



HARRY BERTOIA

MONOPRINTS

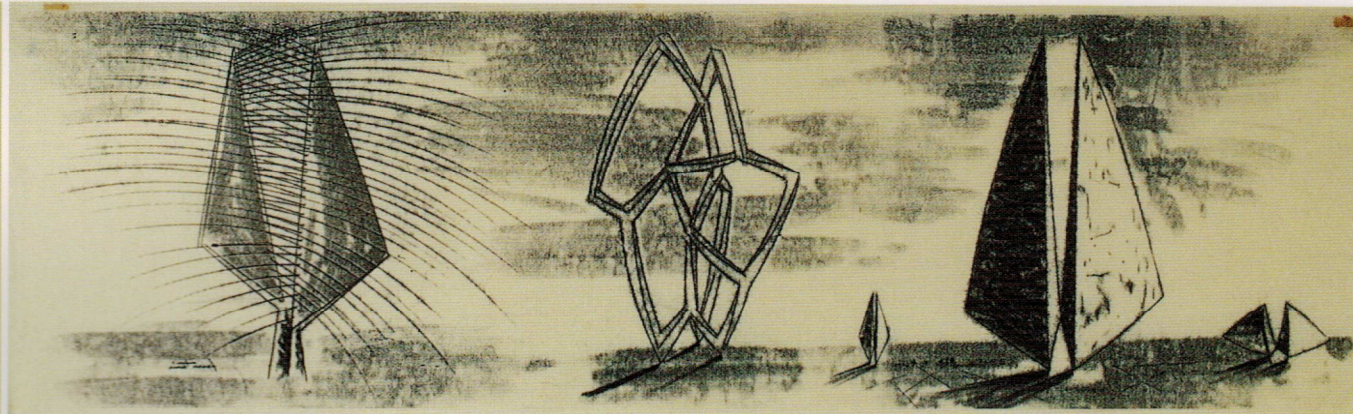


Plate 1. 12" x 39"

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As children, surrounded as we were by examples of Harry's sculptures and chair designs, none of us was aware of what was being created on paper after our bedtime. Our evening meals, accompanied by lively and probing philosophical conversations, were followed by a chess game between our parents, after which Harry took a two-hour nap on the living room couch with a magazine (*Scientific American*, *National Geographic*, *Time*, or *Life*) fallen across his chest. We were admonished not to disturb him, so we did our homework in the dining room. He would leave the house when he awoke, and it never occurred to me until recently that I didn't hear the car leave. He wasn't returning to his shop three miles away, he had simply walked across the driveway to the barn, where he worked on the monoprints.

One of the monoprint features that I am most enchanted by is the occasional ghost image of the previous print. Having rolled colored inks over a large plate of glass and then laying a piece of rice paper down over the glass, Harry worked from the back, sometimes not even seeing exactly what effects his fingers or tools were producing. He would pull the finished work away from the glass and put it aside, wet side up, to dry. Then, without touching the ink-covered surface, he would lay another sheet of paper down, and again work on the back side. This time not only would the multi-colored lines and dark shadows show up on the front of the paper when it was pulled up, but also the white lines and shadows left by the last print on the untouched spread of ink.

In contrast to some of the angular or flowing, but always compelling, works in metal, there is an exquisite, delicate genius expressed in the monoprints. Sometimes I am reminded of the music of Harry's tonals when I see the progressions of lines or dancing rows of suggestive and playful marks, and, as with the music, there is often an ethereal, other-worldly, even cosmic echo in the imagery. According to the other members of my family, the monoprints were usually forerunners of eventual sculptures, and this is frequently evident, but the ones that could not be translated into metal were like poetry, striking a tuning fork in the soul, resonant of ineffable mysteries, invitations to remember the dimensions of divinely infinite imagination. The body of work represented here is one of the many facets of an artist driven to experiment on the frontiers of creativity, and perhaps, in a way, the most valuable, because, unlike the manifestations of his other areas of mastery, these are made easily available to a wider audience. Harry wanted and needed to make a difference in the world, to enhance people's lives and spark their minds with beauty and truth. He would have been highly satisfied—might be watching with a smile as we speak!—that in yet another way the ripples of his life force continue to awaken awe. As he once said, "The purpose of life is to experience the miracle of life."