"Ditto" - Images in Print

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ditto

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images in print
"ditto"

is an initiative of the School of Art and Design's Centre for Printed Image (CPI) which was formed to coordinate research activities in photographic, digital and autographic print processes. The centre fosters excellence and innovation in this exciting and constantly changing field of creative production.

This exhibition demonstrates some of the relationships of printed image to individual research interests as well as the multiplicity of techniques and print media now available. The School of Art and Design has built a momentum of practice in print media, a level of expertise and state of the art digital facilities that will support high quality research.

The Centre's first collaborative project is to make the subtle and complex technique of photogravure, first developed in the 1830's, available again to photographers and graphic artists. The project is possible because of the Centre's partnership with master printer Thomas Gould of Duck Print Fine Art Limited Editions in Port Kembla. Trial proofs from the initial experiments in photogravure are shown with individual staff research in printed image.

Richard Hook
Coordinator, CPI
The word "ditto" comes from the Latin "dictus", which means "to have said". Originally then, it indicates a space of repetition within oral communication – the referencing and duplication of an original moment of speech. This sense is still evident in the symbolic orthography of "ditto" – the empty double quotation marks signalling both speech and its absence; its passage into stone, ink, metal and paper.

Ditto as the recollection of speech, ditto as the emptying of speech: this engages with the paradox of print - its motion of rendering and displacing, repeating and slipping free. Whether in the shape of the ink marks of writing, or the negative plate of the relief print, or the acid bath of etching, or the grain of the rocker in the mezzotint, or the reversal of dark and light in the photographic negative, or the speed and uniformity of moveable type, print has traditionally been associated with a play away from the simplicity of origin. Walter Benjamin, very famously, relates the modern mechanically reproduced image to the death of the sacral aura of art. The copied, printed image gains new cultural currency by engaging the viewer in their own space and on their own terms.

Now, however, the meaning of print has changed, or another dimension of print has gained priority. Within the context of a dynamic sea of pixels, print appears as an island of materiality. To print is to have something at hand, to make it tangibly exist. Print enables the solidity of the page; as a form of mortal flesh, as something that dies and persists. From a cynical perspective, an interest in the printed image can seem naïve, nostalgic or venal (the lure of selling limited editions), but there also other possibilities. These take shape as questions. What does it mean to return to the scene of print (and to particular historical scenes of print)? What does it mean to engage with a mortal space of technical displacement? What relations are evident here? Where can they lead us? How can they inform our experience of the more general – rapidly circulating, rapidly accumulating - realm of the electronic image?

Would it be possible, for instance, to rediscover and re-imagine the smallness and intimacy of print, which is linked, of course, to its capacity to scandalize? I think of Goya’s Los Caprichos or Fox Talbot’s lace photograms: the former a set of urgent sketches that summon, precisely though their reduced scale and limited means, an interstice where horror can be thought, seen and deflected from its immediate consequences; the latter an index of alchemy, of the passage between night and day, moon and sun – plainly, scandalously, demonstrating the poetic potential of the automatic image. And all of this has relevance today in a world of instantaneity and proliferation, in which print – small, thin, separate, almost permanent – can somehow rediscover a potential to unsettle and inspire.

Deleuze argues that the one thing that the Hegelian logic of identity cannot comprehend is the difference between two identical things. The strangely mortal terrain of print may provide a vehicle for approaching, for touching, for hallucinating this difference. This is likely to involve two strategies: firstly, a work of reinvention; of writing, copying and repeating historical processes; and secondly, a work of montage, in which print is juxtaposed with other media, particularly the dynamic and abstract media associated with the contemporary abstract, networked, and screen-based image. The aim, through repetition - through the ditto – is to discover and re-discover the strangeness of the printed impression.

Associate Professor, Brogan Bunt – Head of School of Art and Design
Regarding the printed image as medium of expression, I am exploring relations between pictorial appearance and images – when, how, under what conditions, and for whom, a picture might become an image.

Here I find resonance in W.J.T. Mitchell’s discussion of the terms picture and image in his book *What Do Pictures Want?* (1). In this context, Mitchell uses the word picture to cover all kinds of understandings associated with the word image taken together with the process of understanding itself; in short, the entire situation in which an image has made its appearance. This is an eminently active process, hence the verbs ‘to picture’, ‘to get the picture’, ‘to be in/out of the picture’. Image is “…any likeness, figure, motif, or form that appears in any medium [of material or virtual activity]" including “...mental imaginary entities, a psychological imago, the visual content of dreams, memories and perception...” and so on. Image is also a term to express likeness, similitude, resemblance and analogy, plus, importantly in this context, it may be simply the name for a product of photographic and printing technologies. In this conception, pictures are “ways of worldmaking” not just world mirroring (2) and images are participant in this activity.

