

MATT MAGEE: PRINTS 26 August – 30 September, 2017

Many artists pull energy and inspiration from their immediate surroundings and relationships. Matt Magee's relationship to objects, people, place and process, is fundamental to his ambitious and omnivorous practice. With this, his fifth solo exhibition at the gallery, the work on view is an important distillation of his familiar iconography and major themes. In the previous exhibitions, painting and sculpture have been the primary means of delivery. In this exhibition, Magee reveals his always mature command of process with a stunning group of print editions.

Prints will often expose an artist's weakness to mine familiar and tested imagery; sometimes, devoid of context for the artist's larger concern. Not the case with this group of seventeen prints. All the prints actually further a narrative with Magee's painting, sculpture and installation work. The prints underscore Magee's core concerns with systems and forms that relate physically and graphically. The minimal mark making in many of the prints become a language that Magee uses to communicate, in the abstract. Seen in total, the prints are truly an instance of, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." Magee leaves no doubt in this exhibition. His prints "connect the dots" to the paintings, sculpture and installations, without becoming ersatz multiples of the unique works. These prints are the physical manifestation of an idea about multiples and the process that created them.

To fully appreciate the print editions, it is important to understand the circumstances of their making. All the editions on view are the result of invitations to collaborate with established fine print publishers. These publishers work with master printers and workshop assistants, who become constructive and practical extensions of the artist during the making of each print. Make no mistake, Magee is the author of every mark and the final result. The technical challenges of proofing and printing are the printer's domain. It is their expertise with high quality, hand-printing that make these editions so extraordinary. This is an opportunity few artists get, and Matt Magee proved himself worthy of multiple invitations to explore lithography and relief printing at its most artisanal and refined.

First in New York, at Grenfell Press in 2011, he produced two auspicious relief prints: Rows of Jays and Breviary. Using letterpress type in its pure multiple form, rows of lower case "j's" were arranged as a field, and printed as a monochromatic riff on the tenth letter of the alphabet; producing a playful take on concrete poetics with a minimalist's eye for design and balance. The "rows" are printed in a Rose red—the elegance of it all is graphically succinct. Few artists make a first print that is such a pure summation of the process used to make it. Breviary is a riff on order and community. The woodcut marks perch in place without any real agenda, other than the instinct to come home to roost in a grid/hive of structure. To my eye, they read as graphic paragraphs and suggest the "grapheme" works to come. Magee approaches these editions with a humor and knowing sense of mark making that is well beyond most first attempts.

Residencies followed at the Tamarind Institute in Albuquerque—2013 & 2016. This historic American workshop is predicated on the collaborative experience, and focuses exclusively on the traditions of hand-lithography. Magee produced all fifteen lithographic editions at Tamarind working on both plate and stone. The autographic primacy of lithography is the basis for many of the prints in the exhibition. Color and composition are signature strengths in Magee's paintings, so too, these lithographs explore a range of color and scale.

The specific references and inspirations for the Tamarind prints are further indication of Magee's history in Art and consciousness to his surroundings in and out of the studio. From his notes here's some insight into the individual prints:

After Math 2013, The image was inspired by a small Frank Stella diptych on canvas from 1963, his signature nesting squares. I took the Stella a step further by re-routing and bisecting (via my own diptych format) the nesting squares. **After Math** refers to the memory of seeing the Stella's and to the geometry and mathematics of the composition.

Carthew, Decoder and Verbatim 2013, **Carthew** was titled for a place in the south of England I once visited, that is the source for the clay used to make china/dishware. The circles and dots in the compositions derive directly from the placement of portholes seen on naval vessels making their way up the Hudson. Decoder evolved from a painting titled 'Red Riddle' which was in the Knoedler show in 2010. The painting references the prows and portholes of the ships on the Hudson even more specifically and Decoder was titled as such to become a solution to the riddle. The placement of forms in **Verbatim** was inspired by a photo Rauschenberg took in Tibet. (Magee had worked as archivist for the Rauschenberg Studio for 18 years).

Graphemes, 2013 These emerged from Agnes Martin's screenprint edition 'On a clear day' 1973. My mark making of ovals, dots and voids imposed on her system of grids builds a personal structure of language based in Morse code and semaphore. These prints have since become the basis for a series of wall murals also titled Graphemes.

Proems, 2016 A Proem is a preface. The proems are language-based as if looking at the pages of a book. The rows of dots and hyphens project linguistics in its most basic elemental form. When viewing these prints one senses patterns of text but nothing specifically is written, they emerge purely from repetition and the mind's eye.

Collection 1 & 2, 2016 They were inspired directly by a small Paul Feeley watercolor from the early 1960's in the collection of the Albuquerque Museum of Art. The artifacts in Feeley's composition are laid out as a collection. An impression of 'Decoder' was acquired by the Albuquerque Museum and included in an exhibition with the Feeley, organized by curator Titus O'Brien.

Green Seven, 2016 Derived directly from a photo I took of a 4 ft neon seven at an intersection in Albuquerque. The shape of the neon seven is exactly the same in the print. The number seven is a personal talisman and charm and has been used as numerical sequence and as a form in many paintings and objects over the years.

WishList, 2016 This began as a 1 1/2" x 1 1/2" thumbnail in one of my sketchbooks with the word wishlist written by it. Each of the forms was produced as a cut out by master printer Valpuri Remling and we spent hours configuring the forms until they rang true. Rather than an itemized wish list this wish list becomes an amalgam of form.

Harry's Eyes, 2016 This is a print of rows of the 1960's musician Harry Nilsson's eyes. 20 years ago I bought the jacket (without the record) of a 45 vinyl record from a music shop on 23rd St. in NYC. The jacket had a portrait of Harry Nilsson with the eyes off-set, a double image. I reacted viscerally to this image and we used just the eyes to produce a print that becomes both organic and tree-like but also architectural and facade-like and harkens back to the 1930's with references to the absurd and Dada.

Why do artists make prints? Prints are historically a democratic art form, a way and means to communicate to a larger audience. The invention of the printing press enabled cultures to share statements, achieve consensus and develop community through word and image. Today's fine print edition is the embodiment of a collaborative, shared experience; an opportunity to expand the artist's studio practice and welcome shared purpose. To collect prints is to join this community and participate in the tradition of print as an endorsement of ideas and artistic enterprise. This exhibition represents Matt Magee's immersion in print and process. The result is a cohesive "suite" of ideas that just happen to be exceptional printed art as well. I for one cannot imagine a better definition of the imagined and the real.

Thomas Cvikota