

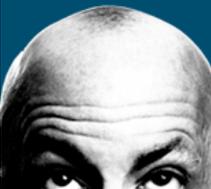


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News: Cover

Graphic Situation

By [Francis X. Gilpin](#)

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The guests, a few still carrying their wineglasses, mosey through a concrete research building at the edge of the University of South Florida's Tampa campus. Four prints by William Wegman rest on a workshop table. In the air-conditioned cool on this hot summer night, the patrons of USF's Graphicstudio queue up for a close look. They see few dogs.

William Wegman, the artist famed for his mock-serious photographs of Weimarers, was in Tampa earlier in the year, working on a series of prints with Graphicstudio. The twisted tourist in Wegman scoured an antique bookstore and found vintage postcards of Tampa scenes. Wegman worked with Graphicstudio artisans to enlarge the gauzy landscapes on the series of postcards into splendid tableaux of a bygone city, almost unrecognizable today. Throughout the art world, Graphicstudio is known for innovative printmaking and sculpture. Yet, back home, Graphicstudio gets lost amid lovely beaches, mediocre sports teams and subtropical kitsch. In the 1980s, Deli D. Sacilotto, Graphic-studio's research director, flew to Stockholm for an exhibit by James Rosenquist, an American pop artist who lives most of the year near Tampa and produces work at Graphicstudio. "The dealer there knew nothing about the university," said Sacilotto, "but was very familiar with everything about Graphicstudio."

Brenda Woodard, former assistant director of Graphicstudio, said the Tampa atelier regularly welcomed the best of New York and Los Angeles. "It was better known in the art centers than it was within its own community," said Woodard. Graphicstudio has grown accustomed to the regional slights after nearly 30 years of operation. If the Tampa Bay area's best-kept cultural secret is to survive, however, that low local profile needs to be elevated.

Public universities were in budgetary upheaval even before state tourist tax dollars started drying up in the terrorism panic. Campus administrators, desperate to please their penny-pinching political benefactors, are forcing institutions like Graphicstudio to be more relevant, not only to patrons but to taxpayers footing the bill. Ron Jones, dean of USF's College of Fine Arts, re-christened College of Visual and Performing Arts, addressed local subscribers before the tour that featured the Wegmans and other Graphicstudio works.

Jones nervously recalled USF budget cuts of the 1970s, which knocked Graphicstudio out of business for four years. The newest round of reductions is deeper than any previous, he said. In June, Jones ordered his department chairs to trim \$343,000 from their spending proposals to fit USF President Judy Genshaft's revised budget of \$9.5-million for the College of Visual and Performing Arts.

"The fact that we are standing here and not talking about closing Graphicstudio does my heart good," Jones told subscribers at the August reception.

But that doesn't mean big changes aren't in store. Jones has seized on the departure of Graphicstudio's fourth director, Hank Hine, who is moving to the Salvador Dali Museum in St. Petersburg, as a chance to reshape the mission.

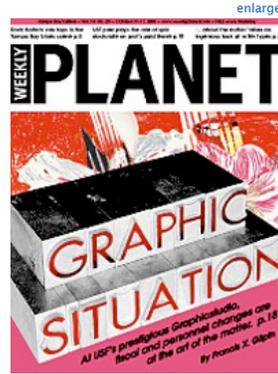
"We are forced to accept the fact that Graphicstudio can no longer be what it was," Jones told the *Weekly Planet* in a recent interview. "It just can't be. It's going to be something different."

A commercial enterprise sheathed in an academic setting, Graphicstudio will be expected to be profitable, Jones said. Whether it is now is tough to say. Regardless, Graphicstudio could soon be called upon to help prop up the finances of USF's entire fine arts college.

"We have to figure out some other way, to put it in the crassest terms, to increase the income to support what we're trying to do," said Jones, "or decrease what we're trying to do."

More troublesome, Graphicstudio must boost sales and subscriptions in a lackluster business climate where demand for its primary output, contemporary prints, started to decline well before the economy did.

