

June 28 - July 28, 2012

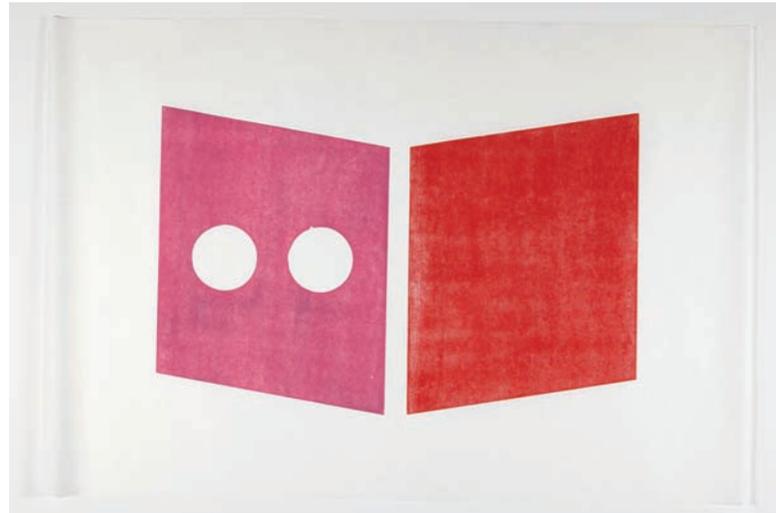
Artist Talk

Thursday, June 28 | 6-7 pm

Opening Reception

Thursday, June 28 | 7-9 pm

Derek Sullivan *Surplus Portfolio*



Eager, Guilty, Free, Reserved, woodcut on Kozuke, 25" x 37", 2012. Printed by Laine Groeneweg under the auspices of the Open Studio Visiting Artist Residency, 2011-12. Photograph by Chris Thomaidis.

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Gallery Hours
Tues. to Sat., 12-5pm



Annotations for the *Surplus Portfolio*

by Jen Hutton

1. The book that has yet to be written or read also describes a spatial arrangement: two rhomboids set along a fold, a zip drawn through a chevron with a hot knife, or a hypothesis verging on isometric space. Its symmetry suggests it is some sort of projective test — a denuded Rorschach ink blot — but all I want to do is tell you a story.

2. For now, I'll try to fill in the blanks:

Two shapes in tandem make a rhythm. If each is a projection of the other, together they imply a shifting cubic form that can be approached from above and/or below. I'm told this illusion is called a Necker cube (after the Swiss crystallographer Louis Albert Necker), and like a Rorschach, is an ambiguous image that can only exist on paper. I envision it as a container for surplus—things of ambiguous value.

From the street, the house that used to be Waldhausenstrasse 5 looks just as innocuous as the cube. The occupant was a painter who nailed his pictures together.

3. Pulled into the house's interior, I pushed at the corners to alter the view. As night descended, an exposure on the adjacent wall stretched along its length. What light projects a shadow? He pinched the ends of it to make it believable.

4. In complexity, too, we found a rhythm undulating along the walls. In the furthest room, the ceiling torqued. Every shape sleeps until it is pushed into a behaviour, or placed in an affinity, to confront its neighbour with a cough or a trill on the lips.

Slowly the painter buried the home's conventional Euclidean structure under layers of board and plaster. He called his crystalline grotto "a cathedral of erotic misery." When he was exiled in 1937, he prayed for it from afar.

5. The space was constructed and remains in fragments, which the mind can only seam together using a handful of photographs from multiple points of view. Elsewhere, he started to build others, extensions of the first; like it, they were unfinished and left for ruin.

As the room collapsed into shifting planes, the sun set in reverse.

6. Perhaps I'm reading into these too much. Perhaps these aren't rooms at all—but they could be. I follow the cues like little crumbs, but these blanks beg to be projected upon.

If I'm prone to obscurantism, he too buried stuff in the walls: talismans, objets trouvés, secret rooms with little apertures to spy on the others.

7. The shape of the thing couldn't be traced; it was written as it was made and remains incomplete. By including all its "former identities" and "consisting of its own remains," it comprised all its possible futures. It carried over its content and stepped on its own tail. It was one part of an envelope that had a nonsense name: Merz.

6. So I retrace my steps without thinking. Like the Necker cube, the Penrose stairs (after the British mathematician Roger Penrose) is an impossible object in isometric space, a staircase that perpetually ascends and neatly folds back on itself. (If only things were that simple.)

