

Overboard: Knothole and Stump, 2012

K. Hudspeth

Edition of 50 produced for the Legal Art Community Supported Art project.

Collograph/chipboard relief; Intaglio-inked with a viscosity relief roll (on most); variable edition from two plates printed on Zerkall Copperplate. 15" x 11".

[Works are titled, numbered and signed on recto, the title being either "Overboard/Knothole" or "Overboard/Stump", depending on the matrix for that particular impression.]

The prints in this edition are hybrids of a few forms—the collograph, which is a print made from materials glued to a plate (which printmakers call the matrix); intaglio, which traditionally uses a metal plate of varying levels and is printed by pushing ink into the recesses of the matrix and wiping ink off of the surfaces, then pushing a dampened paper (with great force) into those recesses; and relief printing, which uses many different materials for the matrix—linoleum and wood being the most commonly recognizable, and which is functionally the opposite of intaglio in that recessed areas of the plate are non-image areas, and ink is applied to the surface of the matrix and printed on dry paper with much less pressure than intaglio.

The matrices for this edition were created by cutting areas out of chipboard [relief], gluing shapes cut from Bristol board to the chipboard [collograph], and covering the front and back with acrylic gloss gel medium to both protect the matrices from the oily ink and to make it easier to wipe the ink off of the matrices. The plates were inked in the intaglio method, which allows ink to enter very tiny recesses in the matrix, then another, translucent color of ink (at a lower viscosity, lower tack and higher oil content so that the two inks would not mix) was rolled over the surface of the plate in the manner of relief printing. The plate was then printed on an etching (flatbed) press at high pressure—the same pressure used for metal plates. The paper which received the impression is made of 25% cotton fibers and 75% sulfite (cellulose from wood which has had the lignin removed), and is damp when impressed. The dampness causes the fibers to swell, and the paper to be more malleable; the paper is able to be forced into the tiniest recess of the matrix, producing great detail when pulling the ink out of the plate, and especially in the case of this edition, produces a lovely deboss.

This edition is a variable edition, which means that the impressions are intentionally not identical. Generally, printmakers consider each impression to be a *multiple original*, because there are always slight variations in hand-pulled prints. Each hand-pulled impression is inked and printed individually; there's no magic button or automated process. For example, for this edition, the most I was able to print in one day was 14—and I was quite proud of myself for being so productive!

In our contemporary era, when digital identical multiples are easy for everyone to make, the idea of the *multiple original* is more important than it was in the recent past. Why pretend that the impressions are identical, when they are not? Why not be playful with color, or by using two plates of related imagery? Very often, printmakers think of an edition as a singular work that gets broken up and geographically dispersed. The individual impressions become isolated from one another, and of course do function on

that level, but they also have another meaning in aggregate—one that very often, only the printmaker is able to perceive. [For more about this idea, please read *Printmaking: Editions as Artworks*, by Timothy Van Laar, published in 1980 in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* (Vol. 14, No. 4).]

To relate this concept to farm-share type CSAs, after which the structure of this project is modeled, a hand-pulled print is like an heirloom tomato, while a digital or web-offset print is like a tomato that has been genetically engineered to streamline production—and which has similar tradeoffs: flavor or texture no longer has the spark of uniqueness, having been exchanged for commercial stability.

In terms of art, identical multiples are an artificial constraint imposed by the market, especially as far as digital files are concerned. The production methods used in hand-pulled prints often have wear limitations. The main reason I used two plates for this project is that the impression quality would have degraded because of plate-wear had I only used one to produce an edition of 50 prints.

Interestingly, artificially-limiting the edition size is a contemporary tactic; as late as the 19th century in Europe, prints were sold at different price points depending on plate-wear. The finest impressions were the most expensive (it's also important to note that these were not necessarily the first impressions pulled), while the impressions pulled toward the end of a plate's life were literally sold from the street for far less.

Sometimes, people think that the edition numbers indicate the order in which the impressions were pulled; this is usually never true—though, as you can imagine from the example above, it used to be the case that an impression with a high number often showed greater deterioration of the image than an impression with a lower number. In our own era, as long as the quality of each impression is within a certain range (the better the skills of the printmaker, the more stringent that range of quality is), a print can be placed in any order in the edition. A print numbered 1/x (or one out of the total edition size) could have been printed last! Impressions which are not numbered, such as proofs, are not considered to be part of the edition; ideally, they are also not sold, to preserve the market value of the numbered prints.

Another thing that is important to know when looking at hand-pulled prints is that it is usually the act of printing which causes the artwork to exist. Very often, artworks which are self-contained as digital files can quite happily exist solely on a screen. When such works are printed, they are considered to be *reproductive* prints—they replicate a pre-existing artwork. In contrast, most hand-pulled prints require the method of their making in order to be expressed. For example, I could not have created the work for this edition in any other way; a plate of differing heights and forms was required, inks were required, pressure and damp paper was required. Even looking at this work on a screen (phone, tablet, or computer monitor) is to perceive a simulacrum of this work; the tactility is lost, the deboss is invisible, the luminous sense of the reflection of light off of the paper surface, through a thin layer of ink to your eye is replaced by the projection of light from a screen to your eye. You might not think it should make a big difference, but it really does.

This edition was printed with a variety of Charbonnel inks; ink modifiers used were: litho varnish and Graphic Chemical's Easy Wipe as well as their Transparent Base. The inks were prepared in a kind of 'small batch' fashion; I mixed them at the start of each day's printing session, remixing a slightly different color from the remains of the first, according to my mood (thinking of different seas, shallow or deep waters, or different types of wood) as I would run out.

The content of the artwork for this edition takes as its subject the Middle Passage. The title *Overboard* refers to the act of throwing living people, ill and enslaved, into the sea in order to stem the spread of disease on slave ships, as well as to try to make insurance claims against 'cargo' loss. The knothole and stump, both forms of wood, stand in for gendered bodies, objectified, commodified—a people forced to become (hewn and cut, stacked and inventoried) raw materials for the creation of the New World from which many of us still benefit and for which many of us still suffer. I have tried to make the work beautiful, so that people will look at it rather than away from it; I have tried use my own white privilege to make this content visible to others possessing white privilege. I hope that before the content is known, the work seems delicate, lovely, peaceful and pleasant, but that after the content is known it seems cold, lifeless, grim and accusatory.

Kathleen Hudspeth is a printmaker who incorporates many different printmaking methods into her work. She is an Adjunct Instructor at New World School of the Arts for both the high school and college. She'll be opening a printshop soon in downtown Miami that will offer classes outside of an academic context. Her website is: thenextfewhours.com/KH, and you can read her occasional musings on printmaking there as well as see a larger sample of her body of work. She received her BFA from the University of Texas at Austin in 2000, and her MFA from the University of Miami in 2009. She is a Miami native whose family has been living here since 1927.