

IMPACT

PRINT CONFERENCE, UK



Selected exhibits

by Travis Paterson

Northern NSW based artist and co-curator for *Stories of our making*

The recent IMPACT 6 Print Conference (16-19 September), at the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol, brought together a remarkable array of printmakers from around the world to participate in solo and group exhibitions. There were a significant number of shows housed at the university and another six associated exhibitions at venues throughout Bristol. Australia was strongly represented with exhibitions by Antonietta Covino-Beehre, Jenny Peterson, Richard Harding, Marian Crawford and the group show, *Stories of our making*. Together they formed an excellent preview of what we may expect at IMPACT 7. The work featured during IMPACT 6 was high quality, well executed and thought provoking; what follows is just a small sample.

Mechanical Brides of the Uncanny by Edward Bateman was the first work I saw and I knew things were off to a good start. Presented as a series of carte-de-visites, it features portraits



of turn-of-the-century automatons. The cards document the different roles of these mechanised beings, which seem perfectly at ease in front of the camera. Anachronistic is often a derisive word but not in this case; the subjects fit effortlessly within the narrative of Bateman's seamlessly depicted world. Reading plausibly, it appears that these are simply documents of an exciting, forgotten time.

IMPACT also featured a number of installation-based exhibitions. One of these was the collaboration *Before the Outburst* by Rita Marhaug and Greta Grendaite. The tension in its title prompted viewers to study the cryptic dialogue between works, which was heightened by contrasting digital imagery, intaglio prints, drawing and painting. It spoke of the relationship between visual thoughts and uttered language and of internal dialogue that is often suppressed, however loud it might be.

Committed to Print, curated by Prof. Stephen Hoskins and Dr. Paul Thirkell, featured contemporary 2D and 3D prints using recently developed imaging technologies. Amongst these was *Digital Darwin* by Brendan Reid, a series of five 3D prints of a fox slowly transitioning from a rectangular prism to a more fully formed rendering. The Centre for Fine Print Research at UWE is currently engaged in 3D printmaking as area of research, and works in this exhibition highlighted the potential of this process.

Frea Buckler's *36 Google views of Mount Fuji (after Hokusai)* was a timely reinterpretation of the classic woodblock series. Using imagery sourced from Google, it posed questions about how we look at and experience the world in an era of digital resources and near saturation of visual imagery.

Amongst the external IMPACT-related exhibitions was the 7th RWA Open Print Exhibition at the Royal West Academy of England. It comprised over 400 international works by juried and invited artists. Keisei Kobayashi's large-scale wood engraving, *At Dawn - Song of Praise*, dominated one of the walls. It featured animals swarming the skies above a seemingly submerged city; birds, fish, insects and other animals appeared to exist naturally together in the same space in an

Keisei Kobayashi *At Dawn - Song of Praise* (detail), wood engraving and chine collé, 85 x 230 cm. Photo credit: Courtesy of the Artist and the Royal West of England Academy

Edward Bateman

Mechanical Brides of the Uncanny 2009, double sided digital prints with archival pigment inks, each card approximately 11.4 x 7.6 cm



apparently apocalyptic scene. The beauty and uncertainty of this expertly executed unfolding event was magnetising and slightly unsettling.

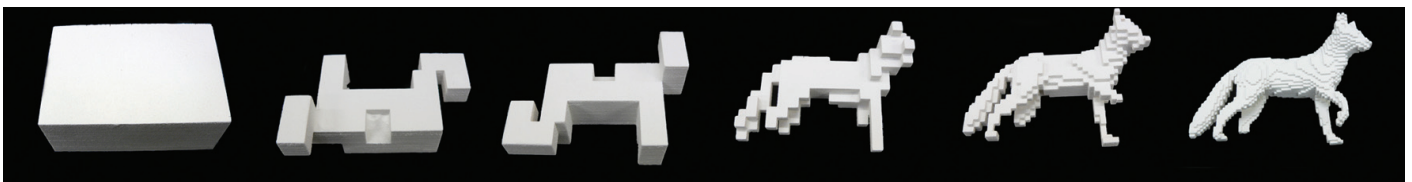
Also included in this exhibition was Marilene Oliver's *Dervishes*, an incredible self-portrait sculpture made from CT scans printed onto sheets of glass organza that intersected to form a tube-like structure. Layers of the mapped internal body were slowly revealed as viewers moved around the dervishes that, in turn, were moved by viewers' displacement of air. Oliver showed us the most private of places that we normally never get to see. The beauty of this work belied a darker atmosphere that resonated underneath like a secret or an imprisoned body.

