The Floating World

[*Centrifugal: Ideas from different cultures in print*. FAB Gallery, University of Alberta: Edmonton. Sean Caulfield, ed. 2008. 8-21.]

Beneath an undulant screen of bent reflections and a veil of skittering, tendrilled organisms, I search for Liz Ingram's face. The print's title, "Seductive Echo l (Self Portrait)," promises her presence. Dark patches might be hair and eyebrows, but her other features are washed out. The artificial light, the porcelain gleam and the shallow water indicate a domestic rather than natural setting. This Ophelia drowns at home.

"Seductive Echo?" Is she a siren tempting us deeper into her damp chamber? I face the print, but because the camera's perspective is from above, my position doubles. I am at once a vertical viewer standing before the picture and a horizontal incubus hovering over the naked woman like a lover or crime scene photographer.

The most ancient charm of images is their embodiment of beauty and denial of a more tangible embrace. Pictures are inconsumable, or at least unconsummatable, creating not satisfying desire. However, the creeping allure of this gothic scene is less sexual than sensually uncanny. While the title promises a portrait and the tub a nude, a scrim of light and folds of shadow obscure detail and resist easy satisfactions. The figure is amorphous, effaced. Its attractiveness, even gender, is indeterminate. Ingram deflects a gaze that scans for erotic possibilities.

If not this de-eroticized body, what is the "Seductive Echo?" Peering into the defaced face, I see my reflection in the glass. Vibrating layers of sticky ectoplasm and squirming dark life float between my face and the pallid being who looks blankly down at me, our positions reversed. Suddenly, her eyes open!—is it a trick of the light?

This vacant body is not the seducer; the feeling of liquid languor is the strange attractor. Water is the seduction. Embalmed in this cool coffin and, in the moment before breathless panic, I imagine dissolving into amniotic bliss. Thanatos is the desire for death, a primordial drive toward non-being, unconsciousness, a return to aqueous sleep.

"Seductive Echo l (Self Portrait)" (photo intaglio, aquatint, dry point) may simply show the pleasure of a bath. However, the chilling blue water, the erased features, and the presence of organisms that seem to be claiming the sallow flesh, all suggest a drowning. Is this suicide, like Ophelia's, due to losing her voice and becoming an echo of another? Echo of Greek mythology was torn to pieces and her parts scattered around the world. Robbed of control over her own voice, she was condemned to repeat the words of others. "Seductive Echo" satisfies whatever narrative we need. I, for example, cannot help but read it in the context of this exhibition. Prints are seductive echoes: multiples pulled from a matrix and distributed throughout the world. They are visual echoes from a lost source. However, unlike Echo, prints regain their voice when re-sounded by engaged viewers.

Prints and Pots

This essay begins with a swim. I wanted to dive into a picture, let it wash over me and become twined and twinned with the artist's expression. This is a serious luxury that few writers on contemporary printmaking permit themselves. It is easier to collect artist statements, explain techniques and history, or discuss the general state of the art then it is to appear naked before the work.

Critical, creative attention is essential for the development of any art form. In a discussion with printmaker Jennifer Dickson a decade ago, Diana Nemiroff, the former curator of contemporary art at the National Gallery of Canada, explained that printmaking and video art "both manifest problems that occur within medium-centred practices, when a critical discourse has not yet developed or is too internally driven [Dickson's paraphrase]" (124). If a work is only developed and discussed within the context of its own medium it has only a limited effect on the larger culture. And if its only subject is its own material, making and history, its potential meaning is even more restricted. In most cases, such things are works of craft or decoration rather than art. Art is a social exchange, a discourse of ideas and reasons as well as the creation and circulation of human-made things and images.

I was both honoured and challenged when *Centrifugal*'s curator, Sean Caulfield, invited me to write this essay. I am a painter, not a printmaker. I think he hoped that a writer from an allied field could offer some perspective. What might an almost outsider see that an insider might not? A printmaker is more likely to be looking for prints in a printmaking show, while a painter is more likely to be looking for art.

