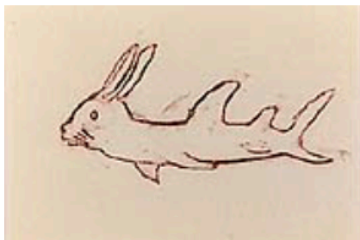


## The Random and the Ordered by Starr Figura

"New Prints 2004/Winter: The Random and the Ordered," Jan. 15-Feb. 28, 2004, at the International Print Center New York, 526 West 26th Street, New York, N.Y. 10001



Sarah Hauser  
*Bunny Shark*  
2003

Take five art professionals and put them in a room for the better part of a work day, turn off the lights, and show them more than 800 slides of recent printed art submitted by artists, publishers and print workshops from all over the country (and, in a few cases, outside the U.S.), then ask them to collectively select an exhibition from these images. There is an undeniably random aspect of this process -- the slides submitted do not represent every artist, publisher or workshop, just those who chose to submit at this time; the people doing the viewing have come with different interests and (conscious or unconscious) agendas; and, although the slides are viewed and reviewed numerous times over the course of several hours, the limitation of a single day prohibits any extensive research or rethinking about what is being seen.



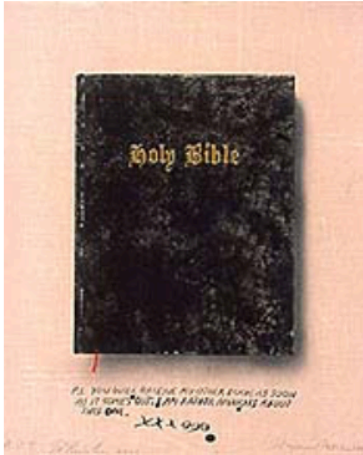
Cameron Martin  
*Under the Sun Every Day Comes*  
2003

And yet this inherent randomness is in many ways the juried exhibition's greatest virtue, for it is a controlled chaos that allows for a selection based on both knowledge and instinct, and an exhibition that ultimately includes a stimulating balance of the familiar and the unexpected.

Curators are natural organizers, people who are constantly grouping and re-grouping objects and ideas into different categories, both as a means of making order from apparent randomness, and also as a way of telling a story. Print curators tend to be even more compulsive in their organizing and categorizing than other curators, for, in addition to such familiar categories such as artist, period, theme, style and movement, they concern themselves with finicky questions of technique, constantly striving to identify and explain the subtleties of etching, lithography and screenprint, to name just a few of the myriad print processes available to artists.

When most exhibitions are being organized, objects are selected for their effectiveness in telling a particular story, both as individual works of art and in terms of the way they relate to one another. For a juried

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Ed Ruscha and Raymond Pettibon  
*The Holy Bible -- State I*  
2003



William Kentridge  
*Untitled (Zeno Writing II)*  
2003

exhibition, however, each work is selected only on its own individual merits. The search for an organizing principle is done after the fact, when shared styles are sought and thematic clusters arranged. (Or, alternatively, the organizing principle might be no organizing principle, or an arbitrary one, for example installing the works in alphabetical order.)

As a curator -- one of the five people who selected the works in the show -- I will assert my natural right and inclination to group the works we selected into categories. Although only one of potentially hundreds of such permutations that might have been proposed using this specific group of objects, it will hopefully provide a meaningful prism through which to consider the works on view.

## Animal studies

One of the most delightful surprises to emerge from the selections that we made were series of works by three different artists based on animal studies, all of which are intimately scaled and display a fragile beauty. Through a Dureresque handling of the drypoint needle, Alexandar Duravcevic has lovingly captured all the minute details of fur and grass that define the quiet, elusive world of his *Vermin/Hare* and *Vermin/Mouse*.

Less intricately worked but equally captivating is Sarah Hauser's frottage series of fantastic hybrid creatures that are less terrifying than humorously adorable in their deformations. In each image of her *Deer Suite*, Paula Schuette Kraemer presents a deer in two different states of movement, overlapping one on top of the other through the use of a semitransparent waxed silk. This unusual technique suggests a deer's quick, rustling motions in an otherwise still, hushed environment.

