



RANDY GARBER:
Reverberations

RANDY GARBER:
Reverberations

March 5 - April 18, 2010
Curated by Ruth Hall Daly

Randy Garber's art is intelligently and emotionally loaded. She produces works with a mastery of technique that adds resonance to the narratives we inevitably construct when we encounter her images. Garber's art draws on her particular experiences and situations to produce intensely personal yet broadly human images, ones that demand dialogue and reflection. She is an artist who understands the power and complexity of visual communication in a profound and nuanced manner.

Jim Richard Wilson
Director, Opalka Gallery

To My Heart the Waters Rise, 2004, gouache, watercolor, gold leaf on Wasli paper, 8½" x 7"



Reverberations

The visual persists until its disappearance; the sonorous appears and fades away into its permanence.
- Jean-Luc Nancy¹

In *I See a Voice*, Jonathan Ree examines, critiques, and laments the escalating oppositional traditions of orality and ocularity in the 20th century. Ree writes on the “philosophical and sociological anxieties about the voice . . . Literature, or written language in general, was not the companion of speech, but its opponent, because it belonged to the open world of light, space and the eye, not the closed world of sound, time and the ear.”² Ree disputes this perceived divisiveness of voice and text and other miscalculations as “shadowy metaphysical prejudices” and challenges the assumption “that language has two fundamentally different forms: audible speech which occupies time but not space, and visible writing which occupies space but not time.”³

Ree’s exploration of the phenomenon of voice and the auditory, inevitably invokes questions of communication, perception, and the physical senses that shape experience. He acknowledges – and many experience – that vision and touch “appear to be more reliable guides to the objective realities of nature than hearing.”⁴ Yet hearing has a unique and dynamic relationship with vocality. “It is a miniscule contingency in a way, but a metaphysical anomaly as well, and not unconnected with the special values and anxieties that have woven themselves into the phenomenon of the human voice.”⁵ Most, but not all, people can hear, make themselves heard, and hear themselves. Yet for the deaf or hearing-impaired, this triangular relationship is profoundly challenged, if not unhinged.

What Ree describes as a phenomenon could be characterized as an enduring conundrum of positions, perspectives, and misinterpretations. For more than a dozen years, Randy Garber has been preoccupied by these strikingly elusive, but tenacious, questions of hearing, listening, speaking, signing, and the always inadequate probes and processes deployed to navigate, represent, and make meaning in (and of) the human condition. Her prints, paintings, and installations actively contract and dilate, shifting from intimate to expanded scales to map her own history within phenomenological and epistemological observations.

Printmaking is the adaptive instrument that Garber most frequently wields to mobilize her deepening research into the vagaries of communication and provisional constructions of meaning(s). She uses historical and traditional processes to bring insight to urgent contemporary issues. For her, printmaking is never a benign endeavor. Sharp tools, abrasive materials, and corrosive fluids incise, erode, damage, and compromise surfaces of copper plates and other materials. Frequently, new marks are applied that dim and muffle, if not annihilate, preceding evidential strata. Requiring extraordinary attention and precision, its essential character emerges in the abrading tensions of creation and destruction.

In this active realm of exactitude and ambiguity, density and spatiality, cacophony and silence the work becomes manifest. Garber's prints are hybridized, heterogeneous, and endlessly amendable, negotiating her iconographies with other established representational systems such as maps, graphs, and other ways to present and envision information. In the unfolding time required to create densely inscribed and populated surfaces, consciously formed thoughts intervene in embodied gestures. In Garber's work, there is the vivid sense that a process may pause or stop, but the animating subject of speculation has no end.

What You Already Know (2008), is a multiple, constitutively inconclusive meditation on communication and comprehension. The family of prints was inspired by the death, in 2007, of the chimpanzee Washoe at the age of 42. Applying feed forward theory, researchers Allen and Beatrice Gardner trained Washoe to use (communicate with) American Sign Language. She was the first non-human to acquire human language and reportedly passed this on to her adopted son, Loulis. One print in the series, titled *What You Already Know*, obsessively repeats "what you already know" in Farsi, Arabic, English, and other languages. The linguistic patterns form a dense, labyrinthine frame around a silent expanse of white. A companion print (*Frames Trump Facts, re: George Lakoff*) a cacophonous hive of the same refrain in multiple languages forms in the center of the paper where it episodically convenes in legibility or collides in inscrutability.

Another print, *Everything is Illuminated*, is a diminutive, isolated illuminated manuscript producing a singular, iconic effect. In colloquy, another print (*It's a Toss Up Any Way*) is populated with miniature images in an eclectic glossary of intellectual resources and personal touchstones. Other prints (such as *The Wonder of It All*) represent neural and reverberatory circuits of organisms' brains, errant cellular growth, a monkey as well as traces of the somatic and symbolic processes that cooperatively shape perception to compose, at least conditionally, meaning. With its dialectical orchestrations of presence and absence, centrality and marginality, and precision with the enigmatic, *What You Already Know* is a genealogy of the persistent, preoccupying ideas that echo in all of Garber's work.

