PHILLIP WALL:
STUDIES IN FIELD IMAGERY UTILIZING SCREEN PRINTING AND LOW RELIEF TECHNIQUES

A thesis submitted to the College of the Arts of Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

by

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May, 2008
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The body of work *Phillip Wall* is a series of printed studies that utilize screen printing and low-relief techniques to construct a field image. I sought to learn alternative ways of making a screen print through the use of small stencils, repeat patterns, and overlapping colors. My aim was to combine the notions of busy and quiet into every piece. The work is obsessive, which is the very nature of my process. There is a great deal of repetition and neutralization in each print. I print large to small, dark colors to light, and from opaque to transparent. This method helps me layer the work to the point where the final print begins acquiring the quality of monochrome. Every print is one of a kind, and I construct them accordingly. The objective is to cover the entire surface of the paper with a printed motif, while assembling the image through the series of layers producing a shallow textural and illusionist depth. One small component becomes the starting point to repeat and form a solution. The final print carries with it a sense of an all-over pattern that dominates the visual solution. The work suggests a feeling of calm.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend the utmost appreciation to my advisor Noel Reifel and committee members Michael Loderstedt and Darice Polo, as well as the entire faculty and staff of Kent State University.
The print series *Phillip Wall* explores the possibilities of building an image through many printed layers to make a whole field. The main objective is to cover the entire surface of the paper with a printed motif, while assembling the image through the series of layers producing a shallow textural and illusionist depth. The final print carries with it a sense of an all-over pattern that dominates the visual solution. The work suggests a feeling of calm.

The initial step before making the print is to prepare the paper. A twenty-two-inch by thirty-inch sheet of American Masters (white) is torn down to a twenty-two-inch by twenty-four-inch format. I chose this paper for both the smooth surface and its ability to accept a large quantity of ink and water. The format decision came from trial and error. I knew I wanted something approximately square, but a true square seemed awkward. There is an illusion with horizontal and vertical axis. Horizontal measurements appear shorter than vertical measurements. The format chosen maintains a square presence while feeling more stable than a true square.

My working methodology on how to execute these prints is formed around screen printing. Screen printing, a stencil medium in which ink is forced through a mesh fabric onto a surface, has particular characteristics that fit my personality. First, printing is quick compared to other print media. I can easily layer multiple colors as well as step and repeat small stencils to create pattern. I chose to use hand-cut stencils made from clear Contact Paper exclusively for every printed layer. The Contact Paper stencil, as opposed to a liquid filler or emulsion stencil, rests between the paper and the mesh, creating a shallow well that can hold ink. The resulting printed element is thicker, and
has a subtle raised edge, giving a tactile quality to the surface of the print. Also, the squeegee may pass over the stencil more than once. Each pass increases the thickness of the printed form. I integrate single, double, and triple passes of the squeegee into every print. I print with Createx water-based inks because they dry quickly.

Experimentation plays a major role in developing the work. Every print is one of a kind, and I construct them accordingly. My process begins with a vague vision of what the final print will be, and as each layer is printed, changes may occur. Usually a color and or a shape initiate the print. For the majority of the stencils, a three-inch or six-inch long squeegee is used. I print small areas at a time, then move the paper or rotate the screen and print the same stencil again. I may step and repeat from a few times, to as many as needed to fill up the paper. The water-based inks dry quickly enough to permit relatively fast printing without damaging the previously printed area. Printing in this manner does not require a large screen or precise registration. I print over the entire surface of the paper, unless I decide to expose any small un-printed areas.

When finished, each print is mounted on a twenty-two-inch by twenty-four-inch panel made of quarter-inch thick masonite and wood. These materials are assembled to create a box-like structure roughly two inches deep. After two coats of gesso, the print is mounted with Helmar Professional acid free glue, and spackle is applied around all four sides to hide any nail holes and to cover the seam between the masonite and the wood. The spackle also creates a rough edge, generating the presence of a paper deckle. Mounting a print this way flattens the print permanently and extends the physicality.
Each print requires only one screw to hang. There is no glass, mat, foam board, or further framing device. The presentation resembles an un-framed painting on the wall.

