在制作中

陈小文

版画与众不同的特点来自于“制作”。制作不同于绘画，绘画崇尚为所欲为和即兴发挥 相反，相反，版画的制作工具和工艺不可避免地限制艺术家对下意识的依赖，迫使艺术 家去精心设计，去掌握制作。因此，“版画制作”常被片面的认为是技术活或者是唯美 的。如果换一个角度，跳出偏见，把“版画制作”流程视为一种独特的、具有前卫性的 创作方式，在观念上将它的特征和当代视觉文化生产的特性联系起来，我们方能背离“ 唯美主义”，在当代美学思想的层面上欣赏美国当代版画艺术特有的“制作美”，高超 精悍的技术和新颖多变的样式，进而展开对版画制作的当代性的讨论。 要深入地了解美 国当代版画艺术，首先，我们必须看到:美国当代版画制作的特殊性以及它和后现代视 觉文化生产之间的相互映照，很大程度上来自于在它背后运行的一整套版画制作系统， 其中包括:版画工坊运作模式，版画销售，收藏，评论，和公众教育。

运作系统

美国当代版画从六十年代至今，与美国当代艺术并行发展，为丰富视觉艺术语言起了无法预测的作用。艺术家、版画工坊和发行商之间默契合作，行成了一个试验性、观念性、商业性之间的缺一不可的联系。这种相互关系给予美国当代版画特定的视觉震撼 和它技术上的前卫性。众人皆知的当代具有代表性的美国版画作品大多产生与美国的版 画工坊。美国有近百家的版画工坊，它们不同于传统意义上的“家庭作坊”和“学术机 构”，是一些小型的企业模式，其背后连着一个由艺术家，版画工坊，发行商，评论 家，博物馆构成的，即分工明确，又相互协调的机制。当代美国版画从其发展的最初阶 段，就带有当代艺术的鲜明特征，即:社会性。最初，艺术家去版画工坊做版画的目的 很单纯，技工和艺术家之间的合作也充满了试验和娱乐性。职业版画家制作版画有他特 有的惯性，而在版画工坊里，艺术家与技工的合作必然带来与职业版画家不同灵活性: 要么运用已有的，或者发明新的版画技术去遵循艺术家的作品风格。要么艺术家向技术 妥协，技术的局限反道为艺术家暗示了新的可能性。

发行商，评论家，博物馆之间的合作即充满了艺术性和戏剧色彩，又不失专 业性。如:参展的几家版画工坊分别与华盛顿国家美术馆建立了“版画档案”合作关 系。1981年，华盛顿国际美术馆建立了 Gemini 版画工坊的版画档案, 其中包括了2000 多件过去21年间在 Gemini 版画工坊创作出的版画作品。1990年，华盛顿国家美术馆 建立了 Graphicstudio 版画工坊的版画档案。Graphicstudio 处了捐赠过去制作的所有 作品，还在1990-2005间

制作的所有版画中，单独为国家美术馆印一件“国家美术馆 版”。这种合作为双方互相奠定了权威性，同时也为民众和社会积累文化财富。在美 国，艺术院校的版画教员可以随时和美术馆预定，带领学生去美术馆的版画阅览室，由 阅览室工作人员将指定的艺术家版画原作拿出来，供学生欣赏。

八十年代末是美国版画和版画工坊发展盛期。随后，受到九十年代国际经济形式萧条的洗礼。Deborah Wye 曾对此有过如下描述: “八十年代的经济形式吸引众多艺术家去做版画，版画工坊和技工扩大生产.....日本藏 家的介入控制着版画销售，一些仅仅出版了一年的版画在拍卖行居然价格飞涨，理查 德。笛本克恩(Richard Diebenkorn)的凹版腐蚀版画《绿色/ Green》 创作于1986 年，印张60，原价15000美金，而到了1987年秋，价格高达42000 美金。 贾斯珀·简斯 (Jasper Johns) 的丝网版画 《国旗 1 号/ Flags I》创作于1973 年，共印了75张，在 1988年创造了世界当代版画拍卖 250000 美金的记录。”[I]

