



OKTP



GARY SIMMONS

04.01.12

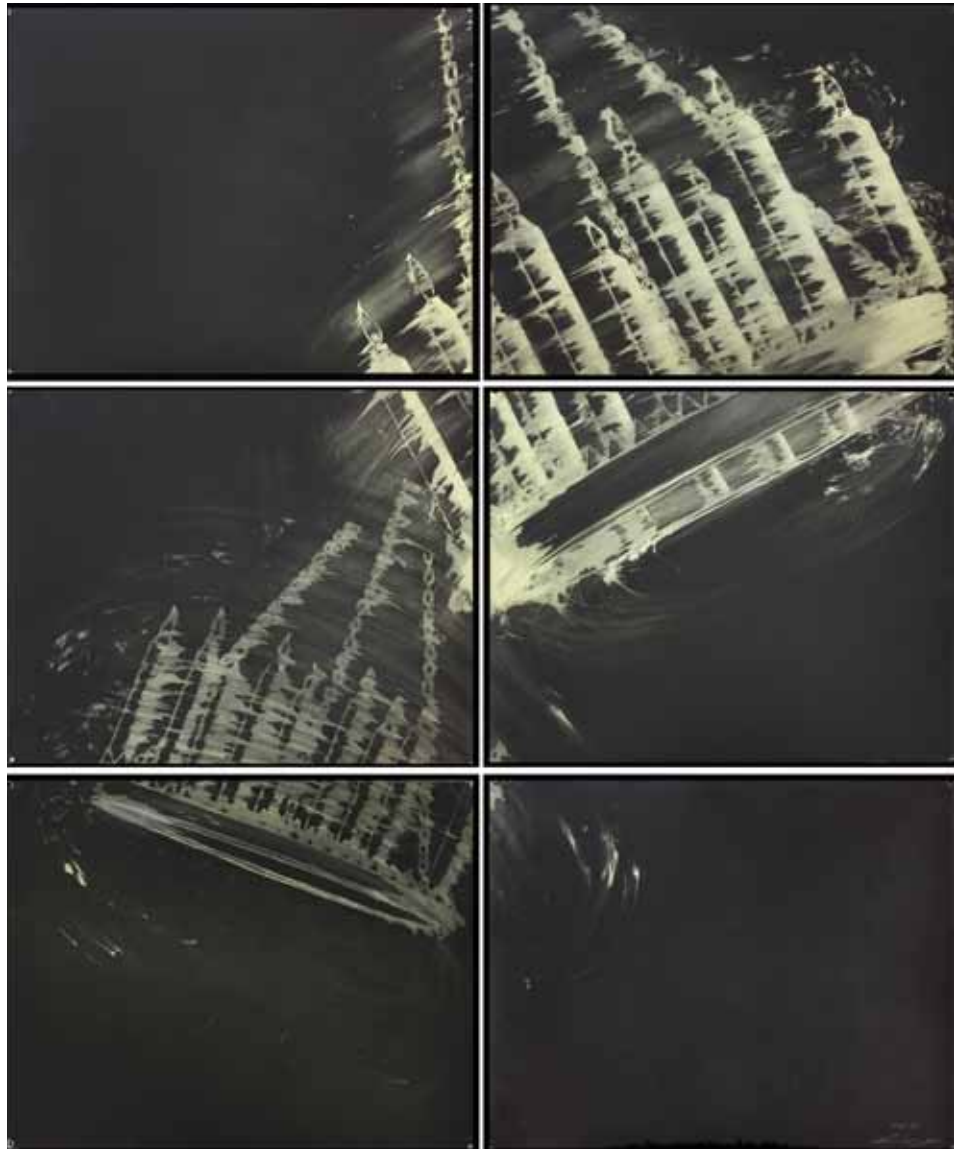
Gary Simmons smears, exquisitely. The magic is in the moment that you can't quite get back. Film is an excellent inspiration for the moment just missed and eagerly anticipated. Inspired by snippets of film, even film theaters themselves, Simmons explores the text, scenes, and architecture of cinema in these new prints. His specific way of marking on canvas is hard to achieve in intaglio printing. A physical painter, he was initially impatient with how long it took to achieve the desired look of erasure. At first the printers used a litho crayon, which was too hard to smear. Then they painted a soap-ground on top of the crayon and that worked beautifully. It took several days for the printers to figure out the marking in a way that felt comfortable for Gary. He returned for a second visit to complete what he began and then the process went much faster. In our conversation he was very open about learning to work in the new medium.

