

Overview

Tim Rollins + K.O.S.

Tim Rollins + K.O.S. came to San Francisco in August to make etchings at Crown Point Press. This was our first time working with a group of collaborative artists and their first time exploring the medium of etching. In 1981 Tim Rollins was a young conceptual artist who had always been interested in teaching. He got a job teaching art to "learning-disabled" students in a public junior high school in the South Bronx. Rollins soon discovered that his students responded to art—art taught his way, rather than the way it is usually taught in the public schools. Rollins turned his classroom into a working studio, a studio where he could make his own art, during class, between classes, any time he could find. In fact, the line between teaching and making art blurred and ultimately disappeared. Some of Rollins' students were especially dedicated and became a group of regulars who participated in an after-school and weekend program Rollins called The Art & Knowledge Workshop.

Because many of the kids were dyslexic, Rollins would read aloud classic books like Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Dante's *Inferno* as the kids worked, and they responded by making imagery stimulated by the text, directly on the pages of the book, a practice which has become the group's stylistic trademark. Remarkably, the works the group made, such as their several versions of *Amerika* based on Kafka's book of the same name, caught the interest of the art world and began to be included in art exhibitions. Recently, Rollins left the public school and Group Material, the artists' collective he co-founded, to devote all of his energy to the Workshop and K.O.S. (it was the kids themselves who chose their name, Kids of Survival).

There are about fifteen active members in the program now, and four, Richard Cruz, George Garces, Carlos Rivera, and Nelson Savinon, came with Rollins to work at Crown Point Press. Tim Rollins + K.O.S. are more than an art collective, they are art activists who have changed perceptions about who can make art and have demonstrated the power of art to directly and concretely affect lives.

The following conversation between myself, Tim and the kids is excerpted from an interview in VIEW published in January 1990 by Crown Point Press. Information on how to obtain the complete interview



and other issues of VIEW appears on the back page.

Constance Lewallen

CL: *When is your exhibition in Basel, Switzerland?*

Tim: Next spring, at the Gegenwarts-kunstmuseum, the contemporary art museum attached to the Kunstmuseum.

CL: *The theme is going to be The Temptation of Saint Antony, isn't it?*

Tim: Yes.

CL: *How does the imagery you have developed here at the press relate to the imagery you used in the Temptation painting? Did that have abstract imagery, too?*

Carlos: Not really. For the painting we had these biology textbooks illustrating worms and things and we used these books to draw our monsters. But these new images look like monsters we have never seen before.

CL: *You think of these images as monsters?*

Nelson: Yes, monsters that could just kill you instantly.

Tim: They're definitely demons, very beautiful demons. They're sinister and gorgeous simultaneously.

CL: *The most dangerous kind.*

Tim: What's great about these is that they were created out of these strange, sinister chemical processes. These images could only occur in the process of etching, through the spitbite technique and these little techniques we invented: using machine oil, sheets of plastic, sandwiching two copper plates together and letting the acid bubble in-between and using water in inappropriate amounts.

CL: *Nelson, did you have a preconceived idea about printmaking? I know you had looked at prints that artists have done in the past, but did you have an idea what it would be like to work in etching?*

Nelson: No, I had no idea. We all learned quick, but when I got here I didn't know what to do. At first I was learning spitbite, pouring the acid, I was playing with that, but I didn't know there were other things in printmaking, so I found that out and now I know.

Tim: But this technique was so appropriate
continued on back page

New Editions

Using a single page from Gustave Flaubert's *The Temptation of Saint Antony* as a background, Rollins + K.O.S. invented a variety of suggestive forms, forms they see as abstract "monsters." They found the spitbite technique to be a perfect analogue to the demonic forms described in the text. The black and white images also call to mind microscopic and cosmic organisms. The series of 14 etchings is available as a portfolio.

John Cage, the recipient of the 1989 Kyoto Prize in Creative Arts and Moral Sciences, was back in San Francisco in September and produced his largest etchings to date. Cage continued to work with many of the elements and issues that define his recent *Stone* series. He again prepared the atmospheric background by setting fire to a wad of newspapers and smothering the flames with a damp sheet of paper. Cage then arranged 15 large stones on a plate. Using sugarlift and spitbite aquatint, Cage brushed around the contour of the stones in green, orange, grey, rust and other earth colors derived from the stones themselves. After proofing, Cage decided to repeat the process of placing and tracing until he achieved the desired density of forms. The final painterly and colorful proof, *75 Stones*, was reached after five rounds. Typically, Cage determined the placement, choice of color, tracing technique and brush size through chance operations derived from the *I Ching*.

