



## Owner's Guide for “*Homage to Hayter*” State I

by Bill H. Ritchie, Jr. , made for the Baren Woodcut  
On-line Exchange Folio Number 13, the *Music Folio*,  
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# Before I Died, I Made A Print

## An Owners Guide for Homage to Hayter

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*Subject: Notes on the final image on his print, Homage to Hayter as Bill Ritchie has some final thoughts on this work. He wonders what Hayter would have said, finishing—unbeknownst to him—his last print. No one knows but what they are doing now is their last deed.*

### I knew then what I know now

If the late Stanley William Hayter had known, working on what would be his last print of his life, that he would not live to complete any more works, what would he have written? I am printing the last image on the print that “Bill” inspired me to make, and it’s not going well, technically speaking.

I can explain all the things that went wrong, but those *problems* are not what made this print interesting and successful for me in the end. It was the *solutions* to the problems raised that makes this print valuable in my collection. This print is, after all, about music, but it’s also to pay homage to S. W. Hayter for helping me understand how a print can be like music.

Hayter must have had times like this, and no doubt he would have some advice to give me if he were alive (and on Internet e-mail). Hayter was passionate about teaching and helping other people get what they wanted, I think. He’d have loved the Internet. He’s what Elmer Gates, if he, too, were alive today, would call a Great World Teacher. He’d get the Gates Prize, too.

But this essay is not about Hayter, entirely. This is an owner’s guide for the people besides myself who will have this print in the 13<sup>th</sup> *Baren Exchange Music Folio*. The folio was planned months ago—even as long as a year ago. I signed up to make a print on the

theme of music, which was the theme someone in the Baren group suggested. The print is due tomorrow, June 1, 2002.

I will barely make the deadline. Almost everything I had envisioned, when I signed up, I’ve been unable to do. Then, you may wonder, *how did I manage to finish?* It is because this print met with all sorts of obstacles—and in printing the black image and text I’m still encountering what you’d call *problems*—that I have been able to have an interesting work. It may be one of the best things, as an art experience, I’ve ever had! I’m sure there will be more, too.

### How did this start?

It was at about the same time when the *Music Folio* was announced that I received an invitation from Tyrus Clutter, in Idaho (he’s another Baren participant) to send him my DVD version of the Stanley W. Hayter video. It’s a disc made for PC/DVD players made from my video archive on printmaking and printmakers I have known. When I got that from Tyrus, and the *Music Folio* invitation, it caused in me an immediate epiphany, like an awakening.

I’d thought this before, yeas ago, when I was thinking about the dying of the age of visual communication and the revival of the age of aural communication. So as I was creating the DVD and the still images that go on the covers, I chose one for the basis

of the print.

## So far, so good

That was the easy part. Then I waited to see how I would make this image of Hayter into a print, using relief printmaking, on the music theme. Then, something happened which seemed to be, at the time, a mere distraction, but which was a keynote in deciding how to use woodcut with the Hayter image. Here's the story:

At a meeting for arts advocates in our State's four regional arts districts I ran into a former student, Marta Olson, who brought my attention to the fact that teachers in our school district can not take printmaking courses for continuing education. That, to me, spelled trouble for printmakers who hope to maintain the quality of the "fine" art and also to earn a fair return on their labors in the art marketplace.

"You need art education in printmaking on-line," I told her, and this refreshed my interest in teaching woodcut at a distance—an idea I first tried in 1980. I corresponded by e-mail with Marta and sent her some sample DVDs. That's when I started sketching the puzzle background. The puzzle is part of my plan for distance learning, or art education on-line, using non-toxic woodcut printmaking. In this way music, with S. W. Hayter's image and the puzzle merged. We academic professors, by the way, call this "process art."

## Art education goes on-line

As I said above, Hayter was a *Great World Teacher*. If there were a Gates Prize for Great World Teachers in the arts, I believe he would have been awarded one. Long before the notion of the so-called *International University* was popular, Hayter was proactively getting people into his Paris Atelier 17 who came from all over the world. English and French were the dominant spoken language, but there were artists from everywhere, it seemed to me when I visited him in 1969 and 1983.