"The art world has changed," said Jones. "Printmaking and painting are not at the center of things today."



ABOUT THE COVER *Weekly Planet* Art Director Todd Bates combines linotype and a detail of James Rosenquist's "Shriek."

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REVIEW

Donald J. Saff, a former engineering student who was swept up in the printmaking renaissance of the late 20th century in Europe and his native New York, founded Graphicstudio in 1968.

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"Graphicstudio was modeled after the print workshops that really started their heyday in the '60s," said Brenda Woodard, now an assistant to Jones. "It was when the whole issue of prints came to the foreground again where it had really lapsed for such a long time as popular art."

Saff had met Deli Sacilotto in 1964 while the two men were in Italy on fellowships. Sacilotto said Saff came to regret the name Graphicstudio.

"Many times, he said: 'I wish I'd thought up a really catchy good name,'" said Sacilotto, who came to USF to work as a printmaker at Saff's invitation. Graphicstudio lacked the ring of rivals Gemini G.E.L. in Los Angeles or Tyler Graphics Ltd. in New York, although Sacilotto said Saff always considered those workshops inferior to his.

The first artist to work with Saff and Graphicstudio was Brooklyn College professor Philip Pearlstein. During two-and-a-half weeks in Tampa in 1969, Pearlstein finished four lithographs, despite inexperience with the medium. "I've worked with other printmakers," Pearlstein said in a 1987 interview, "but I think that really was my first experience in depth."

Two female students posed nude for Pearlstein, a first at USF. His choice of subjects was considered more remarkable down south than the fact that he was working directly onto the stone that would make his prints.

Saff continued to attract artists like Pearlstein, who enjoyed some stature in the late 1960s and tapped into Graphicstudio's technical proficiency to experiment with new media and achieve greater respect. "Don had a very good eye," said Sacilotto. "We wanted to have a mix of well-known people and emerging and exciting people."

The roster of artists recruited by Saff and his successors is impressive, considering Tampa's absence from cultural A-lists. The success has been attributed to a tradition of intellectual generosity and fine craftsmanship established by the master printer.

"Don, he's a scholar, but he's also very innovative with ideas and materials and things, and he sees how they work for other artists," James Rosenquist once told Ruth E. Fine, a curator at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. "He seems to be giving away ideas that he develops."

When Rosenquist was injured in a Tampa automobile accident, Saff converted Graphicstudio into what amounted to a personal workspace for the recuperating artist.

Following Pearlstein and Rosenquist to Graphicstudio have been Alice Aycok, Chuck Close, Jim Dine, Robert Mapplethorpe, Robert Rauschenberg and Edward Ruscha.

For all the visiting stars, Saff was confronted by a dilemma. Subscribers, a key revenue source, liked big names. But Graphicstudio struggled with a countervailing stigma at the university that the workshop wasn't generating enough student credit hours to justify state subsidy.

Art instructors had to pick up the slack for non-teaching faculty at Graphicstudio, which tended to overshadow their own projects. They shed no tears in 1976 when USF closed the atelier in a funding crunch.

Saff, who had risen to dean of the fine arts college, stepped down. Four years later, a new president and provost resuscitated his baby with legislative backing. Saff stayed vaguely in the background until 1985 when he returned to a revived Graphicstudio.

While he was away, Saff's own work was honored in a Gemini exhibit at the National Gallery in 1984. The positive re-sponse prompted modern prints curator Fine to appeal to Saff for help starting a Graphicstudio Archive at the national museum.

Graphicstudio's esteem soared in 1991 when the National Gallery hosted a retrospective. More than 250 lithographs, etchings, woodcuts and other pieces by 37 artists were on display for almost four months.

"The exhibition celebrates the formation of the Graphicstudio Archive and suggests its extraordinary range," gallery Director J. Carter Brown wrote in the catalogue for the show, *Graphicstudio: Contemporary Art from the Collaborative Workshop at the University of South Florida*.

Graphicstudio had arrived.

A decade later, Graphicstudio is at another crossroad.

