



HERNAN BAS

01.01.14

If you just look quickly at the work of Hernan Bas, you might think that he lives in a fantasy world of Pan-like creatures looking for solace among chaos. Look longer, and you sense a narrative that begins in abstraction and moves toward consciousness. In person, he exudes a nervous energy, eager to start work on another piece, but he remains very present and eager to talk about what he is doing in his art.

-Kenneth Caldwell

Paulson Bott Press: Have you made prints before?

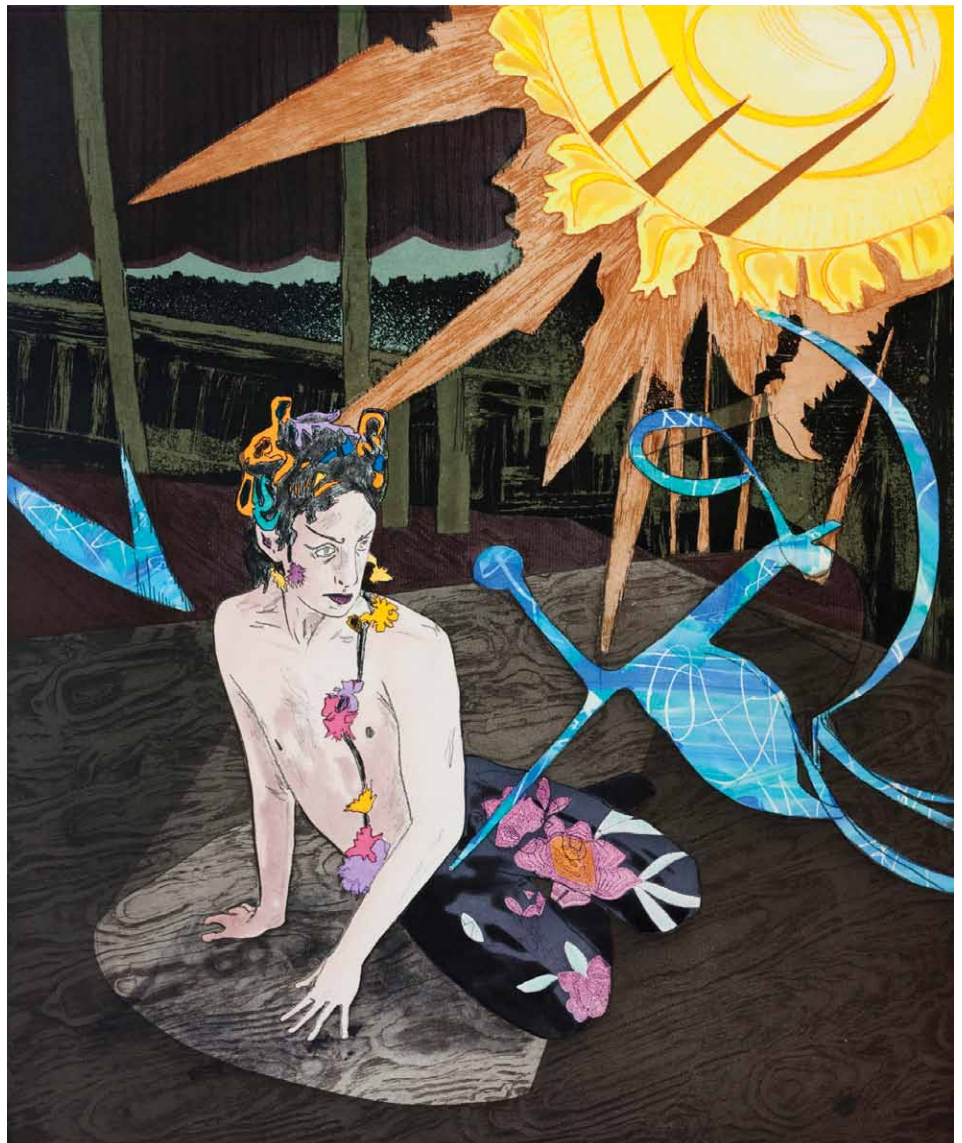
Hernan Bas: I made some in Copenhagen and did some photogravure work in Tampa. But aside from those and [some in] high school, I haven't done this work in quite a while. It is not a very forgiving medium.

Q: How did you find your way to Paulson Press?

HB: I called to inquire about acquiring a work by Tauba Auerbach, and Rhea asked if I might want to do something.

Q: Did you prepare anything before you got here?

