

Carroll Dunham

The extensive *oeuvre* of American painter Carroll Dunham has infused the discourse of representation versus abstraction with new life, while simultaneously pointing to a number of untapped directions found in twentieth-century painting movements, such as Surrealism, action painting, abstract painting, and pop art. In Dunham's works, pictorial elements reminiscent of cartoons became recognizable details within an enlivened abstract picture surface as early as the beginning of the 1980s. Later in that decade, Dunham turned to larger formats, painting the expanses of his canvases with visually constant forms in fluid gesture: bodily shapes, reduced to pictographs, appeared repulsive and hairy, resembled tumors, teeth, or lips, and were rendered in expressionist colors with an impressive painterly quality. Recently Dunham's pictures have become distinctly more figurative, displaying aggressive male and female caricatures, with buildings, planets, and trees becoming additional vehicles of human emotions and unbridled primary energies.

Although Dunham is perhaps best known as a painter, he is a prolific draftsman, and for over twenty-five years has been an imaginative and experimental printmaker. He has worked with a number of printers and publishers; these projects have included single prints and portfolios, as well as artist books, executed in a wide variety of printmaking processes.

Allison Kemmerer, curator of *Carroll Dunham Prints: A Survey* notes in the exhibition's catalogue that while Dunham devotes equal amounts of energy and time to painting, drawing, and printmaking, and that all three media are part of a cohesive and continually evolving whole, it is in his prints "that the tension between instinct and control, so integral to all his work, is most intense."

Carroll Dunham was born in 1949 in New Haven, Connecticut and lives and works in New York and Connecticut. He has exhibited in group and solo exhibitions internationally, including the *Whitney Biennial* (1995, 1991); *What Is Painting? Contemporary Art from the Collection*, MoMA, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2007); *Examining Pictures*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, and Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1999); and *Urgent Painting*, ARC, Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris (2002). Solo exhibitions include Metro Pictures, New York (1997, 1999, 2002); White Cube, (1998, 2003); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2002); and Gladstone Gallery, New York (2004, 2007, 2008).

Third World

By Carroll Dunham

When I began printmaking, I had no sense of what its relationship would, should, or could be to the rest of my work. The opportunity to immerse myself was offered and I took it, in what proved to be a felicitous bit of timing; I was ready to extend the range of my art, perhaps without consciously knowing it. I was aware of and admired the prints of certain artists, living and dead, and had some practical grasp of photography, screenprinting, and four-color commercial printing derived from earlier interests and job experiences, but the techniques more common to limited edition "fine art" printing were terra incognita to me. I think I was both intrigued and intimidated by

their unfamiliarity, and by what I sensed to be a parallel dimension of art-making practices and philosophical premises slightly skewed from those with which I was familiar.

Bill Goldston brought a litho stone to my studio during the spring of 1984, on which I eventually drew what became the central compositional structure of my first published print. It sat in a corner of my studio for months while I worked on other things, intermittently approaching it, making marks on it, getting accustomed to its cold/warm smoothness and the greasy particularities of lithographic materials (and trying to imagine “lithography”), only to find—after actual time spent in a printmaking studio—that the most salient characteristics of printmaking (that the matrix isn’t the work of art, that the hands and minds of one’s collaborators , indeed their very presence, influence the movement of thought), would encourage false starts unproductively linked to my paintings and drawings. I searched for some generative “idea” which was under my nose all along, in the marks I couldn’t help making, in the strange alchemical universe of lithographic procedures, and in my hazy aspiration that printmaking could become an actively self-organizing branch of my work.

There came a point of acceptance, born largely of exhaustion, when marks began migrating from stones and plates to paper in meaningful ways, and hints of closure beckoned from a wilderness of options. Glimpses of what a print by me might look like began to dissolve my self-conscious cluelessness, and cathexis became possible: on the nascent artworks, on the atmosphere of the studio, and on the reference frame of the collaboration. In hindsight, my first lithographs seem to have emerged from a cascade of process and subject matter, and although at the time I was most excited by their not-painting, not-drawing, internally consistent “graphicness,” those prints now appear to me as images of the generalized movement of energy and matter exchanging identities in fields of syntactic circumscription. I was drawn in, and established a routine of regular visits to the print studio, where a self-sustaining logic of process moved me from project to project, a wave which at some point, with the luxury of open-ended encouragement, became a fully dimensionalized continuum, the third element, with painting and drawing, that together delineate the construct called “my work.”

