



E-CATALOGUE WINTER 2011

Midnight Ride

A BOOK OF 30 ETCHINGS
BY CHARLES ECKART



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MIDNIGHT RIDE

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On front cover (#12): CANDLE. 1984. 5.5 × 3.63"

EVERY YEAR Santa sets out on a midnight ride to deliver gifts to children all over the world. It's an impossible mission, but a wonderful, generous fantasy about providing joy and happiness. To give a fragment of oneself to friends in this way warms the spirit and is very satisfying to the one who gives. Maybe that is why Santa Claus is such a jolly old soul.

For the past 48 Decembers I have made holiday greeting cards for friends and family. From that period 30 etchings were selected for this book. Some early cards were silkscreened, others were woodcuts, but in 1966 I acquired a small hand-built press and started etching. The subtleties of the medium led to a richer development of simple images reflecting the season's merriment and bounty, landscapes close to home, and other scenes related to my art. Working in this medium gradually turned the idea of producing a temporary seasonal greeting into producing a fine etching that my friends might want to keep—a gift.

Over the years my attitudes and vision have changed. Clues are scattered through the book that point toward three periods of painting development. The book begins during a time when I was a realist painter living in San

Francisco, with a nine-to-five job. My commute by bus stimulated my eye and I began to paint my fellow passengers. The paintings reflected the routine and repetition, the boredom and anonymity of everyday life.

By the 1970s the tedium of the actual execution of realist paintings increasingly frustrated me. A dramatic shift occurred as I entered a period of figurative expressionism, allowing me to keep a continuous creative involvement in the painting process from start to finish. At first, strange and distorted figures appeared. Then visions of liberation came in the form of winged figures. As I developed the images over time, they morphed into androgynous standing figures and faceless heads.

Another major life change occurred in 1985 when my wife Alice and I moved to Point Reyes Station. My focus shifted to the landscape. Early efforts were expressionist and representational but I gradually learned that I did not want to record nature as observed, but to glean her lessons in order to create purer paintings that equal and reflect the beauty and complexity of the natural world. Gradually the work became more abstract and this is the vein I work in today.

Many of the plates were inspired by examining the techniques

and mannerisms of old master etchers such as Rembrandt, Callot, Goya, Whistler, and many others. One example is *Sierra Night*, 1980, which was the outcome of studying James Ensor's *Stars at the Cemetery*. Two other examples are *Ripening Pear*, 1974, and *Acorn*, 1976. Both were inspired by the first state of Rembrandt's *The Shell*. The landscape plates certainly have been influenced by Rembrandt and Whistler.

The most common tool used for drawing on a grounded plate is the needle. It leaves a fine, consistently uniform line. To draw a broad and bold line becomes a challenge in the immediacy of drawing on the plate. Searching for a more versatile tool I discovered the *échope*, invented by Jacques Callot in the 1600s. The *échope* has a steel shaft with a beveled tip forming an oval. By twisting the *échope* while drawing, a very fine line swells into a broad heavy line. Callot invented this tool to imitate the swollen lines of engravings. For me, it became a tool for bold lines and expressive mark-making. The *échope* has been used on a number of plates and is best seen on *Bearded Man*, 1987, and *Artist's Reflection*, 1981.

Expanding the idea of the *échope*, I have made my own fine-toothed tools of varying widths out of wooden dowel

for drawing very broad lines through soft ground. *Willows of Winter*, 2006, was drawn entirely with these wooden tools.

One plate in particular, *Lingering Memories*, 2004, has a direct family connection. That year Alice and I spent the month of October in Paris. About the third week into our stay I began wondering what was going on in the minds of our two much-loved cats, Gus and Ariel, concerning our absence. Were we gone forever? I drew in my sketchbook a scene of the two cats looking from our deck into space wondering what had happened to us. When we returned home I added a bit of Paris to the sketch, which resulted in the idea for this card. Now the cats in their comfort seem to be absorbed with the stone lion from Place de la Concorde standing high up in the cypress trees.

