

PHILAGRAFIKA PHILADELPHIA

What does it mean to make a print in this day and age? The festival *Philagrafika* answers that question with a vast array of work presented at over eighty venues [January 29—April 11, 2010]. The program is built around *The Graphic Unconscious*, a core of five major exhibitions with work selected by a curatorial team led by Colombian José Roca. The festival promises to be the first in an ongoing triennial series.

The idea of *impression*—stamping an object onto a surface—has remained central to printmaking over the centuries. Usually, the stamp itself is kept out of the viewer's sight: a block of wood or stone, or a metal plate, carved or burned by the artist using arduous, centuries-old techniques. Works in *The Graphic Unconscious*, however, come clean about their production. The artists have often devised new means of making an impression, and frequently show off their techniques as a part of the work.

A tire, for example, leaves a distinctive mark. As it rolls, its mark turns into an endless patterned band. Mexican artist Betsabeé Romero's *Always Finding Another Cage*, 2010, on view at Moore College of Art and Design's gallery, turns the tire into a rubber stamp. The work displays a series of carved bus tires rolling out long bands of pattern on screens suspended from the ceiling. Instead of tread marks, these tires print traditional Mexican motifs whose intricate beauty belies the sinister side of the tires, which cause numerous accidents in Mexico because they are allowed to run bald.

German artist Thomas Kilpper took the impression of a building's entire floor to make the monumental work *State of Control/Out of Control*, 2009. Featured at the Temple Gallery, Tyler School of Art, this work was represented by a "making-of" video—the final piece occupies 1,600 square meters. To make the work, Kilpper and his assistants carved images into the floor of the former East German state security (Stasi) headquarters, which they then printed onto large, sail-like sheets of polyester fabric. In the video, we see the dogged diligence of Kilpper's team as they kneel for hours to carve news photos into the floor's

hard surface—later using gallons of viscous ink and a steamroller-like apparatus to press the images into the fabric. This very political work covered the history of German police surveillance, using images of both watchers and watched from colonial Namibia through the Nazi period and on to the postwar Communist dictatorship.

At the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA), Pepón Osorio's *You're Never Ready*, 2009, also makes a huge impression by enlarging an x-ray on the museum floor. The ghostly stamp of the Puerto Rican-born artist's dying mother's skull acts as a *memento mori*, made all the more ephemeral by the unique surface on which it is printed—a bed of confetti. The spectral quality of the x-ray is enhanced by its eerie greenish-blue color against the gray tones of the confetti.

Another salient feature of printmaking is the *multiple*—one source spawns many copies. If the print was initially a means for artists to spin off more affordable versions of their one-of-a-kind paintings or sculptures, it is also an ideal medium for the politically or socially-conscious artist, as Goya's *Disasters of War* demonstrates.

The multiple can have a decorative purpose as well, as Romero's work also reveals. Philadelphia artist Virgil Marti adds his own take on the multiple with *VIP Room*, 2010, a wallpaper-adorned space visible through a front window at the Moore College gallery. Marti has made printed wallpaper a signature part of his art—using it, for example, to transform a stark prison cell in Philadelphia's historic Eastern State Penitentiary into a flamboyant monument to Oscar Wilde. The Moore display is also flashy, with psychedelic designs printed on silver and a fur ottoman as the centerpiece. On closer inspection, the geometric patterns of the wall turn out to be arrays of skulls and bones—making this piece too a reflection on death.

Tromarama's animation *Happy Hour*, 2010, at PAFA plays with a ubiquitous printed multiple—paper currency. The Indonesian collective manipu-

lated facial expressions from banknote portraits to create animation cells. Displayed on a monitor adjacent to its source materials and accompanied by music, the final animation has stodgy heads of state singing popular tunes in a manner reminiscent of Monty Python cartoons.

Regina Silveira's enormous bugs crawl all over an adjacent swimming-pool-sized room at the Moore College gallery. In two complementary pieces, *Mundis Admirabilis*, 2008-2010, and *Rerum Naturae*, 2007-2008, she propagates the insect motif on walls and floor using laser-cut vinyl, on a central stand, embroidering the bugs directly into a tablecloth and screen-printing them onto a set of ceramic vessels. For the artist, creeping infestation is a metaphor for political corruption of the kind that sometimes turned her home country, Brazil, into a festering mess.

Copying can be risky business. In an effort to draw attention to corporations' sometimes oppressive use of intellectual property restrictions, the Danish collective SUPERFLEX has frequently pushed the limits of copyright. Their project *Copy Light*, 2008/2010, displayed at the Temple Gallery, enlists Tyler students in the making of "copies" of well-known lamp designs. The lamps are, in fact, identically-framed boxes sheathed in transparencies that bear images of the famous designs; a bulb is set inside each.

Like many of the works in *The Graphic Unconscious*, Silveira's bugs and SUPERFLEX's lamps veer far from the acid-soaked and ink-stained world of the print shop; they could just as easily be seen in a show entitled *The Political Unconscious* or *Clone Wars*. In its own way, however, each deals with the unconscious impulses behind printmaking: the physical act of pressing surface onto surface, and the urge to duplicate as a way of moving the image out of the studio and onto the street.

—Edward M. Epstein

INSIDE FRONT COVER + OPPOSITE, TOP, RIGHT: Regina Silveira, *Mundis Admirabilis*, 2008-10, plotter-cut and digitally printed vinyl, and *Rerum Naturae*, 2007-2008, screen-printed transfer and overglaze on porcelain, hand-embroidered linen; installation view at Moore College of Art & Design, Philadelphia (courtesy of the artist; photo: Amanda Mott); OPPOSITE, TOP, LEFT: Betsabeé Romero, installation view of *Always Finding Another Cage*, 2010, at Moore College of Art & Design, Philadelphia, carved public transportation tires, prints on wire mesh (courtesy the artist; photo: Amanda Mott); MIDDLE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Thomas Kilpper, installation view of *State of Control*, 2008, at the former Stasi headquarters, Berlin, carving on linoleum floor, and linocut on paper (courtesy of the artist and Neue Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin; photo: Jens Ziehe); Tromarama, *Happy Hour*, 2010, DVD projection and 49 etchings on paper, 10.3 x 7.2 inches each (courtesy of the artists); BOTTOM: SUPERFLEX, installation view of *Copy Light*, 2008/2010, at Temple Gallery, Tyler School of Art, Temple University, demo of the lamp construction with Tyler School of Art students, January 25, 2010

