

Since 1992, **Brant Schuller** has been working as a printmaker making sculptural prints and works on paper. He received a 2001 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowship in Visual Art and has completed residences at the Frans Masereel Center (Belgium) and the Nagasawa Art Park (Japan). Schuller's work can be found in many collections throughout the USA, Canada and Europe. Schuller's solo exhibitions include Anchor Graphics, Chicago, IL; Temple Gallery, Philadelphia, PA; Spaces, Cleveland, OH; and the Society for Northern Alberta Printmakers, Edmonton, AB. He has participated in group exhibitions in the USA and abroad and has received a number of awards and honors. *SITE-SEEING*, a collaborative project with artist Kristy Krivitsky, was included in Lucy Lippard's *On the Beaten Track*. His work has also been included in *Sculpture, Juxtapoz, New American Painting, Antenna* magazines and many newspapers. Schuller earned a BFA from the Cleveland Institute of Art (Cleveland, OH) and an MFA from the Pennsylvania State University (University Park, PA). He is currently a Professor of Art at Millersville University in Millersville, PA.

Craig Rodmore is an artist or writer or editor in Toronto or Montreal or Halifax

Open Studio — Canada's leading artist-run nonprofit printmaking centre since 1970 — is dedicated to the production, preservation and promotion of contemporary fine art prints.

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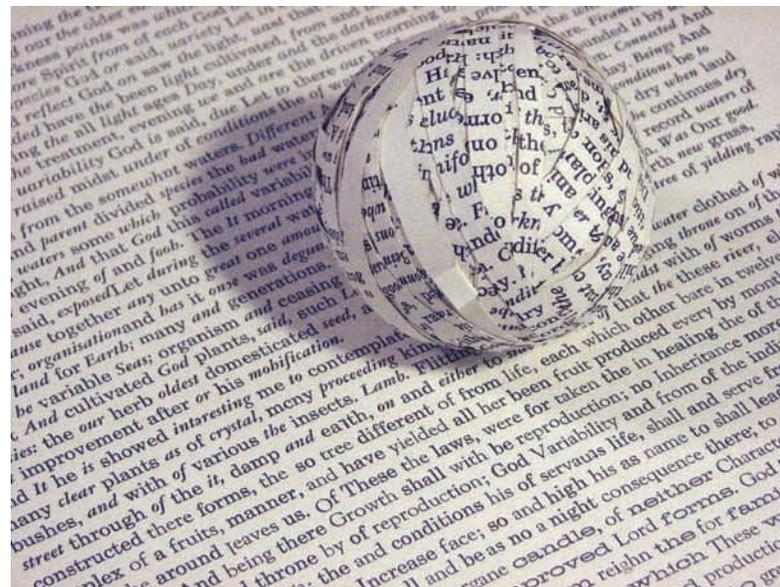
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January 10 - February 16, 2013

Opening Reception: Thursday, January 10, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Brant Schuller: *Saint*



Snowball: Once upon a time The End, detail, letterpress on paper, 6.5' x 6' x 12', 2012.

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Drudgery and Ecstasy by Craig Rodmore



This exhibition presents two works by Brant Schuller, *Snowball: Once upon a time The End* and *Saint*.

Snowball begins with a cut-up: the words of the first and last chapters of the King James Bible and *The Origin of Species* are interspersed, alternating, word by word, Darwin's text with that of the Bible. The cut-up method — cutting apart and rearranging pieces of found or composed writing to generate unexpected results — was employed most famously by William S. Burroughs, but is readily traceable at least back to Tristan Tzara's early-twentieth century experiments, and reached Burroughs by way of the painter and poet Brion Gysin.

