

**Abstract**

**A DEMOCRATIC ART**

by

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May, 2013

Director of Thesis: Michael Ehlbeck

School of Art and Design: Printmaking

This is a report on my creative research and it is written in support of my thesis exhibition entitled *A Democratic Art*. This thesis is an investigation into the ways printmaking is celebrated within the printmaking community, with particular attention given to the notion that printmaking is *the most democratic of all art forms*. In exploring the concept of a *democratic art*, I will consider democratic participation that has taken place throughout the history of the United States. This work is the result of my experience working as a collaborative fine art printer and the satisfaction I have derived from my involvement in these endeavors, coupled with my concern for the relationship between this specialized labor and the constant struggle for social justice within the broader political economy to which it is inevitably tied.



**A DEMOCRATIC ART**

A Thesis

Presented To the Faculty of the Department the School of Art and Design

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

by

Michael Smoot

May, 2013

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	iv
INTRODUCTION .....	1
PROBLEMS IN PRINTMAKING: TECHINCAL DIFFICULTIES .....	3
SECTION 1: ... of the notion of a Democratic Art .....	5
SECTION 2: 174 Impressions .....	17
THE BEAUTIFUL STRUGGLE .....	37
CONCLUSION .....	50
REFERENCES .....	51

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 1 .....	5
2. Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 2 .....	6
3. Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 3 .....	7
4. Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 4 .....	8
5. Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 5 .....	9
6. Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 6 .....	10
7. Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 7 .....	11
8. View #1 of print examples .....	18
9. View #2 of print examples .....	19
10. View #3 of print examples .....	19
11. 16 Relief Techniques and 4 Japanese Woodblock Techniques .....	21
12. 16 Relief Techniques (detail) .....	22
13. 30 Relief Collagraph Techniques .....	23
14. 30 Relief Collagraph Techniques (detail) .....	24
15. 30 Etching Techniques .....	26
16. 30 Etching Techniques (detail) .....	27

17. 30 Intaglio Collagraph Techniques.....	28
18. 30 Intaglio Collagraph Techniques (detail) .....	29
19. 10 Monotype Techniques.....	30
20. 10 Monotype Techniques (detail).....	31
21. 60 Lithography Techniques (detail) .....	33
22. 60 Lithography Techniques and 4 Screenprinting Techniques.....	34
23. 4 Screenprinting Techniques.....	35
24. Buckets.....	36
25. Collagraph Matrices.....	36
26. Relief and Etching Matrices.....	36
27. Collagraph Matrices II .....	37
28. Etching Matrices .....	37
29. Mirror Phases .....	38
30. Mirror Phases (detail 1) .....	39
31. Mirror Phases (detail 2) .....	39
32. Mirror Phases (detail 3) .....	40
33. Mirror Phases (detail 4) .....	40
34. Yesterday/Today (Untitled) .....	41
35. Yesterday/Today (Untitled) (detail 1).....	42
36. Yesterday/Today (Untitled) (detail 2).....	43
37. Yesterday/Today (Untitled) (detail 3).....	44
38. Yesterday/Today (Untitled) (detail 4).....	44
39. Yesterday/Today (Untitled) (detail 5).....	45

40. Yesterday/Today (Untitled) (detail 6).....	45
41. Without the mighty roar? .....	47
42. Without the mighty roar? (detail 1) .....	48
43. Without the mighty roar? (detail 2) .....	49

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most often cited characteristics of printmaking that is used to distinguish it from other modes of artistic production is that it allows for the creation of multiple, practically identical, images or impressions. This notion, which holds reproducibility as the hallmark of printmaking's functional potential, can be broken down into three requisite components: the *matrix*, the *medium*, and the *substrate*. An example of this could be the tracking of muddy footprints onto a floor. In this example the matrix is the bottom of one's foot, the medium is mud, and the substrate is the floor. Therefore, the matrix holds what is to be transferred, the medium is the substance or material carried by the matrix, and the substrate is the support material upon which the medium is impressed or deposited. Traditionally, matrices are made of wood, metal, or stone, mediums include various forms of ink, and substrates are most commonly paper.

With its ability to easily create multiples, portability and ease of distribution are another set of traits used to delineate printmaking from other types of artistic creation. While it is typically a piece of paper covered with ink or the *print* that is disseminated, it is not difficult to see how the muddy foot in the example above could also be pressed against a wall, thus allowing for impressions to exist simultaneously on the floor, a wall, or practically anywhere else one could imagine to stamp a mud covered foot. This illustrates that the portability and distributive capabilities possible in printmaking can be applied to the matrix, the medium (which by its very function must be portable), and the imprinted substrate.

The combination of these characteristics: the creation of multiple impressions, portability, and ease of distribution serve as the premise for the claim that printmaking is the most democratic of all art forms.

During the 1930s, the era of the Depression and the New Deal, American artists made printmaking one of the decade's most vital and exciting art forms. Both egalitarian ideals and economic constraints encouraged artists to explore prints as a way to produce "art for the millions." Innovative printmakers emphasized new types of meaningful content, and sought new strategies for distributing their works to a wider audience. Their desire to expand public interest in visual art paralleled contemporary American interests in promoting "cultural democracy," a term used in the 1930s to suggest that greater access to fine art, music, dance, and theater would benefit every citizen...Supportive critics and art dealers quickly asserted that the diversity, originality, and dynamic visual quality of 1930s prints demonstrated their importance as a vitally democratic type of American art. Prints were seen as particularly democratic because they were produced as multiple originals and could therefore be sold more inexpensively and distributed more widely than paintings. Francis V. O'Connor, the first scholar to reassess the importance of the 1930s federally funded art programs, has noted the close connection between increased interest in printmaking and the affirmation of democratic social ideals: "Prints in any technique—relief, intaglio, planographic, or stencil—are the products of immediate risk and implied social commitment. The artist who crafts them must command an often difficult medium while also possessing a sense of democracy alien to the creators of unique objects." (Langa, 1-2).

A democratic art should question the intentions, the traditional methods of production and modes of display. Traditionally printmaking is often appreciated merely for the variety of technical

effects it can produce. If printmaking is to live up to its claim of being a democratic art, it must challenge this appreciation and explore the possibilities of a democratic art that begins with civic participation. The nature of democratic participation does not propose concrete solutions; rather solutions are generated through the act of participation itself. The images in this document are represented in a way that draws attention to the one's interaction with the artwork and the phenomenological aspects of the gallery's display mechanisms. The two main sections of my thesis deal with the tradition of printmaking, fine art, and gallery display and, concludes with an alternative conception of a democratic art and artistic/democratic involvement.

### **PROBLEMS IN PRINTMAKING: TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES**

While there are a number of potential matrices, mediums, and substrates that could be used to produce prints, the traditional medium is either water-based or oil-based ink and the traditional substrate is one of many types of paper. The key variable that is routinely used to distinguish different printmaking techniques is the kind of matrix used for the creation of impressions. These techniques are grouped according the way in which ink is carried or transferred by the matrix and are categorized as follows: *relief*, *intaglio*, *planographic*, and *stencil*. Relief techniques retain ink on top of plateaus on the matrix. Intaglio techniques carry ink within depressions in the matrix. Planographic techniques hold ink in the surface of the matrix. Stencil techniques pass ink through openings in the matrix.

A large portion of my thesis exhibition consists of a series of prints that were made using each of the four traditional categories listed above: relief, intaglio, planographic, and stencil. This series of prints was created to give the viewer an overview of a variety of printmaking techniques and the methodologies they support. These prints, along with other objects in the

exhibition, lend credibility to the questions that are posed by the other pieces in my exhibition by representing my active participation in the world of fine art printmaking and as such, validate my concerns for some of its guiding tenets.

Printmaking has a long and varied history and the starting point that is commonly used to encourage an appreciation of this history is its ability to make copies of visual information. This ranges from multiple handprints on prehistoric cave walls serving as testament to the individual who participated in the creation of a series of enigmatic paintings, Sumerian stamps used to denote ownership of clay vessels, charcoal rubbings of Buddhist sutras that had been painstakingly carved from stone in China, Gutenberg's bible that paved the way for a whole new era of information exchange, early American newspapers and pamphlets that provided a platform for a cacophony of disparate voices, posters either lending support for or denouncing social movements, advertising billboards selling products, to limited edition fine art prints created in collaboration between famous artists and boutique printshops to be sold at art fairs and auctions. Printmaking's capacity to produce multiples that can be distributed and displayed to a mass audience has been a perennial source of its social relevance and appreciation.

