

imprint

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printmaking • works on paper • book arts



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above
Irene Proebsting, *Expanded Head*,
1995, collage 25 x 23 cm.

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opposite
Nicci Haynes, *Silents*, 2014,
stop motion animation of A4
photocopied pages,
aspect ratio 704 x 1072 cm.

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Between movement and stasis

Kate Zizys investigates experimental approaches connecting film with printmedia.

When we view art products through the lens of the technologies used to create them, our visual and affective experience might be enhanced. The artist's hand has long been celebrated while the machines of production have tended to be sidelined as mere technological aids. What happens, though, when we consider the connections between traditional printmaking and experimental film?

The machine, certainly, is a friend of great sensory importance and influence in the making of print-based works. Not only does the machine contribute to what might be described as the 'final surface', but the interaction between different image-processing machines and viewing platforms further extends the overall aesthetic. Harnessing this interaction to produce meaningful contemporary art works is a dedicated job and perhaps best understood through Donna Haraway's feminist cyborg vision of shared communication between people and technologies¹. It is during the process of creation that experimental artists foster an important relationship with their machines, which is essentially collaborative. It is perhaps this process that frees the final artwork from a banality of visual imagery for the artist/printmaker. We see our machines in our works, and we understand and celebrate them.

Artists Irene Proebsting and Nicci Haynes developed their appreciation for image-making technologies and the creative potential through exposure to industrial and commercial industries during the early 1980s when the digital era was new. As a young woman, Proebsting was employed as a drafting officer at the Yallourn Power Station for the State Electricity Commission of Victoria. The job involved drawing up plans, typesetting, manual graphic design work and photography. She went on to collaborate with experimental filmmaker and composer Barry Brown, creating oblique experimental and non-narrative films on Super 8 celluloid, using sound to harness hand-crafted static images interspersed with landscape footage and special effects.² These artworks are viewed via Super 8 projection and variously scaled TV sets.

Haynes, by contrast, spent her childhood at her father's offset printing business, which provided labels to the lace-making manufacturers of Nottingham, England. Later earning a science degree, Haynes' expanded knowledge of offset printing mechanics and chemistry led to the creation of innovative animations produced via surface interference on celluloid, print production via photocopy machinery and manipulated found film footage.

To construct her works, Haynes also builds her own image-making machines incorporating flip-book techniques and uses hand drawing. These art products incorporate incidental sound, lighting and sometimes projection. Some exist on digital platforms such as Instagram, where they are commonly viewed on a small scale but can be accessed in larger format depending on screen size.

There are diverging ideas across the two artists' methods of making and exhibiting. Both use a collage of materials and processes and incorporate drafting, light, sound and projection as a creative foundation for image creation and viewing. Machinery and software are used as making and operating tools. There is an alternating scale on which works can be viewed across viewing platforms, which is a significant feature from a curatorial perspective. Both artists' works are also respondent-based, requiring the maker to engage in problem-solving through collaboration with the tools and procedures used, as opposed to striving for mastery over a single medium.³ Respondent works are fundamentally exploratory and involve compromises, negotiating and changing direction right through to and beyond the final product.

In Haynes' case, her practice incorporates old, new and self-made technologies. Through her works,





outdated, invented and emerging technologies incorporate mistakes, glitches and even obsolescence. Her works are built using practical methodologies to create functional items that aid the creation of further works as seen in her *Experiments* and *mad Walk*⁴ on Instagram, involving a self-built animation machine and incorporating light and shadow. Both works incorporate traditional drawing, lighting and loose binding techniques transformed into physical and digital animation. Other works in progress use laser-etching directly onto 16mm film creating a new way to produce tonal values while paying homage to scratch film techniques used in pioneer experimental filmmaking and the dot-screen matrix used in photographic serigraph printing. Here, the use of technology is collaborative in the sense that Haynes makes aesthetic compromises with her machines and mediums along the way, adjusting for new visual experiences at different points of making and exhibition.