Before I re-engage the individual prints in this exhibition, I want to prepare the ground by examining the artness in printmaking and the recent changes in the self-consciousness of the field. The feeling I get from Caulfield and *Centrifugal* is a desire to engage the world beyond the medium while not evacuating what the medium has to offer, and to develop a critical discourse that exceeds "internally driven" paradigms.

Sightlines: Printmaking and Image Culture was a groundbreaking conference and series of citywide exhibitions hosted a decade ago by the same institution that mounted this show. I was fortunate to attend and note the stirrings of a conversation that *Centrifugal* renews. Many called for an increase in critical writing. This desire was voiced on the floor but is absent in *Sightlines* (the conference proceedings that actually *pre*ceded the event). The collection gathers texts about art world politics and the marginalization of printmaking; lots of recent histories and wonderful writing about the pleasures of the practice and of teaching, but hardly any critical attention is accorded to the works of art.* The essays are mostly about printmaking and printmakers, not prints.

A few years earlier, at a ceramics conference, Paul Mathieu asked, “Why is it so seemingly easy to write about art and so difficult to do so about crafts? Most texts written about crafts are technical, historical, or subjectively philosophical” (33). Of course, there is writing about craft, just not enough of the sort he thinks it now needs. Is this an impossible project? Mathieu insists, a la Foucault, that crafts are ‘other’ to art. In some passages, he claims that this is due to art world prejudice. Other times, he explains, “there is a real difference” (34); crafts are beyond classification and their meanings are non-verbal. If craft really is “outside discourse” (33) can anything be said about them?

I think these claims are true, but not in every case. We must watch for categorical errors. For example, Mathieu welds all ceramic objects into a single category. Yes, production ware, art studio ceramics, ceramic sculpture, and even toilet bowls (32) are all made of fired clay, but after that, they part ontological company. His rhetorical strategy is to show that if even one craft object deserves critical attention, then all should receive similar elevation. If one contemporary pot can get into the National Gallery of Canada, others should follow. This is good intuition but bad logic. There are many paintings in the NGC, but not all paintings or painted things are admitted. The NGC does not collect paintings, ceramics, or prints; it collects art.

Despite his professed egalitarianism, Mathieu eventually melts the weld that secures craft and art; the only pots he names and illustrates are works of art. He has his own clandestine ontological hierarchy in which some pots are more deserving of mention (and critical attention) than others. His illustrated example is Leopold Foulem’s beautifully clever “Lace Teapot,” a teapot shape rendered in porcelain chain-links. Though called *teapot*, it is no more a teapot than is a painting of one: neither can hold tea. It is ceramic, it is craft*ed*, but it is not only craft; it is a meta-pot, a pot *about* pots. It is a work of art.

Art is an idea embodied in form. The idea transforms the mere real materiality of the medium in our imaginations so that we recognize it as a form of communication or life. This understanding is embedded in *Centrifugal*’s subtitle: ***Ideas*** *from Different Cultures in Print*. This is the expression of a desire. *Sightlines: Printmaking and Image Culture* located printmaking within the larger discourse of image culture. *Centrifugal* has the same international interests but is concerned about printmaking becoming diffused: just one more medium within a larger (non-art) media pool. The curatorial selections separate *art* printmaking—those works that are primarily concerned with conveying ideas for their own sake—from the gravitational pull of trans-national, industrial and commodity enterprises mostly interested in persuasion for economic gain.

The title’s emphasis on *idea* may seem antithetical to the seeming purposes of art. *Idea* is usually associated with *intellect* and some may assume that by employing this word, the curator (an academic) is aligning printmaking with the other ‘objective’ research endeavours proper to a university. Perhaps, but I think the effort is more complex: most artists and critical art theorists’ sense of *idea* goes beyond analytical thinking.

