Phoenix Rising gives artists place to create, show their works

By Nancy Gibson
Dispatch Arts Reporter

printmaking, in many ways, lies in a communal experience. Artists give a subject and style to an etching or a woodcut, but, when they put the print, friends and colleagues might help manipulate the press or build the etching paper, or simply share the excitement of the мастерштейн image.

Then, of course, a print is not a single work but one of multiple that hangs easily in a student apartment, suburban home or downtown office.

Phoenix Rising Printmaking Cooperative and Gallery is putting the commercial brush into printmaking.

The fledgling organization, which opened in September at 938 Parsons Ave., is the city's first cooperative printmaking studio and a labor of love for the founding artists.

Anne Cushman, a printmaker from Philadelphia; Claire Hagan, a former print instructor at Fort Hayes Arts and Academic High School; and fellow printmakers in 1995. They devised a plan, found space, survived a fire, bought and scavenged equipment, and began to attract other artists who loved printmaking as much as they did.

"Brought in for Aug. 7, the cooperative will host an open house and demonstrations from 6 to 8 p.m.

The events coincide with print exhibitions at the Lanning Gallery, 900 N. High St., and the Hagan-directed Gallery at Jungjahn, 29 E. Russell St.

"Most major cities have places like this," Cushman said, "but a printmaking coop just hadn't existed in Columbus before.

"As an artist, it's hard to maintain an interest in printmaking because the equipment is very large and expensive. Our goal was to have a place for ourselves and other artists to make prints."

With financial support from the Columbus Neighborhood Design Assistance Center, the women worked with landlord David Bidwell to renovate the building — which once housed a drugstore, then a used-appliance store.

The renovation suffered a setback in 1996 when a fire caused extensive damage.

"That's why we're called Phoenix," Hagan said.

They have tried to make the storefront building look as it probably did originally, with wood floors, large windows and a cozier atmosphere.

At the front is a small gallery, leading into a space filled with presses, drawers and equipment.

Phoenix Rising purchased used presses, including a 100-year-old etching press that reinforces the old-fashioned atmosphere, from Ohio State University. Hagan and Cushman spent about $6,000 to buy another etching press from a company in Altoona, N.Y.

"It's the only new thing in this place," Hagan said.

An old cafeteria rack, purchased for $1 at an auction, makes a print-drying stand. Old maps from the state provide storage.

Hagan supplied an old mill, and the Columbus College of Art and Design donated water tanks. Robert had the idea of painting a blue sky and clouds on the ceiling.

While Hagan and Cushman have served as directors, the structure is changing into more of a true cooperative, with members taking charge of the organization and its direction.

Bryan Baker, a recent printmaking graduate from Ohio University, will become the live-in administrator; he is renovating and will occupy an upstairs apartment.

The five-member Phoenix board comprises of Cushman, Hagan, gallery owner Ursela Lanning, artist Heather Murr and Bob Tatum, director of the former Lanning Elia Press.

The cooperative offers lectures and workshops as well as printmaking facilities.

The goal is to educate consumers as well as artists.

"Printmaking hasn't changed in 500 years," Cushman said. "The principles are the same, but a lot of the techniques have changed."

"Contemporary printmakers are excited or put off by computer-imaging techniques.

Many artists are demanding non-toxic inks and solvents, and printmakers in general are concerned about the public perception of prints.

"A Xeroxed watercolor is a fine art print," Hagan said. "People at art fairs often don't understand the difference between commercial prints and fine-art prints."

With Phoenix Rising, Cushman and Hagan hope to attract students, young artists and established artists who work primarily in prints or want to sample a new medium.

"It's funny with artists who are printmakers," Cushman said. "Sometimes you think, 'Why don't you just paint it?' But you get caught up in the process and you can't get the same image from a painting or a drawing."

People who make prints, Hagan said, appreciate the incremental stages involved in making art.

"And there's always the element of surprise," Cushman said. "Pulling a print is a very exciting moment. When somebody around here says, 'I'm ready to print my plate,' there are always two or three people ready to watch."