"Without writing, words as such have no visual presence, even when the objects they represent are visual. They are sounds. You might 'call' them back – 'recall' them. But there is nowhere to 'look' for them. They have no focus and no trace . . . not even a trajectory. They are occurrences, events."⁶

COGNITIVE Dissonance (2008) also presages Garber's most recent installations. On player piano scrolls with their sonic punctures and stenciled lyrics, she applied layers of woodcuts and reliefs on both sides of the paper. Installed with one edge to the wall, the scrolls coil and unwind to create a meandering path like intensities and digressions of thought or conversation. Emancipated from its flat, graphic conventions, the print is elusive and fugitive. Reading the work is partial and intermittent as passages of the scroll reveal their content while others are obscured and withheld. This striking image of sonority and silence invokes the variances and incommensurability of language.

Listening (2010) is a familial series of three installations (*Transmit, Receive, Connect*) that I saw in development in the artist's studio. One work (*Transmit*) is a matrix of many hollow copper pipes of various dimensions, suspended and densely arranged like passages of text. The general structure reveals a stunning granularity; the surface of each pipe has been marked and inscribed with grams and glyphs before being placed in etchant. (A print, however, is never in sight.) Clenched in constricted cylinders, many signs are confoundingly inaccessible. Even with extreme attentiveness, only peripheral perspectives and bounded understanding are derived in this cascade of spinning information.

"If I stop the movement of sound, I have nothing – only silence, no sound at all. All sensation takes place in time, but no other sensory field totally resists a holding action, stabilization, in quite this way. Vision can register motion, but it can also register immobility. Indeed, it favors immobility, for to examine something closely by vision, we prefer to have it quiet. We often reduce motion to a series of still shots the better to see what motion is. There is no equivalent for a still shot of sound."⁷

Another work (*Connect*) is an errant cartography of fragmented and deteriorating copper plates – the essence of Garber's reiterative process – tenuously connected by a network of plastic tubes. In the transparent vessels, small copper shards and scrapings from the degenerating plates look like sloughed, clotted cells. Casting irregular shadows on the wall, this detritus of a creative process becomes a phantom grammar.

The third installation (*Receive*) evocatively presents the conceivability (and possible futility) of reception and communication. Cone-shaped, copper frames are armatures for taut, translucent skins of prints. Like satellite dishes, ear trumpets, megaphones, or the labyrinthine cochlea of the ear, these strategically scattered – and perhaps fruitlessly industrious -- objects appear to randomly pivot to capture or transmit sound.

In *Listening*, Jean-Luc Nancy writes, "Why, in the case of the ear, is there withdrawal and turning inward, a making *resonant*, but, in the case of the eye, there is manifestation and display, a making *evident*. Why, however, does each of these facets also touch the other, and by *touching*, put into play the whole system of the senses? And how, in turn, does it touch perceived meaning? How does it come to engender it or modulate it, determine it or disperse it? All these questions inevitably come to the forefront when it's a question of listening."⁸

Garber orchestrates a passionately experimental engagement with the processes of printmaking with deepening and discursive investigations of the vagaries of communication and the unsettled character of meaning. With sensitivity and daring, she has made investigative printing both the vehicle to and visual representation of the relationship of language, listening, and apprehension. The work resides in – and invites viewers to be keenly attentive to -- the sensory, somatic world of hearing and vision, as well as culturally coded realm of listening and visuality. A compelling guide in the pursuit of intelligibility, this fiercely searching work refuses resolution.

