

# Prints & Glass



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## Couple's joint show at Haydon Gallery a special treat

Sometimes galleries pair artists who work in mediums so different it is difficult to understand why the show was put together.

On first glance, that would appear to be the case with the stunning woodcut prints of Karen Kunc and the gorgeous blown glass vessels of Kenny Walton that now fill the Haydon Gallery.

Those familiar with the local art scene are already aware of why they're paired. But for those who don't know, Kunc and Walton are married. And they just happen to be two of Nebraska's best and best-known artists.

The Haydon show, which runs through Jan. 26, is the couple's first Lincoln exhibition. In 1983, they had a show together at the Norfolk Arts Center; in 1989, they had a show at Hastings College, and they've more recently had a small exhibition at a Columbus, Ohio, arts and craft museum.

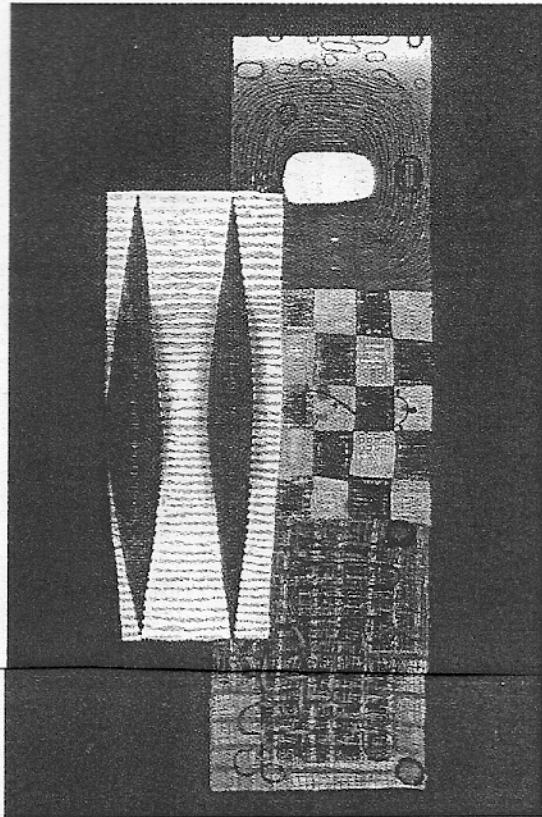
The 63 objects at Haydon make up the largest exhibition ever by the pair.

"It's taken awhile for it to happen because Kenny's so busy and his work goes out so much," Kunc said. "Not that it's easy for me to do a show. But I have multiples, so I can pull things out from years ago. He doesn't have things from several years ago."

"It's really fun doing it in Lincoln because people have followed our work for years. They've noticed little bits and pieces of the story — to really confirm it by seeing the work together. That's really fun."

With a little looking, longtime appreciators of Kunc and Walton's work can see some links between her prints and his glass.

The most immediately evident connect is the bright colors. But their use of pattern to create a sense of motion is quite similar, and both are clearly masters of their respective crafts — a connection that isn't lost on the artists.



COURTESY PHOTO

"Endless Arabesque" by Karen Kunc, 2001

"We've always known there's been kind of interconnections between the abstracts, the sense of color and attention to intricacy and detail," Kunc said. "And kind of our obsessiveness."

In a separate conversation, Walton agreed that the pair shared some elements in their work.

"Color and textures and pattern is it," Walton said. "Subject matter — Karen's work has some basis in real life, it's kind of landscape oriented. My work doesn't have it. I can't draw stick people. I can't draw a piece in advance to see if it works visually. For me, it's trial by fire, no pun intended. If I start a piece, I have to either finish it or quit."

Nebraska is, at least in part, the subject matter of Kunc's prints. Many of them make reference to the land, often as viewed from above. But plant-like forms found in works like "Oasis" and "Prairie Silk" provide a more universal subject matter.

"It's an innate organic sense to things," Kunc said. "It's my interest in nature and attention to issues from landscape in the large cosmic sense to microscopic concepts."

