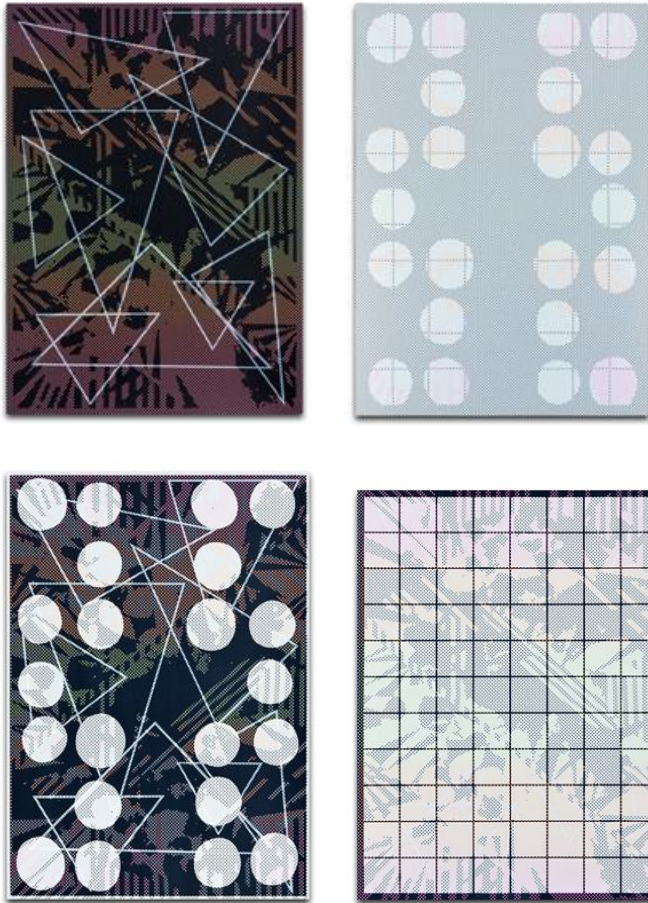


A Means of Exchange 3



Julia Dault

The Holograms (1), 2014

The Holograms (2), 2014

The Holograms (3), 2014

The Holograms (4), 2014

Screenprints on Somerset Satin (300gsm) paper with

screenprint on Peregrina Tungsten Fractal (290gsm)

paper applied by chine-collé

Editions of 8

Each: 82 x 57cm

Appropriately, for an international exchange project, ideas about language thread through the resultant works; overtly in the text pieces by Floyd and Shrigley, but nonetheless critically in the abstract prints of Robert Orchardson and Julia Dault.

There is a significant amount of translation required between the languages of painting and sculpture and that of print.

Even though, on first seeing Dault's paintings, I had assumed she had a printmaking background, detecting familiar tropes arising from printing such as layering, subtractive monoprinting and the use of scraper tools, I was mistaken. One of our first conversations therefore centred around how she would set about making a work in print that was authentic to her practice, when she had no experience of the media. Dault is an artist who

responds to materials and media directly and her work is deeply rooted in a personal physical interaction with them. So it was never going to be enough for her to just be shown portfolio examples. In effect, therefore, we embarked on a crash course, with each day involving opportunities to sample different print processes including monoprint, etching, lithograph, woodcut, screenprint and more. At the same time it was neither possible nor relevant for her to master any of these, the idea simply to give her an insight into the idiom of this other language, so I encouraged her to 'play', that is, to respond to the materials and not worry, at that point, about how it would lead to a finished product.



In *Printmaking: a Colony of the Arts* Luis Camnitzer describes his experience and observations of collaborative editioning with non-printmaker artists in the editioning boom of the 1970s:

When I refer to a colony I mean it quite literally: as a territory taken over by another power where identity is maimed and slowly forgotten, values are shifted and the will for independence becomes ritualized into an increasingly empty and hopeless vow. (Camnitzer 2006,p 103)

Camnitzer confesses to his own affiliation to the colony, where his delight and respect for the many crafts that make up print processes can veer towards fetishization (he believes that *'printers who don't clean the edges of their plates before printing are eventually, duly punished in hell.'*) . (Camnitzer 2006,p 103)