— Kenneth Caldwell

Paulson Bott Press: Why haven't you explored the print medium before?

Gary Simmons: I hadn't been happy with the results. Printmaking has very specific steps that you have to follow. I like the immediate response I get from painting and drawing, and it took time to find folks who were patient so I could understand and embrace the print-making process.

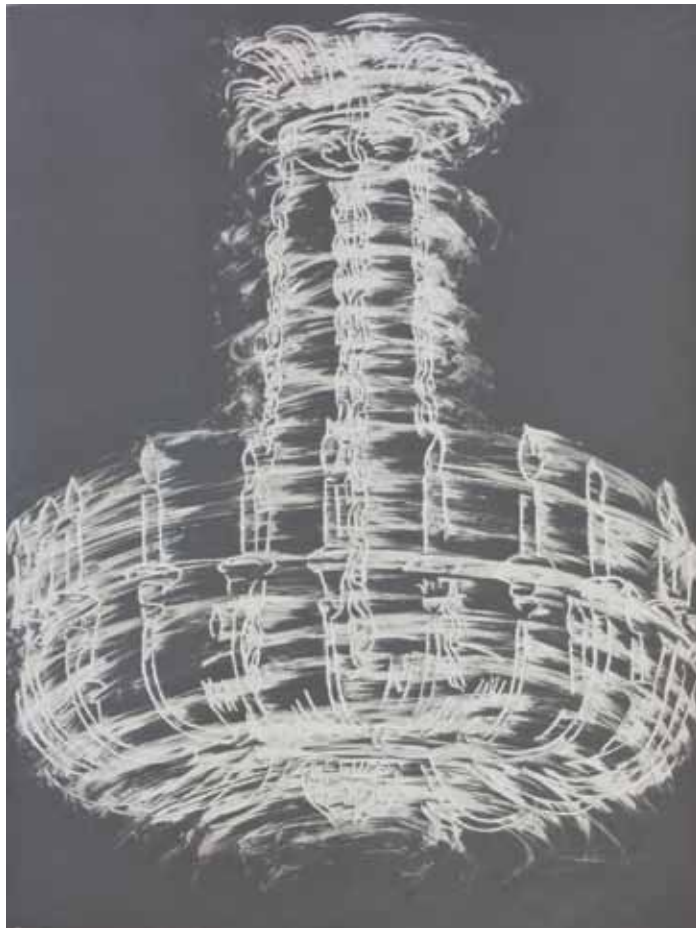
Q: Tell me how your imagery works in this medium. Erasing a surface is totally different from working with a plate and acid and waiting.



(above right) **DOUBLE SWING HALLWAY, 2012**

Color Aquatint Etching; 6 panels each:
19 1/2" x 25"; Edition of 15





(above left) **CHANDELIER SPIN, 2012**
Color Aquatint Etching; 41" x 30 1/2"
Edition of 35

(right) **BONHAM MARQUEE, 2012**
Color Aquatint Etching; 41" x 30 1/2"
Edition of 35

GS: There's a whole language that was totally alien to me. They let me do my thing, and then we worked around the parts that didn't feel right. They sensed my apprehension or frustration and then asked, "Well, why don't we try this?" to see how I could fit the process into my way of working. I do the work and then I erase it. And I don't usually go back into it. I leave the mistakes where they are.

Working with sandpaper was in tune with what I do because I can make marks that are kind of ghosts of movement or gestures. The sweeping, whirling marks that happen are a lot more like what I do.

Q: Tell me about these images.

GS: Some come from the film *The Shining*. I did a show that was based around ghosts

using that film as the centerpiece, the moving chandeliers and Jack Nicholson's famous phrase, "All Work and No Play Makes Jack a Dull Boy." In the movie, Shelley Duvall thinks that Nicholson is working on a novel. And instead he's writing that phrase continuously and stacking all these bits of paper and things. You realize he's lost his mind. I like the idea of work and play connected to the artist. I actually bought a proper typewriter to get this type.

