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## DIRK HAGNER & THE BOSTON PRINTMAKERS AT THE ART COMPLEX MUSEUM

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July/August 2015

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# BOSTON PRINTMAKERS LOOK AGAIN

## CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS ANSWER THE CALL

"Look Again," a hybrid summer-long exhibition of master prints paired with contemporary interpretations, is the happy outcome of a collaboration between the curators of the Art Complex Museum in Duxbury and the Boston Printmakers. To showcase highlights of the historical print collection in the Art Complex's Carl A. Weyerhaeuser Library, curator Craig Bloodgood decided to seek contemporary responses to a selected group of works. The exhibition contains new works by 57 artists invited from the Boston Printmakers' international membership to complement 31 originals through a contemporary lens. While all the works display a high level of craftsmanship, a few among them break away to forge their own path.

One has to laugh at Coco Bergman's "Down in the Grey Zone," a linoleum send-up of Warrington Colescott's bitter expressionist etching, "Down in the Green Zone." While Colescott's piece, like the works of George Grosz, rails against privilege and decadence in a Baghdad officers' club, Bergman restages this composition in a nursing home, using Colescott's palette of orange, green and grey to satirize the pleasures of the elderly. For the cavorting and posturing army officers, Bergman substitutes a decrepit foursome playing canasta, a couple kibitzing in their wheelchairs, and a rouged granny in a walker toting the novel "Fifty Shades of Grey."

The exaggerated boundaries separating objects in Armin Landeck's "Engraver's Tools" provided a way in for Mary Ince's three-dimensional "box-book" entitled "Fractured Silence." Ince has folded, connected, and manipulated hand-pulled etchings on which quotations are digitally printed, then bound them into tiny booklets with "silent" pages strategically left blank. The booklets stand partially open around a decorative folding structure best described as a cross between a cootie-catcher and a tesseract, into whose pockets the books slide and hide.

Ando Hiroshige's vertiginous woodblock, "Yoro Waterfall in Mino Province," inspires Laurie Alpert and Leslie Eliet to emulate his vertical gesture. A moody winter landscape also by Hiroshige lends Eleanor Rubin its earthen colors to underscore a deep uneasiness in her own woodcut, "Winter Night." Irregular bands of raw sienna, Venetian red and grey-blue sky roll like muted thunder across Rubin's broad panel. An unsettling black hawk-like form bearing down on a bowed female figure resembles a white counterpart in Hiroshige's composition.

Käthe Kollwitz's politically-motivated lithograph "Helft Russland," an appeal to combat hunger, renders in a few deft strokes four powerful hands that stretch to cradle the head of



a dying famine victim. Responses include Deborah Olin's giant monoprint diptych decrying contemporary scourges of excess and malnutrition, two woodcut contour-line portraits by Annie Hayes, and Marilyn Sherman's etching-monoprint of hands protecting a woman's breasts over censored texts of her son's military recruitment letters.

Brian Kreydatus' intensely gouged woodcut, "Feeding," responds to Kollwitz's aesthetic as well as her content. Kreydatus proposes nurturing as the antidote to hunger in the image of his hand spooning mush into his infant son's mouth. Employing Kollwitz's simple compositional strategy, Kreydatus also grounds his forms in a strong pyramidal structure. The foreshortened feeding hand thrusts upward toward the baby's open mouth at the apex of the triangle, while the baby's little

Dirk Hagner, *Droneland Afternoon*, 12 color relief reduction print and stencil on 528 canary yellow post-its, 72" x 63".

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clenched hands and elbows weigh down the base. Secure within this framework, the child's rounded head is lovingly modeled.

### MAKING SHEEP'S EYES

Kate Hanlon's "The Lamb" unearths literary and religious antecedents of "The Sheep of his Pasture," a tiny wood engraving by Edward Calvert after a print by the printmaker-poet William Blake. Calvert's two-inch-high image adds a dark crag and a regal sunset to Blake's sheep munching by a country stream. Hanlon's own four-foot-wide woodcut presents a single blasé sheep in buttery hues of pale sienna and aubergine, lounging on a lush green hillock carpeted with fronds and flowers. Lettering in his curly fleece spells out a stanza from "The Lamb," one of Blake's best-known "Songs of Innocence."

Dirk Hagner's unconventional "Droneland Afternoon" turns on its head Grant Wood's "Tree Planting Group," a Depression-era lithograph of an industrious farm family working together. Hagner prints a family at play in a twelve-color lithograph on an unusual substrate, a six-foot-high grid of 528 canary yellow "Post-it" notes. The father, in crimson bathing trunks against a yellow-shingled ranch house, tosses a little boy into the backyard pool. Form is rendered in camouflage splotches of fleshy pinks, mauves and maroons, shimmering blues and greys for water, and a dappled olive stretch for lawn. The surface charm distracts us, and perhaps the clueless family as well, from awareness of bombers and military drones swarming in the leaden sky above and ugly black plumes billowing in the distance. The unstable surface underscores the impermanence and insecurity of the present.

In his reduction woodcut, "The Prodigal Swine," Jim Monson explores his obligation to be "faithful" to Albrecht Dürer's woodblock, "The Prodigal Son Amid the Swine." Monson

blows up a few square inches showing the penitent's hands clasped above the heads of four ravenous pigs. The differences in scale, a conversion to Prussian blue ink, and Monson's preference for solid color areas rather than tiny precise lines make the two images surprisingly dissimilar. Yet our capacity is sharpened to discover previously unremarked aspects of the Dürer. Similar acute angles in the pig-trough's top plane and the slanted roofs in the background define a strong unifying plane in Monson's "copy." With the jump in scale and emphasis, we recoil from the pigs' sly vulpine squints. And the praying hands, though less refined than Dürer's, now cast powerful shadows, drawing



our gaze back to a double silhouette of Dürer's pious gesture. There are always new ways to see.

| Elizabeth Michelman

Top: Mary Ince, *Book Box: Fractured Silence*, 2015, etching with box construction, 12" x 12" x 1 1/2".

Bottom: Brian Kreydatus, *Feeding*, 2014, woodcut, 13" x 12".

