

AURA

Repetition, Reproduction,
and the Mark of the Artist

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Repetition, Reproduction, and the Mark of the Artist

Curated by Ben Rak

Alison Alder	Milan Milojevic
Gary Carsley	Ben Rak
Tony Curran	Erica Seccombe
Michael Kempson	Samuel Tupou
Anna Kristensen	Judy Watson

A Manly Art Gallery & Museum Touring Exhibition.

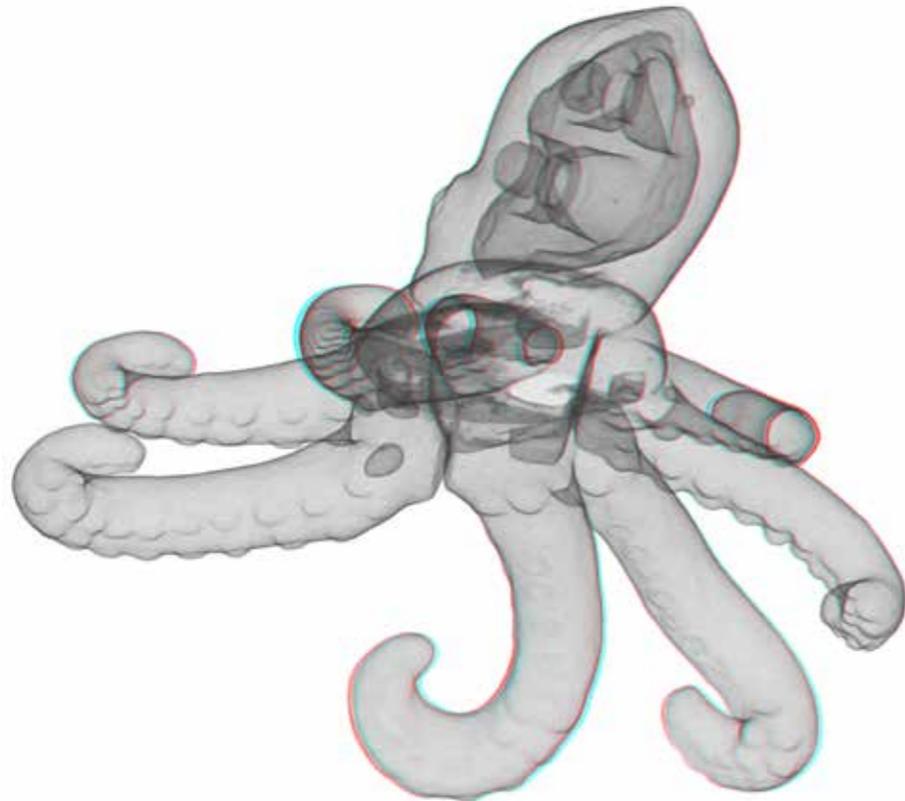
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AURA

Repetition, Reproduction, and the Mark of the Artist
By Ben Rak

Within the broad sphere of the art-making world, the medium of printmaking is viewed in various ways. Some people fetishise the processes and technical prowess involved in the making of print artworks, while others consider prints to be 'merely' reproductions and struggle to view them as one would a painting or sculpture.

In his 1935 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin attempts to unpack what it is about the mechanically reproduced image that displaces its artistic authority and relegates it to second-class citizenship in the art world. Benjamin explains that 'the genuineness of a thing is the quintessence of everything about it since its creation', an idea that he translates into the term *aura*. He goes on to argue that in an era when artworks can be reproduced by technological means, the *aura* of the artwork tends to diminish.

Walter Benjamin frames the diminishing *aura* as possibly a positive attribute of certain artworks. However, I argue that in most cases, the reduced *aura* affects the observer on the conscious and subconscious levels and lessens the viewer's appreciation of the artwork, particularly in the twentieth century, when digital reproductions are made easily and inexpensively.

In putting together the ten artists in this exhibition, my intention is to express how different artists use the perceived shortcomings of printmaking - repetition, reproduction, and the mediation of the artist's mark - to confound the viewer's expectations of the medium and impart an *aura* to mechanically reproduced artwork.