When all the cards have been printed and mailed off to friends in different parts of the world, I get a good feeling, probably not unlike Santa when he returns from his midnight ride.

CHARLES ECKART

Midnight Ride is published by Charles Eckart, a longstanding Bay Area painter with an exhibition history that goes back to the late 1960s. The etchings have been selected from a larger group of images that were created as Christmas cards for family and friends over the past 48 years. The cards were intended as gifts of small pieces of fine art. The finely drawn images are varied, embracing the season's merriment and bounty, landscapes close to home, still lifes, and other images related to the artist's painting development.

Each book contains 30 original etchings created and printed on white BFK Rives paper by the artist on a Griffin press in his studio in Point Reyes Station, CA. The book was designed in collaboration with and the text printed by Alan Hillesheim of Digger Pine Press in Oakland, CA. The page size is $10 \frac{1}{2} \times 13$ inches, allowing generous margins around each etching. The text is set in 14-point Palatino and the title face is Zapfino.

The book was bound by John DeMerritt in Emeryville, CA. The book was printed in single sheets, which are stubbed, tipped together, and then sewn in four-page signatures. Glassine interleaving has been tipped in at the gutter to protect the fragile surface of each etching. The book is covered with a deep green silk and rayon Japanese bookcloth. The endsheets are Canford Guardsman Red.

The slipcase is covered with an Italian natural finish cotton/linen bookcloth. The title is stamped with a metallic foil onto the cover and spine.

An edition of 50 is for sale with an additional five copies for the artist. Each book is numbered and signed by the artist. The price is \$2,000 USD.

