



ALMOST ILLUMINATED
EDWARD BERNSTEIN

INTRODUCTION

Deborah Cornell

Always an innovator and experimenter, and simultaneously an expert, a strong exponent of the elegant, accomplished traditional forms of the print, and an explorer of the edges of what a print could be—Edward Bernstein has been for many decades a vital presence at Indiana University and in the contemporary world of print. I have known him and his work from innumerable meetings in myriad countries, with countless exciting new projects, papers, and exhibitions in his wake. Bernstein is a consummate artist and printmaker, whose intaglio prints and drawings are the center of his practice, but with a recent expansion to fine digital prints, video, and cross media projects, all executed with the demanding professional standards that characterize his printed work.

A peripatetic artist with a special connection to everything Italian, Edward Bernstein is self-described as a New Yorker who has lived everywhere but New York. Informed by constant motion, observation, and travel, and by his background and interest in political science, both his life and his practice are infused with a broad awareness of commonality in the human condition.

Bernstein was affected deeply by disasters such as the earthquake at Assisi in 1997 and the 9/11 tragedy in New York. Yet, rather than evocations of destruction, the images that evolved in his subsequent work were of shelter, home, the chair, the warm sparkling light of the chandelier, and, later, winged figures—angels and Icarus. These combined to become for Bernstein an overriding metaphor for the memory of well being and completeness in an uncertain world. His deep knowledge of and respect for historical Western art anchor his work in the roots of cultural experience, demonstrating without words the continuity of human expression.

In the book *Virtual Art*, Oliver Grau writes, “The work of art is no longer a single encoded message to be presented to a viewer, but an arrangement of...possible narratives and interpretations....” Bernstein creates meanings and relationships well beyond the objective existence of experiential sources. His work conflates object, history, memory.

Ed Bernstein’s experience is broad. He has studied political science, painting, and printmaking and worked at Atelier 17 in Paris in spring 1968. His major solo exhibitions include Brazil, Venice, Chicago, Philadelphia, Texas, and Indiana. His works have been collected by the National Art Museum in Beijing; the Museum Nacional de Belas Artes, Sao Paulo; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, St. Louis; the Pushkin Museum, St. Petersburg; and the Ulster Museum in Ireland.



Beyond his creative accomplishments discussed in the catalog essay, his contributions to the vitality of American printmaking have been remarkable. He has curated a broad spectrum of exhibitions, including the recent *Pordenonelegge Artists Books*, shown in Italy; *No Danger*, an installation of 3-dimensional prints in Richmond, Virginia; *Old Traditions in New Clothes*, presented in the UK; and *Potenti Impressioni*, presented in Washington DC and in Italy. He has generated panel presentations that include “Role Play: Artist as Curator” (New Orleans), “Cross-Pollenization: Emerging Artists in Contemporary Brazilian Printmaking” (St. Louis), “Canadian/American Printmaking: Cross Fertilization or Cultural Imperialism?” (Chicago). During his years of distinguished professorship at Indiana University, Edward Bernstein imparted to hundreds of students his own passion for the intricacies and exquisite demands of the fine art print.

Edward Bernstein is a humanist, a humorist, and a citizen of the world with an acute awareness of the frailty of human life, its warmth and compassion, its potential and its tragedy. This exhibition constitutes a life history, but it also imparts an overwhelming sense of being in the present, a sense of the experience of human events (human essentials), intensely personal yet intensely broad. Whether through an insightful, skilled exploration of unconventional methods, or a sculpture, or a fluent expression of long-respected printmaking methods, Bernstein’s insistent evocations and play of dark and light illuminate and inform, melding and connecting us to his insights.