

## ALONE OFF THE PRESS

### **An exhibition of monotypes (one-off prints) at *The Left Hand***

Regardless of their shared original purpose of allowing artists to produce multiple copies of the same image, each of the various methods of printmaking is finally only of interest for its expressive qualities. None of these methods is more versatile or immediate than the monotype or less useful as a means of image reproduction.

*The Left Hand* was set up to encourage imaginative visual art and to allow me to follow my own preoccupations. Since my late teens I've been intrigued by the monotype for its particular characteristics as well as by its relative invisibility. *Alone off the Press* is this gallery's first attempt to draw more attention to the medium as well as indulge my continuing curiosity.

Degas, who made wonderful monotypes, is said to have hated the name and instead called them 'drawings done with greasy ink and printed'. That's a reasonable distaste and an apt basic definition. More fully explained, the image is made from thinned printers ink or other paint (black or any colour) which is drawn, painted, rubbed back and scratched (brushes, cloth, sticks, cotton buds and whatever comes to hand can be used to apply and remove the ink) on a non-absorbent surface such as a metal plate or sheet of glass. Paper is then placed on the plate which is run through a press or pressured with a hand roller, rubbed with the back of a spoon, a pen or the like. The paper is then pulled away with much of the ink attached. A second or even a third print (known as ghosts) may be taken in this way, each much paler than its predecessor. Like all other printmaking methods, monotypes are mirror images of what is put down on the plate but, unlike them, there are no permanent marks on the plate that hold ink and are reproduced each time. Each mark on a monotype plate is unique and unstable until printed. If the ink is applied thickly it may spread and blur the original marks when pressed. If making the image takes too long or the ink is highly thinned it will begin to dry and refuse to leave the plate.

It is the immediacy of application and the influence of time that forces the artist to concentrate, to take risks and to avoid fussing about. These factors often save monotypes from the endless time-consuming technical possibilities of the other forms of printmaking. The pursuit of those techniques, beguiling and full of potential though they are, often subverts the image by eventually killing off the impulse that inspired it. Making monotypes, though, does share with the other printmaking methods at least one degree of removal from drawing or painting – the intervention of some sort of press and the element of chance that accompanies that process. In a sense this adds excitement; whatever the effort put into the image and however great its apparent success, it is uncertain how well it will lift onto the paper until the moment it is peeled free and turned over. It might seem contradictory, but this resistance to complete control, and the uncertainty, even fear, that accompanies it, demands that artists break free of self-consciousness fudging and engage directly with their task.

*Alone off the Press* is a loose survey of monotype artists from the Braidwood/Canberra region as well as many from much further afield. The process of asking people to contribute to the exhibition has itself been fun. As usual, artists I know have suggested others they know but, in this case, Cecile Galiazzo also mentioned Thomas Middlemost, an enthusiastic champion of the monotype. Thomas, the Art Curator for the Charles Sturt University Art Collection, kindly gave me a generous list of contacts for artists I would not otherwise have invited.

The contributors to the exhibition are: Andrew Moynihan, Debra Luccio, Jonathon Throsby, Peter Mclean, Anita Laurence, Sheree Kinlyside, Tony Ameniero, Kate Stevens, Caren Florance, Wayne Viney, GW Bot, Julian Laffan, Sally Smart, Lizzie Hall, James Whittington, Rona Green, Franki Sparke, Paul Nolte, Olivia Bernardoff, John R Walker, Cecile Galiazzo, John Pratt, Caren Florance, Tim Burke, Nicci Haynes, Debra Johansen, Phil Day and possibly others who have yet to finally confirm they'll have something to show, including Pam Debenham, Caroline Williams and Ron McBurnie.

### **Flipping Books**

Also at *The Left Hand* is a collection of flip books initiated by Caren Florance's *Ampersand Duck*. Called *Flipping Books*, the project is an ongoing one that encourages artists to express themselves in this simple form of animation. Each artist is asked to make a minimum of five books for sale plus a show copy that can be handled and browsed. This is *Flipping Books'* second showing and there are hopes that the collection will travel the country in a suitcase, gaining books and momentum. Among the artists involved so far are Laura Stekovic, Nicci Haynes, Natalie Azzopardi, Ursula Frederick and Caren Florance herself. For more information about the project please contact Ampersand Duck: [ampersandduck@gmail.com](mailto:ampersandduck@gmail.com)

Julian Davies

*The Left Hand* is a non profit gallery in Braidwood, NSW.

*Alone off the Press* and *Flipping Books* will be open 10 am to 5pm for three consecutive weekends:

27 & 28 August, 3 & 4 and 10 & 11 September, or by appointment. Ph 48427189 or 0422 530846.

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