Through the swinging door, I start down the stairs, sneakers squeaking on tile.

5. At the very least, I'd like to think that things are open to being read backwards just as much as forwards.

4. This is a story:
For a while, all I did was make books. I pulled unnumbered pages from a stash of paper I rescued from a previous cleansing, spread them on my kitchen table, and gave them a sense of order. As night descended, I stitched pages together with waxed thread, glued them in a cloth-bound cover, and reinserted my book back into circulation. *Unreadable! Degenerate!* moaned the critics, and before they burned it with the others I took what I could from the pile and started again.

3. A book operates as a door, or more precisely, as a stack of doors hinged on one edge. Each recto is a way in and each verso a way out; when I make my books this is still easily confused.

2. On Google Street View, the house that now sits at Waldhausenstrasse 5 is a dull apartment building covered in white stucco. It begs to be projected upon.

1. The shape that describes a spatial arrangement is also a book that is yet to be written or read. Some say it is a novel that writes itself. Boards splayed open, its innards are sliced away and made ready to be filled anew. Cover to cover, I envision the book as a container for surplus—things of ambiguous value.

Bibliography: Schulz, Isabel, ed. *Kurt Schwitters: Color and Collage*. Houston, TX: Menil Collection, 2010.

Jen Hutton is an artist and writer who is currently stationed just outside Los Angeles.

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.

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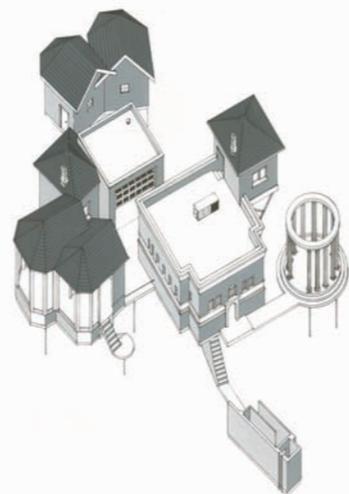
After receiving his Master's of Architecture at Carleton University, **Tom Ngo** began to explore architectural representation in the field of art. Tom has since been working as a mixed media artist and is currently represented by LE Gallery in the city of Toronto. Concurrently, Tom produces designs and concepts for the esteemed office of Moriyama & Teshima. Keeping current with architectural practice helps inform the art that Tom creates — melding it with his work to shape a critical outlook on contemporary art and architecture. Tom Ngo would like to offer a special thank you to print-maker Joseph Siu for his patience and expertise during the print process; To the Open Studio Staff: Jill Graham, Sara Kelly, Jennifer Bhogal and Astrid Ho for their help and support; and to Chloe Town for her organizing thoughts and writing about the work.

Derek Sullivan (b.1976) is a Toronto-based artist. Recent solo exhibitions include Albatross Omnibus at The Power Plant, Toronto and Young Americans at KIOSK in Ghent Belgium (both 2011). His work is included in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada. His collaboration with Gareth Long, *The Illustrated Dictionary of Received Ideas*, has been performed at numerous venues including PS.1, Queens, NY; Art Metropole, Toronto; Artex, Montréal; and Wiels, Brussels.

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Tom Ngo *Refractions*



Alpha (Plan), screenprint on paper, 19" x 24", 2012.

-Printed by Joseph Sui under the auspices of the Open Studio Visiting Artist Residency, 2011-12.

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Tom Ngo: *Refractions*

by Chloe Town

When looking at Tom Ngo's print entitled *Gamma* what do you see first, the whole form or its detailed content? There is no right answer, of course, yet the realization that we do both is part of understanding Ngo's latest work. There are two scales to *Gamma*. There is the mirrored geometry of the overall graphic and then there is its fantastical architectural space. On the one hand, we have a contemporary grotesque and, on the other, a drawing of a very odd built environment.

The other two prints on display are called *Alpha* and *Beta*. This suggests that they are the first in the series and that they are precursors to *Gamma*, but this is not the case. Ngo derived and produced all three images simultaneously and each demonstrates how an iterative or exploratory drafting process can generate unexpected architectural ideas. The same source material was employed for all three, yet each terminated at a very different place. These images upend our expectation of what buildings can and should look like and degrade our sense that architecture should be hemmed in by logic and permanence.