Many people are anxious about criticism because they want to maintain an inviolate space for feeling, intuition and pleasure apart from an analytic gaze.** Certainly, there is

always room for people to enjoy a subjective experience of art. However, when they feel the need to understand rather than simply enjoy their aesthetic experiences, other forms of engagement are required. Critical responses arise out of a desire to enter into an intersubjective dialogue with works of art, history, ideas and other people. And, because prints are rarely unproblematic communications, they humble any dogmatic approach; they demand creative responses. As a result, few critical art writers conflate *idea* with cerebralism. *Idea* includes feeling, sensation and intuition.

An idea is the smallest unit of meaning (Quinton 411). An idea, or concept, is a mental representation derived from some outward or inward (felt) sensation. An idea is an image (411). Printmakers create image-ideas. The power or lack of these image-ideas depends upon their resonance with viewers: the deeper the resonance within individuals *and* groups, the more powerful the work. However, the affective meaning of any work of art ebbs and flows over time. Works of art die and revive due to the attentions of sensitive viewers and published responses. Critical writing about prints link mental and actual images together in long strings to form meanings. This operation not only communicates subjective experience, it transforms it. Writing about art changes our minds and feeling and sensations and intuitions.

So, "Why is it so seemingly easy to write about art and so difficult to do so about crafts?" Most pots do not request or require comment. They go about their jobs discreetly. They escape verbal meaning, if not tactile notice. Most prints and paintings operate the same way. They improve life without disturbing it. They do not require language to enact or enhance their instrumental or decorative value. However, as we move up the ontological hierarchy of aesthetic things, some objects catch our eye and tease our mind more than other things. Some steal our breath. A few even shatter hearts and change lives. They clearly belong to a different ontological category. Some things mean more than other things and meaningful things often elicit responses in another form: a sign, a smile, an essay, another work of art.

The title, *Centrifugal*, suggests a being flung from a center. I read this metaphor not as printmaking's retreat from the dominant art center and into a happy, self-contained orbit; but rather, a flight from one paradigm to another, unsettled, complex, diffused and ex-centric critical art realm.

Centrifugal Force

While *Centrifugal* displays an encyclopaedic range of techniques, the show is more about the depth of practice within conventions than in highlighting deconstructive works that play so far on the edge of printmaking as to threaten its integrity. All the works here are on paper and hung on the wall. There are no sculptures with print elements or commercial 'prints', or videos calling themselves prints. This disposition focuses the viewer's attention on the interplay among visions rather than on the periphery.

Looking at the works for a sustained period, I am most struck by how different my visuality is from that expressed in these pictures. To my eyes (trained for representational painting) most of these works are flat and floating. The images are intimately bound to their grounds and they prefer a horizontal rather than vertical gravity. Ingram's "Seductive Echo l (Self Portrait)," for example, has us look down through layers for its subject: abstract marks slither across the surface, beneath them lies a body, beneath that, a tub. All float. Gravity pulls from behind the image rather than from its conventional (painterly or photographic) place at the bottom of the composition. As a result, objects are free to hover across picture planes or bob back and forth in a slight space.

Ritsuko Ozeki's three, large "Netting" prints (lift ground, etching, aquatint, chine collé) are pressed into sheets of paper that look like roughened beige tarps. The ground is more object than 'window', more tactile than pictorial. The black, biomorphic forms do not push into illusionistic space but seem to inhabit the thin slice between that solid ground and our air. They could be plants sectioned for microscope slides or thick nets flung on the sand. They might even be rough maps of a coastline. In any case, our view is down into a flat, floating world.

There is something vaguely comic about Ozeki's shapes. Less regular and elegant than nature's designs, they seem like hand-made responses to nature. Perhaps they are architectural designs for organic buildings or a bio-engineers first draft plans for new organisms.

Naoto Okuyama's prints play similar games between representation and abstraction. His "Blood" series (carborundum, drypoint, gampi chine collé) feature pitch-black shapes on a light ground. They resemble those joke drawings—you know the type—where a few abstract lines suddenly make representational sense when you read the title. For example, a vertical line down the center of the page is met in the middle by two equilateral triangles with their points touching, turns out to be a butterfly on a clothesline or a man with his bowtie caught in an elevator door. Only, Okuyama's visual puns are not so easily resolved. They may refer to very specific things, but it is hard to know for sure. Is that a drop of blood there, red blood cells or platelets coursing through a vein over here?

