

Print/Out: 20 Years in Print

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Christophe Cherix, Kim Conaty and Sarah Suzuki, *Print/Out: 20 Years in Print*, edited by Libby Hruska, exhibition catalogue, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 19 February–14 May 2012, The Museum of Modern Art, 2012, 236 pp., 261 col. and 87 b. & w. ills., \$50.

The title of MoMA's recent exhibition, 'Print/Out', which features work drawn almost exclusively from the museum's permanent collection, embraces two different frames of reference. On the one hand, it suggests a print outpouring or 'print fest', as is appropriate to a show devoted to examining contemporary printmaking on a global scale. Organized by Christophe Cherix, Chief Curator of the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books since 2010, it follows in the wake of two previous print surveys organized by Cherix's predecessors, Riva Castleman's 'Printed Art: A View of Two Decades', 1980, and Deborah Wye's 'Thinking Print: Books to Billboards, 1980–1995', 1996. Whereas each of these previous shows was monumental, featuring works by 175 and 149 artists respectively, Cherix's presentation includes only 40 artists whose work is used to exemplify particular developments and trends. Primary among these, as the exhibition's title also serves to indicate, is the major transformational development in printmaking witnessed during the past two decades: the advent of the printout – the computer-generated image and hard copy output – that is radically altering systems of print production, print publishing and print distribution. As Cherix noted in the catalogue, computers, imaging programs and printers have in recent years become so advanced and user-friendly that artists, even those of limited space and funds, have been able to turn their studios into state-of-the-art printmaking facilities. A result is that few new print workshops have emerged. Further, as the technical expertise of master printers and their traditional apparatus are no longer necessary, artists can more seamlessly incorporate the medium into their work.

While the exhibition also features work of a more traditional nature, it privileges experimental pieces that extend the boundaries of printmaking, most often through the use of digital processes or commercially-derived techniques, such as screenprinting and photolithography (offset). This bias is reflected in the design both of the exhibition installation and catalogue. Occurring at intervals through the exhibition, are walls papered with a black-on-white dot matrix pattern that suggests mechanical reproduction (Ben Day dots, halftones, offset printing's raster dots and the like). These walls are hung salon style with selections from portfolios or print series by eleven different artists: Trisha Don-

nelly, Liam Gillick, Damien Hirst, Daniel Joseph Martinez, Julie Mehretu, Jorge Pardo, Slavs and Tatars, Kara Walker, Franz West (a double-sided poster series), Pae White and Xu Bing. The dotted walls provide the show with a jazzy, extroverted rhythm and are effective backdrops for works that are flat and boldly graphic, such as the text-based works by Gillick, Hirst, Martinez and Slavs and Tatars (the latter the subject of a monographic exhibition at MoMA in late 2012), the photo-based pieces by Donnelly and West and Pae White's abstractions. However, images featuring tonal gradations, intricate imagery and/or a finesse of execution, like those by Jorge Pardo, Julie Mehretu, Kara Walker and Xu Bing, are overpowered. The curatorial decision to break up portfolios further hampers the apprehension of the work of these artists, as the sense of progression or narrative encompassed by their portfolios is lost.

In the exhibition catalogue, white pages of text with accompanying illustrations alternate with pages covered with a tight, black-on-white dot matrix bearing reproductions of work featured in the show. Here again, the more



94. Marina Abramović, *Spirit Cooking*, 1996, etching with chine collé, 315 x 278 mm (New York, The Museum of Modern Art © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn).



95. Martin Kippenberger, *Content on Tour (Inhalt auf Reisen)*, 1992, screenprint mounted on plywood, altered by the artist, 1,800 x 1,500 mm (© Estate Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. Photo Lothar Schnepf).

'delicate' pieces are overwhelmed by the design concept, a situation exacerbated by the fact that many are shown in diminutive scale. As a whole, however, the catalogue, which was designed by the Amsterdam-based team Mevis and Van Deursen, is a remarkable achievement. Its multifarious sections, dotted and otherwise, are clearly organized and the text, printed in the Futura bold typeface laid out on pages with unusually tight top and bottom margins, makes the act of reading an exhibition catalogue a fresh and noteworthy experience.

