Crown Point Press
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Overview

April Gornik, *Tropical Drift*, 1998. Color direct gravure with spit bite aquatint. Paper size: 30¼ x 38½"; image size: 21½ x 29¾". Edition 40. Printed by Daria Sywulak.

April Gornik

A Spiritual Approach

April Gornik's light, as critic Michael Brenson describes it, is "sunlight that does not seem to be reflected on water, but rather to have gone around the earth and come up underneath it." It's peculiarly her own, but in her approach she is part of a tradition of painters lined up through the ages. She uses the illusion of light to suggest spirituality.

She says her landscape painting is "very much to do with me, thinking as a twentieth century person," but she arrived at its present form partly by looking back a hundred years. Born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1953, Gornik grew up in Cleveland, and attended the Cleveland Art Institute, then went on to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. At that time, in the 1970s, Nova Scotia was legendary. Many important first-generation Conceptual artists taught, or guest-taught, there. Illusion was frowned-upon. Students were advised to think about materials and process as the key to art, to explore structure and language. Beginning the year after she graduated from art school, Gornik "taught myself to paint from the most basic ground zero." In her struggle to do that, her mind went back to Cleveland, and from there, backwards in time.

April Gornik, *Moonlit Sea*, 1998. Direct gravure with spit bite aquatint. Paper size: 30¼ x 38½"; image size: 21½ x 29¾". Edition 15. Printed by Daria Sywulak.

April Gornik, *Sky and Mirror*, 1998. Color soap ground and water bite aquatint. Paper size: 26 x 28 1/4"; image size: 16 5/8 x 19 3/4". Edition 40. Printed by Daria Sywulak.

In her youth, she had frequented the Cleveland Museum, which contains some American Luminist paintings, including Frederic Church's famous *Twilight in the Wilderness*. As an art student, she thought of Luminist paintings as "merely nineteenth century decorations. But," she adds, "in some sense, *Twilight in the Wilderness* affected me." What she learned from the Luminists, the painters of light, was the possibility of painting as spirit. "Depicting the way the world actually looked was not nearly as important as conveying the sensation, the spiritual essence of the landscape."

She combined this insight with what she had learned in art school. "I wanted to make things direct and uncomplicated and kind of systematic. I didn't want to have needless detail, needless realism. I was still involved with an ideational vocabulary." Some of her artist-friends who, like her, had moved to New York when they finished school, reacted against the systems of their teachers by beginning to work expressively. These included sculptor Bryan Hunt (who is still a friend, twenty years later) and painter Eric Fischl (whom she later married). Gornik, however, did not adopt an expressionistic approach. She maintained a quiet, contemplative demeanor. "I can't explain how visionary this was when it was first happening," she told Constance Lewallen in *View*. "It all seemed to be generating out of my soul."

"I come up with an image that fascinates me, then I find a form it can work in," she says when asked to explain her working method. Rarely has she actually seen a landscape that resembles the ones she paints. Sometimes she is guided by photographs that she "recognizes," but she alters their content to suit herself. "I don't know how this makes sense. It's just intuitive. I'm not even interested in the literal place. It's a state of mind." This state of mind is dramatic and engulfing. The viewer does not occupy a clear vantage point, but rather becomes suspended within the space of Gornik's "personally spiritualized, personally fictionalized" art.

Why is this demonstrative of the thinking of a twentieth century person? Gornik says that in the nineteenth century, landscape began to be seen as "a pantheistic evidence of the wonder of God" which allowed it to be a "seat of the sublime, something the soul could project onto." Before that it was simply "a big navigational problem. Mountains, for example, were a threatening death-like phenomenon." Thinking about this, I suppose the change had something to do with the invention of photography, which allowed a very real-looking landscape to be experienced without its actual weather or its true physicality. Gornik has built on a nineteenth-century attitude toward illusion, and re-oriented it, moved it away from religion toward personal psychology.

"I love how proprietary people are about landscape," she says, "How people project onto it, familiarize it, personalize it, populate it psychologically, become possessive of it. And that's just what I do." At the same time, while she is working on a particular landscape image, she always has clearly in mind that she is creating fiction.

Each of these pictures is like a poem, a short story, a song. It is one person's perception, imagination, and experience set down in such a way that it touches another's. If you are drawn into the picture, it is likely that Gornik has revealed something that can become personal to you.

—Kathan Brown

Tom Marioni
New Releases

Tom Marioni, *Light*, 1998. Color aquatint with drypoint, scraping and embossing. Paper size: 12 7/16 x 15 1/4"; image size: 11 x 13 7/8". Edition 15. Printed by Dena Schuckit.

Tom Marioni, *Finger Lines (Blue)*, 1998. One print from a set of four color soft ground etchings with aquatint. Paper and image size for each print: 12 3/4 x 8 3/16. Edition 20. Printed by Dena Schuckit.

