

OPEN EXPRESSION: CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN PRINTMAKING ART
American University in Cairo, Egypt
November 14 - 24, 2005

Open Expression: Contemporary American Printmaking Art celebrates the vibrant creativity and expression that is current in the American print scene through the prints of 30 invited artists. This exhibition is formed with intentions of good will and cultural exchange, and to celebrate the openness that is so characteristic of Americans as a people. The works in this exhibition naturally reflect the profile of America, that is of a large and diverse population, of our multi-faceted, dominate popular culture of diversions, technologies, excesses, and of our critical voices that openly seek to understand and place ourselves in the world scene. This exhibition is especially characteristic of America - outspoken, independent, sensitive, dynamic - at this particularly critical time in history.

The artists in the exhibition were selected through an open call for submissions that asked for provocative and timely works. There are a significant number of influential artists and teachers in this exhibition, as well as the next generation of printmakers who are the inheritors of a legacy for creative expression in the print media. Printmakers in the United States are widely scattered in this vast country, networked by membership organizations and academic positions, through the family tree of educational links and influences, united by the internet, technological inquiry, and community purposes that give us shared "creative commons" for numerous exchanges, visits, workshops, conferences. Printmakers have made their own art world, independent of - and largely ignored by - the glossy culture capitols of the art world. This then allows for printmakers to enjoy the luxury of this versatile medium and to be attuned to their own expression for graphically rich images

Open Expression is meant to convey a broad range of printmaking approaches, a diversity of methods and techniques, multiple viewpoints about all sides of contemporary concerns.

Contemporary printmaking today is not dominated by one school of thought or stylistic direction, and is squarely open to postmodern questions into historical backgrounds, analysis of human behaviors and identities, questioning of perceptions and illusions of meaning. This exhibition addresses many of the troubling issues that confront us daily, that permeate our senses on the conscious and subconscious level, that address the fragility of life, environment, and human relations from the personal to the political. These are overlapping areas of concern which the selected prints address: powerful political/social statements; personal investigations into the human sensory experience of time, memory and ephemeral awareness; and investigations grounded in historical occurrence and our basis of knowledge, truth, meaning.

A powerful and gripping message is addressed in the woodcut prints of urban victims by Thom Shaw. The toy soldiers indoctrinate play and aggression in the screen prints of John Hitchcock. The childlike depiction of modern evils belie the candy color and innocent style in the digital prints of Diyan Achjadi. Technology has created newfangled and disturbing hybrid forms of communication in the screenprints of Matthew Stolle. An apocalyptic future is a chaos of neighborhood crime and corruption in the etching and linocut by Marcus Howell. Randy Clark's screenprints join and contrast two iconic heroes, while a peasant victim recalls an unforgettable demoralizing posture. Kristin Powers Nowlin examines social stereotypes with systematic color codes for identity games through her screen prints. The mixed media prints of Jerry Krepps are aggressively drawn and cut with twisted snarls and tentacted knots of anger. Jennifer Anderson reveals fragmentary remains and decay in her delicate etchings. The otherworldly glowing light from the TV and from explosions have immobilized viewers and victims in the etchings by Gordon Sherman.

The senses of touch and sound on the micro cellular level are literally revealed as monumental abstractions in the lithographs

of Patricia Olynyk. An ironic moment is a sensory memorial as destructive bombing worlds away is simultaneous with spring profusion in the etchings by Tanja Softic. Physical materials are imbedded in the mixed media prints of decimated landscapes by Dean Dass. The stain or soot of burnt ink is the remains of a barren forest in the prints by Catherine Chauvin. The etchings of Debora Oden create questions about the balance of aggression and delicacy, which are as precarious as our own personal psychology. Andrew Schroeder creates etchings in which he seeks inner knowledge and instinctual response to suggest memories and dreams. In her etchings, Jessica Mills sees the personal in the sense of place, as individuals are tied to and destroyed by the harshness of agricultural degradation. Endi Poskovic creates woodcuts in which the illusion of grandeur and American frontier mentality leaves a wake of pollution and waste. In the etchings of Ron Fundingsland, there is a whisper of the critical passing of time and the secrets of American political life. Karen Kunc creates etchings that carry a mood of nostalgia and loss, as the protective grove of a forest cannot shelter what is inevitably lost in the wind.

In Matt Wittmer's etchings the history is specific as he examines actual situations of transgressions of a murderer and authoritative power against a cult. Abner Jonas creates etchings that depicts an Americana of isolation and stalwart righteousness that is deceptive and ironic. The humble metaphors in the prints of Janet Ballweg are truly about negotiations, and the ideal that troubles can be worked out over the kitchen table. Bridget Stewart's mixed media works are of the physical shape and scale that can stand in for the victim, and envelop us with emotion. Charles Beneke's intaglio prints evoke the measure of our emotional limits and beliefs that lead to destructive paths.

The prints of Jean Dibble depict the scientific logic of destructive forces and seeks a prayerful invocation across centuries. Justin Quinn's drypoint prints obsessively translates what remains obstinately uncommunicative while visually legible. While the series of etchings by Joshua Luther explores our limited vehicles of reference, demonstrating how meaning and belief is an artificial construction. Brian Curling's woodcut prints creates layers and transparencies as he examines and fears the metaphorical storm, but he also creates a gem of hope and renewal. The mezzotint prints of Francisco Souto contain classical measures of time and truth to solidly ground us all within the eternal and in the expanse of the universe

As you see, these works are playfully ironic, darkly meaningful, powerfully critical, personally revealing, inward looking, sensually beautiful. These all have in common extraordinary mastery of print language that is effective for conveying such important ideas, as this is the legacy of printed art. These artists have beautifully composed and drawn-cut-etched-shaped their images, and their abilities are the underpinnings of such compelling art. We are drawn in by their accomplishments and fulfill their artistic intentions - that is for us to see, to contemplate and respond to their viewpoints and the openness of their expression.

It has been a pleasure to organize and curate Open Expression: Contemporary American Printmaking Art for this exhibition at the American University in Cairo. I wish to thank the artists especially for their trust and support. I also give tremendous thanks to our hosts and colleagues at the American University in Cairo, and their staff and students. I owe a great deal of gratitude to my friend Dr. Wael El Sabour El Kadar for being the catalyst for this important opportunity to present our prints in Egypt.

Karen Kunc
Willi Cather Professor of Art
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
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