制作

在版画工房，制作是一个公众行为，凝聚了许多人的心血。它是一个家庭作坊式的“集 体创作”流程，技工扮演了艺术家同母异父的兄弟的角色。技工的参予自然为艺术家提 供了力所不能及的可能性和想像的空间。他们完善已有的技术和工艺，又不断的为了每 一位艺术家特有的风格和艺术趣味，去发明新的工艺和材料。 好的技工不仅具备近乎于 炼金术般的技术，同时又善于把握艺术家在版画工房工作时的最佳状态。在这样一个特 殊的版画制作合作关系中，观念在制作中产生，艺术和技艺互为因果。

美国当代版画的“制作”孕育了许多具有启示性的创作理念，使我们不得不给 版画“制作”一个新的解释:“制作”是观念和前卫的创作行为，而不仅仅是工艺，。 冷战后，“国际村落”思潮的高温以及九十年代高科技带来的泡沫经济，掀起国际双年 展热浪。意识形态和经济的迅速变体要求艺术评论界和策展人永不休止地推出新观念。 在这样一个大气候下，“制作”更多地被看作是“观念”的反义词。艺术家、评论家和 收藏家都在一边倒地推测和编造一件作品表达了什么，而忽略了当代西方艺术评论最应 该关注的问题:艺术品是在一个什么条件下产生的。

在思想活跃的工作环境，版画制作永远是实验的过程，一个成熟的艺术家可以 埋头于制作，在制作困惑中发现新的可能和突破。 有些象“前卫”艺术家，不同之处 在于: 前卫艺术家 的目的是铺垫通往未来的路，而版画家在制作中，善于抓住正在敲 门而至的“未来”。比尔 . 高尔德斯通(Bill Goldsman)对罗伯特·劳森伯格 (Robert Rauschenberg) 制作版画方式曾有如下描述: “.....葛罗斯曼女士 在脖子上围了一条围巾，劳森伯格说:“我可以用一下你的围巾 吗?” 我们在吃晚饭，刚结束，接着我们把围巾拿回来，在暗房里放上一张感光胶片， 他拿着围巾扔了下来，然后我们暴光，冲洗，我们就这样做了《Veils》系列的第一张。 我们曾经如此.....他常常清晨2点钟去野外，沿着铁路走，检起一个垃圾带，和

如此只类 的东西，然后粘到墙上，拍照，然后我来冲洗底版，他亲自在暗房工作，”[II]

劳森伯格的游戏化、程序化的、裁切和粘贴混合的制作方式， 把充满神秘色彩 的“艺术家的权威性”贫民化了，这是一个180度的大转弯:艺术家在告别画家的主观世界，直接表现来自外界的刺激和多种想法交错从叠的瞬间。四十年后应邀请来佩司制 作版画的年轻艺术家泰诺 . 丹农文(Tara Donovan)，将劳森伯格的游戏玩到及至，放 弃所有绘画工具和图片，甚至艺术家主观意识和情感，直接把生活中不可却少又不被人 注意的实物，固定到板材上，再直接印刷。她2006年创作的《无题/ Untitled 》是她把 橡皮头筋排列在一起，做成凸版。她引人深思的制作方式，赋予她的作品深刻的意义。 丹农文和劳森伯格在版画制作中最大限度地利用“偶发”取代艺术家“才能至上”的传 统价值观。他们的作品反复地提出这样一个问题:决定艺术价值的条件是什么?

从展出的美国版画中，我们似乎可以看到另外一种倾向:如何做比做什么更重 要。作品的意义更多地来自做的行为和过程。参加这次展览的许多画家，从未间断版画 创作，即使当版画销售不好的时期。做版画是他们日常生活的一部分，有点象中国人练 书法。KiKi到各院校讲学时，只要有版画系，都要在那儿做几件版画。超常的工作量 将“制作的魅力”推向及至。 在伟亚 . 萨铭斯(Vija Celmins)的《夜空 3/Night Sky 3》和查克·克洛斯(Chuck Close)的《自画像木刻/Self-Portrait Woodcut》中，视 觉冲击力和惊人的工作量、工作态度不可分开。静下心来看当代艺术，我们会发现:即 便是最观念的、反传统的、以及那些似乎简单而又深刻的作品，其背后都有极度的工作 量作支撑。 玛丽娜·阿布拉莫维奇(Marina Abramovic)做行为艺术时，对任何作品 都不含糊，总是将自己的身体承受力推向极限。

