

# *EASTERN PAVILIONS Print Portfolio*

## 0.1 Paradox of a Pavilion Without Walls

### *Circulating*

The most thrilling moment of John Berger's television series *Ways of Seeing* (1972) has to be the opening scene in which, with purposive insolence, Berger applies a stanley knife to Sandro Botticelli's *Venus and Mars*, which hangs in a Regency sitting room. 'Tonight,' Berger's voiceover sounds, 'isn't so much the paintings themselves that I want to consider, as the way we now see them in the second half of the twentieth century.' The image of a gaping canvas cuts to a printing press. Now the redacted Venus looks out at us from rows and columns, multiplied many times, on paper reams speeding through a printer. Later a wide shot reveals the defaced Botticelli in its setting - a fragment of a set constructed within a studio. 'The image of any painting can be seen in a million different places at any time, as you look at them now on your screen your wallpaper is around them... at this same moment they are on many other screens.' Berger's opening iconoclastic act peels away reproduction after reproduction, artifice after artifice. In the little Penguin published book, which wears its insides on its cover, Berger acknowledges his indebtedness to the German philosopher-critic Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Published in 1936, the essay describes with messianical acuity how mechanical reproduction - the democratizing effects of mass printing press and photography - has transformed the ways a work of art is experienced in modernity.

Twenty one years later, in 1947, the French Minister of Cultural Affairs André Malraux described the *musée imaginaire* - the Museum Without Walls. The reproducibility of artwork in art books, postcards, posters, unmoored them from their original scale, circulating them far beyond the physical architecture of the museum. This marked what he called a double decontextualisation. The initial decontextualisation occurred in the nineteenth century with the invention of the art museum - a storehouse for amassing and viewing paintings. Here, paintings ripped from their sites of origin, 'cut loose from all referentiality to the use, representational or ritual, for which they might have been created' can be viewed. Isolated from their originary context in the museum they lose function and become *l'art pour l'art*, art for art's sake - autonomous, self-valuable. In an age of the Museum Without Walls the second decontextualisation occurs when photographs of art in artbooks, postcards, posters and reproductions, unmoored from their original in the museum, circulate. Today, the concept of the museum without walls is part of many large museums' digital strategy. Its moniker might be the virtual museum, the online museum, the digital museum, the cybermuseum, or the web museum - a virtual annex on the institution's physical architecture that holds digital collections with no necessary counterparts in the 'real' world.

How do we see images in the second decade of the first half of the twenty first century? After Benjamin, Malraux, Berger, the artist and media theorist Hito Steyerl describes the 'poor image' in her essay *In Defense of the Poor Image* (2009) as the true condition of the photograph today. Viewed on a screen, the poor image is a degraded, itinerant image in an ocean of other images that 'circulate' online.

The poor image is a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution... The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited it transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction.

Like the democratising character of the printing press before it, the Internet is a great leveler that makes more artworks accessible than ever before. But in the virtual, the compromise for accessibility is quality. As the poor image accelerates, it deteriorates.

Does digital screen culture really threaten print media? Is the trade-off for accessibility distraction, diminished attention spans? Today, what does a print portfolio - take Eastern Pavilions' print portfolio - say about images in the second decade of the twenty first century? Doesn't a print portfolio seem strangely anachronistic? Curiously lumpen? In an age of what another art historian calls the 'promiscuity of the image', there seems, perhaps, a renewed relevance for a Museum *with* Walls. It is in light of the hyper-circulation of objects, texts, images and films in our contemporary culture that has led the art theorist Boris Groys to describe the art installation as a radical stabilisation.

Unlike the promiscuous image, the installation does not circulate. Rather, it gathers everything that usually circulates - image, objects, texts, films - by installing them. In general, the installation operates as a reversal of reproduction. The installation takes a copy out of an unmarked, open space of anonymous circulation and places it - if only temporarily - within a fixed, stable, closed context of the topologically well-defined 'here and now'. In the temporary residence of the installation space the promiscuous image gains aura. In, or on, Elizabeth Price's print *Places Where People Resort* (2011) the word 'Here', rendered in a typeface that links the printed page to her moving image work *The Woolworths Choir*, insists on a topologically well-defined 'here and now'. It materialises the very situation in which the print is viewed. Implicit in a print, we could say, is a longing for slowness. Or, because the print is already reproducible, the print lacks the

anxiety of decontextualisation. Because a print is made to circulate it only has to contextualise itself.

