



EFA Robert
Blackburn
Printmaking
Workshop

The Only Thing That Lasts:

An Oral History of Robert Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop interview with Devraj Dakoji

Devraj Dakoji was born in 1944 to a family of Ayurveda Practitioners, and was influenced heavily by the landscapes of his hometown of Hyderabad, India. After graduating from the College of Fine Arts and Architecture in Hyderabad in 1965, he pursued further education in printmaking at M.S. University of Baroda, Chelsea School of Arts in London, and the Tamarind Institute in New Mexico. He was appointed as Chief Supervisor of Graphic Studios, Dept. of Art, Garhi, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi in 1977 and Commissioner and jury member for the 2nd Graphic International Print Biennale, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal in 1991. In the early 1990s, he delved into teaching and managing international portfolios at the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop. He eventually co-founded Atelier 221, a printmaking studio in Delhi, with his wife, Pratibha. Devraj 's involvement with the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop Program has spanned three decades, and he continues his work there through teaching, curating exhibitions, and collaboration as a Master Printer with renowned artists such as Chakaia Booker, MF Husain, and Juan Sanchez.

In this excerpt, Devraj reflects on how Blackburn kept a watchful and caring eye on the printers in the studio. He also shares how his collaborative work with artists influenced his approach to chine collé and the way he teaches lithography today.

Interview conducted by Camille Crain Drummond

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Devraj Dakoji:

But, here is why—Bob was, he was also a printmaker, a master printer also, he knows so much. But he always hiding himself, but he always looking at how the quality was coming of that. He used to, in between it, come and watching how the prints are running, and then he's [trails off]. Sometimes, he come to my house, with my family was there, and it's to discuss, *no it's a good, I like very much*. So that is what I experienced with Bob's studio, and that is what I like him, the way he is. Then of course, I started doing my own work also during that period, that is another artistic part. Of course, I was doing the edition for other people and collaborating different things, same time I'm teaching, also another experience. So that is another good experience. During this period I came on [words

unclear] from India that time. I was almost 40 years I was here, and then one year in Tamarind, three years in Bob's studio experience. That is what happened [words unclear].

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So this is a Husain, M.F. Husain from India. And mostly, I was mentioning that he used to work with colorful prints, I used to make different plates. But here is a—we introduced to him chine collé. The chine collé technique came from China, where during the school, children they used to make a woodcut, a linocut, and they want to make a little colorful print. But then they started using colored paper. So putting it together and printing. The same time, this is again, Tamarind, they started this is—a lot of a—even Crown Print, other places also they are using chine collé and etching, intaglio, and litho also. But here is a Husain print. We used a gray paper—instead of white, color paper, white paper—and then you can use the silver paper, and then the green, and the red. So this is most colorful, very simplified. But mostly is drying very strong the black and white. His work was very strongly, he loved the drawing part [words unclear], that is I like it. So we printed an edition of 25, same way. But, you know, usually chine collé is very difficult to make, but this, when I was doing these prints there was a lot of my studio students helping, internship students, doing the gluing and printing. But this time it was in, when we started, 2007, he came again, he wants to make prints. And that time he said, "No, I want to make a chine collé. Not the same way as last time I did an edition, but each print should be different colors"—varied print. So that is a varied print, it's not going to work out in the ethics of the printmaking. But he said, "No, I don't want to bother over [words unclear], I want to print—each print should be a different color paper. Then we are printing that time, one of the [words unclear] professor came here and he was working in the print shop, yeah. And then he said to this artist: how he got the idea of work the varied print? Because he's writing a book on varied print. So Husain is not a printmaker, he's artist, a painter, he's a filmmaker, and he's a poet also. He makes photography also. But he want to have a different experience, that is what I find. So that way, we learn a lot of things from working with the different artists, collaborating with the artist. So then, I also very enjoying working with the same artist with the collaboration, and the same time when I teach, then also introducing the technique of chine collé into my litho class. So people enjoying it, because mostly people, they think, *Oh, black and white is OK*, where the time is short. When they come into the second class then work with chine collé, we can try this. It'll help you with the excitement again. So this is what I learned in Bob's studio, what I experienced with working at this technique. So.