Judy Watson's series of etchings *the holes in the land* (2015) is the outcome of a fellowship she undertook at the British Museum in 2013. The works depict reproductions of the architectural plans of the museum, layered with drawings and textures of Aboriginal Australian objects that were collected by the museum in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The reproduction of the museum plans suggests a cultural transfer from native possession to colonial power structures, as reinforced by the title's allusion to the gaps left behind when the objects were carried away to England. By placing the drawings of the objects over the blueprints, Watson emphasises that the museum's physical possession of the objects is subservient to their cultural ownership by the Aboriginal people from whom they were taken.

Similar to Watson, both Milan Milojevic and Samuel Tupou use the reproductive qualities of printmaking to deal with ideas relating to their cultural heritage and place within contemporary Australian culture.

Image detail: Erica Seccombe, *Ocularanaglyphos*, 2012, Anaglyphic print on KMO polyester, anaglyphic paper glasses, 275 x 253cm.

Milan Milojevic's work centres on the relationship between his Australian culture and his parents' Old World European cultures. He begins his process by scanning eighteenth century naturalist engravings, which he reconfigures and prints digitally to create imaginary flora and fauna, hybrids of native European and Australian plants and animals. Milojevic then employs traditional print techniques, such as etching and relief printing, to print on the digital images, thus making the form of the work hybrid, similar to the content. His use of both old and new technologies becomes a metaphor for his attempt at negotiating the pull of two cultures—his parents' and his own.

Samuel Tupou's background is Tongan, but he lives in Australia. His images contain reproductions of Tongan tapa cloth patterns combined with icons of Western popular culture. Could Tupou's use of a commercial technique—screenprinting—be suggesting that Western mass production is taking over his traditional Tongan culture, with him trapped between the two?

Anna Kristensen is captivated by surfaces, primarily rocks, gems, and stone facades, which she exquisitely paints in a photorealistic fashion. In her 2014 series *Render*, Kristensen departed from her usual painting technique and created a set of hybrid print-paintings, depicting brick walls and stone pavers. In these works, the detail of the stones is screen printed while the mortar holding them together is hand painted with glossy metallic paints. By using printmaking techniques in the production of these works, she acknowledges the reproductive qualities of painting and raises the question of whether viewers see a difference between hand painted reproductions and mechanically made ones.

Michael Kempson's meticulously drawn etchings of stuffed animals in his monumental work *Child's Play* embrace both reproduction and the mechanical mediation inherent in printmaking as conceptual devices. Though possessing the skill to develop complex colourful etchings, he chooses to limit himself to a minimal, monochromatic, technically pared-back style of work typical of pre twentieth century engravings. This method is perhaps a stylistic allusion to one of the influences on his art—William Hogarth, who, like Kempson, was engaged in social commentary through satiric imagery. In depicting visual reproductions of toys that are mass produced reproductions of animals, Kempson positions his social critique not only in the domain of geopolitics but also within the sphere of consumerism and globalization.

Alison Alder's long-standing interest in social issues and Australian politics finds perfect use of the visual vernacular associated with the commercial printing of newspapers and magazines—the halftone dot pattern—in her series *Australian Political Disasters of the 21st Century*. By reproducing newspaper images of politicians and increasing the scale, Alder degrades the halftone patterns to suggest an anti authoritarian punk aesthetic. This aesthetic perhaps connotes that our politicians are not living up to the standards that we expect of them, or, as Hito Steyerl explains in her essay 'In Defense of the Poor Image', that a poor image is a 'bastard of an original image...It often defies patrimony, national culture, or indeed copyright!'

Gary Carsley's use of reproduction twice over (he blows up a photograph of a landscape and re-reproduces it as photocopied wallpaper) applies the characteristics of printmaking and photocopying to the field of queer theory. Carsley describes his work by adopting terms (such as *transimage* and *draguerreotype*) from the language of the queer subculture, thus criticising traditional binary definitions both within the subculture and without. Furthermore, his view of the digital process as an extension of the handmade adds to his defiance of binary definitions and leads him to create work that is at once an original and a reproduction.

Tony Curran's combination of video and painting defy the traditional notion of what a print is and how prints are made. Curran uses a computer program to randomly select shapes from a database of marks that have come out of observational drawing on an iPad. Maintaining each shape's original colour and position from the digital files, he then proceeds to meticulously colour match in oil paints and "print" (paint) on to his canvas. By reproducing the image from the screen to the canvas, Curran positions the artist as a machine or technician in the process of art-making – similar to a printing press or inkjet printer. Furthermore, this manual reproduction of marks that have been subverted by a digital mediation process call in to question the authority of the artist's hand as the authentic site of artistic creation in a similar fashion to Kristensen's and Carsley's work.

