

Overview



Laurie Reid, *X-1*, 2000. Color spit bite aquatint. Paper size: 14 x 51"; image size: 5 x 40". Edition 20. Printed by Rachel Fuller.

Laurie Reid

Laurie Reid is a young artist (born in 1964) who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her work has recently received attention from the wider art world by being included in two exhibitions in New York: the Whitney Biennial in 2000, and a group show at The Drawing Center in 1995. In 1999, she received an award from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's SECA (Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art) group that included a cash grant and participation in an exhibition at the Museum. In all these venues she showed large (5 to 16 foot-long) watercolors with very little watercolor on them. Sparse, barely pigmented watery chains of marks glide across the paper, warping it as water will do, and the sheets—with titles like "Tender Tangle" or "Linger in the Moonlight"—hang freely, without frames, from pins in the wall.

"You can almost feel the wind blowing through the landscapes that Reid merely implies through her use of water and faint watercolor," wrote a critic in New York, and a brochure accompanying her museum exhibition in San Francisco talked about "the resurgence of formalism."

"I'm not so sure about the landscape idea," Reid tentatively comments. "And I don't believe there's such a thing as pure formalism. I do sometimes use a grid, and other formal constructs, but there's always the human hand involved. Psyche, material, form—it is a concoction that has to be brewed just right."

If our Crown Point Press philosophy were to choose only artists whose primary work would clearly translate into prints, Reid might not have been invited (nor would quite a few others in our group). I learned long ago, however, from the artists with whom I first worked, not to think of this process as a translation. We try to choose good artists, and we expect they will do something we ourselves could never have imagined. With Reid, that is what hap-

pened. She didn't try to imitate her watercolors. She quickly grasped that prints have a different nature.

After the prints were finished, I asked her about that difference. "In the first place," she said, "it was immediately clear that I wasn't drawing on paper. This was a copper plate. And I was drawing with acid that was biting into it. I liked the seriousness and weight of it all. The watercolors have vulnerability, yet they want to be imposing. The big size helps them do that. But printmaking is imposing in itself. The plate mark is stable and fixed. I could see I should work with that. When I put the prints up on the wall, even the small ones, even those we intended as tests, they didn't dissipate. Prints are very resolute. When I looked at these prints, they stood up and stared right back at me. That's big."

Several of the plates Reid drew as tests ended up as parts of editioned prints. And other tests that failed were redrawn on plates of



Laurie Reid, *First Verse*, 2000. Spit bite aquatint. Paper size: 13-1/2 x 22"; image size: 5 x 11-3/4". Edition 20. Printed by Rachel Fuller.

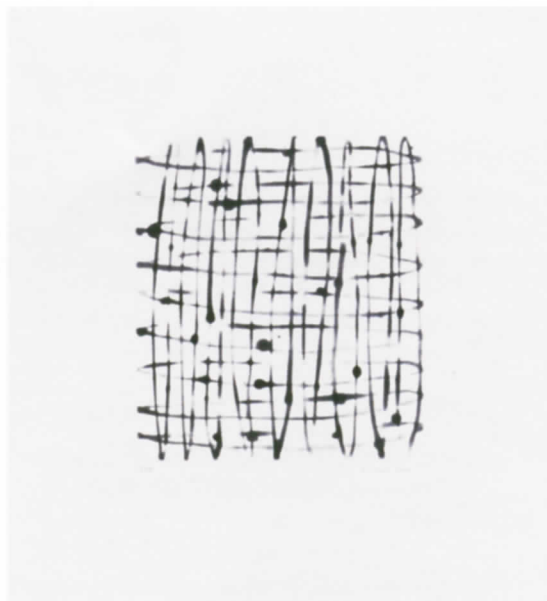
approximately the same size. "I felt so focused and concentrated," she told me. "I intended to work large, but I got attached to those tests. They worked. They didn't need to be bigger. I got a little bit lucky there."

Lucky, or smart? I thought, and asked her if she grew up around art. That's not necessary for an artist, of course, but it does promote confidence in the field later on. Her answer was yes. "Art was around." She grew up (one of five kids) in a university town, Eugene, Oregon, and her father is an artist. His work, and that of his artist friends, was always in their home, along with reproductions from museum bookshops. When the family occasionally traveled, they would spend time in museums and galleries and, at home, art materials were part of the environment. "As a child, I was absolutely absorbed by materials," she remembered. "I loved the sensation of materials."

In deciding on a career, however, she did not at first choose art. She got a degree in French literature, and after a time spent in Paris began teaching French language in New York and, later, San Francisco. Eventually, she enrolled at the California College of Arts and Crafts. "I had always loved words, but at some point I realized that what I really loved about writing was the act of writing," she explained. "The feel of the paper under the hand, the tool in the hand, the smell of materials." Her art, she says, is "more about a desire to communicate than communicating something in particular." If you look at a page of writing in a language you don't understand, she points out, "you get a sense of the page, and the spirit of the writer, the sense of devotion. You don't always need to understand the precise meaning of the text."

