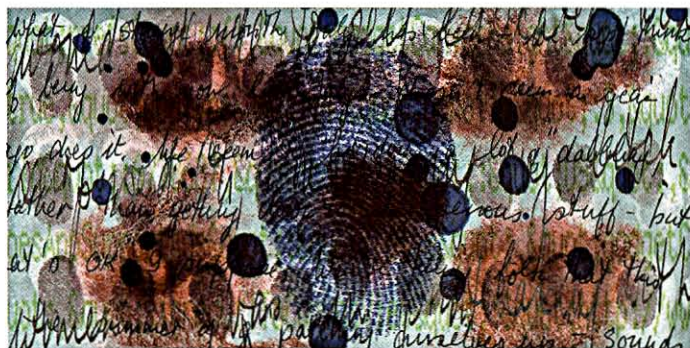


Finger Codes

by Eleanor Gates-Stuart (in discussion with Richard Wohlfeiler)



Eleanor Gates-Stuart, FC11, from the series *Finger Codes*, 2010



Eleanor Gates-Stuart, FC02, from the series *Finger Codes*, 2010

Artist Eleanor Gates-Stuart talks about her prints recently produced during her International Artist Residency at the University of California, Santa Cruz, USA.

EGS In the *Finger Codes* series, my images use information and data relating to citizenship and society, mapping references, classification systems and code in visual transcripts. The evident painterly use of mark-making could be interpreted as the artist's personal / direct touch. I am also interested in communicating scientific information — interpreted as *visual artifact*.

RW The way you handle codes and systems in your prints suggests a methodology for highlighting awareness of competing and coexisting fields that structure, explain, and define contemporary identity in culture. Successful systems can appear to be global, perhaps even universal, in their operation, making it seem that the essential questions are the ones they ask and provide the means to answer, while rendering other perspectives unthinkable or invisible. Negotiating this kind of mediation requires giving visibility to the substance of systems — with their respective materials, rules, relations, and limitations — in order to step outside of the fields of order and meaning they set up.

EGS I had to focus intensely on the technical aspects of digital printing to make sure that the images looked as I intended. I also wanted to capture ephemeral elements, as in the tracing of time, memory, letters and words spoken / gone, and often these were juxtaposed with identifiers in the virtual world and communications data, such as source code, numbers, grids and pattern.

RW In the digital environment, these materials intersect in ways that collapse the internal coherence of their systems. Visually, the rationalised, formalised structures you mention exist in tension with complex organic, even chaotic, overlays of competing

patterns that are spatially ambiguous or devolve into visual noise. This kind of potential 'information' can also produce effects that invoke an aesthetic dimension, such as cloudy shapes of heightened or subtle colour that seem to generate light and space. These prints work by fusing critical / analytical modes of thinking with the aesthetic: the spell of beauty is cracked open as the desire for legibility confronts the illegibility of codes degraded by competitive clashes with other systems of signification, and the formlessness of code noise contributes to new formal elements that offer subjective visual enjoyment.

EGS In a way, I seem to be dealing with things that are not there anymore — fragmentation, remnants, tags and also information that cannot be removed such as embedded code and symbol. I tried to capture the way this looks. I was also keen to invent a 'tool' or create my own palette for composition, so I used my painting studies with Photoshop to keep that non-digital look, carefully adapting and rendering image specification as the final profile, printer quality and paper were important. The image had to appear embedded into the surface, much like the feel of a traditional print, and yet have the spontaneity of a brush mark. Repeated imagery in the smaller lithographs took on new meanings in situ and helped me to make decisions during installation. Sesnon Gallery Director, Shelby Graham, collaborated in the curatorial selection.

RW I often found my first response to seeing the work develop was an aesthetic appreciation of visual texture, richness of form and colour, and, undeniably, subjective beauty, all of which offer visual enjoyment that is primarily abstract. The unified surfaces produced by your large-scale inkjet printing

invite associations with textiles or tapestries. But with prolonged viewing this initial response becomes complicated as individual elements — fingerprints, manual marking, language in handwriting or typeface, formal patterns — break out of the gestalt or recede back into it. This tension makes it possible to see the interplay of mediating systems — representational, symbolic, expressive, logical, formal, aesthetic. By offering an experiential demonstration rather than a diagrammed illustration, the project constitutes a field for the exercise of visual intelligence. •

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Eleanor Gates-Stuart is a UK born, Australian artist and educator, based in Canberra. Eleanor is undertaking a PhD at the Centre for the Public Awareness of Science, Australian National University and is an honorary Research Professor at UCSC, Division of Arts.