The catalogue opens with an introductory essay by Cherix, followed by ten sections consisting of texts and interviews by Cherix, Sarah Suzuki or Kim Conaty that highlight projects by individual artists or collectives. An exception is the section devoted to a printer/publisher – the Santa Monica-based Jacob Samuel – who in the mid-

1990s developed a portable aquatint box which enabled artists, beginning with Marina Abramović in Amsterdam, to create intaglio prints in their studios (fig. 94). For 'Print/Out', Samuels closely documented his use of the box to collaborate with the Cologne-based Romanian twin brothers Gert and Uwe Tobias, renowned for their expressionistic woodcuts, on their first series of etchings.

A detail of one of Martin Kippenberger's *Content on Tour* screenprints, of 2002, reproduced with an overlay of screened dots, appears on the *Print/Out* catalogue's front and back covers (fig. 95). This print series began with the artist commissioning an assistant to paint replicas of a few of his early paintings. Kippenberger photographed the copies and then destroyed them, assembling the smashed-up paintings in wooden containers (both the photographs of the commissioned paintings, which were enlarged to



96. Ellen Gallagher, *DeLuxe*. 2004–05, portfolio of sixty photogravure, etching, aquatint, and drypoints with lithography, screenprint, embossing, tattoo machine engraving, laser cutting, and chine collé; and additions of plasticine, paper collage, enamel, varnish, gouache, pencil, oil, polymer, watercolor, pomade, velvet, glitter, crystals, foil paper, gold leaf, toy eyeballs, and imitation ice cubes, overall 2,134 x 4,242 mm; each 330 x 267 mm (New York, The Museum of Modern Art © 2012 Ellen Gallagher and Two Palms Press).

the scale of the original paintings, and the dumpsters filled with the destroyed copies were presented in exhibitions). He then photographed the assemblage of smashed paintings and used this photograph as the basis of the *Content on Tour* screenprints, which were mounted on plywood supports. Kippenberger marked the surfaces of the prints with random lines through the use of a circular saw, making each a unique object and multiplying the ways these works violate the lines of demarcation between media, while addressing issues of originality and reproducibility (the fact that the words input/output can be read in the prints is hardly accidental).

Also merging categories of media and raising issues not only of original and copy, but also of copyright, is the *Copy Light/Factory*, of 2008, a room-scale installation by SUPERFLEX, the Copenhagen-based artists' group established in 1993. The piece functions as a lamp production workshop in which the sides of cubic, wood-frame light fixtures are affixed with computer printouts of iconic Modernist lamp designs. Printmaking, design and performance overlap in this installation, which grows increasingly crowded (and illuminated) as more lamps are produced; at the conclusion of the show, the lamps were auctioned off.

Printouts, not of Modernist icons but of photographs culled from a commercial online image bank, served as the basis of Aleksandra Mir's *Venezia (All Places Contain All Others)*, commissioned for the 2009 Venice Biennale. Mir

juxtaposed both generic and well-known images of waterscapes from around the world with the place name Venezia to create 100 postcards printed in an edition of 10,000 each, for a total of one million. While a full set was displayed as a group at MoMA, the postcards were distributed as free souvenirs on the biennale grounds, where two Italian postal service mailboxes were installed to aid in the mass dissemination of this participatory work.

The pursuit of broad channels of distribution and the desire to go beyond both institutional and national frameworks were also motivating factors for Museum in Progress, an art association founded in Vienna in 1990. It has thus far commissioned projects from over 400 international artists that have appeared as printed 'interventions' in newspapers, magazines, billboards and other mass media outlets, largely in Central Europe. Among those whose projects are featured in 'Print/Out' are Felix Gonzalez-Torres, IRWIN, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Hans-Peter Feldmann.

