

RALPH ARNOLD GALLERY

LOYOLA
UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

BAD EDITIONS

Participating Artists: JE Baker, Matt Bodett,
Jackson Bullock, Lauren Cardenas, Rachel Fenker-Vera,
Kevin Goodrich, Millicent Kennedy, Annie Kielman,
Marie Bannerot McInerney, Megan Sterling.

Curated by Rafael E. Vera

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Throughout history, printmaking processes have been used to reproduce and disseminate ideas by way of books, pamphlets, posters, and even playing cards. Printmaking is a rigorous discipline that demands a set of strategies that will result in the creation of a matrix, which is then used to recreate—as identically as possible—the same image multiple times. Within contemporary art practice, the boundaries that once defined printmaking as a utilitarian reproductive technique have been experimented with, enhanced, modified, and sometimes even exterminated. Interdisciplinary methods of art-making have created collaborations between mark-making, material, surface, and concept that beg the question: what is a print?

In *Bad Editions*, a series of artists explore the possibilities of printmaking as a process, as a philosophy, and as an excuse for art-making. By incorporating strategies that deviate from tradition—turning a chair seat into a woodcut, using a pigskin instead of a copper plate, or altering existing mass media print materials—the artists in this exhibition challenge printmaking to define itself broadly. These artists take traditional methodologies as a point of departure to question the limits of the print, the role of the edition, and how printmaking techniques might inform other disciplines.

Lauren Cardenas, Kevin Goodrich, and Rachel Fenker-Vera examine notions of contradiction, nostalgia, domesticity and strategies for preservation. They share a desire, which is almost urgent to reproduce something that may be lost, to capture a fleeting moment quickly forgotten.

Lauren Cardenas uses the Xerox machine like a blade to simultaneously mask and reveal images, exploring formal bonds and the fragility of intimacy. In *Homage to the Green Ray...for Tacita Dean*, Cardenas presents a found book page obstructed by a Xeroxed rectangle. The page is distressed and lays precariously on a large white sheet of paper, attached only by a line of green stitching. The familiar book page, completely exposed in a frame with no glass, in contrast with the uncompromising black of the Xerox machine, creates a quiet and compelling moment of contradictions.

In *Landscape No. 17*, Kevin Goodrich forces copy machine toner through a silkscreen onto a canvas, an exercise that appears futile, as the toner which is commonly used for quick, automatic reproductions, fails to achieve its goal, leaving a blurry and broken image. The inherent quality of the copy machine toner makes it impossible for it to navigate the matrix identically multiple times, extinguishing the possibility of an edition. The result is reminiscent of a badly developed Polaroid that has been pulled roughly and prematurely out of the camera. The image, which is stark and bold, references painting, and speaks of a romantic persistence to reveal a memory that cannot be replicated.

A strong desire to record, preserve and protect a memory is also in the forefront of Rachel Fenker-Vera's *Notes*. In this work, three embroidery hoops made of polished sterling silver contain linoleum monoprints that depict the familiar color and shape of post-it notes. Paying close attention to the history of embroidery and using materials traditional to keepsakes and heirlooms, Fenker-Vera carefully stitches notes written by her son, now nine years old, collected over the past three years. Though a monoprint is present, it is the scan of the note that becomes the matrix, linking methods of printmaking with embroidery. These "reminders"—sometimes communicating a message to the recipient and other times documenting a process or a "note to self"—are mundane, unpolished and ephemeral. They are records of a private dialogue that are reproduced through processes associated with preservation and continuance; they touch upon the universal desire to pass on something that is meaningful while reexamining the concept of what should be saved and remembered.

Matt Bodett, Millicent Kennedy, and Megan Sterling's work explore limitations and expectations, records of existence, domestic rituals, and notions of displacement and reconciliation.

In *Delusions (emptiness is form)*, and then again in *Delusions (with hero)*, Matt Bodett pushes the limits of etching in the attempt to make it three-dimensional. This is achieved differently for each piece: in *Delusions (emptiness is form)*, by pouring plaster directly onto a plate and allowing the drying process to leech the ink off of it, and in *Delusions (with hero)*, by pouring layers of acrylic medium over the plate, letting the ink dry along with the medium, and then peeling back a film-like substrate which he can model onto any surface.