Finger Codes was produced during Eleanor's residency (September – December 2010) at UCSC. The works were exhibited at the Mary Porter Sesnon Art Gallery, UCSC from 3-8 December 2010.

Finger Codes was printed as a set of 14 artworks using inkjet on Hahnemuhle Monet Canvas 410gms, 112 x 224 cm; and as an edition set of 4 prints in inkjet on Hahnemuhle German Etching Paper 310 gms, 56 x 112 cm.

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cover

Cat Poljski

City Intervention Project, (detail) 2011
etching, aquatint, drypoint (2 plates)
etching, digital inkjet print,
60 x 85 cm

donations

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in this issue

pca

- 03 PCA General Manager's Report
- 24 45th PCA Annual Report by Akky van Ogtrop

technical

- 05 Why Photogravure when you can just hit 'Command P'? by Bill Moseley

special feature on book arts

- 06 PCA Zine Project 2011 by Georgia Thorpe
- 07 Staying Sticky by Anna Poletti
- 08 Where do you go to learn book arts?
- 09 Preserve or perish: how the SLV protects its artists' books by Carolyn Fraser
- 10 Fine press collaborations: *The Night Ladder* and *twelve labours* by Angela Gardner
- 11 The Wayzgoose Press: an independent press with an international reputation by Jadwiga Jarvis
- 12 Petr Herel: propitiation by Sue Forster
- 14 Pieces of the puzzle: the art of George Matoulas by Des Cowley
- 15 Glen Skien: the poetry of the everyday by Penny Peckham
- 16 Caren Florance: typographic time lord by Nicci Haynes
- 17 Haunted by books, by word and image: Paul Uhlmann + the artist's book by Paul Uhlmann
- 18 Bibliotheca Librorum apud Artificem: Monica Oppen's private collection of artists books by Karen Vernon
- 19 The Centre for the Artist Book, Brisbane: reflections on surviving the flood by Noreen Grahame
- 20 State Library of Victoria: books and artists by Des Cowley
- 21 Art Gallery of New South Wales Research Library and Archive by Steven Miller
- 22 Artists' books (?) at the State Library of Queensland by Helen Cole
- 23 Artspace Mackay: some new acquisitions by Michael Wardell

exhibition previews and reviews

- 26 *Hot off the Press*: Sydney Printmakers' 50th anniversary exhibition by Sasha Grishin
- 28 *Pressing Issues*: 2011 Castlemaine Visual Arts Biennial by Damian Smith
- 30 *Plates, blocks and stones: five centuries of international prints*. State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia by Lucy Harper
- 33 Cat Poljski: *Imagined Cities* by Richard Harding

new work

- 32 *Finger Codes* by Eleanor Gates-Stuart (in discussion with Richard Wohlfeiler)

artist profile

- 34 Annika Romeyn: winner, 4th Port Jackson Press Australia Graduate Printmaking Award by Sue Forster

news

- 04 Letters to the Editor
- 35 Australia in Print

The book arts issue

Most issues of *IMPRINT* contain some articles about artists' books but it has been many years since the magazine has had books as its theme. This issue acknowledges growing interest in book arts among artists and printmakers — encompassing unique works, fine press publications and low cost multiples such as zines — and the growth in artists' book collections, both institutional and private. Reflecting public interest, acquisitive artist's book competitions are also on the increase (see our Australia in Print section). Joining Artspace Mackay's Libris Awards and Southern Cross University's Artists' Books Awards, Manly Library recently held its inaugural competition and East Gippsland Art Gallery its second. In 2011 the Adelaide Perry Prize for Drawing was awarded for an artist's book, as was the 2009 Fremantle Arts Centre Print Award.

Here, you will find articles by artists about artists who make books but may not have not received much press in *IMPRINT* to date, articles about the history and content of some of Australia's finest collections of artists' books, bookplates and zines, and information about where you can go to learn book arts and protect precious artists' books. My thanks go to all the writers, and especially to Des Cowley at the State Library of Victoria for initiating several articles and writing two.