### *Wafting*

Before photography there were prints - from etchings to woodcuts, Durer to Goya, broadsheets to street-hawkers. Print in the eighteenth century was celebrated for its ability to waft abroad on a thousand wings (these days images are viral and circulate). They were easily transported and circulated information and art to a wide audience. One of print's essences is its multiplicity. 'The concept of a matrix,' printmaker Paul Coldwell wrote in 2010, 'from which multiple images can be printed, is still, I believe, a revolutionary one and one of the foundations of a sophisticated culture.' Multiple images are produced, enter culture and circulate, and act like an international currency, crossing boundaries, states and time.

From the earliest prints that were directly rubbed from woodblocks, to the four-colour offset presses that print artbooks, postcards, posters, and now into the digital age where an image file might be sent electronically across the world in under seconds, the principle of dissemination and communication remains the same. The Eastern Pavilions print portfolio represent a wide range of print techniques, from Coco Crampton's *Arsy-Versy* (2011) woodcut, firstsite's Contone print reproduction of Nigel Henderson's *Wall Painting. Stopping Out. Grove Road* (1949-53), to Andy Holden's *Untitled* (2011), an extension of the silkscreen print by the addition of googly eyes, plastic toy eyes adhered to the print surface.

Long before the birth of mass-media communication prints circulated. Throughout the eighteenth century, Richard T. Godfrey writes in his history of printmaking in Britain, reproductive prints outnumbered those designed and executed by a single hand of at least fifty to one. It was the desire to more accurately reproduce paintings, watercolours and drawings that drove the development of new techniques. Like the critic who is a parasite upon works, the printmaker was parasitical upon original artworks. The print, specifically the engraving, was considered the handmaiden to art. Upon the founding of the Royal Academy in 1768 engravers were excluded from membership.

The development of photography from the 1840s to the '90s ruined the majority of printmakers. Here was a medium with a slavish subservience, an aptitude and precision, to the imitation of things. Combining optics and chemicals photography could show pictures of famous faces, scientific specimens, faraway places, paintings in the Louvre. 'To survive,' writes A Hyatt Mayor in *Prints & People*, 'printmakers had to turn from what they saw to how they saw, the rare birthright of personality.' He continues in melancholic tone to affirm the accompanying de-ritualisation of the modern world, in somewhat naive terms:

(African carvers similarly changed functions when they ceased to make equipment as useful as X-ray tubes for detecting the unseen and fighting sickness and began instead to tempt tourists with curios. The new African souvenir can be as skillfully made as the old magical mask, but it is cut off from the vitality of service to a higher power. Among us, no painter has for centuries sat down to his easel with a prayer, as Cennini recommended around 1400.)

Print repurposed as an expressive medium coincides with the invention of a collector's marketplace. From Whistler comes the modern practice of signing the print in pencil. When he published his first set of lithographs in 1887 he charged £4 / 4 / 0 for sets signed in pencil, and half as much for those unsigned, despite being all printed in the same print shop. The signature, written by hand, represents authorial intent and affirms its status, not as a mechanical reproduction, but the original work of the artist's mind. Scarcity affirms originality. The edition nullifies reproducibility. The edition resists wafting, or as we might put it today circulating in an ocean of images. Print, this medium which was everyone's, became scarce, limited.

While we know of its scarcity, we also know there is no absolute unique, singular original. Yet, anyone who has looked closely at an etching or screenprint will know that, despite their matrix, each is finely, minutely different - a nuance introduced by the human hand in the process. Prints signed and numbered on their surface display their 'authographic intent' more than others. Colin Self's *How He Felt in the Presence of Butterflies* (2011) and Coco Crampton's *Arsy-Versy* (2011), a drypoint etching and woodcut print, are not only signed and numbered, but display a physical interface between the matrix and paper in their making.

The degree to which a print is more or less 'authographic' could be a way to think about the diversity of prints represented in the Eastern Pavilions portfolio. However, this degree should not be keyed to value. In the early '70s Richard Hamilton declared screenprinting a modern print-maker's medium because, unlike etching or litho, it 'lacked dependence on the hand of the artist'. With the skilled assistance of Chis Prater, a London-based commercial screen printer who ran Kelpra Studios, Hamilton realised a key early work *Adonis in Y-Fronts* (1963). The following year, in '64, Hamilton, with the ICA, published a portfolio of 24 artists that included Gillian Ayres, Peter Blake, Patrick Caulfield, Bernard Cohen, Robyn Denny, David Hockney, Howard Hodgkin, Allen Jones, R.B. Kitaj, Victor Pasmore, Peter Phillips, Bridget Riley and William Turnbull - most of whom had not used screenprinting before. Print making is a collaboration. Behind most of the Eastern Pavilions print works is a technician, who arguably may be equally as important.

