

O K T P



CAIO FONSECA

11.01.2006

Caio Fonseca has been making prints with Paulson Press since 1998. The keen observer can see subtle changes in his work over the years and is able to detect an evolution of composition and form. Subtlety is one of Fonseca's gifts. Sometimes the forms seem to be the protagonist, sometimes the space. While Fonseca is an excellent pianist, often playing during breaks at the press, he resists too literal a connection with music. Yet the secret life of music creeps into his paintings. Dissonance and harmony have a relationship to each other and inform the geography of his canvases. In music, what is not heard is akin to spatial emptiness. All elements in Fonseca's work, whether forms, lines, or

spaces, are placed—or, in Fonseca's method of painting, revealed—in relationship to each other. His art is about the balance of elemental forms. We spoke to him in the gallery at Paulson Press about his work and specifically about printmaking.

—Kenneth Caldwell

Q: I see a pretty direct relationship between the paintings and the prints. Does the printmaking inform the painting in some way?

A: For years, I was not interested in doing prints. I didn't understand why people did prints. It seemed—before I learned anything about it—to be antithetical to mark-making the way I do it. I work very much in a progressive, almost left-to-right

fashion. So working without the ability to see that progression was difficult for me. But the thing that convinced me to make etchings here is that they strive as much as possible with the medium to get more of a sense of painting into the etching. The sort of flat etching didn't interest me so much. So we found a way to put strings into the paper, which gave a physical quality to the paper. We've used as many as ten plates on some of the prints. We've really tried to saturate them. I liken the process to writing a novel, and being asked to first put all the verbs in and then put all the nouns in and then all the little words. It's a completely frustrating and absurd way for a writer to think, but it is a very interesting way of deconstructing



The artist's tools.

Three String Etching Giallo, 2006

Color aquatint, spitbite aquatint, soapground, sugarlift, and softground etching; Paper size: 39" x 50"; Edition of 50



Three String Etching Ligos, 2006

Color aquatint, spitbite aquatint and softground etching, Paper size: 21" x 20"; Edition of 50



Caio Fonseca in the Paulson Press studio.

what goes into making a painting. So the answer to your question of how the printmaking process informs my work—it's not that it changes it so much, but it does make me think of all the various overlapping components that are the stuff of any painting I do. It's just interesting how you can arrive at similar-looking results from such completely different vantage points.

Q: So are you saying that because of the nature of this kind of printmaking, it pushes you to look at the totality of the piece at the beginning? Because in printmaking, you have to be more strategic and see the whole thing?

A: Other people do things more freehand or straightaway because I think they are more directional in the composition. There's great spontaneity in my paintings, but it's not arbitrariness. When I put something here, I need to know that the next thing will be in relation to it. And it is simply impossible so far for me to do that in the etchings. But I've found lots of ways to invent a richness and a complexity that I don't see in many prints. For example, when you do splatters on your canvas, it might be just a little afterthought, a little thing. Here it's a whole other plate, and you might want to

think, "Where is it going to go?" And it's interesting to know that what is so second nature to me in painting—it's like learning to write with your right hand, in my case. It's instructive to see how deconstructible your work is and to sort of tie one hand behind your back to see how you can understand your work in a new language.

Q: In the painting, then, there seems to be what I call an underpainting. And then there's an overpainting that reveals. But that isn't possible in etching.

A: Exactly. We have a funny list, a growing list of 21 challenges. I feel I'm very lucky to be such a terrible etcher that gets such wonderful results with etching. People say, "Do you enjoy making prints?" and I usually say, "No. I really don't like making prints. But I love the process of getting to an end result." The reason I joke that I don't love making prints is that I have to put all my experience and what I know about painting aside in order to execute and stay within the bounds of the medium, which is where you're going to get the best results. Don't try to imitate an effective painting if it's not necessarily germane to the medium. But we joke about things like—you put a mark here, it won't stay there. You're painting with a color which is not the color it's going to be. You do a

line this way, it's going to go the other way. You're doing a drawing on a slippery metal plate where you can't control your line as well. There are a million things which are almost an absurd proposition. And yet it's a miracle that it all comes together. And that's where the collaboration comes from. They are so masterful and helpful in trying to diagnose the way to get to the end.

