

Zigmunds Priede: Aggregates of Time

Selections from the Collection of Landon Kirchner and Barbara Smith

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Kansas Focus Gallery

Zigmunds Priede, who was born in Latvia in 1935, is a beloved former JCCC faculty member whose students include many who have gone on to have successful careers in the art world. After receiving his master's degree in painting from the University of California at Berkley, "Zig" moved to New York where he worked alongside world renown artists such as Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Motherwell, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Some of the most iconic prints of the 20th century were made by Priede, and he has been recognized for helping establish the renaissance of printmaking and its acceptance as an artform by contemporary painters in the New York art scene. *Zigmunds Priede: Aggregates of Time* marks the 60th anniversary of Priede's move to New York to become a master printmaker at Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE).

Priede fled war-torn Latvia as a child with his mother and young sister, taking refuge first in West Germany before finally settling in Minnesota, where he would go on to earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and eventually join the fine arts faculty at the University of Minnesota. Priede's career as an artist and educator ultimately brought him to Kansas City where he met former JCCC administrators Landon Kirchner and Barbara Smith. Aside from one major work from the Nerman Museum's own collection, the prints in this exhibition are taken entirely from Kirchner and Smith's personal collection. Kirchner is not only responsible for hiring Priede to teach at JCCC, but also for establishing the Campus Art Project Committee at the college, on which Priede served.

This exhibition is guest-curated by Dr. Allison Smith, Professor, Art History, and the wall text is written by her 20th c. Art History students. The selected works highlight Priede's contributions to the fine arts on the JCCC campus, the greater Kansas City arts community, and the history of printmaking in this country.

JCCC students involved in this exhibition include Lorece Beidel, Libby Davis, Emma Govreau, Paige Joski, McKenzie Mason, Alex Messmer, Lindaliz Suarez Gomez, Stella Subasic, Stella Turner, and Isabella Wallace.

Zigmunds Priede (American, b. Latvia, 1935)

Event Horizon, no date

Mixed media on paper

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 95.28



Event Horizon refers to the enormous trauma and transformation of Priede's life. The symbolic narrative is about place, family, chance and change. The birds represent his family unit before WWII. Saws are instruments of destruction and construction. The saw is used here as a metaphor for "that which was cut down" and signifies being cut from his father and home in Riga, Latvia. The relief-printed faces represent various, diverse populations and cultures.

- Penny Thieme, former 20th Century Art History student



Augury (Regina), n.d.
Mixed media

Priede's *Goddess* series (2006-2007) depicts the life-affirming nature of the feminine through ancient goddess forms. His fascination with the beauty, creativity, strength and resilience of women is deeply rooted in his admiration for his mother who escaped war-torn Latvia with her two children and then immigrated to the United States at the end of World War II.



Kansas, n.d.
Mixed media on paper

This work was a birthday gift to longtime colleague and friend Landon Kirchner. In this composition the finch represents the artist's migration from Virginia to Kansas, where he spent three decades teaching in the JCCC Fine Arts department.



California, n.d.
Collage on paper

This work pays homage to Priede's time as a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley where he received an MA in painting in 1962.



Out of Time, n.d.
Mixed media on paper

Priede is fascinated with the concept of time, a theme that can be seen throughout his life's work. The artist often revisits imagery, reworking the same image into later works. In this work, in the center left, Priede reuses the shadow of a finch to represent evolution. The complex composition demonstrates the artist's technical proficiency with the lithographic process. Three silver-cast, diagonally placed shapes represent modernity.



Untitled, n.d.
Mixed media on paper

While teaching at the University of Minnesota in the 1970's, Priede photographed paper and stone looking through an electron microscope which uses a beam of electrons to magnify an object often up to 1,000,000 times. He did a series of large lithographic prints combining art and science making visible the worlds he discovered. On his 74th birthday he began creating mixed media works using them as the foundation. He has since digitized the original negatives he worked from and printed them on fine art paper.



Untitled, n.d.
Mixed media and collage on paper

This work pays tribute to Jasper Johns' famous Pop Art sculpture, *Painted Bronze*. In 1962, Priede began his career as a master printmaker at Universal Limited Art Editions where he collaborated with distinguished artists such as Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Helen

Frankenthaler, and others. Years later, Johns sent him an image of an ale can which he incorporated into this work.



Narrative Suite, Part II, n.d.
Lithograph and collage on paper

Narrative Suite explores displacement and immigration through “aggregate time works,” which reflect Priede’s voyage from Latvia to Germany to Minnesota. After WWII, Priede’s father joined the German Army to expel Soviets and secure independence for Latvia. Priede never saw his father again. Faceless figures represent refugees like the artist and his family, who trekked across Latvia into displaced person camps. Finally, figures on a boat cross the ocean into the US. While informed by Priede’s story, anonymous figures invite viewers to bring their own interpretations.



Narrative Suite, Part I, n.d.
Lithograph and collage on paper

Priede integrates self, place and time, while inviting viewers to add personal meaning. Background trees make connections to Priede (which, translated, means pine tree) and Latvia (famous for its trees). Between 1940 and 1944, Latvia was forcefully occupied by the former USSR and Nazi Germany. The ghastly skeletons represent Latvian men forced to fight on both sides, never to be seen by their families again. The upside-down lithograph of the artist’s own ear represents silenced Latvian protests. This piece remains especially relevant considering the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian conflict.



Magical City #4, 2017
Woodcut printed on wood veneer with handwork

The *Magical City* imagery was inspired by the artist’s recurring dream where he is always walking through fantastical, colorful cityscapes he likens to coming to the United States after World War II. Priede employs an abstract style emphasizing design and color. Priede said, “It’s about the visuals and color. The story is secondary. It could be mine or somebody else’s.”



Untitled, n.d.

Mixed media on paper

Untitled, n.d.

Mixed media on paper

Untitled, 1983

Mixed media on paper

LOANS all collection Landon Kirchner
and Barbara Smith

Formal design is of the utmost importance to Priede. The abstract shapes and linear elements in his prints are highlighted by the visual reference to the shape of the lithographic stone used in the printmaking process. While he often repeats imagery in his work, he also created unique “monotypes” in which only a single work was produced.