

Off the Wall CPI Opening Speech, Walter Reid Centre, September 2019

Erin Dunne

While studying my Bachelor of Fine Art at Qld College of Art, I was drawn to the processes of printmaking by what seemed like magic to me – there's nothing quite like the thrill of a print being revealed in its production, or the excitement of conveying artistic ideas through a diverse range of media. Viewing "Off The Wall" on Monday afternoon was the loveliest hour of my week, and it was great to be immersed in printmaking again. Tonight I'd like to talk about two things: firstly, the realisation of the overall exhibition concept of "Off The Wall", and secondly, some of the common threads and themes touched on by the individual works within the show and their contemporary relevance.

Firstly, printmaking as a discipline is flexible in its application and presentation, broad in the range of processes and media that it encompasses, and responsive to intersections with emerging technologies and other disciplines. We see forms of printmaking across a multitude of cultures and time periods. When the first humans used natural pigments to press their handprints onto surfaces in their environment, they were effectively monoprinting, and the historical development of the discipline is truly fascinating. Printmaking has played a significant role in the dispersal of knowledge, wisdom and culture, as well as fostering literacy and the emancipatory gift of education, and enabling the transmission of personal artistic expression. While technological development has enabled this expansion of printmaking, such developments are always accompanied by tension. Digital technologies have rapidly transformed our world, but the trade-off for our increased connectivity is constant preoccupation with the seductive, slick screens of devices, which offer a continuous stream of ubiquitous and often impersonal images. In this environment, the opportunity to create and experience works of art that are products of analogue, hand-made and multisensory processes becomes increasingly essential as a counterbalance. "Off the Wall" offers an antidote for this modern malaise by virtue of the quiet and deep contemplation that each of these works asks of the viewer. After spending time with them this week, I can attest to the fact that the rewards for that time and consideration are great.

What we see here in "Off the Wall" is an enduring discipline with ancient roots being reimagined through contemporary artistic practices for a contemporary audience, demonstrating printmaking's continuing relevance as a discipline. Artists have reclaimed and transformed familiar objects and materials to create works where the seductive and sensuous surfaces of prints collide with physicality and materiality to create new narratives. Other works invite the viewer to activate them through touch and participation, allowing us to become co-creators of works in a discipline where touching is often forbidden due to fragility, which makes the invitation to collaborate even more enticing. We see works that revel in the beauty of creation, whether visual in terms of pattern, repetition, colour, texture and form, or creation in terms of nature and the environment. Other works still, inspire sensory responses beyond the visual such as the sound of wooden panels click-clacking, the intimation of a gentle wind moving through prayer flags, or the sense of warm embrace offered by soft fabric.

There is also a great deal of conceptual overlap in "Off the Wall". Many works urge us to imagine a world where cooperation wins out over competition, where equal care is given to ourselves, each other and the environment. In some cases this is explicit in the work, while in others, we are offered the opportunity to look more closely at the entities that we share our space with, and to cultivate appreciation for them through aesthetic contemplation. A handful of works explore memory and nostalgia as the threads that bind us to our surroundings and places of personal, spiritual and familial importance. Throughout this exhibition, we see creative engagement that pushes the possibilities of processes, and deep consideration of themes and concepts that are as varied as each of the artists while remaining relevant to audiences.

In conclusion, I would like to commend each of the artists for their thoughtful responses to the theme of "Off the Wall", which embody creativity and inventiveness, and display attention to detail in resolving and presenting the work. Congratulations to you all, and thank you for the invitation to open the exhibition. I hope you enjoy this evening of celebrating your work, it's certainly well deserved.