

RECORD KEEPERS

23 OCTOBER - 01 DECEMBER 2018

Duke Hall Gallery of Fine Art
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

The Record Keepers

by Anna Hoberman and John Ros

A print, by simple definition, is an impression created from a matrix — a mold in which something is cast, shaped, programmed or recorded. The most significant characteristic of a print is the possibility for multiple impressions. An edition holds power in numbers and the ability to be distributed widely. Unlike other types of art, a print can exist in multiple places at the same time. The ease of dissemination links the medium to politics, social movements, revolt and revolutions, testifying to the existence of events within a period of time. A print is a powerful artifact that documents the culture in which it was created by and for.

An early example of print medium being used for social commentary is Francisco Goya's *Los Capricious (The Whims)*, a series of etchings created in the 18th century. Goya's prints are a satirical exploration of the dark underside of Spanish society and the ruling class. Goya has described the work as depicting, "the innumerable foibles and follies to be found in any civilized society, and the common prejudices and deceitful practices which custom, ignorance or self-interest have made usual." With *Los Capricious* and other works at this time, Goya took etching and social commentary to an extreme seldom reached before.

In *Caprichio No. 24: Nohubo Remedio (Nothing Could Be Done)*, Goya depicts a woman wearing a dunce cap being lead through a crowd while riding on a donkey. The woman's expression is sullen and the mob, predominantly male, is angry. We are witness to a public shaming but are given no clues to the crime committed. The artist uses tonal shifts to highlight the woman and make her look almost angelic in contrast to the horde that surrounds her. Goya's critical illustration reveals a palpable desperation and absurdity.

Robert Rauschenberg's, *Peace Portfolio I*, is a later example of how prints become a powerful tool in aiding political agenda. Created in 1970, *Peace Portfolio* is a collection of twelve original lithographs, by artists including Allan D'Arcangelo, Peter Ferber, Adolph Gottlieb, Stanley William Hayter, Lee Krasner, Ibram Lassaw, Robert Motherwell, George Earl Ortman, Robert Rauschenberg, Saul Steinberg, Esteban Vincente, and Larry Zox. These artists, well known and respected in their day, donated their artworks and all proceeds from the portfolio went directly to fund political campaigns of "peace candidates" with antiwar positions.

Rauschenberg's contribution to the portfolio *Ship Captain Faces Charge in Oil Spill*, combines newspaper clippings and photography to describe a political climate of protest and unrest. The headline of the main news clipping (which is also the title of the work) is not specifically war

related, but in the context of the collaged text and imagery, is part of a portrait of American concerns during the 1970's: oil, baseball, aviation, police vs. the counter culture and the war in South Vietnam.

Prints enable artists to share their work and perspectives throughout the world. From posters and manifestoes, to clothing and banners, if it can be multiplied, then it can be distributed and simultaneously a dissemination and documentation has begun. *Record Keepers* is a group exhibition composed of contemporary "print" artists, who strive to present/preserve current and historical events via their editions. *Record Keepers* looks at print as a contemporary way of editing content and playing with traditional ways of researching and printing. The documentation of our social landscape becomes a key underlying theme throughout all artists in the exhibit.

Alix Lambert's (Brooklyn, NY) *Courtroom Prints*, 2016, presents information based on sketches made during criminal courtroom trials. Lambert takes on the role of a courtroom artist — rendering official judicial documents. The lithographs combine quotes from the proceedings to give a more rounded portrait of the events being recorded. Alix Lambert's work is perhaps the most direct documentary practice included in the show. The artist's work also teeters in the realms of political commentary, as she chooses which court cases to present to the audience. Because of this, Lambert's work can be seen as an examination or critique of our judicial system.

Azikiwe Mohammed's (New York, NY) air brushed T-shirts, *Remember Us*, 2017, is the most politically oriented work in the show and is a painful critique of the United States' shameful racial reality. The T-shirts are recordings of unarmed black women murdered by police officers. The artist uses the medium of the T-shirt, as it is a common gesture of remembrance — especially in the black community — for those who have passed away tragically. Mohammed views the work as, "a pledge to try and do better, an offering of respect to those no longer here, and an opportunity for other people to do the same."

The Shapes Project: Threaded Shapes, 2005/2010, is a collaborative work by artist Allan McCollum (b. Los Angeles, CA; lives New York, NY) and master printer Judith Solodkin. The digital embroidery print editions are a continued investigation of the artist's ongoing Shapes Project, which is a combinatorial system to produce unique two-dimensional "Shapes." The algorithm allows for the making of enough unique shapes for every person on the planet to have one of their own. McCollum transforms statistical information (the world population) and creates a visual library. Each shape is unique, just like the individual it represents.

Elizabeth Moran's (b. Los Angeles, CA; lives New York, NY) *Farewell!*, 2009-2011, is a compilation of goodbye emails from an advertising firm that she worked for during the end of the recession. The emails are portraits of co-workers and friends and become a unique way

of documenting a point in time when layoffs were a frequent occurrence. Moran conceals the names of the *Farewell* writer, but keeps the date and timestamp of the sender's letter. The emails are shown in chronological order to add another layer to the story that is unfolded with each goodbye.

Aurora De Armendi's (b. Havana, Cuba; lives Brooklyn, NY), *Libro de las Preguntas (A Book of Questions)*, 2014-2015, is comprised of queries directed toward three groups of people — Haitian detainees, Cuban detainees and Guantanamo Bay employees, including soldiers, physicians and social workers — whose paths intersected in the early 1990's as Haitian and Cuban refugees were detained in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, under the supervision of the American military. De Armendi describes the work as, "a gesture of memory and reconciliation, to remember together." The questions in the book are written in Spanish, Haitian Creole and English. The artist not only documents an event and period of time but also takes record of her own personal history.

Emma Nishimura's (Toronto, Canada), *An Archive of Rememory*, 2016-2018, deals with the documentation of one's own personal history through a collection of narratives surrounding the Japanese Canadian internment. The archive explores memories and how one sorts, contains and navigates the weight of our own histories. Nishimura implements photo-intaglio and sculptural papermaking processes to create bundles that appear to be full. Each bundle, however, is empty — a shell that creates a skin of history — a timeline of the past. The bundles draw inspiration from a traditional form of Japanese packaging known as furoshiki, family stories have been layered into the folds of a wrapping meant to carry or protect. Memories have been captured, recorded and archived. Each bundle represents a different person's perspective.

Jo Baer (b. Seattle, WA; lives Amsterdam, NL) uses the matrix of a digital print to gather and compile information from both physical and digital collected material. The process drawings exhibited here were used to develop the print edition, In the *Giclée-ed Land of the Giants*, 2015. Baer plays with images in layers, digitally collaging the visual collections sourced from her myriad experiences. Building layer upon layer, Baer pushes the limits and allows for possibility in every new transaction. Scanning each reworked print brings further information to the computer drawing space. Baer's practice has been in constant flux for over half a century; now in her late eighties, the thrill of walking in uncharted territory has given her the confidence to accept the uncertainty of such oscillation.

Record Keepers contains elements from contemporary artists all capturing various histories through various types of processes, materials and editions. Though quiet in their own ways, there is a sense of urgency in all of the works. The documentation differs for each artist, but the goals remain similar — thorough research and the dissemination of that research into multiples. This exhibition embraces the edition throughout that process and looks to the artists to create exciting interactions between the process and the multiple.