

November 3, 2024, through January 12, 2025

New Mexico Memories

paintings and prints by
Nicholas Hill of Granville, Ohio

Statement

I first visited New Mexico in 1983 when I was teaching at Bethany College. During several visits, I spent most of my time in and around Santa Fe. The landscape and the built environment prompted me to create a series of paintings and intaglio prints over the following years.

The work evolved from memories that led to the invented landscapes and architectural structures. The process of translating memories into images was realized over time. I used journal writings, sketches, ephemera that were gathered on location, photographs, and bits of color and texture found in nature.

The approach of using documentation to generate visual compositions has been a staple of my studio practice ever since. Travel to diverse locations has resulted in distinctly different series of work, but the manner in which I process memories is consistent.

Two years ago, when I came across 25 intaglio plates in my studio from my 1980's New Mexico series, I decided to revisit them and the concept of memory.

I created a new problem for myself: to re-etch the copper and zinc plates extensively, to dramatically alter the imagery on the plates by responding to them 40 years later. I tend to make "rules" for myself when beginning a new series. In this case an important rule was to etch the plates without making proofs throughout the process. (Commonly, a printmaker makes working prints or proofs to inform the next steps in the etching process.) I applied this new rule as an alternative way of exploring memory. The plates had incised lines and textures. Those marks functioned as my memory sources. From that fundamental plate topography, I employed the physical process of etching or taking away to look for essential forms that still rang true to me, both visually and conceptually. After three months of etching without proofing, I spent two weeks of printing the reworked copper and zinc plates. Of the 25 plates, I decided that 20 of them were complete and ready for the next step: incorporating color.

Since graduate school, I have printed plates in black-and-white until I consider them to be resolved or complete. At this point, if color is part of the concept, I begin to explore color solutions. All of the 1980s New Mexico etchings had been printed in color. In this new iteration of the series, I opted for color again, but with another rule: I did not allow myself to look at the earlier color prints. The newly-etched plates required a fresh approach to color decisions.

My initial color references for this series of prints are gleaned from color sketchbooks. I create such books filled with bits of color: found colored paper scraps, swatches of colors from paintings, ink palette colors and reproductions of works of art that I have found to be visually arresting. The color sketchbooks are like my private encyclopedias, covering a wide range of approaches to color mixing and mark making. For each of the *New Mexico Memory* prints, I selected two or three swatches of color as starting points to begin mixing inks.



New Mexico Memory XII by
Nicholas Hill, 2024, 8-plate
intaglio print, 30 x 20 inches

My approach to printing is more like painting than print-making in that I ink a plate, and then I alter the next color based upon the appearance of the first color. It is a time-consuming process. Because of my painterly approach to color mixing, I opted not to create editions of these prints. Each impression is one of a kind.

As I make prints, the essential aspect of printmaking is not repeatability, but rather the distinctive mark-making qualities of etching, and the unique color effects that are achieved with the indirect process of printing on a press.

When I first went hiking in the Sangre de Cristo mountains, I was amazed by the iron red dust. Eventually my hiking boots were coated with this natural pigment with each step that I took. Hunting and gathering, wandering, looking at natural and human-made elements are the animating forces of memory for me. Etching, scraping, inking, and printing copper plates are physical efforts that focus my exploration of memory from concept to tangible image.

- Nicholas Hill

Biography

Printmaker and painter Nicholas Hill lives and works in Granville, Ohio. He is a 2017 Guggenheim Fellow, has exhibited his work extensively, and has been awarded residencies in Chile, India, Portugal, Italy, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Poland.

Hill's work is represented in more than fifty public collections including the United States' Department of State, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the New York Historical Society, and the Library of Congress.

After receiving his MFA degree from the University of Iowa, where he studied printmaking with Mauricio Lasansky, Nicholas had an extensive teaching career at the State University of New York, Union College in New York, Bethany College, and Otterbein University in Ohio. Nicholas chaired the art department while at Bethany College.

In 2025, Nicholas will return to Chile and Portugal to offer printmaking workshops and to exhibit his work.



Birger Sandzén
- MEMORIAL GALLERY -

401 N. First Street, PO Box 348, Lindsborg, KS 67456

(785) 227-2220 sandzengallery@gmail.com www.sandzen.org

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