



# FOCUS ON MATRIX

UM press shares years'  
worth of collaborations

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# University of Montana Matrix Press shares deep collection of prints

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Over at the University of Montana campus, a diverse collection of prints by artists from Montana and farther outside the U.S. has been growing, year by year.

Founded in 1998, the Matrix Press in the School of Visual and Media Arts invites guest artists many times a year to come to town for a five-day, all-day printmaking session with help from the instructors and students.

The press is showing nine artists from the past five years' of residencies at the Zootown Arts Community Center this month. There's a strong sense of color that's around the room, but the techniques are as different as the artists.

"The approaches of all the artists are really different," said James Bailey, a UM art professor and founder of the press.

One artist might be "very spontaneous," throwing out ideas to use clip art and pop images. Another might be more methodical.

That's part of the point: Students get to see and learn different ideas from professional artists, working on the fly.

"Each process has certain strengths, certain weaknesses, so how can you learn what are the strengths of that particular process and utilize those to then move your ideas forward in a different way than what you maybe normally are doing?" Bailey said.

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**Marwin Begaye, a Dine artist** who teaches at the University of Oklahoma's School of Visual Arts, has won awards for his large-scale woodblock prints, often featuring birds whose feathers are delineated as clearly as the intricate patterns behind them. Here, he experimented with color, combining his detailed bird images with vibrant blues, yellows and magentas.

"The bottom line is, if the artist is happy, I'm happy," he said. Working in a team this way has a certain amount of "push and pull. You don't want to push your



Prints by Corky Clairmont during his residency with Matrix Press.

aesthetics to the point where it's not really the artist's work anymore."

Corky Clairmont, who started the art program at Salish Kootenai College and is nationally recognized for his printmaking, thought up a project that's interactive on multiple ends.

Some of the artists came here through a partnership with the Missoula Art Museum, which, initially with grants from the Warhol Foundation, paid to bring Indigenous artists to town.

Neal Ambrose-Smith, department chair of studio arts at the Institute of American Indian Arts, visited in November 2021. His mother is Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, who grew up on the Flathead Reservation and is recognized for her contemporary painting and prints.

He brought clip-art books stocked with dated '50s and '60s pop imagery that he freely combines with cultural figures like the Coyote.

Some artists make around 100 prints total, others like Ambrose-Smith produced 200.

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**Bailey started Matrix** in '98 as a way to bring artists to UM for collaborations like these. Its collection includes pieces by each artist they've brought out. Jason Clark, a former student,

returned to Missoula after some years away to work at the art school and work as Matrix's tech.

"The first thing is education, to get professional training for the students on the team, but also for the classes to be able to talk to an artist, see how they work through a process," he said.

During the residencies, Bailey and Clark and students work with the artist for roughly a solid week, Monday to Friday.

After they're done, the portfolio is split between Matrix, the artists and the students. (MAM also receives some.)

One such student is Crystal McCallie. She earned a BFA in printmaking at UM, then immediately began a master's. A non-traditional student, she started out in illustration, a medium that's connected to printmaking, then ceramics. For her, working in multiples is appealing because they're affordable and accessible. They're easy to sell at markets and online.

In the ZACC show, she's participated in six out of the nine residencies, meaning she has a great print collection.

Printmaking is a whole process, too, and she's a process-oriented creator. It's a community-type art, where people share techniques. Working on the residencies has instilled a "huge

## If you go

Matrix Press, "Recent Collaborations," is on view at the Zootown Arts Community Center's main gallery through the end of the month.



TOM BAUER, MISSOULIAN

Corky Clairmont works on prints at the UM printmaking studio in April 2022.

amount of confidence" for her working with Bailey, Clark and the visiting artist.

"Between three extremely skilled and experienced printmakers having all of this knowledge, then putting it into practice over a week, we have access to so much printmaking knowledge that we wouldn't have as students, and on a massive scale," she said.

Clairmont's visit sticks out in her memory because of his conceptual bent about the nature of place, and how one particular part of a landscape isn't more important than another. He took a map of the city core and drew a grid, then marked some 20 places at random. They spent a full day visiting each one. "Sometimes it was an alley behind an apartment building," she said. Other times, it might be down by the river, at the Missoula County Courthouse, or near the PaddleHeads ballpark.

They found objects that were noteworthy: At the courthouse, it might be the historic metalwork on the staircase. They drew them on transparencies and took photos.

"We came back with all of this data and shot it onto a screen, and then Corky was able to screen-print these objects of these locations on these prints," she said. They include QR codes, which take you to Matrix's website.

Not all of the artists who they invite work in printmaking as a primary medium. Ka'ila Farrell-Smith, a Klamath Modoc artist from Oregon, focuses on painting and they worked with her to adopt her painting into forms of printmaking. They wove in photographs she'd taken of ancient petroglyphs in Park Lake, Washington.

Tim Musso, an extremely detail-oriented relief printer, brought carved woodblocks and transparencies and wanted to figure out ways to incorporate color.

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**Artists who will collaborate** with Matrix include Stella Nall, a UM art graduate whose work has been shown at the Missoula Art Museum; Max Mahn, a UM BFA and printmaker whose work is seen on concert posters around the country and Dogfish Head specialty beers; and Lisa Jarrett, a UM MFA graduate who now teaches at Portland State University. Her work includes social practice projects.

Since residencies are a chance to experiment with new techniques, it can take years for the work to reach audiences. A few examples are John Hitchcock, a Madison mixed-media printmaker who's continued in the vein he began with that residency.

Prints that Sara Siestrem, a Portland-based artist, made with Matrix were used as a cover for the book, "Knowing Native Arts," by Nancy Marie Mithlo. (Another print is on view in the MAM lobby.)

Sometimes the Matrix collection gets dispersed: Duane Slick's prints were sold to the Des Moines Art Center, since that's where the artist is from — the sales go back to fund the press and the next round.