示意图 + 书写

赛若 ·兹(Sarah Sze)的《夜/Night》即没有叙事，又没有形象，它给我们的是示意 图。“示意图/DIGRAM”在德勒兹(Gilles Deleuz)的词库里另有哲学上的含义。德 勒兹用这个词汇来表达他对哲学的思考，认为哲学不应该是关于过去的，而应该是关于 即将来临的。对于德勒兹，“示意图”不是暗指，它聚集各种生命体的相互联系。“ 它的目的不是描述现时存在，而是在生态连续不断地变体过程中制造新的现实.”[III]约瑟 夫·博伊斯(Joseph Beuys)最有代表性的素描是他留在黑板上的书写。 博伊斯在谈 他的素描时曾说:“素描是第一个以视觉形态表达思考，一个从不可见到可见的转折 点。”[IV] 德勒兹所描述的示意图极为透彻地在波依斯的板书中得到体现，它将思考形象 化(用德勒兹的词汇:”image of thought”)。示意图不同于草图。草图是具象的， 图解版画家将要完成的画面。而示意图是抽象的，记录了版画家的探索和作品的演变过 程。借用德勒兹“Diagram”语义和博伊斯的板书，我们会从贾斯珀 . 约翰斯(Jasper Johns)的创作方式中领悟版画制作特征之一:变体(变体画)和它的观念意义。 约翰 斯做版画时先有草图，进入制作后，很快便在一个版

或者几个版上反复破坏、建立和变 体，我们可以在他不同版本的《四季/Four Seasons》中看到约翰斯惯用的变体画创作 方法与博伊斯板书和德勒兹“Diagram” 异曲同工:在生态连续不断地变体过程中制造新的现实。 与油画相比，版画更接近写作。它与书写的天然联系不仅仅体现在画面和形式

上。如果我们从版画家的创作方法，程序甚至于习惯动作中，寻找版画的书写特性，我们回对版画的刻痕有新的的认识，版画的刻痕不是简简单单的笔触，而近似于编码， 查克·克洛斯(Chuck Close)的版画是最好的例子。在克洛斯的人物肖象版画中，图案 式笔触传达出计算机式的书写感。一行一行阅读 克洛斯的木刻自画像里每一个方格，观 者会发现，克洛斯似乎在一笔一划地用方块字“写”肖像。 同时， 我们可以跳出形式 主义的框框，来看理查德 . 特透(Richard Tuttle)的《春夏秋冬》的刀痕、纹理、几何 图形，它们是碑文，或者涂鸦。图式和符号融化在物质原始状态的纹理、形状和视觉感 之中，他的返朴把我们带回美学的本质:美学最初是关于人类视觉感知和肉体情感的学 科，而不是关于艺术的。

纸本

罗伯特·劳森伯格(Robert Rauschenberg)对材料极为敏感，具有奇特的胆略和想象 力，善于用非传统雕塑和绘画材料，在平面和立体、情感和“文化符号”之间作文章。 作品充满了阳刚之气。而在《对往事的回忆/Ruminations》组画里，水痕流淌在“ 纸”面上的痕迹时隐时现，唤起观众对过去的留恋。纸、水痕、加上大量的空白，增添 了“轻”的感觉，完美地再现了主题。 基基·史密斯 (KiKi Smith) 经常用超薄材料， 让人联想到皮肤。仔细地揣摩她的版画《无题(胸)/Untitled (Bosoms)》，她对纸张 的选用不是偶然的。 九十年代后年轻一代雕塑家以新的姿态进入版画创作， 他们重新 认识版画材料，尤其是纸。 他们不在意“是否象版画”， 回到纸材料的物质特性和可 塑性，热衷于三维空间里纸材料和印制工艺相结合的多种可能。重申:纸不仅仅是形象 和观念的展现材料，纸本身就是形象，自身附带着观念的底蕴。莱丝雷·笛尔(Lesley Dill)的《循环诗裙/Poem Dress of Circulation》和 赛若 · 兹(Sarah Sze)的《记事 本/Notepad》恰如其分地运用了纸的物质特性和文化含义。

