



PORTA MAGICA

JASON SCUILLA

2017 Friends of the
Beach Museum of Art
Gift Print Artist

MARCH 14 - JULY 1, 2017

An American artist of Italian descent, Jason Scuille has been drawn to his ancestors’ country for many years.

He has traveled there several times to study and create prints. The country’s architecture, frescos, and sculptures appear in his work, as well as ghosts from the past that he imagines lingering near them. Figural drama, rich surfaces and heavy line, and a deadpan sense of humor characterize Scuille’s Italy prints in this exhibition.

The main title of the exhibition, “Porta Magica,” means magic door in Italian. It is the name of a ruin in the dilapidated section of Piazza Vittorio Park near an apartment Scuille rents in Rome. “According to legend it was part of an eccentric alchemist’s monument,” he notes. “It’s overgrown and rarely visited, but its folklore and mystery have always been inspiring to me.”

Scuille’s imagery is indeed like a door into a magic world—inhabited by fragments from the feet of Ancient Roman emperor Nero’s colossal statue, bones of a bird, twirling monks, and phantom saints and martyrs. He says, “The content [of my work] sits in that mysterious gray area that makes life and humanity so complex, magical, and interesting.” Through a surrealistic visualizing of ancient and Renaissance culture, Scuille explores human behavior — the good and the foolish — and reminds us of our mortality.

Scuille is aware of the way in which a particular work might resonate with contemporary events and social issues, but he is quick to say that he sees his imagery as timeless and open in its meaning. “In many ways the United States of America shares similar vices and problems with Ancient Rome,” Scuille says. “I choose to investigate these themes through printmaking, an art form famous for challenging the accepted norms of society.”

– Elizabeth Seaton, Curator
Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art

Electrolytic Etching

Scuille feels an affinity to the alchemist memorialized by Porta Magica in Rome because of his effort to perfect an unusual method of printmaking using electrical current that he refers to as “electrolytic etching.”

In traditional intaglio printmaking, an artist coats a copper plate with a ground that is resistant to acid. He uses a needle to draw an image through the ground and expose the metal of the plate. Then he subjects the plate to a corrosive bath that eats away at the exposed metal. Ink is placed in the crevices so an image can be printed. Scuille notes that this process dates back to the Renaissance.

With electrolytic etching, the prepared copper plate is placed in a weak copper sulfate bath, which is then electrified. Metal particles are removed from the exposed areas of the plate under this current; the plate can then be inked and printed like a traditional etching. Electrolytic etching is safer, less toxic, and offers more control than traditional acids.

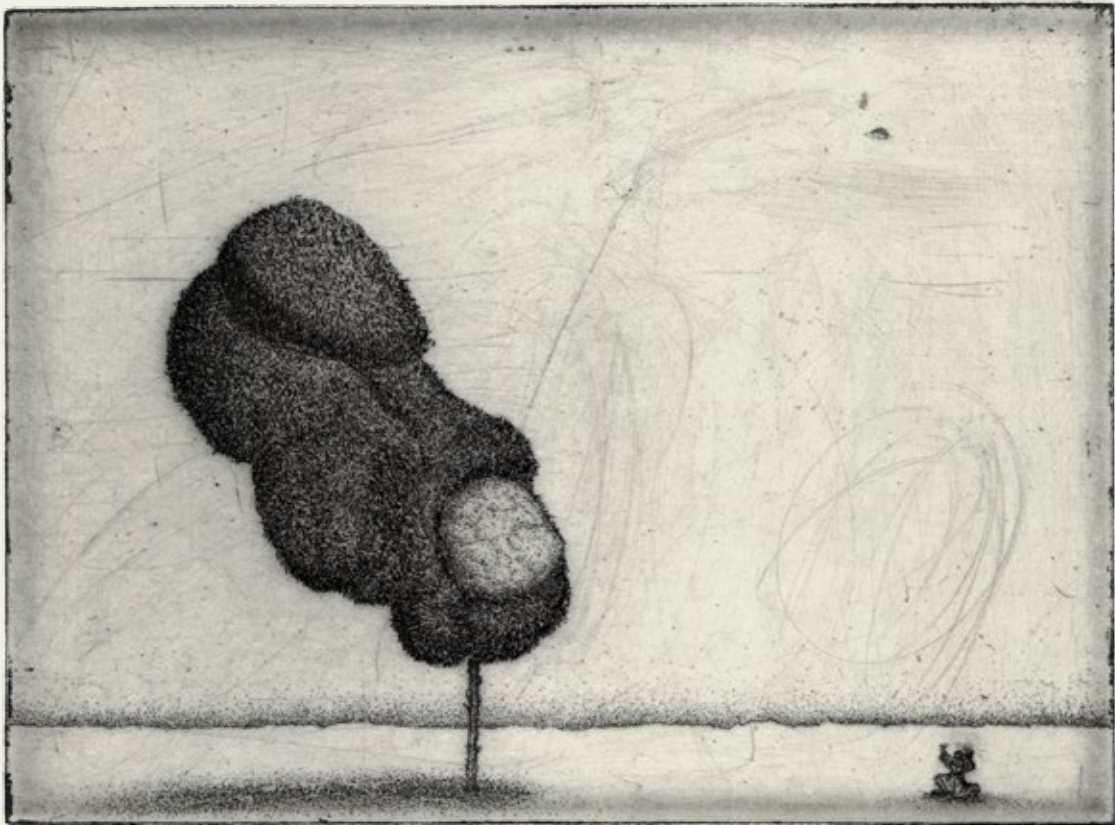
The method is used by only a handful of artists around the globe. Scuille has refined the technology, developing grounds that stand up to the electrical process without compromising attainable details and figuring out ways to control the timing of the electrification for consistent results.

