



INSIDE THE GALLERY PODCAST – SERIES 6 EPISODE 7 (Early May 2024)

A PRINTERS PROOF – FRED GENIS
Grafton Regional Gallery

Curator: Prof Pedram Khosronejad

Tim Stackpool:

First of all, who was Fred Genis and why did he come and how did he come to Australia in the first place?

Pedram Khosronejad:

Fred Genis originally, he's from Netherlands, born in 1934 and passed away in 2022 in Mullumbimby in New South Wales Australia. In his entire life, I can say was an immigrant. He worked all around the world in different continents to just find a peaceful place to work professionally with artists and also create a nice place for his own family. When he was young, he met his wife, Rina and alone, or together, they travelled different continents like Africa, South America, in North America, like United States, Europe, Australia. And indeed he visited, they visited together first Australia before 1979, probably 1959 if not 1960, that they came to Sydney first. And as he didn't find what he wanted in the artwork, they left here for other countries. I think in first country that he could find himself as an artist was United States.

Seven years that he worked there, between 1965 and 1972, he was really between good hands, good schools of lithograph printmaking and could prove his talents that he had inherited from extensive classic learning and knowledge of lithography in Netherland and Europe, he began to work suddenly with big names in United States. This is where actually his three daughters are born. And while with his wife Rina, it was the age of education of girls, they preferred to move from New York and they choose to come in 1979 in Australia, settled down here, and this is where again, many Europeans and Australian, top-rate artists work with him. The last destination probably was in Byron Bay where he had his own studio. In Mullumbimby, when he passed away, Fred Genis, I think for me, remains an immigrant who worked extensively on transferring his professional knowledge, art and technology, and honestly put it, nicely, a craft Tim to Australia and beyond. And this is why I think I would like to call him Invisible Alchemist.

Tim Stackpool:

An Invisible Alchemist. Yeah.

Pedram Khosronejad:

Alchemist.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah. As you say, he travelled so much you felt he was an immigrant for life, but of course he was a master lithographer. And I just wonder if that's now considered an ancient art. Let's just understand what lithography was back then, or perhaps still is, and whether it's still important for the arts today.

Pedram Khosronejad:

It's very tricky question, the second part of your question. The first part is very easy. Lithography is a topic about traditional printmaking or technical technology that involves artists draw with a crayon or a special liquid for lithography that in industry, they call it touché on a very polished slab of the stone which is mostly limestone or in more recent periods, they work also on zinc and aluminium plates and they will draw what they want on these surfaces.

Tim Stackpool:

The artist draws on the surfaces?

Pedram Khosronejad:

On the surface of limestone or aluminium plates or zinc plates. They draw with this greasy crayon or that liquid touché on the surface, and this greasy image is going to be ready for a print. Then they, on the surface of the stone or plate, they cover the surface with a very chemical liquid to secure where the image is and where the image should not be printed. When the surface covered by these, then they will again clean the surface of a stone or plate with a damp textile or just make it damp so the surface that is not greasy stay blank so the drawing and images that draw on that plate already to be covered by a roller inking the surface of a stone or plate. And then we put a damp flat paper, print paper on the surface of a stone or plate and then run it under the lithograph press.

Tim Stackpool:

Right. Basically, the lithographer is the technician who is then printing the works of the artist.

Pedram Khosronejad:

Well, in very simple way, you can say technician, but is not actually technician, as I said is alchemist. Why? Because like all sorts of print, traditional printmaking, printing is the collaboration between artists and printer. I think until today, if I don't exaggerate, mostly always we talk about artists and not the printer. However, not all artists, especially in the field of lithography, they don't have knowledge of lithography, and they need to learn how to transfer their artistic idea on the surface of limestone or plate. And this is the printer who should prepare it, ready for print, how you make that colour, how to fix that colour, what is the extensivity of the deepest of the colour. What's the tonality of colour? What's the texture? How you can make texture on the surface. These are all in the hand of magician-printer. Here printer's role is to listen to artists, guide the artists and say, "Okay, this is how it works." So instead of technician, I say facilitator, but facilitator who knows definitely extensively the technology of making colours, making inks, and mostly how it works in lithography.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah. So this exhibition called A Printer's Proof, are we seeing works that Fred Genis retained, which were practically proofs of work, which were never released to the public. Is this the collection that you're showing us?

