

## **Stochastic Art in a Rough and Tumble World Denise Hawrysió's Situational Prints**

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Anyone seeking an introduction to Denise Hawrysió's printmaking might consider re-visiting Robert Filliou's idea that "art is what makes life more interesting than art." Filliou's circular formulation of the reciprocity between life and art points to another notion of Hawrysió's, that, following Picabia, there is no temple of art; it is the world outside of the museum/studio that is the source of art's spirit. How then does a print have 'more' to do with the world outside of art, how does it become 'situational'? Imagine a printmaker's studio in the middle of the night. An earthquake strikes. Concrete chunks fall onto blank etching plates, gouging them. The artist then prints those marks, on their own or layered with others. Life, in the form of a seismic event, takes on a richness owing to its ability to record its own actions. This story explains in fictional form how a rogue etching plate can find its way onto the bed of an etching press. It is an allegory of the type of process that has informed Denise Hawrysió's printmaking over the past twenty-five years and a hypothetical example of how conceptualized practices can be incorporated into printmaking.

Hawrysió's prints emerge from her ongoing dialogue with contemporary theory. Her influences include the work of Hanne Darboven, On Kawara and Joseph Beuys as well as strategies drawn from Earthworks, Happenings and Fluxus. Early on in her life in art, Hawrysió knew the serial music of Philip Glass and Steve Reich and of 'language-as-drawing' as characterized by the work of Cy Twombly. As a result, much of her work has an aleatory quality manifested by a panoply of collective forces she employs as tools of her trade, including mechanical, human and geological phenomena. She seems to conceive of the printmaking plate as both a mini-landscape and a stage for cultural production, in which her semi-controlled acts of marking plates micro-mirror the macro marks left by Earthworks artists such as Michael Heizer.

The artists Hawrysió encountered after moving to San Francisco in the early 1980s paved the way for another aspect of her printmaking process: the unpredictability of socially engaged, performative art. San Francisco was then home to very particular modes of production: artist groups such as Survival Research Laboratories, conceptual artists like Bonnie Sherk, and performance artists such as Tom Marioni. And if Beuys's blackboard text scratchings were an influence on Hawrysió, his art of social engagement was even more so. She has, for instance, cold-called farming families to ask them to mark or draw on her etching plates. Ordinary people have marked her plates with their messages – their words and scrawls are a record of directness and unmediated simplicity, of a type that no one schooled in art could ever make.

While some of Denise Hawrysió's prints include texts written by her collaborators, others, especially the recent *MacDowell Bed Studies*, use ironic text juxtapositioning. These texts present a quasi-conceptualist deadpan tone that informs viewers about the artist's intentions, while positioning the work at the intersection of fiction and truth, history and myth. While in some cases the artist's intentions may not be borne out by the object one sees, other resonances do relate to actual subject matter – her 1979 diptych *West and East* shows a fascination with the pounding freeways outside of Kingston, echoing the work of Jack Chambers and presaging Tom Sherman's video work *You can't watch TV and drive a car at the same time*.

This exhibition comes at a time when printmaking's stock has fallen. Art schools and university art departments throughout North America have closed, or are contemplating the closure of their printmaking departments. In many cases the theoretical turn that art has taken since the 1970s has not worked in printmaking's favour, as many printmakers have allowed the shift to conceptualized practices to pass them by. Hawrysió, in contrast, has seized upon the diagrammatic and cartographical possibilities that presented themselves in other art forms and has incorporated them into her prints.

The global dialogue that has valorized 'process' in art over the commodified object has generated much discussion and many creative solutions to the problem of how to remain idea-oriented while still having something to see and/or sell. Denise Hawrysió's procedures and obsessions reflect that conundrum. Her use of quasi-rational repetitions and palimpsestic layering has created a very distinctive graphic vision, one that has been committed to research, social issues and the expansion of the boundaries of her chosen medium. Combined, Hawrysió's prints add up to a twenty-five-year testament to one artist's belief that there is no more an end to art than an end to anything else – everything continues, and one medium in art has as much potential as any other.

The layerings of process that define Hawrysió's project – chance, texts, drawings, collective involvement, erasures, mirror images and repetitions – are all based on her application to printmaking of the Situationist idea of 'the construction of events.' Her constructed events are newly inventive explorations of the Dadaist project of returning the everyday to art. If the everyday can be elevated by being re-positioned in art, then the pitfall of beginning with the aesthetically rarefied subject can be avoided and art will continue to be open to both urinals in galleries and random markings made on printing plates. Hence, Hawrysió's prints can also be seen as mirroring consciousness – just as the world imprints itself on the mind via the senses, she asks the same of the world in relation to her plates: she asks her plates to go get imprinted, go see what the world has in store for them. Her printing plates, sometimes like flaneurs absorbing the passing scene, at other times like adventurers seeking experience in site-specific encounters, have brought back messages, both formal and subject-related, that would never have found a place in art but for Hawrysió's particular creative vision.