如把纸张仅仅看作版画家独有的先天嗜好，那我们将无法解释过去二十年中当 代艺术家对“纸”材料表现出的前所未有的激情。 纸张得天独厚的“轻”、书写特性、 可塑性、易复制拷贝、易传播，为“激浪派”艺术家以及之后的前卫艺术家提供了无穷 的想像空间和有效的武器。但是，“激浪派”艺术家更看重纸张和印制的结合，尤其与 商业印刷的结合，纸的价值体现在传播上。 值得提出的是，当代美国艺术家对纸的轻、 软和不易保留的特性的兴趣更带有个人情感，他们的尝试更加针对观众的感官体验。

阅读

欣赏版面和欣赏油画有很大的不同。我们总是习惯性地把版画作地图或者书去读，这不仅仅是因为版画是纸上的艺术，尽管纸上的艺术自然让人联想到书。我们更多地去读版画而不是去看版画， 这是由我们和版画之间在空间内的方位关系所决定:版画通常放 在桌子上，或被拿在手里，与人只有一臂之隔让人从上往下看，而油画给我们垂直画 面，让人从前往后看。观看方式的差异来自于制作习惯的不同。去画一副故宫，油画的 惯例是:画家站在画布前，描绘由前至后的透视空间。而版画家总是要伏在桌面和版画 印刷机上，象是在拼图，地平线和大地吸引内力在平展开的画面中消失。 在简·哈蒙德 (Jane Hammond)的版画《极精彩的市中心 /The Wonderfulness of Downtown》以 及 伊丽莎白·默里(Elizabeth Murray) 的《鞋带/Shoes String》里， 笔痕、符号、 形象， 重叠交错，如同桌面棋盘上的棋子被撒在桌面上， 即便是竖挂在墙上，我们仍 旧下意识地俯视，从上往下看，象是读书或者看地图。哈蒙德和默里的版画把我们带 回“阅读”的情感与记忆。

在版画的传统中，组画和变体画更为鲜明地强调阅读的连续和重复。 特里·温 特 (Terry Winters)的《组画/Folio》由十一件可以单独成立的版画组成，通过序列、 重复、变体、复制使阅读伴随时间进入深层次。 安·汉密尔顿 (Ann Hamilton) 的 《 倒影/Reflection (12:00 to 12:55)》由12张被曲纹玻璃模糊的艺术家本人肖像组成。海 米尔顿透过曲纹玻璃，在一小时内每隔五分钟，拍摄一张，然后又安时间进程的顺序将 作品排列在一起。观众不知不觉地在感受光影变换的同时，阅读钟表指针的变化:12 :00，12:05，12:10，直到12:55。 海米尔顿用光影和它所暗示的时间替代了作品 的文学性，留给观众可读的线索。 艺术家埃德·拉斯查(Ed Ruscha) 的作品通常离 不开文字，在照相凹版组画《乡村风情/Country Cityscapes》里，文字从画面消失， 只剩下黑、白纸条。 黑、白纸条置观众于画面之外，让人无法进入，而同时又吸引观众 从一个画面读到另一个画面。就象读中国画长卷，视点随着人的移动而移动。 当你细读 淡淡地印在画面下方的文字时，你会发现“文字和极有代表性的通俗风景相互讽刺和对 立。”[V]

这个展览将明确地向观众展示:当代版画制作的合作机制促使这一艺术形式脱 离了她原有的具有工业色彩的复制艺术品的使命，它是充满探索性的、表现力无穷的艺 术。“美国当代版画艺术展”的目的是促进版画传统、语言、观念、和教育模式的交 流，推动当代版画艺术的发展，和东西方建立在共同艺术信仰基础之上的密切联系。

附:

. I Deborah Wye, “前言《思考版画》, 纽约现代美术馆, p. 12.

. II 与比尔 . 高尔德斯通的访谈, 2010

. III Marianne Krogh Jensen, “呈现虚拟材料”, 《环绕与被环绕的》, p. 308.

. IV 约瑟夫·博伊斯, 摘录于 Bernice Rose, “博伊斯的素描语言“, 《思考是艺术形式》, p. 73.

. V 埃德·拉斯查, 平面艺术工作室.