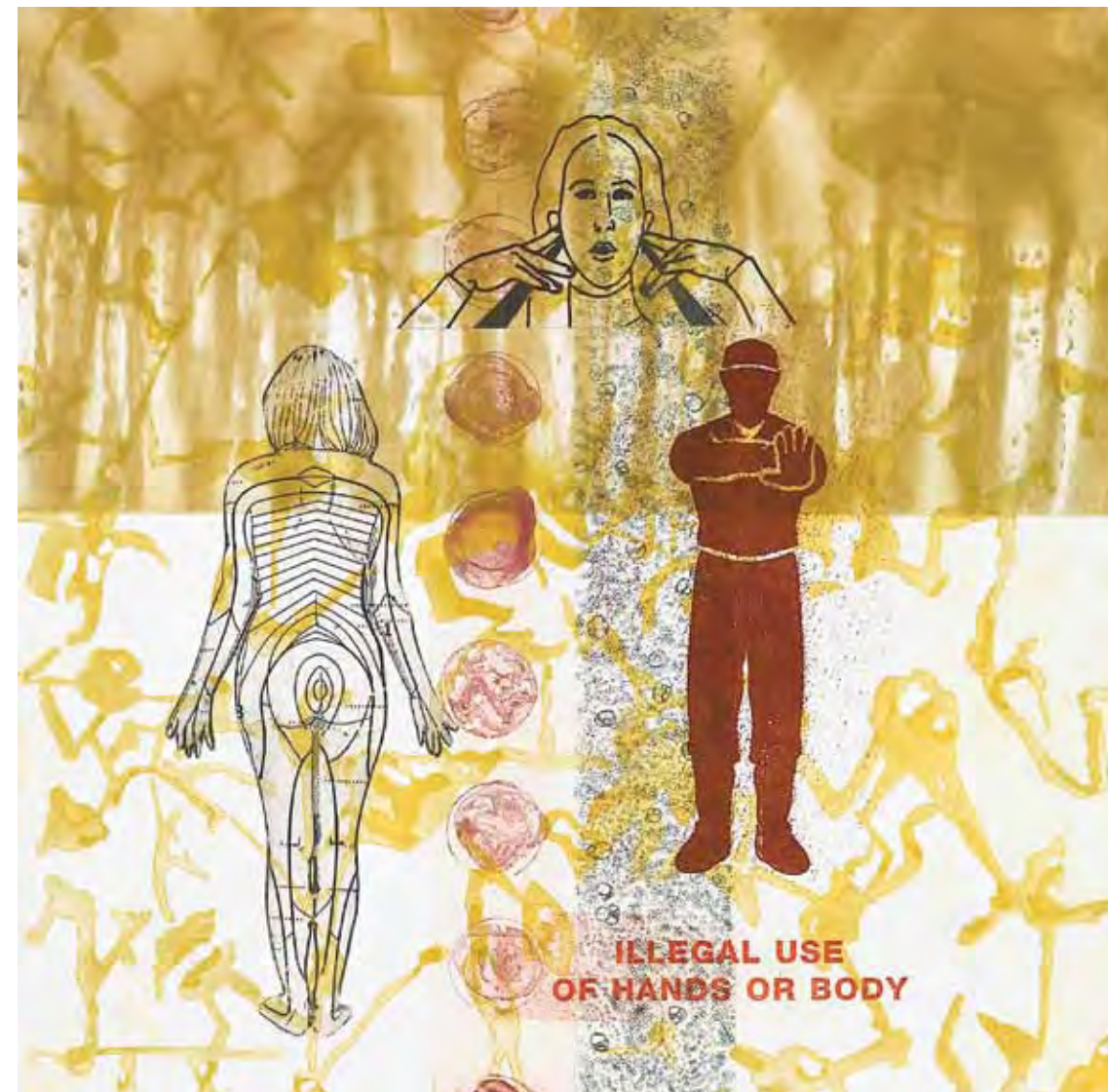
- Patricia C. Phillips

Patricia C. Phillips' research and critical writing involve contemporary public art, architecture, sculpture, landscape, and the intersection of these areas. Since 1980, her essays and reviews have been published in *Artforum*, *Art in American*, *Flash Art*, *Sculpture*, and *Public Art Review*, as well as books and collected essays published by Rizzoli International Publications, Princeton Architectural Press, M.I.T. Press, Actar Press, Bay Press, and Routledge. She is the author of *It is Difficult*, a survey of the work of Alfredo Jaar (Barcelona: Actar Press, 1998). She also has contributed major or sole texts in numerous monographs and exhibition publications.

From 2002-2007, she served as Editor-in-Chief of the *Art Journal*, a quarterly publication on contemporary art published by the College Art Association. She is the editor of *City Speculations* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996). She is on the editorial advisory board of *Public Art Review*. Since 1984 she has held a number of faculty and administrative appointments at various institutions including: Parsons School of Design, State University of New York at New Paltz, and Cornell University. She is currently Dean of Graduate Studies at Rhode Island School of Design.

Notes

- 1 : Jean-Luc Nancy. *Listening*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007. p. 2
- 2 : Jonathan Ree. *I See a Voice*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999. p. 5
- 3 : Ree, p. 6
- 4 : Ree, p. 7
- 5 : Ree, p. 7
- 6 : Walter J. Ong. *Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. New York: Routledge, 1991. p. 31
- 7 : Ong, p. 32
- 8 : Nancy, p. 3



Illegal Use, 2006, 6 plate intaglio with relief roll, image 22.5" x 22.5", paper 30" x 29.5"



Mechanical Help, 2006, multi-plate intaglio with relief roll, 22.5" x 22.5"



Sputtering, 2007, intaglio, wood cut, relief monoprinting on player piano, scroll and okawara, 8' x 7' (variable) x 15"

Artist Statement

"It is all too easy to take language, one's own language, for granted - one may need to encounter another language, or rather another mode of language, in order to be astonished, pushed into wonder, again."