Pedram Khosronejad:

Yes, but I need first explain something about the world of Printer's Proof. In lithography, before arriving at that point, to be sure that you are printing the last version of edition, which both printer and artist are happy, there are other steps. For example, you have TP, which is Trial Print. You have something like PT, Printer Try, you have bon à tirer is a French word bon à tirer. It is good one, which is ready for printing.

There are a lot of dialogue between printer and artist until they are both satisfied. Then they write bon à tirer. After that, the presence of artist in a studio of printmaking is not necessary, based on that example of bon à tirer, printer can alone print everything. Those that go to artist, they are AP, Artist-Proof, those goes to printer, they are PP, Printer's Proof.

Tim Stackpool:

Right.

Pedram Khosronejad:

Therefore each print master printer has his own collection of Printer's Proofs that mostly this is how the printing masters they make money because then they go and sell the Printer's Proof and then get salary through that. The Printer's Proofs are very valuable, back to your question, because our exhibition is based on private collection of Fred Genis which covers his work in United States, in Europe and Australia, and many of prints on the wall in exhibition are prints proof version. However, as a print maker, he had also different other versions: bon à tirer, artist proof, normal edition, and for exhibition I selected different type of editions because I believe this is one of the way that we can educate our public to ask what are the meaning and significance of these things.

Tim Stackpool:

So we see a variety of work from a variety of artists. Is that right?

Pedram Khosronejad:

Indeed. The exhibition area covers four major galleries of the building of the Grafton Regional Gallery built up in 2021. So the gallery one and four which are just in front in the basement and level one covers artists from the United States. The second gallery goes to Europe. And the last part or gallery number two entry covers artists from Australia. In total we have 55 artists and around 152 prints lithographs on the wall. As you can imagine, is very huge exhibition. As a curator, I need to compromise many, many, many, many lithographs. So this is why probably from many artists we have only two, rarely three and many one artworks. Because another situation in lithograph is are they are huge and they're big. You cannot make very small lithograph. It doesn't make sense. Lithographs and artists that Fred Genis work with, especially big names as you know, they wanted really to look on big plates for their prints.

Tim Stackpool:

Now you had conversations with a number of people as part of your study and preparation for this exhibition. I know because we've been talking about it for weeks. And the diversity of that really tells of the extent of why Fred was sought out by artists and so well respected. But who are some of the people that you've been in contact with? There's many of them.

Pedram Khosronejad:

Unfortunately, many of artists who worked with Fred, especially those United States and Europe, they pass away. But very good number of them are still among us so I could interview Tim Storrier and also a female artist who probably was one of the last artists who printed and worked with Fred is Sharon Muir, who is living in the Clarence Valley. I also interviewed well, very well-known Chinese artist, Guan Wei, which was again one of those artists that extensively four or five times between eighties to 2000 work with Fred Genis. Also Danny Moynihan, which another big name in Australian art.

I could talk to Wendy Whiteley regarding the work of Brett Whiteley. So a group, as much as I can say, a group of artists that I could really reach, I interviewed, if not they wrote their memories about working with Fred, which is very, very interesting. For example, one of the famous Dutch artists, a female Gerti, she really, really wrote very nice tips for our exhibition because she's Dutch, Fred is Dutch and the memory is back really to serve this walking together on her exhibition. When we clicked all of these things, this is very interesting where today these artists are standing with which nationality, one feeling is common between them and this is that Fred Genis was a person with full of humour. When you

wanted to begin, we needed to talk about music, literature, poetry, and then we could begin our work. And he was such a master printer that never imposed himself to the artist.

Tim Stackpool:

Now you also had a conversation with Hendrik Kolenberg who was a curator, if I recall, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Pedram Khosronejad:

Yeah, Hendrik Kolenberg was actually first of all, he is Dutch and a senior curator of printing, drawing, and watercolour at Art Gallery of NSW. Hendrik and his dear wife Juliana, are two major keynote speakers of artistic profile of Fred Genis. Whatsoever written in Australia, mostly about Fred, written by Hendrik and Juliana, especially Juliana prepared extensive biography of Fred's artistic line. From the beginning, I think Hendrik and Fred beyond being both from Netherlands work together and Hendrik really understood well the beautiful transferring knowledge that Fred is contributing to Australia being in Art Gallery of New South Wales, being in touch with many other institutions, Hendrik tried to help a lot as much as he could to transfer the works of Fred, of his experiences, to other office. And he wrote very beautifully. One conversation with Hendrik was really eye-opening. And I can say without Hendrik, me as a curator of exhibition could not go beyond the surface of this lithograph because Fred is not here to talk and many of his artists are dispersed.