In her work *Ocularangaglyphos*, Erica Seccombe uses medical visual imaging technology to scan and replicate a miniature plastic toy octopus. In this way, Seccombe is reproducing a mass-produced reproduction in a similar fashion to Kempson but with different conceptual repercussions. Her use of a new technology to both scan and print the work leads us to contemplate our relationship to technology and nature and the connections between them. By increasing the scale of the objects, Seccombe turns what was originally spectacularly natural into merely a spectacle of entertainment.

The artists represented in the exhibition *Aura: Repetition, Reproduction, and the Mark of the Artist* all manage to employ an element of the printing process as a conceptual device to defy nay-sayers' assumptions about the medium and perhaps expose hypocrisies surrounding those assumptions. The artists demonstrate that through an awareness of the history, tradition, and limitations of the printmaking medium, they can use the visual vernacular associated with it to turn weakness into strength and keep the aura of print alive.

Ben Rak is a Sydney-based artist, educator and independent curator.

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. J.A. Underwood (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 7. First published in German in 1935.

² Examples of such objects are pituri tobacco bags, a mangrove paddle for a raft, and an apron of the Mara tribe.

³ Tapa is a cloth that is fashioned from bark and printed or painted, often with geometric patterns. The cloth is made in the Polynesian islands.

⁴ Hito Steyerl, 'In Defense of the Poor Image', e-flux Journal #10 (November 2009); accessed May 21, 2017.

ALISON ALDER

The seed of the idea behind this series was sown when Alison Alder visited China in 2015. Whilst walking along an underground pedestrian tunnel, Alder came across a street hawker selling posters from the 1980s. Yellowed and printed in smudgy black ink, they told the story of middle aged and elderly men, at the height of their power then, but now of a bygone era – made quaint by a rapidly changing and better informed world.

Australian Political Disasters of the 21st Century are roughly printed on cheap newsprint and piled in untidy stacks. They have been constructed using old print technology and images from hard-copy newspapers - perhaps soon to be a thing of the past also. In this series Alder exposes those in charge who are scornful of technology, dismissive of science or frightened of societal change. In Alder's world, the people portrayed have themselves become souvenirs of an earlier age, surplus to requirements, left on the footpath to be discarded, glanced at or collected by the passerby.



GARY CARSLY

Gary Carsley's practice proceeds from his conviction that the hand of the artist is a cognitive interface; not merely instrumental, or a tool for affecting ideas. Economically and culturally the collapse of the value of labour relative to that of capital has created the possibilities for the handmade as a meaningful site of resistance. Manuality for Carsley therefore is not just proof of skill in translating concepts but in the context of the present and its accelerating inequalities, it is for him inherently conceptual. Or to drag Sol LeWitt, *the hand becomes the idea that is the art*. For a long time, Gary has worked with and within subcultural models of artistic production – karaoke and ventriloquism for example are in his practice rhetorical strategies as well as actions. His paradigm of the TransImage, or an image that operates outside the fixed binaries of art or craft, old and new attests to his continuing exploration of queer theory as a mode of practice.

Similarly, his persistent use of redundant forms of image making – intarsia, photocopy and pietre dure among others, mashes Theodor Adorno's framework of the *untimely* with Bertold Brecht's *historification* as a way of engaging with anachronic processes and technologies to readdress current issues in life and art. With respect to *Still Life with Landscape* it is useful to remember Edward Said's affirmation that in the 1960's during a period of heightened idealism and sustained protest against the established order, *floral spectacles were extolled as virtuous forms of non-violent resistance*.



TONY CURRAN

Tony Curran's paintings are the results of a series of fastidious systems, informed by the colour limitations of digital printing, which aim to materialise digital interpretations of the observable world. Instigated as a series of experiments aimed at using a touch-screen as an aid to drawing and painting, the act of painting Curran's digital results amounts to positioning himself as a human printer as he translates digital information into material form by closely matching digital (RGB) colours to the expansive array of material pigments available in traditional media.

Armed with an iPad, Curran produces extensive digital drawings and paintings from observation. The digital nature of this process allows individual marks to be stored and later remixed in the artist's continuously growing program *The unconscious is a rectangle* (2016 - ongoing). *The unconscious (...)* stores individual marks made with the iPad and collages these marks into an infinite series of random compositions.

