

## MAGAZINE

Objects of Beauty | Favorite Things | Behind the Scenes



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## “Creative Joy” – An Interview with Artist Carol Wax

An artist and master printmaker, Wax explores themes of the season in these elegant works of art

Today, we speak with artist Carol Wax to discuss the four limited edition fine art prints: *Doe Bow*, *Fir Play*, *Stag-o-Graph*, and *Snow Gear*, a part of her ongoing Solstice series, which she has created exclusively for The Met Store. Created using the relief intaglio process, these exquisite works of art are surely an elegant way to celebrate the holidays.

Each design is available in a limited edition of 40, priced at \$125 each. Visit The Met Store's Mezzanine Level (located at The Met Fifth Avenue), to shop or call 212-570-3767 for more information.

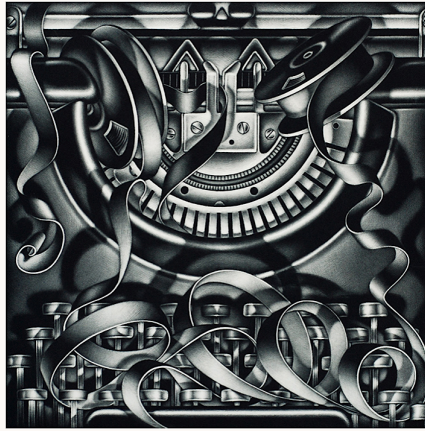
### Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I originally trained to be a classical musician at the Manhattan School of Music but, after a brief career as a professional flutist, I fell in love with printmaking. While working in lithography at the Pratt Graphics Center I discovered the mezzotint process. Soon after I began engraving mezzotints I was asked by the renowned print dealer Sylvan Cole to exhibit at Associated American Artists Gallery, launching my career as a professional artist/printmaker.

As my imagery developed, I became frustrated with the lack of readily available technical knowledge on mezzotint and began researching historical sources for more information. I used this material to write the first text dedicated to this 374-year-old medium. *The Mezzotint: History and Technique*, was published by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. and Thames & Hudson, Ltd. in 1990, and in soft cover by Abrams in 1996.

While I'm best known for my work in mezzotint, I also paint with oils, watercolor and gouache, and create pastels, pencils and mixed-media works on paper.

Recognition of my art includes an Individual Support Grant from the Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, Inc., two Artist Fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts, a Concordia Career Advancement Award from NYFA, The Louise Nevelson Award for Excellence in Printmaking from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and residences at The MacDowell Colony and Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation's Space Program. A selection of the many collections that own my prints are The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The New York and Boston Public Libraries, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Library of Congress, and The National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Type Face (2002) mezzotint by Carol Wax

**Can you tell me about the themes you typically deal with in your artistic practice?**

My imagery is inspired by commonplace objects that I perceive as sentient or mystical. I often describe my work as depicting an anima in the inanimate. I'm especially fascinated by vintage appliances or devices with organic forms that I exaggerate to evoke fantastic creatures or monuments. Or, in the same way seventeenth century Dutch still-lives allegorically symbolized the impermanence of life and beauty, I may render outdated machinery as icons representing the transient nature of technology and consumer trends, contemplating how perceptions of objects evolve from state-of-the-art, to artifact, to art.

Working mainly from models, I combine observation with distorted perspectives, dramatic lighting effects, exaggeration, stylization and imagination to develop my compositions. Sometimes I stage elaborate dioramas, suggesting surreal narratives that consider the humor and menace inherent in our possessions and how they manifest our personal mythologies. In this way, I investigate psychological relationships with the material things we create, covet, consume, and cast away.

**How does that compare with the aesthetic of the fine art prints you have created for The Met Store?**

In conveying my perceptions of objects having inner lives, I often use repeated motifs or patterns that modulate to suggest motion or animation, and a cartoonish rendering style that emphasizes the organic forms I see in man-made objects. The Solstice prints are made using the relief intaglio process, which naturally emphasizes contrasting patterns. As such, I tend to further distill or stylize these designs more than I do in the inherently tonal mezzotint process, reducing some elements to calligraphic gestures.