In both of Bodett's *Delusions*, a line-etching portrait of Napoleon has been transferred onto a plaster sculpture, creating an unusual bust. These pieces give a sense of a faulty grandiosity. Bodett emphasizes this contradictory effect in *Delusions (with hero)* by wrapping muslin and plaster around the "bust", like bandages protecting a head wound. Or, in the case of *Delusions (emptiness is form)*, by sticking a found railroad nail in between the delicate acrylic film that composes Napoleon's head. The portrait lays over the sculpture almost like a sticker, accompanied by a group of rambling plaster casts of horses and small heads, all fragments of bodies that are forced to live as one.

In Millicent Kennedy's *Impression*, a small dining room table is covered in pristine white flour. Three rolling pins sit equidistant from each other on the table, each carved with the image of hands that appear to hold the wooden cylinders. The pins have been rolled over the flour leaving an impression: three pairs of hands, one from each pin, captured by the thin powder. This blind embossing is extremely

fragile, like a white-on-white sand mandala that may vanish at any moment. The hands depicted are those of the artist, her father and her paternal grandmother. But even without knowing whose hands they are, Kennedy shows us a domestic scene that speaks of a ritual passed on through generations. She also offers an inquiry on existence: the imprints will inevitably fade with time, or until the pins are rolled again, following the impulse to bring them back.

In *self-made and twofold*, Megan Sterling displays a mural-style collage that spans over nine feet of wall space. A huge cutout hand and forearm, drawn with charcoal on paper, descend from the ceiling and are met by several strips of a colorful screenprint monoprint that cross the corner from one wall to another. The larger than life hand, though flat, provides an amusing and effective sense of three-dimensionality. Negative space plays an important role, giving the illusion of erasure and inviting the wall to be part of the ensemble. The arm is shifted and fragmented. It gracefully touches a series of vine-like shapes, reminiscent of a Cat's Cradle string game. The colorless hand gives the impression of trying to make sense of the shapes by separating, pushing and holding them. There is something beautiful and purposeful about this action, but the displaced and cut forearm confuses that feeling. The intention to create order is present, but the reality of it appears restricting, like a persistent struggle too big to ignore.

JE Baker and Jackson Bullock share an interest in tactility, sensuality and materiality that leads to an autobiographical exploration.

In *Echolocation*, JE Baker carves the word "YOU" on a slab of Himalayan salt to create an artist book of monoprints. The book is made of handmade abaca paper with indigo and salt; the prints are made from squid ink. The experience of going through the book is visceral, sensual and dirty. Its pages show history, one that seems very personal, and the feeling of the salt on one's fingers gives the impression that the book is corroding and falling apart. The book emits a smell, like hay, dust or sweat. The squid ink—which is used by the animal as a false body to confuse its predator—adds yet another association with the body and bodily fluids, and also speaks of evasion and protection. The words "YOU" mirror each other on every page, sometimes facing inwards as if they were talking to one another, and sometimes outwards as if they were engaging the audience. Though the word is repeated all throughout the book, it does not seem redundant. Each echo looks and feels like a new search for "you", sometimes resembling a question or a plea, and other times a demand or a desire.

Jackson Bullock uses the skin of a pig to create monoprints based on specific Greek and Roman classical sculptures. In *Untitled after Diadoumenos*, Bullock presents a "body" that appears triumphant and heroic but also meaty and bloody.

One can see the folds and pores of the skin as well as the oozing of the ink caused by the pressure of the etching press. The shape references beauty and masculinity, but the color and the choice of material allude to slaughter and pain. One can feel the texture without touching it, creating a psychically tactile connection between skins—the one of the viewer and the one of the print.

Marie Bannerot McInerney and Annie Kielman investigate memory, structure, and distortion as a process for abstraction.

