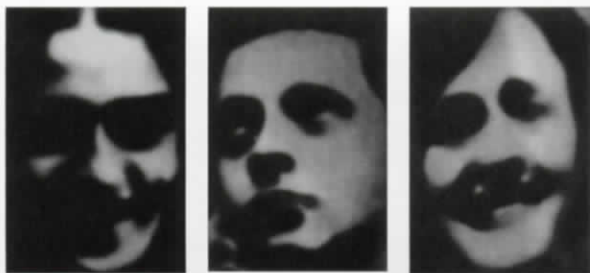


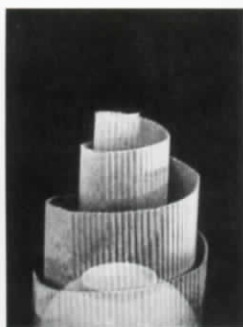
Learning the Language of the Realm



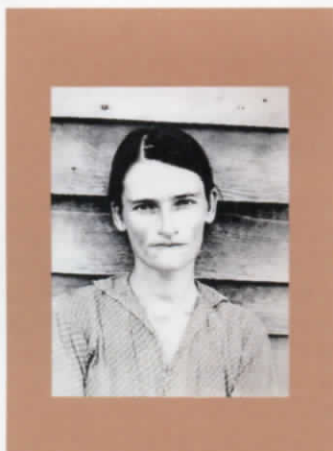
Christian Boltanski, from *Gymnasium Chates*, 1991, a portfolio of 24 photogravures, each 19 x 13 1/4"



Ed Ruscha, *Section 22*, 1995, 10 3/4 x 13 1/2"



Gay Outlaw, *Tatlin*, 1995, 12 1/4 x 9 1/2"



Sherric Levine, *Barcham Green Portfolio No. 5*, 1986, 19 x 15"



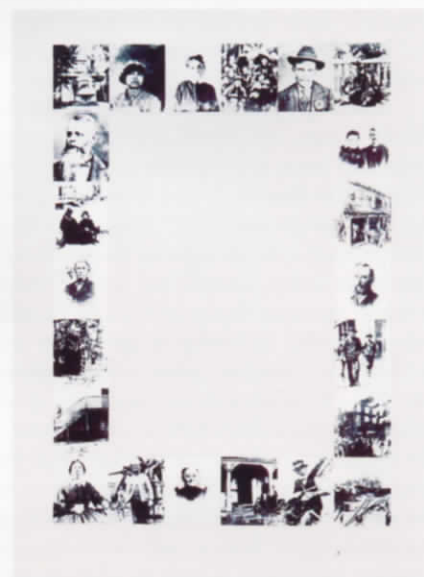
John Baldessari, *Six Colorful Gags (Male)*, 1991, 40 x 48"



Vito Acconci, *3 Flags for 1 Space and 6 Regions*, 1979-1981, 72 x 64"



Tom Marioni, *3rd Street*, 1995, 6 x 8 3/4"



Jannis Kounellis, *Manifesto per un Teatro Utopistico*, 1979, 29 x 21"



John Chiara, *23rd at Carolina*, 2006, 16 x 20 1/2"

Crown Point's earliest photo projects were in **photoetching**, which, like photogravure, is printed from the depths of the plate rather than the surface. In photoetching, however, the plate is bitten to a single depth rather than to multiple depths as in photogravure. Generally a photoetching is produced using a commercially supplied photosensitive ground etched with a halftone screen to give a simulation of various tones. We started working with the process in the late 1960s by adapting for our use a (toxic) ground from Kodak called KPR. There are several such grounds available today, all "non-toxic" and employed as substitutes for the rigors and supposed risks of traditional etching, with photographs or without.

In 1979, **Jannis Kounellis** came from Italy to our California studio. He foraged in junk stores for old photographs and arranged his choices in a rectangular frame around the periphery of a sheet of paper, creating a central empty space. The photos are of people, some with an air of the old west, many standing in front of their homes. One picture in the frame is not a photo, but an old engraving of a house on fire. Kounellis wrote the title of the work on each print in the edition: *Manifesto per un Teatro Utopistico*, Manifesto for an Utopian Theater.

That same year, 1979, we began work with New York artist **Vito Acconci** on a room-size installation completed in 1981. It is composed of three enormous photoetchings, each made from assembled parts because our press could not print anything that big. One of the three images is *3 Flags for 1 Space and 6 Regions*. In it, the flags of the United States and China hang side-by-side with the Soviet Union's flag underneath, mostly obscured by the other two. (This was before the Soviet Union collapsed.) Acconci had brought the flags with him, and we photographed them with our 4 x 5 camera, enlarged the images in our darkroom, and created photoetchings. By hand, we laid out the areas on different plates printed in red, blue, or black. We never made an ordinary photograph from the camera image. And, since this was essentially about learning, we never sent any part of any of our projects out to be done by technicians other than our own printers. At least, not until we worked with Sherrie Levine.