The paintings in this exhibition are reproductions of 'screen-grabs' of *The unconscious (...)*. Rather than selecting the elements of the collage himself, the artist has outsourced any invention of the image to the computer and translated it into material form. Outsourcing to a machine perverts the mechanical implications of print-media in which the latter sees the invention of the image as the site of authorship while the manufacture takes place by a machine or technician as a master printer. In Curran's work this relationship is inverted where the *machine* dictates an image which the *author* then manufactures.



MICHAEL KEMPSON

Michael Kempson's recent prints extend ideas explored following a 2011 residency at Sydney's majestic Taronga Zoo, where the soft toys sold in their gift shop inspired motifs that became satirical metaphors for international power-play and cold conflict. His latest work *Child's Play* (2016/17), is a fifty-panel installation of crisp hand-crafted etchings. They depict invented toy animals that represent nation states, all identified by their three letter ISO country code, combining officially sanctioned animal representatives and occasionally substituting a vernacular equivalent. The formal arrangement of this menagerie is contained by the book-ends of China's panda and the American bald eagle, hinting at the universal and regional challenges confronting the old order, precipitated by shifts in the world economy from west to east.

We enter an uncertain future with a new American President, a Brexit decision to implement, the potential dismantling of the collective security of the EU, a resurgent Russia, rumblings in the South China Sea and the rise of populist coercion and fake news. With the joy Kempson felt following the birth of his grandchildren came concern for the sort of world our young will inherit following observations of the oft brutal self-interest inherent when infants play. In mapping our current geopolitical conjunction and pondering the inevitability that things will and must change *Child's Play* reflects on the legacy of the not-so-cute strategic ideas implemented in the past, and alludes to the value of patience and experience when acknowledging how the future must be faced together despite all of our multiple differences.



ANNA KRISTENSEN

Anna Kristensen's paintings are intentionally discursive and dialectical – they drift between styles and subjects, often placing these subjects in direct opposition. We see this in the way her paintings simultaneously pair antithetical references to nonrepresentational art and figuration, in her juxtaposition of illusionistic pictorial space with the concrete flatness of abstraction, and her rendering of gestural painting in a cool and detached photo-realist style.

Some of these conflicts play out formally in *Crazy Wall II* (2016), a painting of a 'crazy paving' wall photographed by the artist in America. The image of this textured and gestural surface was transferred via silkscreen onto canvas, where it was further worked and transformed. The wall's coarse mortar has been replaced by a flat, metallic copper hue, which comes to contrast the banality of the pavers with a shimmering luminosity. Refracting the light, the metallic paint makes the pavers appear to hover in space, drawing attention to the paintings' surface and completing a complex illusion of material transmutation: from the clay of the original pavers, to a photograph, to a painting that appears as if it could be metal. And further, from a gestural, abstract wall, to a photographic representation, to a painting that is at once representational and abstract in style.



MILAN MILOJEVIC

Milojevic's work explores contemporary cultural identity and the complexities of a cross-cultural position. The imagery is informed and inspired by the aesthetics and visual language developed by 18th and 19th century engravers and naturalist artists. Milojevic constructs fictitious flora and fauna, using a combination of digital and traditional print technologies to create highly patterned chimeras. The imagery is sourced from engravings and the artists' personal lithographs and etchings.

The impulse to construct fictional narratives and spaces is a response to collected stories of a homeland Milojevic never witnessed and is based instead upon memory, myth and fact.

His prints frequently employ the visual effects of symmetry and repetition. The ordered appearance of ambivalent forms make them seem both alien and familiar, like fragments taken from nature that have been enlarged and re-contextualised to form new species.

Through his own experimentation Milojevic has created a universe populated by hybrid flora and fauna that generate a sense of wonder in its audience. Yet this wonder is accompanied by the uneasy knowledge that the world created is a dystopian one, a fabricated version of reality that nonetheless seduces with its spectacular forms that leap from the paper with technicolour intensity, into the space the viewer inhabits.

Milojevic's *Night and Day (The Tree)* is a work of 12 panels inspired by Japanese prints, Bosch, Jorge Luis Borges, Munch's *Frieze of Life*. Munch wrote: "*life and death, night and day go hand in hand*" Within this work the Tree remains the same.



