

## A Means of Exchange 4



**Robert Orchardson**

*Soleil Géométrique*, 2014

Photopolymer print with chine-collé on Somerset satin white (300gsm) paper  
64 x 54cm

Robert Orchardson exemplified the need for the highest craft skills of the printer as he sought to balance and combine two worlds and languages in one print, that of Le Corbusier's utopian architecture and the overwhelmingly popular creations of folk-artist Nek Chand Saini in the city of Chandigarh.

This is a balance yet to be achieved in Chandigarh, where the works of both Le Corbusier and Chand are controversial and endangered and have aroused passionate and at times violent political conflict. Le Corbusier's buildings have been criticised as being unsympathetic; imposed on the landscape and populace rather than arising from them, and impressing a very un-Indian urbanised order; they are attacked by anti-colonialists and the climate. Other than depending for existence on the everyday-miracle material of concrete, Chand's creations are at first sight overwhelmingly opposite; formed of the landscape and waste products, and made without the sanction of any theory of art, government or ideology. They are beloved of the people, but have several times come close to demolition by the authorities who feel they do not reflect Chandigarh's ambitions and status as a modern, international, economically important city. Motives and intentions are shown to be irrelevant, as Le Corbusier's great driver was that of bringing the benefit of idealised 'purist' architecture to the poor and disenfranchised and an almost religious belief in the power of the right angle; the city's founders were motivated by similar ideals and civic pride and Chand, a road inspector, initially just set out to please himself and worked in secret for eighteen years.

His aspirations however reflected Corbusier's in their desire to create, through celebratory building, a future free of religious conflict and of spiritual and societal harmony.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent comparison and analysis of the similarities between Le Corbusier's and Nek Chand's Chandigarh see Lucienne Peiry, Director of the Collection of l'Art Brut, in *Nek Chand's Outsider Art, The Rock Garden of Chandigarh*, Flammarion, 2005



Starting in the very same year as foundations for the Corbusier's city were laid, Nek Chand's Rock Garden in Chandigarh 'was built illegally on government owned land, in violation of strict planning laws that protected Le Corbusier's 'City Beautiful', where everything had to be a part of the great master plan.' (Nek Chand Foundation website.)

Le Corbusier's aspirations for the effects of his work are symbolised by the Open Hand Monument of Chandigarh.



*The Open Hand (La Main Ouverte) is a recurring motif in Le Corbusier's architecture, a sign for him of "peace and reconciliation. It is open to give and open to receive." The largest of the many Open Hand sculptures that Le Corbusier created is a 26 meter high version in Chandigarh, India known as [Open Hand Monument](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Corbusier).*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le\\_Corbusier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Corbusier)

The struggles in Chandigarh echo many instances where ideology attempts to enlist art as agent for change. Le Corbusier was influenced by ideals of Socialist Realism in his early career and travelled to the USSR, where the travails of artists under the regime are well documented. Here he learned and adopted the hubristic maxim 'architects are engineers of the human soul'. Later he was attracted by right-wing ideology and worked for the Vichy Government and Mussolini.

The People's Republic of China in the twentieth century provides a unique parable of the difficulties of imposing ideology on artistic practice and the tensions between academic and populist arts. As China attempted to define a new national identity under Communism, the various contradictory shifts in cultural policy over the twentieth century oscillated between factional dogmas. Socialist Realism for example was imported from Soviet Russia to become Revolutionary Realism but was found to clash with the need for Chinese art to stand for specifically Chinese characteristics. (One of these was the use of paper for painting - and printing - with water-colour, as opposed to the western tradition of oils.)

