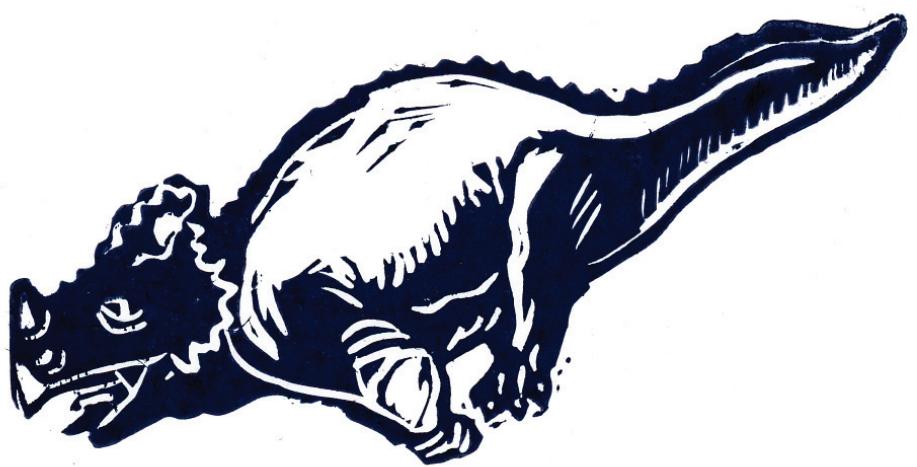
© Darlene Altschul



© Darlene Altschul



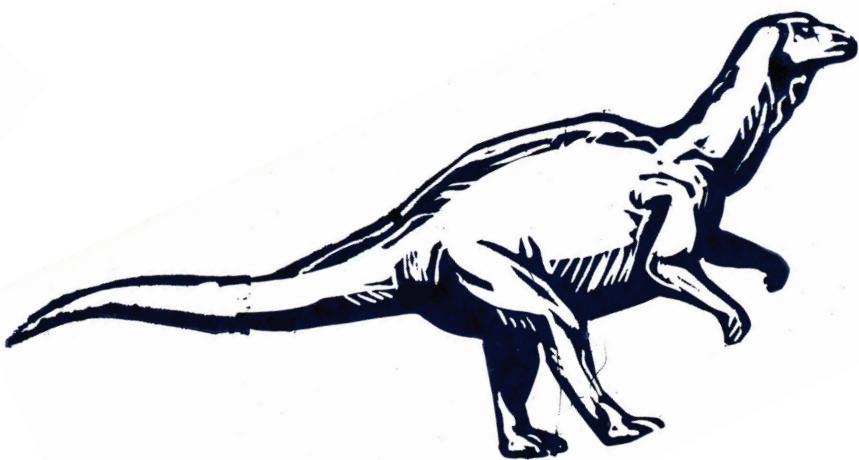
© Darlene Altschul



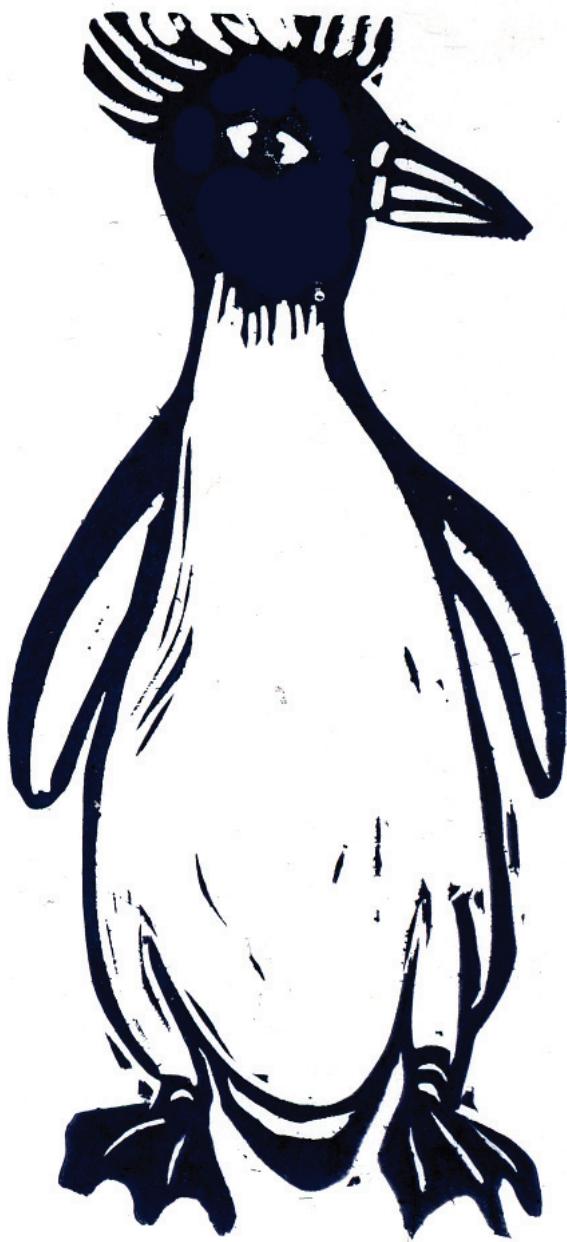
© Darlene Altschul



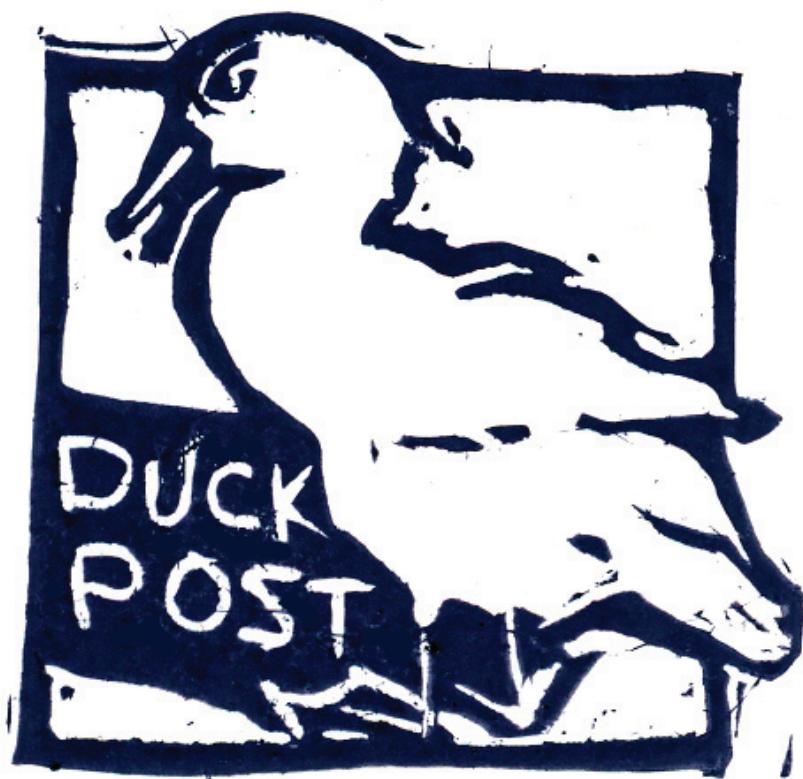
© Darlene Altschul



© Darlene Altschul



© Darlene Altschul



© Darlene Altschul



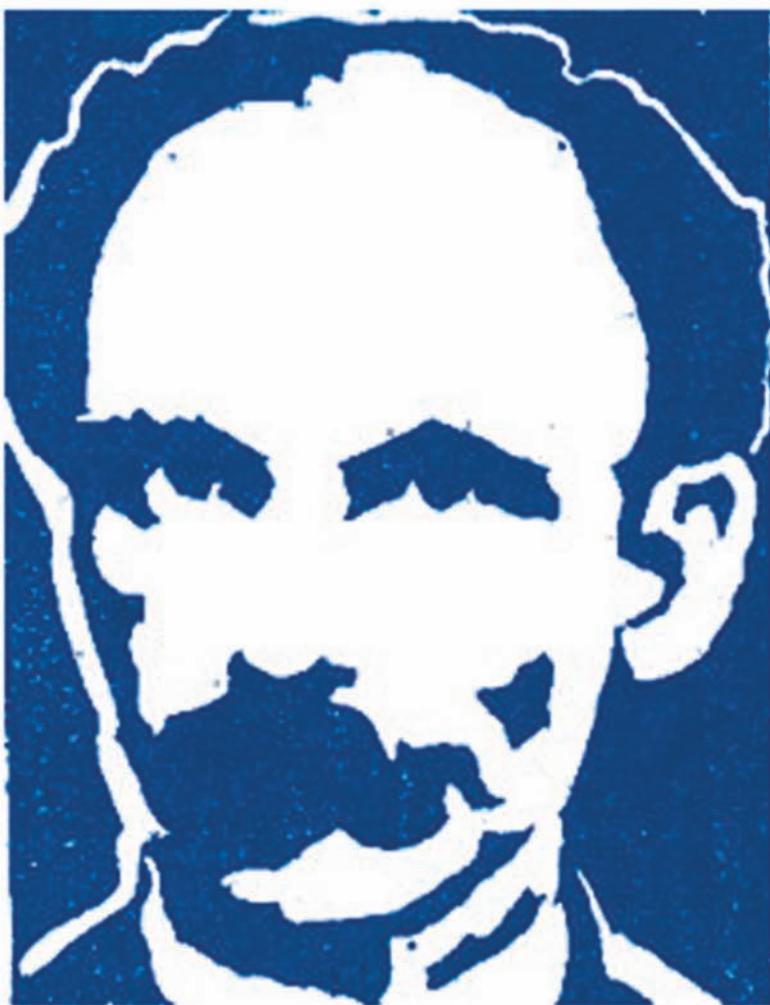
“Man With Glasses” © Lancillotto Bellini



