Art Among Friends
WSU presents exhibit of sculpture and prints by two influential Detroit mid-century Modernists.

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Contributing Writer

Irving Berg and Robert Broner, longtime friends as well as fellow artists and educators at Wayne State University, worked with found objects — only in different ways.

Berg was a sculptor who used the objects in three-dimensional collages, and Broner was a printmaker who used objects as both printing devices and subjects.

Their work and friendship come together in a memorial tribute exhibit, "Berg/Broner: Sculpture and Prints by WSU Mid-Century Modernists." It runs Sept. 22-27 at the McGregor Memorial Conference Center at the university.

The display, presented by the College of Fine, Performing and Communications Arts, complements the Mid-America Print Council Conference hosted by Wayne State from Sept. 24-27.

"There will be about 20 pieces of Irving's work," says his widow, Harriet Berg, whose long career as a dancer is captured in the display organized with curator Douglas Haller.

"Douglas divided the sculptures according to themes, such as family and war, and we've borrowed Berg's Fallen Warrior from the Jewish Community Center in Oak Park."

Haller will be arranging photos of the larger pieces, which incorporated wood and metal.

Berg (1921-2009), who supervised student teachers, also explored artistic styles as a ceramist, jewelry designer and photographer. His projects are in the collections of the Detroit Institute of Arts and Wayne's Reuther Library.

A sculpture garden at Tamarrack's

Robert Broner: Cool Power, 1968, intaglio from circuit board

Camp Maas in Ortonville captures biblical themes he developed with camping assistants.

The prints of Robert Broner (1922-2010) are being sent from New York, where his daughter, Nahama Broner, has selected about 15 of them working with curator Janet Hamrick.

"Robert Broner experimented with printmaking," Hamrick says. "He would take an object, wipe it with ink and make a print. Quarry shows stacked stone pebbles.

Broner completed his projects while working as a professor of art at Wayne in Detroit, Haifa University and Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Israel, and Cooper Union School of Art in New York. He was founder and president of the Michigan Association of Printmakers and the first to use electric circuit boards as printing plates.

His work is in the collections of the Detroit Institute of Arts, Art Institute of Chicago, Museum of Modern Art in New York and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

"Irving and Robert represented a generation of artists that believed in the importance of art to the community," Harriet Berg says. "That stood in contrast to the materialism of the 1950s, an important time of their work."

"Berg/Broner: Sculpture and Prints by WSU Mid-Century Modernists" runs Sept. 22-27 at the McGregor Memorial Conference Center on the campus of Wayne State University, 495 Gilmour Mall, in Detroit. Hours are 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday and 9 a.m.-noon Saturday. http://cfpca.wayne.edu/berg-broner.php.