Cut-ups are rarely just cut-ups. In this case the randomizing function of the cut-up is combined with the quasi-rational systematizing approach of 1960s conceptualism in which "the idea becomes a machine that makes the art"¹ and the artist, no longer a traditional craftsman, becomes a modern labourer, a machine operator, whose task is predetermined and unalterable. The actual machines used to produce the object are old ones: the text was set in metal type using alternating typefaces and printed by letterpress. Printmaking is often characterized by the fetishization of obsolete tools, materials, and procedures and of the irregularities introduced by human and machine error, and just as there is a certain symmetry in the cutting-up operation applied to the two texts and their reassembly by moveable type — those thousands of slivers of letters and spaces — there is a near equivalence between moveable-type printing and the avant-garde violence of the cut-up: both strike us with the charm of the handmade and outmoded.

Notably, the contemporary technologies used in the initial steps were treated as though they were no more advanced than the printing presses employed later: using electronic copies of the source books downloaded from the internet, the artist performed the tedious and unnecessary labour of manually dismantling and assembling the text word by word on the computer. This systematic word-alternation

means that the resulting text, though unexpected, is in a strictly technical sense predictable — if only by some great autistic reader, a Kim Peek or an Ireneo Funes. However, its predictability is undermined in two ways: first by errors introduced at the word-processing and typesetting stages, and second by a final operation in which the text is cut up once more — this time into long, narrow strips sliced vertically down the page — and wound into a ball.

In *Snowball*, the grandiose source material, the diligent manual labour of the typesetter, and the elegance of letterpress printing are set against the irreverent and happenstance cut-up technique (which in turn is set against systematization and repetitive work) and the idle distraction of balling up the shredded paper; in *Saint*, sacred legend mingles with the vulgar banality of that unloved, endlessly reduplicated imagery, clip-art. The title tells us the work's ostensible subject, and what we see are narrow, sawcut logs encrusted with screenprinted plywood axes and sickles and resting upon rudimentary sawhorses or trestles: they evoke, in a sort of metonymic clusterfuck, the wheel of swords on which Saint George, that martyr of whom Emerson thought so little, was tortured; the porcupined body of Saint Sebastian, who, bound to the stake, saw Roman bows drawn against him; and, in the adjacency of logs and plywood, the latter made up of thin skins produced by "peeling" the former, the distant image of the flayed Saint Bartholomew.

Clip-art — the readily available, rights-free imagery of uncertain lineage that one finds bundled with computer software or scattered across the web — serves as a reminder of the slipperiness of signs, their promiscuous circulation, the ease with which they attach themselves to new referents, as in the syncretic repurposing of the image of Saint George to represent Ogun, god of iron and metal work and patron of smiths (though here metal work is at a remove, steel tools replaced by crude wooden likenesses that are fastened by wooden dowels to pieces of wood that rest upon wooden supports). This flickering of signs, alternating between flatness and depth, between degenerate forms and exalted subjects and between one subject and another, is peculiarly modernist, almost cubist; but through all of this, and for all our doubt, the martyrs remain stubbornly present.

There are precedents for this strange confluence of craft and automation, mindless repetition and mysticism, and not only in the daily labour of monasteries. Burroughs, in a recording called "Origin and Theory of the Tape Cut-Ups," notes the discovery early on that "when you experiment with cut-ups over a period of time you find that some of the cut-ups and rearranged texts seem to refer to future events...when you cut into the present, the future leaks out";² and the filmmaker Robert Bresson discovered something similar in the automation of human models processed through indifferent machines: "DIVINATION — how can one not associate that name with the two sublime machines I use for my work? Camera and tape recorder carry me far away from the intelligence which complicates everything."³ Thus these works, despite the artist's evident ambivalence about the viability of conventional methods and the reliability of signs, are part of a tradition: a minor history of mechanized revelation.

¹ Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 10 (June, 1967), 79.

² William S. Burroughs, "Origin and Theory of the Tape Cut-Ups" (20 April, 1976), *Break Through in Grey Room* (Brussels: Sub Rosa, 1994), audio recording.

³ Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer* (1975), trans. Jonathan Griffin (1986; Copenhagen: Green Integer, 1997), 140.