- Oliver Sacks, *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf*, 1989

My work investigates perception and how meaning is deciphered. How we navigate our perceptual terrain is complicated by the fact that what we excavate, discover and describe is always over-determined by the tools we use: language, memory, science, line, shape, color, etc.: puzzling this out is the subject of my work. Throughout my explorations in varied media in two and three dimensional work, my images evoke a sense of order as well as orderly growth gone awry. I believe that the aberrant, the rogue and the wayward signals are the ones that can guide us to expanded understanding of our worlds and ourselves.

Artist Biography

Randy Garber's studio practice is divided between her studio in Somerville and the Mixit Print Studio, also in Somerville, MA.

A recipient of artist awards and grants from the Puffin Foundation, St. Botolph Foundation, and many others, Garber's work can be found in museum, corporate, and private collections, including The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; DeCordova Museum, Boston, MA; the Boston Athenaeum; Boston Public Library; Children's Hospital, Karp Family Research Laboratory, Boston, MA; and The Governor Baxter School for the Deaf, Portland, ME. Recent exhibitions of Garber's work include the DeCordova Museum; Urban Institute of Contemporary Arts, MI; Tamarind Art Gallery, New York City; the Art Institute of Boston; Boston Convention Center; and the Dishman Art Museum, Beaumont, Texas.

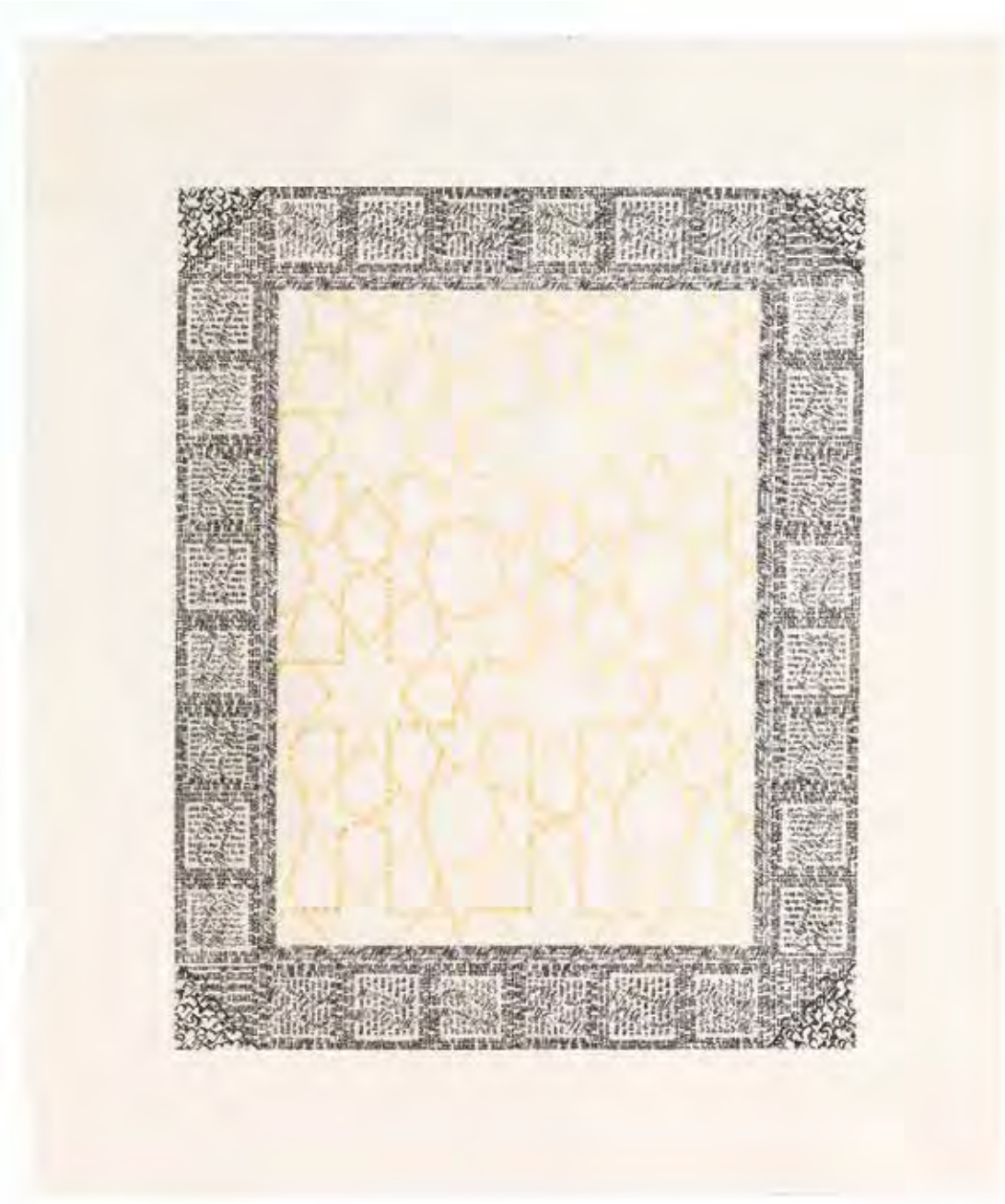
Garber works eclectically, with a passion for using traditional printmaking and painting techniques to express her intensively researched contemporary concerns and concepts. Garber was raised in Philadelphia, PA, watching her father, a hand engraver, carve portraits into silver platters and minute family crests into signet rings.