I'm aware of a certain restlessness in my printmaking. It has been a laboratory of sorts relative to my other work, manifest visibly as curiosity about the attributes of diverse media and the degree of distortion that results from the attitude one might take toward them. I like the idea that "my prints" can look a lot of different ways. Divorced from the physical and psychosocial demands of painting, requiring levels of analysis and strategic thinking alien to drawing, printmaking facilitates the disincorporation of images and procedures and their return to optical physicality in diverse guise. The character of different approaches repositions and clarifies the spirit behind the work, with great expressive potential. The molecule-thin layering of ink in lithography, the virtually infinite information-storage capacity and physical richness of etching, the blunt clarity and flatness of more direct engraving techniques, as well as the weirdly disembodied and now ubiquitous presence of "the digital" in the interstices of hybrid methodologies, each provide a different vehicle for thought and a unique physical body for the incarnation of artistic memes. Printmaking is both its own reward and a trigger for quantum leaps of vision in the other domains of the work. My prints have repeatedly nudged me toward new angles of consideration about the space, support, and facture of my paintings, and even provided the procedural key and metaphorical structure to concretize a previously unfulfilled wish to make sculpture.

The fundamental fact about prints, their reproducibility, can also raise unsettling questions about their connection to the artist's generative presence. No matter how mediated, there is some initial set of actions or choices which jump across procedural synapses to echo in the work of art, and those initiatory behaviors braid together with technical specifics in the evolution of content. Discussion of prints frequently degenerates into cultish craft-based jargon, trumping the excavation of meaning and failing to see in individual works various facets of a complex, higher-dimensional object that extends its physical presence to multiple viewing coordinates.

The widespread and historically crucial contamination of painting and Conceptual art by printmaking techniques and the ascendancy of photography have helped obscure the formal (as in customs and manners, not "formalism") precepts which give printmaking a consensual framework and help clarify its philosophical underpinnings. All the elements that give prints their

specificity—choice of paper, edition size, attitude toward artist's and printer's proofs and ancillary material generated during the working process—are aspects of publishing (and ultimately of artistic intentionality) that are beautiful when consciously embraced, and they have no real equivalent outside printmaking. The portfolio is a vivid example of this, a kind of shared light at the end of multiple tunnels, which asks for a dwelling (a “package”) after its coming-about to underscore its wholeness and to give tone and texture to its intentions.

Monotype is another special case, which for years I held at arm's length because it seemed to bypass those formalities of print practice in favor of dubious rewards, a kind of have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too approach to printmaking which, as a bastard child of drawing and prints, had no categorical integrity (a quality I seem to require to know what I'm doing). But art inevitably upends the rules one sets for oneself, and the lure of new procedures, of new incarnations for the homeless imaginary picture, pulls one away from the programmatic. Over time the three main vectors of my work (painting, drawing, printmaking) have cyclically switched positions at the “leading edge” of my ideas, functioning reciprocally as source and response, both parallel and discrete. Monotypes have begun to operate more as a direct line of research into painting than my prints have previously done. The drive to develop a personal process for making them, their crushed painterliness, which is both direct and interrupted, delayed and suspended by the image transfer, has shifted my sense of what happens on the surface of paintings, and where that surface ultimately resides.

The quality of relationships necessary to productive collaboration is unique. I can't make my own prints; I don't know how. No matter how much time I spend around master printers, and how firmly I grasp the principles of what they are doing, I can't internalize any of it. There is an odd mixture of intimacy and boundary maintenance, where openness to suggestion and adherence to vision on the artist's part must coexist with the simultaneous suspension of ego and confidence to assert one's perspective on the part of the printer, a special chemistry which somewhat counterintuitively clarifies the reach of intention and sensibility while constantly challenging and modifying it.