In 1977 Tom Marioni made a small series of four prints accompanied by a larger print, all drawn with rhythmic gestures. He called the group *Landing* and accompanied it with a title page showing a photograph of a flying saucer, taken from an old science-fiction movie. Now, twenty-one years later, we have a small color print in which Marioni has drawn the flying saucer and titled it *Light*. It is a glow embodied, a metaphor for a lifting mood, the opposite of *Landing*, and it is accompanied by four smaller prints that seem like color trails in the sky when associated with the flying saucer print. They can also be separate, however, as they are continuations of a series of drawings Marioni has been making for years in which he ties a pencil to an index finger and then bends and extends the finger over and over. Called *Finger Lines*, the drawings have a delicate muscularity, a life of their own. This version consists of four soft ground etchings in color, and each one is printed within a tinted "mat"—pink, blue, yellow, or gray—itself printed from an aquatint plate with a rectangle cut out of its center.

A Note on Technique:

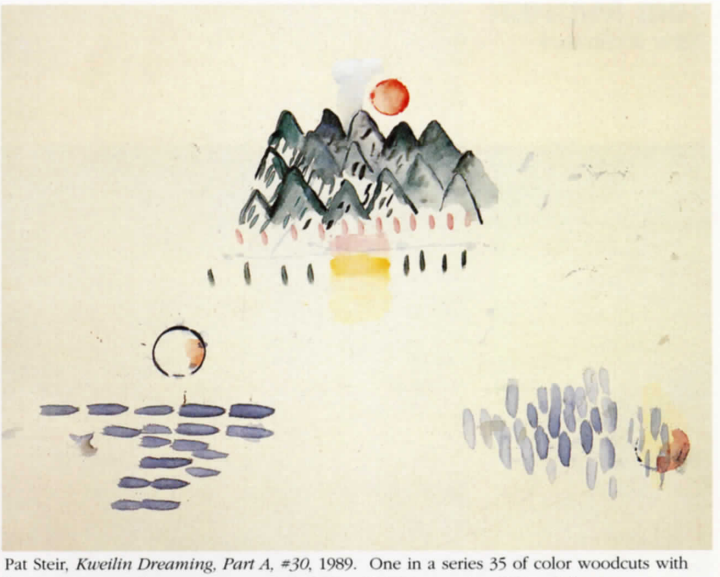
April Gornik's *Tropical Drift* and *Moonlit Sea* are direct gravure prints. The images were drawn initially on Mylar, then transferred to plates, which were re-worked by the artist. *Sky and Mirror* is a soap ground aquatint, drawn directly on the plates by the artist.

Direct gravure is a photographic process that does not use a camera. Gornik drew on three transparent Mylar sheets for *Tropical Drift*, then Printer Daria Sywulak laid each of the sheets in turn over a light-sensitive carbon-pigmented gelatin tissue and exposed it to light. The gelatin hardened in varying degrees according to the varying amounts of light passing through the drawing. The printer then adhered the gelatin to a copper plate (the same plates we normally use for etching), and washed it in warm water to clear away any soft gelatin. Next she dusted a fine layer of rosin (aquatint) over it, and bit the resulting tooth into the plate using acid. The varying depths of the bite were controlled by the gelatin left on the plate. The final (and crucial) step was completed when Gornik traveled to our San Francisco studio and spent a week with our printers, color proofing the plates, changing them, adding new plates, and developing a second version of the image titled *Moonlit Sea*.

Soap ground aquatint, which Gornik used for *Sky and Mirror*, is also called white ground. The artist draws the negative of the image, the part that will resist the acid, using a soap paste right on the plate. This provides a thicker and thinner ground similar to the gelatin as it functions in direct gravure. As in the gravure prints, aquatint is used for tooth to hold the ink in the etched plate. *Sky and Mirror* is printed from four plates, each one drawn directly on the metal by the artist.

Pat Steir
Kweilin Dreaming

Pat Steir, *Kweilin Dreaming, Part E, #77,* 1989-1997. One in a series of four color woodcuts with hand-painting by the artist. Paper size: approx. 37½ x 42¾"; image size: approx. 26½ x 32¾".



Pat Steir, *Kweilin Dreaming, Part A, #30,* 1989. One in a series 35 of color woodcuts with hand-painting by the artist. Paper size: 37½ x 42¾"; image size: 26½ x 33".

In 1989, when Crown Point's China program was in full swing, Pat Steir traveled to Beijing to make woodcuts there. Afterwards, she visited Guilin, a town we in the West called Kweilin before Mao changed the system used for translating Chinese into English. (Peking became Beijing, for example.) Guilin's River Li runs through what once must have been the most beautiful river landscape in the world, a karst landscape with ethereal hill-like mountains rising individually from the valley floor to be reflected endlessly in the water. The mountains and the river are still there, but the scene is marred now with some industrial factories. Steir asked the woodcut studio in Beijing to print some river backgrounds for her—she drew these as short dashes of blue, with round moons reflected, and a few delicate paint drips and smears. This template was printed on silk, a beautiful, glowing material, and in *Kweilin Dreaming, Part A*, Steir drew the mountains (or sometimes something else) with watercolor on each of 35 of them. Later she went on to paint Parts B (15 examples), C (16 examples) and D (10 examples). In all but Part A, the mountains have given way to other images, but a dreamy beauty is characteristic of the series. This month we are releasing Part E, four examples that Steir painted in 1987. This brings the total number of watercolors in the series to 80. There are a few printed sheets left, and we are hoping that in 1998, this year, Steir will complete the project with a dozen or so examples in Part F.

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