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BIG INK comes to Riverviews Artspace

Casey Gillis Oct 3, 2018

If you go

What: BIG INK Printmaking Workshop

When: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday

Where: Riverviews Artspace, 901 Jefferson St.

Info: (434) 847-7277,
<http://riverviews.net/event/big-ink-printing-workshop>
or <https://bigink.org>

Jill Jensen jokes she had an ulterior motive when she suggested bringing the arts organization BIG INK to Riverviews Artspace this fall.

“I’m on the exhibitions screening committee for Riverviews and when we were proposing shows, I proposed an invitational print show and [inviting] BIG INK to come as a part of it because I thought it would be educational for Lynchburg to see an event like this,” says Jensen, who also is Riverviews’ board president. “And, also, I wanted to participate.”

The New Hampshire-based BIG INK, founded in 2012, works to create a “greater public appreciation for large-scale woodblock printing and extend its practice,” according to the organization’s website, which proudly proclaims, “Welcome to the Woodcut Revolution.”

They do that by setting up what the website Creative North Shore describes as a temporary print shop where artists print original creations that are at least 24 by 36 inches on BIG INK’s giant mobile press, dubbed “The Big Tuna.”

According to BIG INK’s website, The Big Tuna has been set up everywhere from a subway station entrance to the middle of a flea market.

“I am a printmaker and I love the concept of really big prints as a possibility,” says Jensen. “Woodcuts and other relief prints are frequently on the small side, so to have some people who are really vested in the concept of big prints, I thought was really fascinating.”

Woodblock printing is a type of relief printing, or printing from a raised surface. Artists draw a picture onto a flat surface, then use tools to cut away the areas that will not print. Ink is then spread on the plate, which is pressed onto paper to make the final print.

For woodcuts, artists carve into blocks of wood.

“Most people don’t understand what printmaking as an art form is,” Jensen says. “People are so used to pressing the print button on the computer and something pops out. They really don’t have a concept of how physical the whole process is — from concept to laying out your work, your image, on wood, then carving the whole plate, inking it and running it through an etching press.

“It’s a very physical process, which most people do not have an opportunity to see.”

The BIG INK printing sessions, which at Riverviews run from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday in the Craddock-Terry Gallery, are open to the public, so observers can see the organization’s press in action.

“The press [will] be set up in the space, which will be cool for people who don’t really interact with a printing press,” says Meg Weston, Riverviews’ exhibition and program manager. “It will just be this gigantic press in the middle of our gallery.”

There are a number of ways for an artist to transfer his or her image onto the wood; Jensen draws all of her work on tracing paper first and then uses carbon paper

for the transfer.

“When doing hand printing, the printing plate is backward from the final image,” she explains. “So if you have any words or letters, everything has to be in reverse when you carve

it.”

Riverviews put the call out this summer for participating artists, who then had to submit their proposals to BIG INK. Thirteen artists were chosen, about half from Lynchburg and the rest from up and down the East Coast, including Massachusetts and New York, Weston says.

“They will each go through and take their turn,” Weston says. “There will be three prints of each plate, [and] one of the pulls will go to BIG INK. They have a gallery. And then the other two, the artist can keep for their portfolio.”

Both Jensen and Weston say BIG INK was a perfect fit to go along with Riverviews’ first-ever Invitational Print Show, which opened in September and continues through Oct. 19.

The work on display ranges from 6 by 8 inches to 40 by 96 inches, Jensen says, a mix of woodcuts, linocuts, etchings, wood engravings, silk screens and more.

“We were trying to get a breadth of size of work and breadth of techniques,” Jensen says, “so when you come to BIG INK, you will also see a fantastic printmaking show.”