What is vital to an exploration of printmaking's reproductive and distributive capabilities, and their connection to the idea of a democratic art, is how these capabilities are used. The intended purpose, anticipated reception, visual content, mode of production, and method of distribution utilized in the performative act of printmaking invariably reveal the social attitudes and values held by those involved in the process. Thus, printmaking can be understood as an institutional act and whether participants attempt to disavow the cultural context in which they are embedded or grapple with it, the fact remains that there is a cultural conception of what printmaking is and what it can do that precedes any physical act. It is a cultural understanding

that determines how printmaking is appreciated. The following section describes the ways in which I utilized these ideas in the artwork and displays that comprise my thesis exhibition in an effort to come to terms with the concept of a democratic art.

While the contents of my thesis exhibition are meant to be viewed collectively, with the different components suggesting something about their relationships to one another, I will discuss my exhibition in sections for the sake of clarity and ease of comprehension. Upon completion of this descriptive analysis I will address the relationships between the component pieces and how they relate to the theme of my thesis.

### **SECTION 1: ...of the notion of a Democratic Art**



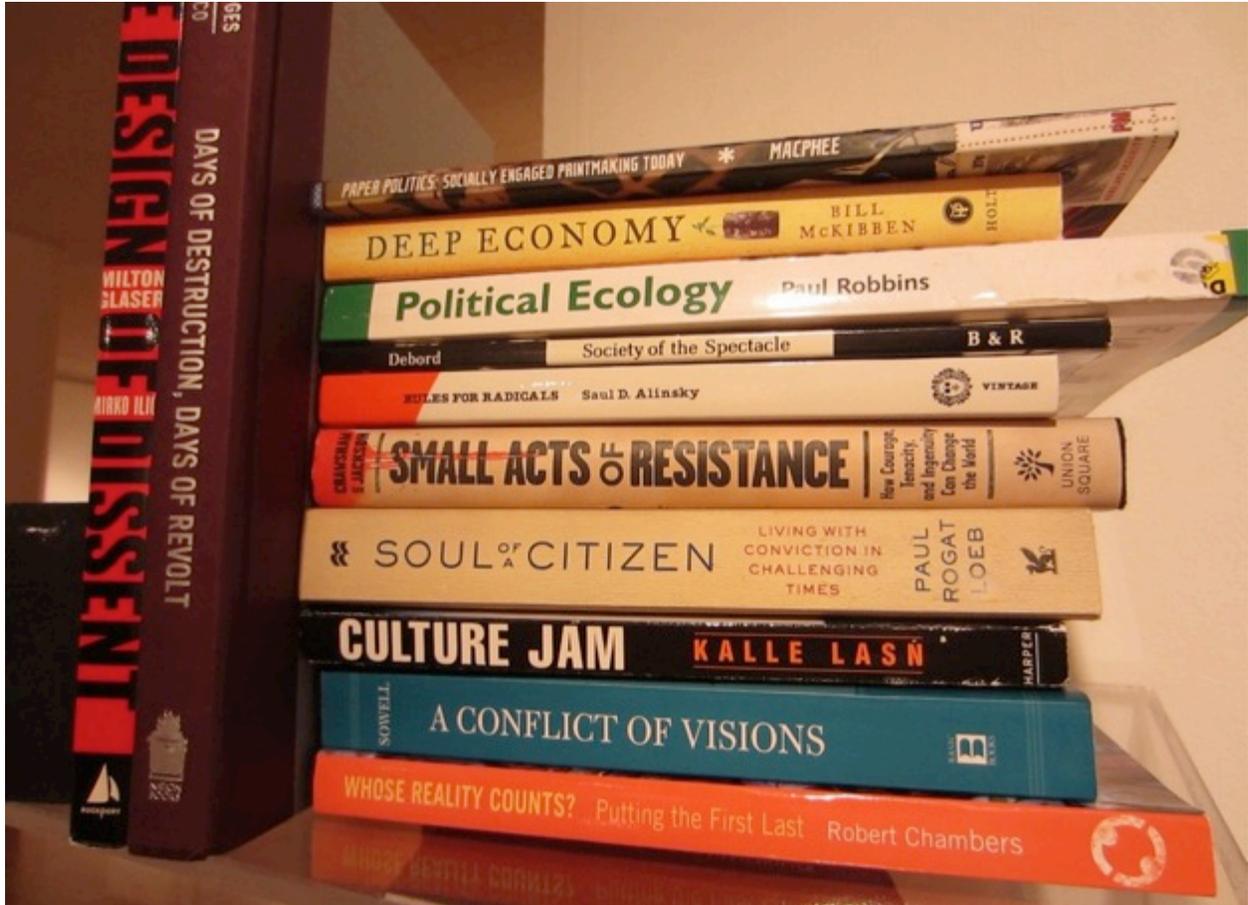
**Figure 1:** *Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 1*



**Figure 2:** *Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 2*



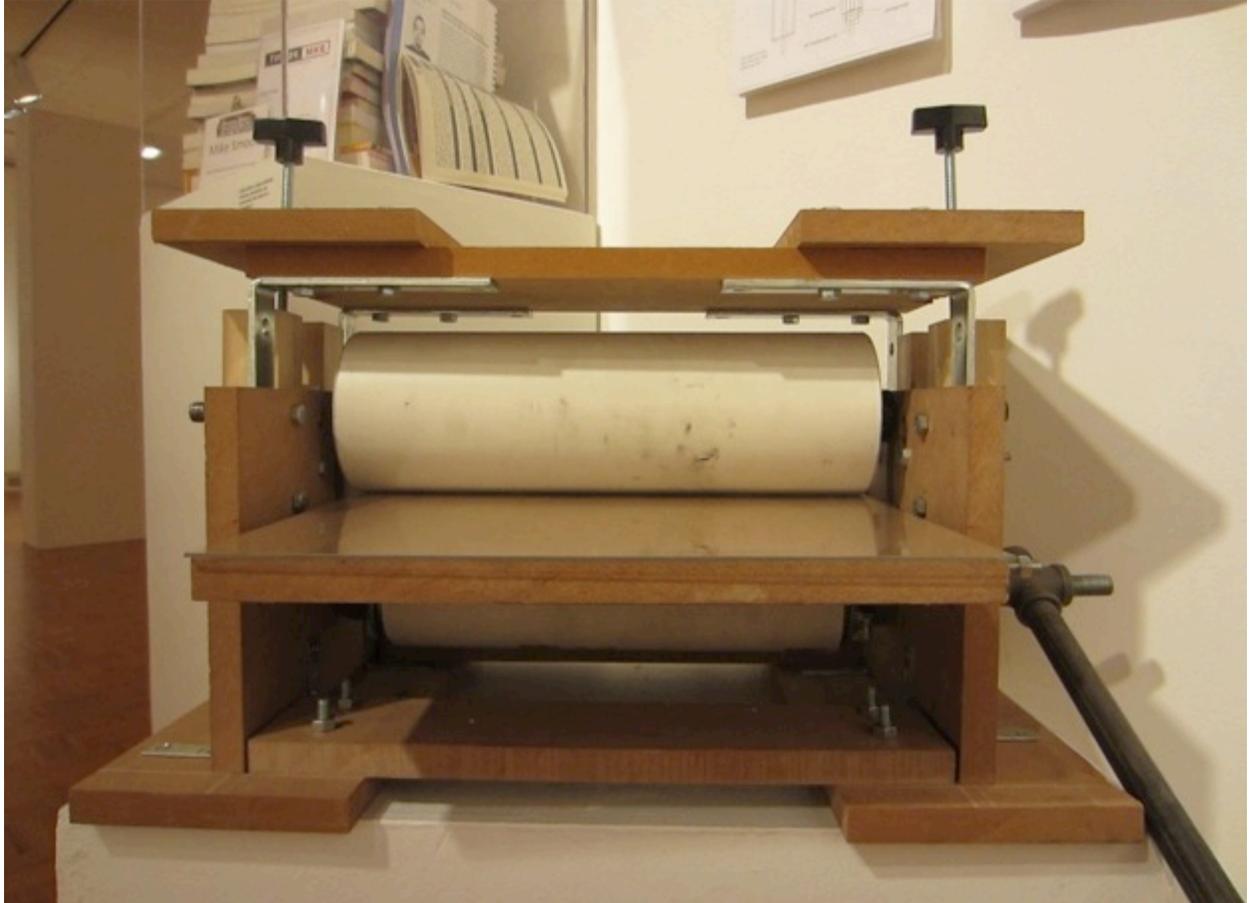
**Figure 3:** *Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 3*



