

By way of an introduction to very various things

"Plant a radish, get a radish, not a Brussels sprout, that's why I love vegetables, you know what they're about." In the year that the longest running off-off Broadway musical of all times closes, the whimsical lyrics of the *Fantastiks* have been dislodged from deep memory and rise to the surface at unexpected moments. Like this one. The song is about the unpredictability of people as compared to the consistency of green groceries. The same might be said of prints, a medium once devoted to the faithful reproduction of images that were, in their original, unique form, out of the reach of ordinary people.

Thus Renaissance etchers and woodcut makers created multiple versions of their paintings, or disseminated pictures of religious, allegorical or historical subjects, to satisfy expanding audiences, with lithography arriving later in the game but providing the means to serve a mass public. Yet from very early on, the procedures fundamental to the several basic print media lent themselves not only to technical innovation but to aesthetic invention as well, such that artists like Rembrandt and Goya tinkered with their etchings to the point that selective wiping or re-biting of the plates, dry-point additions, and other revisions resulted in impressions that varied greatly, and at the extreme must be treated as monoprints, while modern artists have contrived novel effects--of embossing, photomechanical transposition, chromatic overlay, collage and paper making--that may appear in an entire edition, but only in that edition.

The impact of this continuous experimentation has been that closely following the work of artists who make prints--both those who are exclusively printmakers and those who paint, sculpt, perform, install, make videos or otherwise pursue their ideas in whatever directions suggest themselves--means constantly being surprised by what you see when a work's gestation is complete, and sometimes wondering what change of process, release of imaginative energy or mutation in the genetic codes of images accounts for the unforeseen product of the artist's labor.

In short, judging print competitions--like print-making itself--is for those who can forgo the comforts of being sure in advance what they'll end up with. For, in the words of the *Fantastiks*, "as soon as you think you know just what you've got, it's what it's not." This year's harvest of work submitted to the jury assembled by the International Print Center was correspondingly arresting and diverse. The selection made by Susan Lorence, John Morning, Marc Schwartz, Pari Stave, Robert Storr, and Terry Winters reflects the wide range of aesthetic points of departure represented in the larger body of prints considered, along with the multifarious and often startling incarnations the work took.

It is impossible to account for them all in detail, but the approaches included in the final group span everything from intimate abstractions to graphic forms of public address. The latter category includes the concise confrontational text-based screenprint of the Ad hoc Artists who use simple statements to summon forth complex social and psychological thoughts. Their response to the events of September 11, 2001 and to the jingoistic reflexes of some Americans is summarized in the declaration "Our Grief is Not a Cry for War," a phrase and style of presentation that recall the long history of agitational poster art from the revolutionary movements of the 1910s, 20s and 30s through the turbulence of the 1960s, 70s, 80s. With this difference: the point of their work is not to stir people up but to make them stop and reflect before taking precipitate action. Adam Pitt's drole views of bureaucracy likewise extend the long-standing print traditions of social commentary and

caricature and give it wholly contemporary accents. So too does Enrique Chagoya's *Abenteuer der Kannibalen* (Adventures of the Cannibals) where details snatched from disparate sources--Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans and commercial illustrations and cartoons from the Jazz Age--are in effect cannibalized but only partially digested, so that the clash of cultures Chagoya shows persists in a state of mutual but incomplete assimilation of one by another. Art Hazelwood's vignettes from Rabelais's *Gargantua* reach further back in that tradition but do so with a vigor which is not at all antiquarian, nor for that matter are the supersaturated tones of Carol Wax's mezzotint of a what appears to be a cast-iron toy fire engine on a Legend of Sleepy Hollow ride through the night. And neither are the meticulous engravings of Andrew Raftery anachronistic in feel, even though he stages his scenes from everyday life in what looks like a haberdashery from the 1940s, and describes its interior and the people who fill it with the classical reserve of Isabel Bishop or Reginald Marsh at his most precise and least theatrical. As an example of what "old fashioned" means can still achieve, Raftery's demonstration of the burin's capacity for subtle inflection is a *tour de force*. Jake Berthot's etchings of trees have a similar formality and nuance, and similar richness, reminding one of how images of the past meld in the mind's eye and become something new, this case perhaps being the fusion of Cezanne, Seurat, and Samuel Palmer, with shades of Redon.

