

ARTFORUM

“The Graphic Unconscious”

THE PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS
118-128 North Broad Street
January 29–April 11

This ambitious five-venue exhibition brings together thirty-five artists who incorporate prints or printmaking into a wide array of styles and practices. The highlight of the exhibition (itself part of Philadelphia’s citywide festival “Philagrafika”) is at Morris and Fisher Brooks Galleries at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and features Christiane Baumgartner, Mark Bradford, Orit Hofshi, Pepón Osorio, Kiki Smith, Qiu Zhijie, and the artist collective Tromarama. The show encourages a broadened definition of printmaking, one that takes into account digital reproduction technology and encompasses the use of printed matter in combined-media works.

Several of the pieces challenge the traditional notion of prints as multiples. Hofshi, for example, incorporates hand-carved pine panels along with the prints pulled from them into a large-scale sculptural installation. By including the blocks in *If the Tread Is an Echo*, 2009, the artist blurs the line between process and final artwork. She also precludes the possibility of an edition. Another print that would be challenging to reproduce is Osorio’s *You’re Never Ready*, 2007. For this piece, he used a laser printer to superimpose an X-ray of his mother’s skull onto a flattened, compressed pile of confetti. The single continuous image—printed across thousands of individual paper bits like a giant jigsaw puzzle—is a technological feat that subverts printmaking’s tradition of multiple reproductions of a single image by instead printing one image on numerous surfaces.

Also worth pointing out as an effective fusion of new media and traditional printmaking technique is Tromarama’s *Serigala Militia*, 2005. This stop-motion animation, projected in a small chamber, was made by filming a sequence of wooden panels that also line the exterior walls of the room. The blocks’ handmade materiality and implicit labor-intensive production enrich the slick, fast-paced video. Overall, the assimilation of prints and printmaking into a wide variety of contemporary art practices confirms the sustained relevance and versatility of this ancient medium.

— Mara Hoberman



Tromarama, *Serigala Militia* (detail), 2005, 402 woodcuts, video projection, woodcuts 10 x 8" each.