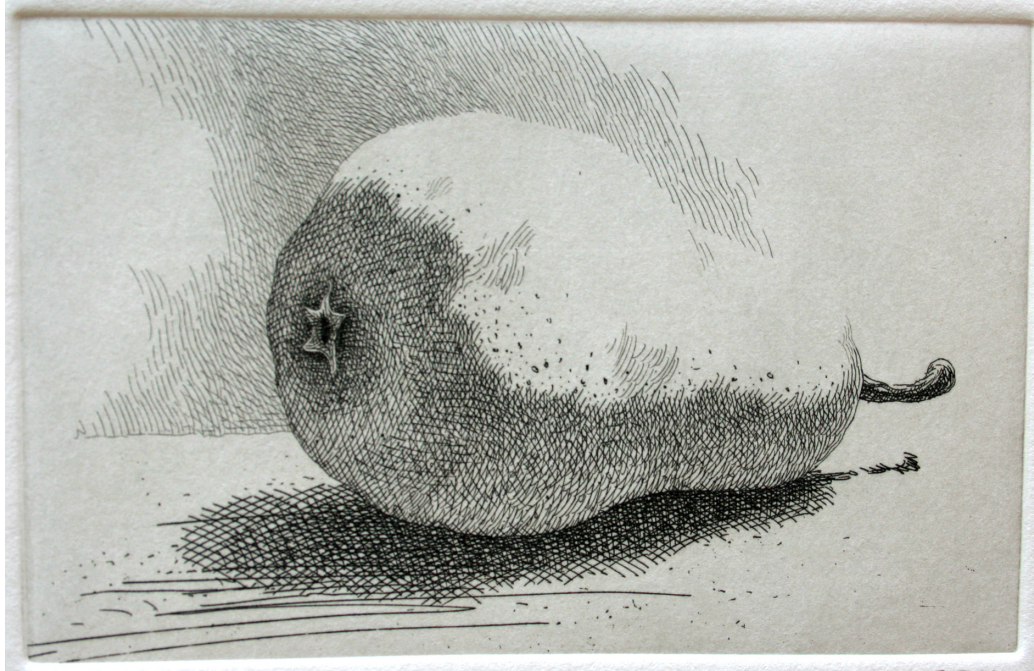




I. MIDNIGHT RIDE. 1967. 3 × 5"



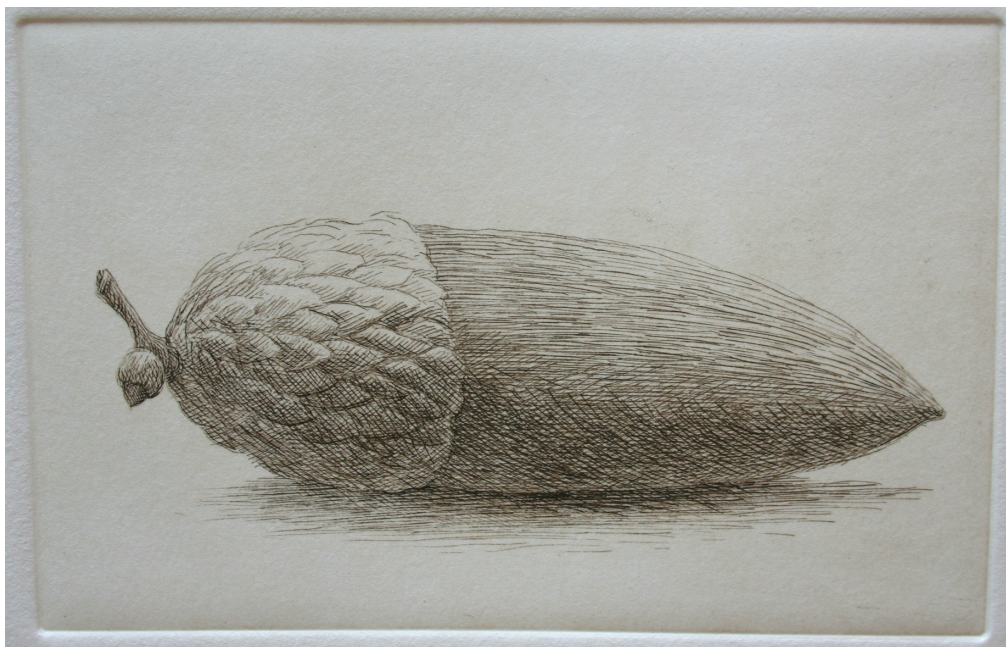
2. WALNUTS. 1967. 3.25 × 5.25"



3. RIPENING PEAR. 1974. 3.25 × 5.25"



4. COOL SANTA. 1975. 4.87 × 3.5"



5. ACORN. 1976. 3.38 × 5.25"



6. WINGED FIGURE. 1977. 3.38 × 5.25"



7. PINECONE. 1978. 3.25 × 5.13"



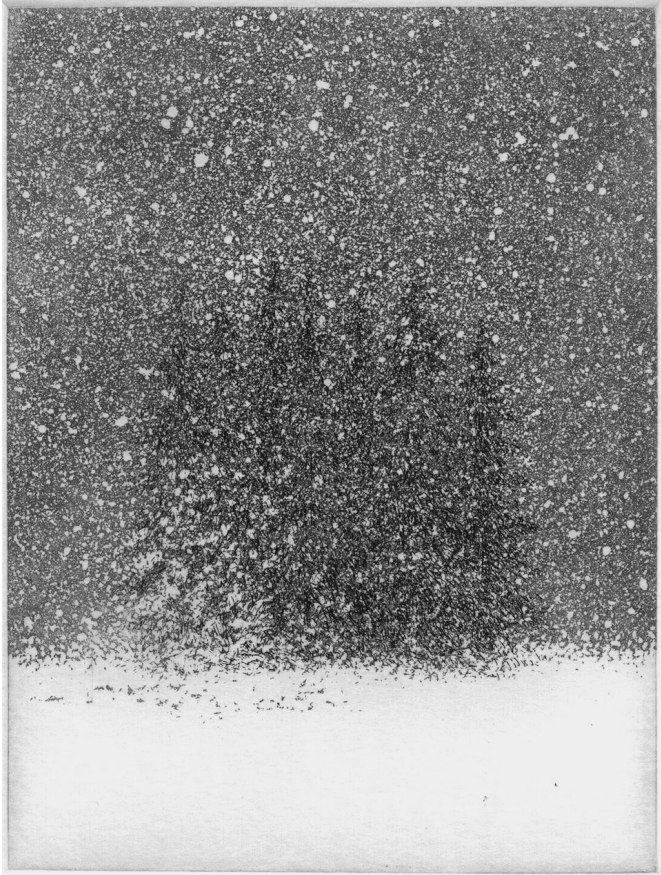
8. SIERRA NIGHT. 1980. 5.38 × 3.63"