Tim Stackpool:

Let's have a little bit of a listen of that interview that you had with Hendrik.

Hendrik Kolenberg:

When an artist started with him, he would talk about what it was that they were on about and he would try and understand how they might be able to work within his lithographic medium. And what I picked up about Fred was probably that he seemed to see lithography more as a material thing than how you normally hear it because lithography is, you don't seem to be aware of ink on the paper, it's so thin and delicate. When you see the best of Fred's lithographs by the artist that really seemed to understand the medium and understood Fred and worked with him well, you do feel that material side and although you don't see that there's a thick layer of ink there, it feels as if there is.

My experience with him mainly was with Lloyd Rees because I knew Lloyd Rees well got to know him quite well. And so I saw most of the lithographs that were being produced. I saw them in a way happening between Lloyd and Fred. Then when I did an exhibition of Lloyd's prints, there was one that I was very keen to get hold of that was in the Art Gallery of New South Wales that was a failure. And he said what he couldn't often get an artist to understand was that you didn't need to draw heavily to make a lithograph. You could be very light, it would pick up everything. But Lloyd tended to be very bold, unaware, he wanted to make sure the image was there. And when he did the Caloola Suite, that's why some of them didn't quite come off, some of them actually were lost because-

Pedram Khosronejad:

It's too dark.

Hendrik Kolenberg:

He was putting too much of the stuff on the lithographic wax.

Pedram Khosronejad:

Yes.

Hendrik Kolenberg:

But this one that was in the art Gallery in New South Wales, which was called a failure, it's almost all black, but Lloyd obviously still saw something in it. And that's what happened to his lithographs. Later he began to draw onto it to try and bring back a bit of the image as you would in a drawing. And it was very interesting to see that print because Lloyd didn't have to put much on it, a little bit of white crayon, and he brought it alive and it's the most stunning lithograph. And then one day going through all of Fred's prints, I found one that he hadn't drawn on, the same, so there were only two of it. And it was very interesting to see those two because Fred was right and Lloyd was right. Fred could see that it might fail and he couldn't go on with it. Lloyd knew.

Now, if he'd printed a full edition of that one, it would've been one of the most exciting of the lot. He should have allowed Lloyd to have just put a few marks on each of them. He would've done it. They could have even all been slightly different. It wouldn't matter. Or even if he just printed 10, it was a pity that only one really he got to the point he was at. But that's what I liked about Fred. He liked to work with the artists, he tried to understand them. And over a short period, that's what happened. So after that first explosion of printmaking with Caloola and that particular print, they made a whole series of them.

Tim Stackpool:

Pedram, it is obvious from that conversation that beyond Fred's skill, the nature of him as a person was part of the reason why artists found working with him so compelling. What do you think it was that made Fred so sought after compared to other Lithographers at the time?

Pedram Khosronejad:

I think Fred was a seeker. He was in search of artists, he was thirsty to help artists to learn about lithography and the possibilities that lithography can offer them that the other mediums could not do that because lithography is very, very technical as you mentioned in the beginning, but has a lot of narrow avenues that only a good master printer can open those doors like a key holder of the gate, this is why I call him Alchemist, and show them to the artist, you can do this. You cannot do that. This does not work with this. And artist could understand, "Okay, I should not do that, or I should do against what he said and see what is happened." A teacher in art, which I include in this case, Fred as a good teacher, should be like a gardener. You cannot take a tree and say, "Okay, your apple should be like this." You can just take care of the tree, pump it, water it, and then wait to see what type of apple you really have. What's the fruit? And I think Fred did exactly like that.

Tim Stackpool:

But I think Pedram, and I may be mistaken that he did have a very strong forthright nature, which was sometimes at odds with the thinking of the artist. But I just wonder if he wasn't then a 'yes' man. And that's why the artist had such faith and trust in him because he would speak what he thought was wrong.

