

ARTISTS' COMMENTARY
New Prints 2008/Summer
June 26 – August 1, 2008

One Juror's Commentary

Robin White Owen

As I write this, four weeks have passed since our jury met to choose the works for the New Prints Summer 2008 exhibition. From the 700 or so submissions that we initially reviewed, the only print that has stayed in my mind that we didn't include is the etching of a giant foot. It was so emphatic: a dictatorial foot, squashing democracy, Ozymandias's colossal foot, standing in a boundless desert, or perhaps the foot of Shiva, offering itself for worship. I had a lingering feeling we should have held on to it.

Then I sat down to look through the images of the forty-seven works we did choose and had a Wow! moment. There are so many powerful prints here! From *Cheney's Camouflage* to *Conflicts of Interest*, to *A Home for Palestine*, this exhibition is packed with satire, drama and emotion.

As we began to make choices about which prints to include in the show, we quickly responded to the artists' choice of subjects. Our selection includes commentary on environmental issues, Washington politics, terrorism, dysfunctional relationships, labor, war, racism, life and death – just to name the ones that appear most frequently.

While the issues are dead serious, the humor in many of the prints made us laugh out loud, and kept the proceedings buoyant. For examples, look at Cooper Holoweski's two intaglios, *Portrait of Milton Friedman eating John Maynard Keynes*, and *The Washington Consensus*, and Yvonne Leonard's intaglio with chine collé, *Things Are Not Too Bad!* Jeff Wetzig's color woodblock prints are witty redefinitions of *Birth* and *Death*.

There are beautiful, haunting works in our show too. *Handkerchiefs for Mothers*, by Desirée Alvarez, gripped us the moment we saw it. Alvarez printed a woodcut of a machine gun on diaphanous chiffon. The oppositions in this work, soft and hard, love and war, birth and death, are almost too much to bear.

Shani Peters' *To Have and To Hold On* is another delicate, yet passionate work. Placed on the floor, screenprinted on silk, with lace and candles, it is an installation memorializing Sean Bell, the young African American New Yorker, who was shot fifty times and killed by police outside a nightclub, on the eve of his wedding in 2006.

And *A Home for Palestine*, by Catherine LeCleire, is an irresistible, iconic object in the shape of a house. The dark-blue little house, printed with gold Arabic writing, contains a folded print that could open up to fill a wall. It's composed of a pattern of printed images of bombed Palestinian streets, buildings, and landscapes, as if to say this future home must encompass this war torn present and past. Interestingly, all three of these works were printed and published by the artists themselves.

My fellow jurors and I were all intrigued and impressed by the variety of new techniques and materials artists are using to make prints. In addition to the woodcut on chiffon, our show includes a polymer plate photogravure and an archival inkjet print from a cell phone photograph! Digital prints have become as commonplace as etchings, lithographs and silkscreens these days.

We also selected a machine that dispenses letterpress prints. Dan Wood's *The New Newspeak Dictionary: War on Terror Edition*, is a thrilling/rousing work in the best tradition of political satire. In this homage to George Orwell's *1984*, he prints out definitions of terms currently used to describe -- or more accurately -- not describe -- procedures used against suspected terrorists.

Another persistent subject was dysfunctional relationships. William Howard's four-plate lithograph *Distance 1*, is a brooding meditation on the gulf that separates two people. Then there's Liz Chalfin's darkly funny *The Ideas Between Us*, where "between" means "separate" rather than "connect."

Daniel Hauben's etching and aquatint *Conflicts of Interest* is an understatement, if ever there was one. Conflating iconographic images of September 11th with medieval images of the Apocalypse, he poignantly represents the terror we felt that day, and the destruction in all realms above and below ground.

Artists tackled the subject of the environment in a variety of ways. The cartoonish screenprint by Randy Bolton, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, lightly references global warming. Kim Baranowski's *Marr Ice Piedmont Glacier Retreat 1963-2007*, represents current scientific research in an old-fashioned diagram as if predicting that the glacier itself will soon be ancient history. Tallmadge Doyle's *Lacerta*, a hand colored etching and aquatint, looked like a mutant constellation to us. We can imagine that even beings in fictional environments are mutating into monsters.

If you're feeling a bit low, turn to Eileen M. Foti's *Cheney's Camouflage* for comfort food. Foti's print is a fast food french fries container with an image of the gun-toting Vice President, doing his job, protecting America.

But don't worry, as Yvonne Leonard reminds us, *Things Are Not Too Bad!*

Robin White Owen, Producer, MediaCombo

* Ozymandias, the 1818 sonnet by Percy Bysshe Shelly, was another name for the Egyptian Pharaoh Rameses the Great.

Members of the *New Prints 2008/Summer: Artists' Commentary* Selections Committee were: Nick Lamia, Artist and Instructor, Fordham University; Gary Simmons, Artist; Robin White Owen, Producer, MediaCombo; and Martha Wilson, Artist and Founding Director, Franklin Furnace Archive.

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