The print's carbon has a bodily thickness that threatens the picture plane. It has a physical presence, rather than a strictly pictorial one, so vivid that it verges on the olfactory. Like tar, it looks stilled but not settled. Even so, like Ozeki's drawings, there is a firm, flat, graphic figure-ground relationship with a gravitational pull from behind rather than below.

This floating tendency in contemporary prints occurs not as a rule, but often enough to attract notice. You can see it in Modernist abstract paintings freed from representation, but I wonder if its persistence in printmaking has more to do with that medium's craft? Easel painters and tripod photographers share a vertical imaginary: the scene is parallel to the artist's eyes or the camera's lens and recorded on a vertical format. Printmakers tend to work on horizontal surfaces: a lithography stone, metal plates, silk screens, etc. Does a printmaker's horizontal practice encourage a flush visuality and a relaxation of gravity?

The “floating” tendency exhibits a preference for a thin screen of unmoored objects drifting against deep space, or, more often, layers compressed in a shallow space or no space at all. Many prints develop in layers. The ‘ground’ is the plate or sheet of paper; not the recessional space of illusionistic perspective (there is almost no analytic perspective in this show). Most of these prints are stratums that proceed up from an amorphous ground and into forms. In some cases, especially Kunchaethong and some of Endo and Ingram’s prints, ground and figure are undifferentiated. The vision is more tactile.

In many works, fragments float in an undefined space, a ground that might be the ground of earth or a floor, but more often it is the fictional/real space of paper (Ozeki, Okuyama), the actual paper (Sloan), or a citation of some other paper (Baur and Caulfield). In most works here, a contextualizing ground is obscured or eliminated to emphasis flatness, mark making and pattern.

Ryuta Endo’s digital images are almost completely obscured by lithographic processing. I think I see a seated figure behind the abstraction in “Physica/Sensus-III” and a bit of landscape in others, but I cannot be sure. The level of abstraction is surprising given the digital print source. The colour field formlessness might be a type of defacement of representation, or, rather than an erasure, perhaps the sources already had a measure of undecidability that the lithography echoes.

The primary pleasure of this work, and of Ozeki’s, Okuyama’s and Kunchaethong’s prints is their Kantian sense of purposeless purposefulness. Some seem to be willing themselves into form; others seem intent on dissolution. Unlike a drawing, which is usually more immediate, closer to the artist’s touch—even recording his or her fingerprints, erasures and smears—printing is traditionally at a remove from the body. The paper is pristine and, because each version is to resemble its mates, the printing stages tend to be mechanical and precise. But this is not true of all prints. There are a class of experimental or experiential prints (such as the ones mentioned above) that use printmaking’s techniques as ends in themselves, as interesting ways to make images that could not be made any other way. These works deemphasize their reproductive possibility. Interestingly, many of the prints in this show are monoprints.

This is a formalist, Modernist, truth-to-materials aesthetic that emphasizes experiment, individuality, novelty, and non-illusionism. Such works highlight what printmaking does differently from other mediums. But the appeal is not simply ideological. There is a unique pleasure derived from looking at something that combines intention and unintention. Controlled ‘accidents’ and surprises in the press remove some aspects of authorial intent and imbue these works with a special form of life. This happens in ceramics when novel glaze colours and effects occur in the kiln and surprise even the most experienced ceramist. Calder’s mobiles have another form of this ‘life’. The design records the artist’s ideas, but the subsequent multiple uninvisioned positions belong to the mobile itself.

I think of these works as visceral in that they are tactile and more analogous with feelings rather than intellect. While ideas can be ascribed to them, or at least to the intention behind them, they strike the viewer as unconcerned with meaning (especially semiotic readings); they may even feel resistant to that sort of attention. They are not puzzles to be solved. Their pleasures come from, in part, from the suspense of judgment, the suspense from knowing and needing to know.