This fundamentalism prevents him emigrating to a 'freer country' (which he identifies as painting) and he concludes that the great danger with print is the tendency to place one's faith in well-executed craft or innovative process to somehow result in a great work of art. In fifteen years of collaborative editioning, often working with artists from other disciplines, I have always valued the fresh eyes that they bring to our sometimes over-ritualized practice in printing. Martin Boyce was so keen to incorporate the accidental marks typical of screen printing mischances, for example, that we had to go to great lengths of artifice in order to force the appearance of faults. This has led me into apologia when travelling among the fundamentalists in print, lest our work should be taken for ignorance of craftsmanship rather than deliberate and considered decisions. Other artists have even insisted on our not wiping the edges of plates as they enjoy the evidence of ink in the print.

The value is in being reminded that print is not an end in itself but a means; a set of tools that can be used - or not - as needed. Camnitzer goes on to identify traditions and 'correct practices' as largely *'technical accident'* in the pursuit of the circulation of information. The real goal is to arrive at *'a careful equilibrium between technique and vision'*, and this can only be done by keeping the borders open and being willing to think outside the narrowest confines of tradition, whilst valuing the experience that informs productive results. (Camnitzer 2006,p 105)

Dault's first observation, familiar to printmakers, but easily forgotten as time and experience breed fluency, was the simple fact that print processes are characterised by indirect action. The painted mark is defined by being direct, whether gestural or systematic, whereas print always interposes an ellipsis between the gesture and the final mark which is arrived at by transfer through or from an intermediary surface. This is something that print artists find to be valuable, giving pause for thought, and allowing the process to intervene or to introduce chance and suggest new directions. Accidents can happen – they are the 'cracks that let in the light'. Many artists have used printing as a way in to making works in other media because of this propensity to disrupt preconceived results and prevent excessive control.

Sometimes several stages, plates, positives or screens intervene and interrupt the process, and other people - technicians and printers - may also have their hands in the production. The artist is often more in the position of director of a film crew. This was also new for Dault, an artist whose work is produced either through hours of solitary concentration on painting in the studio or wrestling unaided and unobserved with uncooperative sheets of semi-flexible materials in a very private act of sculpture. Dault has expressed the importance of her own hand and body being essential to her making, with no attempt to hide but rather an emphasis on celebrating the irregularities that this may introduce. Collaboration challenges this, and challenged us to find ways to blend the two modes of operation. On my part each response Dault had to a print medium or mark was revelatory, in much the same way that showing a foreign visitor around a familiar landscape refreshes one's view and throws new light on characteristics normally taken for granted, and also in signposting the next direction.

Finding an equilibrium between vision and technique could be said to be a defining characteristic of Dault's work. Her history is unusual in that she initially studied the academic theory of art and had a successful career in art criticism. Many who follow this path find it inhibits them from making as they are too constantly aware of the pitfalls and that abound. In her case though, it has enabled her to bring carefully considered philosophy into balance with an intuitive and spontaneous physicality. Her work is powerfully visual and is underpinned and supported by her own system of restrictions and requirements that gives it endurance and depth. Typically in reviews of her work it is this high-wire balancing act that strikes critics. The gallery information for *Color me Badd*, her current exhibition at The Power Plant, Toronto, is infused with notions of balance:

- *balancing spontaneous gesture with responsiveness to rules, logic and the constraints of materials.*
- *to skirt the line between expressive abstraction and cool, machine-like facture.*
- *fuses the emphasis on process found in both Abstract Expressionist painting and post-Minimal sculpture.*

The resulting works balance an austere and monumental aesthetic with a magpie's-eye collection of shimmering metallic finishes, raw 'pop' colours and streetwise textures.

In some ways then the language of print process, consisting in effect of sets of rules for production, and sets of tools to be manipulated, were not as unfamiliar to Dault as may have at first appeared. She brought her understanding of this sort of grammar, and how far rules can be bent to allow evolution.