In *Dead Water*, Marie Bannerot McInerney manipulates found print media—along with other artifacts from everyday life—through a process of compressing, binding and carving. The result is a canyon-like form of text and rock. The careful variations of color inherent to the page, in contrast with the rough erosion of the materials, invite painting and drawing to be part of the conversation. The still legible text mixed with layers of distorted print remind us of the media-saturated culture that surrounds us. It has an unavoidable resemblance to natural forms, and yet it feels urban and structural. The elegant chiaroscuro that seeps from the bottom up, as if it had been left in a puddle, brings allusion to its title.

Annie Kielman experiments with the recurring layering of an image as a process for distortion. *Tensity*, a multiple run inkjet print, starts as a screenprint that is then crumpled, photographed and run through a printer; a method that Kielman repeats multiple times over the same original print. The result is a thick, leather-like paper that folds over and curls under a steel frame, pulling the print off of the wall. This sculptural print is as much about dimensionality as it is about flatness. The image provides a *tromp l'oeil* giving the impression of movement. The illusion activates a dialogue between the representation of folds and the folding itself. The steel frame holds the print in place, enhancing the exchange between motion and stillness. Though a transformation has taken place through her repetitive process, Kielman leaves a hint of its history: the original black and white screenprint that started it all, printed on the back of the paper, peeks through the collapsed corners of the piece, as a testament to its metamorphosis.

These ten artists utilize Printmaking as a catalyst for new possibilities of communication. Sometimes Printmaking starts the process, and other times it becomes an addition to an already existing piece. Printmaking's long catalog of techniques stimulates this collaboration. The ritualistic experience of creating an edition—like the repeating motion of rolling out dough, or the slow and delicate practice of embroidering—informs the way art is conceptualized, created, and consumed. Ultimately, the artist's personal connection to this ritual is conveyed either explicitly or indirectly through the resulting work of art, making the print, and the process of it, a manifestation of the exulted mundane.

- Rafael E. Vera

GLOSSARY OF TERMS FOR THE PROCESS OF PRINTMAKING

Printmaking is the process of making artworks by printing. Except in the case of monotyping, the process is capable of producing multiples of a same piece, which is called a print.

Matrix is the plate, block, stone, stencil, screen, or other means of carrying image information that is ultimately printed onto another surface, typically paper.

Edition is the number of identical copies made from a matrix or set of matrices.

Stencil is a mask that blocks printing ink; most often associated with screen printing.

Screen printing is a stencil process utilizing a fine mesh stretched over a frame. Stencils are attached to the screen and can be made in a variety of ways. Ink is then forced through openings in the screen transferring the image.

Intaglio means to engrave or to cut into and describes the making of metal printing plates. Traditional print-making processes fall into two categories: those where lines are inscribed directly by hand, such as drypoint, and those which employ acids to establish images on metal, known as etching.

Etching is traditionally when a metal plate is coated with an acid-resistant substance called "ground". The artist draws through the ground with a metal needle, exposing the bare metal. The plate is then immerse in acid, which eats into the metal where it has been exposed, creating lines in the plate.

Etching press is a device used for printing which applies considerable pressure as it forces the paper and plate between a roller and a flat bed, thus squeezing the paper into the inked grooves.

Relief is printing that takes ink from the top of a carved matrix. Woodcut, wood engraving and linoleum cut are traditional relief methods.

Embossing is the processes of creating either raised or recessed relief images in paper and other materials, creating a multi-dimensional impression.

Blind embossing is the process of embossing without ink, so that the image is raised but not colored. An example of blind embossing is the seal applied to documents by a notary.

Monotyping is a method that will only allow for the taking of one print of a design.

Monoprinting is a method that generates a one-of-a-kind printed image created with a repeatable matrix.

Artist books are works of art that utilize the form of a book. They are often published in small editions, though they are sometimes produced as one-of-a-kind-objects.

Inkjet printing is a method of creating a print, where minute droplets of ink are sprayed onto the printing surface, done by an inkjet printer. It falls under the realm of digital printing.

Xerography is a process for copying graphic matter by the action of light on an electrically charged photoconductive insulating surface in which the hidden image is developed with a resinous powder (as toner), usually done by a photocopy machine. It falls under the realm of digital printing.