Scuille and Stefan Bossmann, a professor of chemistry at Kansas State University, were recently awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to lead an interdisciplinary team of artists and scientists at K-State to develop safer, sustainable technologies from the electronics and biotech industries for use in studio printmaking. Results will be tested by a consortium of artists, master printers, and educators who will create a portfolio of prints for exhibition and education around the world.

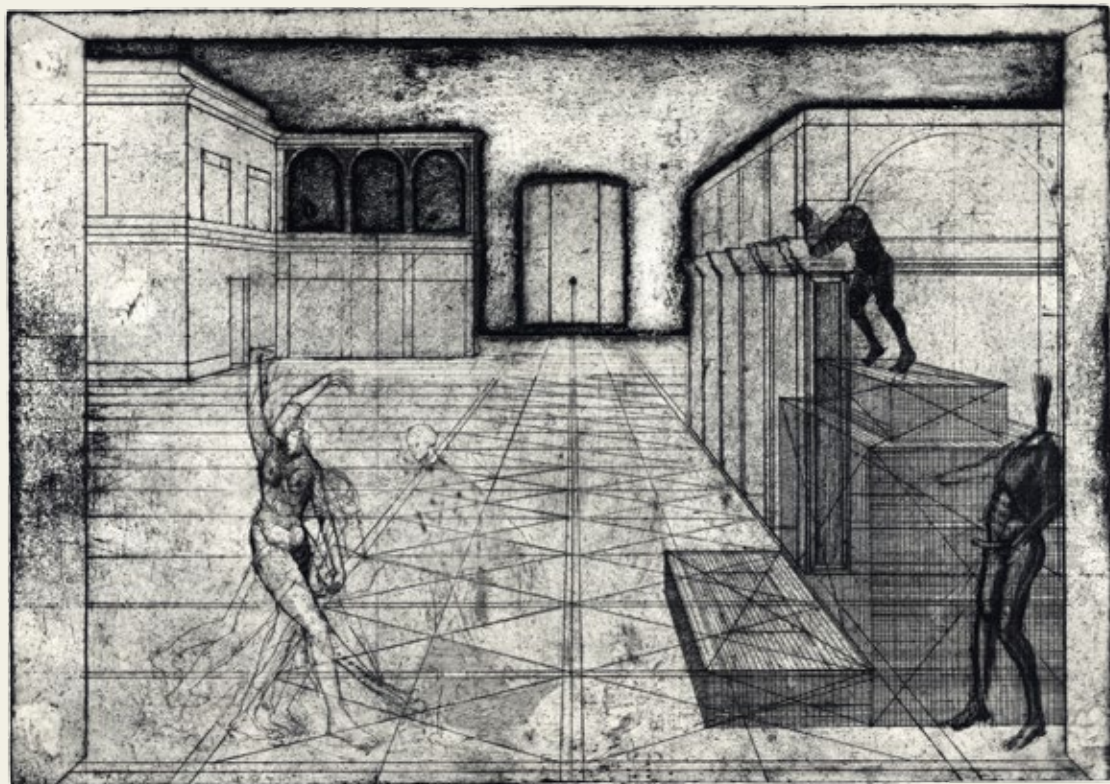
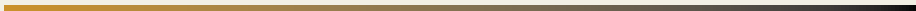


Scuille lecturing on electrolytic etching in 2016 at the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica in Venice, Italy.

