

MONOTYPES

MARC SCHMITZ

MONOTYPES

Druckwerkstatt Künstlerhaus Bethanien Berlin

editions from 2013 -2015

„If you know what you're doing, you're wasting your time.“

- Buckminster Fuller

Monotypes An Abundance of Joy

or hue resultant from the simplest of print making technology, they are envisioned upon archival Bristol carton in optimal (all 100 x 70 Pantone / Steinbacher).

As an apart, in the literal sense, of former oil works which echo themes closely related to poetical inference and literati allegorical symbol, the monotypes assume a categorical "otherness" for the artist. The "other" in question is where philosophical connotations to nature achieves resplendence: colorist spectrum delivers an intense visceral impact and silences premeditations ascribed to the intellect.

Thus bereft of discursive elements, allegory or symbolic referentiality, the concept of the contemporaneous in practice is reduced to a plane of visual tension. This dynamic, visually reductive rather than minimalist in intent, offers works which are both exquisite and profound.

The spectrum yields minor gradations due to the process orientation of

this experiment. The artist has not succumbed to absolutism nor embraced the parameters of minimalism, rather, sought to deliberate the rudimentary basis of colour beyond configuration. Due to the technical pull of the apparatus, the sheerness of saturation fades in slight as we are drawn from the central fore of each print, an absent "line" demarcates and separates the visual composite due to process itself, while in fact, it works to complement the visual schemata.

Initiated in 2013, Marc began to develop his own technique of printing in the printworkshop Bethanien Berlin, which is one renowned, to experiment with an offset machine by overlying layers of prints to receive the blur at the edges, that he is interested in. The most these derivations of gaiety and spontaneity have been widely exhibited, chiefly, between Shanghai, Tianjin and the critically acclaimed Nakanajo Biennale in Japan.

The greater number untitled, it appears

the signature is left to one where the spectator is denied literary reference and left to interpret in a relatively "oblivious" manner. Several, bearing names which refer to seasonal change, infer that the artist has opted for a reasoning of a chronological fascinus which incurs the latency of historico-socio tradition in their indication of leitmotif/symbolic passage of time.

A manifest dedication to color, the series aspires to enliven the joy of life within their naïve employ, both exquisite given their aesthete quality and profound within a prominent simplicity.

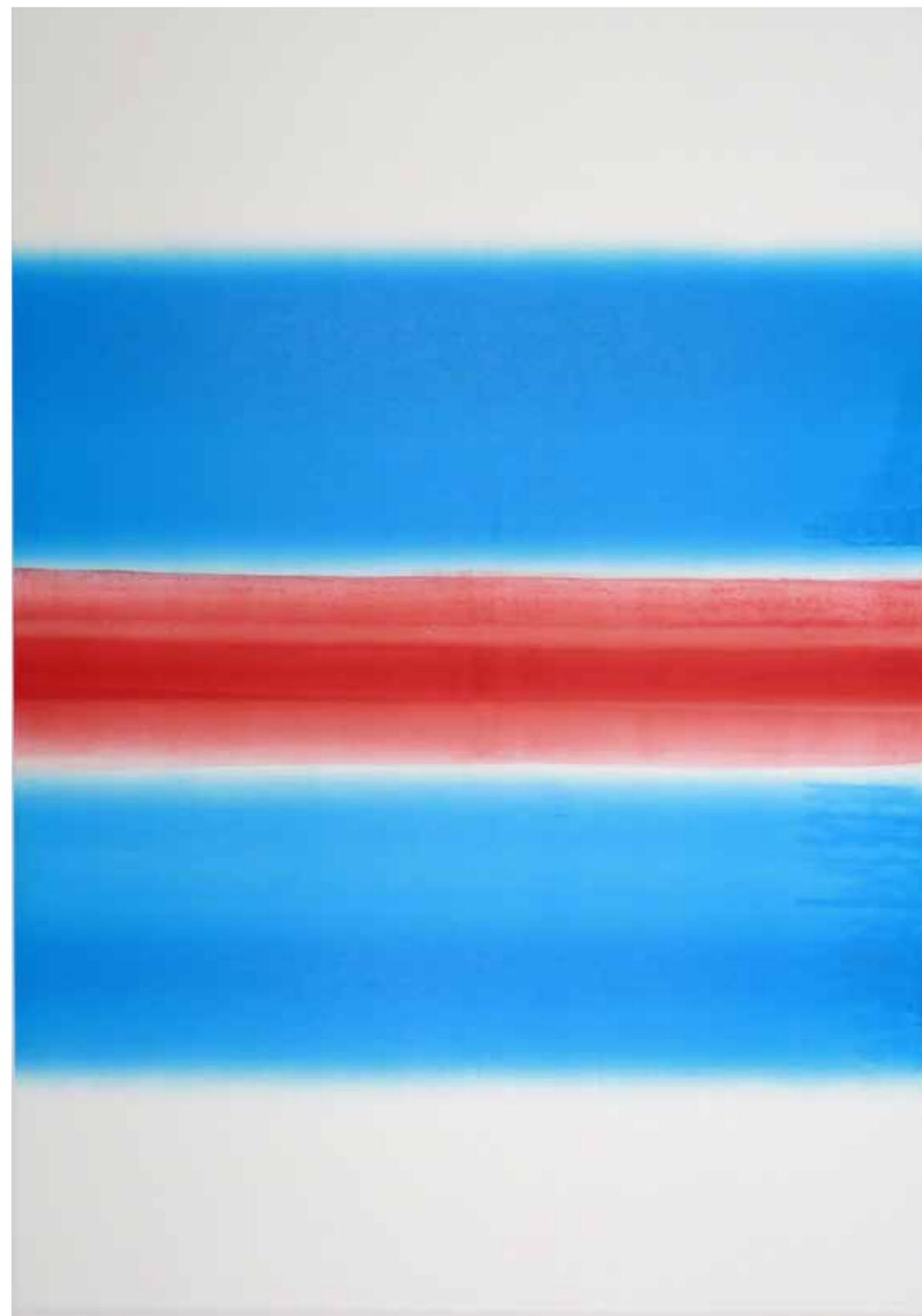
Poetical inference and literati allegorical symbol, one could just enjoy color, imagine a gaseous state or even take the works as decoration. Simply the clearness of the single prints by pointing out a very specific coming together of at least two shapes of color.