BEN RAK

Writing about mechanically reproduced art, Walter Benjamin asserted in 1936 that printed artworks lack the authenticity and, indeed, the 'aura' of 'original' artistic media such as painting and sculpture. Since then, the art world seems to have relegated printmaking to the role of second-class citizen, looked down upon for its characteristics of reproducibility, repetition, and mechanically mediated marks.

Rak's work seeks to re-examine the idea of authenticity in the age of mass production, mass media and reproduction. He combines printmaking and reproductive processes with handmade techniques to seek out links between repetition, replication, uniqueness and authentic artistic authorship. His challenging of the artist's hand as the site of original artistic creation is an attempt to ask how can the print be used as metaphor to scrutinize authenticity in the age of mass production and to what extent does reproducibility need to conceal itself in order to pass as original?



ERICA SECCOMBE

Ocularangluphos is the result of Seccombe's exploration of (3D) micro-X-ray Computed Tomography (Micro-CT) of a miniature toy plastic octopus, and is part of a series of work entitled *Nanoplastica*. The artist has imaged the resulting volumetric data to reveal the external and internal structures of toys by using a scientific program called Drishti.

Now that lenses allow us to see microscopic organisms which have previously been invisible to the naked eye, the infinitesimal can appear to us like monsters. This work is reminiscent of 1950's cold war sci-fi but also considers the recent boom in 3D entertainment technology and our continuing fascination with scale from the micro to the macro. While seemingly playful, this work seriously examines issues of visualization, replication and simulation of the natural world.

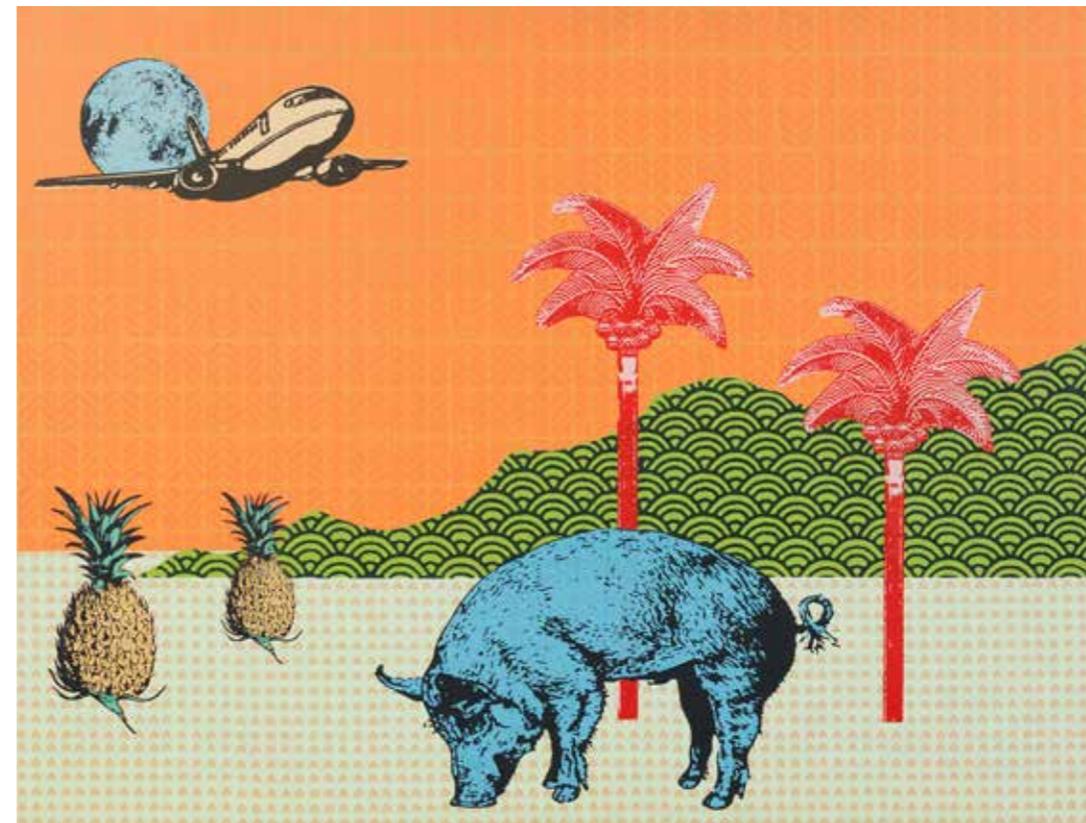
Microplastica is new work that further investigates these issues. Seccombe has experimented with CMYK 3D ink-jet printing technologies to replicate the plastic octopus in modified forms. Since scanning of the toy octopus in 2006, the artist has considered the ubiquitous pollution of plastic debris throughout the marine environment. As plastic rubbish disintegrates into smaller and smaller particles, scientists are identifying trillions of minute objects entering the ocean food chain and seriously damaging ocean habitats. As plastic is rapidly replacing marine life, Seccombe is considering through 3D printing processes, how plastic based species will evolve out of this toxic sea of resin.