Architects have a long history of sampling forms from nature, art and each another but are often remiss in revealing their debts. Ngo, trained as an architect, does the opposite in his artistic practice. He readily admits to a range of references, from Mayan stelae to Renaissance grotesques, Hieronymus Bosch's triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* to Madelon Vriesendorp's paintings famously reproduced in Rem Koolhaas' *Delirious New York*. What these sources have in common is a wondrous, nonsensical bent. To be certain, Ngo is interested in the absurd. Yet, in this show, Ngo tempers his mischievousness with a fidelity to traditional reproduction methods (i.e. screenprinting) as well as conventional graphic standards. He returns first to a pen and ink drafting method that has all but disappeared in architecture in recent years. In this way, Ngo's images most readily recall the work of a group of architects known as The New York Five and, specifically, John Hejduk's theoretic proposals from the 70s and 80s. Hejduk, like Ngo today, was fascinated by the authority that mechanical drawing lent to his incongruous and weirdly iconic architectural ideas.

Both Hejduk and Ngo share a strategy of combining grotesque-like forms and imagery with building design. Yet Ngo more clearly deviates from an aesthetic pursuit in the interest of heady repetition, hybridity and juxtaposition. He happily mixes Classical features with the banal. In the history of the decorative arts, grotesques refer to an ornamental style popularized at the end of the 15th century following the rediscovery of ancient Rome. The term grotesque, which is derived from the same Latin root as "grotto," suggests a representation of a fecund and mutating natural world. Curving foliage, drapery and hybrid-animals are typical subjects. Figures are often repeated and arranged in close proximity to one another yet there remains a general clarity and order to the entire composition. A tree branch, for example, floats freely in space. Chimera-like monsters rest patiently on levitating stone podia. Grotesques are — despite the dark undertone of the name — delightful and provocative, yet tame to our eyes.

A similar deployment of repeated "ornamental" motifs appears in Ngo's work but there are key differences too. In Ngo's version of the grotesque, notably in *Gamma*, he chooses recognizable building parts rather than flora and fauna as his subject. It is not a natural world gone awry that interests him, but an illogically assembled human-made one. Here we see rote elements, such as mullioned windows and a fireplace mantle, mirrored in disregard to customary architectural practice. A paneled garage door, more legible in *Alpha* and *Beta*, is deformed beyond use by the imposed geometry. In *Gamma* the individual elements are moored to a flattened symmetrical pattern, which reads less like a building than a Rorschach inkblot. That is, unlike pure decoration, where patterns extend to the edge of the picture plane and no new meaning is derived from the combinatory density, *Gamma* can also be read as a figure or portrait.

In *Alpha* and *Beta* we see something entirely other. We see strange, densely-packed buildings with no ulterior subtext. It is an odd mash-up of architectural elements but we can trace a route through the built enclosures, from one open space to the next, and recognize that the path makes sense. The rotunda in *Alpha*, for example, does not levitate beyond our (imagined) access. A heavy mass of columns is illogically supported by the thinnest of columns, but we're not to worry. Similarly, we accept the cantilevered volumes in *Beta* just as we accept the seemingly incomplete state of the construction site.

These buildings look unlike any we have physically encountered, but their legitimacy — the fact that they *could* exist — isn't the question. This is precisely what makes Ngo's fictional world so compelling. We are viewing constructions that are both spatially logical and highly unexpected at the same time. The forms are playful provocations and assuredly benign.

The fact that the architectural forms look at all familiar is only because Ngo's base material — a selection of plans found through an online image search — is so deliberately conventional. Ngo culled from the normative and known to arrive at the unknown. And the three-dimensional drafting technique used, known as axonometric projection, lends an assured air to the otherwise nonsensical moves. Like an IKEA assembly diagram, there is something dressed-down about viewing volumes in this way. Axonometrics, after all, do not show objects as they would appear in the physical world, but intentionally distort our vision. That is, unlike a traditional perspective, in an axonometric drawing the side of an object does not recede in scale as it extends through space. Axonometrics allow for the drawn objects to be measurable from every visible side. Ngo's interest in the absurd resides in both form and representation.

And this is the appeal of the work. Ngo's prints may sacrifice verisimilitude for measurable Cartesian space, but they remind us that logic is but one dimension of building design.

Chloe Town holds a B.A. in Cinema Studies from The University of Toronto and a M.Arch from Princeton University. She has taught at several architecture schools in North America including The University of Pennsylvania, The California College of the Arts and The University of Waterloo, and currently practices at Levitt Goodman Architects in Toronto.