



Creative Printmaking Workshop

Il Bisonte, Florence April – May 2011

with Robin Ezra and Annie Day

by Dan Hughes

A group of printmakers joined Robin Ezra and Annie Day, for their annual foray of creative printmaking on the beautiful banks of the River Arno in Florence.

Six Australians and a New Zealander took up the invitation to Florence to explore the intricacies of Waterless Lithography at historical studio Il Bisonte, while also soaking up all of the culture and cuisine this jewel of the Renaissance has to offer.

After arriving in Florence on April 26th, the printmakers were welcomed by Simone Guaita, Il Bisonte's manager, and were treated to a short history of the wonderful studio along with reviewing works by some of the great artists that have created there.

That same evening the printmakers, in true Italian style, dined and socialised together, sharing anecdotes and enjoying getting to know each other before following in the footsteps of the masters to create some wonderful pieces.



Some of the 2011 participants

In their spare time the artists revelled in the atmosphere of one of the most beautiful cities in the world, with incredible museums, churches, palaces and sights that are very different from wide open spaces of home.

Evenings were spent strolling through the city streets, looking at the Ponte Vecchio bathed in the moonlight while pondering whether to indulge in another gelato. In the soft spring sunshine, beautifully crafted scarves and bags were purchased from vendors in the maze of streets in the historic centre.



Around the town in Florence

Our participants also enjoyed the legendary markets of the city. In particular, the Central and San Ambrogio markets offering a spectacular range of locally produced goods, including wonderful cheeses and cold meats with great local wines on offer to accompany them.

Also included in the sojourn were two sessions with Elisabetta Cappugi, a Tuscan Art Historian, who gave a guided walk and talk through many of the Florentine Renaissance landmarks. After meeting in the Piazza della Signoria and viewing the sculptures in the Loggia, the group ventured into the Uffizi to see masterworks by artists such as Giotto, Lippi, Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Botticelli and Verrocchio.

A second session explored the outline of Florence as the old Roman Town; a faded footprint that lay not too far under the surface of the contemporary cobble-stoned streets. At the Bargello the artists studied sculptures by Leonardo, Donatello, Verrocchio and Michelangelo. While walking to Santa Croce, Elisabetta relayed stories of the various floods that have affected Florence over the years. Inside the church the group were awed by the tombs of Michelangelo and Galileo laying alongside many other memorials to famous Italians such as Dante Aligheri, and the composer Rossini.



Around the studio courtyard

During the course, the printmakers spent at least six hours a day studying the various techniques of waterless lithography in the inspiring surrounds of the historic Il Bisonte.

Started by staunch partisan Maria Luigia Guaita in 1959, Il Bisonte originated when Maria purchased redundant lithographic equipment from the map making department of the Italian Geographic Institute. The skilled pressmen who formerly made the maps were also taken on by Maria as her expert printers, and Il Bisonte was born.

Many artists were invited to make plates and work at the studio. Several Italian futurist painters took up the offer and were followed by luminaries such as Picasso, Lipchitz, Calder, Sutherland and Wunderlich. Slowly the reputation of Il Bisonte grew into the legend it is today.

The history of the studio was not all plain sailing however. Disaster struck in 1966 when the Arno flooded Florence to an unprecedented height, permanently ruining many wonderful artworks and inundating Il Bisonte to just below ceiling height.

Moore and many other famous printmakers came to the rescue and helped Il Bisonte to start anew. Moore created many of his archetypal etchings of the human figure whilst assisting with the studio's restoration. In 1983, housed in the former stables of the Pallazzo Serristori, Il Bisonte formally became a school of printmaking.

Although never their original intention, the printmakers decided to create a wonderful artists book as a lasting memento of the 2011 course. Printed on 1960s Vintage Magnani Paper offered by Professore Vincenzo, the visitors agreed the finished product was a fitting testament to a fantastic Florentine adventure.

