

The letters 'O', 'K', 'T', and 'P' are drawn in a thick, black, hand-drawn style. They are positioned in the foreground of a workshop or studio. In the background, there are framed artworks on the wall, a window with a grid pattern, and a large, complex mechanical press or printing machine.

## TAUBA AUERBACH

01.01.12

This is Tauba Auerbach's third visit to Paulson Bott Press. Her process has always incorporated experimentation. Often she would deliberate over her strategies for a long time before acting. In the past few years, perhaps as a result of living in New York, she has been working out her strategies by doing. This can be seen in her well-known *Shatter* works. On this visit to Paulson Bott Press, she wanted to try something quite different from any of her previous work. She used the tools of the press in unexpected ways. After dozens of different experiments, she focused on the power of the printing press to crush and the power of the acid bath to burn. The powerful press itself became the tool by which she crushed paper and devised the pattern for the *Fold/Slice Topo* prints. The acid bath, which is used to etch copper plates, became the focus of the process in the *Plate Distortion* series. In both cases, she explores concepts of topology and topography, of what is unseen and the process that is recorded in the work.

—Kenneth Caldwell

**Paulson Bott Press:** There are a lot of ideas here.

**Tauba Auerbach:** Some of them will get edited out. I don't want to just take what I've been doing with my paintings and do them in print form. That seems unambitious. I want to take some of the same principles or interests, like topology, and explore those ideas in ways that are specific to the printing process.

**Q:** Like what?



(above) **FOLD/SLICE TOPO I, 2011**  
Color Aquatint Etching; 45" x 35"  
Edition of 35





(above) **FOLD/Slice TOPO II, 2011**  
Color Aquatint Etching; 45" x 35"  
Edition of 35

**TA:** There are a lot of things one can do in this printmaking studio that I can't do in my own. We can flatten things in the press or slice through things with the plate cutter and etch plates for various amounts of time to get different densities of ink or layers. For example, I started one experiment by folding up sheets of paper in complicated ways and running them through the press to flatten them.

**Q:** What kind of paper?

**TA:** We used this stuff called Clearprint. It was a little plasticky. We knew we were going to have to get it wet later. So it had to be able to hold together.

**Q:** What happened after you ran it through the press?

**TA:** We drew lines across the resulting funny, irregular, thick shape and put that shape in the plate cutter and sliced through the whole wad of paper along those lines. We ended up with strips, which we numbered to keep in order. We then unfurled the strips and reassembled them on top of a plate and sprayed them with water so they would flatten back out.

So we had basically reassembled the sheet of paper we started out with, only now it was composed of these strips or bands. We then pulled out every second band, say, all the odd-numbered ones, and used the ones left on the plate as a stencil while we sprayed the plate with a resist. After we removed the paper, we dropped aquatint onto the plate to etch the exposed stripes. Then we made a second plate that was a reversal, so that we'd have a plate for the other half of the stripes. Each band was inked according to its number with a different color, so that there is a graduated progression, like on a topographic map. It is almost as if you had taken the irregular shape that came out of the press and dipped it in different colors of ink at different depths.

**Q:** I am a little confused.

**TA:** It's confusing! It was confusing while we were doing it. It is like making a puzzle and then solving the puzzle. And you think it should be easy to solve because you made it, but it's not. We had to figure out where everything fit together. You can see they're complicated.

**Q:** How did you decide which way to fold the paper?

**TA:** There were several different strategies. I tried crumpling the paper and then running that through the press. I tried folding it really regularly. I also tried folding it in a way that I've been folding a lot of my canvas for the fold paintings, where it's rolled and then folded. I selected what I thought was most visually interesting at the end. This is another way to examine the hidden topology of a folded surface. And then to flatten it out again.

**Q:** So you're applying the white or cream at the highest point and the dark blue at the lowest?

**TA:** Yes. We are still working on the colors so that they have a protruding and receding kind of relationship.

**Q:** There is a strategy of figuring out the folds and cutting them. But then, in addition, you have a color strategy to reinforce that?

