

Untitled

Frank Martin

Versatile artist famed for his wood engravings and prints of Hollywood stars

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The output of Frank Martin, who has died aged 84, was prolific and widely varied. As well as enjoying a successful teaching career, he worked as a creative artist and illustrator, employing a wide range of techniques.

His most improbable achievement, however, was to combine an enthusiasm for the traditional skills of wood engraving with a lifelong passion for the golden age of the movies. The resulting series of images have become highly sought after, especially by actors and musicians.

Martin was born in Dulwich, south London. His father, a scientist, was secretary of the Royal Institution, and his mother a professional actor. From Uppingham school, he won a history scholarship to Hertford College, Oxford, but, in 1941, he enlisted in the Royal Artillery.

At the end of his war service in 1946, he entered the printing school at St Martin's School of Art, London, where he was taught etching by Clifford Webb and wood engraving by Gertrude Hermes. He assisted Hermes - one of the 20th century's finest wood engravers - in her colour printing.

In 1952, Martin was elected to the Society of Wood Engravers, and immediately found himself serving as its honorary secretary, a role he held until 1959. But the art form was going out of fashion and the society itself - which, in recent years, has had a considerable revival - was then in decay.

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Meanwhile, in 1953, the artist John Buckland Wright, from whom Martin was taking private lessons in etching, found him a position teaching etching, engraving, lino-cutting and graphic design at Camberwell School of Art. He was an excellent teacher and stayed until 1980, becoming senior lecturer in graphic design in 1965 and head of the graphic arts department from 1976 until his retirement.

Martin's career as a commercial illustrator developed simultaneously. On leaving St Martin's, he began as a fashion illustrator for the Sunday Times, but his many commissions included advertising, books - such as Ursula Bloom's 1959 novel, *Youth At The Gate*, *The Readers' Digest Bedside Book Of The Art Of Living* (1956), *The Manual Of Catholic Prayer* (1962) and the letterhead for Evelyn Waugh's stationery.

Most of Martin's freelance career was involved with books - from the jackets to the illustrations. His most significant contribution was for the Folio Society, for which he illustrated 12 volumes, from Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge Of San Luis Rey*, in 1956, to Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* in 1988. His illustrations for the Folio edition of Stendhal's *Scarlet And Black* in 1965 have been called one of the best series of postwar English illustrations.

A fine and instinctive draughtsman, Martin produced work that is bold, decorative and good-humoured, although he could be too unsubtly fascinated by the female figure.

As a boy, Martin had been enthralled by the stars of the silver screen, and his love of the iconography of film found expression in the Hollywood series he began in the 1960s. Working with the grain of the wood, he turned glamorous screen stills into prints. The artists he created images of included Tallulah Bankhead, Clara Bow, Greta Garbo, Lillian Gish, Jean Harlow, Rita Hayworth and Greta Garbo, as well as the *Ziegfeld Follies*, the *Keystone Cops* and Montgomery Clift. They are perhaps his most celebrated work.

Martin held his first one-man show in 1956. In all, there were 25

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exhibitions at, among other venues, the Folio Society, the National Film Theatre, the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, and the Leeds International Film Festival. Overseas, he exhibited in Berlin, Dublin, New Zealand and the United States. He was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Painter-Etchers and Engravers in 1961, a member of the Society of Industrial Artists and Designers in 1959, and an honorary academician of the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno of Florence in 1965.

Martin was a friendly, affable and hardworking man. Such was his zeal for his work that he carried on long after his official retirement. The skill and intense labour of etching and engraving make exceptional demands, but he continued when many artists are forced to give up on account of failing eyesight.

Among his last books, his house in Dieppe (Martin and his wife, Peg, were keen Francophiles) inspired a volume of wood engravings published by the Previous Parrot Press in 1996, entitled Newhaven-Dieppe. Two years later, the same publishers produced *The Wood Engravings Of Frank Martin*, a full catalogue of his work, with an introduction by Hal Bishop and an afterword in which Martin modestly described himself as a "jobbing artist". His final publication, earlier this year, was *Drawn From Life*, a series of reminiscences of his young female models.

Frank Martin married in 1942; his wife died in 2004. He is survived by their three daughters, one of whom is the actor, Mel Martin.

Frank Vernon Martin, artist, illustrator and teacher, born January 14 1921; died July 29 2005