



NEWS RELEASE

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USI PROFESSOR TO EXHIBIT "THE WONDER OF WORK"

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An unusual combination of engineering and art has resulted in the exhibition, "Great Engineering is Great Art," which will be on display December 8-11 at Midstates Contemporary Gallery, 208 Main Street, on the Downtown Evansville Walkway.

The exhibit, prepared by Augustine "Jay" Fredrich, professor of civil engineering technology at the University of Southern Indiana, showcases images created by Joseph Pennell, a Philadelphia-born illustrator and artist whose pen-and-ink drawings, etchings, and lithographs depicting what he called "The Wonders of Work" are included in museum collections around the world. Pennell's "Wonders of Work" theme developed from his interest in capturing images of buildings, bridges, and other large engineering projects under construction.

The exhibit of famous projects will be shown on Tuesday, December 7, to members of the local chapter, American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), and their guests. It will be available to the public during regular hours at Midstates Gallery: 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday-Friday, December 8-9-10; 7-9 p.m. Friday, December 10; and 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, December 11.

Fredrich, chair of USI's Engineering Technology Department, prepared the exhibition for display at the 1993 ASCE National Convention in October in Dallas, Texas. It also will be shown in March at the 1994 annual meeting of the Indiana Section, ASCE, to be held at Conner Prairie Museum, Indianapolis, and in September 1994 at the 100th anniversary convention of the American Public Works Association at McCormick Place, Chicago.

Fredrich embarked on his project after a November 1989 visit to the Prints and Photographs Room of the Library of Congress, in a search for photographs of historic bridges. A library staff member who had organized an exhibit of Panama Canal images suggested Fredrich might find interesting images in the Pennell collection.

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"Indeed, I did," Fredrich wrote in the acknowledgements section of the exhibit guide. "In less than an hour I had seen enough to know that civil engineers interested in the history of their profession would be fascinated by Pennell's work."

Pennell's interest in creating images of engineering projects, both completed and under construction, was influenced by his friendship with James Abbott McNeil Whistler, another American artist who, like Pennell, spent much of his career living in London. Whistler, whose father and brother were famous American civil engineers, is best known for his painting of his stepmother, but he also created many images of bridges and other structures and many of those images bear striking resemblances to Pennell's work.

Although Pennell spent most of his career living in London and producing images of European scenes, he returned to the U.S. periodically and created images of famous structures such as Eads' bridge across the Mississippi River at St. Louis and the steel bridge across the Niagara River below Niagara Falls.

He also was captivated by the emergence of the skyscraper as a building form and created dozens of etchings of skyscrapers under construction. His most important work is a series of 28 lithographs of the Panama Canal under construction. Eight of these images are included in Fredrich's exhibit. Pennell's Panama Canal lithographs are the only images of their type and are the most widely admired of the thousands he produced in an artistic career that spanned nearly 50 years.

Fredrich spent four years preparing his exhibit, supported by two Faculty Creative Work grants awarded by the USI Faculty and Academic Affairs Committee from USI Foundation funds. The exhibition has been drawn from numerous sources, the Library of Congress and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, among others. While preparing the exhibit, Fredrich discovered the Evansville Museum of Arts and Science had several Pennell prints which he has included in the exhibition.

"I've learned something about art and a little about art collecting from this project," Fredrich said, "but more important than that, I've produced something that can be used to help our engineering technology students -- and other engineers as well -- understand the importance of studying the humanities by demonstrating the relationship between the work of an engineer and the work of an artist."