Keller explores 50 years of printmaking in SC County

California, in particular the San Francisco Bay Area, has a rich history in contemporary printmaking. In 1968, the California Society of Etchers merged with the Bay Printmakers Society creating the California Society of Printmakers and is now the second oldest continuous operating club in the United States. Some of the accomplished artists to come out of the group included Beth Van Hoesen, John Ilie, Karl Kasten and Nathan Oliveira.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, a group of young artists brought those influences to Santa Cruz. Inspired by the possibilities of printmaking, those artists setup printmaking facilities at Cabrillo College and UC Santa Cruz where those classes remain in demand to this day.

Artist and printmaker Tobin Keller has taught at Cabrillo College since 1990 and along with artist Rose Sellery runs the gallery at Cabrillo. Tobin, inspired by the long tradition of printmaking in the county, has compiled an ambitious exhibition that traces the roots and links between printmakers in Santa Cruz over the last 50 years. The exhibit entitled “Bridging Santa Cruz: Spanning 50 years of printmaking” is on display at the Cabrillo Gallery through April 11. The exhibit covers the decades from 1970 until the present and includes the work of more than 35 artists.

This past week, the Southeastern Graphics Council held its 42nd international printmaking conference “Bridges: Spanning Tradition, Innovation, and Activism” in San Francisco. This is the first time in 42 years that the East Coast-based organization has held the conference on the West Coast.

Coast. Tobin, who has had an ongoing relationship with SGC, used the exhibit as a bridge to this year’s conference.

In creating this comprehensive exhibit, Tobin looked at the history of print programs at Cabrillo College and UCSC where both schools over the decades have introduced courses in a range of print media creating innovative programing. While the two colleges were establishing printmaking programs, independent printmaking studios were cropping up around the county. One example is Garner Tullis, who started the International Institute of Experimental Printmaking which helped fuel the grass-paper movement. Some of the many artists on exhibit include Ann Altstatt, Eva Bernstein, Tim Craighead, Jane Gregorius, Louise Nevelson, Bridget Henry, Charles Hilger, Howard Ikemoto, Tom Killion, Gina Pearlin, Charles Prentiss, Paul Rangell and Felicia Rice.

I spoke with Tobin about the exhibit “Bridging Santa Cruz County: Spanning 50 Years of Printmaking.”

KIRBY SCUDDER » What role did the SGC play in you curating this show?

TOBIN KELLER » Two years ago, the SGC started planning for holding their annual conference in the Bay Area. It’s a big deal for them to hold their conference here. They asked themselves, “How are we going to involve artists from the West Coast and the Bay Area?” I was one of a series of artists that was contacted. I had been asked to speak at one of their conferences several years ago and know some of their Bay Area board members. So I was pretty familiar with the organization. They were looking for printmakers to work in collabora-

Kirby Scudder is the director of the Santa Cruz Institute of Contemporary Art. Details: www.sicina.org