For an artist who has proven to be as polyvalent as Marc Schmitz, whose chief operations lies within conceptual and philosophical frameworks, the appearance of a series of bi-chromatic/tri-chromatic monotype prints might disarm those accustomed to more visually complex creations. The works resonate with poetical beauty, the fruit of the random of creation.

Void of figurative relief, the series are in fact the result of a simplified mechanical process, colour saturation combined with a non-linear composition allows for one to absorb the primacy of emotive impact. In owing to whichever gradation

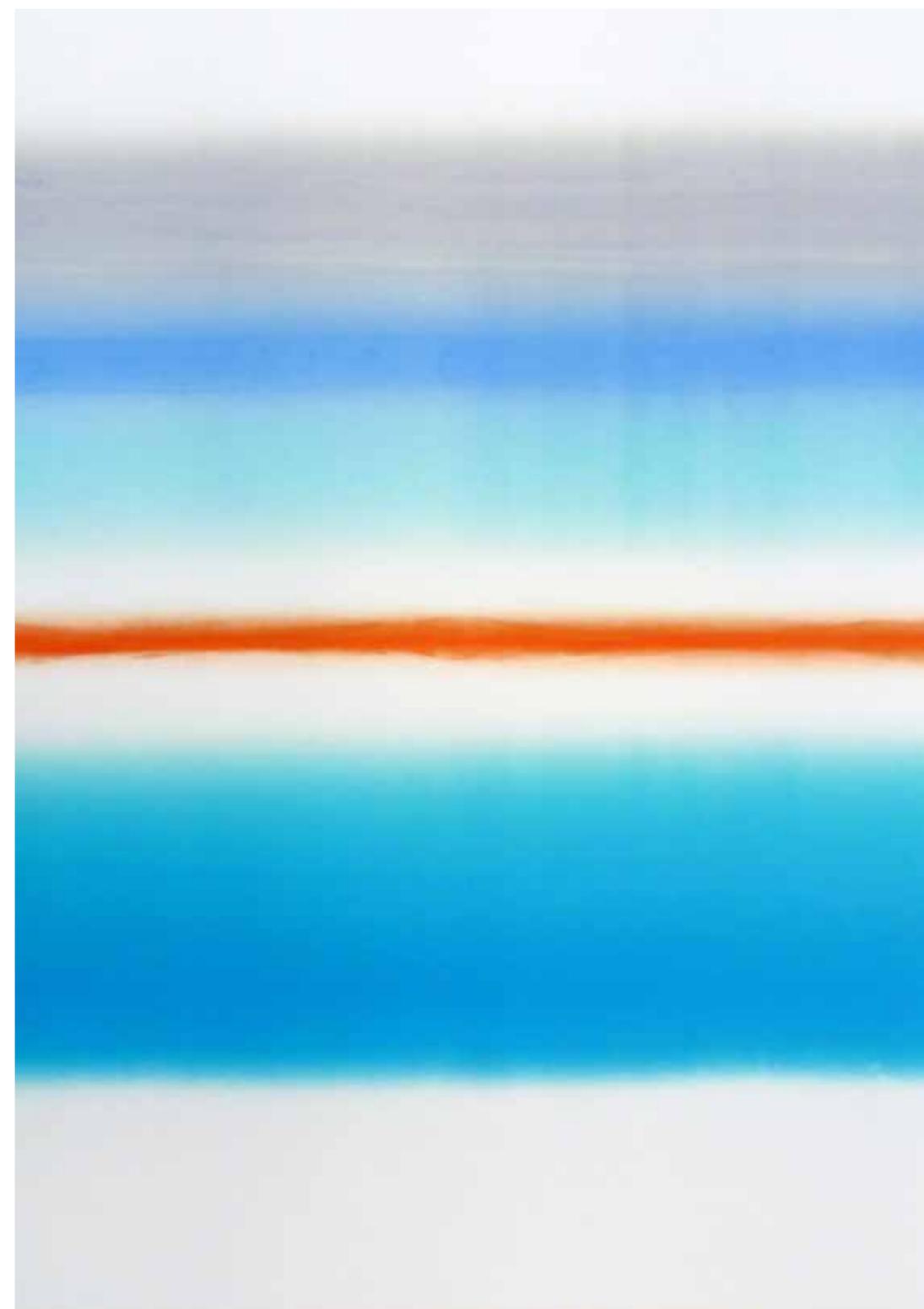
R.A. Suri

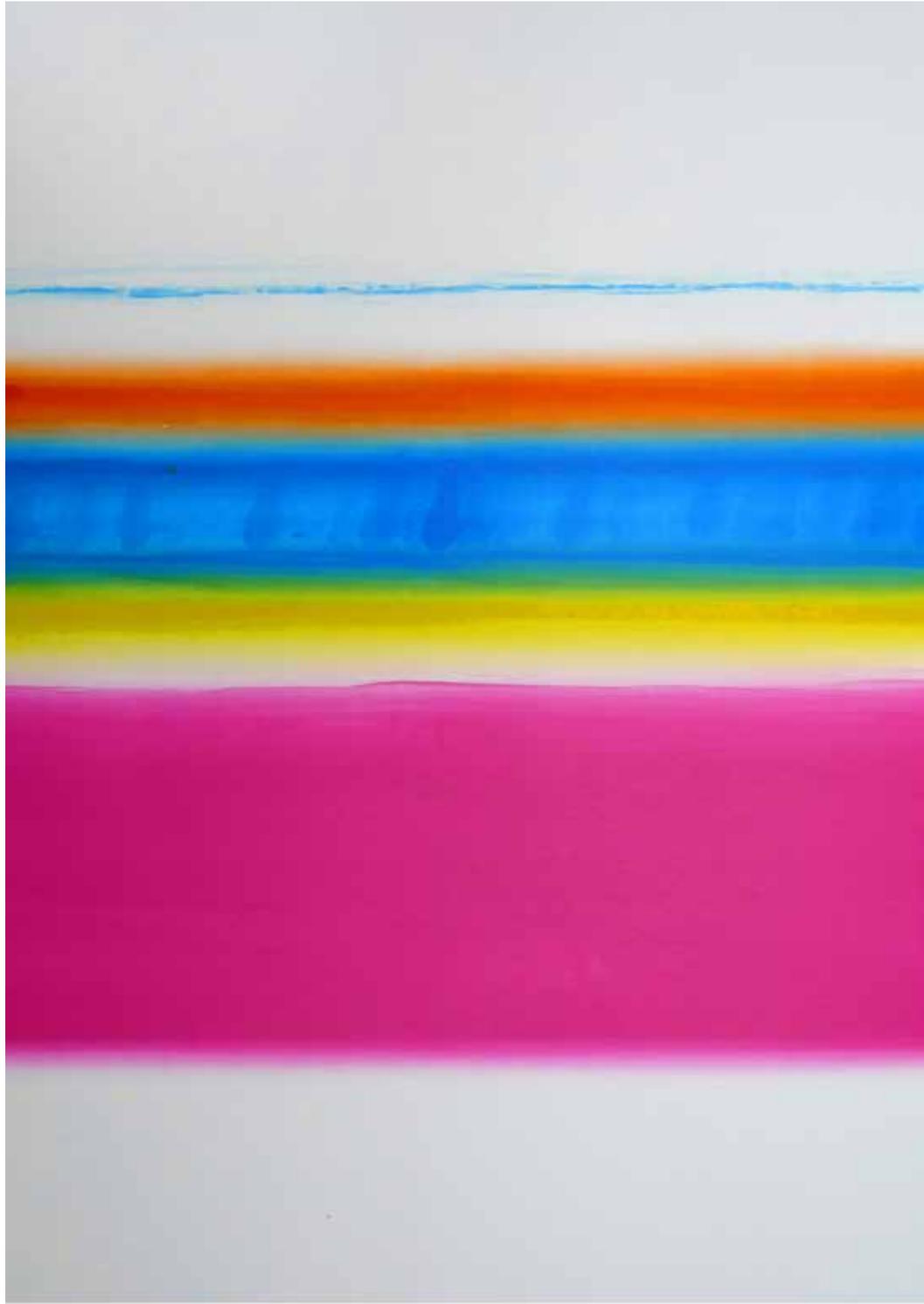
The best things in life are free... the second best are expensive - Coco Chanel