Play Grounds

The space of Hitoshi Nakamori's prints differs from most of the work in this exhibition, but just barely. In his photo etchings the camera shoots the ground from above with little or no horizon. However, because the lens is not parallel to the ground, but records at skewed angle, the image creates a somewhat, but not quite, flat ground that somewhat, but not quite, rhymes with the sheet it is impressed upon.

Taking a photograph within the imaginary of photography is quite different than making one within the imaginary of printmaking. Looking through a lens with a mind to print, Nakamori projects a printmaker's gaze onto the world. Consider, "Small World." In the seconds before the abstract is read into familiarity, this is a flat design. It could even be the analytic cousin of Okuyama's organic shapes. The image is less defined than in a conventional photograph; the textural materiality of the ink is emphasized over the illusion of (photographic) space. However, the picture is not completely flush with the paper. The diagonal grid that fills the right side of the composition uses a convincing perspective to gently, but assertively push into space.

This is not a record of a pure relationship between mind-hand-medium-ground. It records another site through a lens. However, it is not simply a printed photograph. It emerges from both a different materiality and mentality. A signal difference between the photographic imaginary and lens-based printmaking sensibility is the ground. Like painters who tend to see their grounds as supports that enable the image only by being covered by it, photographers generally use paper as a picture's invisible support. Printmakers, however, are never casual about paper. The ground not only affects the picture it is inseparable from it. The importance of the ground—its literal embeddedness in the image—alters a printmaker's visuality even before they pick up a camera. They scout the world not only for images but for grounds.

This habit is punned in Nakamori's three play *grounds*. At first glance at "Small World" the ground of the paper and the ground of the image are hard to separate. Just as the figure of the shadow is given a pronounced texture and shine to increase flatness and underline its 'grounded', tactile, printed nature, so too, the ground is at once gritty like the ground (sand) it describes and as the result of a ground (paper) and dappled ink interface. Our closer attention to this play between abstract and representational grounds rewards us with a wonderful joke on scale. Easily missed in the sand are a dump truck on its side, possibly an ambulance and other things that cannot quite be determined. While the vehicles are toys and the shadow is of a climbing apparatus, the image is obscured

enough to encourage the viewer to see the vehicles as full-sized and the grid a shadow cast by a steel girder building. The ambiguity makes this a wonderful evocation of children's ability to create "Small Worlds" in their play that echo the adult realm, or, perhaps illustrates the more manipulative (educational) wish that has adults to miniaturize their world for children to emulate.

Nakamori further plays on spatial conventions by creating a perspective system that unites (or undermines) Eastern and Western conventions. The grid shadow of "Small World" has an almost imperceptible analytic perspective: the width of the almost parallel lines is only slightly wider at the bottom than the top. However, is this difference more apparent to eyes (mine) trained to look for (Western) linear perspective than to eyes more familiar with axonometric projection?

Traditional oblique projection not only requires that receding lines (or, for example, sides of buildings) be parallel but the front and back lines must be parallel to the picture plane (the top and bottom of the sheet of paper). "Small World" and "The World Where It Tilts" both seem to embrace this convention only to reject it with a slight skewing. However, Nakamori's world seems not only to tilt for formal reasons. The point-of-view suggests that the artist is standing on top of a slide. He appears fascinated by the humorous children's drawings barely identifiable in the sand below. Yes, a print of a photo of a drawing would be a clever nesting of images, but is such a perch advisable, especially with one eye closed and the other looking through a camera? The world seems to be tilting because Nakamori is about to lose his grounding and head for the ground!

Wayne Crowther also plays with photographic, illusionistic space and the flatness of ink on paper. His huge prints are an abstract play of colourful marks when seen up close; appear furry, like velvet or flocking when you step back a bit; and are almost photorealistic when looked at from a distance. Featured here are two heads, both titled "Human Mannequin Icon," a large-eyed Mesopotamian (?) statue and a South-East Asian (?) boy culled from National Geographic magazines or the internet. The abstractedness is probably the result of a mechanical process. The photographs may have been run through Photoshop programs or a series of photocopy degradations before a final translation into relief prints. The result is a flurry of black squiggly, fingerprint-like marks and lines that add up to the boy's blue face, and small, warm, ruddy circles and clustered black dots that create the face of the statue.