That is to say, without a ‘picture’ there might be no image-s. At the same time we are reminded that: “While pictures can be destroyed [be it through natural disaster, iconoclastic action, carelessness, etc], images can continue to live on, haunting, tempting, and perhaps frightening or inspiring us.” (3)

Relations between pictures and images are both concrete and abstract. The proliferation of reproductive technologies has accentuated this process. As in my print ‘Unsealed’, where in responding to the contingencies of everyday living the real chases its own image (so to speak), and the image chases its own reality.


Unsealed - Digital photography print 2009

Mehmet Adil
This set of visual experiments has its basis in a process of software programming. It is the product of a custom software application (Um) that aims to explore neglected possibilities of grid-based drawing and animation. In the case of bit-mapped images, the underlying grid and grid elements (pixels) are typically positioned as a neutral medium for the display of coherent, holistic images. Um takes a different approach, pursuing the positive, visible, apparent features of the grid and shaping pixels as miniature or macro drawing forms. The software is concerned with plays of grid-based pattern, resolution and metamorphosis. It is geared towards screen-based delivery, but I have recently added features that enable images to be exported at high resolution. These images, however, are often difficult to see on screen – accessible only as zoomed sections of detail or as texturally reduced overall views. It is within this context that I have become interested in printing the images; so that I can actually see them. For me, they are images from another place – twilight, abstract images that bear an uncertain, tentative relation to paper. The electronic flow of the animations come closer to their genuine stuff.

Uncertain matter
Digital print
2009

Brogan Bunt
As I follow the labyrinthine diversity of personal geography, lived experience grounded in nature, culture and history, forming landscape and place, I have to dream a little, as well as listen for the political wake-up calls. (1)

Lippard’s writing on community, place and locality informs my print making, my actions, observations and experience of living in Port Kembla. The prints I make about Port allow me the time to reflect on my engagement with that community and the symbolic meaning of its location and significance within the region and nation. I know that in the process of making a print I will discover the accidental, the printing error or imperfection that transforms the work and gives it a life of its own. I’ve learnt this from screen printing but now I make printed images with digital tools and processes that appear to recreate the haphazard, the accidental and chance. That mimics the hand cut as I once would have done in the making of a serigraph. As a Graphic Designer my contract with the client requires me to minimise risk, printing errors are costly and clients are unkind to works of visual communication that fail to be understood. But I’m reminded not to confuse communication with legibility. The end of print... never.

The work in this exhibition is work-in-progress, part of a series of Giclee Prints exploring heritage, meaning, belonging and identity.


The Lure of Port Kembla (detail)
Giclee Print
2008
Agnieszka Golda

Underpinning this work is an engagement with issues of migration, performative ritual practices and storytelling, concerned with addressing conditions of memory, loss and recovery. This work draws on the historical influences of folkloric and fantasy inspired imagery and utilises sources such as Polish ritual costumes and Japanese ‘cosplay’, as well as narrative structures of Polish folklore stories (oral tellings and printed fairy tales), manga (Japanese cartoons) and anime (Japanese animation). Through surface compositions, digital printing, cloth and textile forms the work recalls vanishing historical and personal memories. In a broader context, to invoke this process of recovery through the installation practice, I deploy two-dimensional and three-dimensional practices (textiles, painting, sculpture and digital media). Arrangements of objects, text, digital prints and traditional making-practices (crochet) with depictions of shape-shifting identities explore ways of constructing spaces that seek to stabilise the irreconcilable through the recovery and salvaging of historical, collective, personal and sensory experiences and memory and which, at the same time resist the local structures of feeling of my birth place in Poland.

Advent Rumble (detail)
Digital print on cotton
2009
My paintings and prints draw on the coastal landscape of Port Kembla, through discovering and reflecting on its complex structures, chaotic forces and natural and imposed rhythms. Although our experience of environments is fragmentary and piecemeal over time, our understanding of them must be more holistic and grasp the connections and our place in them. This kind of awareness, informed by ethical and scientific perspectives, among others, along with our unavoidable tendency to personify nature, complicates the task of visual representation.

I’m attempting to present a composite view of a place through relatively simple structures and rhythms, relying on the associative force of abstraction rather than surface descriptions. The forms of “Jetty II”, for example, suggest a skeleton, marine engineering and wave patterns, simple configurations that invoke different scales and perspectives.

The paintings and graphic works mirror each other, often quite literally through the use of Photoshop to extract different layers and possibilities. Images are circulated and recycled through manual and digital modes. Whereas the paintings tend to cultivate luminosity and spatial layers, the graphics take advantage of the cut edge and the sharp contrast. Both reconstruct the organic as architecture, letting the two worlds flow together.