With the exception of Nigel Henderson, all the prints in the Eastern Pavilions print portfolio are signed and numbered in their edition of 144. (Henderson appears in the portfolio as a kind of totemic figure. Among a roster of living and working artists, he is the only one no longer with us. But it is not just his 'lateness' that makes him totemic. Henderson was a key member of the Independent Group, which included the likes of Paolozzi, Hamilton and the architects Alison & Peter Smithson, who met at the ICA in the early '50s to explore popular culture as material. In '54 he left London for Essex to establish Hammer Prints Ltd. In the last few years art and design historians have started to revalue this period of post-war British art.) Originally, in its presentation, the curator of Eastern Pavilions, Kaavous Clayton, mixed the sequences of the editions. There are twelve prints in an edition. There are 144 editions. Twelve divides into 144. Clayton - 'irrationally', he admits - mixed the editions so that one portfolio would contain 1/144, 2/144, 3/144 and so on, instead of each print belonging to a single edition. Before the portfolio could launch Clayton's meticulous work had to be re-organised. This gesture is irrational, of course, only in terms of the marketplace. Such a conceptual gesture effects circulation. It is not without its precedents. Eduardo Paolozzi's *As is When* (1965), twelve screenprints based on the life of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, undercut the idea of an original by printing each set in different colour schemes. In the 1990s Cuban artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres produced endless copies of photolithographic prints displayed as paper stacks that could be taken away for free by the public. These print stacks could be purchased by collectors or museums on the condition they sign a contract to continue free distribution of prints, reprinting them as they reduce (the printed stack's sculptural property is something the contemporary Glasgow-based artists Tom Godfrey explores in his project *Marbled Reams*).

Today, traditional processes and ever-expanding new processes overlap in printmaking. As new technology presents new ways of printing, traditional processes hold an enduring fascination. In Eastern Pavilions' print portfolio digital process cannot be so easily disentangled from analogue printing techniques. But this is a general condition of print at large today. Ryan Gander's *md, ddkmddsdp* (2011) most visibly displays this entanglement. His is a silkscreen print, a process with an ancient history, depicting bands of pixel-matrix patterns. These patterns are exploded views of the red wavy lines that underline possible spelling errors in Microsoft paint - the exploded view, perhaps, of the same red line that shows on my screen beneath Gander's title as I wrote this.

It should be noted that few of the artists included in the Eastern Pavilions print portfolio would describe themselves primarily as printmakers. One of the great modern printmakers, Picasso, was after all not simply a printmaker. Many motifs and themes in these prints

crossover into the artists' wider practice; While the prints have an autonomy inside the portfolio, all kinds of relays exist between them and the artists' wider practice.

In an age of the 'poor image', the hyper-circulation of photographic imagery, the print portfolio is a kind of resistance, a differencing of images. Its small circulation comes at a cost - it is after all a commodity - but its ethic is democratic. Eastern Pavilions' print portfolio comes from a noble intention: to make quality artwork that we can live with accessible.

## 0.2 Notes on the Architecture of Eastern Pavilions

### *Flowing*

The idea of Eastern Pavilions engages the architectural imaginary. What would this pavilion look like? Taken literally, belligerently, the image is apocalyptic. Twelve institutions, each a structure-bearing column, beneath one vast ceiling - Norwich, Colchester, Bedford and London at its extremities - spanning south East Anglia, casting it into shadow, grounding all flights in and out of Stansted. It would resemble the deceptively simple architecture of Big Sheds - those vast, airy structures already not uncommon along dual carriageways at the edge of King's Lynn, Cambridge, or Bedford. It would be an hallucinatory realm.