"Kid" © Lancillotto Bellini



“Klimt” © Lancillotto Bellini



“Marti” © Lancillotto Bellini



“Moustache” © Lancillotto Bellini



“Ray Johnson” © Lancillotto Bellini



“Smile” © Lancillotto Bellini



"Stare" © Lancillotto Bellini



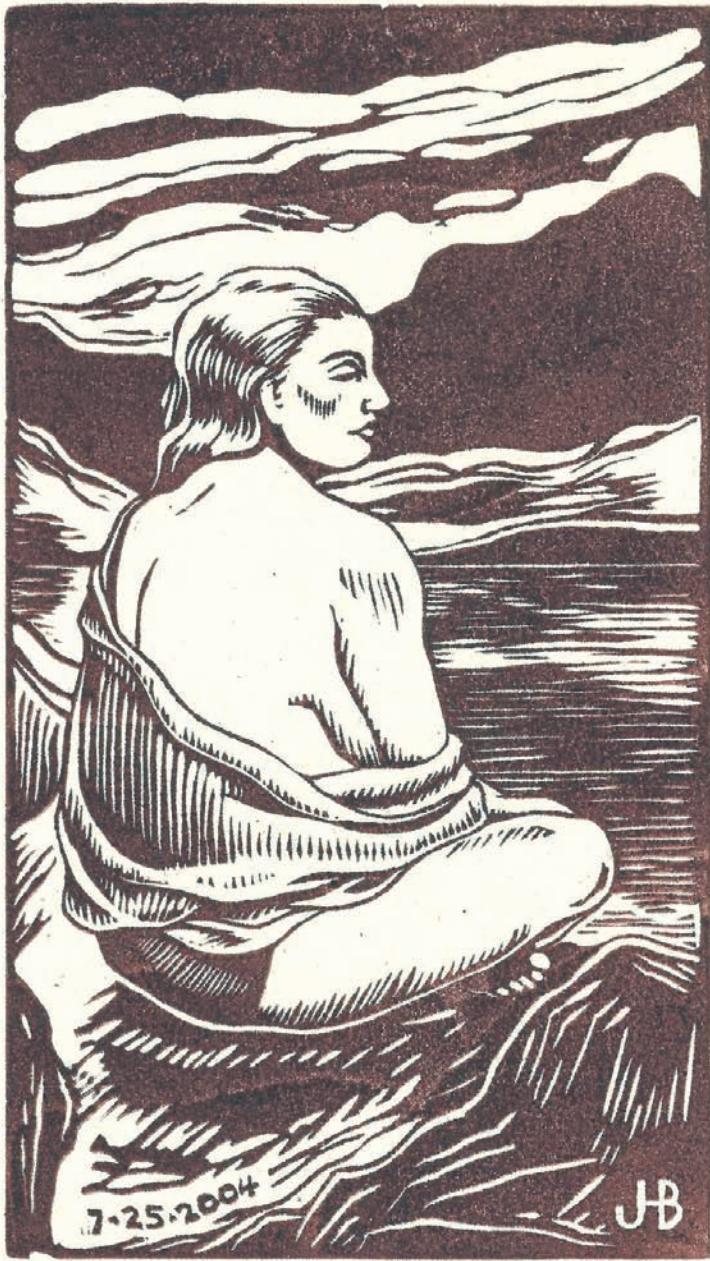
“Woman Laughing” © Lancillotto Bellini

TALKING WITH  
FRIENDS



✓ 20.2004  
JB CAN BE  
INSPIRING

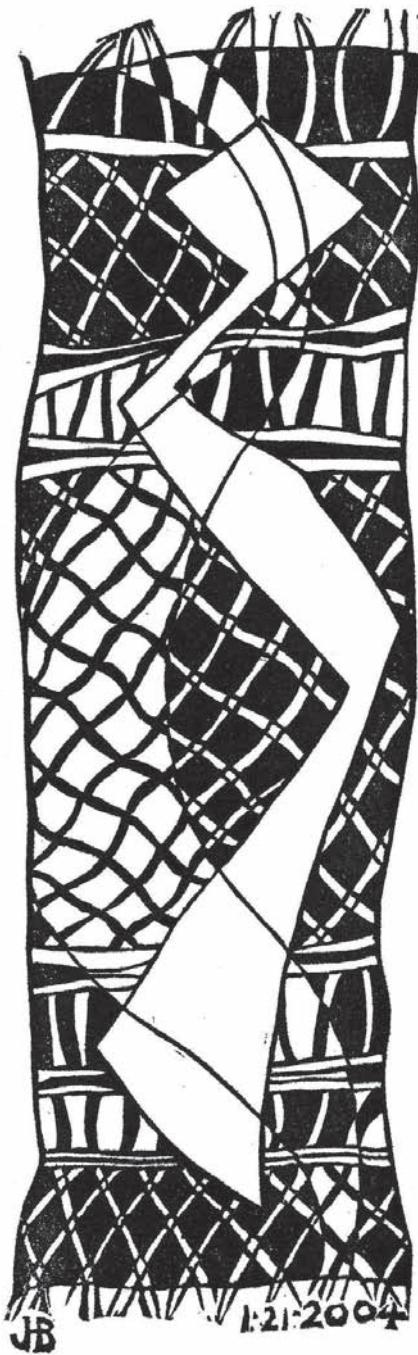
“Talking With Friends” © Julie Hagan Bloch



