

DOCUMENTS

A SERIES OF MONOTYPE PRINTS BY PHOEBE COLLINS
EXHIBIT CURATED BY AIDAN WRIGHT

When we study performance art, more often than not we are confined to doing so via the documentation that is left behind—looking at film or photographs of a performance instead of experiencing the artwork itself. I began this series of prints while taking a class about the history of performance art, when I had to consider what that degree of separation from the original piece meant to me.

If you are interested in learning more about my printmaking process, the conceptual basis of this project, or questions that arose while I have been making this work, please feel free to take this packet with you as you visit the gallery! The text included here has *not* been posted on the walls so that visitors might have their own individual experience with the work, independently of whatever explanation or details I might provide. Please return this printout before you exit the space so that the next visitor has the same option—and I encourage everyone to seek out the work of the artists represented here for further consideration.

Special thanks to:

Frazer Ward for getting me started with this series, Barry Moser and Lindsey Clark-Ryan for helping me to keep going. Aidan Wright for her curation knowledge, installation skills, and thoughtful feedback on everything I make. Shreya Dwibedy for helping me to photograph my process, and for company during many late nights in the studio. Ruby Lowery & the OSE Staff for the use of this space and making this exhibition possible.

Phoebe Collins is a senior majoring in Studio Art with a minor in Ancient Studies. Currently, she is focusing on printmaking, illustration, and book design, but has begun to explore performance & public art in her own practice as well. A love of detail and a diligently cultivated sense of patience support her work in any medium. Outside of her time in the studio, she can be found on the airwaves at WOZQ where she serves as both DJ and Station Manager.

Aidan Wright is a senior majoring in Art History with a focus on postmodern and contemporary art. She is currently investigating the relationship between the works of artist Cy Twombly and classic texts such as *The Iliad*. She dabbles in art-making as well and has an unsatisfied desire to become better at abstraction. Outside of Smith, she can be found at A.P.E. gallery where she works as a gallery assistant, occasional curator, sales conductor, instagram manager, and submissions committee member.

ARTWORKS ILLUSTRATED IN THIS SERIES

“Documents” includes prints of six performances by artists working in the latter half of the 20th Century:

- “Cut Piece” (1964) by Yoko Ono
- “Catalysis IV” (1971) by Adrian Piper
- “Tompkins Square Crawl” (1991) by Pope. L
- “Rhythm 0” (1974) by Marina Abramović
- “One Year Performance (Outdoor Piece)” (1981-82) by Tehching Hsieh
- “Up to and Including Her Limits” (1973) by Carolee Schneemann

The choice to illustrate these specific artworks was based almost entirely upon the quality of the documentation available to me, and how well I thought it would translate to printmaking. I was looking for images with a strong ratio of positive to negative space, as well as an interesting composition. Each image has its own status, arguably just as much as the performance itself. They embody a kind of mythology surrounding the piece, as icons of a particular performance and even of the artist themselves.

With these prints, I was trying to study the purely visual aspect of a performance—or of the documentation, since both things are at play—to get the artwork to operate in a different format. The goal was not to re-perform a piece (although this has been done too, like in the case of Marina Abramović’s “Seven Easy Pieces,” 2005). Instead, my goal has been to recreate the imagery associated with these artworks in an entirely different medium.

See the photographs on display here for a look at how the original performances (and their documentation) compare to the resulting prints.

THE PRINTMAKING PROCESS

The technique used here is known as “monotype,” a process in which a single print is produced at a time, as opposed to many other printing techniques (woodcut, lithography, silkscreen, etc.) which are used in order to produce a number of exact duplicates. My technique has changed somewhat over the course of this project, but I have

provided a general description here.

For the majority of the series, I used a combination of inks: black Speedball ink, Windsor & Newton colored illustration inks, Dr. Martin's iridescent calligraphy ink, and most recently Hanco Lithography ink. I worked with a limited number of brushes, a limited number of colors, etc. so I could experiment and figure out what was working. Because of the constraints of the medium, the process moved fast (most of the prints averaged 45 minutes - 1 hour of work) and I could learn from making them just as quickly.

Originally, I was working in a painting studio on a large glass tabletop. I placed blown-up photographs on the table underneath the glass so I could draw directly from the image and create more or less accurate copies. For each print, I hinged one side of a piece of paper with tape so that it could flip back and forth without shifting. This allowed me to overprint as many times as I needed using the palms of my hands to transfer ink onto the paper. Lately, I have been working in the printmaking studio instead, using sheets of clear PET-G plastic as opposed to glass, and pulling prints by running them through the press only once or twice.

I think that monotype is the ideal technique for this project. Performance being a time-based medium, it relies on ephemerality—an event that happens once—and while it may be repeated, can never be recreated exactly. There are multiples of each print in this series, but because they are monoprints, they are also distinct individuals.

The image is slightly different each time, but more than that, the application of ink to paper via a sheet of glass is unpredictable. I'm working in conversation with the medium as much as I am directing and participating in the process. I find the unpredictability and the individuality of the prints to be their most interesting qualities: they are both obviously the same and obviously different at the same time. The texture that appears within the ink is totally out of my control—half of the anticipation of making these was just seeing what the ink would *do*.

For a truly in-depth look at what goes into making one of these prints, watch some the film being projected in the gallery (full run time: 29 min, 9 sec.)

GESTURE OF THE BODY

The strongest point of connection between the printmaking process and the performances themselves is the gesture of the physical body. I may not be re-performing these pieces, but am I performing something different when I pull a print? Or at least, performing the formal qualities of the pre-existing artwork?

I have been very aware of movement when working on these—my movement around the studio and the feeling of contact that comes from pulling the prints by hand, as well as the movement ink on glass, the expansion/contraction of the paper as it absorbs ink, and so on. I have been actively, physically involved in the printmaking process, just like the materials relating to one another, and just like a performance that engages the body of the artist.

Even if my own participation as a body were not explicitly on display here via photographs and film, it would still be visible: the gestures, lines, and pressure of my hands are just further evidence of my physical involvement.

THE QUESTION OF THE AUDIENCE

Since it is possible to experience a performance artwork first-hand, as well as by viewing the documentation afterwards, there is both a primary and secondary audience, respectively. This series of prints is reliant on the fact that I am a secondary audience member myself, and it wouldn't be possible to create this work unless the film/photographic documentation already existed. Not only that, but it wouldn't be possible to create my prints as documents of the performance in the way another medium might allow (like photography, film, even a pencil sketch).

By that logic, I pose the following questions: are viewers of my prints a tertiary audience? How far removed from the actual performance can you be while still acting as an audience member of any given performance?