



CONTEMPORARY IMAGES IN PRINT SINCE 1915

83rd Annual International Competition: Printmaking

Jurors' Statement

When The Print Center invited us to jury the *83rd Annual International Competition: Printmaking*, surely they were expecting something different. We are the co-directors of an alternative space in Harlem that makes exhibitions about art without art—using reproductions and other surrogates— and haven't curated a show of actual artwork for more than three years. On the other hand, we are also the co-publishers of *Art on Paper* magazine, and in that capacity we think a lot about printmaking and the graphic arts. These are areas that to us remain of vital interest, as much for their socio-political histories as for the many ways artists today continue to fold printing techniques into broader studio (or post-studio) practices.

So, when we first sat down to look at the more than 1,900 entries, our natural inclination was to conceive of a show that somehow combined these two concerns—our more shamelessly conventional interest in printmaking and our more unorthodox approach to curating. In other words, we wanted to find a way to make an exhibition of the prints that didn't actually include the prints and that was more truthful to our experience jurying the show, a process that was realized entirely by looking at digital files and 35mm slides.

Before we committed to a curatorial idea, however, we needed to narrow down the submissions to a core, manageable group. We whittled as follows: we eliminated all the works that made use of symbols that we think have become expressive clichés: the boat as a metaphor for body or soul, the leaf as memento mori, the bird as a symbol of freedom or the spirit. Then we looked for similar works by different artists and selected those that—in side-by-side comparisons—we thought were the strongest (inevitably a highly subjective enterprise). To further narrow down the field, we started bundling works by sensibility or approach—grouping works that prominently employed text or decorative motifs, for instance, or works that made use of the language of comics or graphic novels, or conventional landscapes that showed great technical proficiency. Artworks that couldn't be easily grouped with others we've kept together in their own category. As we narrowed each group down to a core few, we looked for works that showed evidence of self-awareness and self-criticality, rather than work that looked to be in sync with recent trends.

At this point, we had a generous working selection. We took all the digital files and rescaled them in Photoshop using their actual dimensions as a guide, printed them, and then cut them out and laid them on a large table, along with a to-scale printout of a person. (This was to help us understand how actual prints might look, relative to one another, in real space.) It was then that we began toying with different presentation strategies. One idea was to submit our little printouts instead of the actual artworks to John Caperton, The Print Center's Curator, and ask him to either exhibit them under glass tabletops or on all the walls as miniatures. We also considered proposing a show to John that consisted exclusively of projections: in one gallery, a single PowerPoint projection of the digital images we had selected, in the other, a slide show of the 35mm slides we'd selected. But as we got further and further down the path, we got cold feet: the artists were expecting their actual work to be presented at The Print Center, was it fair to them to do otherwise? Moreover, was it right for us to potentially disenfranchise The Print Center's core constituency, when the organization—which we respect and admire—had so generously invited us in the first place? We decided it wasn't.

So, in the end, we selected the works and left it up to John to figure out how to install them. We've done our part. The tables are turned. It is time for you to judge us.

—Shelly Bancroft and Peter Nesbett
Publishers of *Art on Paper* and
Founders of Triple Candie