Her work achieves a further balance between pure non-referential abstraction and an avoidance of sterile minimalism, by her gleeful exploitation of ready-mades in the form of

commercial fashion fabrics – spandex, pleather, and industrial sheets of mirror acrylic and iridescent Formica. As she puts it: “*Abstract painting is so often an untouchable realm to get to some other place, but it’s important to me that it be about the everyday,*”

The equivalent of these materials in print vocabulary is found in paper. It is easy to forget that the evolution of print has been tied to that of paper. Camnitzer, for example, ascribes the growth in print technology to the fact that following the Plague years, people discarded their underwear more frequently so that rag paper was more widely available. Whilst we can and do print on other substrates, the technological developments in print have been largely dependent on the availability of paper: cheap, wood-fibre papers for mass-production of information; cotton-rag papers for fine printing and durability – which all replaced the immensely expensive and difficult to produce substrate of parchment – or sheepskin. The student of print is also a student in paper, it being essential to select the right paper for the process concerned and to know its potential and limitations. Rules concerning this are usually better not broken as the results will only be disappointing. Again working on paper was something new for Dault, but also a way into understanding the physical side of print.



The catalogues of decorative, commercial and industrial papers in the print studio library, especially those that had ‘girly’ touches of glitter and bling, were a rich source of materials for experiment, as equivalents for the fabrics and substrates in her vernacular. Introducing the everyday into the rarified climate of fine print has a similar effect to allowing improvisation in language, an injection of life like street talk.

Another means of grounding the work in the everyday are Dault’s titles, which she chooses with great care but that also playfully refer to pop culture of the ‘80s and ‘90s. The balance here between abstraction and reference is achieved without pastiche or sentimentality, and in large part is achieved by the evidence of her own hand and marks of physical endeavour. Physical engagement locates the artist in the present moment at the time of making and the traces of that engagement keep the works direct rather than nostalgic. Where printing is concerned Jose Roca declares: ‘*Print implies a shift from the optical to the haptic, from a purely visual regime to the centrality of the physical act of transferring a trace by direct contact.*’ So the very nature of print to be an indirect process is also the means of retaining the trace of physical and optical engagement: ‘*...unlike photography, which is literally “an emanation from the referant,” as Roland Barthes pointed out, an imprint acquires its indexical quality by contiguity; one surface in physical contact with another.*’ (Roca, 2011, p 25). In other words a *means of exchange* between materials.

The four prints that form the product of Dault’s residency are titled *The Holograms*, referring to a day-glo-coloured television serial of the 1980’s, the lead character in which uses a holographic computer called *Synergy* to project a holographic disguise:

While disguised as Jem, Jerrica is able to move freely without restrictions and on several occasions other people have been in direct physical contact with her without disrupting the holographic projection. Jem, through the use of her earrings, is also able to project

holograms around her and uses this ability throughout the series to avoid danger and provide special effects for the performances of her group.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jem_\(TV_series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jem_(TV_series))

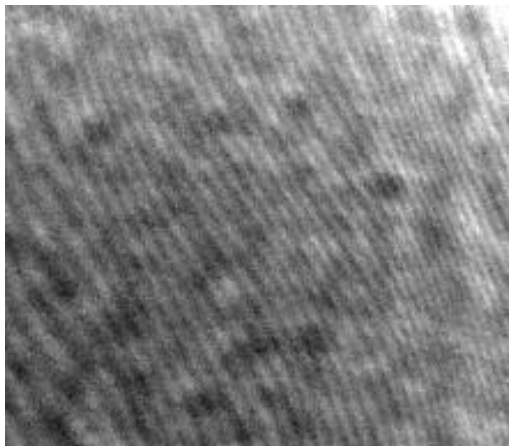


Elements of disguise, the optical illusion of dimensional depth and veiling by over-layering of one image by another can all be found in the elements of *The Holograms* prints. Dault's exploration of various print media – including a laser-cut relief block and digital geometrical drawings - were eventually all standardized into screen (or serigraph) stencils, in order to layer them seamlessly with reproductions of elements of her paintings, rainbow blends and

other motifs from her personal scrapbook. Each print on first sight appears to be overprinted with halftone screens or *Benday* dots with their echoes of pop-art, but this again is an illusion created by specialist paper being collaged over the printed backgrounds. This perforated paper stands in for Dault's use of industrial found grids and patterns and forms a veil that allows only so much of the brightly-coloured underprinting to be tantalizingly glimpsed. This overlaid paper (Peregrina Tungsten and Anthracite Fractal) is slightly metallic in its finish. Three of the four prints have further screen-printed patterns over the perforated paper, so that there are both physical and printed layers on layers.