"Deerlike" 1983 relief intaglio print by Carol Wax

### Can you tell me a bit about how you got started producing fine art prints for the holidays?

I began creating fine art prints for the holiday season in 1983, when I engraved and printed a limited edition of 50 mezzotints, titled *Deerflake*. I continued to make holiday prints, always incorporating deer and/or snowflake designs, on and off for several years, and found that concentrating on the celestial aspects of the Season and calling them Winter Solstice prints helped me cope with holiday stress. When my mailing list became too large for the time-consuming process of printing mezzotints, I switched to etching intaglio plates that I could print in relief, as one would print woodcuts. Some of these editions are limited, and some are unlimited. Continuing this tradition provides a way for me to keep in touch with old friends and family, and to say "Thank you," to people who have shown me kindness in the past year. While sending these creations to people during the holidays may remind people of "cards" they are, in fact, fine art prints.

### What is it like to create something for the holiday season?

Challenging myself to always include deer and snowflake motifs in my holiday designs provides a framework for creating images inherently associated with winter without connecting them to any one particular belief or cultural tradition. Rather, my images embrace most year-end customs: my use of tessellations relates to Islamic mosaics; the six-pointed snowflakes connect my imagery to the Star of David; the occasional depiction of decorative trees and ribbons represent Christian iconography; and my use of blue ink evokes cold indigo skies of winter nights and the Pagan origins of Solstice celebrations.

My concepts derive from many sources. I'm always open to friends suggesting titles I may use as jumping off points for images, while some years I'm inspired by events that occurred during the year. Case in point was the December after 9-11 when it was still too difficult to feel seasonally festive and I felt compelled to create an image that addressed this tragic event. The resulting print, *Missing Peace*, depicts two deer whose elongated legs create silhouetted twin towers as pieces missing from the New York skyline against a backdrop of snowflakes and stars that seem to both weep and offer glimmers of hope. This image touched so many people that I came to see how art really does have the potential to affect and heal, and that – whether you avoid or celebrate the holidays — year end traditions can fill a need to help people take stock of their lives.

Producing images unrelated to one's main body of work can also feed the creative spirit. It's very easy for artists to become stale working in a particular style, medium, or imagery and to lose the fun in making art. Expectations from galleries and other demands often rob artists of the TIME necessary to explore and grow through playing with different materials and mediums. Creating Solstice prints gives me the "excuse" to play with new themes and approaches. Working without the pressure of making "serious" images restores a sense of creative joy that informs my other work.



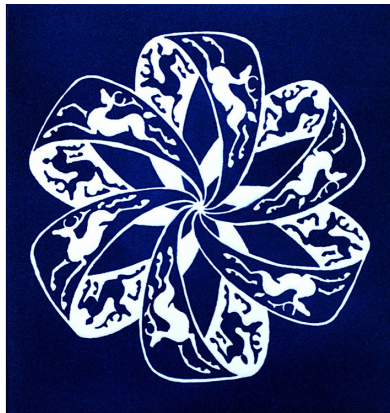
"Missing Peace" 2001 relief intaglio by Carol Wax

**Can you tell me about the designs for this year's four prints?**

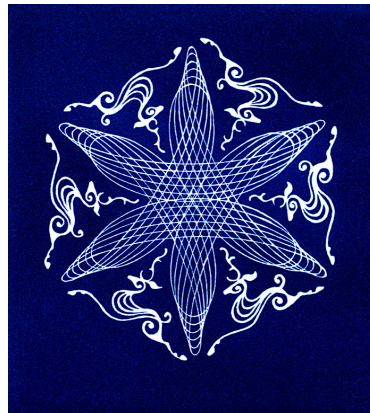
Many of my Solstice images, including those created for The Met, evolve out of my ongoing interest in the symmetrical relationship between the radius of a circle and the points of a hexagram, the presence of this mathematical equation in the formation of snowflakes, and its use in tessellated patterns.

***Doe Bow*** began as a circle that I divided into six even arcs. Deer drawn leaping from the center formed loops that eventually developed into the ribbons of a bow.

The parabolic loops in ***Stag-O-Graph*** were inspired by and created with the help of a Spirograph® toy from the 1960's. The string-like deer complete the hexagonal snow crystal.