Along with the Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1956 politics, (at the same time that Le Corbusier's Chandigarh was under construction) it was posited that if artists were allowed unrestrained freedom, they would naturally arrive at correct Party principles, as if at the basic rules of nature. At first the emphasis was on modernity, and traditional arts and crafts were despised and derided as typifying old-regime sentimentality and superstition. Then policy changed and 'peasant' or folk art was lauded as the representation of the working people. As described by Arnold J Herstand, the scale of mobilisation of folk-artists was immense:

*‘In the first six months of 1958, the province of Kiangsu alone produced ten million “works-of-art”.’ (Herstand, 1959, p23)*

Typically these craftspeople were traditional woodblock-printers and paper-cut artists (producing, for example, 78,000 hand-made poster works in a few months in P’ei hsien province). Their preferred subject matter was decorative and religious. This was not suitable for celebrating the Great Leap Forward, so it was necessary to redirect their inclinations.



Youth, Xin Bo, Woodcut 1961



Liu Jinlan, *One Child is Good*, papercut ca. 1978

From [Beyondtheborder.org/Teacher's Guides](http://Beyondtheborder.org/Teacher's Guides), Art and Ideology in The People's Republic of China.

*“According to Party claims, workers and peasants, who under the old regime found art something mysterious and exclusive, are now becoming masters of culture. The working man, they say, having long been deprived of the right to culture, now finds an outlet for expression in his enthusiasm for the New China.” (Herstand, 1959, p23)*

Under pressure to achieve such quantities, it is not surprising that the quality soon became an issue, as Herstand concludes *‘Certainly, this mass of hurried imagery cannot result in the expression of a genuine folk art. Yet it probably serves the purposes of the government well, arousing the spirit of the people, and stimulating a sense of involvement in the regime.’* (Herstand, 1959, p24)

The pendulum still swings today and in 2013 Party authorised posters began to appear on the streets of China's cities:



*‘Xi Jinping’s China Dream posters are linked to this earlier era of Communist sloganeering. The difference is that while the old posters touted Communist values, the new ones largely replace them with pre-Communist Chinese traditions—drawing on traditional folk-art like*

*paper cutouts, woodblock prints, and clay figurines to illustrate their message. This is a redefinition of the state's vision from a Marxist utopia to a Confucian, family-centric nation, defined by a quiet life of respecting the elderly and saving for the future.'*

Ian Johnson 'Old dreams for a New China'

<http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2013/oct/15/china-dream-posters/>

All the posters can be seen [here](http://www.wenming.cn/jwmsxf_294/zggygg/). [http://www.wenming.cn/jwmsxf\\_294/zggygg/](http://www.wenming.cn/jwmsxf_294/zggygg/)

Possibly, eventually, the pendulum arrives at a point of equilibrium.

Chandigarh owes its existence to the departure of the British Raj and their troubled legacy of Partition. Left without a regional Capital, as Lahore became the capital of Pakistan, the opportunity arose to build an entirely new, modern city from scratch, free of association with Empire or historical India. Emerging from a Colonial past and struggling to define a new national identity, India required art in all its forms to play an important role. The authorities in Chandigarh saw Corbusier's buildings as representing the best of Modern International. However the buildings did not do well in the climate of India, and have been ravaged by monsoons, strong sun and humidity, of which Swiss-born Corbusier is said to have taken too little account when designing them. Vernacular architecture tends to evolve in harmony with its climate, and rarely transposes successfully to another. Opinion has always been divided, and whilst many find his Chandigarh Capitol buildings superlatively beautiful others are extremely critical. This has prevented the final stages being completed, leaving the plan unfinished and the buildings that do exist endangered by neglect, despite attempts to make it a UN World heritage site.

The BAS residency allowed Orchardson to see for himself, and situate them in their cultural context, which included a city that he discovered to strongly feature Chand's influence. Chand's interpretation of the 'divine kingdom', (a project that in definition and ambition seems to share and reflect Le Corbusier's) is extremely popular with the citizens of Chandigarh and foreign admirers alike, with five thousand visiting his *Rock Garden* each day. The populace have several times rallied in force to prevent its demolition by the city authorities.

Chand is mostly claimed as an Outsider or Raw artist. Dubuffet actually defined the nature of Outsider art by its power to thwart the ambitions and pretensions of academically sanctioned culture and indeed 'master plans'.