Randy Garber currently teaches drawing and printmaking at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design and lives in the Boston area.



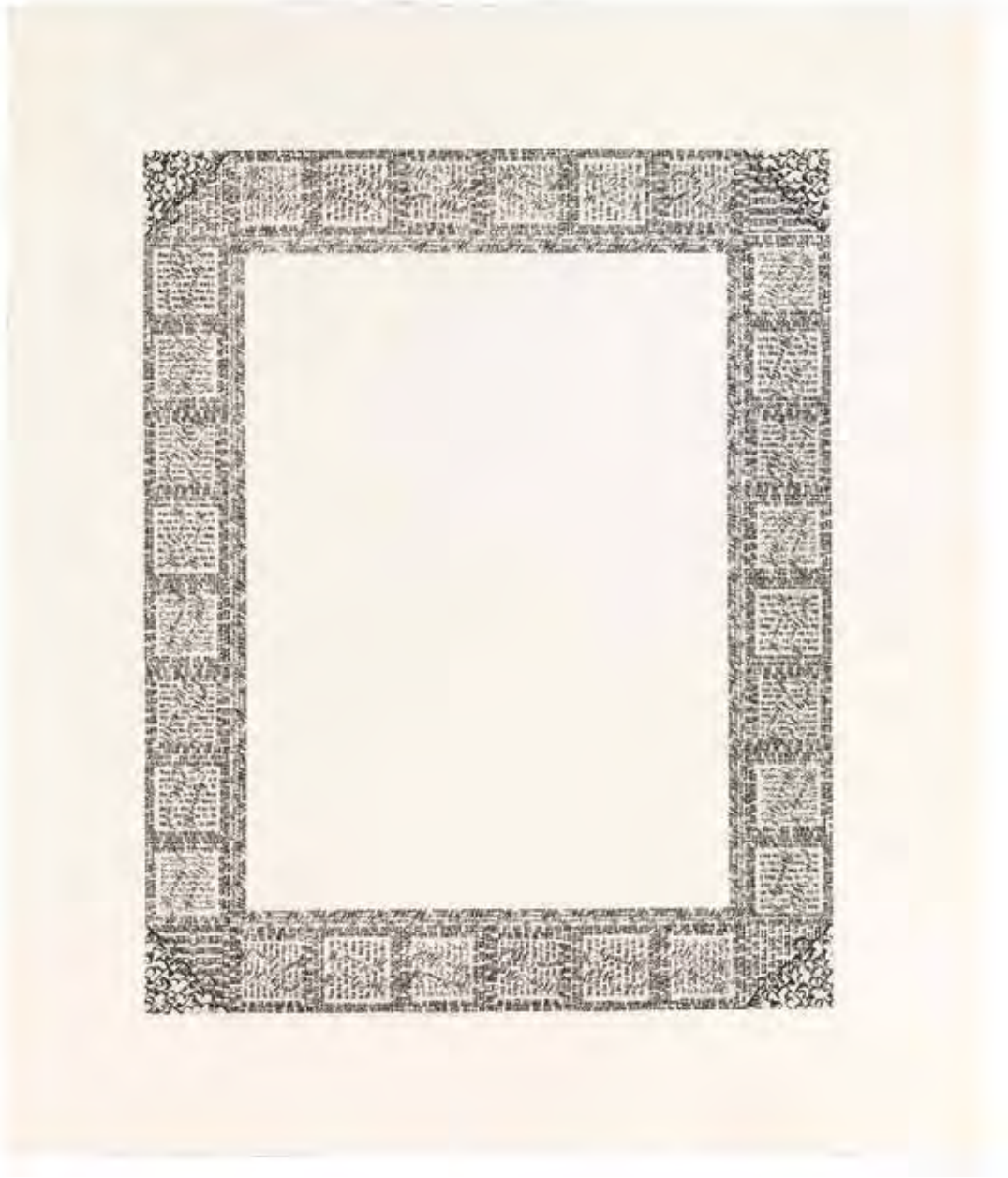
Echo, 2008, stuffed, sewn multi-plate etching with relief roll, 6' diameter