If Hayter had not died before the Internet was opened to the public, he would have created his Atelier 17 on-line for "virtual teaching and learning." It would be another one of the many Web sites--like [www.woodblock.com](http://www.woodblock.com)--for printmaking education.

Many people, consciously or intuitively (people like myself) inherited that dream from pioneers like Hayter and his former students. For example, I met one of his former students in Oslo. Her name is Anne Breivik.

But unlike Hayter—who was forty years my

senior—I live in the age of *digital reproduction*; this is an era when printmaking education, as a fine art form, will be among many distance learning opportunities in the fine arts.

## Vast idea, half-vast plan

Back to now--the beginning image—the still image of Hayter "grabbed" from the 1983 video of him. Here I must tell you I love photo etching. The image of Hayter I took from the 1983 video, made in Paris, was perfect for my vision of a photo etching. I thought I would use intaglio over the top of a woodblock background—the puzzle.

Photo etching technique has changed a lot since I used it in the mid-60s. So, in this millennium, I began to learn things about *Image-On* plate making and *giclee* printing. In using anything like this I'd need to find a collaborator with an intaglio press, also. I talked with several people, but they were not as passionate or interested as I was.

As the weeks and months went by, I could see I would not be using photo etching and I didn't know what to do. So I concentrated on cutting the three puzzle blocks, waiting for an alternative idea to come along.

## Disaster hits

Did you ever have something go so terribly wrong it had an almost religious value, like a knock on the side of your head from God? Or what they call "life changing event"? Here's an example, from real life: *A virus got through my protection on the computer where all the Hayter data was.*

There went my Hayter image, and with this computer down, also the means to make a new image of him. Fortunately, my wife's notebook computer is capable of scanning, so I scanned my first sketches; I had at least that much left of the idea, but it didn't give me the richness or effect of intaglio. Besides, time was running out for me.

The woodblocks were cut and I was fine-tuning them—they being like musical instruments to me. Elsewhere I've written about the connection between music and printmaking, and making the blocks is like making three musical instruments, or voices for a composition.

## Paper shortage

By now it's only a matter of several weeks to the deadline, and I was suddenly a victim of time—time running out. I felt like a musician who was getting

ready for a major performance and disaster hit my practice room. But instead of a practice room, as I said, it was a brain-dead computer.

Not only that, I needed to re-think my plans to use a fine Japanese paper for the edition. The computer data would cost thousands to replace, and the paper another, though relatively picayune, cash outlay.

Now, what would you do? There's a joke that instructed me. Four engineers were riding in a car when its engine died. They wondered what to do. One was a mechanical engineer, another electronic, the third a bio-tech, and the fourth a software engineer. Each had a suggestion, such as "check the mechanicals" and "check the electrical system". The fourth suggested getting out of the car and getting back in as a way to fix the problem.

I'm like that software engineer: when I encounter a problem, I get out of my studio and wander around the neighborhood. So I did. I came across a garage sale, and I saw two old-looking boxes. They turned out to be paper, rolls of perforated paper that are used in a player piano.

This is the precursor to recorded music, you might say, kind of a punch card system for synthesized music. Like the jacquard loom that is the equivalent of the first graphics computer, these scrolls are to music then what the CD is to musicians, composers and other performance artists today.

I bought them. Then I fought with them, taking out the natural curl, and fretting about the fact the paper is "junk" and, being old, brittle and weak. I won't describe the process because it wasn't pretty.

But in the end, I have to say, it was fun. It reminded me of the time I didn't know how to make a woodcut, and each step was a thrill to learn and get my first taste of this addictive art form.

## **Edition Varies (E/V)**

Variable edition, or E/V, I learned in college, is what you sign on your print when the edition has changes from one print to another. You can be very specific about it. For example, if you change from Vine Black to Bone Black pigments, or from green ink to red ink, you need only disclose the fact, with the E/V, to the potential owner that his or her print may look different from that owned by another person.

If you have before you the entire edition of, say, 30 prints, you can see that no two are exactly alike. This is just a general idea. It's not the same as a *monotype* or a *monoprint*, as these are kinds of transfer

painting processes; it's all defined by the artist's intent.

