

June 25 - July 18, 2009

Opening Reception: Thursday, June 25, 6pm - 9pm

Denise Hawrysió

Situational Prints

Denise Hawrysió was born in Toronto and currently lives in London, UK. She received her BFA from Queen's University, Canada, and her MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute. She works in a variety of media including site-specific installation and print and has exhibited her work throughout Europe, the United States and Canada. She has been an active member of London's art scene for several years, founding her own project space in the early 1990s, working collectively with many of Britain's leading artists. She recently received fellowships for print residencies at the Banff Centre for the Arts, the prestigious MacDowell Colony in the United States and the University of British Columbia.

A review in *The Georgia Straight* of her recent Vancouver solo print exhibition stated: "Hawrysió's prints are remarkable for both their conceptual premise and their social engagement—and for the oddly appealing aesthetic that emerges from the process of their creation. They boost the fading fortunes of traditional etching and lithography into the postmodern present."

She has exhibited at Kunstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin), Uppsala Konstmuseum (Sweden), The Showroom (London), Mercer Union (Toronto), Dare Dare Gallery (Montreal), Overgaden, Institute of Contemporary Art (Copenhagen), and recently at Simon Fraser University Gallery (Vancouver and) Dundee Contemporary Arts (Scotland).

Dean Kenning is a London, England-based artist, occasional curator and regular contributor to *Art Monthly*. He teaches at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design and is Research Fellow in Fine Art at Kingston University London.

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EDITING Heather Webb & Sara Kelly
TYPESETTING Sara Kelly
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Brick with the marks of its own making and unmaking. (work in progress), 10.5 mm x 20 mm x 6 mm, copper, 2009

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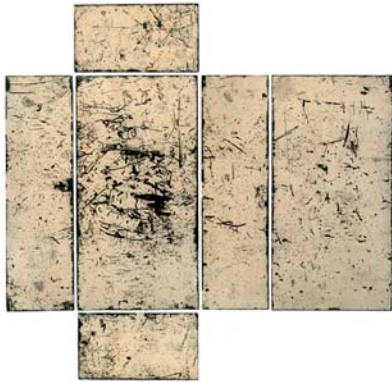
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Tuesday to Saturday, noon to 5 pm

An Etching Plate Feels No Pain

by Dean Kenning



In April 2008, the British newspapers were lapping up a publicity photograph of Harriet Harman, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, touring her socially deprived South London constituency of Peckham wearing a stab-proof jacket. Amidst a spate of teenage knifings in London, Harman's photo op alongside neighbourhood officers in their 'stab-vests,' seemed both an unconscious admission of policy failure, and a misguided gimmick which placed the politician beyond the lives of the people she represented, who, after all, went about Peckham in broad daylight without the benefit of body armour. I was reminded of Harman's PR gaffe when I saw Denise Hawrysió's series of works *Etching Plate Used as Shield*, respectively followed by the clauses: *as I walk through Peckham*; *as I accidentally step into rival territory*; and *in case I have to intervene in a confrontation*. Each title is printed once below an etching, and a second time below a juxtaposed, identically sized photograph of the artist in a mundane public setting: walking down a high street, or queuing at a newsagent's counter; in each shot a dark rectangular plate partially covers her torso. The incongruity of Hawrysió's protective attire pulls together, and comically deflates, the fear-mongering media hysteria about crime, and the heroic, or socially conscious artist's imperative to be 'in the thick of it,' located where the *real* action is. This 'reality' is vouched for through the medium of photography—yes, Hawrysió was really there. But in the bare abstract marks of the juxtaposed etchings, we have a yet more viscerally direct relation to the real.

In *Notes on the Index*, Rosalind Krauss described how photography had in fact 'increasingly become the operative model for abstraction' in the early 1970s.¹ In the terminology of Roland Barthes, photography is a 'message without a code,' an image that has not undergone transformation according to a cultural convention, in the manner of traditional art or everyday signs.² It is a nice surprise to find in the quaintly old-fashioned medium of etching, which we associate with the pictorial, a recognition of the 'mute presence of an uncoded event.'³ The etching has, of course, always been the index of whatever pressures—intentional or otherwise—have scratched away at the passively submitting plate's protective

coating, allowing the acid to subsequently penetrate and corrode its surface. It accounts for the 'aesthetic' white noise ambience of accidental marks and 'under-biting' familiar from conventional figurative etchings. This registrative character is distilled to the point of tautology in *Brick with the Marks of its Own Making and Unmaking*, Hawrysió's witty homage to Robert Morris:⁴ a copper plate coated with an acid-resistant substance is cut and soldered together to form a brick-like object, before being dismantled, put into an acid bath, and then printed, thus revealing the scratches and abrasions suffered by the 'brick'—in fact all surface—which necessarily accompanied its construction and deconstruction.

While this piece is itself a literal recording of a blankly objective process, it is significant that the titles and descriptions of Hawrysió's work have begun to negate the literalism of earlier work, and take on a more metaphorical, indeed anthropomorphic quality. The etching plate appears to have become identified with the human individual, and his/her vulnerability to the slings and arrows of everyday life. Thus, in *Plate as Shield*, an incongruity exists between the inflationary rhetoric—leading to an expectation of traumatic, interpersonal encounter—and the forensics of the etching itself, which reveal nothing but evidence of the rough handling of the plate. The *Pencil Stories* also have moved from descriptions of actually registered processes (*Speed Bump*, *Mount Rundle*), to ones which, at most, bear a quixotic relation to the resulting etching. In *Bully*, Hawrysió recounts how she took a plate to a local school and, paradoxically, 'asked a kid to bully it' (apparently he kicked it around the yard for an hour—water off a duck's back for an etching plate). The jerky marks of *Taser* may be evidence of some sort of frenzied activity, but they were not the result of an electrical current delivered by an RCMP officer. In *Fingernail marks from the guy whose job I stole*, and *Latch marks from the door slamming in my face*, this tendency to human identification reaches its apex.

A metaphorical violence runs throughout Hawrysió's prints through an analogy with the process of etching, one that involves exposure and abrasion. It was the mental after-effects of trauma that lead Freud to speculate, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, about the origins of organic life and their instructive value for thinking about a defensive psychological anatomy: a 'vesicle' (all surface), a 'little fragment of living substance suspended in the middle of an external world charged with the most powerful energies... would be killed by stimulation if it were not provided with a protective shield against stimuli.'⁵ As anyone who lives in London knows, it's not a good idea to leave home without at least putting on your psychological body armour.

¹ Rosalind Krauss, *Notes on the Index. Parts 1 and 2*, in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1986) 210.

² Roland Barthes, *Rhetoric of the Image*, in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977).

³ Krauss 212.

⁴ Robert Morris's *Box with the Sound of its Own Making* (1961) was a wooden box containing a tape recording of its actual construction.

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Angela Richards (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996) 298.