IMPACT highlighted printmakers' readiness to adopt new technologies and use them to best benefit the project at hand whilst also maintaining the strong heritage of traditional printmaking. The enthusiasm, skill and ideas demonstrated at IMPACT 6 makes attendance at IMPACT 7 in Australia an exciting prospect. •



Rita Marhaug and Greta Grendaite *Before the Outburst 2009*, intaglio, digital prints, drawing and painting, dimensions variable

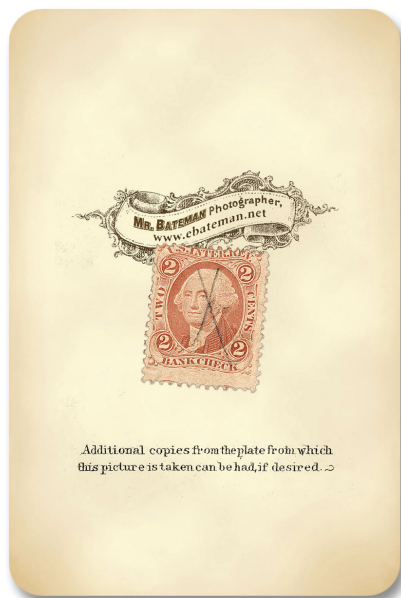
The Australian group exhibition *Stories of our making*, curated by Jan Davis and Travis Paterson, will also be on show at Tweed River Art Gallery, Murwillumbah, NSW, from 27 November 2009 until 31 January 2010.



Brendan Reid *Digital Darwin 1*, plaster powder, coloured binder, 3D print

Y're talking my language

Selected conference papers presented at the sixth IMPACT Print Conference, University of Western England, Bristol, 16 – 19 September 2009



by Marian Crawford

Artist, Studio Coordinator of Printmedia and Artist Book Studios at Monash University Caulfield, and Convener of IMPACT 7

Arriving in Bristol I discovered swans on the river Avon, floating alongside barges that looked intriguingly habitable. In Bristol's Council Chambers 350 delegates from 42 countries gathered to attend IMPACT 6.

Paul Gough, Associate Vice Chancellor, University of Western England (UWE), welcomed us. He noted that printmaking sits comfortably within that field of enquiry that is research, and that this research is successfully 'collaborating within an extended field'.¹

His comments hint, interestingly, at Rosalind Krauss's significant article 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field'. In this article, Krauss critically examined the term *sculpture*, in the post-modern era. She concluded that '*Sculpture* is... only one term on the periphery of a field in which there are other, differently structured possibilities. And one has thereby gained the "permission" to think these other forms.'²

And having thus similarly been granted permission by UWE's Vice Chancellor to think with expansion, I have written about panels that explored the expanding definition of the term *print*.

UWE's research activities are led by Professor Stephen Hoskins. His Centre for Fine Print Research (CFPR) seeks funding from and works to extend industry's research into print. Hoskins' team dismantles industrial machinery to discover, for example, how to print clay through a 3D modelling printer. There is little chance that a warranty for CFPR's equipment will ever be honoured! It is in this context of research and enquiry that the exhibitors, panels and presenters for the conference were chosen. Their papers covered theoretical approaches to print, new technologies, the academy and education, artists' books and the political print.

