

# Overview

## GAY OUTLAW



*Juss*. Color soft ground etching with spit bite and water bite aquatints. 31-x-24-inch image on a 42-x-34-inch sheet. All images printed in editions of 20 by Courtney Sennish at Crown Point Press in 2019.

### LOOKING THROUGH A LENS

*In the spring of 2019 San Francisco sculptor Gay Outlaw worked for two weeks making etchings in the Crown Point Press studio. This was her third project with the press. On August 22, Crown Point's director, Valerie Wade, visited Outlaw's studio in the Outer Sunset neighborhood for a walk and a conversation. Following is Wade's account of this time together.*

*Outlaw suggested they visit the section of Golden Gate Park closest to her studio so they could see two of her favorite spots: the Buffalo*

*Paddock and the fly-fishing casting ponds. Along the way, Outlaw said that she derives most of her ideas from her immediate surroundings. These might include objects that catch her eye while driving or walking, or perhaps objects found in her home or studio. Outlaw loves animals and she talked about the pleasure of simply studying a buffalo's silhouette. Tucked into a secret part of the park is the Angler's Lodge which features three shallow casting pools with water the color of veridian. One of the pools has a*



*Cow Print*. Color photogravure. 18-x-12-inch image on 27-x-21-inch sheet.

beautiful grid drawn on the bottom, and *Outlaw and Wade* were mesmerized by a man in waders casting his long graceful line into various squares.

*Outlaw* studied photography at the International Center of Photography, and the photograph has become the main vehicle for her approach to making art. While she exhibited photographs early on in her career, today she primarily uses them as a way to take visual notes – a replacement of the sketchbook.

**Valerie Wade:** It has been a number of years since your last project at Crown Point. How did you prepare for this residency?

**Gay Outlaw:** I'm very reliant on photography for my thinking. I don't draw as a way of working things out conceptually. I take notes with the camera. I'm influenced by looking through a lens at things. But I haven't shown a straight photograph in maybe twenty years. So, my approach to making prints at Crown Point was naturally through my photography. I thought, why not try a color photogravure, but I didn't want it to read so much like a photograph. I chose the image for *Cow Print* (which was taken from a big wheel of cheese) because it was so painterly. To push it further, I created a grid composition and I knew that we could start with C, M, Y, K plates (cyan, magenta, yellow and black). I could just simply manipulate those colors until the image felt right. I thought that would be a kind of safe place for me to start.

And not knowing whether in the end I'd like the picture or not, I was open to failure at any point.

With *ted4phoebe* I returned to my earlier work at Crown Point where I referred to a painting that I made as a child.

**VW:** The cat print.

**GO:** Yes, this print was totally inspired by a collage that my daughter Mayme made, which I really love. It hangs in my bathroom and I look at it every day.

**VW:** It's very intimate and also it speaks to themes that have meaning to you – family and relationships and connections. Like, the cats are different cats but connected together by a thread. So, there are a couple of layers of meaning.

**GO:** I had a different strategy for each print. It wasn't like I was trying to tick them off a list, but I wanted to try something new with each one. I knew I really wanted to go *gung-ho* for color.

It seemed very natural to me to work from my photographs because, as I was saying to you before, I don't really draw to work out ideas. I look at pictures, and I think about how to make things dimensionally. I do a lot of mold-making in my studio—a lot of positive and negative stuff, which makes printmaking really interesting to me.

I had forgotten how demanding printmaking is that way. It was exhausting.

**VW:** The process does demand problem solving!

**GO:** I was exhausted the first week. And I think that I was really ambitious and didn't realize it. The print *3x3* is actually nine different etchings in one print. Every day of the residency I worked on that print.

**VW:** But the results are beautiful. And you tried some interesting techniques, like digitally printing one of your photographs onto white gampi paper, then cutting that shape and collaging it into the print using the chine collé process. It appears to be a spit bite etching, but it's actually a photograph.

In *Cow Print* it looks like you have employed all the traditional etching techniques. It is very impressionistic and painterly.