Pedram Khosronejad:

Exactly. And this is the rule of that gardener teacher that I'm talking about. Let me give you one example.

Tim Stackpool:

Sure.

Pedram Khosronejad:

In his interviews with one of the art historians back to early two thousands about Willem de Kooning. The interview is around the collaboration of Fred Genis with Willem de Kooning and how they work together and how was Willem Kooning regarding his role? And Fred is saying, well, I told de Kooning, for example, "You cannot use this on the lithograph stone or plate, but you can use this, use that. You cannot use water because it's not water colour", for example, you cannot paint like brush or watercolour on the stone, for example, et cetera, et cetera. And Fred says, with my great surprise, I did see things that he create amazingly. And when asked, "What did you use?" He said, "I use water, the thing that you told me not to use."

And in the interview, Fred is laughing after saying that shows that he's happy that artists didn't listen to him and did what he wanted to do. He could tell you as an artist, "Listen, you are pushing too much." For example, crayon on the stone. This is not what you, for example, wanted. For example, his experience I've been with Lloyd Rees, his long term friendship and collaboration with Lloyd Rees, Hendrik told me the first albums working together is very dark because Lloyd needed to learn about how to use lithographs. But in the second and third one, I think Fred could tell her, listen, you don't need to push that much just be yourself and go relax and do that.

She was very good observer and left time to artists to look at the work, think about it, talk about it, have test prints, trial prints, until artist is happy, not when he's happy because he wanted to be sure that art is really achieved what he wanted and I think this is what I get from all testimonials that I received orally in written or when I read things about Fred. And this is what makes him unique. When he arrived in 1979 in Australia, he's a big master printer, maybe unique in the world, but humbly he worked with all sorts of artists. First, was John Olsen, Bert Whitely, Lloyd Rees, Tim Storrier, also with very humble students at that time.

Today they are big names, like Judy Woodson, First Nation artist, Sharon Muir. He just humbly look at their work and it's very nice because Sharon said, "Well, when I first saw him, he look at my work, he was in silence and I didn't know it's a good silence or a bad silence." And Fred said, "Oh, this is a good silence. Now let's work. You need to work with me." He gave energy to the artist, encouraged them, but dedicated one. Everyone confirmed when I was in the studio working with Fred, no other artists or people were around. Two weeks that I was in the studio, he and his studio material were dedicated only to me.

Tim Stackpool:

Now you spoke with many artists, as you said, one of them was the Archibald winner, Tim Storrier.

Pedram Khosronejad:

Yes.

Tim Stackpool:

This is what he told you about Fred.

Tim Storrier:

A lot of it was like watching a very fine mechanic tune an engine. I mean, Fred being Dutch had this sort of Germanic thing about getting it absolutely right. I'm talking about how the machines, the presses work, how the inks are mixed. I mean there's a hell of a lot of work that Fred did with mixing inks and he was very, very experienced. And nine times out of 10 he'd get within a whisker of what you were looking for first shot. But your relationship with Fred in the studio while you were proofing it to try and get the print to work, it depended utterly on if you knew what you were doing or how the print went. If it was going wrong or you were trying to get Fred to do something he didn't like, it could become quite frosty and you knew you were going in the wrong track. He had a very good instinct and vast experience on how to get a print to work. And some of them work very well easily and others don't. But you couldn't be in better hands, that's for sure.

Tim Stackpool:

That really does sum up the respect that artists had for Fred. But talking about you though, you're a professor of anthropology, what do you think we learn about human interactions and relationships? What have you learned really curating a show like this?

Pedram Khosronejad:

Wow, it's a very big question, which brings us to who probably I am, anthropologist curator, that always I say I'm anthropologist curator. From the beginning of this project, probably in late January, 2024, visiting Fred Genis private collection then select the artworks with my colleagues, bring me here to the gallery and it's so exciting that you are touching the art lithographs works done by Fred Genis and Rosenberg, Willem de Kooning, John Cage, [inaudible 00:26:28] John Olsen, Brett Whiteley, Tim Storrier. Who else you want to say, New Zealand artist Max Gimblett or Sharon Muir, Judy Watson. Guan Wei.