Jetty II
Relief print – printed by Tom Goulder, Duck Print Fine Art Editions, Port Kembla.
2009
I am inspired to re-analyse, re-interpret and to re-construct Ulladulla Mickey's landscapes as both two-dimensional images and three-dimensional object based and installation possibilities. In this respect I want to dwell on them, and possibly dwell in them; and to explore and clarify my own subjective responses and relationship to them. My aim more broadly is to explore concepts of 'dwelling', both in terms of the noun (a building or place of shelter to live in; a place of residence; an abode; a home), and the verb (to reside; to continue in a given condition or state; to linger over, emphasise, or ponder). My own subjectivity (or standpoint) as a person of mixed ancestry, who identifies as 'Aboriginal', but whose life experience has been shaped in the social, cultural and economic flux of the south-east, will be central to the research. To 'dwell in' or to 'dwell on' are contingent on the existence of a certain physical or metaphysical space. How 'we' discover, construct, make claim to, and occupy certain dwelling places, and how the simplistic tension between being in place and being out of place (placement/displacement, local/alien, indigenous/non-indigenous) might be meaningfully triangulated to take cognizance of the myriad 'being' sites 'in-between', will be integral to my research.
Coming out of my research on the hierarchically perceived relationship between oral and written dissemination of knowledge in Western society and how this determines the reception of Aboriginal art, I explore aspects of the fairy tale and knitting as social experience, where the rigidities of oral and literary knowing dissolve.

The fairy tale is a mapping device of the unconscious; of origin and place. Fairy tales travel across time and space and adopt various forms across cultures, embodying displacement and placement at the same time. Before folklorists such as Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm wrote them down – fairy tales were passed on orally.

Through the merging of the tactile (knitting), optical (photography), and cognitive (book) the memorising and discursive properties of these transformative media and their interrelationship come to the fore. Stinging Nettle is central in Anderson’s fairy tale and I use its materiality as meaning-making medium through the organic dye for wool and bamboo yarn. Printing is instrumental to discourse – however other such instrumental processes often precede the printing process.

Internal narratives of the photograph and the external of the written text are juxtaposed with the hand-made garment. I employ knitting as social process – during which stories are told and retold – and as ReSearch of memory. Making of the garment becomes a thought process in itself and a frame for the social act of passing on knowledge wrapped in stories.

A Tale of the Stinging Nettle
Wall installation – knitted merino wool and bamboo yarn – concertina book
2009
Currently I am investigating 19th and 20th century photographic and print styles using contemporary technology and processes, and in this first series I have been looking at the Illawarra coal coast as a subject. The images on exhibition are prototypes, designed to be printed as editions using the photogravure process.

The idea behind the series has evolved from observing the work of the English pictorial photographer Francis J Mortimer (1874-1944), during a recent exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW (2008). Mortimer believed that photography is an art form, no different from other forms of two-dimensional art, saying that "the process is a medium of expression and the camera, lens, and sensitive paper merely the tools employed"[1].

He was adventurous in his methods, risking his life to achieve certain images. In one picture Big wave hunting c 1903 (not shown) Mortimer is seen in "action, secured by rope tied around his waist..."[2]. "Never turn your back on the sea for an instant,' he said, 'the last time I did that, it put me in bed for two days with bruises and a smashed camera"[3].

My work in this exhibition does not mimic Mortimer’s performative method. However they are pictorial, which for me is the first step towards capturing the ocean as a subject, its force and chaotic repetition.

At the end of my first year BFA undergraduate studies, my fellow students and I put on a photographic exhibition. We managed to get a few hundred dollars sponsorship, borrowed frames from a local photographer, and mustered up the tools and equipment to install the works. When our shoestring budget did not allow us to produce glossy colour flyers and posters, we turned to the university's printmaking room to make monographs onto photocopies.

Printmaking is one of the fundamental skills taught in art schools and universities. For a student, the tangibility and immediacy of the craft provide solid steps along a steep learning curve; whilst the tactility of the labour and its methodological processes remain very gratifying.

Engaging with more nascent technologies creates a curiosity for their possible origins, precursors and other evolved forms that open up our vista to alternative present and futures. In many fields that involve image-making, the euphoric embrace of digital technologies is met with an equally passionate inquisitiveness for analogue machines and processes.

Having moved between photography, film, video and newer media forms in my practice, I have recently returned to printmaking as an avenue to explore the image in the context of its reproductive technologies. It is my intention to integrate my photo-etching experiments with my time-based and installation works. One of the aims is to re-discover in the hybridity of modern experience the tactile qualities of the analogue.

Series: Notable commentary on common species of the rocky seashore of Eastern warm temperate biogeographic zone of Australia.
Photo etching
2009

Jo Law
“Of paper there are divers sorts, finer and coarser, as also brown and blue paper, with diverse designs that are printed for the hanging of rooms; truly they are very pretty, and make houses of the more ordinary people look neat.” (1)

I have been keeping five discarded rubber wallpaper rollers used to transfer ink to paper. They were purchased in a Sydney second hand shop in 1993. The detail is cut out of the roller leaving the raised pattern on the surface in relief. The design is reminiscent of the simple decorative patterns that lined the rooms of my childhood terraced home in London in the 1950s.