Proebsting's work is made using in-camera editing techniques, which create an abstract narrative the artist does not wholly control. As shown in works *Harmonic Ghosts* and *Instruments for Chorus and Orchestra*⁵, much of the overt narrative in these films relies on an examination of static images and their details. Specifically noted are Proebsting's striking collages, which feature prominently in *Instruments for Chorus and Orchestra*, as do various texts. The controlled narrative created by visually mapping the varied connections between image and text is interspersed with footage manipulated through in-camera technical alterations in real time. This lends a level of subconsciousness to the work, which could belong as much to the machine as to the artist.

While Proebsting's work is located in the field of experimental film, she uses techniques shared with visual artists working across printmedia. Haynes' works are based closer to print practice and even though she uses celluloid film to create artworks, there is no direct influence from experimental film theory in

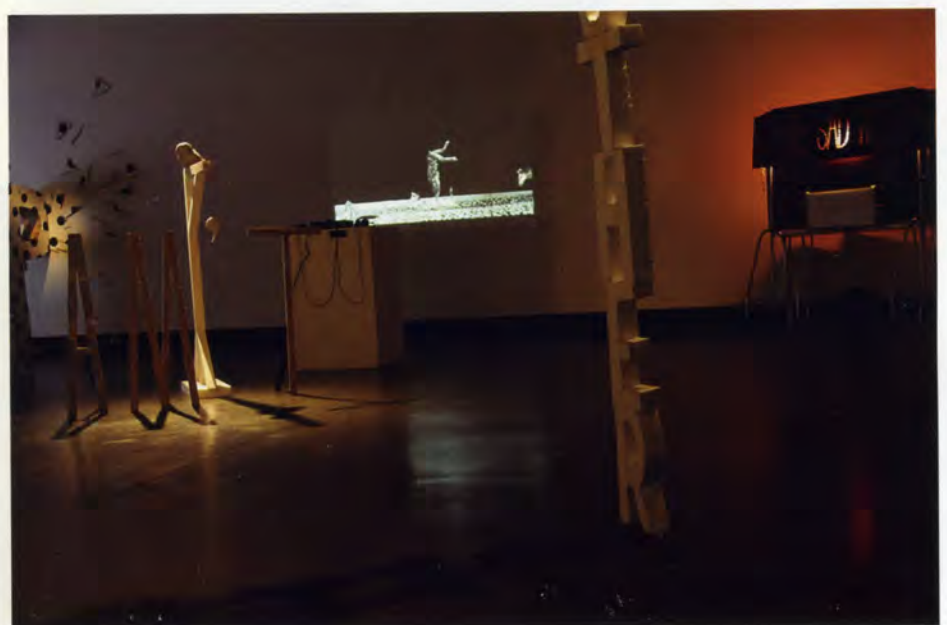
her end-products.⁶ Both artists illustrate how an artist can evolve from producing prints into the experimental film production arena.

The recent post-graduate work of Andrew Keall also demonstrates this well. His use of print production extends into animations constructed from etchings, which are viewed on screen alongside free-standing laser-cut and found-object text-forms, creating an immersive experience within the exhibition space. By using shadows, objects, moving and static pictures⁷, Keall's work is an extension of those creative concerns found in the work of Haynes and Proebsting, located at the intersection of the static and moving image. Like Keall, pre-digital art producers Haynes and Proebsting became aware of these possibilities while learning to make static printed works. In post-modern and contemporary art production this can be identified as an area of play now greatly enhanced by user-friendly software imaging tools, which can propel the training printmaker directly into experimental film territory.⁸

Intaglio states, reduction relief-printing, serigraphy colour separation and black-

and-white as well as colour lithographic techniques can be considered in terms of the proofing and editing process. These two necessary labours reveal how images can be reduced via stop-out, or grow in content through addition of new detail and colour, thereby developing sequential animated visual narratives and abstract non-narratives with sequential value. It is worth considering that manual and digital proofing and editing processes help print-based artists to develop a subtle understanding of aesthetic differences in line, tone, form and colour, arguably more so than digital processes alone can demonstrate, simply because real texture, height and depth cannot be surface features of works created with software, which remain essentially planographic. Digitally produced work is always flat regardless of imitation texture and other applications, and cannot demonstrate chemical and physical phenomena which occur during manual print processes—including working on the surface of celluloid film.