**TA:** That's right. I've been making paintings where I'm folding canvas and then spraying it directionally with paint. So essentially, in that process, paint stands in for raking light. This initial sheet of paper might have been folded similarly to how I've been folding those canvases, but in this case I'm not depicting the folds with light. I'm trying to depict them with an indication of depth—it's less about the surface and more about a position within the folded shape. If this were a canvas, one side would have been hit with paint and the other side wouldn't have. It is a different way to represent or map the same thing.

**Q:** Did you have this figured out before you got here?

**TA:** I tried to do this with canvas by dipping it in dye, but that didn't work. I was trying to dip different layers, but I was having trouble getting to the inner layers. This is one of many things that, when I arrived here, I said I wanted to try. This has been my way of working recently, trying way too many things, abandoning the ideas that aren't working, and then following whatever does work. Recently I did a *Shatter* painting. It took a long time, and when I took the glass off, I realized I didn't like it. So I did it all over again. Part of the concept in those paintings is that I am not going to have control over certain elements in the composition, so I have to be at peace with that and only accept or reject the results instead of trying to corral them.

**Q:** How are the *Shatter* paintings made?

**TA:** They are made by breaking a piece of glass on top of a wood panel. I put a piece of cardboard on top of the glass. I don't know where or how the glass is breaking. It is a stochastic, or random, process. I remove the cardboard and then lift each shard of glass up and spray in the little hole left behind. In some cases, I use colors, in others I do half-black, half-white gradients in each hole. That results, theoretically, in



Tauba Auerbach in the Paulson Bott studio.

a half-black, half-white painting. But it's imperfect.

**Q:** That's a lesson isn't it? It seems like your way of working has changed somewhat. When we spoke last time, a lot of what you did depended on a very deliberate mental exercise before you got down to work.

**TA:** I embrace this way of working because, for the fold paintings, I throw out maybe 10 for every one that makes the cut. That frees me up to work and work and work and then edit at the end instead of trying to self-edit before. There are folds that I made at the beginning of the series that would never make the cut nowadays. My standards are always getting harsher.

**Q:** Was it a big leap to start letting go of stuff?

**TA:** Yeah. But it was really rewarding really quickly.

**Q:** These other prints, from the *Plate Distortion* series, look like a different kind of topography.

**TA:** You're looking at another topological state of the actual plate in this case. This is more similar to the fold-painting process in terms of how the image is made. We used copper foil, which I aquatinted and folded like a crumpled surface. The foil goes into a tub into which we pour acid. The acid etched the surface differently depending upon how crushed or bent it was in different areas.

**Q:** When you are done, what is the plate?

**TA:** The plate is this crumpled piece of foil that has been flattened out and adhered to a regular copper plate.


**Q:** Were you surprised by the result?

**TA:** I was totally surprised! It was almost the opposite of what I expected, because as Renee explained to me, the acid etches directly downward, so I didn't expect the lowest points to have the lightest value. But that's the joy of it. My objective while being here was not to rely on the things I already know.

**Q:** So have any of these experiments pushed you in a new direction?

**TA:** Well, I've been concocting in my mind a new series of paintings that are woven, several paintings woven together. These prints, the way that I had to deal with these strips of paper, they were practice for that. And they reaffirm that I want to pursue that idea. But I don't know exactly what will come out of all of this.

**Q:** There is a kind of fearlessness.

**TA:** I should hope so. Yeah. Well, why be afraid? 



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Color Aquatint Etching; 44" x 33 1/2"  
Edition of 35



**PLATE DISTORTION II, 2011**  
Color Aquatint Etching; 44" x 33 1/2"  
Edition of 35



**PLATE DISTORTION III, 2011**  
Color Aquatint Etching; 44" x 33 1/2"  
Edition of 35