The sum of these gestures suggests the equalizing or leveling power of image taking, processing, reproduction and dissemination. The child and statue are captured with the same dispassion. They are simply two faces among billions. The faux flocking might be an effort, through craft and care, to rescue these images from obscurity and the democratizing of the media age, but I doubt it. The flocking is reminiscent of black velvet paintings—the kitsch aspect is reinforced by the exotic subjects. Crothers appears infatuated with print culture. I am not sure if he is making a critique or simply wading in the pleasures of novel representation. Either way, the viewer is caught between seductive formal pleasures and kitschy content revulsion.

Barbie Kjar's "Fire Tower" is a straightforward drawing of a woman in a conic skirt. The flat rendering offers only a hint of volume, but enough to suggest a column or vase. The title refers to the ruddy colour of the image and an echo between buildings and figures. It also highlights the fact that the image is composed of an assemblage 'tower' of four stacked sheets of paper. There is an additional playfulness in that the dress is decorated with a textile pattern featuring dancing figures similar to that found on classical Greek pottery. This inter-artistic referencing plays on the physical pun that pots, like people, also have feet, bodies, necks and lips.

Surreal Media

Our visual imaginary prior to the age of mechanical reproduction was limited to the visual memories gathered from things seen and the creative combinations of those memories through imagination. It was a visual bank only occasionally augmented by artificial images (art). Our present imaginaries are filled with many times more artificially constructed images than our non-technical experiences could ever capture. As a result, many of our memories are mediated by or are actual shades of media: we have electronic dreams. Given this context, I think that Crothers and Tom Christison are not so much critiquing popular image culture and its ready availability, as they are simply diving in and putting to plate what comes to mind or eye for its own pleasurable sake.

It might not be completely hedonistic. Crothers seems to want to engage and perhaps redeem pop imagery through an abstract intensification, while Christison uses surreal juxtaposition as if dreaming in public to create free associations in the viewer. "Window Shopping" and "Pre-existing Condition" (mixed media) both feature looming plastic doll's heads and medical text organs. The combination of disembodied doll's heads overseeing what might be a brain or coiled intestine in a pubic nest next to candy gummy worms is particularly disgusting but also funny. These fragments drift weightless against a cloudy sky. However, the sky looks like a picture, a ground rather than a convincing space. Because each fragment has a different light source and perspective, they appear to be flat images sampled and pasted into place. The space is more layered than perspectival. The layering is particularly interesting in "Pre-existing Condition," where the figures fade from intense colour and tone back into the smeared ground. This might be a rendition of 'things coming to mind'. Some images are in sharp focus, others are present but obscured; a few are annoyingly almost but not quite legible (on the tip of the tongue).

Laurie Sloan also indulges in this cut and paste, Surrealist aesthetic. Perhaps as part of a strategy designed to avoid linguistic appropriation, none of these collaged screen prints are granted titles to direct our thoughts; we are alone with our associations. I see organic and organ-like shapes on a blank, white ground. Sickly grey, green, and flesh-coloured figures with goose bumps and patches of hair slide around on sterile sheets. Pert nipple shapes spurt, or leak and other parts sweat or otherwise emit liquid. I think I even see a few condoms! These uneasy forms could equally be found in the boudoir or the autopsy table. They make me think of the sort of shapes old Matisse might have cut-out in his bed during a fever.