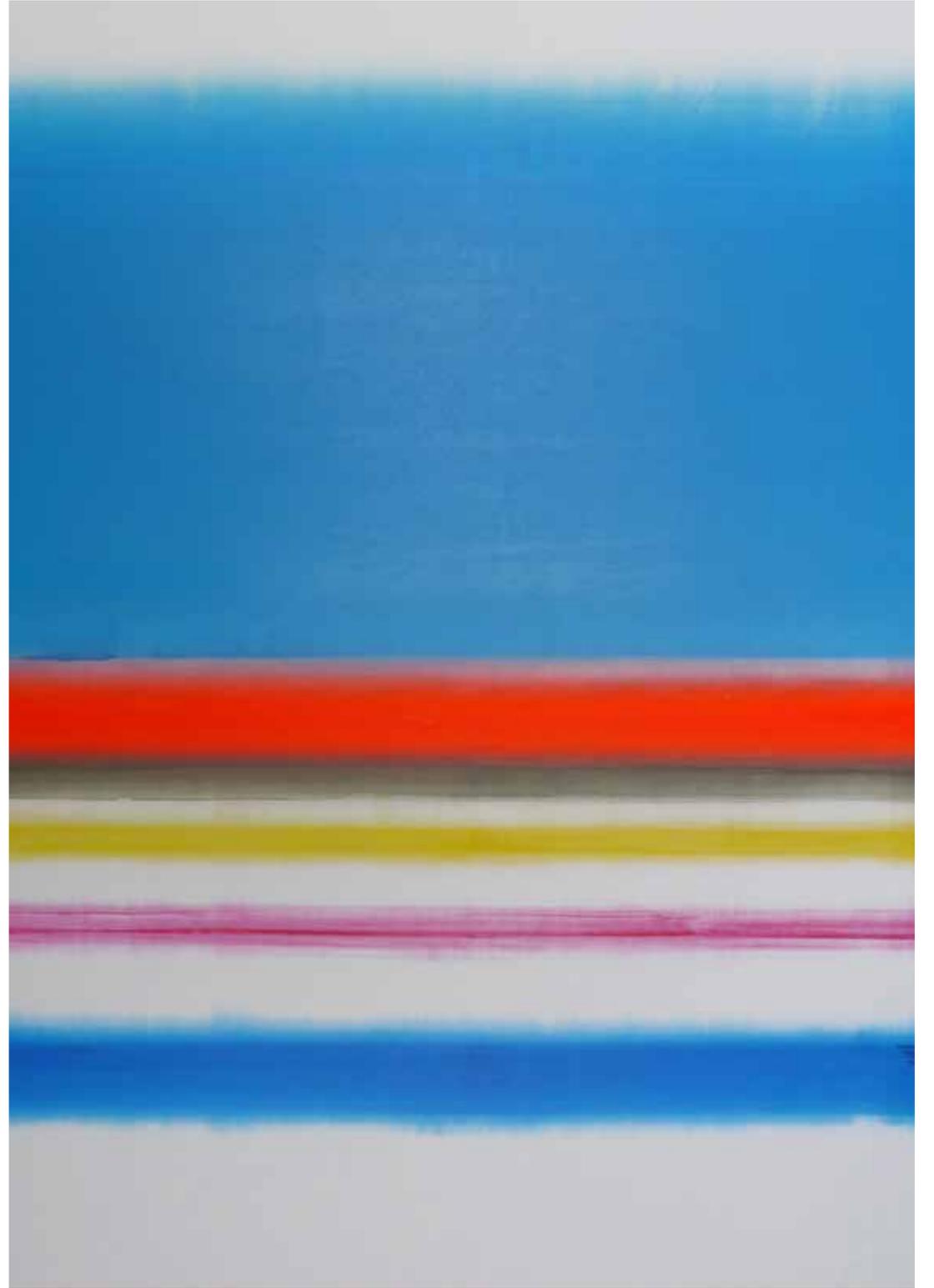








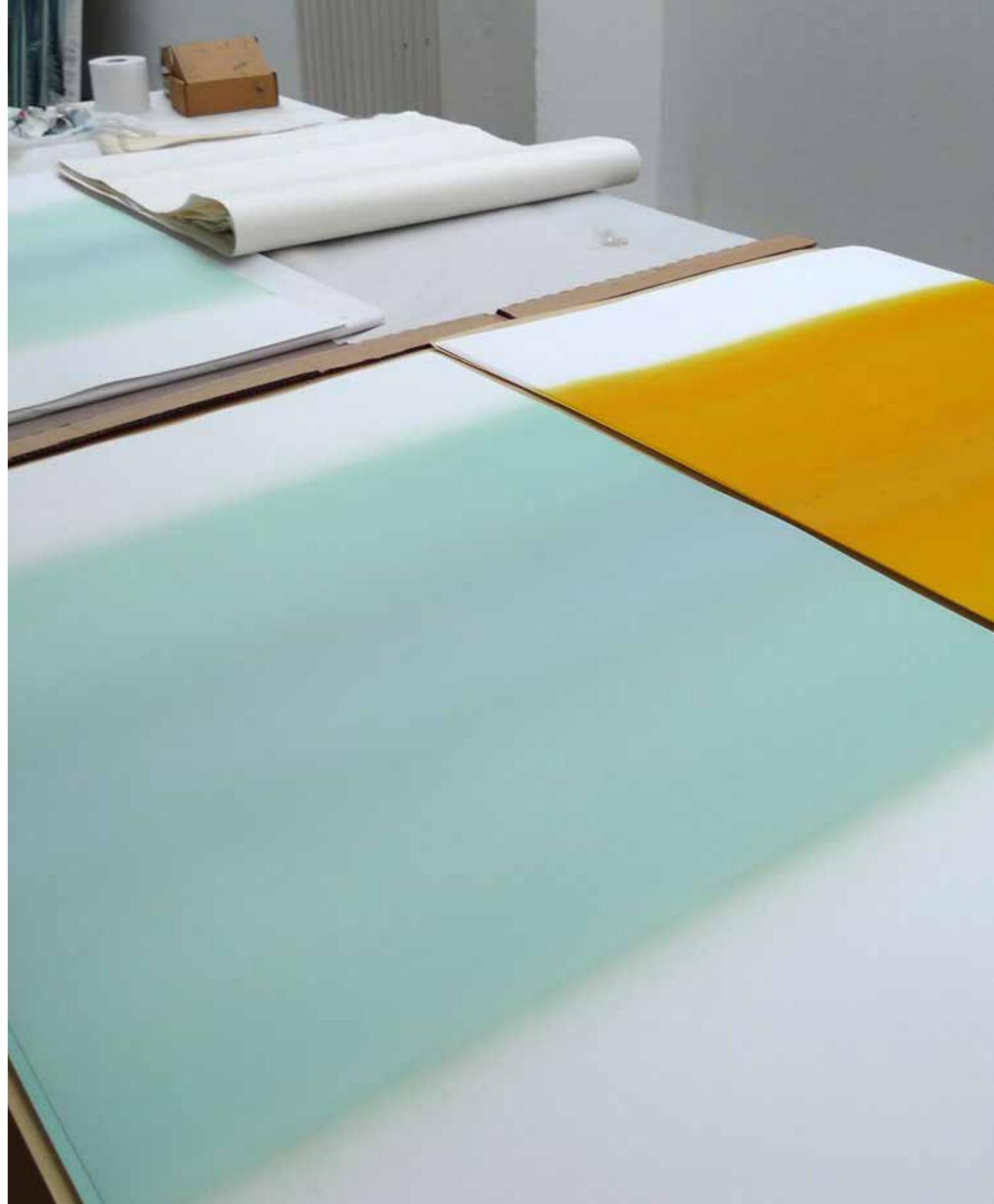




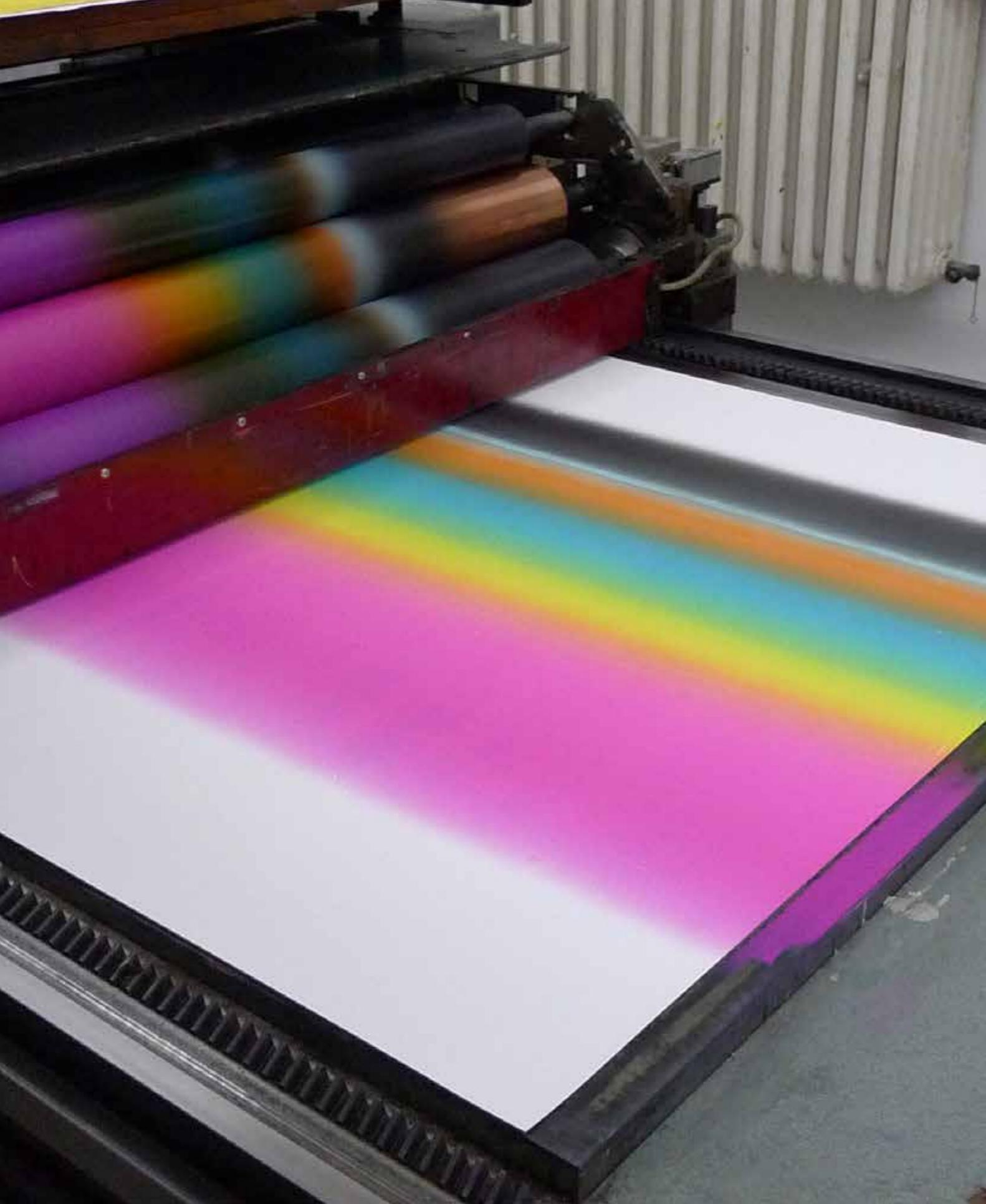












All monotyps are unique original art works printed with Pantone / Steinbecker on Bristol carton, each 100 x 70 cm. All Monotyps were created at the printworkshop Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin Kreuzberg, Germany.

The monotyps have been exhibited internationally as in TEDA contemporary art museum Tianjin, Goethe institute Hong Kong, Galerie Seitz & Partner Berlin, moproo shanghai, Nakanojo Biennial Japan, Art Changdu and Madrid, beside others.

All rights reserved. No part of this book might be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, including but not limited to photocopying, transcribing or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher.