*Figure 4: Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 4*



**Figure 5:** *Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 5*



**Figure 6:** *Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 6*

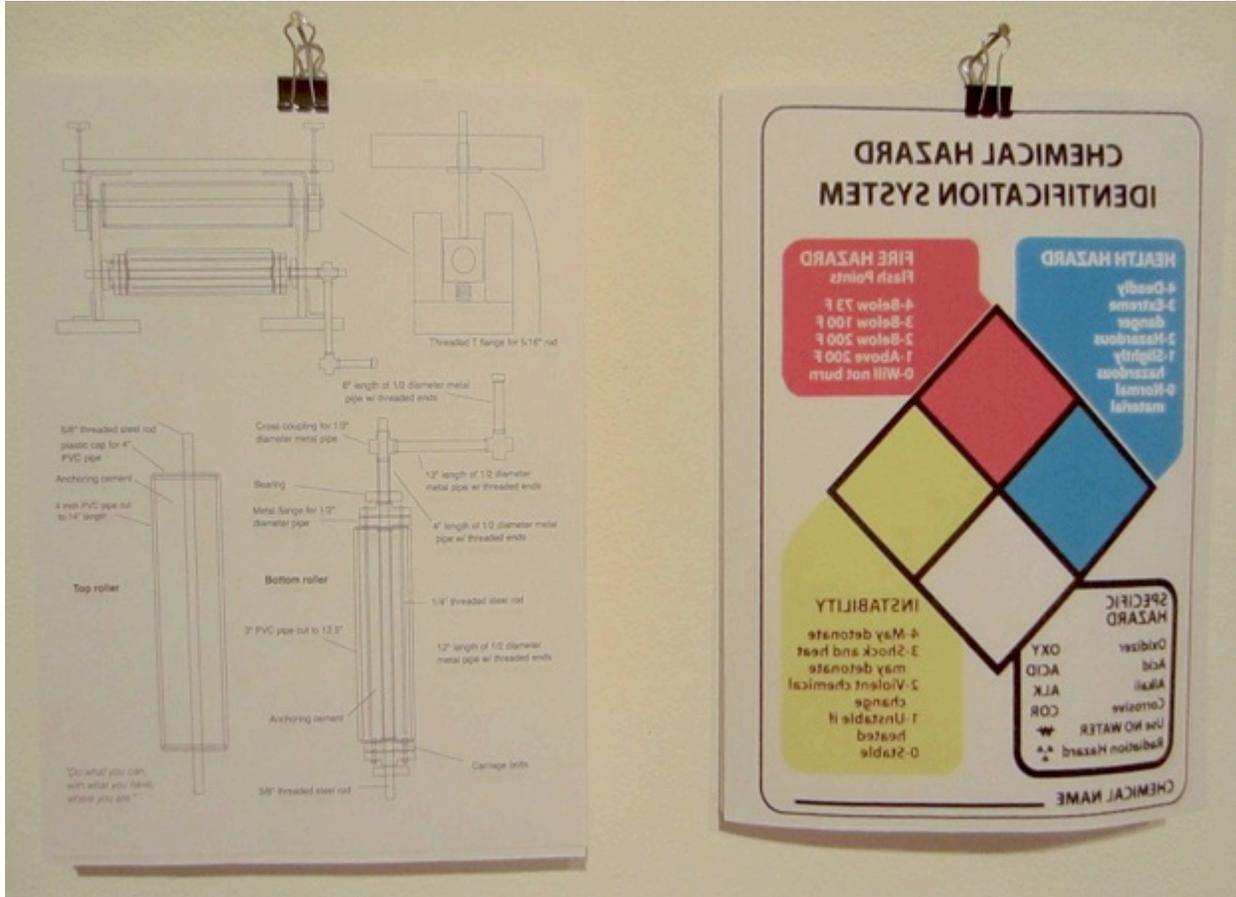


Figure 7: Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art 7

This section of my thesis exhibition is entitled *Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art*. This title is a reference to the contemporary practice of producing prints in limited quantities, their collection by a select clientele, presentation in archival mats and frames, preservation in climate controlled environments, and the contradiction of these practices in relation to the idea of a democratic art. While this section may be experienced as either the beginning or end of my installation, I have

chosen to begin by writing about this collection of work because it deals with my understanding of printmaking as it is practiced and establishes my position within this practice.

The first component of *Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art* consists of three of my own printing aprons hung on the side of an 8x8' moveable wall that is 1' thick and is set at a 90-degree angle against the main gallery wall (Figure 1). Aprons are worn by people working in the printmaking studio as a means to protect their clothing during the printing process. Through their use these aprons accumulate the ink, dirt, grit, and grime that result from actively working in the shop. Many printers take pride in their aprons and the patina of use that they accumulate over time, similar to the way in which a baseball player might take pride in a well used glove. These aprons are evidence of the printer's labor and serve as both a symbolic and literal testament to it. By displaying three of my personal aprons on the gallery wall, I am referencing my individual experience and work in the world of fine art printmaking.

The top apron is the oldest of the three and is from the year I spent honing my skills as a collaborative fine art printer at Tamarind Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico. During this year I became proficient in the technique of lithography, which utilizes the chemical reactions that occur between acid and fat to create a hydrophilic/hydrophobic planographic matrix on either a slab of limestone or an aluminum plate. Tamarind Institute is a unique program in that its aim is to teach students how to create prints for artists rather than for themselves. It is renowned worldwide for the quality, depth, and breadth of its instruction and admission to the program is very selective, being limited to a maximum of eight students per year from an applicant pool that spans the globe. Students are trained to a high level of technical competence in the technique of lithography with the goal that all lithographs they produce, for any artist(s) they may work with,

will meet the strictest curatorial standards of collectors, galleries, and museums. Thus, the Printer Training Program at Tamarind Institute is not directly concerned with the *artistic* development of its students, but instead aims to graduate students that have the knowledge, insight, and experience necessary to assist artists in the technical aspects of the creation of fine art prints. As such, when working with an artist, the printer often has little concern for the content of the print being produced and remains narrowly focused on the production of impressions that are consistent with the artist's goals. Through careful physical and chemical processing of the lithographic matrix, the printer serves to retain the fidelity of the artist's direct manipulation of that matrix, which results in impressions that meet the artist's aims. This apron is a representation of the time and effort I spent learning to be a collaborative printer at Tamarind Institute and the assumptions that that education brings with it, namely, an emphasis on technical mastery of a very specific printmaking technique to be used in the service of artists, with the goal of producing prints of a quality that could be sold to collectors, galleries, and museums.

The second apron on the wall, which is behind my Tamarind apron, is from a printmaking conference that was held at East Carolina University during my second year as a graduate student. This conference, *Print Summit 2010*, was conceived of and organized by the faculty of the printmaking department at ECU, along with some assistance from students in the department. Print Summit 2010 had the participation of a number of established and esteemed printmakers from both the U.S. and Canada, provided live demonstrations of various printmaking techniques, included lectures on printmaking topics, incorporated an exhibition of prints by participants, and culminated in the publication of a book that chronicled and expounded upon the entire event. My Print Summit 2010 apron alludes to my time in graduate school. It also represents the shift that began to take place in my thinking about printmaking as a cultural

phenomenon and how these new considerations impacted the course of my graduate work. Specifically, while the Print Summit was a pleasurable experience, providing the opportunity to interact with fellow printmakers, I began to question exactly what was being celebrated. More than once during the conference, I overheard attendees invoking printmaking's democratic merits. This implication was contradictory to my experience of the conference. This gathering was focused largely on the idea of printmaking as a field of technical exploration, with the idea of progress consisting of novel ways of applying a medium to a substrate. In effect, the so-called democratic potentials of printmaking came to rest solely on the production of multiples and the merits of this production could only be fully ascertained and appreciated by individuals already familiar with its means. The concept that comes to mind when I hear or read the word democracy is the continual negotiation of discord between many divergent voices. The concept of democracy that I experienced at Print Summit 2010 was one of copious homogeneity, despite claims of inclusivity. Additionally, the majority of work that was displayed in the exhibit revealed an ideological position that proposed to mitigate the print object's cultural starting point. This means that the object's merit lay in its autonomy from and transcendence of the *social matrix*, thereby generating a universal appeal. Though this belief, in its function, is meant democracy requires the conscious and willful participation of all of its members so that it may evolve in its recognition of those voices previously unheard. This process is dynamic and participatory and requires the organization and mobilization of many people intent on challenging existing social conditions that are inequitable. To this end, some of the prints in the show contained content that acknowledged social realities. Yet, despite this shift towards a more socially cognizant position, one must question the capacity of a thought-provoking poster, hung within the confines of a traditional white cubed gallery, to arouse purposeful civic participation

among viewers. This is especially problematic given the austerity of the traditional gallery space and its intentional exclusion of any direct references to the world beyond it. My white Print Summit apron hangs juxtaposed to the white walls of the gallery that surround it in my exhibition. Its relative cleanness and minimal use reflect a personal period of contemplation of the world beyond the print studio and how I might apply my accumulated experience in printmaking to a socially accountable and socially responsible artistic practice.