Frames Trump Facts, (re: George Lakoff), 2008, multi plate intaglio, image 22" x 14", paper 34" x 28"



The Wonder of It All, 2008, multi plate etching, image 20" x 14", paper: 32" x 22"

What You Already Know, 2008, intaglio, image 22" x 14", paper 34" x 28"



Everything is Illuminated, 2008, intaglio with à la poupée inking, paper 34" x 28"; image 3" x 2"



detail



It's A Toss Up Any Way, 2008, multi plate intaglio with á la poupée inking, paper 34" x 28", image plates variable from 1.5" x 1.5" to 3" x 2"



COGNitive Dissonance, 2009, woodcut, relief monoprint and intaglio on player piano scrolls, 8.5' x 10' (variable) x 15"

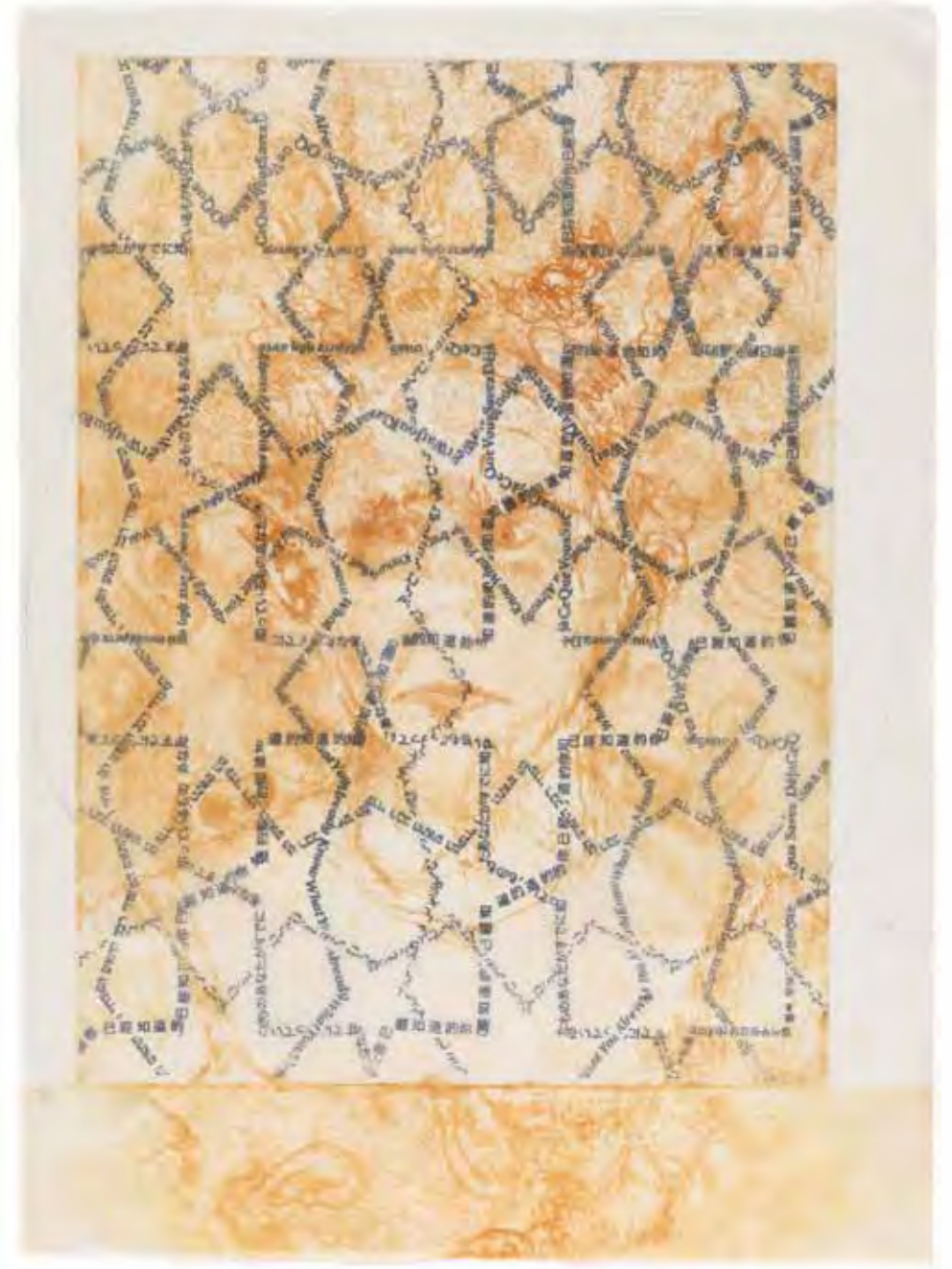


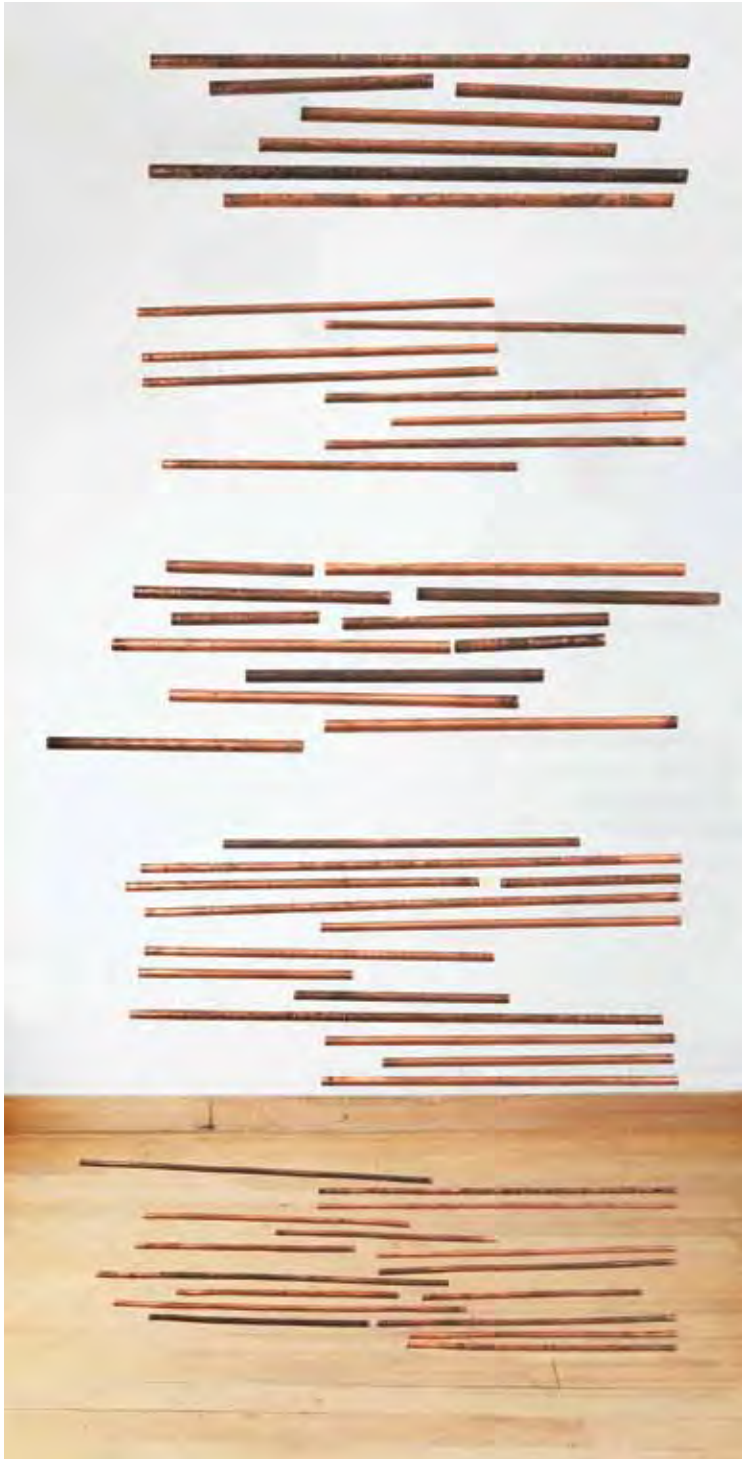
detail



Receive 1, 2010, multi-plate intaglio on Sekishu paper, 19" x 20"

Receive 3, 2010, multi-plate intaglio on Sekishu paper, 21" x 14"





Listening: Transmit, 2010, total of 200 copper tubes, hand etched and inked, suspended with monofilament, , one "page" at 8' x 3' (shown), two pages (not shown) at 9' x 52"

detail



Listening: Connect, 2010 (installation detail), intaglio and open bit copper plates with plastic tubing and copper shards, size variable up to 8' x 16'