© of all the pictures Marc Schmitz

text by Rajath A. Suri, Xian 2016

published by Kunstforum Berlin

printed spring 2016

represented by moproo Shanghai
Seitz & Partner Berlin
Schiefer & Greis Frankfurt

WHAT IS A MONOTYPE

Text by William Jung

Is it a monoprint or a monotype? Many publications use the terms interchangeably referring to works on paper as either monoprint or monotype regardless of how the images were created. This in turn leads to confusion among printmakers, artists as well as the general public. We hope to clarify this by first exploring the historical aspects of the monotype, some of its techniques and what is happening with this technique/medium in the contemporary art scene.

Historically what has come down to us as monotypes/monoprints were in existence since the time of Rembrandt (1606-1669). The monotype/monoprint was referred to subsequently by many different names such as: Adam Bartsch (1821) print cataloguer called the technique, „imitating aquatint“; Edgar Degas and Paul Gauguin called them „printed drawings“; in the 1880’s-1890’s they were referred to as monotones or monochromes, also around the 1880’s artists in the circle of Frank Duveneck in Florence and Venice called them „Bachertypes“ because they were printed by Otto Bacher on his portable press. Similarly the American illustrator William H. Chandlee who made monotypes on a glass surface, called his prints „vitreographs“ signifying glass prints, just as „lithographs“ were printed from a stone.

Around 1960 Henry Rasmusen, author of the first important book on the monotype 2, *Printmaking with Monotype* wrote that some artists preferred the term monoprint as a way to distinguish it from the commercial typesetting method known as monotype. Later on in 1975 David Kiehl, a print curator suggested a difference between monoprint and monotype. Monoprint according to Mr. Kiehl was a unique image pulled from an engraved or etched plate. Subsequently Jane Farmer an independent curator wrote in 1978 in the monotype exhibition catalogue which she curated the following definitions for

Monotypes are usually made by either painting or rolling inks onto a flat surface. This flat surface can be glass, Plexiglas, or sheet metal (etching plate). With the application of pressure the image will transfer onto the paper. Pressure can be the use of an etching or litho press, or hand pressure with a Pinpress, barren or any other means that will exert enough pressure to make the image transfer.

The ink used in a monotype can be applied with a brush, rag or rolled up with a roller or brayer. During the printing process depending on the method of application and the thickness and texture of the ink, the ink may spread and blur as it is blotted or absorbed by the paper. Usually the paper is placed on top of the plate used and the transferred image is a mirror image of the original. How the ink is applied and manipulated with all of its individual characteristics will be reflected in the print, which is what makes monotypes so unique.

both monotype and monoprint. Monoprint, she defined as „a unique image where part of the image is repeatable on a fixed matrix and part is not.“¹ For monotype, she defined it as „Éa unique image where none or the image is from a registered, repeatable matrix.“² This definition has become the standard for distinguishing the two techniques. This definition is however, difficult to apply to new and inventive ways of printmaking. Monotypes may be somewhat misleading because 2nd or 3rd images can often be pulled, called „ghosts“; „cognates“ or „second pulls“. Although much less intense than the original they tend to be more subtle, lighter and more atmospheric, characteristics which are often more desirable than the first pull.

HISTORY

Historically the first monotype was attributed to Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (1616-1670) a contemporary of Rembrandt (1606-1669). Both artists were painter-etchers, Rembrandt van Rijn in Amsterdam and Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione in Genoa. Both artists were experimenting with the printing process to create a tonal effect akin to their paintings. Although mezzotint was already invented it was still in its infancy and neither artist chose this particular path. Instead Rembrandt chose to leave film of ink on selected parts of his etched plates to create tone while Castiglione chose to draw into ink that was spread on a copperplate to create the first true monotype. It is believed that there was perhaps some cross-fertilization of ideas in that seeing some of Rembrandt’s etchings might have influenced Castiglione.

Rembrandt created monoprints where he changed day and night through the manipulation of the wiping of the plate, which had an etched image. Castiglione however in his quest for created tone in printmaking made some 22 known images where he separated the bitten line from the plate tone to become the first practitioner of the monotype process. The monotype process however was not picked up by any major artist of any significance for years to follow. Somehow the uniqueness of this particular printing process was not favored over the ability to mass-produce images using other printmaking processes.

The only major artist prior to Degas (1834-1917) to pick up on the monotype process was William Blake (1757-1827) who appeared to use it with egg tempera to create some of his images for his poems. Probably using a screw press he printed his plates which were of stiff cardboard where he had used egg tempera, a water medium as opposed to an oil medium to paint the outlines of his designs. He then painted broad areas of color onto the rest of the board and printed over the initial outlines. He may have gotten as many as 3 impressions from each ink up and with these he worked over using pen and watercolor. His technique with which he was quite secretive never quite caught on either because of this secrecy or perhaps because he was out of the mainstream at the time. It was not until the etching revival of the 1860’s that the monotype was also revived.

During the etching revival Vicomte Ludovic Napoleon Lepic (1839-1889) used a process he called, „l’eau-forte mobile“ (variable etchings) where he used one set of an etched image of a landscape and created 85 dramatic variations on the basic composition simply by the wiping of his plate. He advocated that the artist who used etching should be a painter or draughtsman who uses the needle and the rag as another uses the paintbrush and pencil. Lepic claimed

to have single-handedly inspired a new course for modern printmaking. „I claim authorship for ‚variable etching‘, that is for the labor of art that permits us to break with common practices and obtain such results with the liberty of ink and rag. Besides, regarding its exclusive control, without their having to ask for it and even to those publishers of engraving who might request it, I bequeath my rag to all artists.“³ His prints were monoprints and not true monotypes, but his etchings were so minimal and the attempts at creating paintings on the surface of the plate so ingenious that he is mentioned because of his influence on future artists like Degas.