IN THE MAKING

Chen Xiaowen

One of the most important natures of Printmaking is in the concept of “Making”. While methods such as painting offer artists a wide range of creative capability and individual expression, the very nature of making a print forces artists to break their dependency upon the subconscious and engage in a more structured and collaborative creative process. Specifically, the “making” in printmaking requires that artists consciously and proactively design, plan and execute their vision within the constraints and capabilities of printmaking technologies, methods and access to expertise. Having disadvantages and advantages, print- making should be viewed as a collection of unique, conceptual, and collaborative methods of “making”. By doing so, and having transcended conventional think- ing and stereotypes, it is possible to fully appreciate the highly developed techniques and novel and multivariate styles of American contemporary printmaking from a conceptual perspective, and beyond that of pure “aestheticism”.

To have a greater insight into the particularity of American contemporary printmaking and it’s influence on, and from the production of post-modern visual culture, it is essential to understand the operational system that pro- duces what we see in the exhibition, to include the business model used by print workshops, the way in which prints are sold, collections, criticism, and public education.

System

Since the 1960s, American contemporary printmaking has evolved in tandem with the American contemporary art movement, playing a critical, and often- unpredictable role

in enriching the language of visual expression. One key phenomenon of American printmaking is that artists, print shops, and publishers are in tacit cooperation, working collaboratively to form a cohesive experimental, conceptual, and commercial bond. To illustrate this point, the best-known American prints by contemporary artists have been, and continue to be made in print shops, while publishers support collection, educational and commercial demand. This relationship has given American contemporary printmaking a particular visual impact and a unique avant-garde, technological role in the creation of conceptual art.

There are hundreds of contemporary print workshops in North America. Different from traditional family-owned workshops and those sponsored by academic institutions, modern printmaking shops are often small, but fully functional fine art commercial practices. Supporting those shops is a highly engaged and intertwined network of artists, publishers and galleries/museums. These highly collaborative functions each play a key role in the creative, educational and commercial process of printmaking. To a large extent, this mechanism ex- plains why American printmaking has evolved to encompass the most important characteristic of contemporary art: social engagement. To illustrate this point, we need only to describe, at a high level, the process of “making” and how the different roles described above interact to create the final print. At the print shop, the artist engages the master printmaker who possesses the skills, knowledge and tools to help the artist realize his or her vision. As this process proceeds, the collaboration between artist and master printmaker often takes on a highly experimental and exciting nature, inevitably brings different and often unexpected results. The Printmaker’s desire to embody the style of the artist’s works drives the invention of new printmaking techniques and processes, as well as leveraging existing techniques. In some instances, artists have to compromise their vision to fit within limitations print technologies, but these limitations often suggest new possibilities to artists.

The collaboration among publishers, critics, and museums is also artistic and colorful, and nevertheless, very professional. For instance, two print shops participating in the exhibition have established a print archive at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. In 1981, the National Gallery of Art established The Gemini, G.E.L “Print Archive”, including more than 2,000 prints made at Gemini over a 21year period. In 1990, the National Gallery of Art established the Graphicstudio “Print Archive”, which contained all works made by Graphic- studio. Since, then, Graphicstudio has donated one National Gallery of Art Proof out of each edition published at the Graphicstudio from 1990 to 2005. This collaboration has helped both the printmaker and the museum, while accumulating significant cultural wealth for the public and the nation. On a broader scale, this approach towards collecting is emblematic of most museums in America. As a result, art professors in American can make appointments with almost any museum to allow their students to view original prints in print study rooms. The end of the1980s is the booming period for the development of the American printmaking and print shops. Later, the American printmaking movement experienced a severe downturn during the worldwide economic repression of the early 1990s. As Deborah Wye explained: “The economic opportunities of the 1980s encouraged artists to become involved in printmaking and publishers and printers to increase their output.... Japanese buyers particularly came to dominate print sales. Some prints increased dramatically in value

when auctioned even within a year of publication. Richard Diebenkorn's etching Green, for example, published in 1986 in an edition of sixty at $15,000, fetched $42,000 in the fall of 1987. At the same time that Johns's paintings were fetching record prices, his screen print Flags I, published in an edition of sixty-five in 1973, broke the record for a contemporary print by fetching $ 250,000 in the fall of 1988."[I]