Q: Those are hard to find. I want one.

GS: I love them. I love the sound of them. And one letter will throw really high or something. So I wanted one that wasn't perfect. I had my assistant going crazy typing "All Work No Play, All Work No Play" all day long.

Q: You turned your assistant into Jack Nicholson.

GS: I did have to say to her, "You look like you're going a little mad. So take a break and do something else." That madness almost reflects making art. There is a kind of psychotic stage that you go into where you're going crazy when you're working. I like that.



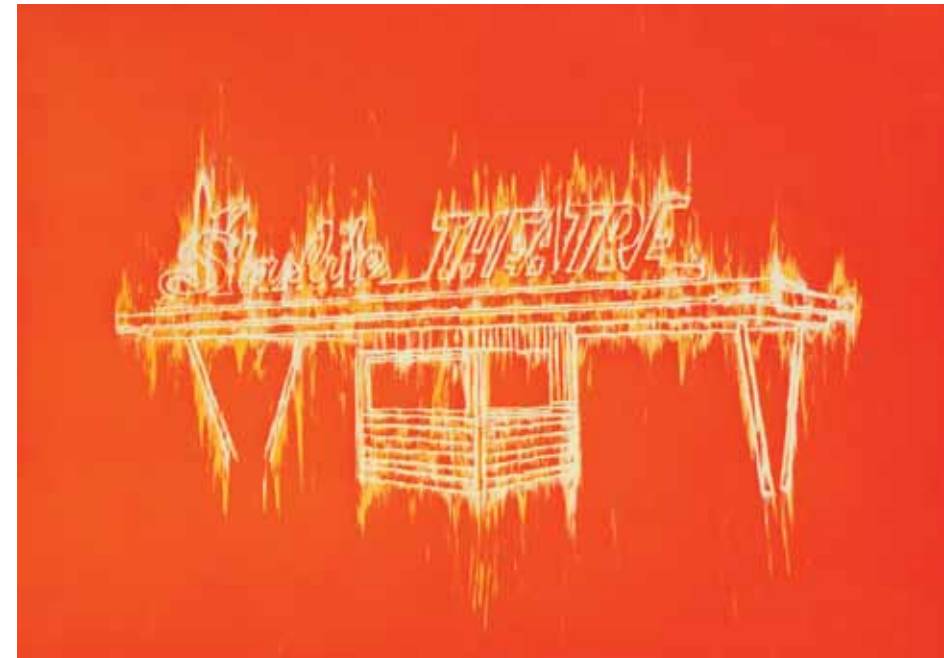
Q: Why did you focus on *The Shining*?

GS: *The Shining* is a classic ghost story. I'm a big fan of that genre and I've always loved the pace of a Kubrick film. Kubrick put the hotel together out of four different hotels to make you think that it's one place. There is kind of displaced moment for the viewer. This is a composite of a lot of different places and a lot of different people and past histories. Traces of the past are present and you're caught between different gears, now and the past, and then maybe the future.

Film informs a lot of the things that I do, and *The Shining* is one of my favorite movies of all time. My wife will come in and say, "Oh, God, you're watching *The Shining* again?"

Q: Talk more about the ghost imaging.

GS: My work hinges on ghosts and traces and issues in the past and things that you can't totally erase or obliterate. No memory is actual. You highlight one part of your life over another, and then you fill in the gaps. And as time passes, there are abstractions, disappearances. I'm after teasing out your experience when you're looking at the work.



As a viewer, you are searching to fill in the parts that are erased to fill in the parts that remain. And that for me is like what a ghost is. It's this trace that haunts you.

Q: Do you sketch out a lot of ideas before you paint?

GS: There's a lot of preparation and a lot of research. If I'm focusing on one film, I'll look at it maybe ten times. Then I'll do little sketches. Sometimes the initial spark will be on a bar napkin in a restaurant, and I'll start the research from there. Then I'll do fragments of things to see if it works. Do I want the chandelier to spin or sway? I'll do the initial drawing and then, to play with the scale or the fragmentation of it, I'll project it. Editing is really important. What you're looking at is really the trace of a performance that you never really see, because I never let people see my doodling.

Q: The works show the evidence of your physical movement.