I attempt to combine the notions of busy and quiet into every piece. The work is formalist, with minimal and maximal tendencies. There is a great deal of repetition and neutralization in each print. Many of the shapes are created from appropriated number and letter-forms. A stencil may contain from one to several small shapes. My palette is limited for the most part to variations of yellow and white, with occasional glimpses of other colors showing through. The soft yellows and whites keep the work quiet, as the many parts keep the work busy. I went as far as to experiment with adding layers of beeswax to the surface. The application of beeswax can be another method to push the neutrality of the printed image. The wax surface brings the parts together, to enhance the quietness of the field.

I work in a general to specific, and specific to general modes. The first printed shapes are larger and more general than later shapes, and most will be printed over. I become more specific on shape choice and registration towards the final layers. The print, on the other hand, begins with specific shapes and ends in a field image. I print large to small, dark colors to light, and from opaque to transparent. This method helps me neutralize the work to the point at which the final print begins acquiring the quality of monochrome. Although repeat patterns dominate the image, I aim to disguise the pattern by blurring the starting and ending points.

The print series *Phillip Wall* provided an outlet for my obsessive mentality. I enjoy working from the small module to repeat and build a larger piece. My
methodology is also apparent through any medium I work with. The obsessive process forms a relationship among the body of work. Regardless of medium, each field image presents itself with this quality, while exposing some avenue of what is underneath. I feel it is important to show what has come before. This series is not about the top layer. It is mainly about repeating, layering, exposing, and neutralizing. I do hope to suggest the feeling of calm.

The use of repetition and patterning has been experimented with throughout the history of art. Since ancient Egyptian stamping and early Asian block printing, artists have continued to explore and incorporate these elements into their work. Most of my immediate influences come from twentieth century artists such as Agnes Martin for her slight variations on structure, Ellsworth Kelly's color fields and formal considerations, and the "white" of Robert Ryman. Two contemporary artists, Jim Isermann and Robert Greene, have recently become inspiring. Jim Isermann's work deals with fine art in popular culture with an emphasis on post-second-world-war industrial design. Along with screen printing, Isermann takes advantage of a variety of materials to make vinyl-patterned murals, wall hangings, and sculptural cubes covered in fabric. His work relates to minimalist sculpture and hard-edged painting. There are references to shag rugs, stained glass, and patchwork quilts. The paintings of Robert Greene, like Isermann’s work, explore form, color, and texture, but with much more emphasis on the monochrome field. He paints with oils on acid free vellum and cuts the work into mostly horizontal strips and rearranges them onto aluminum panels. Greene’s paintings evoke a
rich surface with many layers of paint that quietly fuse together, and invite the viewer to approach and take a closer look.

The body of work *Phillip Wall* is a series of printed studies that utilize screen printing and low-relief techniques to construct a field image. My interest is to visualize the building of a print through many layers forming one cohesive field. I sought to learn alternative ways of making a screen print through the use of small stencils, repeat patterns, and overlapping colors. I feel these prints have interesting features when viewed from up close or from a distance, similar to the work of Robert Greene. The field dominates from afar, and the parts with subtle variations are intriguing from close up. When the busy and the quiet blend well together, the print is successful. I maintained a level of consistency throughout the series by retaining one format, a relatively controlled palette, and a minimalist aesthetic, while permitting experimentation. These images are not variations of each other, but rather one-of-a-kind screen prints that explore variations of patterned motifs. The work is obsessive, which is the very nature of my process. One small component becomes the starting point to repeat and form a solution. I do not need to fill up a wall; I only need to fill up enough space to see the image work.
Figure 1

*Phillip Wall*
Installation View
Figure 2

*A Piano*
Figure 3

$H$
Figure 4

$123456 \times 2 = 12$
Figure 5

Clouds
Figure 6

Candy Store
Figure 7

Rain
Figure 8

Blue to White Curves
Figure 9

*A Lot of Stacked Yellow Bowls*
Figure 10

*Check A*
Figure 11

*Check B*
Figure 12

Yellow Siding