Making

At print shops, the act of "making" is a public act that embodies the efforts of many people playing key roles in the process of a collective creation. In this process, highly skilled printmakers collaborate closely with artists, providing the technical expertise and equipment, as well as assisting the artist in realizing their creative vision. The marriage of artist and printmaker has had a dramatic impact on the evolution of contemporary art and printmaking. As artists expanded their vision and requirements for creative prints, printmakers responded by improving technologies, methods, materials and skill-sets. The best master printers not only possess near alchemy-like technology and skills, but also are effective in fully exploiting momentum of the artists working in the print shops. In this special collaborative relationship of making prints, "concepts generate in the making," arts and techniques interact as both cause and effect.

The true meaning of "making" in printmaking as a methodology of contemporary art creation, rather than a craft, is a subject of study that has received little consideration from contemporary art theorists. After the Cold War, the concept of the "Global Village" and economic events such as the development of a world economy set-off a heat wave of international art fairs and biennials. In response to these rapidly changing ideologies and economic shifts, art critics and curators increased the pace by which they launched new ideas. In such a climate, the making was more seen as the opposite of "concept". Artists, critics, and collectors overwhelmingly speculated and fabricated "meaning of the work", rather than attempting to examine and define the conditions under which the work was made.

In a working environment where collaborators engage in active intellectual and critical thought, printmaking is always a process of experimentation. A mature artist can immerse oneself in the making, and discover new possibilities and meanings in the process much. In this context, the experiments of the printmaker often facilitate or become the breakthrough. Arguably, if the purpose of avant-garde is to pave a way to the future, printmakers have demonstrated time and time again that they are uniquely positioned at seizing the new breakthrough that is arriving in the process of "making". Bill Goldston offers the following description, regarding the creative process of Rauschenberg: ... Mrs. Grosman had this scarf on her neck, Bob (Rauschenberg) said, "May I use your scarf?" we had come to a dinner, and we finished the dinner, so we took this scarf back, and put a film in the darkroom, he held this scarf and dropped, it fell, then we exposed this thing, and then I developed the film, we made the first series of Veils, we used to like that ..... he would went our at two clock in the morning, he was walking along the railroad track, he picked up a bag, or stuff like that, and then he taped

them on the wall or on to the camera, then I photographed it, then we developed film, we made negatives from those film, he worked with them in darkrooms.[II]

To adopt such game-like, process-oriented, and cut-and-paste mixing methods of "making", Rauschenberg says goodbye to painterly individual expression and dominating role of artists' subjectivities in art making. This allows the direct expression of outside stimulation and the interlacing and overlapping of transparent and photographic imagery.

We can also argue that the playful way of making prints, ideas of addition and serial carried out by many American contemporary artists in the exhibition denude the mythology of "the authority of artists" and " the individual unique creation", and make a bold statement that the process of making prints can be very conceptual and contemporary. To many contemporary artists, from the East to the West, the easy access and flexibility of printmaking, together with its advantage of circulation make this simple, but yet sophistic, process to be directly in contact with the values and the need of large population. We can comment prints as "art can be made by everyone", as well as "art for people". This does not mean to depreciate prints' artistic value and status in the contemporary art discourse. On the contrary, the printmaking has always taken the lead in working with the crucial problem of contemporary art: relationship between art and the people.

Keeping with this concept, how to make is more important than what to make. The word "making" stresses the present progressive tense of the verb "make", therefore, the act of making. Many artists participating in this exhibition have never stopped in making prints even during the time when prints have not sold well. Making is a part of their daily life in a very ritualistic way, a bit like practicing calligraphy by Chinese. KiKi Smith, for example, makes prints where she is, whether commercial print shops or art schools where there is a printmaking facility. The extraordinary workload pushes the "charm of making" to the highest level. Visual impact of the Night Sky 3 made by Vija Celmins and the Self-Portrait Woodcut made by Chuck Close cannot be separated from the amazing workload and the work ethic. The "workload" is a very sensitive topic because it culturally has a negative implication. The real truth is that, back to the grand stage of contemporary art, all extraordinary works of art, being extremely conceptual, avant-garde or simple, are supported by an extraordinary "workload". When Marina Abramovic engages in her performances, paying strict attention to every piece, she has always worked to the limits of tolerance of her body.