They are big names that as a curator, I'm really grateful for this position and having access to this artwork on a daily basis, look at them and think about Fred and what he had in his mind. The magic thing here is in one exhibition with plus 115 huge lithographs complex mostly in colour lithographs because if there are colour lithographs graphs, we need different plate for each colour, all these artists and this 115 prints printed by one person, Fred Genis, but they are all different. And this is how I think a gardener like him should be very proud that he has a big garden with diversity of plantations. None of them are the same. How beautiful it is. He was in shadow, respectful for the artist and their art. I think Fred was someone with huge humour. This is interesting to say that he could not even draw one apple as someone who worked with big artists, he could not draw.

Tim Stackpool:

Yes. Well, his art and craft was seen in a different way.

Pedram Khosronejad:

Exactly.

Tim Stackpool:

It was expressed in a different way.

Pedram Khosronejad:

But since young, he learned that he's thirsty for technology and science and craft, as you said. And where is the connection of art with these things? He was dedicated in that. Smelling the ink, tasting the Arabic gum or water-based liquid things to be sure this is good. Any craft there is secrecy in lithography. As a printer, learn them and just apply them. But the other side, he was a man of family, love his wife, children, and worked hard in his life to arrive at that point. In the beginning, for instance, in South America or Africa, he did everything or even in US in the beginning he works in a hotel, work in Africa in railroad just to survive. But step by step, he understood how he can find his way, but never forgot. I think his path, and never forgot his friends. Always they were welcome, always the door was open.

Rina is amazing person. All artists that I talked to, they say we are grateful to Rina and Fred because they stayed with the family for those weeks, printmaking and Rina was in charge of this so they created, both Rina and Fred, a family ambience for this artist to feel good and safe, stay with them, live with them, and do the printings. I think Fred didn't wanted interviews. This is why even today that we are talking, there is not even one article about Fred, not book about Fred's life. No one really heard the entire story of Fred Genis. And this is another important angle of our exhibition. I think he was a lovely human with big heart, excited, always had that big boy inside himself and encouraging teacher. He loved his work, especially with Lloyd Rees.

Lloyd lived in another state in Australia. Many times, especially during last years of Lloyd's life he did drive to Lloyd's place, show him the drawing back to his studio, make the plates, did drive again to Lloyd, corrected them. And how many times he did this way go and back, go and back until both of them are happy and then he printed them. Only a dedicated person can do these things with big heart. But in the end, again, I think as anthropologist I can say he was an immigrant. He sacrificed his launch for transferring the traditional and modern knowledge of lithograph printmaking and definitely his place is in art, history of Australia and beyond.

Tim Stackpool:

And you're helping with that because it's great to see such an exhibition of this kind at your regional gallery. And the director of the Grafton Regional Gallery, Sarah Gurich tells a bit of an interesting story about how this came to be. This is what she told you in an earlier conversation.

Sarah Gurich:

I have seen a lot of prints by Australian artists, but often the printmaker is the unknown in the equation. Fred Genis' work really came to my attention recently when I came to the Northern Rivers, when the Lone Goat Gallery, which is up in Byron Bay, had an exhibition of Fred Genis' American artist prints. It was called Young Americans, which instantly piqued my interest because what a cool name for an exhibition. And that just piqued my interest. Who is Fred Genis? Why is he here? How is this extraordinary body of work coming from someone's home in the hills of Byron Bay?

I think that where you have come in and taken an idea of a collection of prints by a master printmaker to realise an exhibition of this scale and scope and importance is something that it's very special and very significant. For someone like Fred Genis who had such an international career before he came to Australia and had worked with the best of the best in Europe and the United States, and then came to Australia in 1979 to establish his own print workshop, in some ways he brought a level of importance with him to his craft and shared that with Australian artists.

I think that what this exhibition is really going to highlight is the diversity of lithography and what it can do, the incredible wealth of talent of the artists that Fred Genis worked with, but also Fred Genis as a master printmaker. And often, as I said earlier, the printmaker is not seen. He's part of the beginning process, but the end process is all about the artist. I think that's really important, highlighting his legacy

and highlighting that collaborative nature, that collaborative process between a printmaker and the artist, which I think is something that Fred Genis really had a gift in terms of the way he collaborated with the artists that he worked with.