I am interested in the cylindrical form, which can be rolled, but not folded or bent. I have printed in brown ink directly from the cylinders onto single sheet rives BFK art paper. They are hand rolled one rotation, rather than repeated and the registration marks are visible on either side of the printed image.

Blair French has recently commented “Redgate’s practice has been claimed as emblematic of a postmodernist approach to art production and more recently as indicative of a resurgent artistic fascination with the forms and principles of Modernism. However, such apparent shifts in the contextualization of Redgate’s practice indicate changes in the general cultural and intellectual climate as much as in her work itself, which has remained constant to certain core interests, approaches and principles.” This includes a longstanding interest in perceptual and geometric systems, spatial relationships, codes of representation and themes of memory and recollection, which I explore across a range of media and registers.

(1) John Houghton, A Collection for Improvement of Husbandry and Trade (1669)

Wallpaper (detail)
Relief print on paper
2009
Sustainable design is gaining prominence as a pivotal issue for the future of contemporary practice in design. Designers want to address these needs when presenting their work for consideration and acknowledge there is a responsibility to consider sustainability issues and applications in the areas of paper, printing, formats, materials, inks, and executions. (1)

I am currently inspired to explore various printing surfaces and their paradoxical materiality. This exploration comes from my experience as a graphic designer and connection to the world of commercial offset printing, where often I find the medium and the message are at odds. Printing technology and its growth in the last century, along with consumer driven design thinking contributes enormously to the current world we live in along with the by products - waste, packaging, paper misuse, and energy consumption. These works are the beginnings of my exploration into the opportunity designers have to bring problem solving, and awareness.

(1) Sustainable: A handbook of materials and applications for graphic designers and their clients. Aaris Sherin 2008
There were never many occasions when I thought about making prints, however the more digitised the world becomes the more I get excited about traditional mediums and technologies.

Thomas Goulder has been very encouraging and supportive with the spit bite etching and Richard Hook has been very open minded and positive about the tentative steps and as a result I have been able to make five very soft and smoky prints. It was always intended that way. Next to the prints are the drawings from which I worked, mixed media watercolours.

In the 1970’s I was introduced to Japanese woodblock prints. The method was to print by hand, resulting in irregular and unique coloured prints. The other influence was seeing Morandi’s etchings in Bologna and looking at Daumier’s lithographs.

I have only recently been able to set some time aside to be in the printmaking studio. This has taught me something truly essential, to be patient. The slow steps are undeniably exhilarating and to see every small mistake gently pointed out in an inky imprint is a joy. Thanks to Richard and Tom for getting me involved and I look forward to a continuing collaboration within the Research Group in the Faculty of Creative Arts.
The process of translation across visual media is vital and transforming in bringing to light new approaches to an idea. Making a drawing or rubbing of freshly excavated stones that have been carved, inscribed or formed into mosaic, and then transferring that image on to a lithographic stone or etching plate permits a new trajectory for an ancient object into another, contemporary archive.

As a weaver, translating from a drawing to the grid of warp and weft has been a primary strategy in constructing tapestry. The nuances of printmaking in all its variety allows subtle thinking about the intrinsic vocabularies of artmaking, for example in the bite of line, tone and colour onto the weight and surfaces of specific papers and cloth. These elements of printmaking, its technical complexity and layering character in both analogue and digital techniques, adds up to a visual and emotional impact that enriches and extends all the visual disciplines in art and design: painting, sculpture, textiles and electronic media. For me, with primary affinities to drawing and tapestry, printmaking augments and develops my practice to a new audience.

Eustorgis 1.
Two colour lithograph printed by Tom Goulder, Duck Print Fine Art Editions, Port Kembla.
2007
Duckprint Fine Art Limited Editions

Thomas Goulder, Director of Duck Print Fine Art Editions, is a master printer and teacher. He has been printing fine art editions since he graduated from the College of Fine Art (COFA) in 1986. Tom also holds a Bachelor of Education degree. In 1991 Tom was introduced to Christopher Hodges of Utopia Art Gallery, Sydney and over the next 10 years produced numerous fine art limited editions. In 1995 Tom established Duckprint Fine Art Limited Editions in a studio on Parramatta Rd, Camperdown. He relocated to Port Kembla in 2004.

Duck Print offers a wide range of printmaking techniques. In addition to traditional line intaglio etching, relief printing, silkscreening and lithography, Tom has expertise in whiteground and mezzotint process. Tom is a consultant to the School on print matters and has worked with individual staff members to produce limited edition prints as well as undertaking the technical experiments in photogravure.

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