Edgar Degas (1834-1917) picked up the „rag“ bequeathed by Lepic to become the greatest innovator and practitioner of the monotype in the nineteenth century. Edgar Degas by pushing the technique further than any artist before him made the monotype a more acceptable medium. He took advantage of the spontaneity of the medium and used it to its full potential, accidents and all. He experimented with the medium/technique to seek solutions to problems, which could not be fully explored with pencil or brush. As a result of this search, Degas created some 300-500 monotypes. Degas' enthusiasm affected other contemporaries who also explored the technique: Camille Pissarro, Mary Cassatt, and Paul Gauguin to just name a few.

In America the main practitioners of the monotype were Frank Duveneck, William Merritt Chase, Charles A. Walker, and Maurice Prendergast. Frank Duveneck (1848-1919) fame is owed to great part to the survival of his monotypes in Boston and Cincinnati and the documentation of his followers/students of their „bachertypes“ done in Venice and of their encounters with Whistler who may have been introduced to the monotype by them. William Merritt Chase (1849-1916) a painter and teacher who although was not the first to exhibit the monotype in America was a fashionable painter and as an

art teacher was instrumental in popularizing the process. Charles A. Walker (1848-1920) appeared to have discovered the technique of monotypes independently of Chase and Duveneck. His main subjects were landscapes and imagery from the Barbizon school. Of the four the only one to really integrate into his „art“ was Maurice Prendergast (1859-1924) who created over 200 monotypes. He exhibited and sold his monotypes throughout his career and although his monotypes were both well known and received there were few imitators.

The monotype process continued to grow both in Europe as well as in the United States. The „drawback“ with monotypes was that there was no continuing history or tradition and that each artist seemed to discover and rediscover the medium over and over again in his or her way. Many artists began experimenting with the process like: Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) who created over 100, Georges Roualt (1871-1958), and Henri Matisse (1869-1954). On the American side there was: Milton Avery (1893-1965), Adolph Gottlieb (1903-1974), Richard Diebendorn (b.1922), Robert Motherwell (b.1915), Mary Frank (b.1933), Nathan Oliveira (b.1928), and Jasper Johns (b.1930) to name a few of the better known contemporary artists. It is beyond the scope of this paper to include everyone who has done a monotype, but two books which are very good references are the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *The Painterly Print: Monotypes from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* and Joann Moser's *Singular Impressions: The Monotype in America*.

TECHNIQUE

Monotypes are primarily a painter's medium. Although it originated in the printshop it was born through the painter's imagination and

restlessness. It also became a perfect tool for exploring improvisation. Historically the first monotype by Castiglione was in the dark field also known as reduction or subtractive monotype. The basic technique entailed the rolling up of a non-porous surface and in the case of Castiglione most likely a copperplate normally used for etching at the time, with printing ink. Most likely it was first printed in the same manner as the etched plate due to its historic relationship to the etching with damp paper and an etching press. Similarly the plate was most likely prepared in much the same manner as an intaglio plate before „wiping“. In the dark field or reductive method the image is wiped with rags, finger or sticks which may very well have been the back of paintbrushes that can be used later to brush back into the image, to correct an edge or build tone. The removed or wiped areas would appear white in the finished print.

The second method that was probably realized from trial and error was that you can also approach the monotype from the additive or „light field“ manner. Here a clean plate is used as an empty field or canvas and printing ink is applied much like oil paints. While the ink was quite thick and viscous in the dark field monotype, in the light field it is thinned with solvent making the ink resemble something like watercolor. Where more tone was desired more ink was added, when softer tones were desired, more solvent was used.

Intrinsic to monotype is the bit of ink left over after the 1st print is taken. Second and even third pulls result in fainter images known as „cognates“, or „ghosts“. While all printing processes can yield lighter impressions their ghosts in monotype play a special role because they create a new set of tonal values, which can be, reworked or merely used references for the next image or series.

The technique of monotype is quite varied

and its beginnings has not been taught as much as rediscovered and reinvented by each artist who uses it. The artist in turn endows the technique with his or her own style, technique and artistic concerns.

The question arises as to why a monotype and not a painting or watercolor? Why a „print“? The answer may be that a great deal of surprise is built into the printmaking process where the image is: reversed, the image varies depending on how it's inked, how much pressure is applied, is it printed by an etching press or by hand using a baren? There are a lot of unpredictables involved and the spontaneity of the process demands energy, improvisation, gesture, expressiveness and directness. The artist must also appreciate the lushness and sensuality of working with ink.

CONTEMPORARY MONOTYPES

The idea of the monotype as being a „bastard child“ is no longer the prevalent case and has instead become the „favorite son“. Perhaps it is the changing of the times. Much like the etching revival of the 1860's there is a revival of the print by the artist. There are similarities because the wiping of a monotype plate had to be done by the artist, since the process of creating the image and the art of wiping the plate were identical. The idea of the artist manipulating the ink over the plate with their fingers and leaving their fingerprints have become a visual testimony to the artist's personal involvement in the printing process, not to mention leaving their actual fingerprints.

