

## *The Space Between 0 and 1: Printmaking and Digital Technology in Portland*

By Matthew A. Coleman



Installation view of Sang-Mi Yoo, *Anomalous Traces* (2013–16) in “Variable States: Prints Now,” Upfor Gallery, 2016. **From left to right:** hand-cut pigment inkjet print, 36 x 44 x 72 inches; laser-cut wool felt, 63 x 48 x 2 inches; pigment inkjet print, tiered, 96 x 44 x 78 inches. Photo: Mario Gallucci. Image courtesy Upfor Gallery, Portland, OR.

“Variable States: Prints Now”  
Upfor Gallery, Portland, OR  
3 March – 9 April 2016

Upfor Gallery, a young new-media gallery in Portland, Oregon, recently organized a small exhibition, “Variable States: Prints Now,” investigating relationships between digital technologies and printmaking. Curator Heather Lee Birdsong selected eight artists from across the United States (including two Portland locals) who inject digital processes into relief, intaglio and screen-printing techniques, and who also extend print processes into sculpture, video and installations.

The exhibition orbited around a table supplied with copies of Paul Soulellis’s *Printed Web* (2014–ongoing), a collaborative serial project that collects artworks from Internet and digital artists, along with essays by scholars, artists and critics contemplating what the physical embodiment of the Internet might look like. Printed on paper, the Internet’s endless, ever-changing stream of code (or the visible product thereof) is rendered static, bound to a specific context. It manifests the present conditions under which we participate in a hyper-accelerated information-driven society and archive incredible amounts of information. The series can be found online, free

to be printed out or saved in digital form, or even edited and printed out in altered form—an embrace of the open-source, uninhibited flow of knowledge and creativity that the Internet makes possible.

One of the exhibition themes is the relationship between architectural space and memory. Janet Ballweg’s *Domestic Landscape* intaglio prints from 2008 (four in color and one monochrome) present different views of a kitchen scene initially rendered in 3D illustration software. The surfaces and objects are unnaturally smooth, simply constructed and strangely antiseptic. The kitchen walls are hung with frames containing skewed reflections of the room, and dark



**Left:** Blake Carrington, *The Year We Make Contact* (2016), single-channel video installation, 24 minute, 37 second duration. **Right:** Paul Soulellis, *Library of the Printed Web* (2014–15), various publications published by the artist, four-color printing on paper, variable dimensions. Photos: Mario Gallucci. Images courtesy Upfor Gallery, Portland, OR.

doorways open into what could be the rest of the house.

Across the gallery, Sang-Mi Yoo's installation *Anomalous Traces* (2013) reflects upon the homogeneity of tract homes by condensing them into a pattern. The three-piece installation included a wall-mounted felt panel, laser-cut with a pattern of tract house blueprints, and two long paper works that billowed from the ceiling—one a digitally manipulated scan of the felt panel, the other hand-cut with perforations among housing diagrams pulled from brochures for the cookie-cutter “dream homes” that fill American suburbs. Yoo immigrated to the United States as a child from South Korea, and these neighborhoods connote nostalgic notions of home.

The blueprints in Krista Svalbonas's screenprints on Mylar and felt are neither virtual nor idealized, but historical and specific. They record European factory buildings requisitioned as refugee camps after World War II, one of which housed the artist's family. Named after distinct locations (Gießen, Esslingen, Würzburg, Mannheim, etc.), the works were printed with pigments made from copper, steel and other materials that might once have been used in these factories. The necklace-like flocked screenprints of Edwige Charlot—*Anba tout (Underneath)* (2015) and *Fantom an ajan (Ghost of Silver)* (2016)—allude to the artist's Haitian and French heritage and feel like heirlooms.

Since the 15th century, printmaking

has adapted to each new generation of technical advances; 3D printing is the latest mechanical reproduction technology to be adopted by artists. Portland local Brenna Murphy uses it to produce small, blocky sculptures from scrambled pictures she took in Forest Park, a 5,200-acre urban forest next to the city. Resting on mirrors in the gallery's window, these frozen digitized images of nature merged with reflections of the street outside.

Two videos in “Variable States” addressed the instability of digital media—its quality, in the words of media scholar Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, of being “degenerative, forgetful, erasable.”<sup>1</sup> To make *The Year We Made Contact* (2016), Blake Carrington ran the audio of his therapy session with a Lacanian psychoanalyst through an algorithm that translated the frequencies of the soundwaves into images that resemble continuously shifting geological striation or marbling. These black-and-white images erode and consume themselves, collapsing from thousands of pixels to just one. The projection was accompanied by two inkjet prints depicting other instances of decay from the same algorithm, but ornamented with hand-colored splotches and dashes of acrylic, sumi and CMYK printer ink. *No Memory (Each Day the same)* (2016) by Alyson Provax is a compilation of GIFs constructed from letterpress-printed sentences such as, “don't know if this was a dream,” “these days sometimes go on for days,” “each day repeats” and “more of the

same.” Interrupted by gorgeous monotypes and intaglio prints of geometric shapes, these lethargic statements drift, fade and multiply, suggesting both the passage and stagnation of time. In one instance, she shifted an intaglio print of a darkening gradient under a cutout for each frame, animating what appears to be a revolving sphere (or planet or moon).

“Variable States” was a barometer for the shifting atmosphere of printmaking and successfully demonstrated the imaginative ways it continues to embrace emerging technologies. While the show was literally about the variable states of printmaking techniques, the content of the selected artworks revealed how the shifting conditions of digital technology alter the state of memory and architecture—uncovering historical and societal nuances, probing deeper interiorities, and reveling in the amazing complexities of the present. ■

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**Notes:**

1. Chun, “The Digital Ephemeral,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (2008): 160–61.