Kunc's showcase pieces in the Haydon show are three large prints which are on shaped paper. The shapes are rectangles, but Kunc has

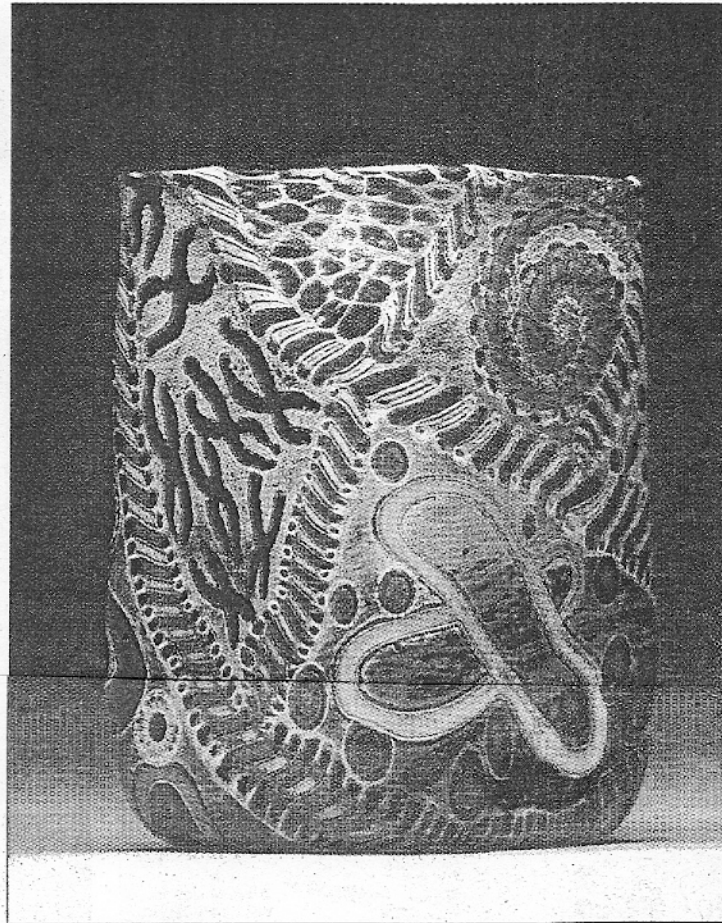
literally taken chunks out of the standard rectangular form, discarding negative space and allowing for even more motion in her images.

Irregular shapes are another element shared by the artists. While Walton's vessels are square in basic form, they are far from hard-edged, and the same holds true for his rounded paperweights.

Walton essentially draws very slowly on the vessel in what is called a hot application process. While there's no direct visual link to specific subject matter in the patterns he creates, the work nonetheless has an organic feel.

"The thing I really like is how unusual things in our environment are, in science and nature," Walton said. "They're so unusual, but if you had a chance to change it, you wouldn't do anything. There's where I'm trying to go in the work."

Walton, who shows and sells his glass pieces at up to a dozen craft shows and fairs each year, does all his work on the couple's acreage four miles outside Avoca. Kunc does most of her work there



COURTESY PHOTO

"Square Glass Vessel" by Kenny Walton

although she also has a studio at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she teaches printmaking.

"Thank goodness, Kenny's in his own building," Kunc said. "It's like hades in there and it's always messy. I try to keep my stuff neater."

Even though they're working within a few yards of each other, Kunc and Walton don't have much input into each other's work.

"We don't see each other's work that often," Walton said. "When I first started making some serious work and good pieces, I'd work for awhile and think, 'I'm making Karen's print.' I really had to make certain I wasn't doing that."

In fact, Kunc said, they don't even critique each other's work.

"I think it's healthier for us not to," Kunc said. "It's best for us to be the best supporters for each other. We've always given each other the space and time to make the work. We both know how involved it is."

Walton had much the same thought.

"It's one thing after your work is done to comment on it," he said. "But when it's in process, I don't want to say it's not welcome, but it's not. We tend not to do that because it's not always helpful to be adding your two cents worth while the work's in progress. After it's over, I never have anything bad to say about her work."

I concur with Walton about not having anything bad to say about Kunc's work and I certainly don't have anything bad to say about Walton's glass either. In fact, this show, the first I've seen in Lincoln in 2002, is likely to be one of the best local artist exhibitions of the year.

Kunc and Walton will give a gallery talk about their work on Wednesday at 2 p.m. at Haydon, 335 N. Eighth St. That is likely to be a lot of fun. But whether you make the talk or not, their joint show is a special treat that's well worth the visit.

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