HB: I worked on these two endpaper prints ahead of time ["Revised Endpapers for the Homosexual Neurosis Pink" and "Revised Endpapers for the Homosexual Neurosis Blue"]. I did some rough layouts for them, but we ended up having to do most of it from scratch. These are all based on the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew endpapers, which I have always been obsessed with. I have



COMUS IN A DRUNKEN STUPOR, 2013

Softground, spit bite, soap ground, flat bite, aquatint, and unique inking;
42" x 35"; Edition of 25

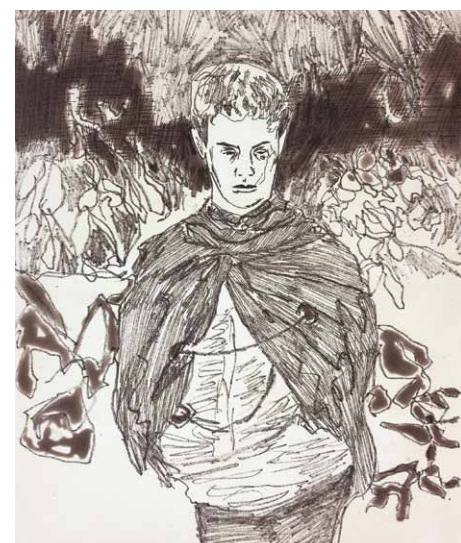
wanted to do this project for years. The images actually come from series of photos that I did based on the Cottingley Fairies, [a series of photographs ostensibly depicting real fairies taken by two girls in England in the early 1900s]. I would hear jokingly that people would say “oh Hernan just paints a bunch of fairies” And I thought, “You want fairies, I’ll give you some fairies.”

Q: Where do these images come from?

HB: Most of them are from previous paintings of mine. I traced the figures from old paintings and added wings to them.

THE ROSY TENANT, 2013

Softground, soap ground, drypoint, flat bite, burnish; 21” x 17”; Edition of 20



THE RENAISSANCE MAN, 2013

Softground, drypoint, spitbite; 21” x 17”; Edition of 20

Q: Why endpapers?

HB: I just like the idea of making endpapers for books that don't exist. They don't all feature fairies, of course, but have different narratives.

Q: But they are actually going to be used as endpapers in your new book from Rizzoli?

HB: Yes. I think I am going to use the pink.

Q: What other images have you been working on here?

HB: This one is a portrait entitled “Ennui

THE PREVIOUS TENANT, 2013

Aquatint, sugarlift, spitbite, burnish; 21” x 17”; Edition of 20



THE DIFFERENCE WAS CLEAR TO EVERYONE BUT HIM, (DUMBSTRUCK) 2013

Softground, sugarlift, drypoint, spitbite, burnish and aquatint; 21” x 17”; Edition of 20

(Or the Endless Conversation).” I just like his pose. To me, he is listening and nodding along to someone talking to him—I understand.

These are all just ones that I sketched when I was here. In this one [“Nocturnal Feeders”], I fell in love how the calla lilies look like flames, but they might end up being black. It is this weird moment of picking berries in the moonlight surrounded by bats mutually feeding on the same thing. My favorite line recently from RuPaul’s Drag Race is when one of the queens says, “I can’t be bothered that you can’t be bothered.” So, that sentiment has been in my head a lot lately. This character is personifying this with the bats.

I am just pulling this print [“Comus In A Drunken Stupor”] for the first time. That is pretty wackadoo. but a good wackadoo. It’s based on a photo I found randomly in a book when I was sitting around with nothing to do. It is Comus, who is the son of Bacchus. Sam here looked it up, and it is a much more accurate character for my body of work—to be the son of Bacchus. What else was he?

Sam: He represents excess and chaos.

HB: Drunken Bambi is how they describe him, right? But I have also been really interested in the Ballets Russes and all those weird costumes and characters and how it all comes together.

Q: You did the drawing on the copper plate here?

HB: Yes. Thinking in the negative is confusing sometimes, to say the least.

Q: Talk about this process of constructing the narrative as opposed to the layering of narrative in painting. When you are painting, do you do the abstract work first?

HB: Yes.

Q: And then the person shows up later?

HB: A lot of the times, I try and plan for the figure ahead of time, because otherwise I can paint him out of the picture by accident. I just get too excited with all this other stuff, and I literally don't leave room for the figure. Sometimes I have to add a panel to the painting and make a diptych because I ran out of room. I don't create purely abstract works, but there is definitely narrative in abstraction.