Diagram / Writing

The Night, by Sarah Sze (2000) provides neither story nor image, but a diagram. In this work, to use Gilles Deleuze's terminology, the "diagram" has a philosophical meaning. Deleuze's idea is of the diagram as an abstract symbol, not fixed in time. It can move spatially in any plane, to reinforce the notion that philosophy is not grounded in the past, but rather it alludes to coming, or becoming. For Deleuze, the diagram is not

representation, but a collection of relationships be- tween forces. “Its purpose is not to represent any existing world, but in a state of continuous mutation to produce a new kind of reality.” [III] In this context, the diagram can be understood in Deleuze’s terms as the “image of thought”. The image of thought is not necessarily a picture describing the “idea”, instead, it is the act of making thought visible in the form of diagrams. When talking about his sketch, Beuys has said that “Drawing is ..... the first visible thing of the form of the thought, the changing point from the invisible to the visible thing ... ”. [IV] The random marks, paper cuts, drafts and diagrammatic lines in Judy Pfaff’s, Year of the Dog, #6, compose symbols and a visual language. While making obvious cultural references, they are, to a large extent, the embodiment of Pfaff’s practicum as a form of writing.

How then, do we perceive the diagram as writing in printmaking, and as a unique characteristic of printmaking? The diagram is different from the sketch, in that the latter is figurative and exists as the printmakers’ blueprint to arrive at an image. Conversely, the diagram is purely abstract. Jasper Johns often made a small sketch before beginning the print process. However, upon starting, he engaged in a process of repeating and creating various states of destruction, establishing fixed and variable, multiple states. Though the sense of diagram may not be reflected literally on the surface of his finished The Four Seasons, what is clear is that his active printmaking process and deliberation highly resembles the form of note taking, cutting and pasting, connecting thoughts, and erasing sentences. In Sarah Sze’s Night, fragmented and inter- changeable symbols, though often recognizable when viewed from a close distance, are diagrammatic, suggesting a kind of scientific writing. First, the piece leads the viewer to an unknown world, or a world of abstraction. Then erases reality moves the viewer toward a pictorial pattern that seems without logic or meaning. By doing so, it can make reference to the use and power of diagrams as a form of communication and language within both the scientific and artistic communities.

It is not hard to argue that compared with oil painting, printmaking is much closer to writing. In fact, printmaking and writing have long been associated. What has not been so obvious is that the trace of writing in prints can be discovered through the method of making prints and through the innate psychology of the printmaker. In Self-Portrait Woodcut, by Chuck Close (2009), pattern-type strokes convey a peculiar sense of writing. Reading each square in the grid, line by line, viewers will discover that Chuck Close almost writes square characters stroke by stroke. It seems as if he writes the portrait. Similarly, in Richard Tuttle’s Seasons (2005), the cuts, the wood grain and the geometries can be read as an inscription, or graffiti, or a manuscript of relationships be- tween forces. His pursuit may be misunderstood as narcissism in a pure form, or we might propose a different assumption: the touch of Richard Tuttle is reflected in the texture, shape and visual sense of the original state of materials. His return to a primitive mark making, or writing, brings us to the true nature of aesthetics: that, aesthetics initially is a subject of study about human visual perception and sensorial experience, not about art.

Paper

Robert Rauschenberg is extremely sensitive to materials. He possesses extraordinary courage and imagination and is highly effective at using non-traditional sculpture and painting materials to do play between two-dimensional and three- dimensional spaces as well as between emotion and “cultural symbols”. His works are full of “die hard” energies. However, in his Ruminations print series, the mark of flowing water on paper flickers, arousing audiences’ nostalgia for the past. In this instance, paper, watermark and a large amount of blank space create a feeling and sense of “lightness” to recover the theme perfectly. KiKi Smith often uses ultra thin materials, letting people think of skin. Weighing and giving a closer look at her print Untitled (Bosoms), one can find that her choice of paper is not accidental.