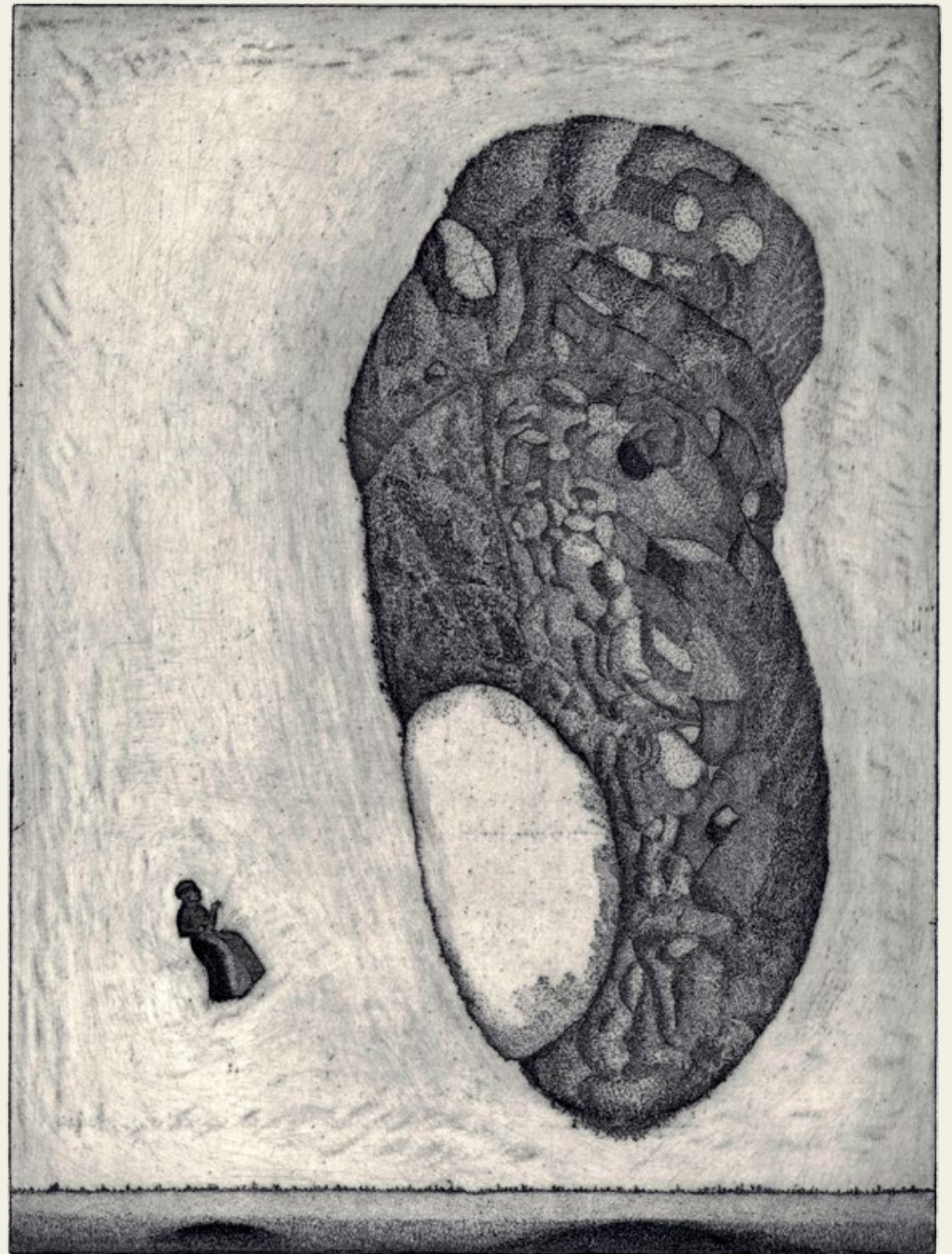
Sources: Kansas State University News Services, “Electrifying Research in K-State’s Art Department Proves Nontoxic Way to Do Etching,” June 10, 2010; and Noelle Blood, “Scuille Secures National Endowment for the Arts Grant to Support Sustainable Printmaking,” *K-State Today*, December 21, 2016.



Devotee, 2015, electrolytic etching, 4 ½ x 6 in.



Piazza with Spirits, 2013, etching, 12 x 17 in.



Monk with Fantastic Digit, 2015, electrolytic etching, 12 x 9 in.

Biography

Jason Scuille is an associate professor of art and head of the printmaking program of the art department at Kansas State University. He is also faculty advisor for Pussycat Press, K-State’s student printmaking organization. Scuille earned his master’s degree in fine arts from Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia in 2005. He received his bachelor’s degree in fine arts from the University of Central Florida in 2003.

The artist’s prints and drawings have been featured in solo exhibitions throughout the United States and Italy and in group exhibitions in the United States, Europe, and Asia. Scuille has shared his development of innovative intaglio techniques and safer printmaking practices at international printmaking conferences and universities throughout the United States. The artist lives in Manhattan, Kansas, with his wife, Melissa, and son, Calvin.



Scuille at the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica in Venice, Italy.



Cannaregio, 2016, multi-plate electrolytic etching and acid etching, 11 15/16 x 8 7/8 in.
2017 Friends of the Beach Museum of Art Gift Print

Friends of the Beach Museum of Art Gift Print

The Friends of the Beach Museum of Art commissions a limited-edition print by a recognized Kansas artist for sale to Friends and the public each year. Kansas State University’s “Friends of Art” started the gift print program in 1934.

The 2017 gift print by Jason Scuille is a three-plate etching incorporating his innovative electrolytic etching process. The print’s warm tones, stippled surface, and topographical motifs evoke for the artist the Cannaregio district of Venice, Italy, in which he lived and worked in 2016, and the Tallgrass Prairie of Kansas.

For more information about supporting the museum as a Friend or purchasing a gift print, call 785-532-7718 or go to beach.k-state.edu.

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