9. ARTIST'S REFLECTION. 1981. 5.5 × 3.63"

10. DANCER. 1982. 4.88 × 3.63"





II. FAMILY OF FIRS. 1983. 4.88 × 3.63"



12. CANDLE. 1984. 5.5 × 3.63"



13. BEARDED MAN. 1987. 5 × 3.5"



14. NIGHT LIGHTS, POINT REYES. 1988. 3.25 × 5"



15. WINTER WOODS. 1989. 4.63 × 3.38"



16. SNOW FLURRIES. 1991. 4.75 × 3.5"



17. ON THE MESA, POINT REYES. 1992. 3.25 × 5.13"



18. VIEW FROM THE BICYCLE. 1993. 3.13 × 5.13"



19. VIEW FROM THE STUDIO. 1994. 2.88 × 5.13"



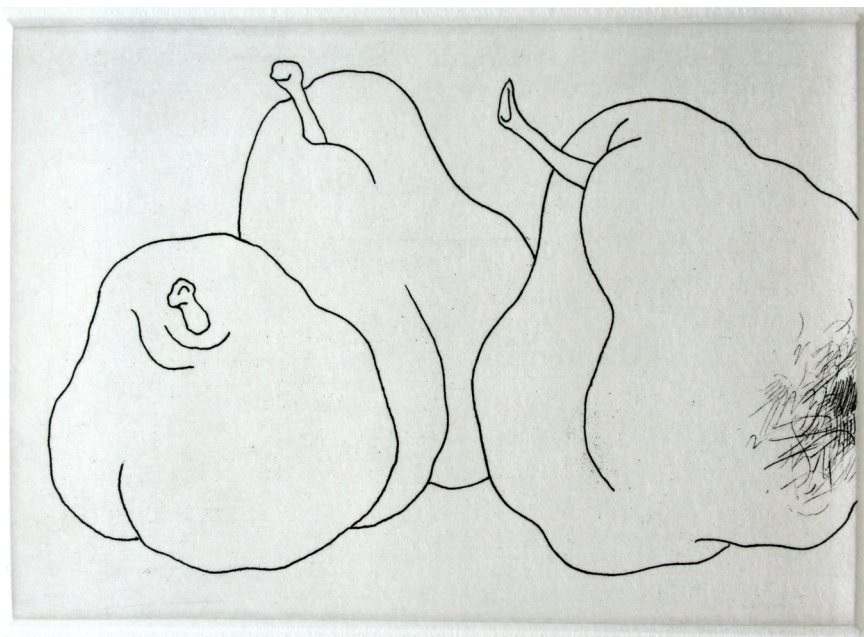
20. BISHOP PINE. 1995. 3.88 × 2.38"