*ted4phoebe*. Color spit bite aquatint with aquatint and hard ground etching. 6¼-x-4¾-inch image on 12-x-10¼-inch sheet.



3x3. Color soft ground etching with aquatint, drypoint and spit bite and soap ground aquatints. Shaped color gampi paper and ink-jet printed gampi on orange gampi chine collé. 23-x-21-inch image on 33-x-30¼-inch sheet.

But, in fact, it's a photogravure. And, conversely, *Juss* looks like a photogravure, but you actually did use the traditional techniques of soft ground etching with spit bite and water bite aquatints.

**GO:** I'm drawn to situations where I think I see something and then I discover that it's not what I first thought. I can be driving down the road, and my eye will be caught by some minuscule detail in my field of vision, and all of a sudden, it becomes huge to me. So, I'll pull over and take a picture of it. As my skills as a sculptor have developed, I've learned how to recreate some of that effect. I don't always do it consciously – often only after I've made something do I realize that it doesn't really look like what it is.

**VW:** In past conversations, you've mentioned that you are also attracted to female forms. When you say "female forms" is it shapes or is it something more political, "feminist art?"

**GO:** You know, I think I have my way of working pretty set. I never start out trying to make some sort of dogmatic point. I would say I'm a woman and I'm also a feminist, and so I'm naturally drawn to things that I see that are feminine. For me, that attraction is just a reflection of who I am. I always want the work to be open-ended.

**VW:** Who are some of the artists who have worked before you at Crown Point that you are influenced by?

**GO:** Oh my, so many. Women artists include Joan Jonas, Elaine de Kooning and Laura Owens.

**VW:** Richard Tuttle, who worked at the press many times, once said to me he thought of printmaking as a bridge between painting and sculpture, which I thought was an interesting perspective. What do you think about this point of view?

**GO:** Well, when I think of his portfolio, *Type*, I like the open-endedness, the lightness of it. I had not seen it until after I made my print *Juss*. And I thought, oh gosh. Each one of these little images incorporates a piece of gauze, which is very close to the material I used to press into soft ground plates to make *Juss*. I'm not nearly articulate enough to talk about the relationship of painting and sculpture. They're so different. I think in all mediums there's a built-in way of making a discovery—that's what keeps the artist hooked. And I think with painting you make that discovery in the very first painting that you make. There is some kind of unintentional familiarity that a stroke of the brush suddenly renders, or some opening up of space with a juxtaposition of colors. For me, with sculpture, it's a lot more complex. I think of photography as related to printmaking in that you've got these plates of color. I studied photography back when people

still printed in darkrooms, from a negative. And that negative, to me, is kind of like the plates in printmaking.

**VW:** Earlier we were talking about the idea that things don't appear to be what they are, in terms of materials you choose for your work. Is the concept paramount or is it the materials?

**GO:** I think they are inextricably linked. The way I work with materials is just really intuitive. When I know what I need to work with, I know it on some deeper level. I don't think of myself as a conceptual artist because, at least historically speaking, I think of conceptual art as being so tied to the idea that the material presentation is less about the process of discovery that I have been talking about.

I think that maybe people think of my work as conceptual because I often show works together that seem, at least superficially, unrelated. For instance, I ended up with four very different prints at the end of my residency at Crown Point. That's an extension of the way I like to make sculpture. Within a certain show, I have pieces that have come from completely different places, and I rely on the fact that an engaged viewer will make connections that I don't really prescribe. I try to provide as many hooks as possible though! I mean who can resist a drawing of kitty cats?

# Crown Point Press

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Gay Outlaw in the Crown Point studio, 2019.

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### *Gay Outlaw Mutable Object*

Using printmaking, photography and sculpture, Gay Outlaw explores the balance between the organic and the geometric, as well as the relationship of photographic imagery to three-dimensional form. This publication accompanied an exhibition of sculpture and photographic assemblage at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art in 2017. Purchase a copy in our bookstore or at our online shop. \$15



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