There is an aspect to printmaking that I would call “transpersonal,” notwithstanding that term’s New Age connotations. Any publishing project is the impure result of one’s own efforts and the skill-set and intuition of one’s collaborators, and things can follow (have followed) amazingly nonlinear trajectories to become “Carroll Dunham’s prints.” There is always some degree of group mind (more accurately “group mind/body”) driving the outcome, and it is probably this ambiguous agency and the peculiar comfort it provides which keeps me chronically returning to this strange arena.

From *Carroll Dunham Prints Catalogue Raisonné, 1984–2006 (Addison Gallery of American Art)*, by Allison N. Kemmerer, Elizabeth C. DeRose, and Carroll Dunham. Yale University Press, 2008.

Glossary of Printmaking Terms

artist's proof (AP)

Impressions pulled at the same time as the regular, numbered edition, traditionally set aside for the artist’s use. Artist’s proofs usually number no more than ten percent of the edition.

aquatint

An intaglio process used to create areas of tone on an etching plate. A powdered acid-resistant material such as rosin is dusted onto the surface of the plate and heated until it melts and adheres to the metal. Acid is used to etch (bite into) the areas of plate between the rosin particles, which creates crevices that will hold ink. The depth of the etched crevices and the spacing between the rosin particles determine the density of tone (dark or light) when the plate is printed.

bleed

An image that runs to the edge of a sheet of paper, having no margins, is said to “bleed.”

bon à tirer (BAT)

Bon à tirer, meaning “good to print,” is the designation by the artist for a proof to be the example that all subsequent impressions in the edition must match. It is also called an RTP (right to print).

cancellation proof (CP)

A proof pulled to demonstrate that a plate was canceled or a stone effaced and can therefore no longer yield an edition.

chop

An identifying mark pressed into a print by the printer, studio, or publisher to denote the print's origin. Generally a blindstamp or seal.

colophon

A statement that gives essential information about how a work was made and by whom, generally on a separate page accompanying a portfolio or bound into a book. The colophon commonly lists the printer, publisher, medium, paper, edition size, and in the case of typographic works, the typeface(s) used.

digital print

Any print that incorporates digital technology in the creation of an image or its printing. Until the mid-1990s, most digital images that artists made on a computer were transferred to traditional plates for printing. Sometimes the name of an output printer or process is given. Digital printing techniques may also be mixed with traditional ones. See also inkjet print.

direct gravure

A variant of photogravure without use of a camera. The artist draws an image on a plastic film, which is then transferred photographically to a plate coated with a light-sensitive, acid-resistant ground.

documentation

For technical, ethical, and (sometimes) legal reasons, many printers and publishers follow a semistandard practice to document their editions. A print's documentation normally includes: the name of the artist, the title, the paper type and size, the edition size, the number and nature of proofs outside the edition, the exact media used and the number of printing matrix(es) and inking colors, the printer's names, the date of printing, where the image was signed and chopped, and whether or not the matrix(es) was canceled.

drypoint

An intaglio technique in which the line is scratched directly into the copper plate with a sharp metal tool, traditionally a drypoint needle. As the needle scores the copper, it creates a ridge of metal known as the burr on either or both sides of the line, and this ink-holding burr gives the printed line a rich velvety appearance. Copper burrs, however, do not hold up under the repeated pressure of printing, and drypoint editions are generally small.

edition

Usually, a group of identical impressions, printed from the same matrixes, and bearing the same title and date. The size of the edition is often indicated as the lower number in a fraction with the upper number representing the single impression within the series (4/16 would be the fourth of sixteen impressions in the edition). The upper number does *not* represent the order in which the impressions were printed. Commonly, an edition is accompanied by a number of proofs, pulled for the artist, the printers, or the publishers.

etching

An intaglio technique whereby marks are bitten into the metal plate by chemical action. The plate is first coated with a ground impervious to acid through which the artist draws to expose the metal. The plate is then immersed in an acid bath until the open areas are sufficiently bitten. Finally, the ground is removed and the plate inked and printed. Etching is commonly used in combination with drypoint, aquatint, and other intaglio processes.

ghost

An image pulled from a plate that has been printed but not re-inked. Monotype plates often yield a succession of ever-fainter ghosts, which an artist may use as departure points for further drawing. Ghosts can also be used in editions.

