

Statement by Jon Cone on Printing Works of Art by Eru Narayana

When I was first approached by Eru to look at his work and to listen to his tapes I was asked to do so in reference to the potential for a collaboration between himself and my studio. And so I sat with the work, and I listened to his voice while he was walking and I realized that by walking Eru understood walking as did those wonderful thinkers in the past like Rousseau and Kant who tickled us with what early humankind may have been like, and Nietzsche and Jack Kerouac who were also prolific walkers. Not that these thinkers liked to take walks as in strolls. Rather they walked 1000s of kilometers and quite often. In fact, they were the type of walkers one wonders when and how they had time to work.

But, they wrote that much of what they published was a result of walking. The meditative state. And I understand this state because I am an endurance cyclist and although not walking for months on end, I do cycle for 1000s of kms at a time and sleep on the ground for a month and wonder myself how I have enough time to do everything that it is that I do. Yet, I do not believe I am a thinker as much as I believe I am an alchemist, and it is that time cycling through a world for days on days that much of my own original thinking have been born.

Eru, on the other hand, through walking, found in his world he could be visited not by ideas which are constantly swirling around the world waiting for souls to latch onto them. He was a diviner to spirits which swirl around the world trying to connect to a soul for whatever divine purposes they have. He is a seeker and a seer. And he tells his story and theirs in a way that fascinated me because I have been close to that world through others. And I have found myself on many occasions entering into worlds that both scared and fascinated me because of the confrontations I had with myself and past selves which I share some DNA with.

So, when listening to a tape that Eru had made for me, had asked me to listen to, had asked me to be open to, I closed my eyes in thought and almost immediately found myself in front of the Great Frieze of Bison inside Font-de-Gaume cave. That same feeling, that same realization that we are necessarily not the end evolution point in humankind. The realization that whoever painted the Great Frieze more than 25,000 years ago was as evolved if not more evolved than I at that moment was a life changing event in that cave. I have been there five times since with always the same reaction, the same tears, the same yearning that comes from witnessing something witnessing me witnessing it back. The frieze is enormous and the five bison's eyes follow your eyes as you walk towards it or away from it or along side of it. There is no escaping their gaze. It is not accidental.

The first time I found myself in Font-de-Gaume it was from an invitation to join an archeologist with permission to see the absolute farthest most gallery. There where the fissure that opened from the earth and from where the water came that carved out this long series of caves is an un-photographed series of cave paintings of those who painted the frieze or were present during the first existence of the frieze. Their heads some bearded and some without. What startled me was how much they looked like me or like you, and how unlike they looked like what I had been led to believe was early man. I was there in this small group as someone who understood art among others who understood bones and others who seemed not to understand anything that they were witnessing. What everyone was looking for was so obviously in front of their noses, but they were blind. They can not see art. They can not read art. They understood it only to have "no meaning". One said, "Man could not possibly have intellectual thought 25,000 years ago". "One man, one crayon, one night," said another.

And so while I could not return to the back most galleries, I could return as a tourist to see the Great Frieze and look at the bison looking at me and knowing that I had seen the portraits and the line of painted animals in their courtship and mating rituals that emanated out from the fissure and back

into the fissure. The fissure, the vulva of Earth. And at Font-de-Gaumme this fissure is the holiest of holies of early cave art and really anthropology if one is open to believing that humankind is not fundamentally different today as it was 25,000 years ago; a drop in time.

And I thought of the gods that Eru has channeled through him and their messages and warnings for our earth. And I realized that I had had this experience in Font-de-Gaume in the vulva of that cave seeing things that so few today have, but more than likely most those living at that time in or near the cave had seen. I had seen something that was once common to knowledge and now desperately trying to communicate to so many who can hear but will not listen. And I thought that though I am not a channeler, and I am not a priest, that I am like the painter of the Great Frieze; someone who must have interpreted what others knew, what others had seen, what others had heard. I visited some 20 caves throughout France and Spain to look and to try and listen and I always came away seeing that this was a language, that there were symbols common to caves though 1000 miles apart. And I never felt 25,000 years older than those who painted there.

And I told Eru about Font-de-Gaume and how I wanted to work with hand ground pigment and that paper would be my cave wall, and that rather than paint these symbols, the language that I saw in so many caves, I would put this interpretation into printmaking - with that intention that it should be widely seen - but knowing it will not. It will be seen by one person as Eru has designed. But my work, my toil, my walking so to speak, that effort will be the same whether it is all intended for one or intended as a multiple, because the medium of printmaking itself is one of struggle and one of interpretation and intentions, and one of great mystery which we printmakers call "the accident", the discovery.