The third apron on the wall is one I received as a gift for my contribution to the Southern Graphics Conference International at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design in March 2013. This apron represents my participation at the conference in which I presented a homemade printing press, which I designed and built from materials that I purchased at a local hardware store. This project was conceived as a way to enable individuals with limited financial means to build a functional printing press with readily accessible materials. Although my findings were presented at a conference geared specifically toward printmakers, the idea that motivated my research was to provide individuals unfamiliar with printmaking the ability to develop their own means of printmaking production. My demonstration addressed an element of the printmaking problematic that I find critical to it fulfilling its claim of a democratic imperative. Namely, that the means and modes of production utilized for the creation of prints must be available to all if all are to have a voice. The hope of this project is that if individuals with concerns grounded in their recognition that the social matrix precedes the print matrix have the ability to generate their own means of print production, along with methods of display and distribution, that these prints will take on a function entirely different from those of their *trained* counterparts and be more compelling and potent in their social engagement. And so, this apron suggests yet another phase of my involvement in the world of printmaking.

The second component of *Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art* is a pedestal that is covered by a clear plexiglass cube. Inside of this vitrine are a series of books on printmaking (Figure 2). These books are instructional in that they relay information about the myriad of processes that comprise traditional printmaking practice and the subset of different techniques that make up these processes. This display is meant to further emphasize the focus on technical acumen that is prevalent among printmaking practitioners. The sheer variety and volume of these books is indicative of the illusory notion of a democratic art, because although there are many books in the pile, and they address different technical aspects of printmaking, the basic tenets for the appreciation of these techniques is the same. These tenets are based upon the different uses of the printmaking matrix for the transference of ink onto paper in the creation of multiples and the idea that this alone is sufficient for the assertion that printmaking is a democratic art. Along with this stack of books on printmaking techniques, the vitrine contains two nametags from printmaking conferences at which I presented demonstrations of my homemade press and the corresponding catalogs for those conferences. The combination of these objects is meant to reference my involvement in the world of printmaking and my efforts to come to terms with its social implications. I have placed these items within the vitrine in an effort to draw attention to the cloistered nature of the technical core of traditional printmaking practice. Conversely, the set of books on top of the vitrine pertain to printmaking activities that are heedful of their social involvement, as well as books that deal with topics that are helpful in generating an informed democratic participation (Figure 4). The placement of these books outside of the vitrine where viewers may peruse them is meant to encourage an active participation with the work, and

through the content of these books, elicit a desire to engage meaningfully in the democratic process.

The third component of *Limited edition, original multiples: Collection, presentation, and preservation of the notion of a Democratic Art* is two sets of inkjet printouts hung from the wall on binder clips, directly above my homemade press (Figures 5, 6, 7). The printout nearest to the vitrine contains the blueprints for my press. Both the press and blueprints are tangible manifestations of the idea of a more democratic form of printmaking. The set of blueprints are available for viewers to take and use however they choose and the press is an example for them to copy and/or improve upon. The set of printouts to the right of the press design is a template for an MSDS sheet that has been reversed so that the text is backwards. This set of printouts concerns my ambivalence toward the health and environmental impacts of the chemicals and processes used in printmaking, even though the printout of the press designs, and the press beneath them, would seem to encourage a participation in these activities. Despite my efforts to address my concerns with the enactment of printmaking methodologies and their effect of the social process, I still find myself grappling with the ecological ramifications of this practice. These ecological ramifications have serious repercussions on the social process, because it is healthy ecosystems, which sustain life, that allow the social process to unfold in the first place.

## **SECTION 2: 174 Impressions**

The second section of my thesis exhibition contains 174 examples of print techniques made using traditional relief, intaglio, planographic, and stencil matrices. The purpose of this section is to present different methods of printmaking and my technical competence in using them, focusing on the different types of impressions these individual matrices can create. The

placement of these objects within the space of my installation is meant to question the social relevance of these methods and my complicity in their production and display. It is also meant to elicit a consideration from the viewer of how and why these prints are appreciated (Figures 8, 9, 10).



**Figure 8:** View #1 of print examples



**Figure 9:** View #2 of print examples



**Figure 10:** View #3 of print examples

The first set in this series of prints is entitled *16 Relief Techniques and 4 Japanese Woodblock Techniques* (Figure 11). All of the prints are made using relief matrices created from the following materials: an end grain wood block, a sheet of plywood, a sheet of linoleum, and a sheet of rubber. For the production of these prints I utilized two methods of applying ink. The first is the Western method of rolling oil-based inks onto the relief matrix with a cylindrical roller called a brayer. The second is the Japanese technique of using a horsehair brush to apply sumi ink mixed with rice paste to the surface of the block. The prints using oil-based ink are printed on cotton rag paper and the prints using sumi ink and rice paste are printed on Japanese paper, mounted to cotton rag paper. All of the prints in this series were printed by hand with a baren. The baren is a 5 ½” diameter round plastic disk with a shallow handle on one face, used to grip the tool while applying downward pressure. The baren is moved in a steady, circular motion across the back of the printing paper, which has been carefully laid on the inked block. Traditionally used in Japanese style printing, barens work equally well with Western techniques.

There are various different types of relief processes used in printmaking. They are classified as members of the same family because in each the actual surface from which the printing is to be done stands in relief above the rest of the block, which has been cut away. Ink is applied to the surface of the block, and is transferred to paper by applying vertical pressure. (Griffiths, 13)

“Woodcut is often described in terms of gauging, slashing, and chiseling, and there is indeed a physicality to the process that often translates to the finished work” (Suzuki, 16). To demonstrate this physicality, this series of prints shows the blocks printed prior to the removal of material as well as after, and with modest differences in pressure. Thus, this set of relief prints is an example of the hallmark traits of the relief process as established by traditional print practice (Figure 12).



**Figure 11:** *16 Relief Techniques and 4 Japanese Woodblock Techniques*



**Figure 12:** *16 Relief Techniques* (detail)

The second set of prints in this section of my exhibition is entitled *30 Relief Collagraph Techniques* (Figures 13,14).

The word collagraph is an amalgamation of two words, *collage* and *graphic*, implying a connection between the method of construction and subsequent printing of an image, and reflecting the etymology of the word from the Greek *kolla*, glue, and *graphe*, writing...Traditionally, a collagraph “plate” is made in the manner of a collage: cutting and pasting paper and other textural elements onto a stiff cardboard support. (Grabowski and Fick, 141)

Collagraph matrices can be printed in two ways. The first printing method is to treat them like other relief matrices and roll oil-based ink across the plateaus of the adhered materials. The

second printing method involves the processes used for printing intaglio matrices, and will be discussed later. The former method of relief printing was the one used for the production of this set of 30 prints. Each of the thirty relief collagraph prints in this section of my exhibit was created using a unique matrix, resulting in thirty unique prints. These prints are an example of the various possibilities of collagraph plates printed in relief. Matrices were made using cardboard, glue, and textural materials and were printed on my homemade printing press.



**Figure 13:** *30 Relief Collagraph Techniques*



**Figure 14:** *30 Relief Collagraph Techniques* (detail)

The third selection of prints in this section of my exhibit is entitled *30 Etching Techniques* (Figures 15,16). Like the plates used in *30 Relief Collagraph Techniques*, each print in *30 Etching Techniques* was made from a unique matrix in an effort to show the variety of visual representations possible. My use of the term etching in the title of this piece is a bit misleading because etching refers to the use of chemical agents (usually acid) to chemically remove material from a metal matrix or plate. Typically, these plates are made of thin sheets of copper or zinc and are etched with either nitric acid or ferric chloride. While the majority of these plates were etched, a few of them were created using nonacid techniques. As such, the techniques used could be more accurately described using the general term *intaglio*.

