

Artificial Nature: Building an Ecological Vision through Printmaking

Panel Proposal for Print City, 2014 MAPC Conference, Detroit, MI

Panel Chair:

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Abstract:

Printmaking has a natural connection to popular culture and prints have traditionally explored the urgent issues of their respective times. From Jose Posada to Francisco Goya, printmakers have used their medium to bring about political or social change, some explicitly and others more subtly. There is a crop of current printmakers who build upon this history by investigating interactions and connections between the natural world and the built environment, highlighting issues of ecology, technology, and industry. Ecological disasters, natural resource extraction, and the excesses of this current place and time become fodder for their cross-disciplinary artworks. Dürer envisioned the apocalypse ushered in by horsemen; contemporary artists echo this anxiety reimagined as repercussions of our own technological advancements.

This panel will bring together 3 interdisciplinary artists who blend their artistic practice with activism to imagine post-apocalyptic hybrids of industry and the natural world. They will speak to their vision of a future ecology in which natural and synthetic become intertwined, some gleefully blurring the lines between the organic and plastic, others with much more trepidation. Hybridization makes sense in the context of the vast intertwined network of ecology, leading to artworks that conflate 'the natural' and 'the artificial', art and activism, and interdisciplinary media. The artists selected for this panel will speak to their interests in other disciplines as diverse as ecology, technology, and film.

Description:

The 2014 Mid America Print Council Conference "Print City" will poise printmaking as a vehicle for meaningful critical discourse around contemporary issues. The "Artificial Nature" panel will bring together in dialog three contemporary artists whose work spans art and ecology to create just such a discourse. The subject matter of ecology and industry is particularly pertinent to the setting of the conference in Detroit.

"Artificial Nature" will not treat nature and culture, or art and ecology, as binaries; instead, panelists will focus on print as a tool for synthesis. Chosen artists will speak to how they conceptualize and visualize the unbounded connectivity implicit in the study of ecology, and give form to this idea through sprawling installations of printed multiples. Multiplicity as an idea and central concept is at the heart of contemporary printmaking, with many artists exploiting this feature to create accumulations or prints as installations. Thus the idea of hybridization is present formally and conceptually in their work. Installation is a medium that blurs edges between an artwork and its environment, and in this way emphasizes the notion of connectivity. "Artificial Nature" advances a subtle activism that politicizes aesthetics to change the way viewers think about and approach the natural world.

"Artificial Nature" will also highlight printmaking's history as a hybrid medium spanning traditional and emerging art-making methodologies. Democratic due to its reproducibility and ability to travel hand-to-hand, the print has traditionally explored popular secular

beliefs and reflected and responded to contemporary culture. The panelists of “Artificial Nature” will build upon this history by addressing the timely topic of the impact of industry on ecology. Before there was ever electricity, the print played the major role of distribution of images and ideas, and as such was in previous centuries the equivalent of the Internet and TV all rolled in to one. In this way, new media can be seen as a natural outgrowth of print, a connection that the “Artificial Nature” panelists explore through combining video, digital, and installation with traditional printed media. By treating printmaking as a set of ideas and logic about reproducibility, layering, and recording, rather than a specific technique, their work serves to trace the proliferation of media from the earliest prints through the most current technologies. Panelists will discuss how they merge traditional and emerging technologies in their work, as well as how they got started on that path.

In addition to each giving a brief presentation of their artwork and research, panelists will seek to address the following in dialog with each other and the audience:

- If and how they hope to effect social or political change in relationship to ecology, industry, and nature
- What the act of politicizing artistic practice means to their work and how it connects to social practice
- Why installation and hybridization of media makes sense for their subject matter
- How traveling and research relate to their ongoing artistic practice

Print artists create synthesis. They are deeply invested in print as a medium, but also often use it as a tool of translation between a range of visual languages and working methodologies. The artworks that result place printmaking at the forefront of a contemporary art world in which artists increasingly eschew labels to cross disciplines – not just within art mediums but intersecting with film, performance, activism, and ecology.

Biography:

Taryn McMahon has received numerous awards for her work including the SGCI Graduate Fellowship and residencies at Anderson Ranch, Anchor Graphics, and Women’s Studio Workshop. Her recent accomplishments include a solo exhibition at The Print Center Philadelphia, co-organizing a panel at SGCI Print MKE, and contributing to printerinteresting.org.