The 'Technological Advances' panel presented discussion about printing onto micro-chips (how small can you go?), 3D printed objects, and printing with concrete. Peter Walters described his work with rapid

prototyping, printing in three dimensions: using a digital file, plastobate powder is printed in layers to form a three-dimensional shape. Walters's digital work is often biologically inspired; he thinks of these virtual forms made solid as *natural*. Tuula Lehtinen worked with her graduating students on an ambitious project, which resulted in images of text being made into concrete slabs to form walkways in a local park. The art school, local council, concrete company and young artists reflected on place, space and collaboration, in the form of concrete 'concrete poetry'.³

In the panel titled 'Theoretical Approaches to Print', Paul Thompson considered what the print matrix's essential qualities might be if its sole identity is digital. He observed that images would be experienced temporally, 'in the time taken to invoke it and its duration to sentience', rather than physically. As we move towards digitisation, questions arise about the authenticity and authorship of the de-materialised print. For Thompson, the authority and authorship of an artwork reside in documentation around the work, the spirit of a 'creative commons' and in communication of the artist's intentions. However, this new 'language of practice [is] set against the challenge of digital repeatability'.⁴

Professor Elaine Shemilt's paper, 'Collaboration, Visualisation and Printmaking', drew inspiration from Paul Klee's 26 etchings illustrating ideas expressed in a c.1911 edition of Voltaire's novel *Candide*. In particular, Shemilt was interested in Klee's search for a means of representing *Candide* in his own visual language. With this collaborative example in mind, Shemilt worked with scientists to make images of a gene that produces a disease in potatoes. The genome sequence in her etchings was pictured in abstract images that were interpretable without reference to scientific texts. She spoke of the artist's powers of visualisation – 'here the role of the artist is not that of an illustrator; the strength of the artist's awareness in the interpretation of the data... [enables] the recognition of new information and routes to new analysis'.⁵

Ruth Pelzer-Montada reflected on the materiality of the contemporary art print, arguing that material studies in anthropology and cultural studies are filtering through to fine arts, leading us to critique assumptions about the superiority of language over objects. She noted that prints have volume, opacity, density and presence, but wondered whether they may also be presented as 'screen' or 'skin' — philosopher Michel Serres's work suggests consideration of the print as skin, the permeability of world and self, and of engagement with the world via the senses and materials, where materials are integral to

meaning. Pelzer-Montada illustrated this with artworks by Emma Stibbon and the Edinburgh-based German duo, ~ in the field, whose work *ink* (2008) she described as a temporary skin, which moves as the viewer approaches.

Professor Paul Coldwell reported on his study of four artists' responses to the effects of digitisation on the print surface. He asked: 'Does digital print require an abdication of a physical response to the final artwork, or is it possible... to produce digital prints which have an individualized surface and a history of their making?'⁶ Kathy Prendergast, for example, scans drawings, and then draws on the digital print and scans again. Images created via this layering of the hand drawn and digital reiterate the physical and material nature of the work.

Of the twelve panels held during the conference, I was only able to attend five. The forty-eight papers presented in these panels will be published by the CFPR, UWE, in mid 2010. I recommend this publication as critical reading for the thoughtful. •

References

1. My record of Paul Gough's remarks, Bristol Council Chambers, 16 September 2009
2. Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, Vol. 8 (Spring, 1979), pp. 30-44, p. 38.
3. Tuula Lehtinen is an artist and professor of the printmaking department of The National Academy of the Arts, Bergen, Finland. See www.tuulaehtinen.fi
4. My record of Paul Thompson's paper, Bristol Council Chambers, 17 September 2009. See also pwthompson.wordpress.com and paul-thompson.org, and IMPACT Print Conference Six, Conference proceedings publication, pp. 52-3. Thompson is an artist and member of Edinburgh Printmakers Workshop, lecturer and researcher at Grays School of Art, Scotland.
5. Professor Elaine Shemilt, Abstract of conference paper, IMPACT Print Conference Six, Conference proceedings publication, p. 54. Shemilt is professor of Fine Art Printmaking at Duncan Jordanstone College of Art and Design, the University of Dundee, Scotland. Her work ranges across media, from printmaking to video and installation.
6. Professor Paul Coldwell, Abstract of conference paper, p. 51. Coldwell is artist and professor in Fine Art at the University of the Arts London.



Marilene Oliver *Dervishes* 2008, dye sublimation print onto glass organza, each sculpture 215 x 40 x 30 cm. Photo credit: Courtesy of the artist and the Royal West of England Academy.

IMPACT 7 will be held at Monash University Caulfield in Melbourne from 27-30 September 2011. To register your interest visit www.impact7.org.au