



Print

defining

Charting the shape of contemporary printmaking reveals a shifting model reflecting the exciting movements within and around the concepts of the print. Printmaking is in a period of intense activity and exploration, technical innovation, and an expanding sense of community and interchange. Formulating the connections and questions brought about by these changes demands a widely conceived focus which includes the confluence of tradition and innovation.

As with other disciplines, printmaking is in the process of eroding boundaries, fusing the distinctions of medium and form. The print is experienced within paintings, multi-media works, and commercial design, as a particular and specific voice. The notion of the print as a single page is being superseded by the dimensional works of the book and the installation, yet the elegant, monolithic forms of the traditional print persist in expressions of strength and insight.

Issues that were once exclusive to printmaking practice now abound in other media. The late twentieth century has adopted the copy as a central form – an aesthetic of the multiple, with its questions of origin, the original, the prestige of the unique and the mark of the hand, and the democratization of mass-produced images. Sociopolitical commentary, the uses of realism, innovative collaborative strategies, intercultural dialogues, and the new aesthetics of expanded technologies - these issues are “old news” to printmakers. But their parameters have shifted and printmaking now reconsiders their altered forms.

## the new terrain of printmaking

Historically, changing technology has catalyzed the re-vision of the print. Innovations like the groundbreaking aquatints of Goya, the introduction of photographic imagery to plates and stones, and the recent popularity of monotype are paralleled by the current influx of digitally-manipulated imagery. The visual language of printmaking is characterized by the transfer, the remotely-produced evidence, or trace, left by the artist's template. Although the computerized image file, like the plate or screen, permits considerable artistic manipulation, its intangibility raises questions about the nature of the transfer process, and about the identity of the creative act when process eliminates tactile manipulation. Even as technology enhances the equally powerful tool of artistic vision, artists now explore whether issues of tactility in traditional and electronic technologies establish a new aesthetic – and how the photocopy or computer will sustain a lively and compelling actuality.

As collaborative models of art practice proliferate, the traditional forms of collaborative process in printmaking are undergoing developments which both acknowledge and transform their history. The prevalence of the workshop as a centralizing site postulates interconnection among printmakers and sparks community-based interchange. Fostered by the Internet and the portability of prints, an international synergy among printmakers produces far-flung exchange projects and collaborative portfolios, inviting multiple cultural voices into the discipline, sustaining the power of the print to communicate outside established channels, and reinvigorating the existing tradition of the sociopolitical print as a valid form of

expression. Currents of exchange are continued through young artists and students of printmaking, whose expressive capabilities renew the dialogue of innovative creation.

Printmaking is now predicated on an expansive model with the boundaries continually moving, a dynamic, multifaceted interaction. The temptation is the negotiation of definitive boundaries for contemporary printmaking – but more important by far is the articulation of the scope and nature of the questions, and most particularly the initiation of dialogues among the synchronous forces shaping printmaking today.

*Deborah Cornell is an artist, the Director of Experimental Etching Studio in Boston, and a faculty member at the Boston University School for the Arts. An earlier version of her essay "Shifting Grounds: The New Terrain of Printmaking" was published in Art New England in the Feb/March 1997 issue, in conjunction with the symposium on contemporary printmaking "Shifting Grounds," which took place in Boston in March of 1997.*

## biographies

**The following biographical information has been provided by each artist. These are partial listings; full resumes can be obtained from DAM upon request.**