Milton Avery made some 250 monotypes during the 1950's, which he exhibited.

Although opening to critical reviews not one piece sold. Apparently the hybrid nature of the monotype and the lack of an edition turned off collectors of prints. Painting collectors were not interested because they viewed the monotype as a print. Recently, however Milton Avery's monotypes as well as monotypes by other artists have been enjoying unprecedented popularity. Artists who have never printed monotypes are trying it and those that have been printing monotypes are exhibiting them.

The rediscovery of the monotype appears to have been greatly influenced by both the showing of 78 of Degas's monotypes in 1968 by Eugenia Parry Janis and the subsequent catalogue, which reproduced more than 300 of his monotypes. Of equal importance was the exhibition organized by Matt Phillips in 1972, *The Monotype: An Edition of One* which traveled throughout the United States. Artists that were influenced by one or both were numerous. Of note were Nathan Oliveira, Michael Mazur, and Richard Diebenkorn. Not only were these successful artists but they were also teachers and educators. Their taking the monotype as a serious medium could only have enhanced its acceptance not only amongst the artistic crowd, but perhaps a whole generation of artists who studied under them either directly or indirectly.

Jasper Johns was also one of the artists to realize the potential of the monotype as a creative medium. His early forays into the medium were as result of his taking his discarded lithographs (which he was probably working with a master printer) and killing time by printing his own monotypes/monoprints over the „flawed“ lithographs. This is quite reminiscent of the etching revival when artist wanted to reclaim the print by freeing it up from the craftsman, i.e.: master printer.

In our own quest in creating „the painterly print“ we have searched along the lines of William

Blake and Gauguin in exploring the use of a water based medium to execute monotypes. Similarly artists are seeking less toxic ways to approach printmaking and monotype is one area where that is quite easy. Much like Milton Avery who took up the monotype in the 1950's after a heart attack or Adolph Gottlieb in the 1970's when his health began to decline or Reuben Kadish in the 1980's when their health declined, artists of the 1990's are actively seeking easier ways of creating prints like monotypes without having to wait until their health declined.

A fairly recent innovation involving monotypes has been the creation of the Monothon by Master Printer Ron Pokrasso, which harks back to Duveneck (1880's), and his „boys“ where monotypes were created as recreation during large gatherings. In the case of the Monothon artists are invited to create monotypes. There is a fee, but a sponsor can cover this. At the end of the Monothon printing sessions one print of each artist is chosen and the prints are both displayed and auctioned off. There have been Monothons in Sante Fe, New Mexico where it started to California and most recently at the Connecticut Graphics printcenter in Norwalk, Connecticut. Researching and reading about the history as well as the techniques involved in creating a monotype has been tremendously enlightening. Much like other painter/printmakers we thought we had stumbled upon this painterly printing technique all on our own. Instead, we learned that the monotype has been around as long as the 1640's when both Rembrandt and Castiglione, painter/printmakers were experimenting with creating tone in their etchings. Further research introduced us to the monoprinter Vicomte Ludovic Lepic, the „queer fish“⁴ as referred to by Degas who bequeathed his „rag“ to all, but it was Degas who realized the potential of this „rag“ and ran with it. Interestingly these „painted drawings“ were never exhibited widely if at all during Degas' lifetime, but somehow they managed to survive to inspire yet another ge-

neration of Artists like Michael Mazur, Richard Diebenkorn and Nathan Oliveira. The monotype has managed to maintain its momentum and has even managed to achieve its own website, www.Monoprints.com. So, we guess it is safe to say that the monotype will continue to grow and evolve even as we write this paper!

Notes

1 Moser, Joann. *Singular Impression: The Monotype in America*, (Washington, D.C.:The Smithsonian Institute Press, 1997) p. 2

2 Ibid., p.2

3 Metropolitan Museum of Art. *The Painterly Print: Monotypes from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), p. 19
4 Ibid., p. 23
Bibliography

Ayres, Julia. *Monotype: Mediums and Methods for Painterly Printmaking*. New York: Watson-Guption, 1991

Laliberte, Norman /Alex Mogelon. *The Art of Monoprint: History and Modern Techniques* (New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1974)

Metropolitan Museum of Art. *The Painterly Print: Monotypes from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980)

Moser, Joann. *Singular Impression: The Monotype in America*, (Washington, D.C.:The Smithsonian Institute Press, 1997)

© 1999 Rostow & Jung All Rights Reserved.

About the artist:

Marc Schmitz

is a conceptual artist and initiator of Land Art Mongolia. He studied Philosophy and Fine Art in Munich and Berlin. Marc participated in Busan Biennial 2004, Beijing Biennale the Sculpture Quadrennial in Latvia and exhibited internationally at the Zendai MoMA in Shanghai and Concert Hall Perth on the occasion of a concert by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra (solo) beside others, and was residence artist on several occasions in Korea, at Peace Art Hotel Shanghai or Goethe Institute Hong Kong.

2013 Marc Schmitz was presented at Venice Biennial in Giardini and 2015 at Trio Bienal Rio de Janeiro and Nakanojo Biennial Japan and at a solo exhibition, TEDA Contemporary Art Museum Tianjin.

He was awarded with the first prize for Art For Expo 2000 World Expo and with the prize of the jury at the 10th Cairo Biennial, amongst others. His work is represented in international collections such as National Art Gallery Beijing, swatch collection Shanghai or WSI N.Y.