Sloan does a remarkable job of making dry, hard-edge paper cut-outs look visceral and fluid. Kim Bauer's sensibilities are similar. His images are enigmatic, and his titles are just as unmerciful to the literal-minded. In "11:32:02" (etching with aquatint) a beautifully rendered (dismembered?) hand hangs down, palm forward. The style is reminiscent of the sort of expository medical prints from the 19th century that were such an uncanny marvel, and artistic goldmine, to Max Ernst. In fact, the paper is given an almost *trompe l'oeil* distressing treatment around the edges to suggest that it is a found thing from an earlier period. It is a strange effort. Rather than just staining and crinkling the paper or printing on an already old and worn sheet, Bauer creates an illustration of these aging effect through printmaking. It is a bravado exercise that at once fakes and unmasks its deception. Had it been from an old textbook, we might wonder at its meaning, what concept or condition it represents. The fingers and thumb seem to have been dipped in some black substance. Was this accidental or intentional?

It reminds me of a Douglas Gordon's photograph of a friend's hand. Gordon convinced the fellow to have his index finger tattooed black. There was a reason—something to do with the legal length of a knife you could carry on your person in England—but the real content seemed to be that this artist managed to get his friend to disfigure himself in the name of art. Sloan's imaginary staining has a similar resonance. Is he, a printmaker working with ink, showing his commitment to the practice—ink has gotten under his skin? Is he now a medical display showing the perils of the vocation? Or, given the allusion to the 19th century, is this a comment on miscegenation? The possibilities abound, but no reading seems stronger than the strange affect generated from this image.

Environment and Implication

One of the strongest themes of this collection is the environment. Jon Swindler is particularly interested in working out printmaking's implication in the consumption of natural resources. His mixed media suite, "Prosthetic Landscapes l, ll, and lll" all have tan and faded green grounds on the edges with warmer brown centers suggesting light breaking through trees to a clearing. There are numerous decorative plant forms along the edges, but the main subjects are stubby, cartoony, delimbed tree trunks; what might be furnaces, and book and branch shapes that float and curve around the other forms. The prints draw a relationship between the destruction of trees to make books and prints. There is even a hint in the illustrational style of some of the botanical drawings that scientific recordings are also complexly implicated in this circuit—benign or even helpful research has an impact on the subject investigated. On the positive side, there may be a message of sustainability here. The trees are not completely consumed, suggesting responsible harvesting and the possibility of re-growth.

Sean Caufield's prints are like alchemical notes, obsessive constructions destined (or designed) to be oblique to all by the initiated. Like Baur, his paper is not just a ground for a drawing but is a special paper coded 'scientific'. The tight blue square grid and lighter grid of overlaid rectangles of "Diagram 1: Mapping the Descent" (mixed media on paper)

suggests mathematical or engineering notepaper. The numbers penciled in on the left and the word “efficiency” at the top suggests that if this paper is not just a found object repurposed by the author, his or her practice attempts to reconcile the technical and esoteric. The grid seems a mismatch for the strange figures that rest upon it: a conical shape in dense blacks, a black hole (?) again accompanied by the word “efficiency.” There is another very dense black tube/plant object and a lighter tube with fan or plume of smoke or fluid. Surreal but not completely absurd there seems to be an intent behind these designs that is both descriptive and constructive as if the author were designing machines based on careful observations of nature.

“Black Wind” (etching, mezzotint, chine collé) has a grid sheet elaborately distressed with numerous light drip stains. Again, as in Baur, the effect suggests an affiliation with the pencil and notebook science of a previous age. It is a purposeful nostalgia that sends us back to the time of amateur scientists when analytic investigations of nature and engineering were available to the leisured but not yet professionalized. We are made to believe that the sheet is literally sweated over—this is hands-on science. It is ironic that an image that took many, many hours to produce would need faux signs of time.

The main figure is a dark shape built up from super fine lines. The form combines nature and industry to produce a symmetrical vessel or smokestack that opens like a metal flower. Two of the tree portholes at the base billow out stylized steam or are they filling a balloon with two holes? Inset at the top left is an intestine-like bladder that could be animal vegetable or industrial. A similar faint drawing lies on the bottom of the drawing. Is this a wind machine, a machine for inflating weather balloons? The various drawings are reminiscent of da Vinci’s visual studies showing homological patterns between water and air currents and plant geometries. These works remind that science still depends on drawing as a form of visual thinking. The dark irony of this image, however, is that we often base our machines on natural forces and designs that then destroy it. We do not quite know what “Black Wind” produces, but it doesn’t sound good.