Q: But there must be a lot of stopping and starting.

A: Luckily, I'm always asking, "What can be done with this mistake?" For example, in one of these etchings that we're working on now, it was coming along fairly well, but we switched course and changed the colors. Instead of it being a light background, we went to a deep red and have had to adjust. So we made a shift. That's something in any medium—you have to be willing to not hold onto the good details too much because then what you'll end up with is some good details and not enough art.

Q: That sort of thing is easier to remedy in painting.

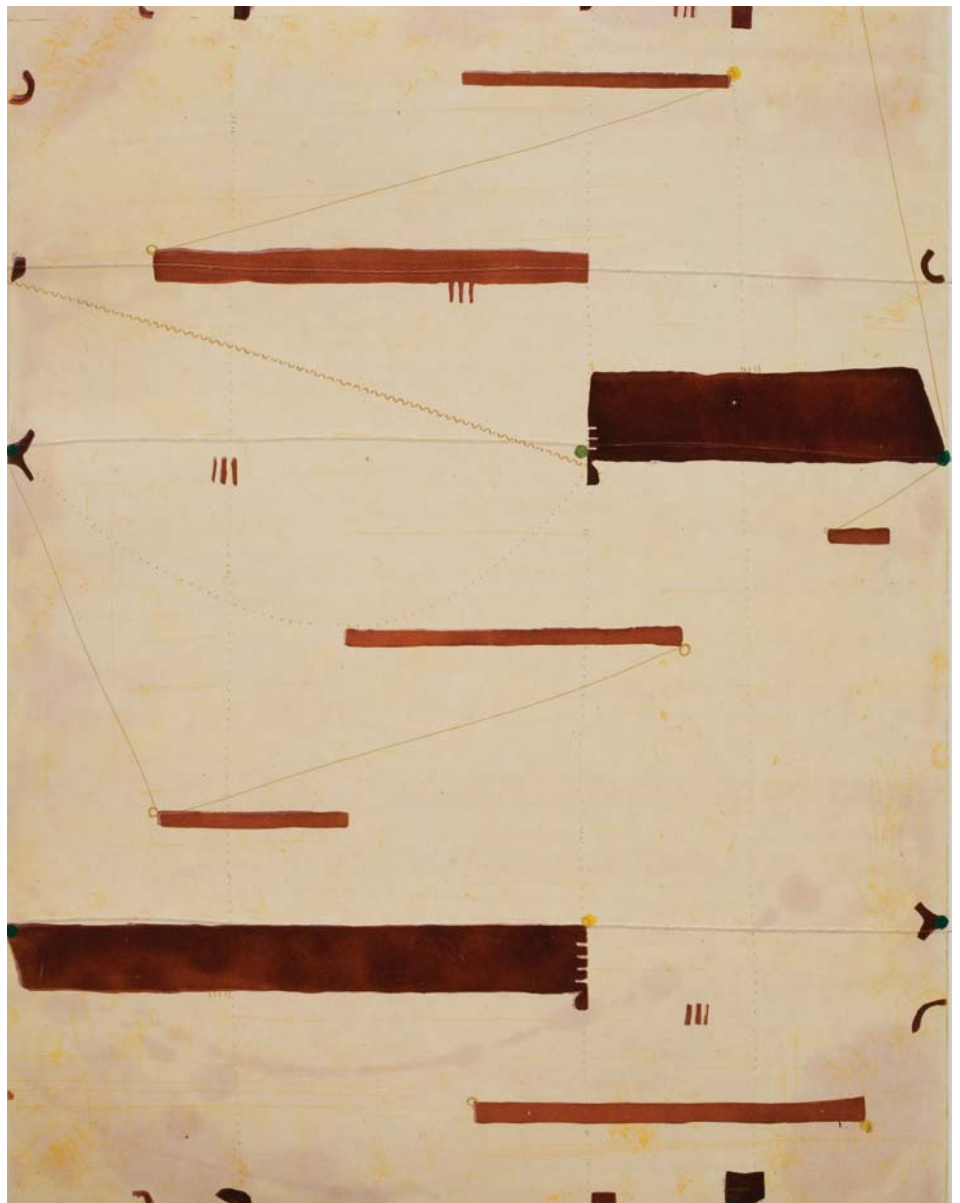
A: Exactly. I joke that I don't make any more bad paintings because all the bad paintings are underneath. I still make bad paintings, but I keep painting over them.

