

June 24 - July 24, 2010

Opening Reception
Thursday, June 24 | 7-9 pm

Artist Talk at Open Studio
Thursday, June 24 | 6 pm. Free admission

Kate McQuillen

Never Green



Never Green, spit bite aquatint, 22" x 30", 2010. Photo by Zev Farber.



Tuesday to Saturday, noon to 5 pm

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Kate McQuillen: Never Green

by Barbara Gilbert

(...)

*See here, where the cleats of linemen
Have roughened a second bark
Onto the bald trunk. And these spikes
Have been driven sideways at intervals handy for human legs.*

(...)

*These giants are more constant than evergreens
By being never green.*¹

During a recent residency at Open Studio, Chicago artist Kate McQuillen created a large sculptural piece (which, in itself, can be unusual for a print artist). Composed of thin strips of printed paper, assembled together with fishing line and glue, *Never Green* conjures up a dystopian scene where a creature manifests from the invisible energy in the telecommunications waves running inside the wires of a telephone pole. He forms, uproots the pole, and ventures forth to wreak havoc. The title of the exhibition, *Never Green*, is inspired by the John Updike poem, *Telephone Poles*, which makes reference to the similitude of telephone poles to evergreen trees and to human figures, with their transformer heads and wooden arms.

Arriving in Toronto in 2007 to enter the MFA program at York University, McQuillen was struck by the number of wires crisscrossing our sky. She was unfamiliar with this state of affairs, Chicago having buried most of its cables underground. While overhead wires can still be seen in some Chicago neighborhoods, they are, for the most part, in alleys and not on main streets. In Toronto, add streetcar wires to the standard electricity and telecommunications cables, and the result is a lattice of black lines across our sky. Intrigued by the sheer volume of data traveling along these wires, McQuillen embarked on this residency with the intention of creating an entity, a creature of sorts, brought to life by the concentration of energy in the grid.

Kate McQuillen began this project, as she often does, with a drawing. She drew the figure directly onto a plate with a permanent marker, and then applied an aquatint. The whole plate was then immersed in acid. The ink from the marker resisted the acid in the etching process, so that the parts of the plate she had drawn on remained white, and an even aquatint tone was established. In a process known as a "spit bite" she then applied acid directly with a brush on some sections of the image, in order to obtain the

variations of tone in the aquatint, as seen in the finished print hanging near her sculptural installation.

The juxtaposition of the print and the installation reveal McQuillen's fascination with line as a sculptural object. In an earlier work, she experimented with strips of paper assembled to form a tornado. Tornadoes make the invisible visible as the wind picks up debris; McQuillen imagined that the same effect could be achieved with paper instead of dust and debris. Taking the idea one step further, she imagined that the constant stream of data we transmit through our cell phones and email could also be represented visually, as a figure. Her creature's defiant gesture suggests a *Moloch*, a deity demanding ever larger sacrifices. The manifestation of monsters in contemporary art often alludes to our fear of the unknown. We don't yet truly comprehend the impact of the amount of telecommunications data we put out there, and this is precisely what Kate McQuillen grapples with in *Never Green*.

Commenting on contemporary society, with our increasing dependence on email and cell phones, McQuillen's *Never Green* seeks to remind us that mass communication began with paper: letters, newsprint, telegrams. And that's how she began this project, with print on paper. She sought to reproduce the rough wooden surface of telephone poles, only to later shear the prints into wire-thin strips with which to construct the entity wielding the telephone pole. The pole itself is also a print, curled into a cylinder and stapled. The staples are a nice touch, a reminder that telephone poles are often used as de facto bulletin boards, and a tactile reminder of these objects we encounter daily, but barely ever really see.

It is a paradox that McQuillen's creature, so large and looming, is actually rather fragile. Held together with glue and fishing line, we could crush it just as easily as it appears to want to crush us.

¹ Updike, John. *Telephone Poles and Other Poems*. New York, NY: Random House, 1963.

Barbara Gilbert is a Toronto-based artist, curator and educator. Currently Secretariat Coordinator at the Ontario Association of Art Galleries, Barbara also teaches in Continuing Studies at the Ontario College of Art & Design.

Through the Visiting Artist Program, Open Studio is accessible to all professional artists, with or without printmaking experience, to explore and develop new bodies of work through print media. Each year, four artists produce their work in the Open Studio facilities followed by two-person exhibitions in the Open Studio Gallery.

Open Studio, Canada's leading printmaking centre, is dedicated to the production, preservation and promotion of contemporary fine art prints.

Open Studio acknowledges the generous support of its government funders, members, individual donors and volunteers.

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Kate McQuillen is a Chicago-based artist working mainly in print and installation. Her work deals with the idea of telecommunications as an invisible landscape in our midst, one that sometimes comes to life.

McQuillen received an MFA in Visual Art from York University in 2009. She has exhibited works in Toronto, Montréal, Boston, and Chicago.

Kate McQuillen would like to thank everyone at Open Studio for their help and support throughout the residency. Special thanks go to Jill Graham for her inspired solutions, Pawel Zablocki for his willingness to share his technical expertise, and Pam Lobb for her endless patience and skill.