Cage used the same method in *Missing Stone*, but was satisfied with the print after the first set of tracings. Cage had intended to use 15 stones (which represent the 15 rocks that comprise the Zen garden of Ryoanji in Kyoto, Japan) but discovered after proofing the print that one had inadvertently been omitted. Since he liked the spare and elegant print as it was, he decided not to add the missing stone. Coincidentally, the garden of Ryoanji is designed so that one can never see more than 14 rocks from any single vantage point. The new etchings by John Cage and Tim Rollins + K.O.S. are being shown in our New York gallery from January 27 through March 10 and in our temporary San Francisco gallery in the Monadnock building,

685 Market St., Suite 200, from February 1 through March 10.

Kyoto-based artist Shoichi Ida returned to our San Francisco studio this past fall and produced a series of 16 etchings with the overall title *Well From Karma*. The prints incorporate spitbite aquatint, softground, drypoint, and chine collé and are softly colored in transparent blues, reds, oranges and yellows. All of these works have the circle as their basic form and relate to Ida's oeuvre based on the well. The first three works in the series contain imprints of living flowers and leaves which Ida pressed directly into the softground. The central plate is flanked by two vertical side panels. The printed flowers and some of the color areas are printed directly on the paper and then covered with a sheet of Japanese gampi paper on which other elements are printed. The translucent gampi paper veils the imagery beneath as if shrouding it in memory.

Numbers 6 through 13 form a set and contain a double spiral as the dominant motif. The spiral represents to the artist energy derived from the center of gravity while the areas of fluid ink relate to natural forces such as rain.

Well From Karma—Echo—Blue and *Echo—Red* are two large vertical prints composed of two separated plate areas printed on the same page. The primary plate contains the double spiral awash in vibrant color while the colors and drypoint lines of the lower panel are softened by a superimposed layer of gampi paper. The largest print in the series, *Well From Karma—Echo Blue #1* is a horizontal work composed of three narrow vertical panels to the left and a larger rectangular panel to the right. The main panel is dominated by a spiral surrounded by a grey spitbite circular band. Splashes of black and blue disturb the geometric symmetry. Ida's fingerprint is evident on many of these works; in a recent interview he said, "I like to leave a little of myself—my activity—in my work." Our interview with Ida in VIEW is now available. Please see the back page of this newsletter for information on how to order VIEW.

Al Held's new large aquatint and spitbite

aquatint etching, *Russell's Way*, like *Putu* he produced earlier last year, is a *tour de force* work reflecting the influence of the water-color paintings Held has been making in Italy. Darker than *Putu*, *Russell's Way* is a strong and dynamic spatial conundrum with a dark indigo background. The composition is dominated by three bold volumes: a green and blue cube in the deepest space, overlaid by a large triangle in various shades of yellow, and in the foreground a red cylinder that appears to project out from the picture plane.

New from our Japanese woodblock program are two releases by David True: *Cut Flowers, unexpected* and *Fragile Wings*. Both are brightly colored and fanciful evocations of the sea. In *Cut Flowers, unexpected*, a frothy encounter between a black whale and a bright blue boat takes place amidst crimson, white and yellow flowers. The smaller *Fragile Wings* depicts an unmanned boat with billowing crimson sails partially covered by white clouds. The boat has been an enduring symbol in True's paintings and prints, but he has allowed his imagination to soar in these highly refined images of sky and sea.

Janis Provisor, in her first project for Crown Point Press, worked on woodblocks in The Peoples' Republic of China last fall. With local woodblock printers and carvers in both Suzhou and Shanghai, Provisor completed two small, horizontal multi-panel works (*Scattered Petals* and *Red Wood*) and one vertical single sheet woodblock (*Long Fall*). Organic and fluid, the images like those in her multi-panel paintings, are fragmented and abstract impressions of such natural landscape phenomena as sound, light or color; these together form a disjunctive narrative. The four-part *Scattered Petals* includes a field of irregular red ovoid forms, while *Red Wood*, in three sections, features a panel with a pattern of transparent red wood grain. Reds, light greens and greys predominate in these delicate works and in the larger *Long Fall* which suggests falling water intermingled with plant-like forms. —C.L.