"Doe Bow" 2016 relief (engraving by Carol Wax) (3 x 2 3/4 inches)

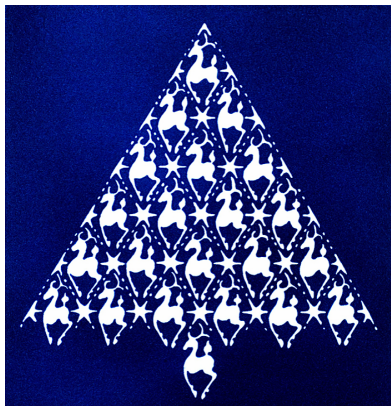


"Stag-O-Graph" 2016 relief (engraving by Carol Wax) (3 x 2 3/4 inches)

***Fir Play*** also began as the radius of a circle dividing its circumference. Connecting only three of the six points created a triangle instead of a hexagram; however, lines paralleling the triangle arms would have completed a hexagram if extended beyond the tree. Where lines intersect within the tree they formed six-pointed snowflakes and divided the plane into tessellated sections that I filled with deer.

Of the four images, ***Snow Gear*** most closely relates to the mechanical imagery common in my main body of work and reflects my Rube Goldberg-esque appreciation of complex devices that perform simple tasks.

The handle that forms the mechanical deer's tail becomes the mechanism by which its hooves propel the interlocking gears with spokes resembling snowflakes. The unseen hand that turns the crank is meant to evoke a *Deus Ex Machina* interpretation of the clockwork change of seasons.



"Fir Play" 2016 relief (engraving by Carol Wax) (3 x 2 3/4 inches)



"Snow Gear" 2016 relief (engraving by Carol Wax) (3 x 2 3/4 inches)

### **Can you tell me about the process of making the prints?**

These prints were created using a relief intaglio process that entails coating a copper plate with a waxy acid-resistant ground and drawing the white image elements through the ground with a sharp needle, exposing the copper below. The plate is etched for several hours in a ferric chloride solution that eats away the exposed metal; areas still protected by the resist do not etch. Once the image is etched deeply enough the resist is removed. Adjustments may be made using traditional burin engraving and metalsmithing techniques.

Impressions are printed in much the same way as woodcuts or other relief mediums. The copper is placed on the bed of an etching press where viscous printing ink is rolled over the surface of the plate. Ink covers the original plate surface standing in relief but doesn't reach the etched image areas below the surface. Placing paper over the plate and running it under the press roller transfers ink to paper, creating a print. Pressure exerted on the paper also pushes it into the ink-free recesses of the plate, resulting in an embossed image. As with all prints, the image appears in reverse or mirrors the design on the plate.

### **How does it feel to have your works offered for sale within the context of the Metropolitan Museum of Art?**

I, like most artists, make art because I *need* to whether it is appreciated by others or not. Nonetheless, having an institution such as The Met recognize and share one's art with its public feels like an affirmation of one's efforts and vision. That kind of validation is priceless to an artist. In short, it feels great!

### **Do you have a favorite memory of visiting The Met?**

There are two places in New York City that feel like my home away from home, where I can go to recharge my creative energies: The New York Public Library and The Metropolitan Museum of Art. I've been coming to The Met since I could first walk, and have never failed to feel inspired by the breadth of its collection that has allowed me to study by observation the hands of artistic masters, both great and minor. Visits that stand out include the 1980 Leon Spilliaert exhibition. I'd never heard of this Belgian artist before and his highly stylized landscapes with modulating patterns had a profound effect on me. Or the time I was lost in the African art gallery and discovered a small statue of a woman, her weight shifted onto one leg with a baby propped on her raised hip, which I thought was the most perfectly balanced work of art I'd ever seen. Perhaps it was the afternoon I spent in the Netherlandish gallery of landscapes wondering what made one piece in particular stand out, until I realized it had a quality of light that I knew I had to find a use for in my own work. Time spent in the Museum's Print Department, looking at impressions by the Masters of Mezzotint is always rewarding. Every visit makes me feel connected to artists — past and present — and grateful to be in the presence of their spiritual company.