gouache

Paint consisting of pigments bound in water-soluble gum with the addition of a white pigment in order to make it opaque. Larger percentages of binder are used than in a transparent watercolor, and various amounts of inert pigments such as chalk are added to enhance the opacity.

ground

An acid-resistant compound of asphaltum, beeswax, and rosin, used to coat etching plates. There are many different varieties. "Hard" grounds present a smooth surface that is easily drawn through with an etching needle, exposing the plate beneath to the acid. "Soft" grounds contain tallow in addition to the other ingredients and thus remain tacky.

hand lithographic press

Term used here for a hand-transfer or scraper-bar, flatbed press.

handmade paper

Paper that has been formed from pulp using a hand-held mold, matrix, or other device, traditionally formed in single sheets.

Hors commerce (HC)

Impressions numbered outside the edition, which may or may not be the same as the edition. Not intended for sale, they are designated for the artist's or publisher's use.

impression

Each copy of a print that has been printed from the same matrix or matrixes, usually at one time.

inkjet print

A digital print printed on an inkjet printer; the term refers to the process of releasing ink through miniscule jets. See also digital print.

intaglio

In intaglio, literally "cut," the image is cut into the surface of a printing element. In printing, a layer of ink is applied to the plate and then wiped from the surface, and remains only in the incisions or interstices. When passed through the rollers of the press, the ink is squeezed onto dampened paper. Intaglio prints are characterized by the distinctive way in which the ink stands up from the paper in very slight relief, and by beveled plate marks, where the edges of the plate have embossed the paper. Etching, aquatint, drypoint, engraving, and mezzotint are intaglio techniques; compare relief printing.

letterpress

A type of relief printing. Traditionally the printing of wooden or lead type using a platen press, in which a large flat plate is brought directly down onto paper, pressing it against the previously inked type. A letterpress proof press (often a Vandercook) uses rollers to ink the type and then press the paper over its inked surface.

lift ground

An etching technique in which a sugar solution (hence also called "sugar lift") is painted to create the image, and then covered with diluted hard ground or asphaltum. When placed in warm water, the sugar solution swells and lifts up the stop-out, exposing the surface below, so that only the painted areas are bitten when the plate is immersed in acid, while the rest of the metal surface remains covered with acid-resistant ground. It allows the artist to paint marks that print, rather than having to outline them negatively with a stop-out.

linoleum cut or linocut

A relief print cut in the same manner as a woodcut. The block consists of a thin layer of linoleum

mounted on wood. The soft linoleum can be cut in any direction without resistance and has a surface that accepts ink evenly.

lithography

A printing process based on the antipathy of grease and water. The process first used limestone (L. *litho*-, “stone-”), and now limestone and aluminum or zinc plates, grained to varying degrees of roughness, are used as the printing elements. An image can be drawn using lithographic crayons and pencils, tusche, chalk, and various grease, lacquer, or synthetic materials, or produced by various transfer or photochemical processes. The stone/plate is then washed with a solution that chemically produces water-receptive, nonprinting areas around the grease-receptive, image areas. The drawing grease is cleaned from the printing surface. A roller bearing greasy printing ink is then rolled over the surface, and the ink adheres only to the grease-receptive image areas. To print, paper is laid on top of the stone or plate, which is passed through a lithography press for transfer. Called a “planographic” printing process to distinguish it from relief and intaglio processes.

matrix

Any surface used as a physical base from which an image is printed. Etching plates, lithography stones, and woodblocks are all examples of matrixes. Also called the “printing element(s).”

monotype

A unique print made without the use of a fixed matrix, usually by painting or drawing on an unmarked metal or glass plate that is then run through a press. Though the process of printing transfers most of the ink from the plate to the paper, second impressions, called “ghosts” or “cognates,” may be printed, possibly for use as the ground for further invention by the artist.