The word intaglio means to engrave or to cut into and describes the making of metal printing plates. Traditional platemaking processes fall into two categories, those where lines are inscribed directly by hand, such as engraving, and processes that employ acids to establish images on metal, known as etching. In contemporary usage, the term intaglio can refer to any printing matrix where the ink is held in recessed areas of the matrix. (Grabowski and Fick, 103)

My use of the word etching in the title of this set was a reference to the fact that these matrices were made from either copper or zinc and as a way to differentiate these prints from others in the section. This set of thirty prints displays a wide range of techniques for creating matrices with metal plates, as well a different method of transferring ink to paper than the one used for relief printing. Because intaglio plates hold ink in the recessed areas of the matrix, the paper used to print them must be soaked in water to remove its binding agents and make it pliable. After soaking, the paper is blotted dry and placed on top of the inked plate that is positioned on the press bed. Intaglio matrices are inked by smearing ink across the surface of the plate with either a cardboard or plastic card. This process forces ink into the recessions in the plate. The excess surface ink is then wiped away with wads of fabric and sheets of paper, leaving ink in the plate's recesses only. The plate, covered with damp paper, is then covered with a set of felt blankets. This entire stack of materials is then cranked through an etching press, which consists of a top and bottom roller, and a press bed, all of which are made of strong materials, typically metal. The pressure created by the etching press squeezes the dampened paper into the recesses of the plate, thereby transferring the ink from the plate to the paper, creating a print. This process is then repeated for all subsequent prints. The signature attribute of all intaglio techniques is the type of recession created in the matrix. *30 Etching Techniques* employs a wide array of acid and

nonacid techniques for the creation of thirty unique metal matrices formed with different types of recessions and is an example of the various potentials of this medium.



**Figure 15:** *30 Etching Techniques*



**Figure 16:** *30 Etching Techniques* (detail)

The fourth selection from this section of my exhibit is entitled *30 Intaglio Collagraph Techniques* and was created using the same thirty plates used for *30 Relief Collagraph Techniques* (Figures 17,18). Since the same plates were used, their method of construction is the same. Similarly, since the plates were printed as intaglio matrices, they were printed in the same manner as the prints discussed in the previous section. Although the plates are the same ones used for *30 Relief Collagraph Techniques* the prints that comprise this section are drastically different in appearance because of the use of the intaglio printing technique. This section reveals the different visual effects that can be produced with collagraph plates because of their versatility of being able to be printed with both the relief and intaglio method. This versatility is one of the key characteristics that are touted in the appreciation of the collagraph technique.



**Figure 17:** *30 Intaglio Collagraph Techniques*



**Figure 18:** *30 Intaglio Collagraph Techniques* (detail)

The fifth selection from this section of my exhibit is entitled *10 Monotype Techniques* (Figures 19, 20).

The term “monotype” is used specifically for works without repeatable matrices...Working on an unarticulated plate, the artist develops an image much like a painting or drawing. When it is complete, the image is printed onto a paper or other support. Because the marks made to create the image are not physically established in a printing matrix, it is possible to print only one copy of the image. Ghost impressions are sometimes taken of the ink remaining after the original print has been taken, but the quality of the image is significantly different so as to constitute another monotype. (Grabowski and Fick, 187)

Monotyping is a unique printmaking process in that it is incapable of producing consistent multiples. However, the necessary combination of the matrix and the medium utilized in the creation of monotype prints emphasizes the production process used in making these prints, and it is this emphasis on the production process that is ubiquitous in the appreciation of the full spectrum of printmaking techniques. This selection of monotypes in my exhibit serves as a record of their production.



**Figure 19:** *10 Monotype Techniques*



**Figure 20:** *10 Monotype Techniques* (detail)

The sixth and final selection from this section of my exhibit is composed of two pieces that display two different printmaking techniques (Figure 22). These techniques are the planographic process of lithography and the stencil process of screenprinting.

Lithography is a planographic process. This means that unlike relief or intaglio processes, it does not rely on the physical characteristics of the matrix. Instead, the matrix is created chemically to form printing and nonprinting areas.

Traditional lithography capitalizes on the principle that oil and water don't mix. The stone or plate surface is comprised of mutually exclusive hydrophilic (water-loving) and hydrophobic/oleophilic (water-rejecting/grease-loving) surfaces. To

make a print, the surface of the matrix is alternately sponged with water and rolled with an oil-based ink, which adheres on to the grease-loving parts.

(Grabowski and Fick, 159)

The planographic prints in this section consist of sixty examples of different techniques using the process of stone lithography and are entitled *60 Lithography Techniques* (Figures 21, 22).

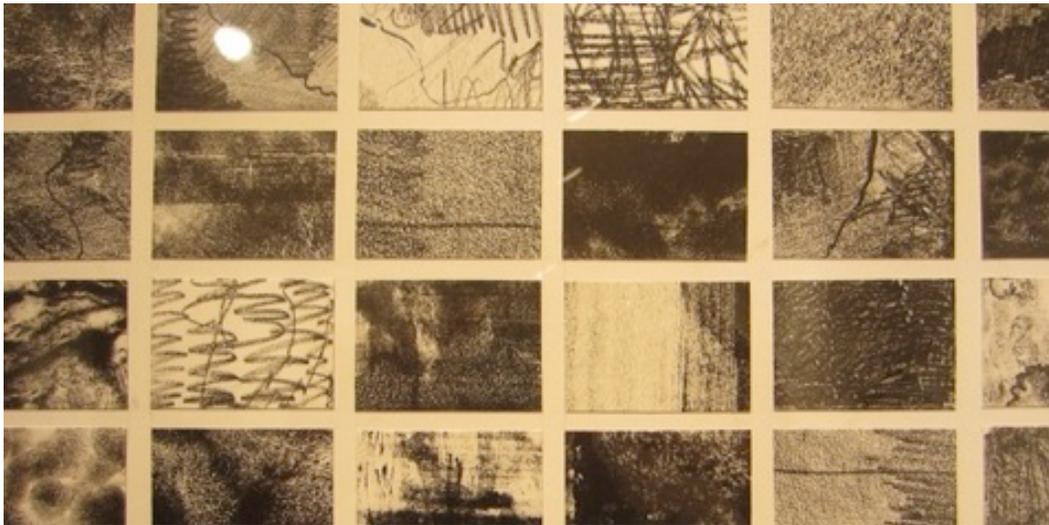
The second set of prints in this selection utilizes the stencil process of screenprinting and is entitled *4 Screenprinting Techniques* (Figures 22, 23).

Screen printing (or serigraphy, or ‘silk’ screening) is a highly adaptive printing process in which ink is pushed through a stencil image adhered to a tightly stretched mesh on a wooden or metal frame. The ink is transferred through this stencil onto a material or object using a squeegee. It’s a deceptively simple process, utilized worldwide in various stages of automation to print a wide range of items, many of which can only be made using the process. (MacDougall, 9)

The screen used to demonstrate this technique was prepared using four methods. First, I used a light sensitive coating called photo emulsion to create a stencil of a computer generated halftone dot pattern. The computer-generated image was printed on an inkjet printer, coated with vegetable oil to make it transparent, taped to the coated screen, exposed to UV light, and the screen was rinsed with water. In this process when the transparent inkjet printout was exposed to UV light, after being attached to the screen coated in photo emulsion, all of the opaque areas on the printout blocked the UV light. The translucent areas allowed the light to pass through and hit the emulsion, hardening it. When the exposed screen was rinsed with water the unhardened emulsion that had been covered by the opaque parts of the printout washed away, creating a stencil of the original computer image. Second, I used a material called drawing fluid, which is a

water-soluble, fast drying liquid, to paint directly on the screen. I used screen filler, which can only be removed with detergent, to cover the areas of the screen that I did not want to print. I then sprayed the screen with water and the brushstrokes I created with the drawing fluid washed away, creating a stencil of them. Third, I used a wax crayon to draw directly on the screen. The wax from the crayon acted as a resist and prevented the water-based ink used for printing from passing through the mesh. Fourth, I used tape, adhered directly to the screen, to block ink from passing through the mesh, creating the rectangle that houses the other three techniques.

The display of the lithographs and screenprints differ from the other prints in my exhibition for multiple reasons. First, they act as a transition to *Mirror Phases* (see Figure 29). Second, I wanted to question traditional methods of gallery display. Through stacked and frameless images, exposed nails, and visible layout lines, books, catalogs, and aprons, I am challenging the normally anticipated gallery experience.



