

BERNARD CHILDS

MASTER PRINTMAKER

February 2nd – March 11th, 2017

Opening Reception: Thursday, February 2nd, 5:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M.

“True printmaking is a risky business, and risk is worthwhile. It leaves the artist free to use his media in a truly creative sense. He doesn’t care how long it takes to perfect a plate or to find or create the tools with which to make it. Nor does he care how many proofs he may have to pull to get the one which satisfies him. It may take six months or two years, but the glow he gets from that first satisfactory proof may last through the next dozen.”

–Bernard Childs, quoted in idea, Toyko in 1961 and slightly revised, in The Art Gallery Magazine, Ivoryton in 1971.

Anders Wahlstedt Fine Art is pleased to present an exhibition of nine exceptional intaglio prints by Bernard Childs. Childs is widely regarded as one of the finest engraver of the twentieth century and these prints offer a fascinating window onto his exacting process—one defined by a spirit of experimentation and meticulous refinement. Included in the exhibition are three iterations of *Holocaust*, which conclude spectacularly in 1968’s *Holocaust I*. *Holocaust I* is the result of a five-year meditation on the prospect of a nuclear conflagration that could destroy the planet and all that inhabited it. The impetus for this project was a 1962 visit by the artist to a nuclear cyclotron with a German scientist. As he stood inside, Childs experienced a moment of reckoning, and indeed the horrifying possibilities it brought to mind would inform much of his work in the following years. The plate for *Holocaust I* is a culmination of Childs’ considerable engraving powers, while the color is a stunning example of the inking techniques that the artist began developing in the late 1950’s.

Bernard Childs was born in Brooklyn in 1910 to Russian immigrant parents. He began to make art as a high school student in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. In 1928 he received a scholarship that enabled him to attend the University of Pennsylvania, but left after two years to move to New York. In New York, Childs worked by day and studied by night with the renowned Kimon Nicolaïdes at the Art Students League. Childs also often trekked to then rural Queens to work under the famed Danish silversmith Peer Smed, whom he credits for imbuing him with his love of metal. The economic and social uncertainties of the 1930s took him away from his work as an artist, and Childs did not begin drawing again until he found himself in the South Pacific, serving as a quartermaster aboard the destroyer escort USS Wesson during World War II. Childs’ ship was struck by a Kamikaze at Okinawa, and the artist endured two years of intermittent hospitalization after returning to New York at the end of the war. In 1947, his recovery complete, Childs returned to his artistic practice and education wholeheartedly, studying under Amédée

Ozenfant, who would become a good friend of the artist. In 1951, Childs moved to Europe, where he mounted his first solo exhibition at the revered Galleria dell'Obelisco in Rome. Following a year spent in Italy, Childs settled in Paris, quickly becoming part of the European vanguard.

When Childs began his printmaking in 1954 at Atelier 17, the famed Parisian printing workshop of Stanley William Hayter, he was already an assured and accomplished painter with a mature abstract style. His studies under Peer Smed and his job as a machinist in a wartime factory provided Childs with a diverse set of skills that enabled him to quickly realize that etching and traditional methods of engraving, like the burin or drypoint needle, could not produce the results he desired. He turned instead to power tools, and became one of the first artists to develop new methods of "power drypoint and engraving." Thus, although he spent a few months at Atelier 17, Childs ultimately arrived at his innovative manner of working through independent experiments carried out in his studio with his own press. His expertise in using high speed drills and rotary burrs enabled Childs to compose freely in line and richly textured surfaces. A superlative craftsman, Childs would often take a plate through months of transmutations before arriving at a final aesthetic statement he deemed satisfactory. Many times he printed no editions at all, and often just a single proof from a given plate before transforming it entirely. Childs approached the printing of his finished plates with a similarly exacting sense of experimentation in inking and selected wiping. With few exceptions, he printed all impressions himself.

Prints quickly became an increasingly important part of Childs' artistic oeuvre, and they were met with much critical acclaim. In 1959, only four years after Childs' initial prints were pulled, they were featured in a solo exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. In his subsequent works, those done in the late sixties and early seventies, Childs underwent a stylistic evolution, from his earlier, open linear compositions to denser clusters of line that finally evolved into more concretely structured shapes and textures. Whatever his formal inclinations, his prints suggest both in their titles and visual imagery his ongoing preoccupation with universal and cosmological themes. Gifted with an intelligent and deeply poetic sensibility reinforced by his considerable technical proficiency, Childs was able to make the intangible visible and the ethereal real.

Childs's work is held in the permanent collections of major museums and cultural institutions worldwide including the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the British Museum, London; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; the New York Public Library, New York, NY; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA; the Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; the Cincinnati Museum of Art, Cincinnati, OH; the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, San Francisco, CA; the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT; the Australian National Gallery, Canberra; the Museum of Western Art, Tokyo; and the Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Anders Wahlstedt Fine Art would like to thank Judith Childs, the artist's widow, for her generous support in the organization of this exhibition.