This has distinct outcomes for artists in training. For printmakers, visual training occurs through observing loss





and gain in the amount of ink offsetting and collecting across different surfaces, paying attention to changes on the surface of works through application of stop-outs, scratching, and applying chemicals and solvents. Being exposed to alterations in colours, where outcomes diverge from theory due to metal mediums altering the hues of pigments in inks, or subtle unexpected colours emerging when pigments are suspended throughout different mediums and layered on top of each other, gives the printmaking artists a deep experience of how pigments work in chemically different environments. This kind of experiential learning through use of different processing and printing methods lends itself to an experimental approach to art making and appreciation, while the machine as the final producer of the finished work adds its own layer of grain, embossment, tone, surface and scale to the product. Experimental film producers such as Len Lye have explored this territory in depth through their own dedicated focus on the celluloid surface in addition to in-camera editing possibilities.⁹

We can accept that fundamentally celluloid film is a print displaying sequential images. When viewed as a celluloid strip held in the hand, what we perceive are static images organised one after another. A machine provides this printout with the means for viewers to perceive motion. Experimental film has embraced common processing techniques including using chemicals, solvents, stop-out and cut / paste editing methods as devices to create new narratives and aesthetics on the surface of the film. We can consider how the manual techniques used in printmaking have naturally extended print-based artists knowledge through to consideration of the moving picture and that these technical revelations have really guided printmakers to the point of intersection with film. Today the term *print* refers to the static image, the repeated image and the moving image as processed on paper, celluloid film or generated through photo and communication technologies and other machine-based processes.

Digital platforms present new possibilities for printmakers, by allowing us to manipulate our manual works

through different processes to create states which can be isolated as frames and linked together sequentially. There are many ways we can do this now. Among other techniques, we can take phone photos of proofing states and GIF them together to observe the changing picture, or we can drop the photos into a morph program and manipulate the sequence as one would manipulate a frame-by-frame video. The digital photocopier can easily create changing frames per image. These can be strung together using software applications to make short films as demonstrated by the short film *Silents* which Haynes presented in Hangzhou, China at the Impact 9 print conference in 2015.¹⁰

Probesting, Haynes and Keall, working as experimental art practitioners in diverging disciplines, demonstrate moves into this moving aesthetic, with mutual concerns about using technologies. Experimental film has broken much ground already. Print based artists, driven by advancing digital technologies, can access this rich ground of process-driven work and perhaps find a map of sorts to expand their practice.



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above

Nicci Haynes,
Mad Walk, 2019,
stop motion animation,
2mins 16secs.
Aspect ratio 1704 x 080.

—
far left

Andrew Keall,
installation detail, 2016,
MFA exhibition.

—
left

Out of the Matrix, group
show curated by
Richard Harding, 2016.
Installation by Andrew Keall
including 3D text forms,
stop-frame animation and
static images. RMIT Gallery.

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Notes

1. Haraway, Donna. *Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. (Routledge 1991).
2. Mousoulis, Bill. 'Melbourne Independent Film Makers'. <http://www.innersense.com.au/mif/proebsting.html> (National Library of Australia Pandora Archive, 2018).
3. Medieval Guilds and Craft Production <http://employees.oneonta.edu/farberas/arth/ARTH200/artist/guilds.html>
4. Haynes, Nicci. *Mad Walk*. Stop motion animation, 2mins 16secs. Aspect ratio 1704 x 1080. Comprises 800 individual drawings, pencil on tracing paper, approx. 7 x 12 cm. (@niccihaynes2019).
5. Barry Brown & Irene Proebsting *Assemblages and Improvisations*. <http://fono-optik.com/>. (Amphitheatre Press publications 2019).
6. Nicci Haynes, interview with Kate Zizys, 28 November 2019.
7. Keall, Andrew. *Out of the Matrix*, RMIT group exhibition (Story Hall 2017).
8. Abrosoft Fantamorph is a good example of contemporary software which allows users to play with static images in order to create moving pictures.
9. The Len Lye Foundation <http://www.lenlyefoundation.com/page/films/70/11/>. (Technix Industries Limited, 2020).
10. Haynes, Nicci. 'Silents' <https://niccihaynes.com.au/t/links>, <https://vimeo.com/111813815> (Nicci Haynes, 2020).