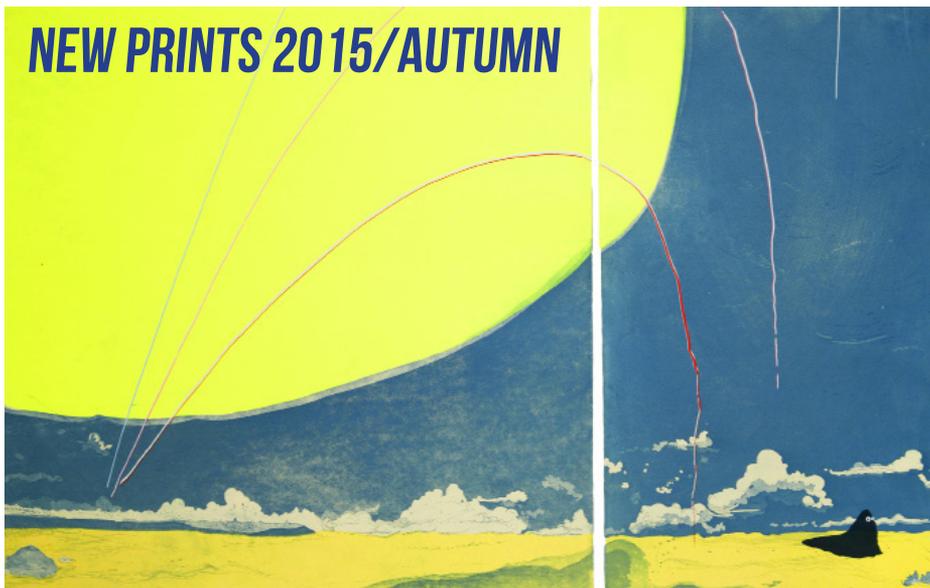


NEW PRINTS 2015/AUTUMN



Artists: Todd Anderson, Kathy Aoki, Evan Bellantone, Marcin Bialas, Allison Bianco, Mary Lynn Blasutta, Sebastiaan Bremer, Noah Breuer, Patrick Casey, Nathan Catlin, Phillip Chen, Matthew Colaizzo, Nick Conbere, Aurélien Couput, David Curcio, Kara Dunne, Scott Espeseth, Megan Foster, Carl Fudge, Rebecca Gilbert, Kevin Haas, Ellen Heck, Amira Hegazy, John Holmgren, Mary Hood, Cary Hulbert, Eeva Huotari, Fleming Jeffries, Crystal Johnson, Leekyung Kang, Kamil Kocurek, Andrew Kosten, Andrew Kozlowski, Sara Langworthy, Yujin Lee, Michael Loderstedt, Kate MacNeil, Barbara Madsen, Renee Magnanti, Nicole Maloof, Jessica Meuninck-Ganger, Barbara Milman, Anne Muntges, Lorella Paleni, Kurt Pammer, Margherita Paoletti, Jill Parisi, Alyssa Piro, Kasey Ramirez, Mark Rice, Jenny Robinson, Jungyeon Roh, Michelle Rozic, David Sandlin, Carrie Scanga, William Skerritt, Evan Summer, Rob Swainston, Clare Szydowski, and Sergey Zlotnikov.

INTERNATIONAL PRINT CENTER NEW YORK

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COMMEDIA BY TOMAS VU

The language of printmaking has always been a kind of vernacular. As multiplicity is inherent in its nature, the print has long been used as means of disseminating information, propaganda, and imagery. It is associated with the masses in a unique way, and its reproducibility can ward off preciousness. I am happy to report that the artists in our show are using the form in new ways, taking the techniques of our medium and elevating them to eloquence through their skills and bold ambition.

The title of the show, *Commedia*, is the original title of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1308 – 1320). At the time, literature and the arts were divided broadly into two categories: comedy and drama. Drama was the so-called high art, written in Latin, and devoted to serious and religious themes. Comedy, or *commedia*, was not necessarily used to indicate a humorous piece of work, but one written in the vernacular of the time. In *On Eloquence in the Vernacular*, Dante explained why he used “humble” Italian in his writing instead of Latin, the formal language of the Church. He praised the vernacular's adaptability, its intelligibility to the masses, and the fact of his love for his native tongue. He also spoke of its mutability – vernacular language changes with every generation, and is thus specific to its time and place.

