

Wo(rk)manship of Risk

Victoria Browne, Associate Professor of Print and Publishing

"Diversity imports into our man-made environment something which is akin to the natural environment we have abandoned." The Nature and Art of Workmanship, David Pye, 1968

This exhibition is the material outcome of transforming reduction into isometric tessellating multi-plate relief prints, and to introduce the 'workmanship of risk' versus the 'workmanship of certainty' within my artistic research. The project expands on knowledge gained from ongoing workshop-led practice; to overcome previous process limitations in the methodology, to realise scalable complex multi-plate configurations and to generate further exploration into colour printing.

Post-Digital Craft

I began drawing leylandii foliage in Oslo's suburbia, by working from observation with charcoal on paper. These sketches later informed the layout of a photomontage, to convey an impression of openness and movement; a strategy to remove the single lens perspective and to combine with painting's formal diagonal line. The composition was divided by a grid and used as a point of reference in the workshop; visible on a digital tablet whilst hand-carving the linoleum matrix. A reduction relief print was executed in the workshop and for each layer of colour; a separate print was transferred from the matrix, digitally translated on an A3 Epson scanner and auto-traced with *Vector Magic*.

The vector files in post-production were not only cleaned-up to be 'press-ready', but an additional editing stage was required to transform them into a multi-layered isometric tessellating composition. *Symmetry Works* was originally intended to automate the process, but the complexity of the files proved to be incompatible and I was compelled to find an alternative solution. The workflow was slower and relied on eye-hand coordination, following a process of a trial and error. However, this was eventually achieved in Adobe Illustrator by overlapping two sides of the composition to erase or extrude the vector paths.

I had originally intended to CNC-router the linoleum laminated matrices myself at KHiO. But due to the limitations of the equipment, the learning curve of *Rhino* and the complexity of the digital files, this process was eventually delegated to a knowledgeable technician, though even he had a limitation of time. In the rush to CNC-router five matrices, irregularities had to be incorporated, which could only partly be resolved by hand at a later stage in the printing process.

In hindsight, KHiO's workshop environment was unable to support the 'workmanship of certainty', but the open access facilities at the Fellesverksted may prove to be a viable alternative in the future. Their new premises in Oslo opened in January 2020; CNC-routers are set up for artists to access themselves with a straightforward learning curve in *V-Carve*. When I compared the CNC-routed matrices to the original vector files, the tests at the Fellesverksted proved to be more accurate than those I employed in my artistic research at KHiO.

Back in the print workshop, the choice of colour palette on the printing press was informed by Edvard Munch's 'Death in the Sickroom' 1893, held in the National Museum of Oslo. I colour matched the original painting by eye with a pantone swatch book and with photographic documentation on a smartphone. Translating these colours into a reductive printing process was a significant challenge and after considerable proofing, eventually resulted in twenty colours transferred with ten print passes on five CNC-routed matrices.

The outcome incorporated Zuber's panoramic aesthetic, William Morris' half-drop repeat and Josef Frank's playful turning of the matrix. In addition, I explored isolating the gradient rolls of multiple colours and re-registering the matrices; to generate a visual perception of flux and diversity in the isometric repetition of the composition. And with the 'workmanship of risk' in mind, I attempted to devise a new method of amplifying colour graduations vertically, horizontally and diagonally across a predetermined sequence of sheet paper; in essence, to scale-up the original print into a larger immersive backdrop.