Greg Staats (b. Ohsweken, ON) is a photographer and video artist whose works combine language, mnemonics and the natural world. Staats draws upon a traditional Mohawk restorative aesthetic that defines the multiplicity of relationships inherent within the condolence ceremony. Staats works in gathering images that have formed as an archive and also draws on a personal and familial archive or recordings, papers, diaries and recently found images. His video works are contemplative and require the viewer adapt the rhythms of the natural world while conceptually defining patterns of renewal to counter loss of language and subsequent worldview. He has had solo exhibitions at the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Walter Phillips Gallery, Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery, Mercer Union and Gallery TPW. Group exhibitions include: the Ottawa Art Gallery, the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, the National Gallery of Canada and the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art. Staats is the recipient of the Duke and Duchess of York Prize in Photography. Recently, he has been Faculty for two Aboriginal Visual Arts Thematic Residencies, Archive Restored (2009) and Towards Language (2010) at the Banff Centre for the Arts. Staats has an upcoming solo exhibition in 2011 at the McMaster Museum of Art.

Greg Staats would like to thank Nadine Bariteau and Emma Nishimura, and would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Ontario Arts Council, the Canada Council for the Arts and Open Studio.

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Greg Staats *body of shadow*



new spaces, screenprint, 24" x 23", edition of 8, 2010.

Left to Our Own Devices

by Ryan Rice

Amidst the abundance of stimulation from global technological spam via mass media inundating our daily life, it is still relevant to cull historical, cosmological, personal and generational sources of knowledge to make sense of our world. By understanding and incorporating what was remembered, imagined, believed and recorded within our environs (social, cultural, political), we constantly push and advance the intricacies of tradition. Traditional knowledge transferred by generations can build the spirit and awaken our interconnectedness and experiences over time and place as a path that informs our future. The Haudenosaunee, a unique confederacy comprised of six nations, have a legacy of symbols, metaphors and distinct forms of orality that exists as a means to reflect upon, move forward and maintain a personal and communal peace. What our ancestors left us was meant to be carried forward and utilized...constantly. Even as the concepts get shuffled, misinterpreted and bombarded by foreign/colonial interruption, policies and attitudes, the strong and relevant significance developed in the past continues to define a people and their presence.

A distinct visual narrative presented through symbolic mark making is the source of strength and is key to deciphering an elaborate archive of knowledge. Considered mnemonic devices, objects created to contain the philosophies and histories represented by these symbolic marks are restitution of tradition and are the residual value passed on as an inheritance that is meant to be kept alive. The currencies of this visual system guide our nations, communities and families. It reinforces organizational function and connects territory, land, and boundaries to our contemporary existence. The mnemonic devices created through the symbolic mark making have become crucial to a national continuum for maintaining political and cultural complexities and a collective memory we continue to experience. Artists and orators developed the complex and abstract aesthetics as a form of visual architecture, a foundation and blueprint whose narratives can be built into the landscape over and over across time and place.

Greg Staats, a contemporary of those artists, gleans what has been recorded and inherited to restore and renew the metaphysical relationship and alliance he has established/acknowledged between himself, physically and spiritually, and the Confederacy. By interpreting the visual literacy, a recognized authority we have inherited, Staats has developed a process to connect intuitively and creatively to the complex systems of protocol that motivate, guide and strengthen his contemporary Haudenosaunee cultural experience. A strategy for understanding and negotiating the vulnerability and reality of socio-cultural transition, Staats maneuvers across artistic media to arrive at the juncture in which he states, "while redefining the parts of self via visual documentation of place I am carrying over certain core beliefs from one system to another, which then creates an interchangeable space for personal re/creation."¹

In the works created at Open Studio, Staats utilized the medium of printmaking—a time-intensive process—to restore the aesthetic narratives of mnemonic devices. In *new spaces*, a gray-scaled/toned multi-layered screenprint, Staats reconfigures the symbology of structure that has been carved and whittled into a stick of enlistment known as a Condolence Cane. An original cane's pictographs interpret, represent and instruct us of the placement (and ironically, burden) of power through the seating arrangement for hereditary chiefs in our Grand Council. A complex and sovereign political system, Staats transfers the fifty title-holders into layered strata, uncovering and acknowledging that our roots are buried deep within the establishment of the League of Nations. Staats' *new spaces* situates the Confederacy's original five nations five layers, or stratum, deep. By placing or laying to rest the order equally, Staats symbolically observes and respects the passing of generations and their ability to maintain a legacy moved forward by the condolence ceremony in which the mnemonic devices are conveyed. *new spaces* is a reconfiguration, a continuum for our narrative technologies to exist and be relevant as they were always meant to be.

The second print created at Open Studio is *body of shadow*, a multi-plate photo-based etching sourced from an archival photograph by Gunther Michelson. The image, taken at Six Nations reserve (Ontario) on April 12, 1962, depicts a procession of condolers along a natural tree-lined gravel road. Staats emphasizes the natural space—a halftone image that has been etched and inked—because it provides a direction of uncertainty conveyed through the Haudenosaunee Condolence Ceremony: "at the edge of the woods." Staats evokes a dichotomy of absence and presence by erasing each condoler's image and replacing it with an outline of cold emptiness to embody emotions of loss, sadness and grief. The liminal nature of *body of shadow* signals patterns of embrace, gait and condolence as a universal ritual now blurred by the convergence of cultures and traditions. By coming to terms with mortality, Staats sees the "cognitive pattern of renewal located in the liminal space between the clear-minded and those consumed by sorrow"² as a process of conscious support and healing.

The inherent repetitive nature of printmaking processes and techniques that Staats utilized for *new spaces* and *body of shadow* reinforce our responsibility to restore aesthetics as our own devices. Both works are reflections drawn from the rich spiritual and psychological Haudenosaunee worldview, which Staats passes on decisively as contemporary principles that have incredible application to our daily lives.

¹Greg Staats, Artist Statement, February 2010.

²Greg Staats, email message to the author, May 2010.