"Ina 2" © Julie Hagan Bloch



"Ina 4" © Julie Hagan Bloch



"Rugnet" © Julie Hagan Bloch



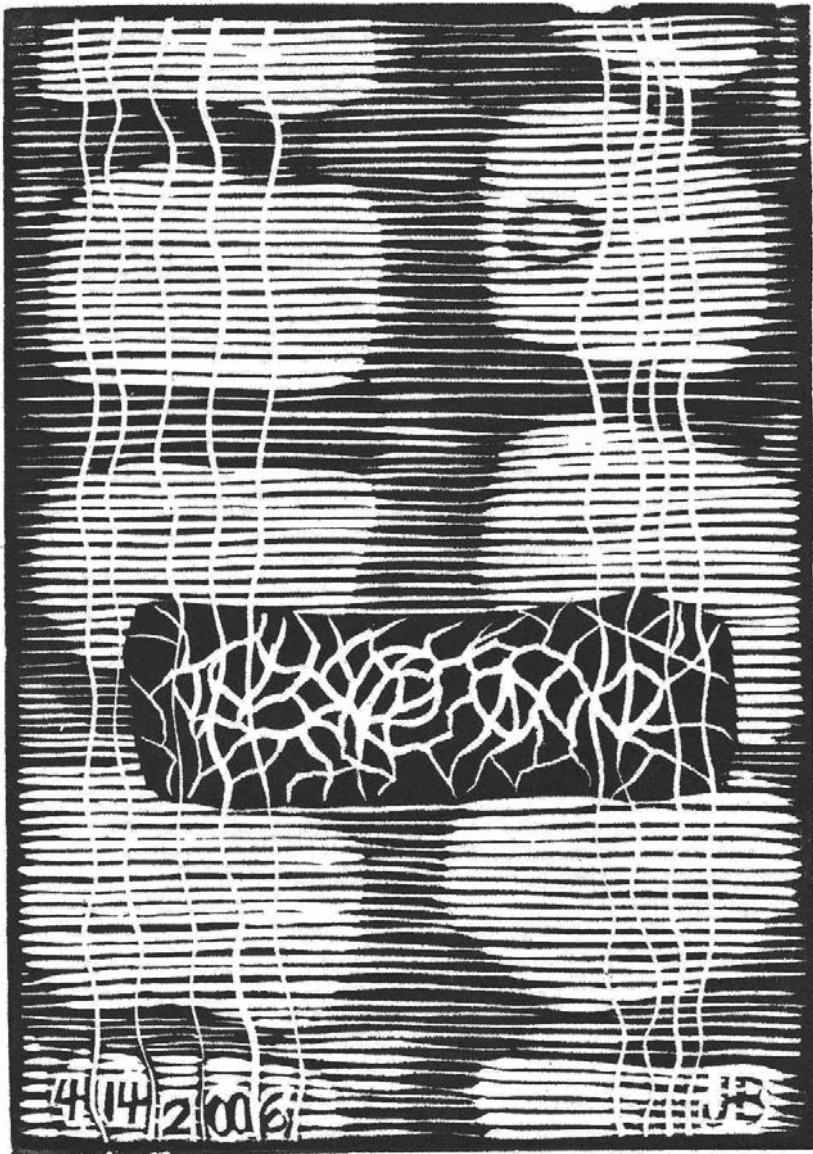
“Hoofbird” © Julie Hagan Bloch



“Drum Pattern” © Julie Hagan Bloch



“Overlap” © Julie Hagan Bloch 2006



"Rocks & Water" © Julie Hagan Bloch



"Spotted Pitcher" © Julie Hagan Bloch



© Jules Davis



© Jules Davis



© Jules Davis



© Jules Davis



© Jules Davis



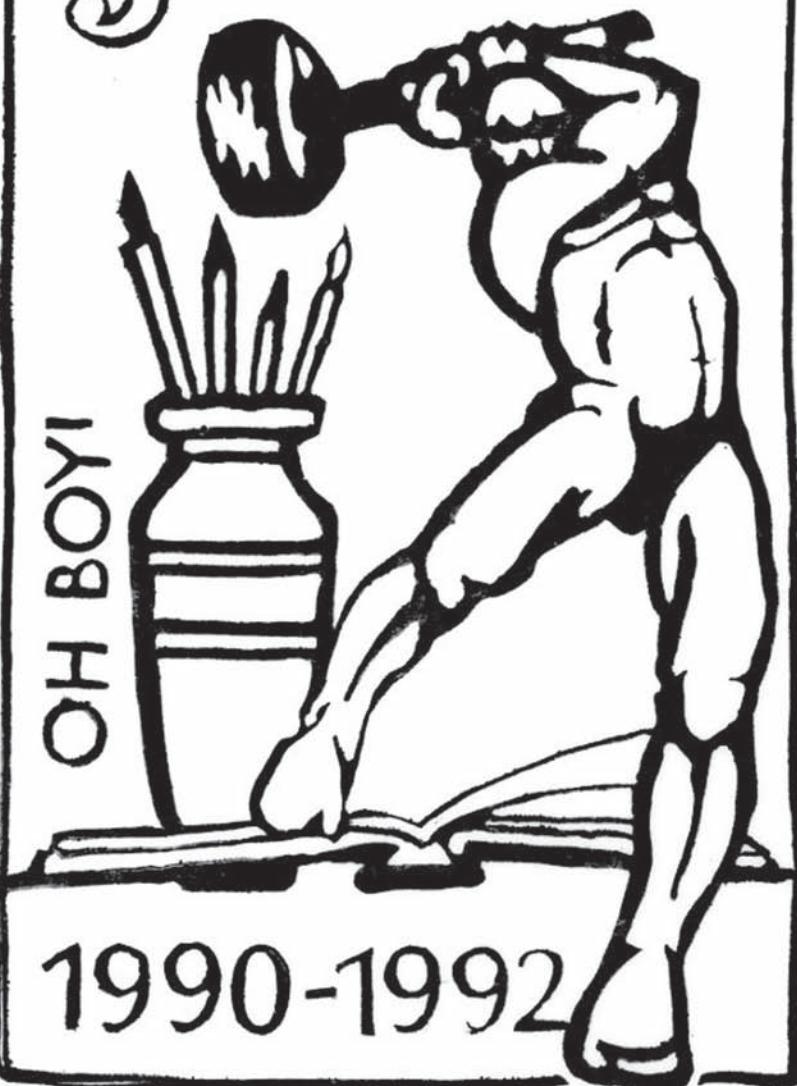
© Jules Davis



© Jules Davis

5

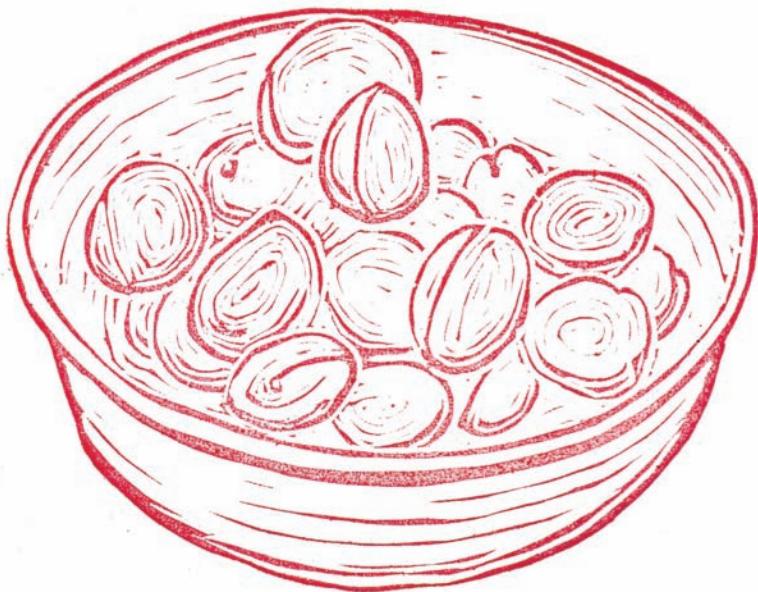
THE BOOK



© Jules Davis



© Jules Davis



# APRICOTS IN KANSAS

© Eric Farnsworth