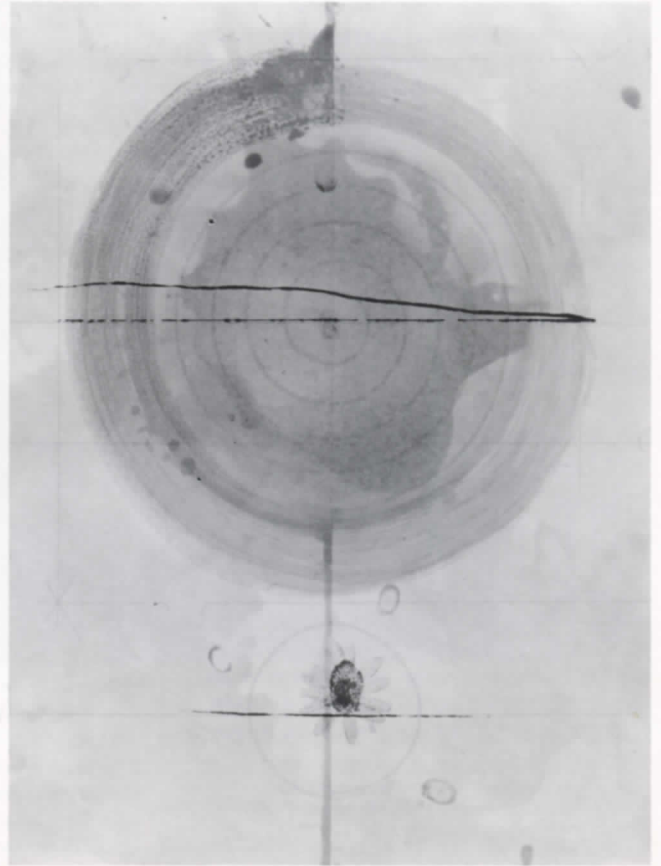
Janis Provisor, *Scattered Petals*, 1989, color woodblock printed on silk, 23³/₁₆ × 31¹/₄", edition 35.





Shoichi Ida, *Well From Karma—Trap in Echo #3*, 1989, spitbite aquatint with chine collé, 26 × 22¾", edition 15.

Janis Provisor, *Long Fall*, 1989, color woodblock printed on silk, 32½ × 21⅞", edition 75.

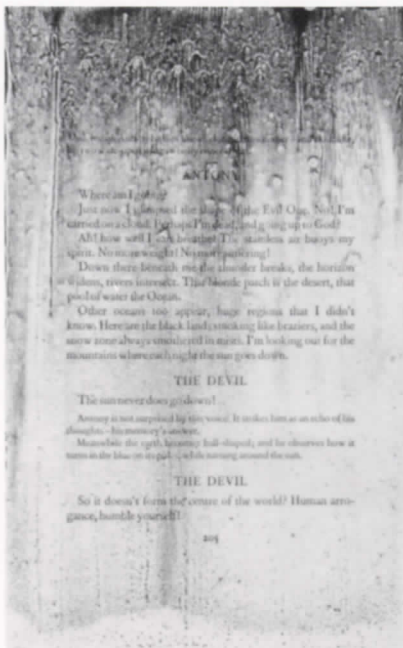


Shoichi Ida, *Well From Karma—Trap in Echo #4*, 1989, spitbite aquatint with chine collé, 30½ × 24", edition 20.