In his splendid *Australian Artists Books* (2008) poet and book artist Alex Selenitsch cautioned against rigid definitions in a complex and highly collaborative discipline, and I have followed his lead. *IMPRINT* takes an inclusive approach to artists' books, reflected in individual spelling preferences for the generic form as alternatively *artist book*, *artists book* or *artist's book*, and its plural *artist books*, *artists books* or *artists' books*! It is a similar no-rules attitude to book form and content and a happy conjunction of 'material and ethereal', described by Jadwiga Jarvis and Nicci Haynes on pages 11 and 16, that appeal to many. Book arts have a way of appealing the poetic impulse, especially among artists who have developed expertise in materials and techniques along with a love of books and words. They can also be great fun. As *IMPRINT* demonstrates, collective passion produces extraordinary results, both in fine press publication teams involving artists, poets, master printers and bookbinders, and in the alternative economy of the zine. •

For details about the PCA Zine Project see page 6.

* Free zine for PCA member — subscribers

Sue Forster, Editor

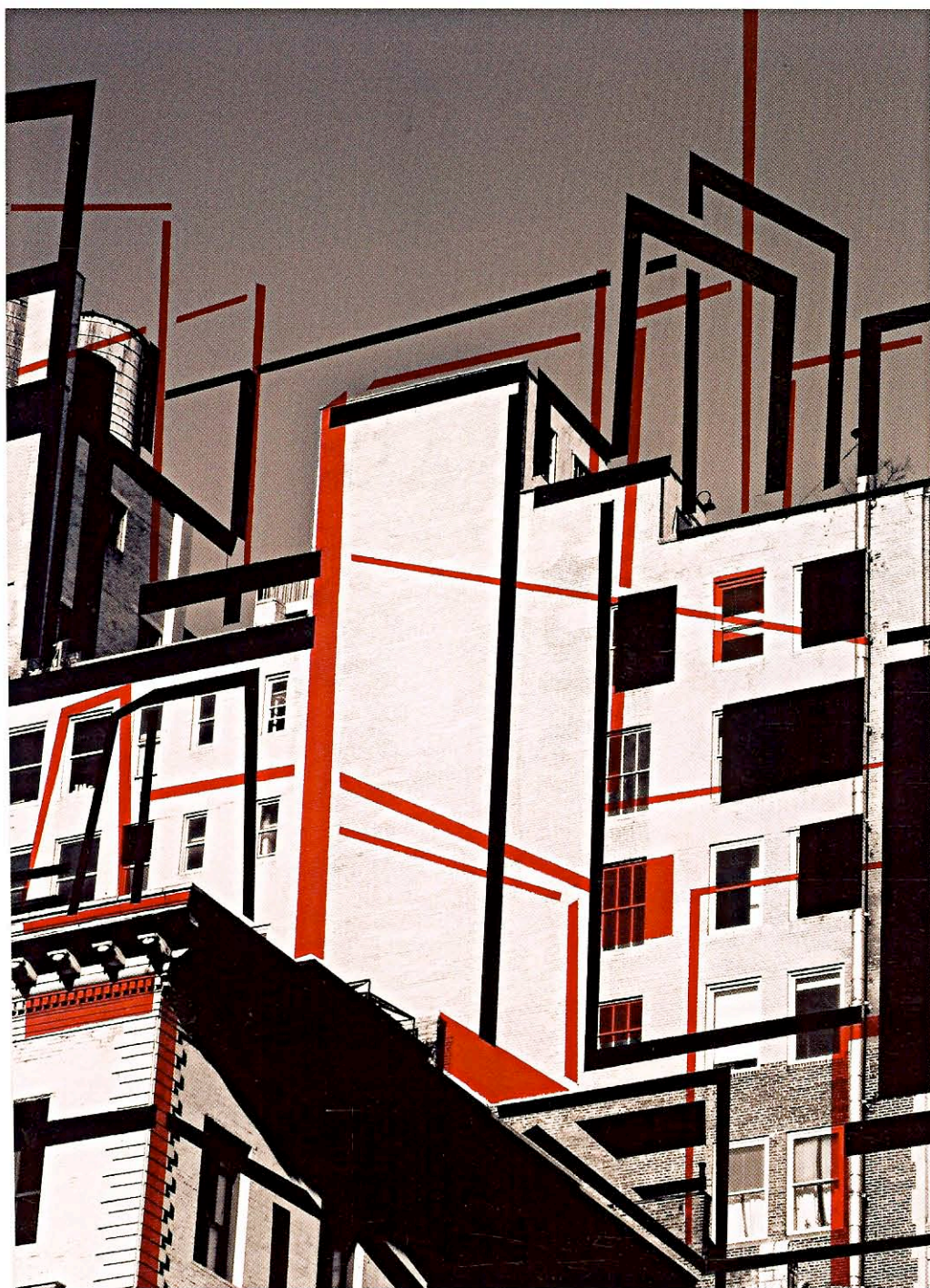


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