SAMUEL TUPOU

Tupou's practice is based on the use of print techniques, primarily silk-screen printing on surfaces such as PVC, acrylic, and acetate. His oeuvre deals with his cultural history: he was born in New Zealand of Tongan descent and is currently living in Australia. His interests lie in the use of tapa-cloth patterns to represent his Tongan identity (tapa cloth is made from bark and printed or painted with culturally significant patterns; it is traditionally used for clothing in Tonga, Samoa, Hawaii, Tahiti, and other Polynesian islands). His images consist of geometric backgrounds overlaid with depictions of astronauts, bikini-clad women, soccer players, and other subjects reminiscent of Australian culture.

Tupou explains that *The Landing* is a homage to the famous 'Ham and Pineapple' pizza also known as the 'Hawaiian' pizza or the 'Tropical' pizza'. Throughout the Pacific Islands the spit roasted pig or 'pig on the spit' is of high cultural significance and is prepared on occasions of celebration and commemoration. In the work, the ubiquitous Pacific Island pig roams free and feasts on pineapples in a strange new land.



JUDY WATSON

In 2013 Judy Watson was an artistic fellow at the British Museum where she worked on *Engaging Objects*, a collaborative research project between the British Museum, the National Museum of Australia and the Australian National University. For *Engaging Objects* Watson researched Aboriginal cultural material held in the British Museum's collections since the 19th and early 20th century.

the holes in the land is a series of etchings from drawings made by the artist during her research of Aboriginal objects – collected, traded or just taken – and now held in the British Museum.

the holes in the land as a title for the works refers to spaces - the concave spaces or shallow depressions that have been left in the country by the objects which have been removed. It is almost as if the objects have been taken, but within those shallow recesses there is still hovering their energy fields. The objects carry within them some of that energy, and the DNA of the people who've made them, and used them, and held them, and been held within them, across to the British Museum, but there is still a shadowing back to their place of origin, back in Australia.

The work is looking at the idea of objects retaining ownership and the ownership is not within the museum. The ownership belongs to the people who made the objects, who held the objects, and who used the objects back in Australia - the Aboriginal people to whom the objects belonged.





WHY PRINTMAKING MATTERS

By Tim Gregory

Printmaking has always had an uncomfortable relationship with Walter Benjamin's notion of the "aura of an artwork". In a 1936 essay, Benjamin discusses the aura of an artwork as that special feeling you have when you stand in front of an original artwork—standing where the artist once stood. He discusses how the aura is threatened by mechanical reproduction (mass printing, photography, film etc.). Printmaking sits outside this type of "mechanical reproduction" because printmaking is invested in the mechanics of (rather than mechanical) reproduction. Therefore Benjamin's critique, linked to the rise of mass culture, doesn't fit well with printmaking. Yet this is because most people ignore the subtlety of Benjamin's argument—far from opposing mechanical reproduction to art, he argues that the aura only comes into existence at the point of its death. It is only retrospectively applied to artworks at the point that we needed to prove that something is lost in a reproduction. The aura attempts to fix the social, political and economic pressures mechanical reproduction applied to art. It is here that printmaking can provide some insights because it is a medium which refuses the nostalgic bandage of the aura. Contemporary art still uses the aura, but new forms of reproduction, in particular digital reproduction, have required supplements to keep the myth of art alive. Once again printmaking provides subtle critiques of these supplements and the exhibition *AURA: Repetition, Reproduction, and the Mark of the*

Artist, demonstrates how contemporary printmakers are subverting the assumptions art makes of itself and its audience.