GS: Yes, the wall drawings are really physical and take a long time. I often think of myself as a visual DJ. By the time you identify the track or the sample, I'm already on to something else. I'm feeding you information and you're struggling to place it. That allows viewers to move around on their own terms. I don't want to lock you into one way of thinking. You bring your own experience and then you create the gaps in between.

Q: The subject matter in these prints seems to offer less commentary on class and wealth issues than some of your earlier work.

GS: Early on, the work was pointedly about race and class. A lot of cultures, not just African-American culture, have lost parts of their history. Some of the recent imagery implies a reference to class issues, but not as pointedly as before. And I think that's where the work has grown—you have to search around for other elements.

Q: Can you talk about your use of color?

GS: Color has a way of changing the emotion of an image. I had a very specific agenda, so I never used color or figures. I wanted the black and white of an issue, to make it as reductive as possible. Now I've started to play with color. But not multiple colors. It's usually a two-color palette.

I don't think I'll ever use a figure, because a figure anchors the piece to an experience outside of yourself. It's a representation of somebody else. I like the idea of using objects and architectural spaces that you may have a relationship to or you may have been in. I think spaces are haunted by bodies already. If I anchored the space with a figure, then it's only about that figure in that space, or your relationship to that figure. That's limiting.

Cartoon figures are a different thing. Early on, I think that was more about having you



Gary Simmons in the Paulson Bott studio.

(left) **STARLITE THEATRE, 2012**
Color Aquatint Etching; 32" x 40"
Edition of 35

recognize what those cartoon figures meant to you. They were very political—they were extracted from political cartoons, they were sometimes Disney-referenced things that a lot of people knew from childhood.

Q: What do you like about the printmaking process?

GS: I like that it makes me slow down. I get bored quickly. I'll be working on a show, and if we can't get to it pretty quickly, I'm on to another idea. I don't work in the studio every day from 8:00 to 5:00. When I get excited about something, I throw myself into it and then move on.

The printmaking process forces me to slow down and solve problems differently. In the studio, we work with trial and error. But working at the press, I initiate an idea and hand it off to these guys, and then it takes some time.

I'm looking at specific gestures a lot more closely, like, oh, I need to drag this out to make that disappear in this certain way. There are a lot of ways of creating an erasure. I'm looking at different inks and colors and how those work and sit over the top of each other. That's new to me.

Q: You are making erasure by doing more?

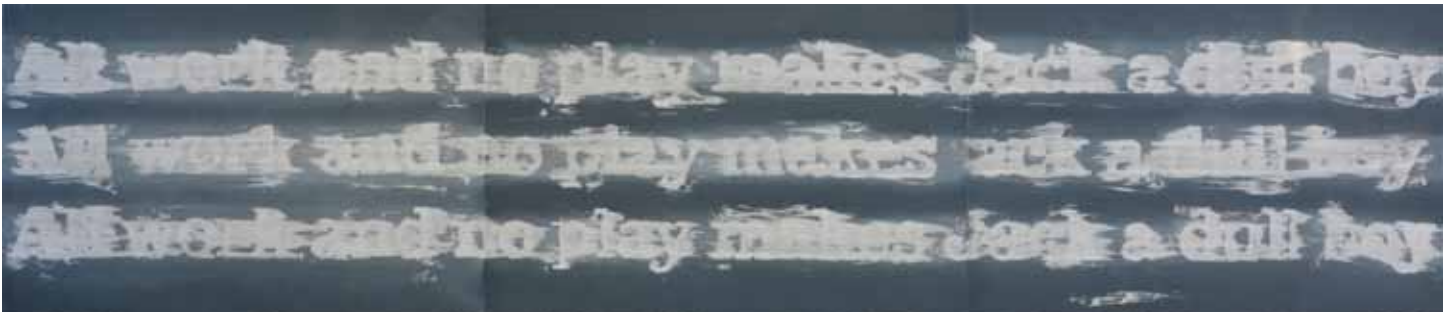
GS: Yeah. That's a great way of putting it. ✱



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ALL WORK AND NO PLAY, 2012
Color Aquatint Etching; 16 3/4" x 62"
Edition of 20



ALL WORK REVERSAL, 2012
Color Aquatint Etching; 17" x 91 1/2"
Edition of 20

DESIGN: MICHAEL OSBORNE DESIGN