A pioneering publishing venture that had seminal impact in China were the three volumes issued by artist and political activist Ai Weiwei shortly after his return to Beijing, after twelve years of living in New York. Produced in collaboration with Feng Boyi, Xu Bing and others, *The Black Cover Book*, *The White Cover Book* and *The Gray Cover Book*, published in 1994, 1995 and 1997, respectively, introduced Chinese artists, who had for decades been cut off from contemporary Western art, to significant images and

texts. The three paperbacks, which were printed in editions of 3,000 and circulated among artists through underground channels, stretch the parameters of the artist's book. Similarly, should Robert Motherwell's *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, published in 1958 be included among the artist's graphic work?

In keeping with the traditional conception of a print as an original yet reproducible, limited edition artwork produced at a professional workshop in collaboration with skilled printers is Ellen Gallagher's *DeLuxe*, 2004–05, a portfolio of 60 prints in an edition of twenty that was printed, published and distributed by Two Palms Press, New York (fig. 96). It is a tour de force project by an artist with little previous experience in printmaking that broke new ground through its wildly inventive engagement with a complex combination of techniques, processes and materials. Each of the prints is based on an image the artist found in vintage African-American lifestyle magazines and variously altered. Among the processes used were photogravure, etching, aquatint, drypoints with lithography, screenprint, embossing, tattoo-machine engraving and laser-cutting. Selective additions of materials, such as Plasticine, paper collage, pomade, velvet, glitter, crystals, foil paper, gold leaf, toy eyeballs, imitation ice cubes and more, transformed each print into a tactile, sculptural relief. At MoMA, this labour-intensive piece has been given its own separate exhibition (it is also featured in a section of the exhibition catalogue). Entitled 'Printin', as a verbal play on 'Print/Out' and as a riff on African American dialect, this exhibition consists of prints, photographs, paintings, sculptures and films by over 50 artists that Gallagher selected from the museum's permanent collection to indicate work that inspired her or that she recognizes as having formal or conceptual links with the *DeLuxe* portfolio.

Featuring Gallagher's hybrid project as the centerpiece of an exhibition made up of work from various disciplines

would seem to support Cherix's contention that fine arts media will eventually coalesce on a single field. He concludes the introductory essay by declaring,

'While printmaking might very well lose its distinctiveness as a traditional artistic medium, many of its key characteristics – its reproducibility, capacity for distribution, and even its collaborative nature – remain essential to art-making. Looking at the vast range of extraordinary projects produced in the past two decades, it is perhaps not the disappearance of the print medium that we are witnessing, but rather the advent of a time in which prints will simply be called "art".'

One may argue on the basis of the work included both in 'Print/Out' and 'Printin', however, that rather than losing its singular identity during the course of the past twenty years, the print medium has remained stubbornly unique. Although there has been a blurring of distinction between prints and paintings, prints and sculptures, prints and photographs (as well as prints and installation art, performance, and so on), with few exceptions, prints take the form of works on paper. All, in some way, involve the reproduction of an image, which may be distributed either in limited or mass quantities. Due largely to the proliferation of photographic and new digital technologies, printmaking has become a widespread artistic practice that allows for independence from traditional print apparatus, workshops and publishers as well as from prevailing definitions of what a print can be. In the early days of the printing press, Albrecht Dürer was among the first to realize the freedom this technologically advanced apparatus offered the artist with regard to designing, publishing and selling his own engravings. He exploited the new printing technologies to disseminate cheap, mass produced prints. Rather than sounding the death knell of the print medium, much of the experimental work in Cherix's show extends printmaking into other fields while returning it to its very roots.

Paula Rego

Sue Hubbard

T. G. Rosenthal, *Paula Rego: The Complete Graphic Work*, London, Thames & Hudson, 2012, 392 pp., 637 col. and 283 b. & w. ill., £75

Paula Rego is one of Britain's best loved artists, admired by critics and the general public alike. Born in Portugal in 1935, despite her years of study at the Slade from 1952 to 1956 and her subsequent life in London, she has

never severed her Portuguese roots. These tap deep into a culture of storytelling, eschewing fashionable 'isms' and art movements, so that over the years her work has remained powerfully and gleefully her own. With consummate skill Rego has drawn back the veil on family relationships and bourgeois drawing rooms, on political and sexual repression, to reveal what is erotic, dark and subversive. Like a tongue poking at a sore tooth, she has