Many of the works in the exhibition could be described as "post-internet art". They have an aesthetic, which is drawn from glitch, greenscreens, backlighting, chrome and 3D modelling. However this is a simplistic observation and it is worth unpacking post-internet art to understand why *AURA* is a critique of the thing it looks like. Post-internet art is not an index of the internet, in fact its success is located in the continuation of the "aura" argument. Post-internet art is the latest bandage on the inflated balloon of contemporary art—or to be precise, the inflated balloon of the contemporary art market. Benjamin's critique was primarily anti-capitalist, and the aura is a capitalist strategy to preserve the value of the art object in the face of its proliferation and democratisation through reproduction. The art market shapes art in a manner that is inaccessible to the vast majority of its makers as well as its audience. And the thing that has had the greatest impact on the art market in the last 30 years is probably something you've never heard of—freeportism. Freeportism is the use of ports outside of state control to store and trade art. Sotheby's was one of the first auction houses to use this system. In the 1990's Sotheby's offered its clients the ability to trade art without the artwork ever being present. Finally art could be traded as immaterial

capital. Art stopped moving, finding its final home in high-end storage vaults in freeport tax havens, completely invisible even to its owners. Better yet, because art does not have the same governance as other commodities, it became the blue chip stock of criminals, tax avoiders and launderers.

Post-internet art appears to be an elegant solution to the reality of freeport art. Post-internet art offers total access. It looks better in reproduction, it offers more features in its online forms than in gallery spaces. It seems to achieve the final liberation of art from upper-class gestures of connoisseurship. Art can finally be consumed like pornography. But this liberation is a false one and it is only allowed to operate because the value of art is no longer located in galleries, or even in private collections. There is no value in art having to perform as a class signifier anymore. The value of art is located in the necessarily invisible, sealed sarcophaguses in freeports. Outside of that, art can be whatever it wants. Post-internet art submits, on one hand, to the mechanisms of the late capitalist art market and the other to the utopian dream of infinite reproducing, free and individualised art.

As a contemporary printmaking show *Aura* refuses this trajectory. What the works in this exhibition achieve is a dragging of the history of printmaking through expanded and post-internet art discourses. It is important to be precise about this distinction: this exhibition is about reproduction and aura, but it is not about infinite reproduction nor about the pleasure of the original. The works sit, oscillating between these two, collapsing the binary. The works are digital *and* analogue, rich *and* poor, spectacular *and* mundane, incomplete *and* overworked, disease *and* cure. Fundamentally they are printmaking, which is to say they make a print. If you think about it a *footprint* is always both original

and reproducible. This is the unique combination we feel when we look at a print. We might think this feeling is somehow lesser than looking at a painting, but the opposite is true. When we look at a painting we see the artist rather than the artwork—we feel the manufactured aura like an omnipresent Hollywood biopic. However when we look at a print we encounter a co-mixture of ideas, conditions and feelings—from the collective effort of skilled practitioners to the vibrancy of an intimate idea seeking new audiences through its iterations. Printmaking has always offered us this fascinating alternate history that has run alongside the dominant, paranoid history of “art.” There are moments when these histories touch, and when this is deliberately and critically done, as is the case with *AURA: Repetition, Reproduction, and the Mark of the Artist*, it can result in tectonic rumbles under the shock resistant, climate controlled freeport art tombs.

Tim Gregory is a Lecturer in Art at UNSW Art & Design. His research focus is on post-pornographic and queer theory

SOME NOTES ON THE AURA OF PRINT

By Glenn Barkley

Some of my best times working in art have been spent looking at prints.

I was lucky enough as a curator at the University of Wollongong Art Collection to work with a collection that was dominated by prints in many different forms. Working with artists, printmakers and collectors, we built a collection that grew into something quite unique and important. It had a particular emphasis on Indigenous prints but it was more than that.

When I started at the collection in 1995 the director was Guy Warren, an Australian artist who had been making prints since the 1940s in Sydney and later in London. He had a refreshing disregard for some hierarchies and the importance of print was a manifestation of this. One of my favourite memories is of Guy coming back from Northern Editions with a stack of prints for the collection - there was something to be treasured about these bundles.

Later gifts and acquisitions from artists such as Noel McKenna, Franck Gohier, Belinda Fox and GW Bot (amongst others) broadened the collection outwards. It really started to bulge however when the collector and philanthropist Dr Douglas Kagi gifted a large group of prints by UK based artists such as RB Kitaj, Richard Hamilton, Joe Tilson and Peter Blake.