NOCTURNAL FEEDERS, 2013

Softground, spitbite, soap ground, sugar lift, drypoint, aquatint; 28 1/2” x 22”; Edition of 25

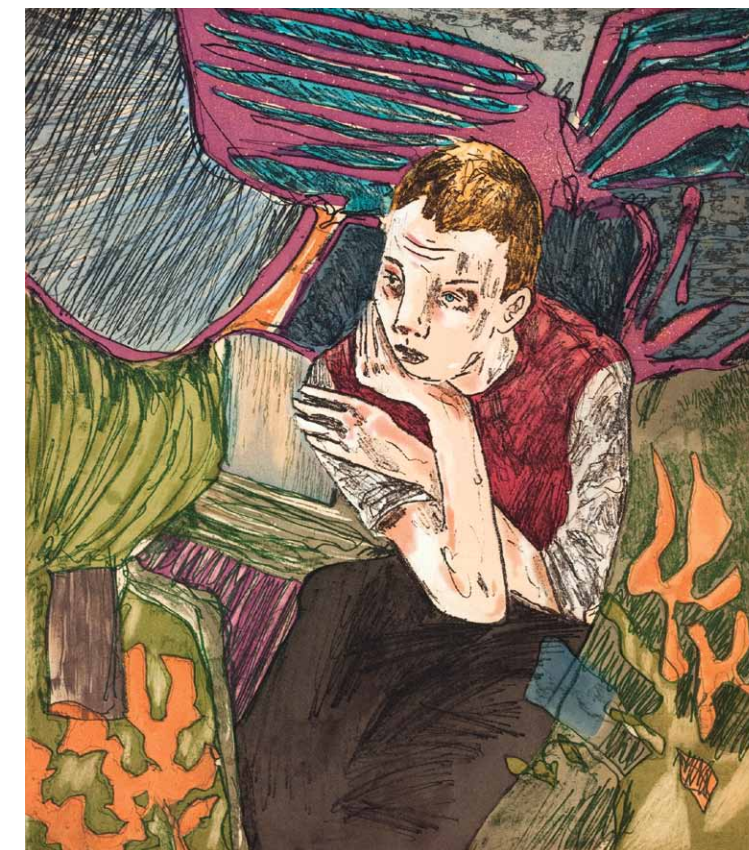
Q: Has printing changed your process of making the narrative, because the ordering of imagery is so different?

HB: It definitely requires some solid planning. I can't really work quite as cavalierly as I normally do, but this process really forces me to think about the end product before it is even finished. Typically, I can't imagine a completely finished thing.

With painting, I can just keep going and going. And you can do similar things in printmaking, going back and forth, but not nearly as much as with painting.

Q: Tell me about these other pieces in progress.

HB: I've doodled a lot here. A little Harry Potter-ish cape here. I don't put text into the work, but I like to just randomly babble titles down like “Renaissance Man.” I have lists and lists of titles in the studio for potential future paintings. I can go to the list if I have nothing in my head when I start a painting. I may have no idea what I am going to do, then I just go to my list of titles and hopefully



ENNUI (OR, THE ENDLESS CONVERSATION), 2013

Softground, flatbite, spitbite, aquatint, dry point and burnish; 23 1/2” x 20”; Edition of 25

something will pop.

This is a first proof, which is just a line drawing print, and I paint on that to get a sense of what colors I am going to use and how to separate the colors into different plates. I still have to do more plates for the skin tone, to get those variations.

These weird lessons have taught me a little bit more about how I paint the fleshes, thinking in terms of those layers. There is a contrast that I am always fighting with to get into the paintings. So, that has been another little lesson of this time here. And of course, learning things left to right.

Q: What else have you been figuring out?

HB: I am just curious to find out what can I do and get away with. Like the grain image in the Comus print. I am really excited about it. It was Sam's idea. We used a wood grain, faux finishing tool with soap ground to make the floor patterns, which came out really cool. Mixing, and putting spray paint in there, and all these different kinds of things that I had no idea that you could do in etching. The

flowers for example are an impression from a fabric.

Q: What else might you take back from this?

HB: I was talking to Pam and Renee about doing an edition of folded screens—gold leaf and the whole shebang. I would like to do an editioned screen, something like that famous Pierre Bonnard screen with the carriages. That could be the next project when I come back, hopefully sooner rather than later. ✈



Hernan Bas in the studio with Master Printer Sam Carr-Prindle



PAULSON BOTT
PRESS

2390 C FOURTH ST. BERKELEY, CA 94710
T 510.559.2088 • F 510.559.2085
WWW.PAULSONBOTTPRESS.COM

First Class Mail
US Postage Paid
Berkeley, CA
Permit #559

REVISED ENDPAPERS FOR "THE HOMOSEXUAL NEUROSIS" (blue), 2013

Aquatint (printed resist); 31½" x 47½"; Edition of 25, Pink version also available



DESIGN: MICHAEL OSBORNE DESIGN