This environmental theme is taken up by Judy Youngblood and Akiko Taniguchi. Youngblood’s “Soak” (intaglio) and “Mysterious Weather” (relief) are blue, white and black images steel wool-like rain clouds watering cartoon drops on plants and people. Some huge drops even work their way back up from the ground like hyperbolic signs of evaporation—or a world gone topsy-turvy. In “Mysterious Weather” the precipitation includes some not-so healthy-looking thick blobs of black rain. After seeing Leonardo in Caufield’s prints, I am not about to let him out of my imagination now. Youngblood’s prints remind me of the apocalyptic “Deluge” drawings. These clouds emit rain, hail and an oily black substance. A hapless humanity waves their hands in attempts to rise above the storm or signal help. Others slip on the oily liquid. The plants, though adaptively distorted, seem to be thriving, even threatening the populous.

Taniguchi’s “Consuming Dawn” (lithograph, etching, chine collé) though initially more optimistic, brims with similarly threatening weather. This print has a wonderful play between a photo etched ground of ‘real’ clouds with an overlay of various types of drawn clouds. There are five black clouds: some smaller grey ink wash blotches/clouds and

numerous contour line clouds. The main figure is a large grey cloud filed with orbs that seem to vibrate with menace. The clouds drizzle inky liquids or hail or snow to an oblong shape that might be a pond that has turned black with its burden. A single, small and skeletal tree draws questionable nourishment from the black ooze. There are three rectangle inserts that recall Caulfield's strategy of tying in other representational languages, especially scientific. The pristine photo clouds may represent the past and the drawn clouds may be a feared polluted future. Of special note is a subtle, ravishing passage in the top left where a wood grain knot could be read as disturbed water with ripples.

As if to answer Swindler with the proposition of a sustainable printmaking practice, Yanawit Kunchaethong produces organic prints. "Paa Sa-Nguan (Forest Reserve)" not only pictorially evokes the forest reserve but is literally to made from it. The artist runs night jasmine and butterfly pea through the press. The print and its manufacture evokes nature's own printmaking-like process, fossilization. "Paa Sa-Nguan" looks a little like limestone fossils but also like galaxies or even a pointillist night forest. "Din Dam Ham Choom (Plenty)" similarly reads as both microcosm and macrocosm. These are all-over compositions reminiscent of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings and his claim that his work did not represent nature but that he "was nature." Kunchaethong's visceral environmental process shortens the distance between art and nature.

As Sean Caulfield explains in his introduction, *Centrifugal* is a gathering of images from a variety of international sources but not corralled by an overarching theme or thesis. The patterns and connections that emerge in the viewing are probably more creative than informing. Even so, there is in this sampling some preoccupations that resonate with contemporary artists around the world: the tension between abstraction and representation, and between and evocation and illustration; the evolution of visuality in the digital age; how artists address social issues while maintaining aesthetic concerns, etc.

What particularly impresses me in this collection is that nearly all of the work is unironically enchanted with its medium and history. Even the critical work seems in love with the materials and craft. This projects hope, a sense of continuity even within a spirit of radical experimentation.

* There are some exceptions, short but informing descriptions and informing characterizations, especially in Malgorzata Zurakowska's consideration of Polish prints and psyche and Pishanu Suphanimit's brief and general survey of Thavorn Ko-Udomvit's work

**Mathieu quotes Doris Shadbolt: "Craft is about the very qualities that current art [theory] denies… the theory-dominated cerebral climate which dominates today's art will change sooner or later and then there will be a powerful expression of reactive response.

And a reaffirmation of the importance of the crafts will be at the centre of that response." This apocalyptic prophesy, or wish fantasy, is in some measure coming true. In art and to some degree in critical art writing, there has been a slow turn from intellectualism and toward a greater appreciation of feeling, mystery (but not quite to the point of including metaphysics), tactility, beauty, and craft.

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