Whilst not trying to be holographic the final appearance shimmers, and appears to change as the viewer moves around it, something like a crow's wing, that seems just black at first, but is underlaid by iridescence and rainbow colours. The earlier stages of intensely bright rainbow blends and patterns are glimpsed through veil-like grids and patterns, to become a work on paper that succeeds in the same aims as Dault's paintings without being a reproduction of an actual painting or pastiche.



Close-up photograph of a hologram's surface.. It is no more possible to discern the subject of a hologram from this pattern than it is to identify what music has been recorded by looking at a CD surface. Note that the hologram is described by the speckle pattern, rather than the "wavy" line pattern.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holography>

Dault chooses her titles thoughtfully so it is worth observing that as well as offering possibilities of seemingly magic illusion and disguise, holograms can also be used to store, retrieve, and process information optically; rainbow holograms are commonly used for security and authentication, for example on credit cards and product packaging. As with the *Jem and the Holograms* story, however, the key component has to be the mystery, which is also the element that intrigues the viewer and lengthens the engagement with the work.

In the four print works for BAS, Dault has isolated six elements that she remixes across the individual prints. The arrangements of circles, grids, and triangles shift from woodblock to screen-print and from one part of the design to another, hinting at the infinite possibilities for improvisation found within even the strictest system. This mobilizes one of the essential characteristics of print process, as **Jose Roca** describes: *'The ontology of the graphic act is to leave an imprint on a support, one that can be reproduced at will.'* The use of this device acts to signify the ethos of print that *'implies generosity through multiplication, accessibility and collaboration; it presupposes a desire to disseminate knowledge in order to reach a wider audience.'* (Roca, 2011, p 25) It is also the reason print process is so useful to industrial and surface design, with its potential for ringing changes and introducing variations at all stages. This simple device points to how print pervades and links disciplines in all areas of visual art, culture and industry almost imperceptibly and has a ubiquitous quality that is often unnoticed.

'In the realm of art, where individuality (in the form of a single, original masterpiece) is often the norm, prints permit at once the existence of the individual mark and the possibility of its reproduction, and thus expand their insertion into the collective domain.' (Roca, 2011, p 26)

Examining the comments by Camnitzer and others such as Georges Didi-Huberman, Roca pinpoints conundrums in the wide-ranging world of print, where the tensions between the possibilities for dissemination collide with the desire for the transcendent rare object, and craftsmanship. Quoting Cuban critic Gerardo Mosquera he says *"Our 'artistic' print posits a contradiction: it is a reproductive medium that self-limits its reproductive possibilities."*(Mosquera,1991,p 25)

Balance is again a key word, and print could be seen as a fulcrum, where the everyday worlds of dissemination of information, the possibility of identical reproduction as well as the particular refinement of craft, hinge to provide a lever for examining culture.

Finally, the consideration that Roca believes most important, and which justifies both the devotion to print of Camnitzer (despite himself), and the concentration on a medium-specific project, whether *Philagrafika* or *Below Another Sky*, is that the printed art work produced should be one that could not be made any other way.

Printmaking is a tool, and a powerful one at that. But only by acknowledging that its intrinsic qualities make it ideal for saying something that cannot be said equally well in other media can print be reclaimed from technique-as-content and be understood as content through technique. (Roca, 2011 p.27)

After all why print it if it is easier or cheaper to paint it? This is a mantra I used often as a teacher and it applies equally to editioning. Dault's work generally is characterised by her understanding of innovative use of tools and her prints to me exemplify works that could not have been made any other way, but not only that, they could not have existed without the specific exchanges between Dault and the DCA Print Studio team.

They use the very idioms of print to comment on its own existence and usage, and its differences and similarities to painting.