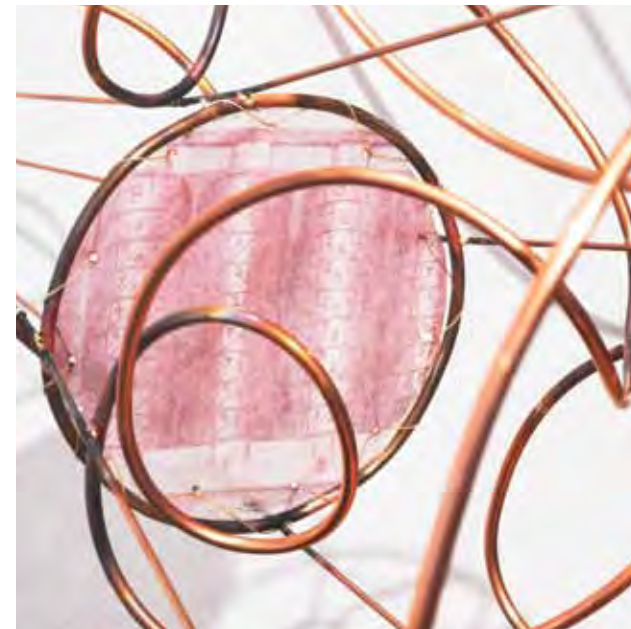


details

Listening: Receive, 2010 (installation detail), size variable up to 9' x 20', copper, intaglio on transparentized Sekishu paper



details



Epilogue

Life's experiences are capable of ramming into one another at the most unlikely times, in the most unlikely places and if you're really lucky the collision will make you consider new things - ideas you've never thought before, things you didn't know you knew. Such a thing happened to me recently in a double-wide prefab quasi log cabin, comfortably situated on the top of a shaved off hill top on a ranch in the wilds of Las Vegas, New Mexico. An old friend, whose double-wide it is, has a sound system that late at night will engulf the double-wide with sound and the five acre meadow that butts up against the hill...if he lets it. With a dry snow falling outside, a pinion fire blazing away in the brightly painted orange fireplace, artwork collected from around the world hanging on the walls, we sat in two ratty old down stuffed club chairs, wine glasses in hand, and listened to a collection of great old rock and roll selections he'd recently burned to disc. At about the fourth selection experiences collided, whatever song it was or note it was, I am not certain, but it made me think about Randy Garber; we'd met years ago while I was developing a series of one-person exhibitions. In my reverie I could visualize many of the works in this exhibition and began to consider once again all that the interpretation of words, sounds, marks, space, silences, and communication mean to her, these exquisite details that form the basis of her work; and, at that moment, I remembered that she once told me she hears sound as if she were under water.

If Randy had been with us that evening, could she hear and feel the way the sound enveloped us? Would she be aware of the all encompassing 3 dimensionality of the music, what meaning would it have for her? Could the 2 dimensionality of the majority of her work be indicative of the way she perceives sound? What would it be like to hear what I was hearing as if I were underwater and could I find a way to visually convey it?

I have not come up with final answers to these questions; it may not be the answers that are important. I do know that the quality of the sound and the environment that evening and thinking about Randy's work, her continuous and serious intent in finding out in visual terms how we "navigate our perceptual terrain" perpetuate my curiosity. I have found myself, just about every day since, thinking about this. I've even thought of a couple of new questions. Perhaps another collision will enlighten me.

- Ruth Hall Daly, Schenectady, NY

Ruth Hall Daly is an independent curator and gallerist. She began her career while a student as a co-founder of the art gallery at Union College, Schenectady, NY. She was responsible for the development of the Viewpoint Gallery art program at Sunnyview Rehabilitation Hospital. She served as manager and director of Alexander F. Milliken Inc, New York and J. Rosenthal Fine Art, Chicago. Most recently, she was director of contemporary art for the Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe, NM.



Opalka Gallery is the formal exhibition facility of The Sage Colleges. Located on the Sage Albany campus, the Opalka's primary concentration is on work by professional artists from outside the region. An important aspect of the cultural life in the Capital Region, the Gallery frequently features multidisciplinary projects and hosts poetry readings, recitals, and symposia, often in conjunction with its exhibitions.

The Opalka Gallery was constructed in 2002 with funds donated by the Opalka family. The 7,400 square-foot facility includes a vaulted gallery and a 75-seat lecture hall with Internet connectivity. The Opalka replaced Rathbone Gallery, which served The Sage Colleges for 25 years and garnered international attention for the quality and significance of its exhibitions.

Opalka Gallery is a member of the Exhibition Alliance, the Association of College and University Museums and Galleries, and the Museum Association of New York.

Exhibition Coordinator: Fabienne Waring

Publication design: Nicole Clayton, Class of 1991

Copyright 2010 artist, authors and The Sage Colleges.



OPALKA GALLERY

Sage College of Albany
140 New Scotland Avenue
Albany, NY 12208

Jim Richard Wilson, Director
tel: 518.292.7742 fax: 518.292.1903
www.sage.edu/opalka