*"Those works created from solitude and from pure and authentic creative impulses – where the worries of competition, acclaim and social promotion do not interfere – are, because of these very facts, more precious than the productions of professionals. After a certain familiarity with these flourishes of an exalted feverishness, lived so fully and so intensely by their authors, we cannot avoid the feeling that in relation to these works, cultural art in its entirety appears to be the game of a futile society, a fallacious parade."* — (Jean Dubuffet. 1988, p.36)

(One can only guess how Nek Chand would have fared in twentieth-century China, as he is neither a traditional craftsman nor even a folk-artist. *Chinese Farmer's Art* is recognised as an Outsider genre that emerged from the mobilisation of peasant art in the 1950's described above, and currently China is opening major museums to celebrate their Outsider artists, notably in Nanjing, but one suspects that Nek Chand's independence and individualism would not have met with approval at the time.)

Orchardson is known for his elegant minimalist sculptural works and installations which refer to futuristic design and architecture, though fabricated with inexpensive and often unlikely materials. He is fascinated by the ideological bases of utopian design and also its failures to change the future and the 'real' world. He uses obscure details from sci-fi films

and popular culture to counterbalance the refined and academic aesthetic, and create unexpected juxtapositions by their combination. It is not surprising therefore that he should elect to bring together the sweetshop colours of Chand and the rigid geometry of Le Corbusier. As Orchardson explains:

*The starting point for the work was a diagram drawn by Le Corbusier to work out the Golden Section. This proportional measurement formed the basis of his designs for Chandigarh. In a sense he used it to help measure and define a kind of perfect ratio that his designs for the city sought to embody.*

*This is of course tied up with his desire that the new city would embody future promise in relation to India's new found status as an independent nation. In my print this diagram is disassembled; it is taken apart and begins to realign its constituent parts to become something new.*

Robert Orchardson to AF, 2015

Working in the studio Orchardson sought ways to combine these two very different aesthetics in a meaningful way, and worked through a couple of different designs with us before arriving at the final proof. Initially taking shapes and colours directly from those of Chand he refined his approach to reflect the process both artists had used:

*This print obviously reconfigures the Le Corbusier diagram in the same way that Chand reconfigured broken ceramics and the mixed colours do reflect that mis-matched aesthetic, though the specific colours are not trying to mimic particular ones I saw there - more trying to go with roughly primary colours...close to CMYK.<sup>2</sup>*

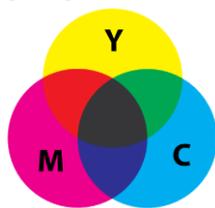
Robert Orchardson to AF, 2015

Both Chand's and Corbusier's creations are subject to the effects of environment, and wear and tear, and Orchardson also wanted to capture that in the textures of the concrete, eroded and discoloured, of Corbusier's once pristine buildings.

From his photographs, taken on his BAS travels, Orchardson isolated the textures and shapes he wanted to use and came to the workshop to mix and approve the very particular colours he chose to represent the work of Nek Chand. These colours were relief-printed

---

<sup>2</sup> The reference to CMYK is interesting in that it brings us firmly into the area of print technology and situates Orchardson's print in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Once an esoteric element of the printer's craft, CMYK is now familiar due to the proliferation of digital printers. One of the great problems in printing was always the difficulty of printing full-colour images or colour photographs from plates or blocks that could only reliably be inked up with one colour at a time. The combination of halftones (dot structures or screens) with just four process colours (or rather three plus black) which mix visually when printed, due to their transparency, allowed colour images of great detail and accuracy to be reproduced cheaply and in unlimited quantities. The twentieth century would be unrecognisable without this invention, which revolutionised the printing of newspapers, textbooks, maps, and magazines giving rise to the greatest information explosion prior to the internet.