**Figure 21:** *60 Lithography Techniques* (detail)



**Figure 22:** *60 Lithography Techniques and 4 Screenprinting Techniques*



**Figure 23:** 4 Screenprinting Techniques

The corresponding element that is part of this display of 178 examples of different printmaking processes and their techniques is four plastic buckets filled with earth. All of the matrices used to create the prints shown have been stuck in these earth-filled buckets (Figures 24-28). The purpose and display of these objects is multifaceted. First, they are meant to comment on the *grounding* of traditional printmaking practice, with its focus on, and reverence for, the technical and physical possibilities of the matrix. Second, they are an allusion to the possibility of the institutional mobility of the matrix. If the generative possibilities of the matrix are what are celebrated in traditional printmaking practice, then perhaps they could be utilized to greater social efficacy beyond the realms of the gallery and printshop. Third, they question the extraction and transport of the raw materials used to create the matrices, and the waste generated

before, during, and after printing. The buckets symbolize the ecological footprint of the print process. The buckets further emphasize the movement of material and the commodity chain involved in the production of these prints. The buckets, stationed below the printed images and filled with earth and printmaking matrices, play a key role in questioning traditional printmaking practices.



**Figure 24:** Buckets



**Figure 25:** Collagraph Matrices



**Figure 26:** Relief and Etching Matrices



**Figure 27:** Collagraph Matrices II



**Figure 28:** Etching Matrices

## **THE BEAUTIFUL STRUGGLE**

The purpose of this section of my thesis exhibition is to investigate the implications of the idea of a democratic art. While the other portions of my exhibition serve to question the notion of a democratic art as it is employed in the field of traditional fine art printmaking, this section aims to address what this idea might mean in terms of civic participation within a democratic system of government. The relationship between the idea of a democratic art as applied in fine art printmaking and the possible ways this idea might be appreciated in relation to one's agency as an engaged citizen is the central motif of my entire thesis exhibition.

The first piece in this section of my exhibition is entitled *Mirror Phases* (Figure 29). It consists of a 12x48" mirror cut into two 12x24" pieces that are mounted perpendicularly to each

other in a corner of the gallery, at the same height of approximately five feet. The location of these mirrors is critical. One of them reflects my prints and objects dealing with printmaking, along with the work of the other artists in the gallery, while the other reflects my artwork addressing democracy in the United States. These mirrors, due to their placement and relationship to one another, reflect the work in my exhibition, the viewer's reflection, the reflection of other artwork displayed in the gallery, as well as other people in the gallery. Besides their placement, the other key element of this set of mirrors is the text that is etched into them. The text etched into the mirror that reflects my work dealing with my explorations of printmaking reads, "Getting to die alone." The phrase, "getting to die alone" is a reference to the concept of autonomy from the social process that is a major premise in the philosophy and practice of Fine Art and fine art printmaking (Figures 30, 31). The text etched into the mirror that reflects my work dealing with democratic participation reads, "Struggling to live together." The phrase, "struggling to live together" is based on my sense of what democratic participation means and what is at stake when this participation is either avoided or undertaken (Figures 32, 33). This sentiment is supported by the remaining pieces in my exhibition.



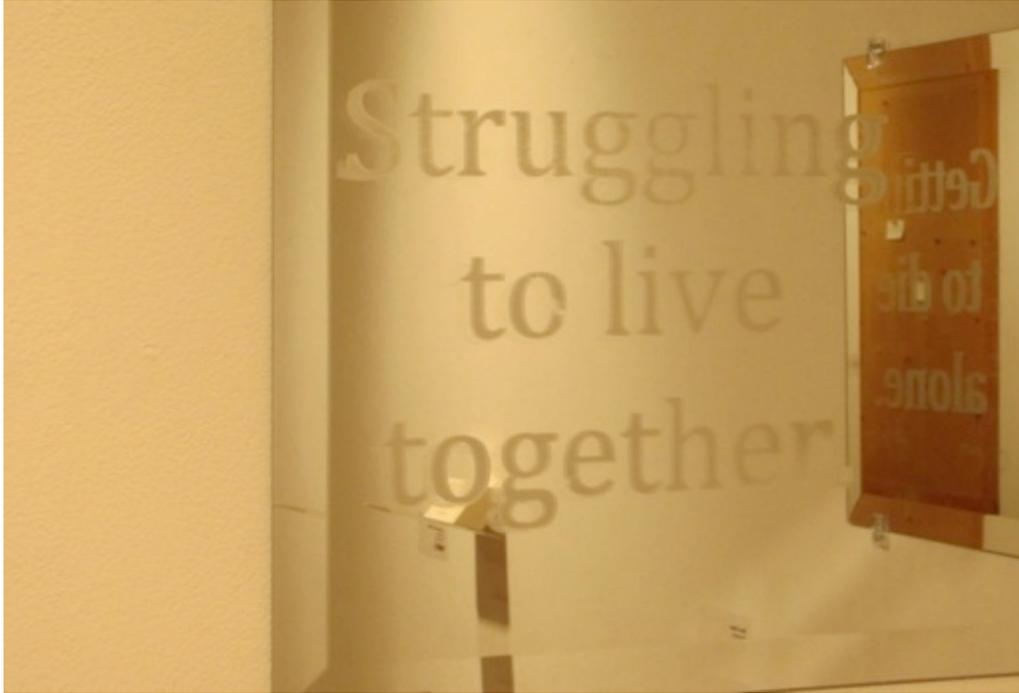
**Figure 29:** *Mirror Phases*



**Figure 30:** *Mirror Phases* (detail 1)



**Figure 31:** *Mirror Phases* (detail 2)



**Figure 32:** *Mirror Phases* (detail 3)



**Figure 33:** *Mirror Phases* (detail 4)

The second piece in this section of my exhibition is comprised of six sets of 150 business cards placed on plexiglass cardholders that have been mounted to the gallery wall. Viewers are free to take the cards if they wish (Figure 34). Each set of cards is entitled *Yesterday/Today (Untitled)* and the entire group of six sets of cards is meant to be considered as one piece. Every set of cards contains different pieces of information. They were all printed with a laser printer.



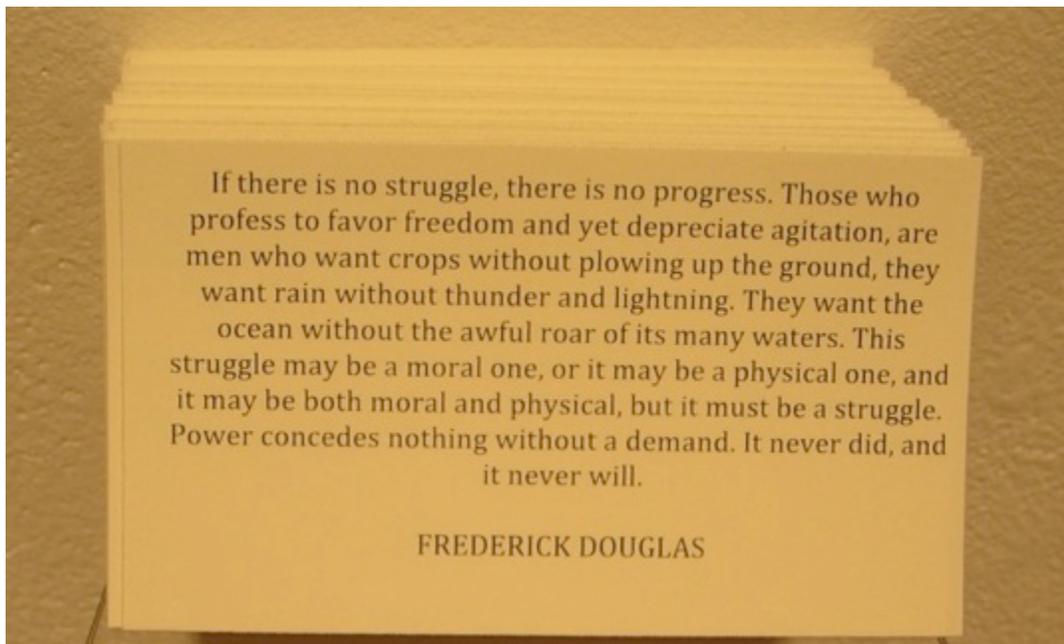
**Figure 34:** *Yesterday/Today (Untitled)*

The first set of cards (Figure 35) is inscribed with a quote from Frederick Douglas that reads,

If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the

ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, and it never will. (Douglas)

