by Richard Waller
Executive Director,
University of Richmond Museums

“Thirty seconds of revelation is worth a million years of knowing nothing,” exclaims Gulley Jimson, the artist and social rebel who is the main character in Joyce Carey’s 1944 novel, The Horse’s Mouth. Eliciting those exciting moments of revelation are at the heart of the mission of the print study center established in 2001 as a museum at the University of Richmond.

One of three museums that comprise the University of Richmond Museums, The Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center celebrates its seventeenth anniversary this fall. Opening on September 22, 2001, the center was named to honor and recognize the generosity and guidance of Joel (a 1945 graduate of the University) and Lila Harnett in founding the museum. Lila Harnett continues to be an innovative leader in the arts and a strong supporter of our University Museums. The Harnetts were true game changers, instrumental in making the visual arts so important at the University of Richmond.

The center remains the only university museum in the region dedicated to the study, collection, and exhibition of works on paper, including prints, drawings, paintings, and photographs.

Today, our print research center houses more than 14,000 works in the collection, spanning more than 500 years, from the fifteenth century to the present and primarily by European and American artists. Closely intertwined with our other two museums, The Joel and Lila Harnett Museum of Art and the Lora Robins Gallery of Design from Nature, the University Museums maintain a rigorous exhibition schedule and continue to develop interactions with faculty and students from academic departments across the University campus and with scholars and artists from the community and around the world.

Our museum’s history of collecting, researching, and presenting works on paper is fascinating and delightfully full of the horse’s mouth “revelations,” but we will focus for the moment on the present and future. The Harnett Print Study Center is currently presenting three exhibitions drawn from the permanent collection. In the Harnett Museum of Art, the two exhibitions are Infinite Choices: Abstract Drawings by Al Held, and Man Up! Man Down! Images of Masculinity from the Harnett Print Study Center Collection, both on view through July 7, 2019. The Human Comedy: Prints and Drawings by Isabel Bishop is on view in the Harnett Print Study Center through April 19, 2019. The exhibitions epitomize the exhibition possibilities our collection gives us: the Al Held (American, 1928-2005) drawings highlight a recent gift to the museum; Isabel Bishop’s (American, 1902-1988) exhibition is devoted to one artist and the development of her artistic vision, and the images of masculinity allows us to select a range of images to explore a theme, see the portrait prints by Fritz Scholder (below) and

Adriaen Collaert (Flemish, 1560-1618), after Joos de Momper (Flemish, 1564-1635)
“October, from the series Twelve Months of the Year” circa 1600, engraving on paper, 7 1/2 x 10 3/8 inches

Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, Museum purchase, funds from the Louis S. Booth Arts Fund, H2008-21.13
© University of Richmond Museums, photograph by Taylor Dabney

Diego Lasansky (American, born 1994)
“Portrait at Eighteen,” 2014, etching with collage, graphite, colored pencil, and ink on paper, 35 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches

Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, Museum purchase, from The 2014 Harnett Biennial of American Prints, H2014-34.03, © Diego Lasansky, photograph by Taylor Dabney

Fritz Scholder (American, 1937-2005)
“Portrait” 1985, lithograph on Arches cover buff paper, 30 x 22 inches

Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, Gift of Charles and Moira Geoffrion in honor of Lila Harnett, H2010.07.03
© University of Richmond Museums, photograph by Taylor Dabney

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also provide opportunities to develop exhibitions; see the recent gift to the museum of a poster by Toulouse-Lautrec that surely will be the catalyst for a future project.

“Why University Museums Matter” is the title of a short essay by Holland Cotter, art critic for The New York Times, written in 2009, in which he writes, “University museums are unlike other museums... They are, before all else, teaching institutions intended for hands-on use by students and scholars. The public museum gives us fabulosity. The tucked-away university gallery gives us life: organic, intimate, and as fresh as news.” He emphasizes that university museums are “equal parts classroom, laboratory, entertainment center, and spiritual gym where good ideas are worked out and bad ideas are worked off.” My only disagreement with him is that I think university museums often give you some of that “fabulosity.”

From a 1998 exhibition that we organized of prints and portfolios published by Center Street Studio, just outside of Boston, and run by artist and master printer James Stroud, came the idea of acquiring one of each of the works published, along with working proofs and other ephemera from these contemporary artists. The collaboration between master printer and artist has been the remarkable hallmark of Center Street Studio since its beginnings in 1984, and the Studio has produced hundreds of prints by artists of national and international reputation. This acquisition gives our collection an archive of ephemera from these contemporary artists. The published, along with working proofs and other papers from the exhibition. Noting the importance, we presented an exhibition, titled Prints & Monotypes: From the Center Street Studio Archives, H2017.18.34 © Carrie Moyer, photograph by Taylor Dabney.

Why study prints?

That’s a question we asked in the brochure printed at the founding of our museum in 2001, and remains easy to answer for a print study center at a university, and of course this applies to all types of works on paper. Prints provide a truly unique opportunity for viewers to learn about artists, especially their working styles and their influences and environments. Old master prints in particular reveal the hand of the artist, and when successive stages or states of a print are available, the viewer is able to see the process that goes into making an image. Most prints are intended to be produced in editions and to be distributed widely. Hence their subject matter, especially in the early years of the medium, was focused on religion, educational themes, or current events.

We are currently working on an exhibition titled The Printed World: Masterpieces of Seventeenth-Century Printmaking from the Frank Raynor Collection and the Harnett Print Study Center Collection, working in collaboration with the VMFA’s Frank Raynor Center for the Study of Works on Paper. The project created an opportunity for the museum’s director to curate the exhibition with Morgan Mitchell, ’20, an art history major at the University of Richmond and the recipient of our 2018 Harnett Summer Research Fellowship, established by Joel and Lila Harnett in 2002. Several of our former Harnett Fellows have gone on to leading careers in the museum field, and Morgan is continuing her art history studies in London this fall semester. The Printed World focuses on the seventeenth century, and it will be arranged in sections to highlight how artists and printmakers depicted their world within the context of new styles, technology, discovery, and exploration. See the catalog (page 8) from circa 1600 by Adriaen Collaert illustrating the month of October that will be in the exhibition.

Happy birthday to the Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center at the University of Richmond. As we continue to be a thriving and exciting research center for the study of works on paper, join us in celebrating our first seventeen years.

Richard Waller, Executive Director University of Richmond Museums, shown in the Harnett Print Study Center looking at a recent gift of charcoal drawings of Italian landscapes by Ray Ciarrocchi (American, born 1933).

Richard Waller is co-director of the Arts Management Concentration in the Department of Art and Art History he has taught studio art, art history, and museum studies courses, and is co-director of the Arts Management Concentration including supervision of internships for undergraduates.

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