As a former dealer in eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century prints and illustrated books, Louise Bourgeois is a connoisseur of just such artists and in particular of the *fin-de-siecle* Symbolists, but her own way with grotesquerie and with weird refinements of the medium are the work of someone who has long since paid off her debts to her antecedents. In this instance caryatids printed on old fabrics most likely culled from her own linen drawers (and later editioned on paper) offer themselves to us less as frameable pictures than as towels for those unafraid to touch with their face or hands the fantasies of another being as if those towels were the *vera icons* or Veronica's veils of an inner but nonetheless always physical vision. In its fairy-tale aspect Kiki Smith's delicate likeness of a girl also recalls late nineteenth and early twentieth century print-making, as if the emblems of femininity from that far-gone era were haunting this one, reminding the viewer of what modernity has done to change the role of women, but at the same time of how persistent certain archetypes remain. Lisa Yuskavage's intaglio is as uncompromisingly sexual as Smith's is discreet, but like Smith's work it tests the vestigial power of the romantic aura that envelops the figure. Neither a *femme fatale* by Felicien Rops nor a pin-up by Varga, nor even a model in a life class, Kathy is full-bodied but self-possessed in ways that defy the lustful gaze, and lost in a kind of reverie that gives the flowers that adorn and surround her the status of protective sentinels rather than mere decorative embellishments. Kitsch exploits its subject to pander to a lazy public; Yuskavage makes it uneasy looking.

In speaking of Bourgeois, I have consciously avoided the term Surrealist since her referents predate that movement and contradict many of its premises, but Surrealism and its American off-shoots are very much alive in the work of younger artists like Tom Burckhardt, George Condo, Suzanne McClelland, Elizabeth Murray and Alexander Ross, most of who have concentrated on the metamorphic dimensions of Surrealism and extracted from them formal principles that operate outside the confines of Surrealist iconography. Condo, McClelland and Murray have all found freedom where Miro or Dali-esque biomorphism intersects with Disney distortion, and then used that freedom to flesh out antic but otherwise divergent worlds; while mindful of those same precedents, Burckhardt has incorporated the elegance of Indian miniature paintings. For his part Roxy Paine has let process and materials mimic the growth patterns of nature at the fungus level, while Ross has rendered organic aberrations with the attentive enthusiasm of a science-fiction buff who

happens to be steeped in Art Nouveau and the work of Gustave Moreau, and is thus acutely aware of how easily the plant world runs riot. It all goes to show that sometimes when you plant a radish you may get a Brussels sprout--and a malignant one at that. Meanwhile, closer to Duchamp and Dada than Dali and company is Jee Sung Lee's assisted ready-made; Kleenex with a forlorn visage on each sheet, this limited edition of presumably unlimited but disposable dejection is funny-ouch! in its imagery, but witty in every regard in its subversion of the fetishized of rarity of works in a medium that was once truly popular. Like Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Lee has created a multiple that begs to be infinite, though unceasing mock woe would be the poetic consequence of resupply. Jonathan Seliger's facsimile of a Lemon Pie pushes this same sensibility all the way to Pop, but retains an element of homeliness and vulnerability that Pop icons seldom had--except in what one critic described as the "elephantine sadness" of the monolithically soft or sagging foodstuffs Claes Oldenberg made in the 1960s, of which Seliger's pathetic desert is the recognizable yet thoroughly individual descendant.