## The body

One of the more familiar themes of the last two decades has been the human body, in particular the poetic suggestiveness of various body parts when they are exposed or isolated. Mona Hatoum's *Untitled (brain)* is one such work, in which a quasi-abstract pattern of crenulations is just barely legible as a delicate relief molded from handmade paper pulp. Lesley Dill's *Head*, another example of the

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Peregrine Honig  
*Betty*  
2003



A.J. Bocchino  
*N.Y. Times Headlines (Feb. 1, 1993-  
July 28, 2003)*

inventive use of paper, is a sculptural multiple made up of die-cut letters molded together to form a human bust, with long threads evocative of tears falling down from where the eyes would normally be.

## Narrative figuration

In contrast to the subtle poetry of the works discussed thus far, the prints in this category -- called very broadly and for lack of a better term, narrative figuration -- make statements that are more forceful and direct. Using figurative and representative imagery, they touch on a range of provocative and polemical issues such as religion, politics, culture, war and death.

Demonstrating the long roots of such imagery, Enriqu Chagoya's *Homage to Goya: Disasters of War*, is, as the title suggests, based on Goya's famous series (ca.1810-1814) of etchings chronicling human brutality. Tiny vignettes such as Mickey Mouse and a Campbell's soup can in the lower margins of Chagoya's prints make ironic reference to the impact that such American products have on the global culture and economy. In another print by Chagoya titled *Road Map*, the United States is so disproportionately large as to make all of the other continents or territories seem like its tiny appendages or satellites. Symbolic markers allude to the history of westward expansion and military and cultural domination.

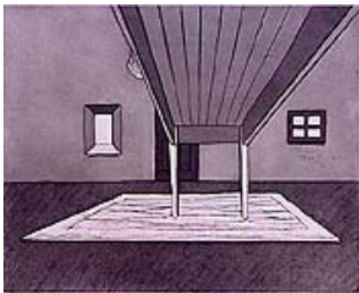
Endi Poskovic, a Bosnian artist now living in the United States, makes enigmatically political prints, such as *Western Tale in Green*, in which issues of memory, displacement and migration are embodied in an incongruously hard-edged and nostalgic woodcut depicting thick green clouds of smoke emanating from a train traversing the Western landscape.

Daniel Martin Diaz's lithograph *Vita* refers to the history of Latin American devotional imagery with a version of the madonna dolorosa emerging from a grave with an umbilical cord linking her fetus to the cross around her neck.

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Louise Bourgeois  
*Untitled*  
2002



Richard Artschwager  
*t,w,m,d,r,b*  
2003

A more contemporary and oblique reference to religion is found in two prints produced collaboratively by the Los Angeles artists Ed Ruscha and Raymond Pettibon. *The End, State I* looks like two frames frozen at the end of an old Hollywood movie. At the bottom, Pettibon's handwritten text is characteristically ambiguous, but the overall reference to death in this work is inescapable. In *The Holy Bible, State I*, the artist's ironic, irreverent humor is even more obvious, as Pettibon has penned the words, "P.S. You will receive my other book as soon as it comes out. I am rather anxious about this last one. XXX OOO" directly below Ruscha's tromp l'oeil rendering of a bible.

William Kentridge, a South African artist of European descent whose work often deals with the cultural and psychological effects of his country's difficult history, is represented by a typically penetrating yet ambiguous image in *Untitled (Zeno Writing II)*, in which two silhouetted figures carrying shotguns are presented against the background of what appears to be a barbed-wire fence.

