

Arnold Shives

GREEN MOUNTAIN

Arnold Shives
BY CHRISTOPHER BRAYSHAW

Artist's Statements (2001)
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By Christopher Brayshaw, 1999

Arnold Shives was born in Vancouver in 1943. He first attended the University of British Columbia, then received his BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute, where he studied with noted painter and printmaker Richard Diebenkorn, who introduced him to the work of French modernists like Matisse and Cezanne. Shives later received an MFA from Stanford University before returning to Vancouver. Over the next few years, Shives worked as a geological assistant in remote regions of the province, and climbed extensively in British Columbia's Coast Ranges, making a number of important early alpine ascents. Shives' interest in the coastal landscape is

Arnold Shives
Green Mountain, 1975

colour linocut print on laid paper; 3/4
(45.7 x 60.6cm)
SAG 1991.01.01
gift of Marion and Gordon Smith

Photograph by Cameron Heryet

evident in his work to this day, and is often derived from natural forms sketched or photographed on his hiking or climbing trips. Shives has participated in a number of group and solo exhibitions in British Columbia and abroad, including exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery; DeLeon White Gallery, Toronto; Paul Kuhn Gallery, Calgary; Burnaby Art Gallery, Burnaby; and the Ferry Building Gallery, West Vancouver.

Green Mountain (1976) is a superb example of Shives' interest in the linocut process, which he worked with extensively from the mid-1970s through the early

1980s. Here, as in all his linocuts, natural forms are abstracted into flat coloured planes whose edges are brought into sharp relief, creating visual tension between adjoining forms. White lines, carved into the surface of the linoleum blocks used to make the print, stress either surface textures or indicate movement within forms. Thus, for example, the whirling linework scoring the surface of the glacier at the foot of *Green Mountain* refers not only to the abraded texture of the old ice, but also to the fact that the glacier is a slowly moving river of ice whose movements are too subtle



Arnold Shives *Green Mountain*, 1975 colour linocut print on laid paper; 3/4 (45.7 x 60.6cm) SAG 1991.01.01
Gift of Marion and Gordon Smith. Photograph by Cameron Heryet.

to be captured by the eye and are consequently only visible through inference and abstraction. Here, as elsewhere in his work, Shives depicts the coastal landscape as constantly moving. Geological forms are never static; rather, they mix and tangle like living things. By depicting organic and inorganic forms intertwining, Shives challenges viewers to break down traditional philosophical distinctions between “nature” and “culture.” His use of abstraction, in the form of the linocut’s large, flat, interlocking planes of colour, prevents viewers from taking his prints as straightforward representations of a particular place. Some times, the abstract forms that dance across his prints’ surfaces do not have any direct parallels in nature; that is to say, they might be leaves, wind currents, or simply an expression of joy at standing in a high, wild place.

Artist’s Statements (2001)

January 4, 2001

It’s good to be an artist. Thanks to the educational efforts of my parents, I discovered the world of art early in life. Even as a child I was intoxicated with the process of coaxing beauty out of wood, canvas, paper and pigment. From my early years, too, I acquired a fondness for the outdoors; this has informed my imagery, which remains principally landscape-based. Evolving out of my interest in wilderness, mountaineering - a real passion of mine for a decade or so - has served me well in the realm of artistic exploration. Both activities entail significant elements of uncertainty and, of course, of exhilaration. And how would we artist cope without an abundant supply of sporting spirit?

Art is a vocation. The following words of Jacques Maritain caught my attention: “Art and poetry are more necessary than bread to the human race. They fit it for the life of the spirit.”

January 15, 2001

Green Mountain (1976) was one of my early cut-linoleum block prints. I believe the day, month and year are recorded in the lower right margin.

For cut-block prints I develop the image in stages. I start from sketches done on site, and/or photographs. I cannot recall what the initial inspiration for *Green Mountain* was. Likely it was the Howe Sound or Squamish mountains. I then simplify. I work out through a series of progressively refined pencil and pastel drawings the placement of the blocks of colour; parallel to the colour arrangement, I map out linear details. When the drawing is reasonably

resolved I draw the design with coloured chalks onto the linoleum, clearly outlining the areas I'll be cutting with a saber saw. Usually the first cuts into the linoleum are done with gouges. I work freely and spontaneously with the gouges. When I cut the block with the saber saw I try to stay close to the chalk line.

Green Mountain went through a couple of states: I made a proof, then adjusted the inks and then gouged some more lines. I repeated this process a few more times until I got it right.

In the spring of 1975 I showed Gordon and Marion Smith my first colour linoblock prints. Gordon liked them-and bought *Green Mountain*!

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