Meanwhile, in the realm of more or less pure abstraction, one finds Surrealism's influence as well in the aquatints of Monique Prieto--blobs that staining might have caused but that seem instead to be the metastasis of computer bytes carefully managed by someone with a designer's savvy. Dusty Boynton plays with amorphousness in the same digital sand-box, as does David Schaffer--though without the techno-aspect--whereas Diana Cooper's expansive construction moves the same discursive activity over to the Cubism side of the art historical ledger. In Polly Apfelbaum's notational column, the procedural side of conceptual and minimal art meet with the retinal pleasures of Color Field painting, summoning the friendly ghost of Larry Poons' early dot-matrix compositions in the same way that Prieto conjures with the less friendly ghost of Helen Frankenthaler's art. Suzanne Caporeal likewise makes us think of another member of that clan, the Canadian Jack Bush, but in the spirit of such hypervisual work, she makes us pay acute attention to the perceptual facts put before us, and to their carefully calibrated equilibrium. And for sure-handed minimalism in its contemporary and thus less austere guise, we have the French curves and color blocks of Robert Mangold--a master teasing eccentric beauty from reductive, almost schematic propositions. Although Mangold has contributed etchings and aquatints on this occasion, his preferred medium has more often been woodcut, and Richard Hutter's scalloped abstraction of gear-like circles and piston-like shafts suggests just how responsive woodcut can be to the pressure of the knife, the ink roller and the press itself, in this case depicting an industrial world inside a organic shape by means of a pre-industrial process of replication. Laura Sue Phillips' off-true grids, Jonathan Higgins' atomized universe, and the bleedings tone bursts of Larry Scholder evince the virtues of rigorous simplicity.

Jim Iserman flips all of that and generates complexity out of obviousness, irregular optical puzzles out of the eye-catching shifts of which mechanical regularity is capable when programmed to accelerate or break its rhythms. Andrea Zittel plays with many of the same patterning variables as Iserman in her quilt-like kaleidoscope of urban sprawl, while in a sheet that resembles a rough patch of plastered wall as much as a topographical chart, Ed Ruscha finds lunar voids where the stars congregate at the intersection of Hollywood and Vine. The technique used in Ruscha's object-image is called mixografia; a lovely word for the hybridities towards which print-making is prone. Emblazoned with a cryptic glyph that appears to have been burned on to the surface of the image, mapping also provides the gridded substructure of Manuel Castro Cobos' print. And then doubling back on Iserman and Zittel's wall-paper-like distribution of motifs, we come to Takashi Murakami's extravagantly cute, extravagantly pretty but above all anti-natural sublime. In its fashion an

image of the floating world, Murakami's landscape has all the elegiac quality of a vast acreage of astroturf in miniature golf course. The relentless cheerfulness of his style may in due course give way to hysteria or melancholy, but for now we may take it at face value--the face that it is of the central panel (*Moon*), a not quite "happy face" calling out from from entropic niceness. Sandrine Guerin's 32 views of what looks like a mountainous horizon involve concentration and dispersal in equal measures, as if each of these views might open up except for the crowding of the others. The final effect is to be denied the very things--unfettered movement in unbounded space--that the sublime traditional offers. Is this perverse on her part, or just a way of saying that the old idea of losing oneself through the aperture of pictures is no longer possible though the desire to do so is unabated? It is hard to say, but she increases the tension between these two awarenesses with the greatest economy.

Finally Richard Tuttle's suite of five etchings are a bouquet of print-making possibilities; a bit of this, a bit of that, all deftly arranged to give us something that is much more than the sum of its parts or the by-products of the procedures and materials employed. If these are in their way mutant flowers, then they suggest that we need not necessarily regard the abnormalities of nature or of art as a cause for alarm, though monstrosities can be wonderful too, but rather should anticipate them as the opportunity for delight. In key with that of the creators of the *Fantastiks*, Tuttle's whimsicality gives proof positive that even so humble a thing as a yellow square--the graphic equivalent of the humble cabbage bud, Brussels sprout, or perhaps the dandelion--can blossom exotically. Such transformations are the essence of printmaking, and one can safely assume from the evidence of this crop that they will keep happening.

Robert Storr, Member, Selections Committee

Selections Committee *New Prints 2002/Summer*:

Susan Lorence, John Morning, Marc Schwartz, Pari Stave, Robert Storr, Terry Winters