Charles D. "Hank" Hine III is wrapping up his seven-year directorship -- sooner rather than later, Jones apparently hopes.

Hine, educated at Stanford and Brown, came to USF in 1994 from San Francisco, where he ran his own small fine art press. He recently announced plans to move across Tampa Bay to the Dali next June.

But Jones looks to be pushing Hine toward the door now.

Although the dean denies that, Jones wrote Hine in a recent e-mail message: "Hank, I am

sympathetic with your desire to continue to be the director of Graphicstudio until you move to the Dali but these times are calling for quicker action."

Hine told the *Planet* that his Graphicstudio experience has been "like working with a team of top-notch scientists." Graphicstudio, in fact, is formally called the Institute for Research in Art.

Over the summer, Ron Jones asked Margaret A. Miller, director of USF's Contemporary Art Museum, to add Graphicstudio to her portfolio.

Holding down the two jobs, Miller told the *Planet*, "gives me an opportunity to create teams and merge the staff in certain areas to try to create a more coherent relationship with artists that I think will benefit the community."

The challenge is doing that at a public university where a reconstituted governing board dominated by Republican businessmen probably views grant-attracting scientific research as a faster route to fiscal stability and national prominence than experimentation in the arts.

Jones talks a lot about the artistic mainstream these days. That could mean Graphicstudio will pass up the riskier projects that it used to embrace.

"Which artists to select and how can you stay in the mainstream when nobody can even define a mainstream" is how Jones summarized Graphicstudio's quandary in the current fragmented state of modern art.

While the Jones outline for saving Graphicstudio is a work-in-progress, it surely rides on Miller's reputation for staying just ahead of the curve at the Contemporary Art Museum.

"People look at you and wonder: 'Why would you want to work with living artists?' It's all sort of neater if they're not around," Miller said with a smile. "I really love working with artists who are willing and engaged in thinking about the world of ideas in a new way."

Jones wants Graphicstudio to feed off Miller's energy. "For the moment, the idea is to be a part of that same momentum and not outside that momentum," he said. "We don't have the luxury of taking it off in different directions where we reduce the probability of maintaining, obtaining or retaining a greater national presence."

The goal, according to the occasionally rambling Jones, is "creating the buzz, the noise and therefore having a greater probability of attracting subscribers and people to consider retail purchases, the two things that are essential to supporting what Graphic-studio does."

In contrast to the bow-tied dean, Miller dresses stylishly casual, like the artists she has coaxed to the museum. Miller briefly co-directed Graphicstudio when it came back from the dead in 1980. But the USF art professor has also absorbed the message from Genshaft and the new trustees.

"To size up what would be of educational value, what would be of community value, what's prestigious in an international sense, you know this is a hard task," said Miller. "You have to think long and hard about who you want to invest these kinds of resources in. Who you can raise money for? Who will work with the students? Where a market will be?"

Miller said she raises \$450,000 every year to keep the museum going and Graphicstudio requires at least that much.

Deciphering Graphicstudio's financial performance is tricky. It hasn't undergone an outside audit in years. Unaudited figures show six-figure operating losses in fiscal years 1998 and 2001.

As of June 30, Graphicstudio showed an asset balance of minus \$119,173, according to a *Planet* analysis, which excluded some short-term obligations yet to be paid. Subscription and retail sales for the 12 months ending June 30 appeared to be off sharply from the prior year.

Jones cautioned that the figures were unreliable. "It's impossible for you to use our budget documents and draw accurate conclusions about what's happening at Graphicstudio," he said.

So what is happening?

Subscriptions, which entitle buyers to regular offerings of original limited editions at a discount, are actually up slightly, Jones said. His contention was cast in some doubt by a light turnout of local subscribers at the reception.

Jones did acknowledge displeasure with sales to single-piece purchasers such as dealers or museums. "Retail sales have dropped and that's a concern," he said.

Original prints were an affordable alternative to one-of-a-kind artwork for young collectors a generation ago. But print sales have been sinking steadily since the 1980s. Digital printing and offset lithography have made a bad situation worse for Graphicstudio, rendering its more painstaking methods less vital.