Q: As opposed to painting, printmaking can be kind of unforgiving.

A: You are right that in painting, things are always correctable. In fact, the process of painting is hundreds of corrections. In etching, the accidents are often some of the nicest parts.

Q: I think you said somewhere that the overpainting is the more intuitive activity in your work. Are you constantly thinking, “This is more conscious, this is more unconscious, this is intuitive, this is not”?

A: In my painting, the underpainting seems so exuberant and free-form, so one would think that was the more Dionysian, and then the imposition of order over that with the overpainting might seem more structured and ordered, but actually it's the opposite. I struggle very much with the underpaintings, and then it is a very intuitive process to go in and find the painting. So it's keeping in play all those variables that are nonvisual, nontactile, because they're just layers. Strata. And the hardest thing is keeping in mind the vision of the end result through that whole process. It's a leap of faith aided by experience. ✱



(Top Right)

Three String Etching Bluepoint, 2006

Color aquatint, spitbite aquatint, sugarlift and softground etching; Paper size: 29" x 34";
Edition of 50

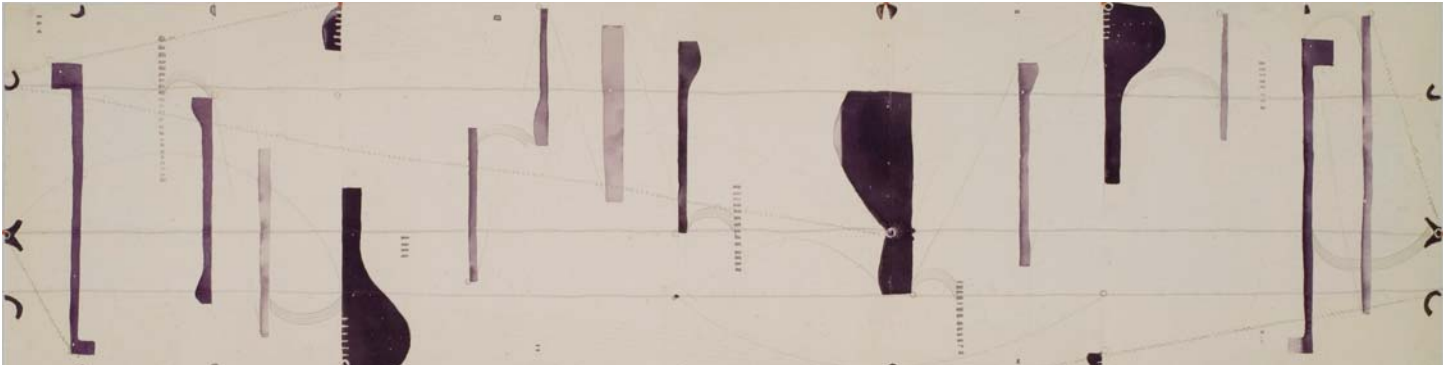
(Bottom Right)

Three String Etching Interval, 2006

Color spitbite aquatint, aquatint, and softground etching; Paper size: 31 3/4" x 26";
Edition of 50

Three String Etching Eliporeia, 2006

Color aquatint, spitbite aquatint and
softground etching; Paper size: 25" x 64 1/16";
Edition of 50



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