As metaphor (a figure of speech not literally applicable) the image is rich - it does a great deal of work. Twelve institutions gather beneath its translucent roof; the roof is held aloft by twelve pillars. While Eastern Pavilions has no enclosing or excluding walls between its pillars, it forms a boundary. But this is an open boundary - porous, dynamic - spanning Norwich to the East, and London to the far west. A minimum definition of architecture could be that it makes space: if Eastern Pavilions is architecture, it is architecture without architecture. Placeless, roaming, indeterminate. Eastern Pavilions at Manchester Contemporary, Eastern Pavilions at the University of Essex, Eastern Pavilions in Bethnal Green, Eastern Pavilions in Lincoln. It was a certain decentralised, roaming architecture - architecture without architecture - that the utopian-visionary school of architecture dared to imagine in the 1960s and 70s.

Influenced by Pop Art, sci-fi comics and the structures of oil refineries, experimental British architectural group Archigram imagined a plug-in city of the future, in which buildings would be indeterminate in scale, would be in process and flux, and spread in an expanding network. Construction cranes would be permanent features of their buildings. Part of the architectural ensemble, these cranes would lift new modular rooms into place, add whole new floors to the perpetually incomplete structure. It was at the ICA - not here but at the old ICA in Dover Street - in 1963, the year after David Hockney, Allen Jones and Peter Blake showed at the Paris Biennale, that Archigram curated the Living City

exhibition, which proposed the city as a 'unique organism'. For Living City Archigram members David Greene and Michael Webb designed a placeless triangulated structure floating 'with an unstated purpose, hopefully benign, arriving in a bleak landscape'. 'Here,' one commentator writes, 'the shape and physical boundaries of the building are dissolved, pushing indeterminacy to an extreme, wherein the range of alternatives is so broad and open that the building almost disappears. Moreover, *The Thing* not only responds passively to uncertain situations but rather its radical indeterminacy is an active agent that creates and fosters an even more ambiguous and emergent reality.'

As the critic Simon Sadler writes in his book *Archigram: architecture without architecture* the group's primary concerns were flows and processes, the question of how best to capture these qualities in architecture. Further, how to capture architecture in a burgeoning era of transistorised and wireless information devices. In his book Sadler highlights a fascinating connection to the wider influence of conceptual art of the time, which was then famously dematerialising the object. Between 1967 and '69 Greene taught with the artist Victor Burgin in Nottingham, and at his suggestion turned to the writings of Joseph Kosuth and Sol Lewitt (Burgin's *Photopath* featured in the seminal conceptual art exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form: Concepts - Processes - Situations - Information*, which took place at the ICA - recently relocated to the Mall - in 1969). As Kosuth writes in one of the most important documents of conceptual art of the era, *Art After Philosophy* (1969):

*... man in the nineteenth century lived in a fairly standardized visual environment. That is, it was ordinarily predictable as to what he would be coming into contact with day after day. His visual environment in the part of the world in which he lived was fairly consistent. In our time we have an experientially drastically richer environment. One can fly all over the earth in a matter of hours and days, not months. We have the cinema, and colour television, as well as the man-made spectacle of the light lights of Las Vegas or the skyscrapers of New York City. The whole world is there to be seen, and the whole world can watch man walk on the moon from their living rooms. Certainly art or objects of painting and sculpture cannot be expected to compete experientially with this?*

Drawings and building projects began to disappear from Archigram's work, Sadler writes, as they embarked upon the tabula rasa of free-form architectural thinking - a pure form of architectural idealism. Around the time Malraux's museum lost its walls, architects, influenced by the dematerialising art object, imagined architecture without architecture. Its indeterminacy released place from overdetermining identity. And yet, however indeterminate, however fluid, the architectural image of Eastern Pavilions is not totally free-form - it provides a stabilising structure. Beyond the print portfolio box, what is this structure that coheres the group? It is an idea. Walls that are not there.

The art historian Richard T. Godfrey claims that printmaking as a worthy addition to a painting practice, printmaking for its own sake rather than for merely reproducing drawings, began in early nineteenth-century East Anglia with the Norwich School.

Artists such as John Sell Cotman, John Crome, and John Middleton, pioneered the art of 'unpretentious and intimate' studies of landscape and so constituted the first English group of painter-etchers. This valuation of the print as art could, according to Godfrey, only have happened 'secluded from the busy machinery of the London print market'. While few of the portfolio artists would actively identify with the Norwich School, something of the remove from London that enables extraordinary things to happen is evident here. Eastern Pavilions is an identity, a place without place, that has continuous connections to other places, times and agencies. So while it is desirable for an East Anglian pavilion to retain its specific identity, it is interconnected, dynamic - diffuse with London.

Jonathan P Watts, April 2013