I intended this edition to be *State I* of the *Homage to Hayter* print I may, in a few years, complete. It's a memorable edition because it expanded my understanding of the relationship of printmaking to music.

## **Printmaking is a performance art**

I've held the philosophy for many years that printmaking is part performance and part visual art—a kind of bridge art between the aural tradition and the visual tradition. Most people put printmaking in the same category as drawing and painting. I do not. Prints are in a class by themselves, and have been since the first intentional printmaking began about 30,000 years ago.

For my purposes, the E/V is what I need and use. It tells you I made an edition but, either for artistic or technical reasons, there are variations. For example, the lettering on some of the prints is broken and chipped looking. It's a natural consequence of the printing methods I mixed—the lettering coming from the laser printer and, on the perforated musical scroll paper, was coming unstuck.

This, by the way, also accounts for some prints having bits of typography and miniscule threads of black toner fused in spots. You'd be falling apart, too, if you were as old as those scrolls and had been put through all the steps that this print went through to get here!

## **Comestibles, collectors and E/V**

Does this bother you? If so, think of this joke about a terrible restaurant, my way of discouraging people from the rational aspects of whether the print they have is exactly like all the others:

A man looked up from his dining table at a restaurant and noticed that the waiter, serving him his meal, was holding the edge of the steak on his plate with his thumb!

"Hey," the diner said, angrily, "You can't put your thumb on my steak like that!" and the waiter replied, "What, you want me to let it to fall on the floor again?" Then the man saw, in his soup, a fly floating.

"Hey, waiter, there's a fly in my soup!"

The waiter hushed him, and said, "Please sir, not so loud, or everyone here will want one."

In prints, I can imagine that if one print is different from the others in the edition, then people will focus on this difference, which may be a mere technical change—not an error or smudge, but something the

artist actually was glad to see as a happening.

But in the publisher's mind, or the art dealer's, it's not fun to try to explain these variations. That's why some people are adamant about multiples being *exactly* alike in a consumer society. I'm not like that.

Incidentally, while I write and edit this essay, I realize, too late, that I didn't use E/V—but I signed the usual edition numbers, e.g., 1/30, 2/30, etcetera. But as the owner, you get the idea.

## What do those lines say?

One more thing happened along the way. It was totally unexpected, a real gift to me. It came about as a result of a message I put on the Baren Listserv when some invited everyone to tell their views about music and prints. I wrote about my "musical instrument" idea. The words of that message to everyone on the listserv is on that comatose hard drive I mentioned above, so I can't copy it and paste it here.

But one person, named Janet Hollander (her work is also in the Music Folio) wrote a response, and I asked her to let me include it in my print. Janet is a genuine member of the Atelier 17 "alumni."

If your print has text in which some of the words and lettering have dropped out, and you can't read it, then here is the text written by Janet Hollander:

*"I . . . am taken immediately back to how, when, and where music began to be the dominant motif in my work. I was in Paris studying with Wm. Hayter, whose first lesson (as many of you will remember) was to draw standing up, rocking on the balls of your feet so that the drawn line flows loosely and freely through the body, as an action of the whole body. The assignment was to make these flowing lines through soft ground onto etching plates. Loosen the pencil grip!*

*"I loved this lesson, took to it like a duck to water (it felt that fluid and natural), and I began making life drawings - using this technique - at a large studio on the Seine. In that studio the models were dancers, who held poses for very short spans of time, and sometimes did not hold poses at all but kept moving through the session. I'd make 20-30 drawings in an hour in a slightly panicked and slightly exalted*

*state. It would take many days before I could look at the drawings and make sense of them, but I loved them.*

*"When I returned to the States I arranged with several choreographers in New York to work in their studios, setting up a table in the corner as they worked with their dancers. I would draw, standing up, trying to generate a mark on the page that participated in the feeling of the music and the moving image the dancers made on the floor and in space. It was wonderful, and most gratifying of all was this: the dancers could always "read" those drawings, though the drawings were quite abstract.*

*"Bill, thanks for stirring up this memory."*

For updates go to <http://www.seanet.com/~ritchie/hayterol.pdf>