My most physical medium is intaglio. The pigment takes many hours to grind fine enough in burnt linseed oil so that it can both be pushed into the etched grooves of the printing plate and yields easily enough to be wiped from the

parts of the plate that are not bitten into. The wiping can be physical where elbows gain aches but can also be sensitive enough to tickle ones fingertips. The press has enormous pressure to force ink from the plate into the damp yielding paper. And the paper will not yield to the pressure unless made specifically to. And this paper is a container for the expression and therefore itself I thought should be special. We would make it for this project in the same way he/she/they who painted the Great Frieze had found the bison already there in the shape of the cave wall. We would form this sheet to be thick, maybe too thick, and bulbous and absorbent to withstand so many times through the press, and yet be sensitive enough to yield subtlety when needed.

And so I envision molding sheets of handmade paper exclusively for an image. The color of the paper and its specific size by what the image communicates to me. And I will start with a neat stack of this paper perhaps 36 sheets. To start with six sheets as a beginning and go as far as that might allow. Then gain something from it to bring to the next... and again, and again, and again, and finally execute the work from what I have experienced, from what proofs have been successful, and from accidents have allowed themselves to manifest so that I may take advantage in perfecting them.

It is a long process. Weeks. Not days. And there is much time between printmaking one day and another to wait for the dry down. To see how a pigment ground into an ink to be printed under another color of ink reacts together, and what they form ultimately when dry. Then with three inks, always in threes so that one can give a different meaning to the other two like the triangles painted in the entrances of the caves. One can see this happen in the first hour of drying. But, the paper then deforms. The intaglio studio is one of moisture. Paper is soaked and damped to be pliable under the great pressure of the top roller and the blankets of woven felt that protect the paper from the great force. This moisture though either attracts or repels the ink. There is only one point where it is not too wet and not too dry. So

prints find their way back into plastic while the work continues. Not unlike caves which are damp here and dry there.

Someone heard or saw something say the bison would see being seen. We can't know, but we can sense who painted the Bison seeing you see them.

How does Font-de-Gaume cave become to be painted? We only know what pigments were used. Not because they were left behind, and some were, but because the paintings have now been analyzed. We do not know who painted it. We can not know what they meant because they left only the work as evidence. And now we can only visit in small groups for only 20 minutes penetrating only a small way in as our breath will now make the paintings fade.

I am going to be the cave printmaker. I will be the one who interprets he who saw and he who heard. And I will invent some new way of printmaking while I interpret, because I want this process to be unlike anything else. Necessarily, I will begin and stop and react and reassess to begin again. And I will necessarily begin to leave behind in my footsteps, printed proofs. Proofs are the substance of printmaking as are concepts that fall behind in design. Some of them will be necessary to guide the further work to show what 2 or 3 or 6 colors look like before receiving more. They are necessary in order to retrace one's path. And some of them will be so beautiful in that State or that Trial that they can not be discarded. And this constant trialing of colors one on another, this constant trying of technique or method or pigment or transparency or addition or subtraction or reversing the order, leaves behind Trial and State Proofs. The 36 sheets become fewer and fewer. If more are needed they will be used. It is impossible to know where one ends only where one begins in collaborative experimental printmaking. At times I will be the handmaiden in the act between paper and Eru. At times I will be the fearless one venturing forward. At times Eru will be the one that sees something different than can I.

And at some point in this creative process we will sit perhaps on table tops, because table tops are best for sitting and crossing one's heels and swinging ones legs back and forth which helps pass the time staring at Proofs for an hour or so, listening with our eyes at what they are saying they need to be finished. It is often during this time that the one is recognized. The Bon a Tirer. The print that is "good to pull". The print that will be the example by which the edition will be matched to and will replicate as closely as possible. But in this cave, there is only one. There will be no edition (the copies). And after the Bon a Tirer is signed for what it is, all of the printing plates will be inked for one last time and scratched deeply with an X and printed to prove their cancellation. After which only the Trial and State and Working Proofs along with the Bon a Tirer that Eru signs and that I chop with my printers mark will be joined together into a special portfolio made exclusively for the project that is made to its exact specifications in length, width and height to house them archivally for centuries if need be. Or they can be removed and viewed and framed if desired. But, every other sheet of paper that was involved in the project is destroyed. Nothing exists. Not even the capability to repeat it. Not some copy in case one needs it. The only other sheet is small. It is called the Documentation Sheet which indicates that every print that exists is signed and identified and notated, and that everything else has been destroyed along with the plates.

This is as close as I can get to those who painted Font-de-Gaume and why I will only print on Mur-de-la-grotte 600gsm handmade paper and in this manner.

I have been involved in some extraordinary print projects. It took me three years to complete Richard Avedon's last living portfolio, and two years to complete Gordon Park's retrospective prints for the Hirshorn Museum. And I lived and worked along side Gregory Colbert to produce his enormous Nomadic Museum exhibitions of the Ashes and Snow prints. These in particular were seen by more than 13 million people making it the most viewed exhibition in history. But Eru's concept of one print and one holder

of that print is both novel and brings the process into a possibility of collaboration between artist, printmaker, and the holder of the print. It is just not anything ever conceived before and perhaps unique to this era, this time, this culture. It is to me an extraordinary opportunity to make art history.