

# Iconic Images of America's National Parks: Printing History

## Claire Burke

### Fourth Year Award Proposal

I propose to interview and print with the creators of the iconic *Ranger Doug's Enterprises* National Park posters. As a studio art and environmental science double major, I am deeply invested in exploring the interface between the two fields. I am especially interested in America's National Park System, having worked as a seasonal employee at Olympic National Park. I believe that the creation of America's public lands is one of our most unique achievements as a nation, but also one that is at high risk of being permanently diminished in coming years. My proposed experience would allow me to further my knowledge in both my academic fields of study. I would learn about the silk screen printing process, what a commercial printing business entails, and explore how art affects the public's understanding of America's national parks and monuments.

From 1935 to 1943, the Works Projects Administration's (WPA) Federal Art Project hired unemployed artists to complete a variety of projects, including the printing of approximately two million silkscreen posters in 35,000 different designs. Of the two million posters, only about 2000 survive. Fourteen of the surviving 2000 posters featured images of national parks such as Yosemite, Grand Teton, and Mount Rainier. These designs were strongly influenced by the silkscreen techniques and graphic painting style of Anthony Velonis. The chief designer of the park poster series is thought to be WPA artist Chester Don Powell. Powell and screen printer Dale Miller printed editions of between 50-100 posters of the fourteen original designs, but the project was cut short after the beginning of WWII. The prints were lost to history for decades, until they were rediscovered by Doug Leen in 1971.

Doug Leen, working as a seasonal park employee at Grand Teton National Park, rediscovered some of Powell's original National Park prints. He was intrigued by the designs and endeavored to track down the rest of the posters. Doug, over the course of 20 years, painstakingly located twelve of the fourteen original designs. In 1993, Doug started replicating the original posters as a fundraiser for Grand Teton, and it quickly gained momentum into a full business. *Ranger Doug's Enterprises* now distributes postcards, posters, and stickers in the WPA style across the nation. They distribute their products for sale to the National Park Service as well as online sales, art stores, and conservation associations. Currently, direct online orders account for nearly a quarter of *Ranger Doug* sales.

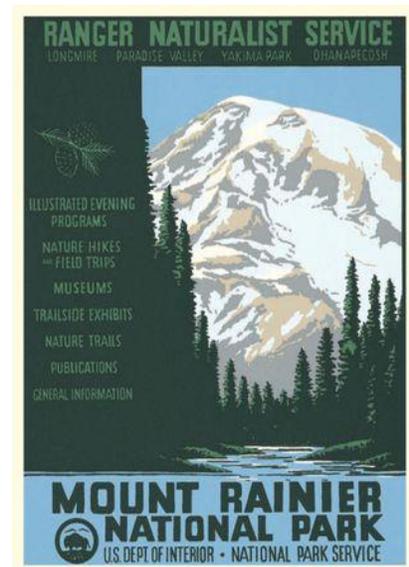
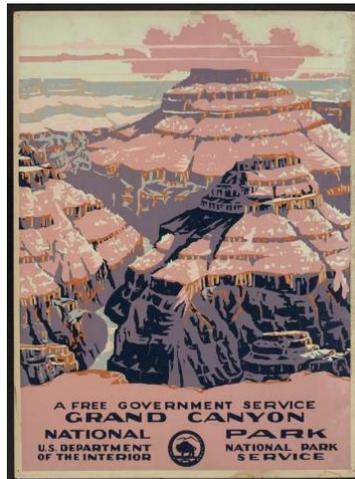
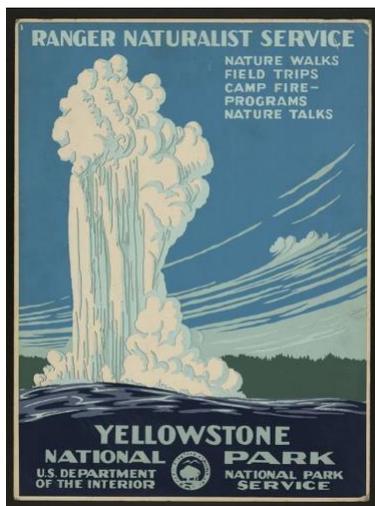
I am especially interested in learning about the silkscreen printing process and the challenges of recreating a style. The *Ranger Doug's Enterprises* team has meticulously recreated the process used for the original WPA posters, and developed new designs in the same style. *Ranger Doug's Enterprises* is composed of four main components: three printers (Cole Graphic Designs, Corey Sign Company, and Paragon Press), procurement, graphic design (digitization and development of designs), and administration. I am interested to see how a commercial art operation is run, and what challenges come with running such an operation.

During my time in the Seattle area, I will visit the procurement site and two of the three printers (Cole Graphic Solutions and Corey Sign Company). Corey Sign Company is a one man show and Cole Graphic Solutions has a staff of 30. Visiting both printers will offer great insight to how staff size affects work flow and operation capacity. I will also visit Olympic National Park to interview interpretive rangers about their opinions on *Ranger Doug's Enterprises*

imagery and the recent increase in visitorship to parks. I will interview the printers and administrators of *Ranger Doug's Enterprises*, taking video throughout.

I will use my video documentation to create a film which explores the relationship of printmaking and environmental activism. Print media has experienced a resurgence in recent decades. Similarly, the environmental movement has experienced significant growth in response to mounting environmental issues. Through my film, I want to explore the intersectionality of science, art, and societal change. *Ranger Doug's Enterprises* is a prime case study which transects both the print media revival and the environmental movement. Through the film I will present the unique history and current operations of *Ranger Doug's Enterprise*. Upon this framework, I will analyze issues such as commodification of art and nature, the trajectory of environmental art, and the role of art on public perception of the environment.

The three images below are examples of the WPA style, the Yellowstone and Grand Canyon are images of originals from the Library of Congress, and the Mount Rainier image is an example of a *Ranger Doug* reproduction.



**Trip Timeline:****August 19 – 26, 2018****August 19**

Travel from Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD) to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA)

**August 20**

Tour of procurement facilities in Seattle. Learn about inventory stocking, packaging, ordering, and distribution. Interview with Angie and Todd Bunker, Chiefs of Operations.

**August 21**

Travel to Kingston, WA. Tour and demonstration of silkscreen printing process with Scott Corey of Corey Sign Company.

**August 22**

Travel to Tacoma, WA. Tour and demonstration of silkscreen printing process with Cole Graphic Solutions.

**August 23**

Travel to Port Angeles, WA. Interviews with park staff.

**August 24**

Travel to Lake Crescent and the Hoh Rainforest. Filming of scenery which inspired original WPA poster design.

**August 25**

Travel to Kalaloch, WA. Interviews with park staff.

**August 26**

Travel from Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA) to Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD)

**Post Trip Timeline:**

Return to UVA Fall 2018 classes. Use Abode Premiere on computers in the New Media Studio at Ruffin and Digital Media Lab at Clemons Library throughout the semester to produce a short documentary film on my experience and the interviews collected on the trip. Any necessary final touches are to be made over winter break.

Present my documentary film at outcome presentation Spring 2019.