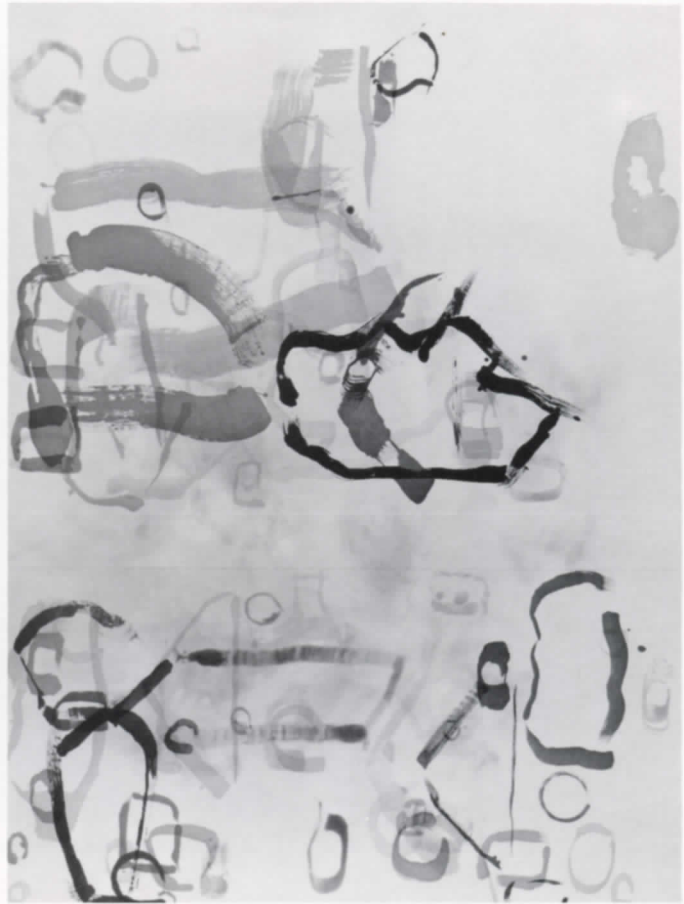
David True, *Cut Flowers, unexpected*, 1989, color woodblock, 30½ × 43", edition 150.

Tim Rollins + K.O.S., *The Temptation of Saint Antony VIII*, 1989, toner aquatint on xerograph, chine collé, 22¾ × 15", edition 30.

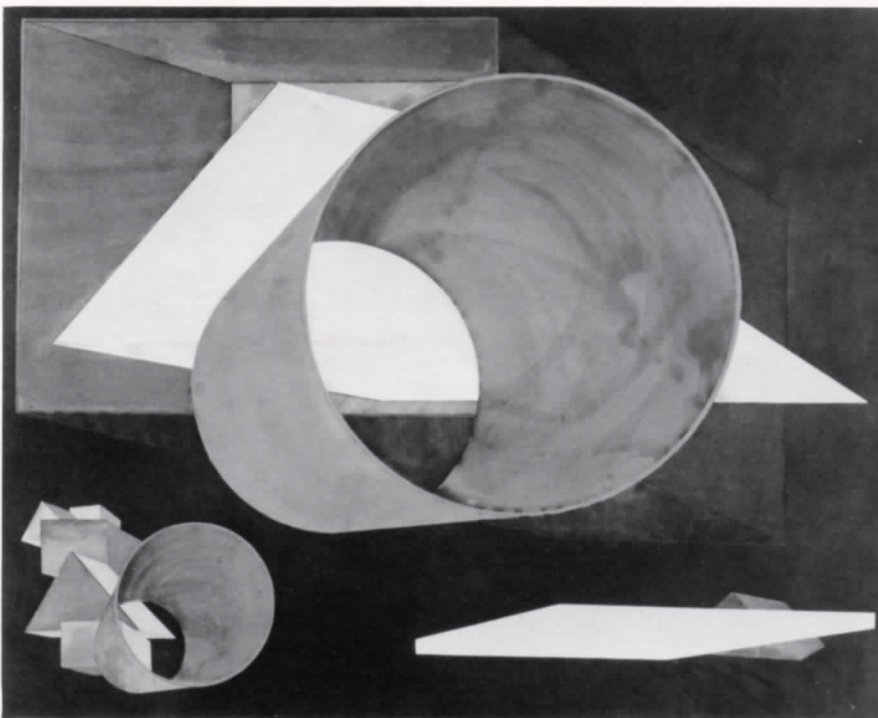


Tim Rollins + K.O.S., *The Temptation of Saint Antony VII*, 1989, aquatint and toner aquatint on xerograph, chine collé, 22¾ × 15", edition 30.





John Cage, *75 Stones*, 1989, color spitbite and sugarlift aquatint etching on smoked paper, 54 × 41", edition 25.



Al Held, *Russell's Way*, 1989, spitbite aquatint and aquatint, 41 × 54 1/4", edition 50.

Tim Rollins + K.O.S.

to the subject matter.

