

# 'Frogman retires'

## USD printmaker Lloyd Menard built international profile for art department

JAY KIRSCHENMANN

[jkirsch@argusleader.com](mailto:jkirsch@argusleader.com)

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(Christopher Gannon / Argus Leader)

Lloyd Menard works on a print plate in his Beresford studio, Frogman's Press & Gallery. The plate is for his self-portrait and is part of the prints on the wall behind him.

BERESFORD - From the center of a long studio, Lloyd Menard's voice booms. "Come in," he yells. His gruff tone is partially drowned out by a television blaring a "Three Stooges" movie.

"Sit down," he says, without looking up.

Before him is his self-portrait - a picture of a grown man riding a tricycle, surrounded by images of people and things that contributed to his long career. After 40 years of teaching, 34 at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion, the art professor finished his last week on Friday. While his impact on the arts in South Dakota is difficult to measure, his former students are a testament to his work as a mentor: 40 USD printmaking alumni have gone on to teach Menard's lessons in universities and colleges across the nation and abroad. Scores more work as artists.

"I never made a lot of money, but you know, when your students come back, and they're all doing so well, and you know that you were a part of it, it's very rewarding," Menard says. Beyond the classroom, Menard is internationally known for hosting the "Frogman's Print & Paper Workshops," the world's largest print workshops.

He started them in the Black Hills 24 years ago. In recent years, they have been held at USD. Last summer the workshop brought together 13 teachers, all from outside South Dakota, and 114 students from 28 states.

And in what he calls a "great way to go out," the 66-year-old artist was honored recently with two national awards, one for teaching and one for his work as a printmaker.

### World-class reputation

At Frogman's Press & Gallery in the quiet town of Beresford, Menard meticulously dabs on a black sticky compound that will protect his self-portrait printing plate during etching.

When he finishes, he looks up, pondering his three-level space, as he talks about what he has accomplished. "It's basically my press, and it's where I have printed my work plus many others, people I invite, national and international artists," he says.

"Now that I'm retiring, there will be a lot less of that."

Menard's tough exterior melts as he tells about the origins of his workshop, his Beresford facility, and how he got the "frog" name. It came from his days as a 228-pound, short, eighth-grader. "I had a voice like a frog, so the kids called me 'froggie,'" he says. Menard lost the extra weight, but in later years he kept a variation, "Frogman," as a CB radio handle.

Soon "Frogman" became synonymous with quality printmaking and garnered a world-class reputation. "He has had a huge influence on students across the country, and internationally, and I knew I could learn a lot from him," says Laura Melancon, a USD senior who moved to South Dakota three years ago, "sight unseen," as an undergraduate from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She met Menard at a conference in New Orleans and wanted to learn more from him.

"I'm sorry to see him go, but I know that he'll still be supportive toward artists and printmakers in the future - he does a lot of visiting-artist workshops himself.

"In the future, as a college-level art teacher, if I invited him to come to my school, I'm sure that he probably would," she says.

### Growing a department

Menard essentially helped build the USD printmaking and art department by trading visitations to other universities with art professors across the nation.

When Menard arrived at USD in 1972 the university had only a small undergraduate program in art and one printmaking press. "As the only printmaking professor (with) a small working budget at USD, he responded early to these limitations by calling upon other professional printmakers to bring their work to USD as visiting artists and lecturers for the students," says Cory Knedler, chairman of USD's art department.

"Largely, the visiting artist's payment was through Lloyd, in turn, to visit their institution or gallery, often at his own expense," Knedler says. "With this vision of a printmaking network in mind, and Lloyd at the center, he can now boast that he has given over 70 workshops in prints and handmade paper throughout the United States and Europe."

Today, as the culmination of his efforts, USD has the only university printmaking program in South Dakota that is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Arts and Design. It's also the only South Dakota print program to offer the bachelor of fine arts professional degree and the master's of fine arts terminal degree. "He built spectacular print facilities at USD, with eight presses, one of which was designed by Professor Menard himself, which is capable of printing a 4- by 8-foot relief or etching plates," Knedler says. "But while he helped build the overall strength behind USD's degrees and facilities, his most important contribution is the inspiration and knowledge he offered his students."

In fact, Menard's position will be filled by a former student from 27 years ago, John Timothy Pizzuto, now an art professor at the Ringling School of Art and Design, Sarasota, Fla. "Lloyd Menard built a dynamic visiting artist program, which was the greatest educational experience of my M.F.A. Both undergraduate and graduate students worked elbow-to-elbow with these artists, learning first hand about their process and ideas," Pizzuto says.

The exposure to the program with artists and students from around the country is part of the reason Menard and the USD have such a strong reputation in the field of printmaking, Pizzuto says.

Former Menard student Beth Swanson, now a retail sales and framing designer at Rehfeld's in downtown Sioux Falls, says he was a "good mentor, and a good friend." Swanson graduated in December 2003 with a bachelor of fine arts degree, three semesters of which were spent with Menard. Like many students, she was apprehensive at first, leery of Menard's reputation as having a gruff personality.

"I learned that he may at first seem that way, but he will help students who work hard on their art," Swanson says. "He was a very good teacher who is willing to put forth as much as a student is willing to work." Knedler says students end up calling him a friend who helped them succeed.

"Many of the alumni have attested that much of their successes have come from the work ethic they learned from Lloyd and his unique program of study, which they have taken with them to their own institutions as instructors themselves," Knedler says.

### **Artist's journey**

Once a hog and cattle killer in an Omaha packing house, Menard says he did many other jobs, including brick laying and driving a cab, before finally deciding to pursue education.

"It's hard to come home and make art when you've been splattered by blood all day long, so I went back to school," he says. Since then, Menard has shown his own artwork in more than 350 national and international juried and invitational exhibitions and is represented in more than 450 museum, corporate, university and college collections worldwide.

His works have been published in the most referenced printmaking text, "The Complete Printmaker," and in magazines and gallery catalogs.

Frogman's Gallery serves as an extension of his love for teaching, as he hosts many visiting artists who print and exhibit there. The extensively remodeled former Ben Franklin dime store also is his home and living quarters. Papermaking facilities are downstairs, the press on the ground floor, and exhibits are upstairs, in the modern gallery, reached by a spiral staircase just inside the front entry.

Now hanging in the gallery is "University of South Dakota Printmaking Graduate Students and Majors," on display through May 13. The gallery opened in the fall of 1994 and since has hosted more than 60 exhibits by regional, national, and international artists. After opening nights, it's only open by appointment.

"And with me retiring I'll be gone a lot," Menard says.

"I'm going to travel, hunt, fish, spend more time with my kids and grandkids, and have a good time, as much as I can. You just never know, you get to a certain age you don't know what you've got left." He says he has no regrets, although he has yet to buy a dream house on a lake, where there's plenty of hunting and fishing nearby.

"The one thing that I've been doing over all these years, teaching, has been my No. 1 passion. And the students have been ultimately the most important thing in my life," Menard says. "I'm going to miss them. But you've got to stop and hang it up at some point."