Printing a photograph as an etching has been, for most of Crown Point's history, one of the processes we offer cafeteria-style to artists when they come to work with us. They choose what they want to use. New Yorker **Sherrie Levine** chose, along with several other images, her most recognizable work, a reprinting of a famous photograph of a sharecropper's wife taken during the Depression by Walker Evans. But by 1986 when Levine arrived I was finished with photoetching as we knew it then—the messy liquid used to coat the plates, the fumes, the strong solvents needed to develop images. I had seen some of Massachusetts printer Jon Goodman's prints reviving **photogravure**. This process is very old—it began with the beginning of photography itself. It uses gelatin as the base for its light-sensitive ground and water as the developer for the image. And it is more subtle than photoetching because of its varying depths of bite. Goodman agreed to make a photogravure plate for us, and we printed it as Levine directed on a visually strong brown handmade paper from a mill named Barcham Green. We added an aquatint background printed in white to set off the photograph from the deep-toned paper and ended up with the image titled *Barcham Green Portfolio No. 5*.

Some years later, after we had moved Crown Point Press from Oakland to San Francisco and suffered an earthquake that necessitated another move, we learned to do photogravure by working with French artist **Christian Boltanski**. His *Gymnasium Chases* is a portfolio of 24 prints, abstracted portraits of every student in the graduating class of a Jewish high school in Vienna at the beginning of World War II. The photographic images Boltanski provided had been extensively manipulated and it was important that every subtle nuance be retained if they were to have the emotional affect the artist sought. Our printers, Daria Sywulak and Lothar Osterburg, with generous hands-on instruction and subsequent telephone support from Jon Goodman, made and remade plates over about three years, and eventually produced a stunning piece of work that we published in 1991.

Later that same year, 1991, we were ready for **John Baldessari**, the influential artist from Los Angeles who has worked only with text and/or photography since 1970 when he burned all his paintings, saying that they were too removed from life. "**Most people keep magazines and newspapers in their house, so at least you speak the language of the realm,**" he told an interviewer who asked why he had turned to photography. In the mid-1970s he began working with film stills, isolating them to take away their drama. In *Six Colorful Gags (Male)*, one of the photogravures he did at Crown Point, he shows headshots of actors with gags in their mouths. The color is created with transparent aquatint backgrounds.

Ed Ruscha, who also lives in Los Angeles, is sometimes called a pop artist because he was in the first pop art exhibition (1962) and his paintings of Standard Stations are masterpieces of the movement. However, as he later said, he made those paintings not to celebrate common objects but to "be premeditated about my art. I wanted to make pictures but I didn't want to paint." To this end, in 1963 he published the now legendary book of photographs titled *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* in which the stations are shown frontally and are clearly snapshots. Our first photo work with Ruscha was *Section 22*, 1995. He scratched the film by hand before we made the image into a photogravure.

The photogravure titled *3rd Street*, 1995, by San Francisco artist **Tom Marioni** is one of a few photographs in his body of work that are artworks in themselves rather than documentations of actions or temporary installation works (an important use for photography by conceptual artists). He took the photo in 1973 of Breen's, the bar under his long-time studio and Museum of Conceptual Art, and the glowing lights, inviting doorway, active street, and historic sign create a sense of place. For the color in the print, Marioni made several aquatint plates by hand to print behind the photogravure plate. Like all documentary photographs, this is a picture of something.

The "something" that **Gay Outlaw** photographed for *Tatlin*, 1995, is corrugated cardboard wound around an upturned kitchen bowl, standing in for a monument built in 1920 of iron and glass by Vladimir Tatlin, the father of Russian constructivism. Outlaw lives in San Francisco and in 1995 when she made this print she also produced as a public art commission a large sculpture made of fruitcake. Because of the conceptual art movement, every material in the world is available for her art, and her choices are a matter of utility not principle. As Tom Marioni has said, a conceptual artist is not defined by the medium he or she works in, but chooses for each work a medium appropriate to the idea behind the work. Most artists are specialists: painters, sculptors, printmakers, or photographers. Outlaw is sometimes called a conceptual artist, sometimes a sculptor and photographer. None of the artists in this group except Susan Middleton and John Chiara are specialist photographers.

John Chiara, the last artist on this abbreviated list of Crown Point photo projects, is our first photographer. He is from San Francisco. The son of a photographer, he has been around cameras all his life, and the one he used for his photogravure *23rd at Carolina*, 2006, is a room-size box that he drives around on the back of a truck. He parks with the lens of the camera pointing to the view he will photograph, goes inside the box to focus, and wriggles out through a flexible plastic tube, hoping his appearance will not startle a passerby or a curious dog. Each photograph he makes is unique. He exposes onto photosensitive paper that he develops inside the camera. In making his photogravures (which are not unique) he exposed onto transparent positive film that we placed against the photosensitive gelatin used to create the image on a copper plate.

Chiara's landscape is very different in character from the octopus, bird, or flower of **Susan Middleton**, the featured artist in our gallery this month. But both photographers are serious professionals, deeply involved with the craft of the medium and with the subject matter they pursue.

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