

in conversation

23 January 2013: this transcribed conversation is taken from a recorded informal conversation held between Colbert Mashile, Mandy Conidaris and Kevin Sneider at The Caversham Press. This exhibition's prints were laid out on the work surfaces around us.

NOTE: when we discuss drawing, it refers to a line drawn directly onto the surface of the lino.

MC - In terms of our focus from outoftheCUBE, we are interested in what makes artists tick, what makes artists create the images that they do, and why do artists make the images that they make. In other words, we will ask why this image has come about rather than how you made it technically, or an explanation of what it may mean. Our interests are also process-based: how did the process lead you to the images that you created, how did these images evolve, or did they evolve from each other?

CM - I like the way you've laid the prints out because that's much the way they started. I didn't have a narrative *per se* to work with, or a theme, but I do work very intuitively. I am informed by my situation, by my circumstances, but am not conscious of these when I'm working. I delve deep into trying to imagine things. I don't know where they [the images] come from, but I just start working with them when they do. Sometimes a narrative is there, but it is so dislocated that while working I start to see other things. So the process for me is that the drawing can change many times. I can make images out of the lines, the images might change, I might see an image I like lying around, a piece of newspaper or something, that feels relevant to my work. Then somehow it will find its way in. Even with the text, I leave a blank space in the image, like a bubble, without knowing what word I will write there, and then all of a sudden I just look around & see something ...

MC - A little trigger?

CM - Yes a trigger, and then in that instant I realize my own way of knowing that so many things are connected, and then it just makes sense when it's put there, although it may seem to have come from nowhere, like for example here (points) in *Have a Heart*.

MC - So you could have drawn that image, and then left this [text box] empty until something came along?

CM - Yes, until something came.

MC - And if you were working on another day or week, another word might be there? This just happened to be that word, that day, which was the word for the image?

CM - Yes, and also because I look at things, to compose the balance of things ... the placing of the letters [within the text bubble] has to do with the balance. But mostly it's to do with

the interconnectedness of things

MC - Do you make preliminary sketches or do you work right on the lino?

CM - I just sketch directly onto the lino, sometimes with my tools. I don't keep a sketch book. But before I start, I always get nervous. I don't know where that comes from, because when I start working everything just kicks in, but before I start I might pace around, scratch my head a bit, and often there's nothing! I'm trying to come up with the images. But once I start working I think the communication happens in my head, the images start to happen in my head.

MC - So when you start working on the lino, it just seems to happen?

CM - Yes. I can sometimes switch from mode to mode, for example, I'll work with everyday people in a very obvious way, then sometimes something that is much more deeper, much more complex. One piece that I'm working on might give way to others, that is, one element might go into another, then into something else, and this may go on and on.

MC - So it's a very spontaneous process. Do you find there are certain times where you are more in tune with the deeper subjects and other times where you are more involved with working with the everyday, or do you tend to work with both of them at the same time? Do you ever work on different plates at the same time or only on one at a time?

CM - Only on one plate at a time, and then I will switch from that mode when I reach a point where I can't take it anymore. But I don't always work like that. When I started this project I was teaching my students, showing them classic drawings and I found myself getting some kind of interest in that again, and most of the [everyday] images come from that. Then when I was working alone, the second phase, I'd work at night, cutting images, just working larger, just drawing spontaneously,

MC - And these bigger ones [linocuts], you must spend more time with them, days?

CM - Yes, once I draw I find the image and try to follow that.

MC - Do you cut one section then move onto another, or cut all parts together?

CM - In the finishing stages I'll move from one part to another. But when I start, I'll sometimes just work out from a corner and just go.

MC - Because you've got a really lovely variety of marks and they really agitate the image, activate the image quite strongly.

CM - Some say that maybe it's because I'm a painter, then that also comes to the fore in my cutting because every cut is like a brush stroke,

MC - Then once you've finished your cutting, you're not that much involved with the actual printing, mainly you cut the block and then someone else prints it for you. And then when you come back and assess your image afterwards, obviously the print is very different from the block. How do you feel then, do you physically get a sense of excitement?

CM - Yes definitely, it's a new work, its BOOM! And it's always in reverse. When I considered the image it was facing the other way, so all of a sudden it's a new thing for me. It's very, very exciting.

MC - That's the magic of printmaking!

CM - You start to see things that you never noticed and you start to remember the emotions you were in when you were doing some cuts.

MC - That is something that I've noticed, as I'm a printmaker, making mainly screenprints, that when I'm working on the positives, I'm often in a space and thinking about a specific thing and you forget about it, and then when you actually do the printing - it might be two weeks later - it brings back those thoughts, which is something that's peculiar to prints, because you don't have that time gap with other mediums.

CM - Yes, that's very interesting, sometimes you remember. And it's like a journey and you go and you don't notice that you pass a lot of trees along the way, but somehow if somebody gives you a photograph of a tree then you think, oh, I did see the tree, I did see that tree!

MC - Basically you've got the two types of work, your more everyday images, then your deeper, more personal images. If we look at your more personal images, once they're printed and you start to really look at them, do you ask yourself how you think other people would respond to them or is that not much of an issue for you?

CM - Not much, because by that stage I'm looking at the work differently. Now I look at the work and question it in a technical way instead of a conceptual way. I start to think, is that working, is the balance ok, and things like that, then someone will come and look and say, oh the skulls, is that about death? But I never notice those things.

MC - So everyone brings their own associations to the work & you're happy for them to do that.

CM - Yes. Just keep it open-ended.

MC - It's good to be like that. Great, thanks so much Colbert.