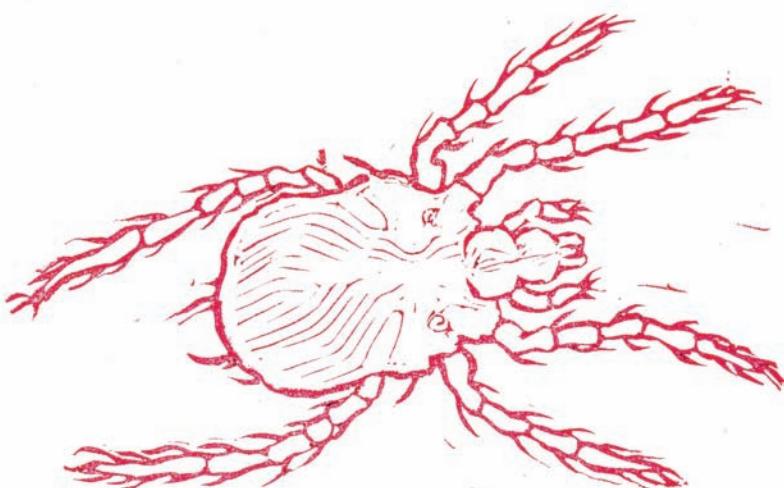
ASIMINA  
TRILOBA

© Eric Farnsworth



DIOSPYROS  
VIRGINIANA

© Eric Farnsworth



**EUTROMBICULA ALFREDDUGESI**  
(130X)

© Eric Farnsworth

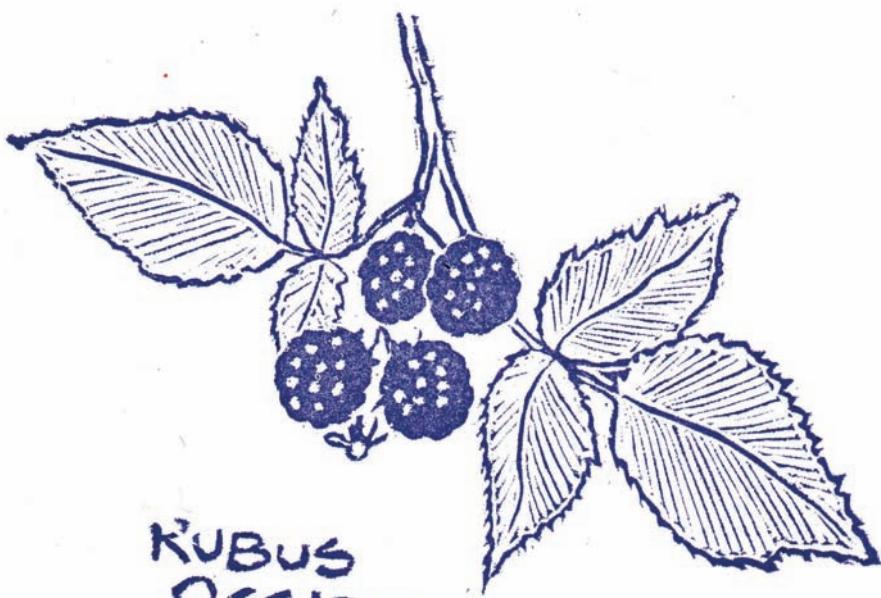


© Eric Farnsworth

PYRUS  
COMMUNIS

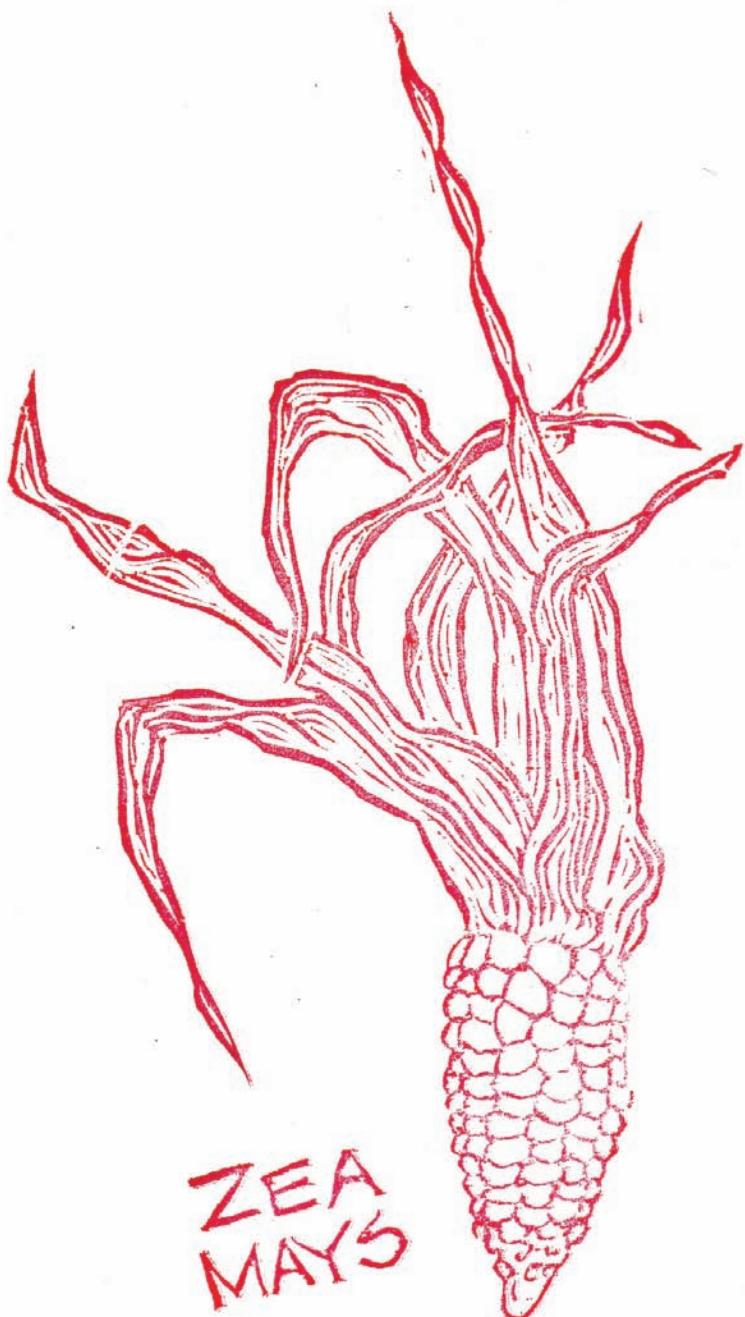


© Eric Farnsworth



RUBUS  
OCCIDENTALIS

© Eric Farnsworth



ZEA  
MAYS

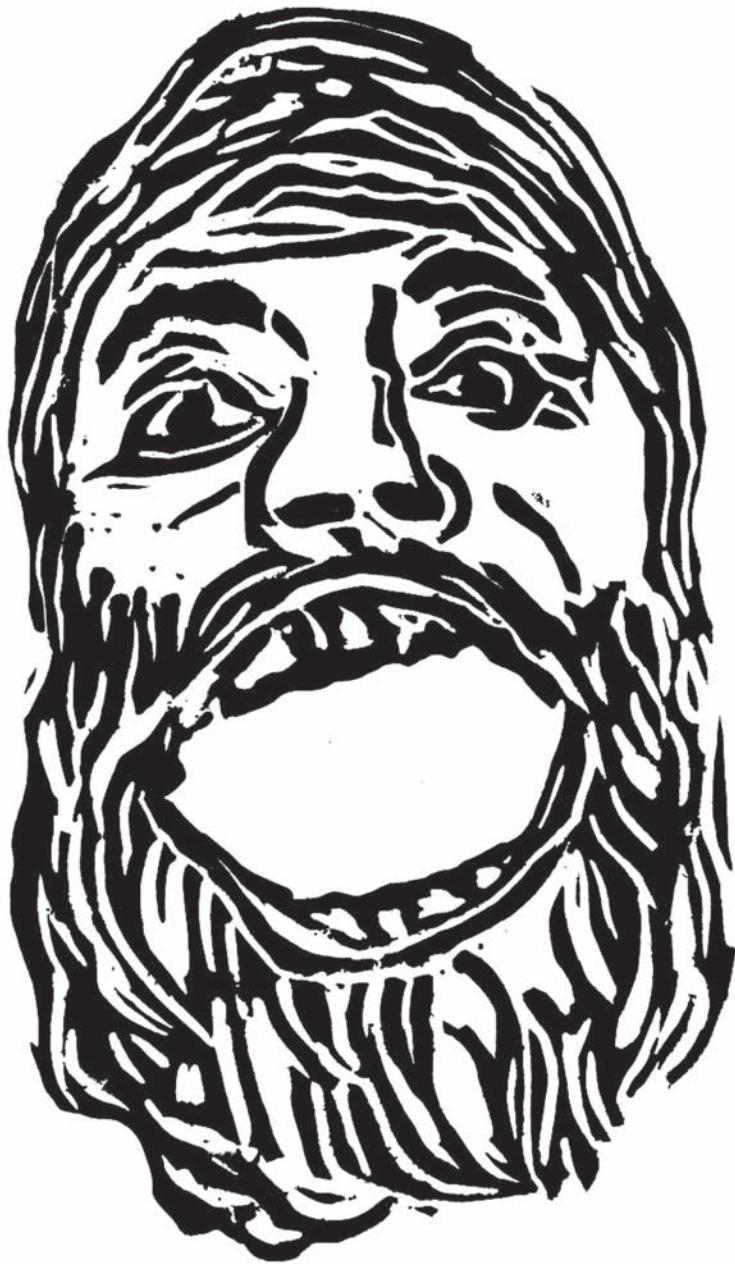
© Eric Farnsworth



© Ed Giecek



© Ed Giecek



© Ed Giecek



© Ed Giecek



© Ed Giecek



© Ed Giecek



© Ed Giecek



© Ed Giecek



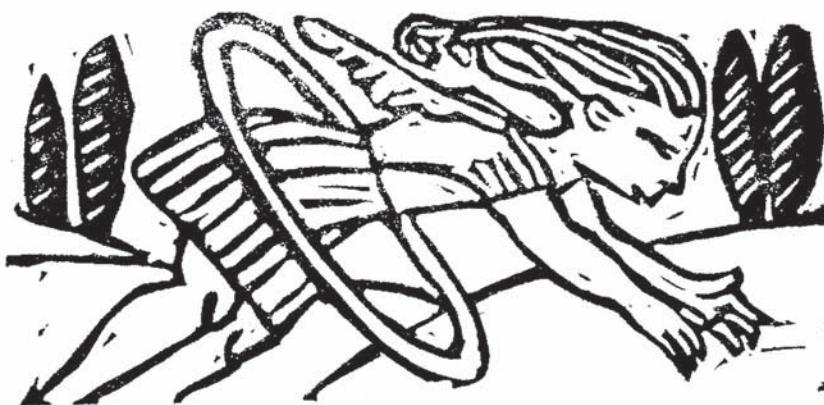