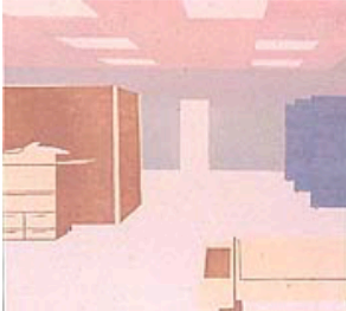
Dealing with sexual politics from a feminist point of view is Peregrine Honig, with three prints of pin-up girls juxtaposed with mordant texts that point to a violent underside for such images. Addressing current events in a somewhat more abstracted manner is A.J. Bocchino, whose *NY Times Headlines (Feb. 1, 1993-July 28, 2003)* is literally that, a mural-sized sheet in which ten years' worth of headlines have been highlighted in different colors and strung together in one seemingly endless continuum. While the effect from a distance is of a pleasingly colorful abstraction, close inspection provokes myriad memories and associations.

## Geometric abstraction, geometric representation

Another surprising result of the you-never-know-what-you're-going-to-get jury process is the fact that only two artists selected for this exhibition are represented by abstract works. Ann Conner's *Timber #s I-V* is a series of grainy woodcuts, each a different color, whose fascination derives from the fact that they each contain the same composition of geometric shapes, but it has been rotated and repositioned to quite different effect in each sheet. Louise Bourgeois (who also makes figurative work) has screenprinted patterns in red onto old pieces of fabric; her bold forms and strong color give the

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small, delicate pieces of cloth an unexpected forcefulness and monumentality.



Amze Emmons  
*Office Space*  
2003

Although not abstract, the works of Richard Artschwager and Amze Emmons are interior views that rely on a careful calibration of geometric forms to produce a quasi-surreal and ambiguous sense of space. In each of the three sheets that make up Artschwager's triptych *t,w,m,d,r,b*, the same six elements -- table, window, mirror, door, rug and basket -- can be found in different arrangements and are seen from different perspectives. His restricted palette of various shades of aquatinted gray enhances the otherworldly stillness in these images. Amze Emmons's *Office Space* is a similarly hushed and haunting image of an unoccupied office, its walls, cabinets, and ceiling defined by nothing more than flat rectangles of muted pastel pink, blue, and yellow.

## Technique

Any of the works included in this exhibition could be discussed from a technical point of view. Prints are like that. For some prints, the medium itself is essential to the meaning of the work, whether it is the rawness of Munch's woodcuts or the slickness of Warhol's screenprints.



Aleksandar Duravcevic  
*Vermin/hare*  
2003

The works of two artists in this exhibition were created using unusual processes that merit explanation. Brian Fridge's prints, subtitled *Star field*, *Twin cloud* and *Solar flare*, were made using a process that relates to his video work, in which he filmed steam as it transformed into ice crystals in his freezer. Still images of this process were digitally enlarged and transferred to a copper plate via photogravure, and the resulting prints are evocative of the natural and cosmological events described in the titles. Leah Siegel's abstract digital drawings also suggest a kind of vaporous metamorphosis, but this effect is derived from another kind of mysterious, microscopic system, that of the computer, whose software programming she used to make the images.

## Quiet beauty

Two final works in the show are the inevitable oddballs that, by luck of the draw, don't quite fit either together or with the others. Yet despite their differences they are both examples of restrained beauty and

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Paula Schuette Kraemer  
*Deer Suite*  
2003

simplicity. One, William Bailey's *Imaginary Studio*, is a small, intimate etching, depicting a seated woman in an almost Hopperesque moment of quiet withdrawal. The other, Cameron Martin's *Under the Sun Every Day Comes and Goes*, is a large-scale lithograph of a winter-bare tree trunk. Isolated against a pale gray background, and abstracted by virtue of its flat black on white patterning, it is a cool, clean image of perfect stillness.

**STARR FIGURA** is assistant curator, department of prints and illustrated books, at the Museum of Modern Art. This essay was originally written to accompany "New Prints 2004/Winter: The Random and the Ordered" at the International Print Center New York, Jan. 15-Feb. 28, 2004, and also appears on the [IPCNY website](#).

The selection committee for "New Prints 2004/Winter" included Kimball Higgs of Gagosian Gallery; Jean-Paul Russell, master printer and director, Durham Press; Carol Ann Schuster, collector; and Mina Takahashi, executive director of programs, Dieu Donne Papermill.