Dante's embrace and elevation of humble materials, and the specificity and personality that they created, are reflected in the works I have selected. As the show took shape, I reflected on late nights in graduate school long ago reading the *Divine Comedy*. I was in my studio, reading snippets of his poetry while tossing between sleep and wakefulness. Dante's words infected my subconscious, often leaving me unsure whether I was in the real or in a dream, and that sense of his work has stayed with me.

A pervasive moodiness in the work here also brought to mind the figure of Dante as we meet him in the *Divine Comedy*. He is 35, “halfway along life's path” (of the Biblically given seventy-year life span), and lost in a dark wood of sin. Though he traverses the worlds shown to him by his guides Virgil and Beatrice and sees the strictly divided, well-organized hierarchies of being, he himself is stuck in between, adrift, searching. His story tells of a literal ascent through these worlds, and represents a journey of the soul.

In these prints I see much of the same spirit. I see searching, exploring, voyagers. I see cosmologies displayed and questioned, hierarchies established and undermined, and most of all I see a gleeful experimentation.

I have divided the show into three sections using Dante's cosmology of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. Though these categories could be seen as restrictive, I am most interested in their porousness, in the motifs that bounce throughout multiple categories, and call themselves into question.



Sebastian Bremer, *To Joy - Gentle Wing, Circle, Virtue's Steep Hill*, 2014, digital print with collage and hand additions, edition: 12, 25 x 25 inches each, printed by Erik Hougen, published by Lower East Side Printshop (NY).

We begin with *PARADISO*. This category is populated with many landscapes, and symbols of paradise we have come to expect – open spaces, clouds, rainbows. But upon closer inspection, each of these works reveals itself to be more complex. The eyes in Alyssa Piro's *STARE WINK WINK* look out to the clouds, but the dismembered shapes bring to mind coins put on the eyes of dead bodies, and give the bright colors an eerie cast. Allison Bianco's work depicts what seems like a sunny beach, but its placidity is interrupted by a shadowy black figure and an incoming cloud of electric green, the color splitting the difference between childlike and toxic. Michael Loderstedt uses that most traditional signal of levity and joyousness – a rainbow – but its colors are faded, and it presides over a water-world, the only evidence of humanity a house perhaps drowning or maybe on stilts. We witness the aftermath of a calamity, or places dislocated, or the end of a storm, and it leaves us questioning our paradise.

PURGATORIO tells a story of things in between. Evan Bellantone's rainbow echoes those in *Paradiso*, but it is literally suspended, off balance, between opposing dark forces. Noah Breuer's man is slashed in two, interrupted and not quite fitting in its frame. Evan Summer shows us a road to nowhere, a project either incomplete or abandoned in an unfriendly landscape. In Marcin Bialas's work, three elaborate doors are a road to nowhere, inviting us to follow their path off a cliff. Each of these works has a sense of forces out of whack, of things not quite right.

INFERNO is at once the most obvious and the most slippery. We see some recognizable imagery – houses on fire, dead birds, guns and missiles. But the fires that rage in Claire Szydowski's work don't seem to disturb the suburban community in front of it; in fact, the absence of humans gives the sense that this place is long abandoned, and maybe the fire is a rebirth. Nathan Catlin's *Still Life* shows us dead birds strung up by their feet, a scene whose gruesomeness is mediated by the delicate line work of their rendering and the seeming placidity of the birds. Flip the image, and they would be ready to take flight. In a way, this piece sums up the show – the birds actually have a sense of ascension, if only through the tiny cords, and thus the work fights its category, and levitates.

As the show has come together, it has been wonderful to see the works begin to speak to one another. Walking around the room, I see conversations starting in one place and finishing in another, I see the categories blur and then come back into focus, and I am taken to the same place Dante transported me to: wandering between states, striving for ascension.

- Tomas Vu, New York City, 2015



Crystal Johnson, *Wickenden Street II*, 2015, soft-ground etching & drypoint, edition: 8, 18 x 24 inches, printed & published by the artist.

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Cover Image: Allison Bianco, *Leave Your Troubles Behind*, 2015, Intaglio and screenprint. Edition: 6, printed by the artist and Lois Harada, published by the artist and Cade Tompkins Projects (RI).

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