© Ed Giecek



© Ingrid Van Kogelenberg



© Ingrid Van Kogelenberg



© Ingrid Van Kogelenberg



© Ingrid Van Kogelenberg



© Ingrid Van Kogelenberg



© Ingrid Van Kogelenberg



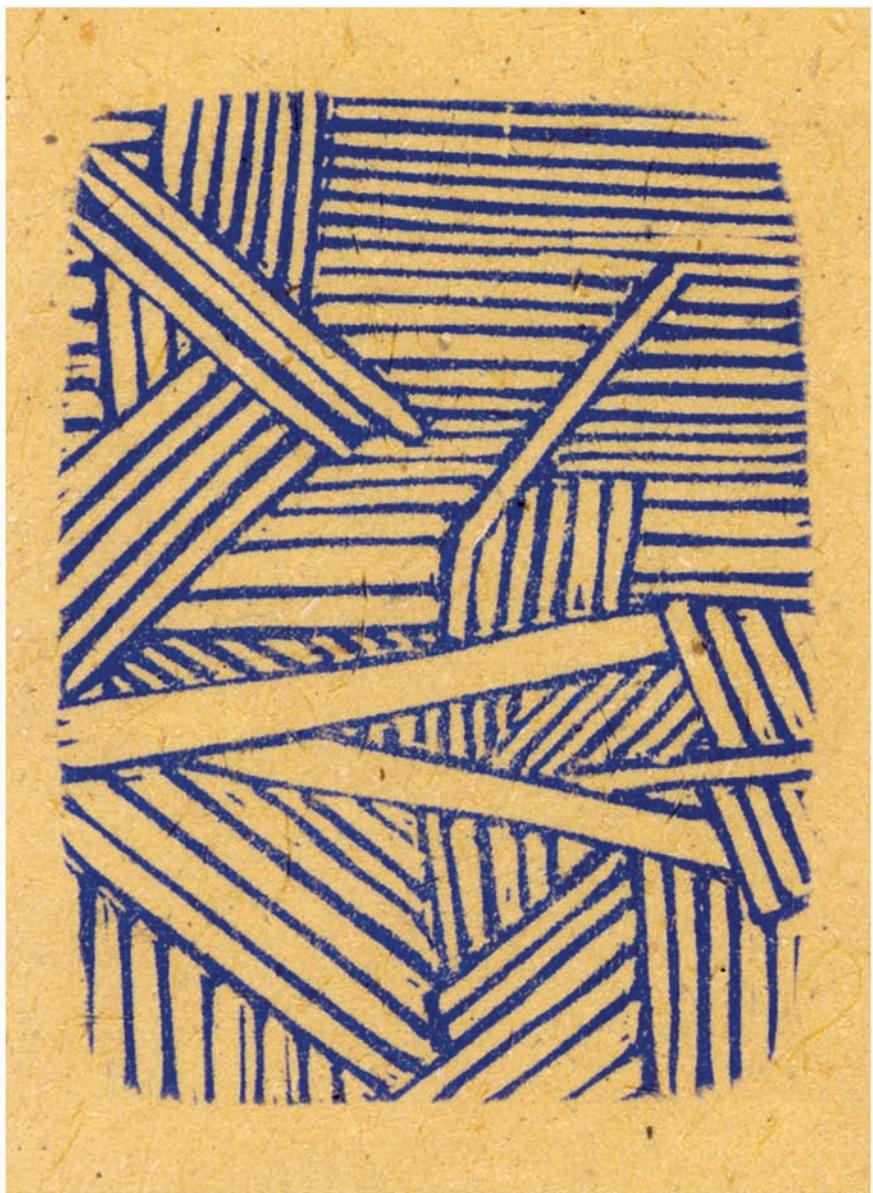
© Ingrid Van Kogelenberg



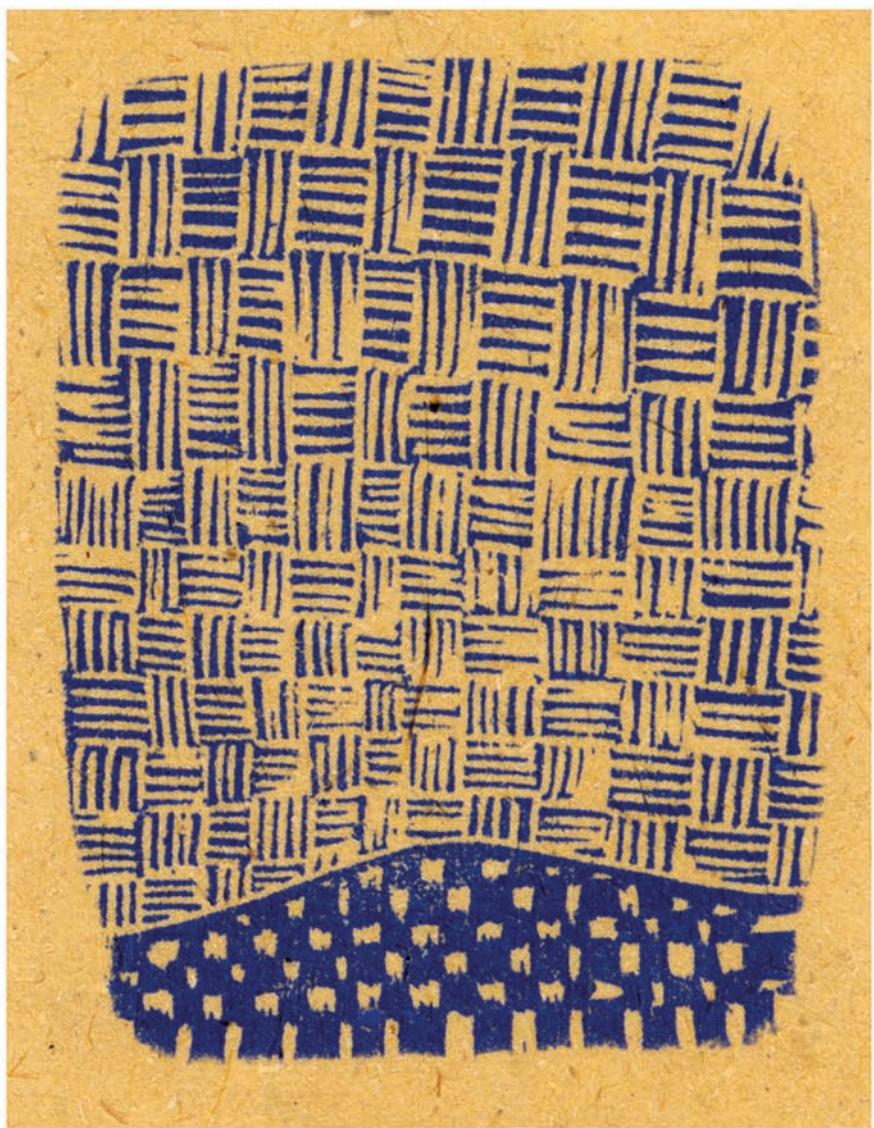
© Ingrid Van Kogelenberg



© Ingrid Van Kogelenberg



Abstract Composition-1 © John Mountain 2005



Abstract Composition-2 © John Mountain 2005



Child © John Mountain 2005



Coffee Pot © John Mountain 2004



Couple © John Mountain 2004



Downhill © John Mountain 2004



Flowers © John Mountain 2004