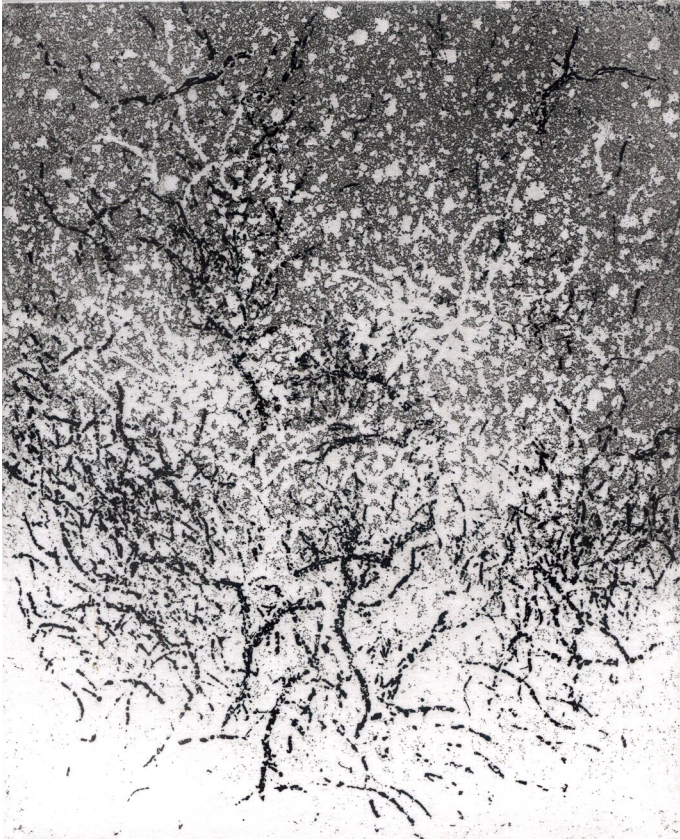
21. GROUND COVER. 1997. 4.63 × 3.63"



22. FROM THE GARDEN. 1998. 4.5 × 3.63"



23. THREE PEARS. 2001. 3.1 × 4.5"



24. DECEMBER, 2002. 4.5×3.5 "



25. GRAPES. 2003. 4.38 × 3.5"



26. LINGERING MEMORIES. 2004. 4.38 × 3.5"



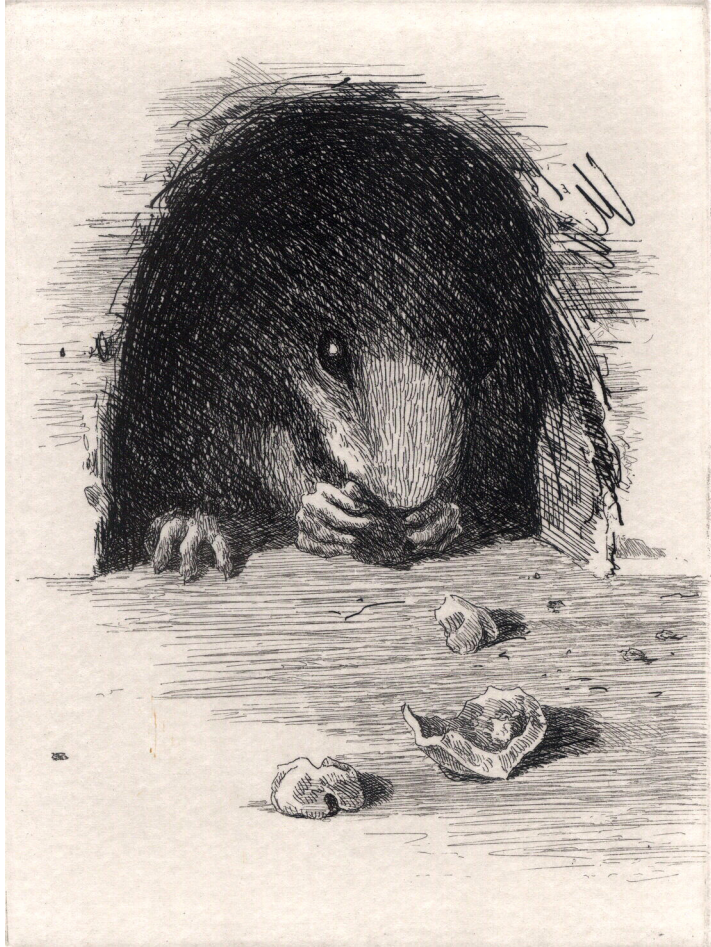
27. BISHOPS IN FOG. 2005. 5 × 3.5"



28. WILLOWS OF WINTER. 2006. 5 × 3.88"



29. RISING MOON. 2007. 5 × 3.88"



30. THE GIFT. 2008. 5 × 3.63"