The first group of prints, the first tests, are black and white and are titled *Elements*. "They are raw," she wrote, when I asked if she would explain the titles for me. "They are the building blocks, the elements, in the same way that line, page, and punctuation are the elements of writing. The elements are beautiful in themselves even before they are organized in such a way as to function as carriers of meaning." There are three of these, and she sees them as a group and does not want to separate any individual from the others.

The next group is made up of two pairs, titled *Day Light/Night Light*, I and II. "The dark prints, the night lights, function as the gravity that holds down the lighter prints, and the day light pieces



function as buoys for the night lights. Because of their small size, they need the gravity of the dense prints." In each pair, it is the day light print that suggests writing, that has lines across the page. Reid says that the *Day Light* prints show the "desire to document, to be of the page, to connect the inner world to the outside world."

The *Day Lights*, Reid remarks, "are going to be different every morning, noon, and night." They are printed with luster inks of very pale tones. "You could miss it. Luster layers allow for a slower kind of looking. Perhaps they won't be seen, and then like a flash they appear when you move and see them from another angle."

In exploring the medium of etching for the first time, Reid tried out pencils and needles, drawing with them in soft and hard grounds. But she ended up using only brushes, painting with acid in using the spit bite process, and with a soap paste for work with soap (or white) ground. The soap medium is sticky, not liquid like acid, and what the artist draws, the image, comes out light in the print against a dark background. Reid used this process as a deliberate reversal, or foil, for the spit bite acid mixtures that she could handle in ways familiar from her work with watercolor mixed with water.

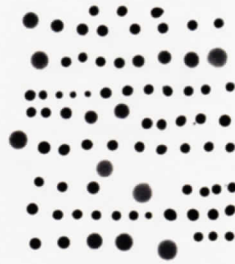
"I like the acid (spit bite) in the way I like water for its unpredictable/uncontrollable nature," she wrote in her note to me. "There is always an element of surprise/chance. There is a very delicate dance between exerting control and allowing the materials to have their own way. Always in the company of gravity (chance)." Watching Reid working, left-handed, concentrated yet relaxed, I could recognize something like dancing. Her demeanor is energetic, poised, light-hearted. She gets one chance. But she knows she can start over. Reid re-drew the image in the small print, *First Verse*, several times, and when it was right she recognized it immediately, with delight.

The last prints that Reid made in her week working with us were the two called *X-1* and *X-2*. They are separate images, but are both made from the same plates printed in different configurations. In her notes, Reid describes them as "The X's: Meetings of Lines in Space."

"The X is pre-determined, but then the acid drops only roughly where desired," she explains. "The X is formal but the way it is



Laurie Reid in the Crown Point studio, 2000.



Laurie Reid, *Elements*, 2000. Spit bite and soap ground aquatints and aquatint (triptych). Each sheet measures: 18-1/2 x 17"; image size each: 10 x 9". Edition 10. Printed by Rachel Fuller.



Laurie Reid, *Day Light/Night Light I*, 2000. Color spit bite and soap ground aquatints (diptych). Each sheet measures 17-1/2 x 18"; image size each: 9 x 10". Edition 10. Printed by Rachel Fuller.



Laurie Reid, *Day Light/Night Light II*, 2000. Color spit bite and soap ground aquatints (diptych). Each sheet measures 17-1/2 x 18"; image size each: 9 x 10". Edition 10. Printed by Rachel Fuller.



executed is very individual. The X in general is used to denote a very specific place, the intersection of two lines, but in this case it is ambiguous exactly where that is." In conversation, she refers to these prints as "tender strings of intimate dots," and adds that printmaking seems to her to be a very intimate medium.

It is their intimacy and their unassuming nature that are, I think, the keys to why Laurie Reid's prints are so refreshing. In closing my interview with her, I asked if her work is a reaction to our culture, a withdrawal from the bombardment that is constantly upon us. "Sure it is," she replied. "It creates a space for another kind of activity."

—Kathan Brown

In the Crown Point Gallery:

John Cage: Notes and Scores for Prints
and

New Prints by Richard Tuttle and Laurie Reid
Through March 1.

The book, *John Cage Visual Art: To Sober and Quiet the Mind* by Kathan Brown will be available March 1. The book is hardcover with 144 pages with 116 color illustrations. If you would like to order a copy, please send payment to Crown Point Press by check, Visa or Mastercard. \$42 plus \$5 shipping and handling. CA residents should include \$3.46 tax.

Please join us for a reception for Laurie Reid and a book signing with Kathan Brown on March 1, 6-8 p.m.

At the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco: The Visual Art of John Cage: to Sober and Quiet the Mind, an exhibition of prints by John Cage, will be on view through April 15.

At the San Francisco Art Institute: A panel discussion on John Cage will be held on February 28 at 7:30 p.m. Gordon Mumma, George Leonard and Kathan Brown will discuss Cage's music, writing and visual art. The discussion will be moderated by composer Charles Boone.



Laurie Reid, *X-2*, 2000. Color spit bite aquatint. Paper size: 14 x 51"; image size: 5 x 40". Edition 20. Printed by Rachel Fuller.

20 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105
415. 974.6273
FAX 415.495.4220
www.crownpoint.com

PRESORTED
FIRST-CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
SAN FRANCISCO, CA
PERMIT NO. 2

Crown Point Press