Mylar

A trade name for sheet polyester; it can be drawn on, used as a photo-stencil element for transferring a drawing to a printing element, or used as a printing element itself.

offset lithography

On an offset press the image is transferred from the lithographic plate or stone to a cylindrical blanket, and then onto paper. Because of this double action, images do not appear reversed (as they do in traditional lithography, etching, or relief printing). Offset printing also works with thinner inks that dry more quickly, and can be used to lay down several transparent layers to attain subtle gradations of tone. Offset lithography often uses photomechanical processes.

photoengraving

A method of making a photographic relief plate using acid to eat away nonprinting areas. It was widely used commercially earlier in the twentieth century.

photoetching

An intaglio process in which the etching plate is coated with a light-sensitive acid-resistant ground and exposed, through a dot screen, to a photographic image. A “negative” resist dissolves in the areas that are exposed to light, while hardening in areas not exposed to light. Thus pits are etched and ink is held in the areas that appeared light in the photographic image. A positive resist dissolves where it is not exposed to light.

photogravure

A term used generally to describe any photographic intaglio process, especially with continuous tone.

plate marks

The embossed ridge of paper left by the edge of plate when printed under pressure.

presentation proof

Part of an edition may sometimes be signed and numbered as presentation, or museum, proofs and reserved for museum use.

printer's proof (PP)

An impression identical to those in the edition but printed for each printer who worked on the edition.

proof

Any print that is not part of a regular edition. Trial proofs (TP) are pulled to check progress while a print is being made, with some labeled as trial color proofs (TCP). Working proofs (WP) are trial proofs on which the artist has altered by hand – drawing, painting, etc. Other proofs may be indistinguishable from the print edition, but are not part of the regular numbering sequence, traditionally encompassing artist's proof (AP) and printer's proof (PP).

publisher

Print publishing can take many forms, and can encompass many different relationships between artist, printer, and dealer, but generally the publisher pays for the development and printing of the edition, and usually the distribution, in exchange for a percentage of the profits. Publishers may

be identical with print shops or they may exist independently, hiring printers as required (contract printing). Some publishers are creatively involved in the development of the project, overseeing it on a daily basis, others simply fund the projects.

pull

A printer's term meaning to print an element or image.

reduction print

A reduction print is made with the use of a single block. Through a series of progressive cuttings, inkings, and printings, the image slowly emerges while, paradoxically, the actual block is destroyed. A reduction print can therefore never be reprinted.

relief printing

Any form of printing, such as woodcut or linocut, in which raised areas are inked and printed while recessed areas are not. The printing matrix is usually made by cutting away the nonprinting areas. Compare intaglio.

screenprint

A stencil process using a fabric screen through which ink is transferred onto the paper. Areas to be printed are left unmasked, allowing the ink to pass through the screen. The stenciled or masked areas hold back the ink from printing.

siligraphy

A waterless planographic printmaking process based on the repellence of ink and silicone (rather than water, as in traditional lithography). Designs are drawn or painted with water-soluble art materials onto ground glass. The surface is then coated with silicone, covering the nonprinting areas of the image and leaving the exposed areas to be coated in ink applied with a roller. The print is then made by pressing paper against the inked drawing.

silkscreen

See **screenprint**.

spitbite

A direct intaglio method of painting a grounded etching plate with a strong acid rather than placing it in an acid bath. Pale to dark tones can be achieved by varying the strength and duration of the acid application. The term originated with the traditional practice of putting saliva on the plate to mix with the acid in order to control the dispersal of the fluid over the plate.

sugar lift

See **lift ground**.

thumbnail

A light application of color, all over, to help further colors register correctly.

trial proof (TP; TCP)

This impression varies from the edition either in imagery, printing sequence, or fabrication, with color trial proofs sometimes so labeled (TCP).

tusche

German for “ink,” it is the name given to the greasy liquid used to make marks on a lithographic stone or plate. It can be thinned to the consistency of drawing ink or thickened into a solid form.

wash drawing

In lithography, a drawing made with diluted tusche. This technique gives the artist the freedom to draw spontaneously using a wide range of continuous tones directly on the stone, plate, or transfer paper.

wood engraving

Traditionally a woodcut made using a very hard wood and a special graver (similar to a burin for metal engraving) used to produce extremely fine lines and details. In contrast, Dunham’s engraving tools have ranged from routers to laser cutters. As they are printed on a vertical hydraulic press under great pressure, the thick paper is molded (embossed) by the contours of the woodblock.

working proof (WP)

An impression upon which the artist has added work by hand. Ordinarily used to help the artist visualize the next step in the creation of the image.