

OKTP

ROSS BLECKNER

10.01.2007

Ross Bleckner visited Paulson Press for the third time in April 2007. The resulting group of twelve prints represents a shift from his previous abstract imagery to more representational forms that might be found in the garden. His interest in using layers of color to achieve a quality of light remains unchanged; the recognizable images of

leaves invite a focused contemplation. We spoke to him as he worked on a copper plate.

—*Kenneth Caldwell*

Q: Did you come out here with specific ideas you wanted to explore?

A: Not really. I'd been working with this tree of life image in my paintings, and I thought that would be a good starting

point to see if I could translate it into a print. It's a kind of a meditation image in which you're looking down at the center and everything circles out from it.

I've just been working on a group of paintings that give me flexibility to become very intricate with some painterly aspects. What I end up doing here is keeping the same structure.

Q: Can you explain the concept of structure more?

A: The structure of the image: the leaves, starting out from the center, and the rotating leaves in different configurations. They are all very layered; I'm trying to get this kind of shadowy quality of light.



(left) **Bonfire**, 2007

Color sugarlift aquatint, spitbite aquatint and aquatint etching; Paper size: 29" x 28"; Edition of 35

(below) **Swinging Door**, 2007

Color sugarlift aquatint and spitbite aquatint etching; Paper size: 29" x 28"; Edition of 35





(top left) **Swinging Blue Door**, 2007
Color sugarlift aquatint and spitbite aquatint etching; Paper size: 29" x 28"; Edition of 35



(top right) **Silver Bonfire**, 2007
Color sugarlift aquatint and spitbite aquatint etching; Paper size: 29" x 28"; Edition of 35



(bottom left) **Beginners & Others**, 2007
Color sugarlift aquatint, spitbite aquatint and aquatint etching; Paper size: 29" x 28"; Edition of 35



(bottom right) **Beginners**, 2007
Sugarlift aquatint etching with chine colle; Paper size: 29" x 28"; Edition of 35

I am starting from that vantage point, and want to see if I can possibly do that with prints and see whether they coordinate with some ideas that I had for the new paintings.

Q: Are the images of the leaves based on photos that you've taken?

A: The images of leaves come from a combination of paintings that I have done using molecular structures that all have their own kind of spiraling, centrifugal, gravitational force. So I went from the microcosmic electron images to the more macrocosmic landscape images. And I thought this was a way of combining them. I give it a configuration, give it an image, and yet keep it abstract so you are dealing with the meditative quality of what I was looking for in light and layers.

Q: In these print works, which are less abstract, how do you accomplish the luminosity?

A: You get it by printing and reprinting. And moving things around, varying

the amount of pigment. We make things look like they have a vibratory quality and try to create prints that are within the tradition of etching, but are very optical and luminous.

Q: Do the prints push the painting in a direction? How much dialog is there between the print making and the painting?

A: I don't really know. It's the drawing quality that I kind of isolate a little more in the print making. I try to loosen up and open up, and then see what happens.

Q: When did you first start doing prints?

A: I started doing them in '99, because they kept bugging me. I like the quality of the light and the ink on the paper. And it's just another way to make a drawing, which I don't really do. These are the only drawings I really make.

Q: Is there a different kind of excitement you get when you see the print coming off of the press versus painting?

A: I like how immediate it is—you either like it or you don't. It happens much

quicker, so in that sense it's like a drawing. I also like the fact that you can get immediate gratification and you can duplicate it.

Q: So when you come out here, do you bring a lot of materials, or do you just bring a few sketchbooks?

A: There are a few sketchbooks and some images that I've been working with. I try to stay fresh and improvise.

Q: These new pieces feel less somber than some of your earlier prints.

A: Those works had to do with configurations of molecules, and so they were a little more scientific. These are just more focused in the sense that they're simpler. The other ones are less drawn, more constructed.

Q: These have a more sketch-like quality.

A: Yes, more like a drawing.

Q: They feel more like a kind of a moment in a garden where you might be working.

A: All the paintings I've been doing recently are called meditation paintings.



So maybe they have to do more with the present tense. The other ones reflect a kind of documentary quality, which might seem existential. But a documentary quality that has to do with the arrangement of things, both inside your body and outside your body, as in stars, particular arrangements, and solar systems. This imagery has to do not with that kind of speculation, but a kind of a presence like a meditation, which has to do with looking for another kind of image which might be more spiritual.

Q: Does it have to do with a turning point in the external world or in your internal world?

A: Sometimes you see things and they come more into focus, and it feels like a better time to explore them further. I've always felt that I dealt with it through the use of light. And now I'm just trying to deal with it with the use of an image working with the light. And, you know, just deciding on a very simple image that I could keep repeating over and over again.

Ross Bleckner was born in New York in 1949 and grew up on Long Island. After attending the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in Valencia, CA, he returned to New York and became one of the first artists to join the Mary Boone Gallery, where he continues to exhibit today. Since that time, his work has been exhibited in major group and solo exhibitions at museums throughout the world, including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Berkeley Art Museum. In 1995, a mid-career retrospective was held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. ✨



Ross Bleckner in the Paulson Press Studio.

(left) **Five Locations**, 2007

Color spitbite aquatint with chine colle;
Paper size: 39 1/2" x 30 1/4"; Edition of 50

(right) **Four Locations**, 2007

Color spitbite aquatint with chine colle;
Paper size: 39 1/2" x 30 1/4"; Edition of 50



(top left) **Sky on Head, 2007**
Sugarlift aquatint etching with chine colle;
Paper size: 29" x 24"; Edition of 50



(top right) **At Present, 2007**
Sugarlift aquatint etching with chine colle;
Paper size: 29" x 24"; Edition of 50

(bottom left) **Early Every Morning, 2007**
Sugarlift aquatint and flatbite etching with
chine colle; Paper size: 29" x 24"; Edition of 20

(bottom right) **Early Every Evening, 2007**
Sugarlift aquatint and flatbite etching with
chine colle; Paper size: 29" x 24"; Edition of 20



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