Nakuru Flamingoes © John Mountain 2004



Standing Man © John Mountain 2005



© Art Naphro



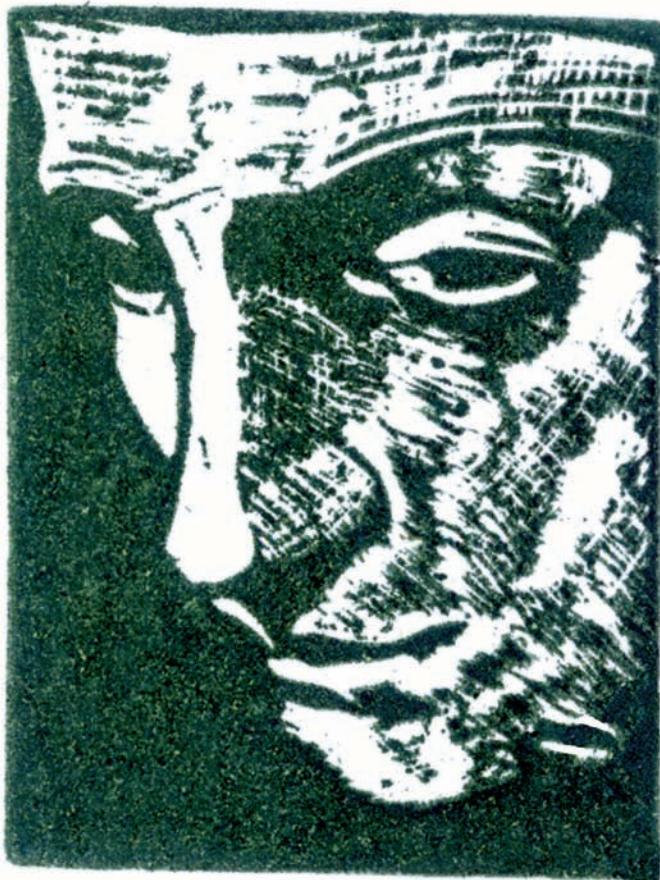
© Art Naphro



© Art Naphro



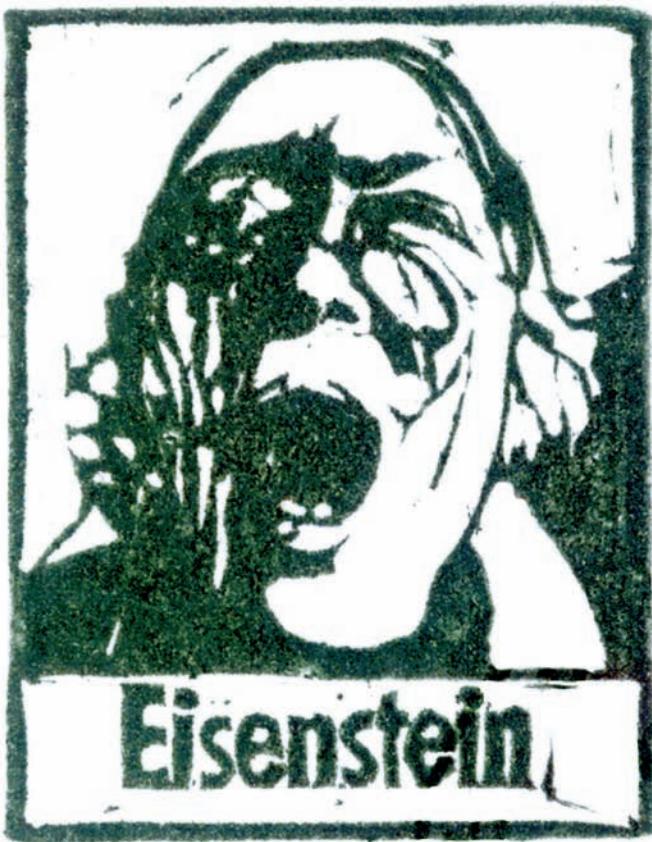
© Art Naphro



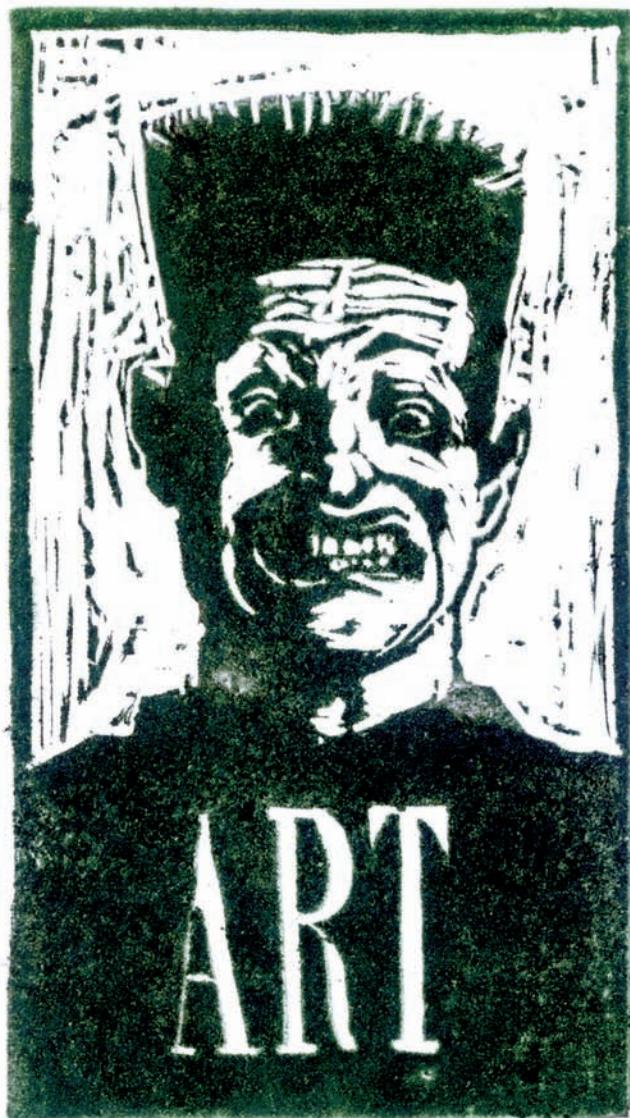
© Art Naphro



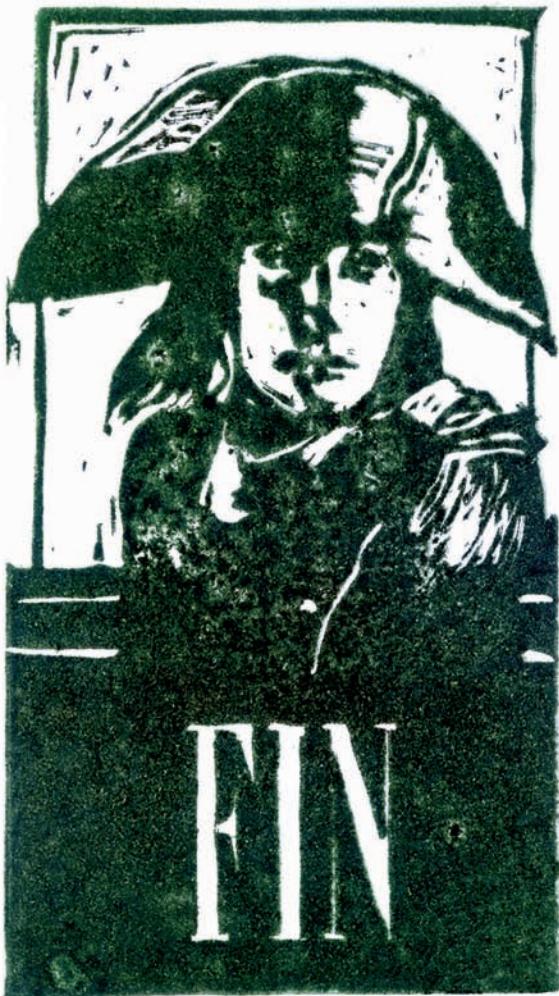
© Art Naphro



© Art Naphro



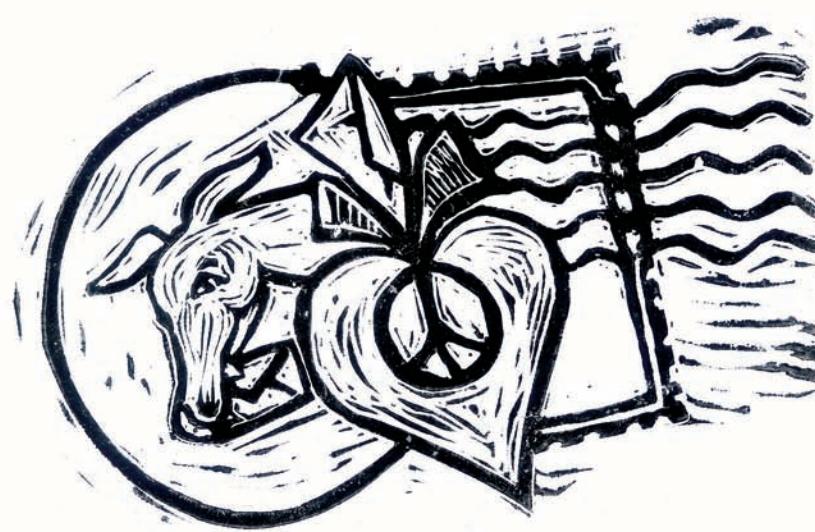
© Art Naphro



© Art Naphro



© Neosho 2009



© Neosho 2009



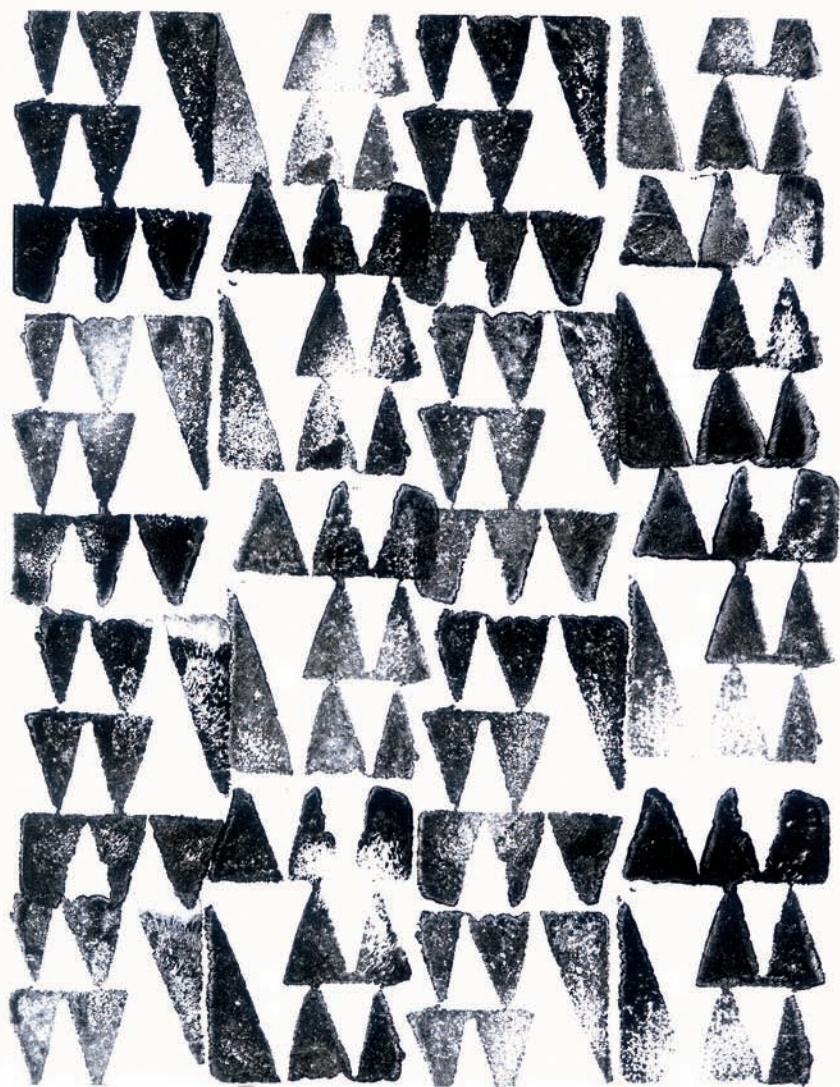
© Neosho 2009



© Neosho 2009



© Neosho 2009



© Neosho 2009



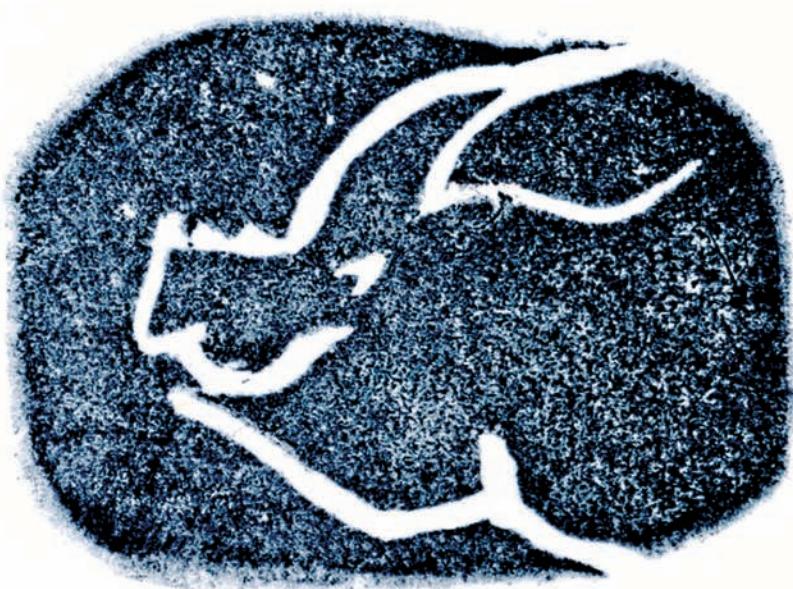
© Neosho 2009