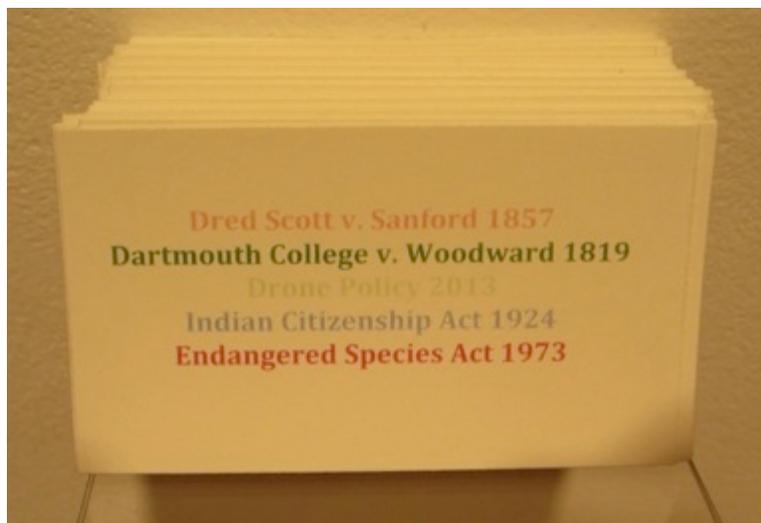
This quote by Douglas, an African American slave who eventually won his freedom and became major figure in the Abolitionist Movement, is a testament to the level of involvement and commitment that earnest democratic participation requires. At the same time it is a call for engagement with contemporary social issues and proof, by way of examples from his life and times, that within a working democracy even the most egregious and unjust of social practices, no matter how ardently entrenched they may be, are capable of being upturned and changed. The sentiment of this quote can be related to all of the work in my exhibit.



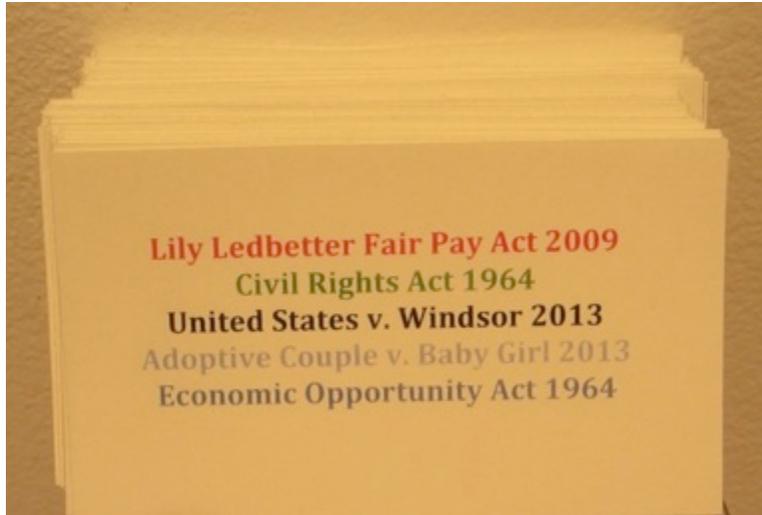
**Figure 35:** *Yesterday/Today (Untitled)* (detail 1)

The remaining five sets of business cards are composed of a series of significant events

from U.S. history, followed by a date that locates them in a particular period (Figures 36-40). Each card contains five entries and the individual entries are color coded according to the topic they relate to. These topics revolve around the foremost social movements in the history of the United States and include: antislavery movements, civil rights movements, women's rights movements, labor movements, Native American rights movements, antiwar movements, poor peoples' movements, environmental movements, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender movements, and student movements. The five inscriptions on each set of cards correlate to a different topic, so that each set of cards contains information relating to five different social movements. Additionally, these entries are not listed chronologically. Despite the seemingly random compilation of the information on these sets of cards, the information on each set is arranged by a desire to address the ahistorical potential of a method of historical analysis based the creation of a chronological narrative. In this way, the viewer is invited to make connections between the information on each card based on the similarity between cultural references and connotations, hopefully getting a feel for the cultural origins of the idea of history itself.



**Figure 36:** *Yesterday/Today (Untitled)* (detail 2)



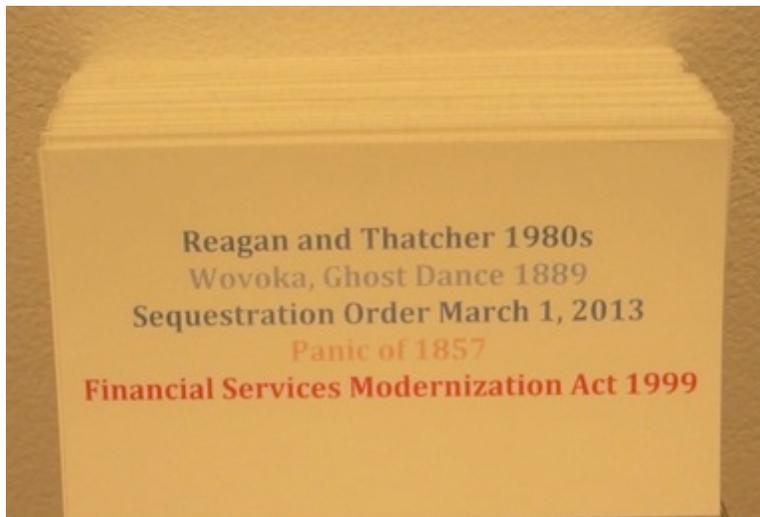
**Figure 37:** *Yesterday/Today (Untitled)* (detail 3)



**Figure 38:** *Yesterday/Today (Untitled)* (detail 4)



**Figure 39:** *Yesterday/Today (Untitled)* (detail 5)



**Figure 40:** *Yesterday/Today (Untitled)* (detail 6)

This piece suggests an alternative to printmaking's conceptualization of the idea of a democratic art because these cards point to real-world examples of civic negotiation in the U.S. and the cultural changes this negotiation can generate. They also acknowledge how rapidly less equitable social relations can arise when there is a lack of participation among citizens, emphasizing the primacy of civic participation to the creation of just social arrangements. An

appreciation of this altered notion of a democratic art originates in a reverence for the creative potentials of the *social matrix*, rather than the physical/material matrix emphasized in traditional printmaking. The tenets of multiplicity, portability, and distribution, used to articulate the concerns of traditional printmaking practices, can also be adapted and applied to this alternate take on the idea of a democratic art through a recognition of the strategies used to manipulate the social matrix by means of civic negotiation and engagement by mass social movements. The informational cards that make up *Yesterday/Today Untitled* serve as a way to consider what the methods employed in this other type of democratic art might entail, through their references to the durable impressions that were imprinted into the social fabric through the earnest democratic participation of an actively engaged citizenry. The final section of my thesis exhibition is an attempt to get a sense for what an appreciation of this newly minted democratic art might involve and how its formal elements might be discerned.

The last selection from this section of my thesis exhibition, and the last piece in my show, is a work entitled *Without the mighty roar?* The title is a reference to the Frederick Douglas quote mentioned previously and is meant to suggest something about civic participation. This piece consists of a large pin board and a small dry erase board (Figure 41). These two components are representations of potential techniques for the manipulation of the social matrix. The pin board is well used and faded, showing a record of the past sheets of paper that have been hung on it, represented as a series of various dark rectangles set against a bleached background. I placed multicolored pushpins in the corners of these rectangles to emphasize that each of these shapes is the result of an individual having posted something on this board at some point in time. In this sense, the pin board is an artifact of civic engagements and negotiations. Despite its attributes as an artifact, the board can still be used and altered today, which is made apparent by