I mention this because I think that the thing working with this collection did for me was to introduce me to printmaking’s often forgotten tactile and physical properties; from touch, to weight and even to smell, it’s aura no less.

Aura (the exhibition) works both with and against the cliché of the ‘aura’. Printmaking is an artform where the general public is aware yet confused. Often when you say to someone that you make, work with, or collect prints, the answer could be, more often than not, ‘like posters?’. You then need to go into an explanation of what printmaking is, and isn’t.

And confusingly now, when someone says, ‘like posters?’ the multifarious, changing nature of printmaking today means the answer might be ‘well maybe...it could be ... it is sometimes... but not all the time... you know what artists are like...prints today...’ In printmaking now, if such a ‘thing’ exists, the *idea* is the thing with the most currency regardless of means of execution.

The idea of the idea being paramount in an artwork tends to be something that the baby-boomers think they invented, like site-specific sculpture. Of course these ideas, and ideas in general, have been around for a lot longer. The exhibition of ideas however is a bit of a new one.

Often the major vehicle for this is prints. From the 1960s onward conceptualism decimated and sometimes exploded most of the art forms in which it came in contact with. From ceramics to etching nothing was sacred and all was available. The bistro of signs created an all you can eat smorgasbord of object and post-object shrapnel that is still being put back together like the shell of a bombed plane. Print was a way to disseminate some of conceptualism's ideas in the world of the 'everyday' where they could be consumed and subsumed. Sadly however, printmaking mostly fell back onto the tropes of the art world as a means of distribution and much of the work made in the 1960s has slipped from view. Internationally, the thinking person's generation of artists moved over to the fine art end of production where they proceeded to dismantle that as well. But importantly printmaking began to generate its own self-fulfilling market place.

Interestingly, while conceptualism was seeking to pull everything apart, the high profile studios of the master printmaker - such as Geminin GEL in Los Angeles and Kelpra Studio in London - sought to place the artist back in the centre of production surrounded by rule breaking technicians who were happy to work with every artist's whim.

The printmaking studios of the 1960's, coupled with conceptualism's anything-goes aesthetic and iconoclasm provide the foreground for considering today's printmaking. Refusing to be restricted by the print studio alone artists seek assistance in every corner from plastic moulding to 3D printing to IKEA to Officeworks.

It is now in the gallery (the post-studio studio), that the print and the object can come together and coalesce for the first and perhaps only time. Printmaking as represented in the exhibition *Aura* gives us a sense

of what printmaking has become in this world. There is still a sense of the anything-goes ethos of previous generations but now it is coupled with a deeper understanding of technology. The sense of prints in the world and how they operate is also endlessly interrogated.

Take editioning itself, something that once used to be a way to define what a print was. Editioning has become an act that can be incorporated into a work's meaning. It can be hundreds or even thousands of prints. Sometimes the act of printing itself is passed over to the viewer - downloadable files becoming a digital matrix by which an endless stream of images can be produced ad infinitum.

Alternatively the print can be a one-off, the runs of prints can be drastically reduced as if in recognition of the shrinking audience (or market) for traditional printmaking. Furthermore, a work can be made up of multiple parts, all printed, but brought together to make something unique. Through the advancement of 3D printing technology, printing is starting to dissolve into sculpture in a much more fluid way, changing a 'print' from something which we have come to understand as being mostly flat, to having the potential of being three dimensional. The end of editioning is in essence an end to printmaking as we may have known it, or optimistically a beginning to what it might be.

But what does this mean for the print and its 'aura'? From my experiences - especially those working with collections - the print's power comes from its analogue charms, and its handmade qualities. I am attracted to the object in the room. I know this might be an old fashioned idea but it is one that still captivates - just witness the resurgence in craft and the plethora of handmade and artisanal mass-produced goods now flooding our lives.

But if the exhibition *Aura* tells us anything it's that these ideas of the object's status and fetish-like qualities are constantly up for grabs. The artist still works in the world of things but now the very nature of things is changing. Will the aura be resilient enough to shift guise from one form to another?

Glenn Barkley is a curator, writer, artist and gardener based in Sydney and Berry NSW. He is Co-Director of The Curators Department.



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