"It's not a fluke and it's not driven by the current economic condition," said Jones. "If you expect to do the same thing the same way in a declining market, you're going to have to expect your sales to decline."

Miller has no intention of letting Graphicstudio stand still. Sitting in her office one recent morning, a drowsy Miller is jolted to life by coffee and a chat about her recent triumphs and the exciting

potential of the Graphicstudio-museum marriage. She wants to build on Wegman's February visit. His Tampa show at the Contemporary Art Museum was heralded on Bay area billboards with huge replicated panels of his trademark Weimarers. "While he has this mass appeal on one level, he is a serious artist," said Miller. "I tried to demonstrate that."

Wegman graciously popped in at Blake High School to talk with students familiar with his work from *Saturday Night Live*. That is how USF cultivates the next generation of art lovers, Miller said.

Thinking aloud, Miller contemplates a public art project by San Francisco interactive videographer Jim Campbell that USF has recently commissioned. Since the Museum of Modern Art has a Campbell exhibition coming up, a USF show by the MIT-trained engineer is probably out of the question.

Nevertheless, Miller wonders whether Graphicstudio could help Campbell with digital artwork for his upcoming New York exhibit. Do an edition with him? Offer a residency so Campbell could inspire USF students or clue in Bay area residents about the latest in video art at a museum lecture?

"I don't know if that would work," said Miller.

If the details can be negotiated, Miller is frenetic about the possibilities: "The community would begin to see the artist in the context of an exhibition, a public art commission, students would be engaged academically, and we could do some editions with a pre-arrangement or a partnership with another museum as part of an installation, or maybe they would go on the market."

Miller catches her breath. "Clearly, his dealer is interested in getting new work by him because there is a waiting list," she said.

This fall, Miller will assemble a distinguished panel of artists, collectors and curators from across America to advise her on such calls.

"It's a changing time for the distribution of prints or art," said Miller, noting recent exhibits that have been staged completely on the Web. "So it might be interesting to think of new markets and new ways of distributing."

Although Jones and Hine have crossed swords over the changes at Graphicstudio, the dean said: "We're not exchanging Hank Hine's decisions for Margaret Miller's decisions. What we're doing is exchanging a model that relied on the director to make the decisions -- no matter who the director was -- to a model where there is tremendous input from various perspectives."

That should include the workshop's talented staff.

Deli Sacilotto, for example, is an expert in photogravure and is skilled at other printmaking techniques. Sacilotto has introduced several new techniques to the field. "The mad scientist," Mapplethorpe used to fondly call him.

"We invent new processes," said Noel Smith, Graphicstudio's education coordinator. "But we also improve old processes."

Jones hopes that Miller can update Graphicstudio, the collaborative printmaking pathfinder, for the 21st century.

"That will come closer to what was the Don Saff approach, which was everybody's in there with that artist and a kind of chemistry is created that is unique to that moment in time," said Jones. "Whether that part can be replicated, we'll have to wait and see. It's going to take some real magic. Even if it falls short of that magic, I think it will be a better system."

Saff, who brought Miller to USF 30 years ago, has full confidence in her. "She's wired into the arts scene," said Saff, who has been assisting the Guggenheim Museum in opening a satellite gallery in Las Vegas.

The presence of his old friend Sacilotto at USF reassures Saff, too. "While he's in there," Saff said, "I'm not worried about Graphicstudio."

It is no secret that Saff hasn't been a Hine admirer. The Graphicstudio founder said Miller and Jones are just the duo to lead his creation to new glories. Whoever happens to be running USF is irrelevant, he said.

"I was never dependent on the upper administration," said Saff of his USF years. "Sometimes, I had their support. Sometimes, I didn't. Graphicstudio is bigger than that administration, or any administration."

"I'm not being egotistical. I'm out there in the art world. I work for the Guggenheim. Graphicstudio is one of the most innovative institutions in this country and, extrapolating on that, in the world."

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