onto delicate sheets of Japanese (washi) paper which were then bonded by chine-collé onto the main substrate (Somerset cotton rag paper) as the print was pulled. Printing in China developed much earlier than in Europe, largely due to its invention (around the second century (AD)) and plentiful supply of paper, and printing of images with water-based inks and brushes was possible due to the strength of the paper. This is crucial for chine-collé, where the paper is coated with adhesive and run between matrix and substrate in a roller (mangle-like) press – which uses immense pressure. (*Chine* refers originally to Chinese paper, but loosely includes Japanese, as China soon exported the technology to Japan and Korea). Asian papers differ from western in being composed of plant fibres, often, for example, mulberry or bamboo. The long fibres of these plants allow them to be made into very thin tissue that has relatively enormous strength and stability, even when wet. European native plants tended not to be suitable for this, and it wasn't until cotton-fibre became reasonably abundant (see above from Camnitzer) that any amount of paper was available. Even cotton-rag paper cannot match the robustness of bamboo paper however. It is important that the washi tissue does not stretch or wrinkle and that it accepts the fine detail of the inked plate. Once printed it should not be possible to see the joins. Hundreds of years of paper technology in the east and west have produced the means to achieve these results, and though they may sound simple most would be impossible with the wrong papers, as many a printer has found to their cost. (Some Japanese papers are now endangered, and in the last few years printer's staples have ceased to exist as the last member of the family to know the recipe has died.)

The plate used for *Soleil Géométrique* is an industrial, photopolymer-process plate used for fine image printing, a modern replacement for traditional photogravure plates.

Photogravure is a process that was invented in the west, where it followed hot on the heels of the invention of photography, as Fox-Talbot and others sought a method to transfer photographic images to non-photographic paper using inks. This process meant that tonal gradations could be accurately and richly reproduced, which was welcomed by fine printers, but it also had offshoots into industrial Rotogravure, especially in the early twentieth century. This represented an enormous cultural leap, as information could be almost immediately disseminated, and the ability to print photographic images from the same matrix as text meant that the whole of society could see images that would previously have depended on hand-engraving, such as images from the front in warzones throughout the world.

Continuous tone in photographic prints is extremely challenging to reproduce in monochrome ink, and depends on the invention of halftone. Initiated by Fox-Talbot, the industrial refinement of halftone is credited to Frederic Ives of Philadelphia. Orchardson's photographs present a particular challenge as the variations in tone are very delicate and subtly low-contrast, being required to reproduce the rather dull greys of worn concrete. For this we introduced a fine, high-resolution, stochastic (random dot) halftone, which is the nearest equivalent to the grain of photographic paper, and does not leave a mechanical dot structure. Exposure times, development times and skilled inking are all critical to arriving at a finish that is a light veil of 'concrete' grey, but retaining the very fine detail of the image.

The plates we use today however are made largely in Japan, using photopolymer technology. One of the problems facing us in making Orchardson's print was the shortage of a particular brand of plate caused by the devastating typhoon in Japan, in the area the plates are made.

In its physical make-up then the print is compressing into one surface a mixture of tradition and modern industry as well as the products of Asian and European culture and technology. The etching press used is identical in design to that first invented in fifteenth-century Europe to force paper into microscopically thin, engraved lines on copper plates and by squeezing the plate between the narrow contact area of the two solid metal rollers pressures of several tons are exerted. No other press would exert enough weight to press all these components into one sheet.

As each of Orchardson's prints passes through the etching press, it bonds seamlessly into one plane the joyous haphazard of Nek Chand, bounded but not diminished by the elegant geometry of Le Corbusier, and the velvet-black of printing ink as rich as dark matter; at the same moment it unifies the long-fibred *tosa washi* with the cotton-fibred Somerset paper in a meeting of East and West, and the long histories of invention that reflect their technologies.

Inventions and ideas distant across centuries and continents, have always spread and combined to create human history and culture. Events in Communist China, even though borders were restricted, had common sources to the creation of Chandigarh, and inventions from fifteenth-century Europe influence modern technologies in Japan. Perhaps *Below another sky* should be renamed *Below one sky* ?