Tim Stackpool:

Pedram, before we wrap up, once you started digging further into the history of Fred Genis, what was the one thing you think you found most compelling? You talked about his love of family, his love of working with the artist. What do you think shines brightest out of every part of Fred's career?

Pedram Khosronejad:

Facilitator and be a good friend. When I talked to John Firth-Smith or anyone, they said he was a good friend. He listened to you very well, carefully and never talk too much. But definitely some of artists, they told me he was so excited he could not focus on one thing long time. And I said, "Okay, let's go have a drink. Oh, listen to this music." I think feel I'm asking myself because it's amazing what he achieved. He was an individual that loved socializing with artists in the studio, but when he wanted to print them, he was alone. And I think it was the creme la creme for him, the best of the best time for him alone in his studio and feel okay now I'm printing that beauty alone here in my own space, my own time. As I said, he was very humble.

He worked with famous top-rated artists, humble artists as once a Bohemian migrant artists, students. Doesn't matter for him. If he could see the talent differently. He was a talent hunter too. And he did psychology of artists. His work with John Cage even is like collaborative project of John Cage in all cases, I would love to be there and see how he was dealing with John Cage which is big, big name philosopher, composer, artist, thinker whatsoever. From working with that person, De Kooning, Rosenberg, whoever in us, and then coming here working with very humble artists in young age, I would love to think what he's thinking, how humble you can be. He never said, "Oh, I walk with the De Kooning so I don't work with normal people, or you should go to my waiting list." And he hated bureaucracy.

He began to teach in different schools of art in Sydney, let's say a print department of Sydney College of Art. And he was elected as the head of printmaking at the National Art School in Sydney from where he resigned because I was told he hated the bureaucracy. And he understood at that time, probably we are coming to the end, students, they don't have that much interest to what he's saying. And he probably felt that he's wasting his time, resigned at back to his own studio to work with artists. And one of my hopes, our hope in gallery, by running this exhibition, let's say that it was his wish. And I read that in 2003 that in this interview about De Kooning, he says, "I wish that one time somewhere I can have retrospective exhibition about all three continents where I worked, US, Europe and Australia," and never happened until now.

It is for the first time that these three continents, lithographs printed by Fred Genis will be on the wall. And I think that it can show the importance of the place of lithography in 21st century in Australia. And really I hope artists, students of the field, come here, look at this and together we think where we are going from here regarding traditional lithography making in Australia and beyond and learn from what Fred Genis collection kept for us today.

Tim Stackpool:

The exhibition is running from when till when?

Pedram Khosronejad:

Exhibitions opening ceremony will be at 11 May Saturday at 02:00 P.M. and exhibition will go until July 7th.

Tim Stackpool:

And you have a curator talk coming up as well.

Pedram Khosronejad:

On the opening day from 02:00 to 03:00, I will have floor talk conversation between myself as a curator and Rina and Luis Genis, the wife and the daughter of Fred about Fred's life Fred's trajectory as a printmaker. And after that we will have very, very, very interesting workshop hands-on lithography here inside the gallery by the last lithographer, printmaker and artist who worked with Fred in Mullumbimby. He will have one studio opening here to show everyone how they can work on the stones and how they can print. And then we have the opening official ceremony, which will be opened by the director of Gallery and keynote talk of Hendrik Kolenberg. The ceremony goes on until the 05:00 P.M.

Tim Stackpool:

And the other thing is, Pedram, I just want to be sure I understand the gallery is closed one day a week or so.

Pedram Khosronejad:

Yes. The part of Gallery of exhibition Mondays, we are not working, but the rest of the week, including weekends, we are open from 10:00 AM to 04:00 P.M. except the public holidays.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah, I just wanted to make sure because I don't want people turning up and then finding that the gallery is closed on the one day that they're in town.

Pedram Khosronejad:

Everyone can find the information and details on the website, for our gallery, how they can reach us.

Tim Stackpool:

Excellent. Look, Pedram, I think it's terrific. You and the team at the gallery actually finally recognising the work of Fred Genis, and he's like this nucleus with this orbit of these amazing artists, international artists just circling him for decades at a time. Great to actually interview you this time again for a change. And thanks for your time and your effort, as I say, put towards the exhibition.

Pedram Khosronejad:

Thank you, Tim.