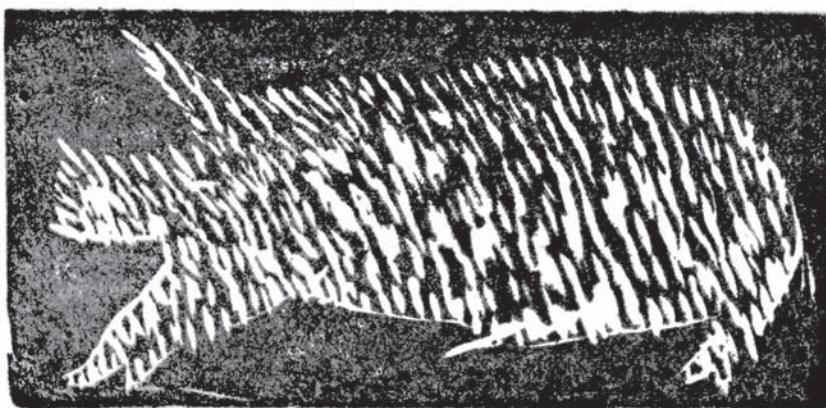
© Neosho 2009



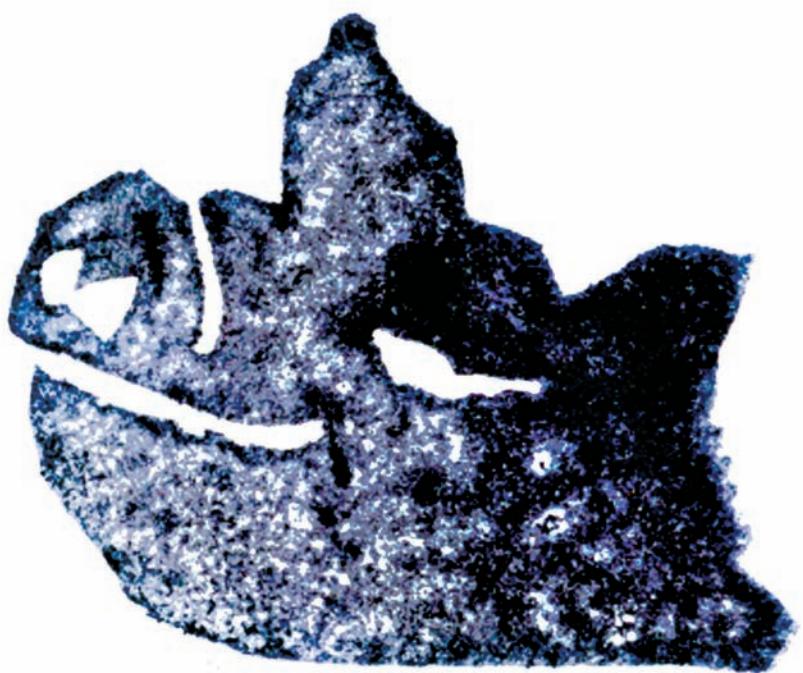
© Neosho 2009



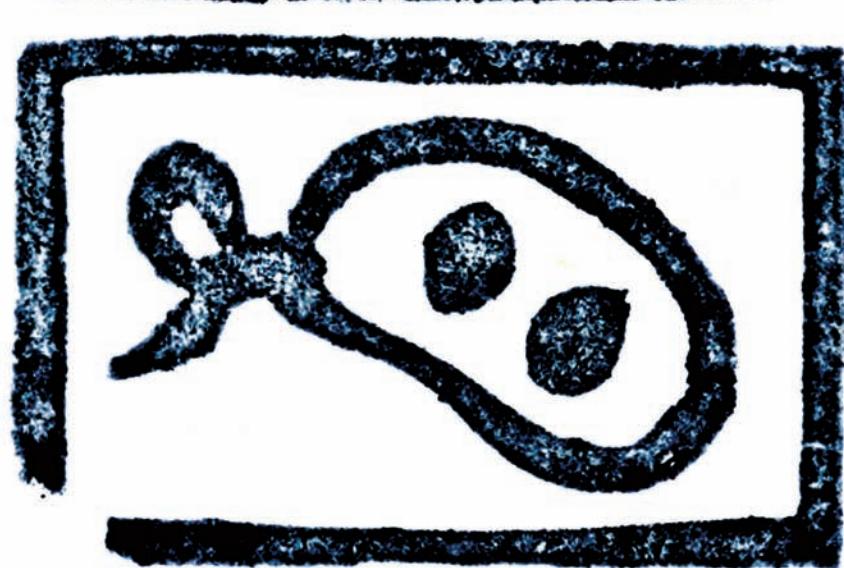
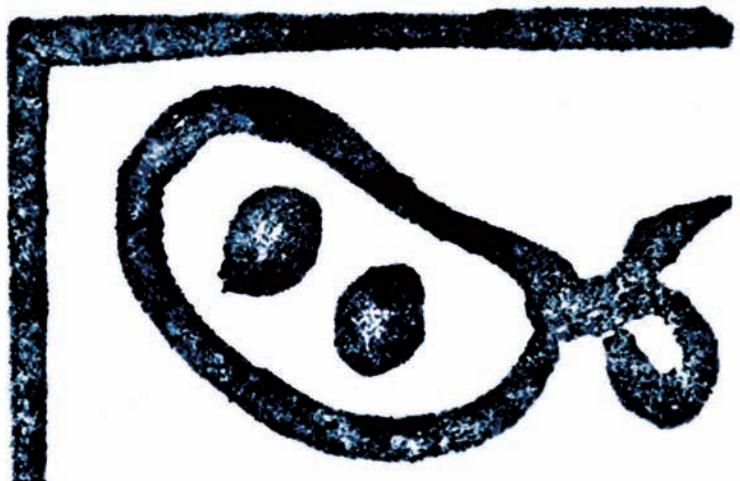
© Baudhuin Simon (aka Pig Dada)



© Baudhuin Simon (aka Pig Dada)



© Baudhuin Simon (aka Pig Dada)



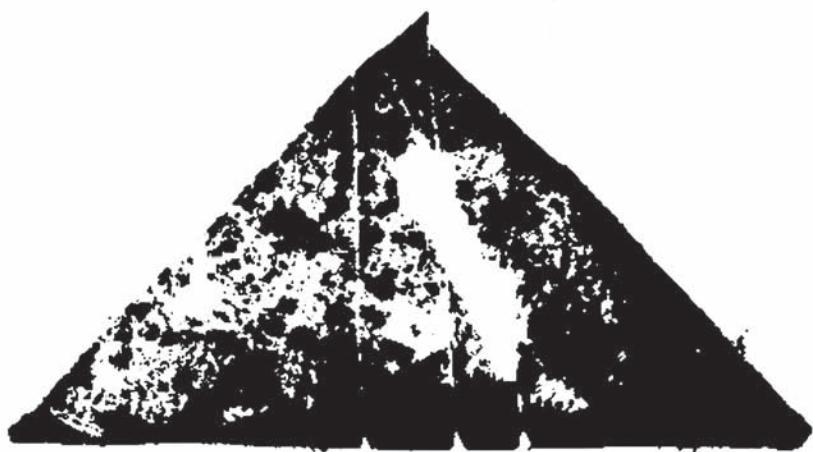
© Baudhuin Simon (aka Pig Dada)



© Baudhuin Simon (aka Pig Dada)

POEM

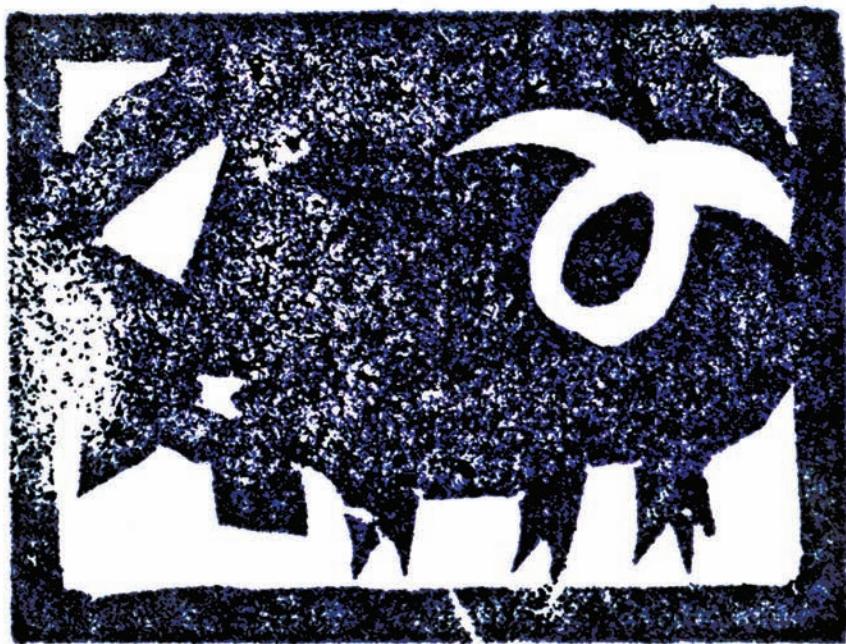
© Baudhuin Simon (aka Pig Dada)



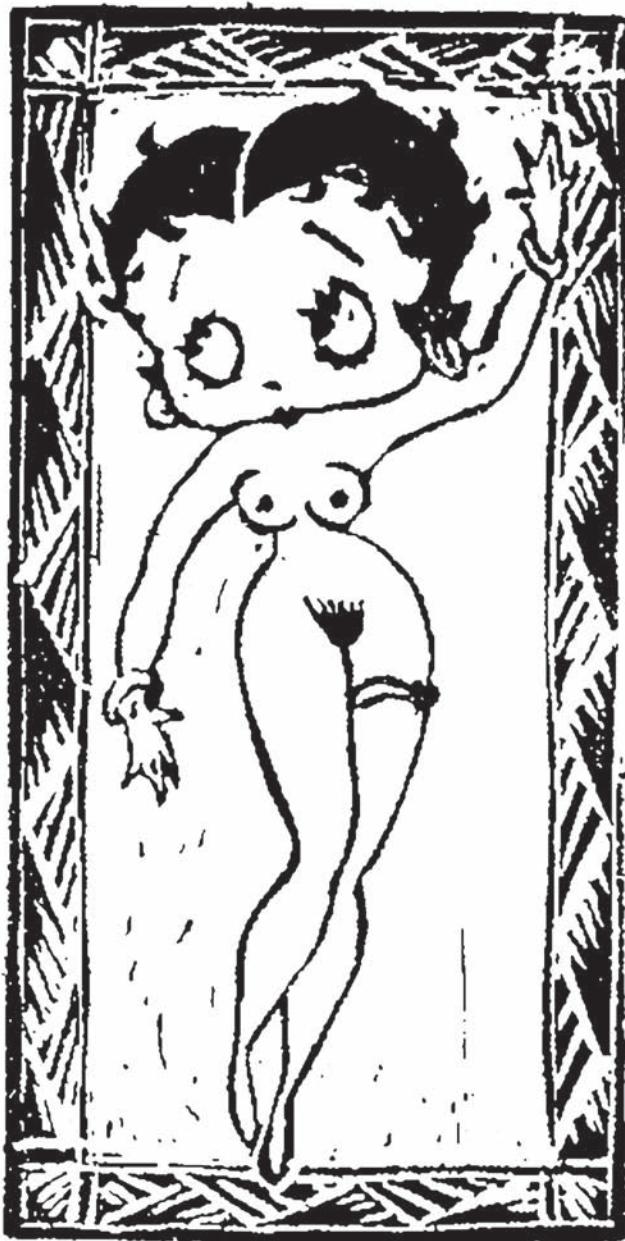
© Baudhuin Simon (aka Pig Dada)



© Baudhuin Simon (aka Pig Dada)



© Baudhuin Simon (aka Pig Dada)



© John Tostado



© John Tostado



© John Tostado



© John Tostado



© John Tostado



© John Tostado



© John Tostado



© John Tostado



© John Tostado

# INDEX

Introduction .....	Page 3
Eraser-Carving .....	4
Darlene Altschul .....	9
Lacillotto Bellini .....	18
Julie Hagan Bloch .....	27
Jules Davis .....	36
Eric Farnsworth .....	44
Ed Giecek .....	53
Ingrid Van Kogelenberg .....	62
John Mountain .....	71
Art Naphro .....	80
Neosho .....	89
Baudhuin Simon .....	98
John Tostado .....	107
Index .....	116
Credits .....	117

## **CREDITS**

Text © John Mountain  
Pdf by DKA 2010