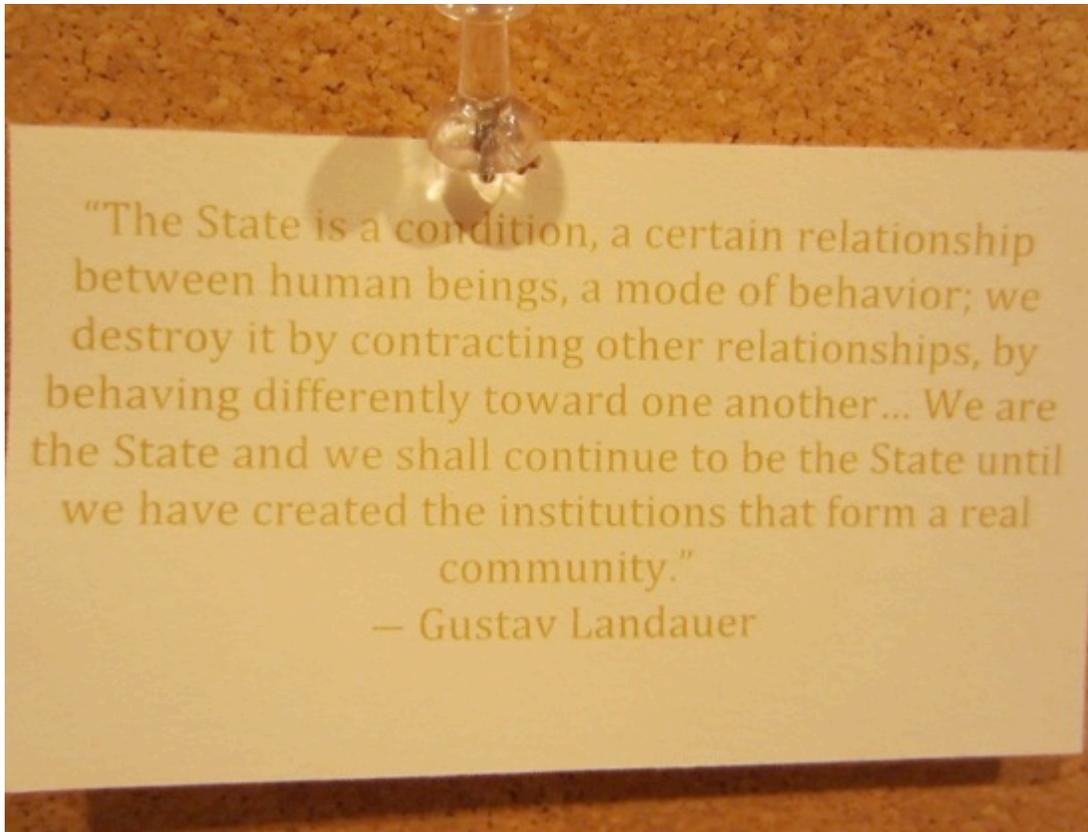
the multicolored pushpins that cover it, as well as a lone business card that is tacked to its surface (Figure 42). This business card contains a quote from the German social anarchist and pacifist Gustav Landauer (April 7, 1870 – May 2, 1919) that reads,

The State is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of behavior; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently toward one another... We are the State and we shall continue to be the State until we have created the institutions that form a real community. (Landauer)

This card is an enticement to question the conditions and nature of our social relationships, with an eye toward changing them. Combined with the pieces that make up *Yesterday/Today (Untitled)* and the pin board, to which it is tacked, this card alludes to the potential for viewers to alter their social conditions, as well as their complicity in the existence of conditions that may be unfavorable or unjust.



**Figure 41:** *Without the mighty roar?*



**Figure 42:** *Without the mighty roar?* (detail 1)

The last component in my thesis exhibition is a small dry erase board hung from the gallery wall adjacent to the pin board (Figure 43). This dry erase board has 6 different colored markers that hang from its base and are attached with magnets. Each marker has an eraser attached to it so that items can be removed from the board as well as added. Additionally, each marker, as a part of its labeling, is emblazoned with the word *rewritable*. At the very top of the board I have written the heading: Notes/Thoughts/Complaints/Ideas/Questions. This item, like the pin board, is up for grabs. They both can be altered by visitors to the gallery, throughout the duration of the exhibit. By setting up an installation with elements that acknowledge and question the political realities inside and outside of the gallery, and providing a platform for viewers to contemplate, comment upon, and alter these conditions in a concrete way, my work suggests the formal elements involved in an alternate method of democratic art-making. This

method relies on an appreciation of generative nature of the social matrix, a relinquishing of the concept of artistic autonomy from this matrix, and a desire to alter the quality and conditions of the cultural relationships that comprise this matrix. Thus, the efficacy of any professed democratic art might best be determined by the extent to which it gives voice those that are marginalized, and yet unheard, in the arena of civic discourse.

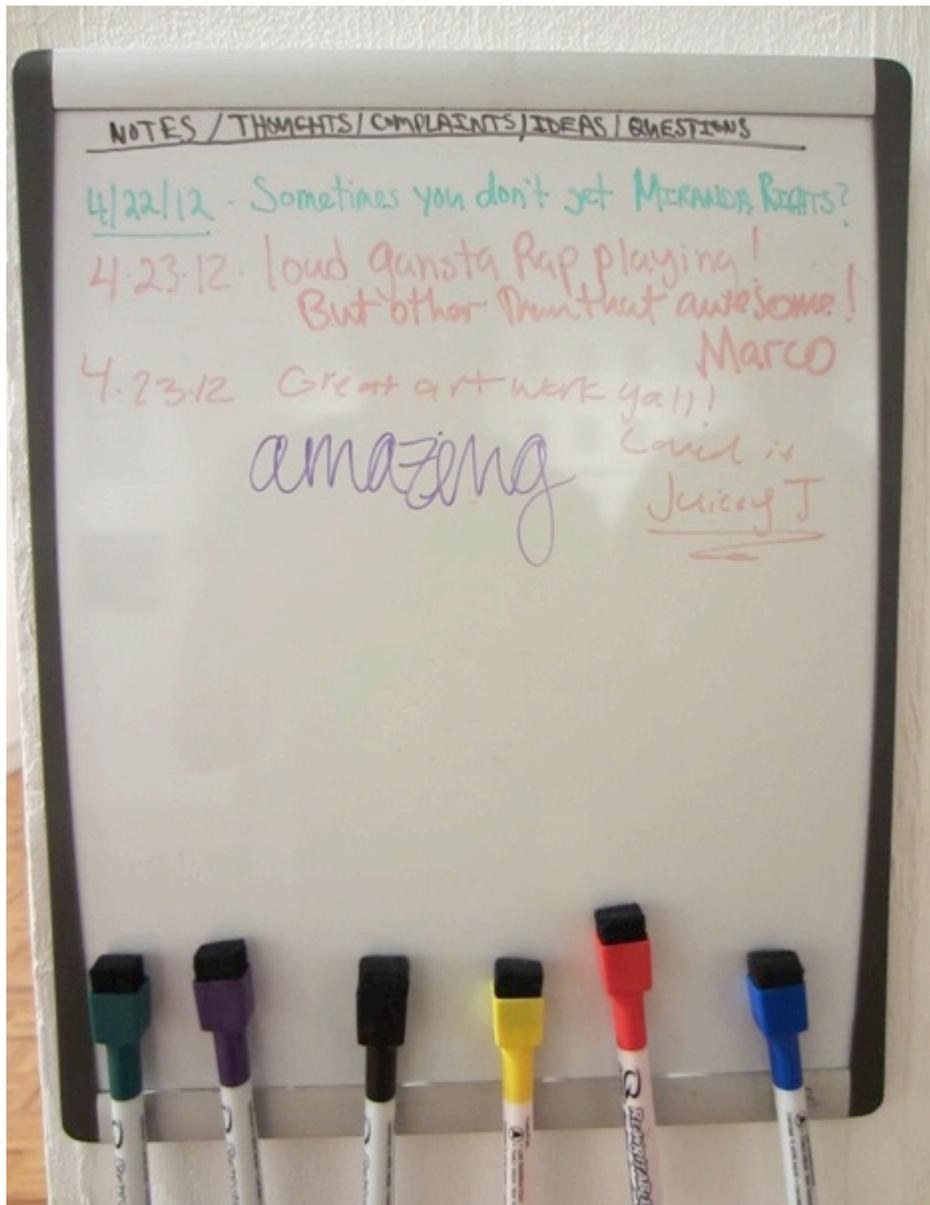


Figure 43: Without the mighty roar? (detail 2)

## CONCLUSION

This thesis is a question about what a democratic art might mean. Traditionally applied to fine art printmaking, the term *democratic art* as been used to give this particular mode of artistic production an air of social relevance and significance, which rests solely on its reproductive processes and the distributive potentials they enable. In comparing a detailed sampling of printmaking processes, techniques, and methodologies to examples of actions, events, and movements throughout the brief history of the United States, I seek to question which of these methods is most effective in bringing about actual social change. Whether it was the Abolitionist Movement, Women's Suffrage Movement, Civil Rights Movement, Labor Movement, or Gay Rights Movement, it was these movements, these collections of proactive citizens, that spoke out, protested, organized, rallied, fought, and in many instances died, that changed the conditions of society to something more equitable. The historical reference show the way cultural change happens is through an active engagement with, and creative reimagining of, the culture in which one is embedded. In this sense, this thesis can be understood a personal attempt to begin to reimagine what printmaking might offer as a democratic art intent upon bringing about tangible changes in our social relationships.

In an effort to actively participate in a democratic art I have accepted an invitation to work with a group of Baltimore, MD high school students during the summer of 2013. This collaborative project will introduce the democratic art of 1930s America and challenge students to create printed material that speaks to contemporary social concerns.

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