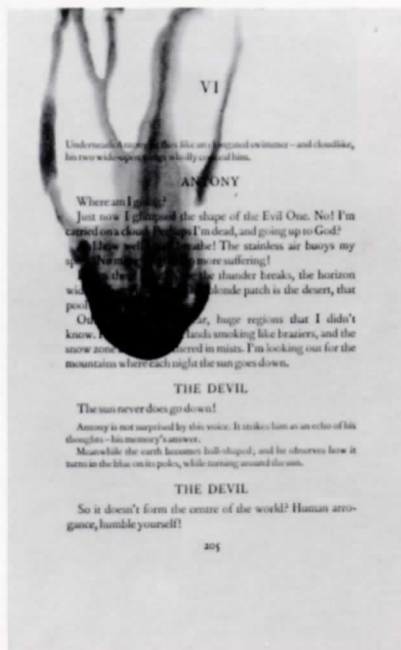
CL: *You mean spitbite aquatint?*

Tim: Yes, absolutely, the little creatures represent matter itself. When you get right down to reading these science texts about particles, you learn that everything is made out of particles. It's like how you have to look through the magnifying glass at the rosin beads to see if the copper has been eaten away; Carlos would put acid on the plate and say, "Let it eat, let it munch a little while." It's a kind of gentle violence that's done to the plate. It's as if you're doing something that's really quite painful to the copper.

CL: *Well, I didn't think of these images as monsters, but what I thought was fascinating about all of them was their suggestive ambiguity. For example in this image we have been calling the embryo, it can be seen as an embryo, it could also be something you might see under a microscope, and it could also be something cosmic.*

Tim: That's the challenge of the Flaubert text, because the book demonstrates that outer space and inner space are really the same space, and Flaubert also compares the self to the planets. We've worked with that theme in some of our past works, like *The Red Badge of Courage*, in which the wounds turn into little planets, cosmologies, and I think all of us love science fiction and horror movies, so we wanted to address science fiction as the mythology of the present. In the old days the Greeks believed in Gods, and the Native Americans believed in spirits,

Tim Rollins + K.O.S., *The Temptation of Saint Antony III*, 1989, spitbite and aquatint on xerograph, chine collé, 22 3/8 x 15", edition 30.



and Christians believed in Jesus, now we believe in monsters.

CL: *George, how did you arrive at the idea to use the same page, page 205, from the text for all the images?*

George: I think it's a good idea because even though each image is different, using the same text holds it all together. They're all different but there's one thing they all have in common. It's like all of us, we're all different, but there's one thing that holds us all together.

CL: *How do you decide which images will be included in the suite?*

George: We put them up on the wall in a line and the strong ones really stick out.

Richard: The good ones kill the bad ones, they kind of tell you themselves.

CL: *Well, what if say Nelson, Carlos and George like one and Richie and Tim don't?*

Nelson: Then you leave it up there and just think about it. You have to give it a reason why you like it.

Richard: Or why you don't like it.

Nelson: Not just, "Well, it looks good..."

George: Or pretty, or...

Tim: It's rare that we have major disagreements. Yesterday we decided there had to be 100% consensus or almost 100% consensus—this is it! Lot's of times I'll look at something and think it's corny and dumb and the kids will say, "No, Tim, you're crazy," and then it gets in. Then sometimes it's vice versa—I like something that's really corny and wild and they'll say, "No, forget it, it's ridiculous." Usually we save each other from great embarrassment later.

Point Publications

We are pleased to announce three new issues of VIEW, our series of artists' interviews, which will complete Volume VI. Interviews with Shoichi Ida, Tim Rollins + K.O.S. and Wayne Thiebaud, along with those by Tony Cragg, Robert Moskowitz and Al Held, can be purchased as a boxed set or individually from our New York and San Francisco locations or by mail from our San Francisco office. The price of boxed sets is \$27 (\$30 outside U.S.) and individual issues, \$6 (\$7 outside U.S.). These prices include postage. To order, please send your request, along with payment, to our San Francisco office. California residents add 6.75% sales tax. Please write us for resale information and for a complete list of our publications.

New Address

As of February 1, 1990, our San Francisco gallery will be temporarily located in the Monadnock building, 685 Market St., Suite 200. Gallery hours are Tuesday–Saturday, 10–5.

We plan to move into our new building, 657 Howard St., San Francisco, California 94105, on May 1, 1990 where our studio, gallery and offices will be permanently located.

Our temporary mailing address in San Francisco is: 250 4th St., San Francisco, CA 94103.

Overview

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Crown Point Press

San Francisco, CA

415 974-6273

Fax 415 495-4220

568 Broadway

New York, NY 10012

212 226-5476

Fax 212 966-7042