Since the 1990s, a wave of young sculptors has entered printmaking with a new attitude toward, and conceptual ideas about printmaking materials, especially paper. The recognition that paper is not only the material to carry image and concept, it itself is image and attaches inside information of concept, has unleashed wave of creative and meaningful ways of using paper. The Poem Dress of Circulation made by Lesley Dill and the Notepad made by Sarah Sze appropriately make use of the physical characteristics and cultural implications of paper.

If we accept the perceived belief in paper as the printmakers’ inherited fetish, it is difficult to explain the unprecedented passion for paper shown in the practices of contemporary American artists and printmakers in the past two decades. The characteristics of paper as a lightweight, flexible, easily distributed, copied and marked means of expression and communication for artistic ideas provides an exceptional advantage to the avante-garde artist. Taking the Fluxus movement, for example, paper was far more in tune with conceptual art due to its ease of distribution. The Fluxus artists were firmly invested in the marriage of paper and printing, especially commercial printing. Therefore, in the case of the Fluxus artists, the value of the paper was intrinsically linked to the idea of distribution. That being said, a resurgence of interest in the ephemeral nature of paper over the last several decades has enabled American artists to explore new possibilities that were unattainable under modernism conventions.

Reading

Perhaps the most significant difference in reading, viewing and understanding a print versus an oil painting is one of orientation. With prints, we tend to read them like a map or text, while paintings suggest a frontal and vertically accessed image. To make a picture of The Forbidden City, for example, the tradition of oil painting would have the artist stand in front of the canvas to paint. On the contrary, the printmaker typically leans over the table or press bed, departing from the horizontal line above their head. Clearly, in this interpretation, making prints is akin to assembling a puzzle, where horizontality and gravity are absent in the flatness of the table surface. As result, we read prints more so than view them. In the prints, The Wonderfulness of Downtown by Jane Hammond

and Shoe Strings by Elizabeth Murray, both though vertically displayed on the wall, all pictorial elements appear spread out across the table, like chess pieces on a chessboard. We read them as books or maps. In addition to flatness, prints by their very nature, are art on paper and paper is customarily placed on a table or held in the hands as they are read. Prints take us back to the sensation and memories of reading.

Traditionally, the practice of reading prints has been strongly informed by the concept of the print suite. This tradition continues to engage contemporary artists for many reasons, among those being formal, personal or conceptual. For example, the suite of lithographs titled Folio, by Terry Winters is comprised of 11 prints, each print amplifying the next through a continuity of reading by sequence, repetition, and replication. In another example, Reflection (12:00 to 12:55), by Ann Hamilton, this series of prints conveys her ongoing interest in the concept of time. The 12 images in this suite are self-portraits blurred by curved glass. Ann Hamilton, through curved glass, shoots self-portraits once every five minutes over the course of one hour, and then arranges the works by intervals of time. Audiences unknowingly read the change of the clock from 12:00,12:05, and 12:10 to 12:55 while experiencing time-based shifting shadows. In these works, Ann Hamilton has successfully replaced the concept of portrait painting with that of time and shadow. The works of Ed Ruscha rely on language. In his intaglio suite, Country Cityscapes, the letters are absent, but can still be viewed as images in negative space. The negative space or void denies access to the landscape, reinforcing an urge to read from one picture to the next, similar to strategies in Chinese scroll landscape ink painting. Upon further examination of the words lightly printed on the bottom of the pictures, it is evident that “the pictures and the words create a startling counterpoint to the iconic nature of the imagery.” [V]

As this exhibit clearly demonstrates, printmaking is more than the sum of its methods. The collaborative nature of contemporary printmaking has enabled this art form to evolve from a replication process with industrial overtones into an artistic form where experimentation and investigation is supported without limitation. The intent of this exhibition is to promote the exchange of traditions, language, ideas and pedagogical models for the advancement of contemporary printmaking, while bringing east and west closer through common artistic goals.

Endnotes

I Deborah Wye, “Preface”, Thinking Print, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, p. 12.
II Interview with Bill Goldston, 2010
III Marianne Krogh Jensen, “Mapping Virtual Materiality”, Surroundings Surrounded, p. 308.
IV Joseph Beuys, quoted in Bernice Rose, “Joseph Beuys and the Language of Drawing”, Thinking Is Form, p. 73.

V Ed Ruscha, Graphicstudio publication.