Recent discoveries have shown that over 5,000 years ago nomadic shepherds opened up some of the first links between eastern and western Asia and Europe, carrying the seeds of agricultural civilisation west in the form of wheats and grasses suitable for making bread and so blazing trails that eventually became known as the Silk Road. Gerard Chaliand in *Nomadic Empires, Mongolia to Danube*, argues that '*The prime determinant of the whole history of central Eurasia was the need for nomadic shepherds to have grazing land for their animals...*' (Gérard Chaliand, 2005,)



*The printer in a previous existence*

## Conclusion

In her introduction to *The Graphic Unconscious* Teresa Jaynes reveals some of the debates and conclusions that she and the organizing committee had about the decision to stage Philagrafika 2010 as a medium-specific event. It reflects some of the questions that have arisen for those of us engaged in the *Below another sky* project. Both arose from communities (Philadelphia & Scotland) typical of those where there have been extraordinary periods of innovation in both fine art and commercial printmaking, having, as Jaynes identifies: '*strong collections, thriving schools, active print shops, and an engaged public.*' Concerns about decline in print practice and understanding, and threats such as closing university print departments are countered in both places by the strong legacy and enthusiasm among practitioners and organisations. Not surprisingly then, we could echo the goals set by Philadelphia '*to solidify a strong network among the print community; to increase visibility for the artists, organizations and institutions involved; to engage new audiences for printmaking and to build confidence in collaboration as an effective means of benefitting the arts community as a whole.*' (Jaynes, 2011,p11)

Roca's essay in the publication *The Graphic Unconscious* examines the ramifications of this medium-specificity.

*'The Graphic Unconscious refers to the unconscious invocation of print – or its characteristics, including seriality, multiplicity and dissemination – in contemporary art, quite often by artists who either do not consider themselves printmakers or shy away from being associated with a single medium.'* (Roca, 2011,p.23) He tracks the expression *Graphic Unconscious* to a mixture of Benjamin's '*optical unconscious*' (from a *Small History of Photography*) and Jameson's '*Political Unconscious*' and quotes Judith Hecker, assistant curator of Prints at MoMA:

*Installation, performance, and video art, photography, and new-media technology (including digitization, virtual reality, and the internet) have expanded artistic vocabularies, and artists are increasingly drawn back to the printed series because it enables further explorations into the multiple, developmental, and spatial structures of these other mediums.* (Hecker, 2000, p 516)

Tracking some of these 'expanded print' explorations that include all of the examples in Hecker's list, through the works of the artists represented, Roca shows how this medium-specificity allowed the curators of *The Graphic Unconscious* exhibition to use the restriction as a means of expansion into the whole of contemporary art practice.

As Roca puts it: '*If there is a graphic unconscious in contemporary art, our task was to bring it to the surface of public consciousness to reclaim a space for the return of the repressed (imprint) lurking inside contemporary artistic practice.*' (Roca 2011,p 28)

## List of references

L Camnitzer, *Printmaking : A Colony of Arts* (2006), reprinted in *The Graphic Unconscious*, Philagrafika, Philadelphia, 2011

G Chaliand, *Nomadic Empires: From Mongolia to the Danube*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey 2005.

J Dubuffet. *Place à l'incivisme (Make way for Incivism)*. *Art and Text* no.27 (December 1987 – February 1988).

J Hecker, *One Thing after Another; Serial Print Projects in Modern Contemporary: Art at MoMA Since 1980* NY, The Museum of Modern Art, 2000

A.L. Herstand, *Art and the Artist in Communist China*, *College Art Journal* [College Art Association](#), Vol. 19, No. 1 (Autumn, 1959), pp. 23-29

T Jaynes Introduction, *The Graphic Unconscious*, Philagrafika, Philadelphia, 2011  
G Mosquera, *El Disegno se definio en Octubre*, Bogota. p25 Translation by Roca. (see below)  
J Roca, *The Graphic Unconscious or the How and Why of a Print Triennial*, in *The Graphic Unconscious*, Philagrafika, Philadelphia, 2011

"SubtractiveColor" by Original uploader was SharkD at en.wikipedia Later version uploaded by Jacobolus, Dacium at en.wikipedia. - Transferred from en.wikipedia. Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons - <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SubtractiveColor.svg#mediaviewer/File:SubtractiveColor.svg>