

Venice in Print

An exhibition of large format woodblock prints by Lucinda Tanner

31.5 – 14.6.2015 | Dorfstrasse 40, 4452 Itingen BL

Introduction

by Felicity Mark

There is this scene in the 1985 Merchant Ivory Productions drama *Room With a View* where the character of George Emerson (played by Julian Sands) climbs a tree in the countryside in Fiesole, Italy, shouting 'Beauty! Joy!' to the sky. There is no real context for this outburst, Emerson is besieged. He continues on throughout the film to climb numerous trees, walk joyously in the rain, ride a bicycle everywhere with obvious pleasure, and in one particularly memorable scene, cavort naked in a lake on a hot day, all the while quoting passages from the great poets of the day. I love this character, I want to be him ... to ride a bicycle and let the pleasure of it spread across my face, to skinny dip in a country lake without care! To be unselfconscious, without reservation or hesitation! This film, the tree climbing, the character of George Emerson come to mind when I think of my friend Lucinda. This association is not literal, it's about a certain kind of spirit and a way of being and looking at the world that I have marvelled at many times in her company, and it is this sensibility that permeates Lucinda's work.

The exhibition of large scale woodblock prints 'Venice in Print' is a culmination of two years work. During this period Lucinda undertook two two-week printmaking residencies at The Venice Printmaking Studio, an international studio devoted to large-format printmaking and artists books. The studio encourages the exploration of traditional as well as experimental printmaking practices and ideas and is located on the island of Murano, Venice. Outside of the Venice studio time Lucinda continued working the woodblocks in her home studio in the regional town of Itingen, Switzerland, returning sporadically Venice to use the large printing press and commit the works to print.

Venice is the setting and the subject of Lucinda's ongoing interest and investigation through print. The city's vast waterways, punctuated with deep channels suitable for the passage of large sailing vessels, historically set the stage for Venice's ascendancy as a maritime trading powerhouse, becoming the principal supplier of the Mediterranean link in the spice trade. Primary trading partners Byzantine Constantinople and Islamic Cairo played a critical role in shaping the Venetian aesthetic. After all, you are what you see. As a result, the Venetian architectural style is a fusion of both Byzantine and Islamic forms overlaying a Latin Christian

foundation. The Eastern influences on the architecture of Venice are often overlooked; you just have to look in the right places to find them, it is these elements that have held Lucinda's imagination.

The weeks spent in Venice took hold of Lucinda, I see her walking through the city, her eye searching, the constant sense of a corner not turned, an area left unexplored, a dead end, a lost building, hidden places. Venice, the magical city that has not been tamed, the twisting urban layout - the labyrinthine choreography of the urban space, both confounding and extraordinary.

The ancient craft of the woodcut print, which has its origins in Asia and Eastern Europe, is a notoriously difficult and rigid medium. The act of working an image into the wood is physically and creatively demanding. In committing an image to woodblock, as much consideration is given to the negative as to the positive space. Moreover, working the woodblock print at this massive scale is enormously technically challenging - maintaining the correct pressure across the paper, paper shrinkage, unruly inks and uncontrollable atmospheric conditions require numerous technical adjustments. The resultant prints in 'Venice in Print' demonstrate Lucinda's determination to learn its language and harness the unweilding nature of the many layered processes involved. The works here are ambitious, and executed with the skills of a master printmaker.

The multi-panelled and single detail prints in the exhibition have been hung densely across a single large wall of the exhibition space. Here the heavily beamed wall has become an enabling constraint, against the dark wooden backdrop - they appear floating, suspended. The density of shapes and patterns, dark shadows, strong stylised lines and planes of abrupt colour, evoke a distinct sense of meandering through the walls the ancient city. The physicality of the prints, almost human in scale, dissolve the traditional viewing space gap between art object and viewer, encouraging a greater emersion in their scope, tactility and pictorial depth.

I invite you to step inside these extraordinary and very beautiful interpretations of Venetian architectural details and facades, just as the city that inspired them allows us to be more at ease getting lost, be drawn into the light and dark. Inhale the damp stone, turn a corner into a passage yet unexplored - Venice, the city that folds into itself.

Felicity Mark
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