

# Overview

CHARLINE VON HEYL

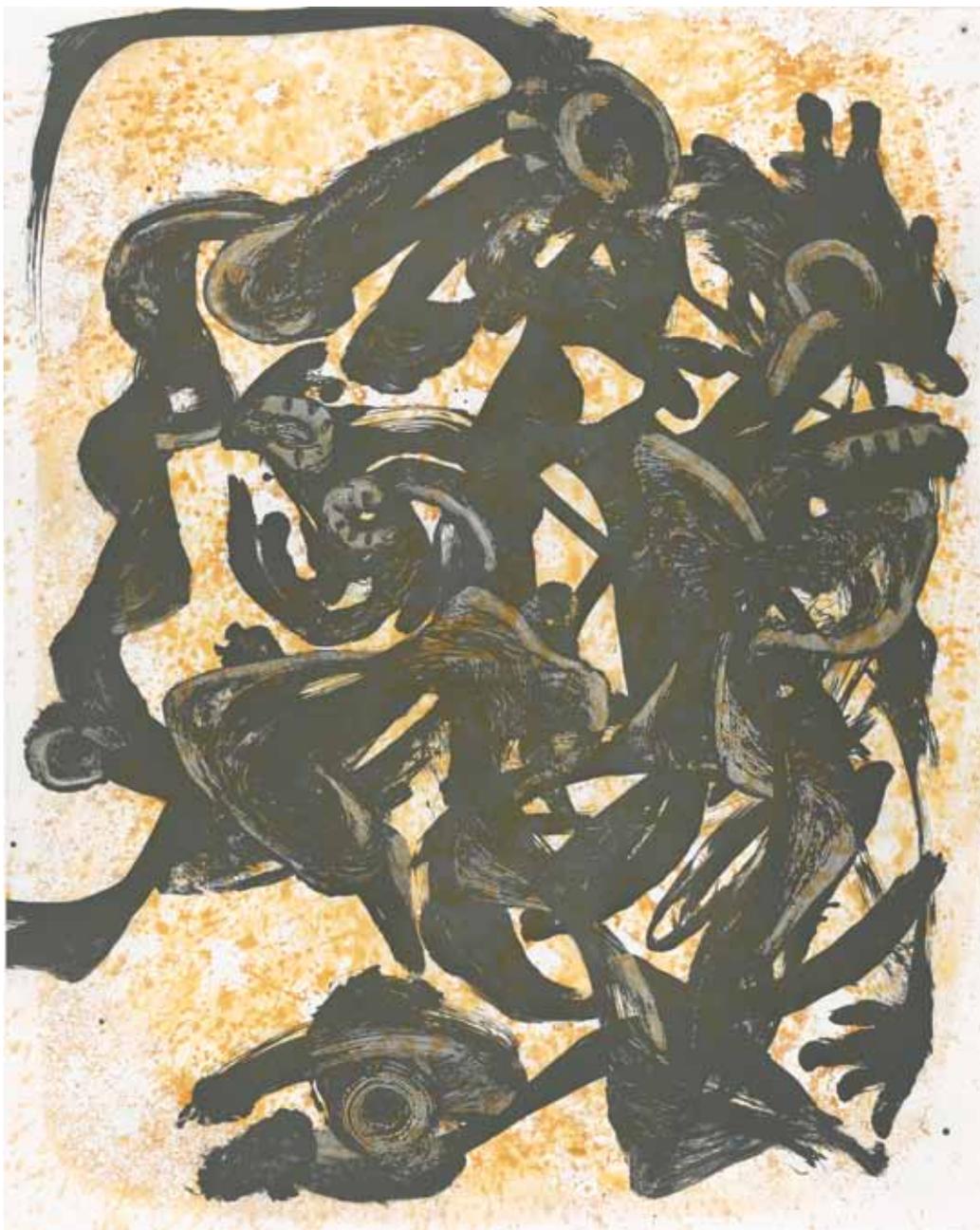


*Nightpack (Red, Yellow and Blue).*  
Large etchings 44¾-x-35¾-inches on  
52¾-x-42¾-inch sheets, edition 10.  
Printed by Fanny Retsek, 2014. See  
[crownpoint.com](http://crownpoint.com) for prices and detailed  
media descriptions.

"It looks like you could take the pieces and just push them back up into the frame," Charline von Heyl exclaimed when she saw the first proof of the print she later named *Nightpack (Red, Yellow and Blue)*.

"If you did," I replied, "They would fall through to the other side." And all of a sudden in my mind the pieces became gears and

metal bars clanking through the frame, intertwined with thoughts comically coaxed upward by a little four-fingered hand. I thought maybe I was being too literal, and then remembered Charline's first response to that print: "It's old-fashioned. It's forties. I love it." Machine images fit the forties. Besides, she is seriously aware of



*Nightpack*

something she has called "our slapstick eternal now."

*Nightpack* in an earlier iteration was printed in pencil-gray ink with a poem by Emily Dickinson in the background. Because plates print backward from the way they are drawn, Charline had copied each letter in reverse, using a brush dipped in acid. *Banish air from air / Divide light if you dare* is how the poem begins.

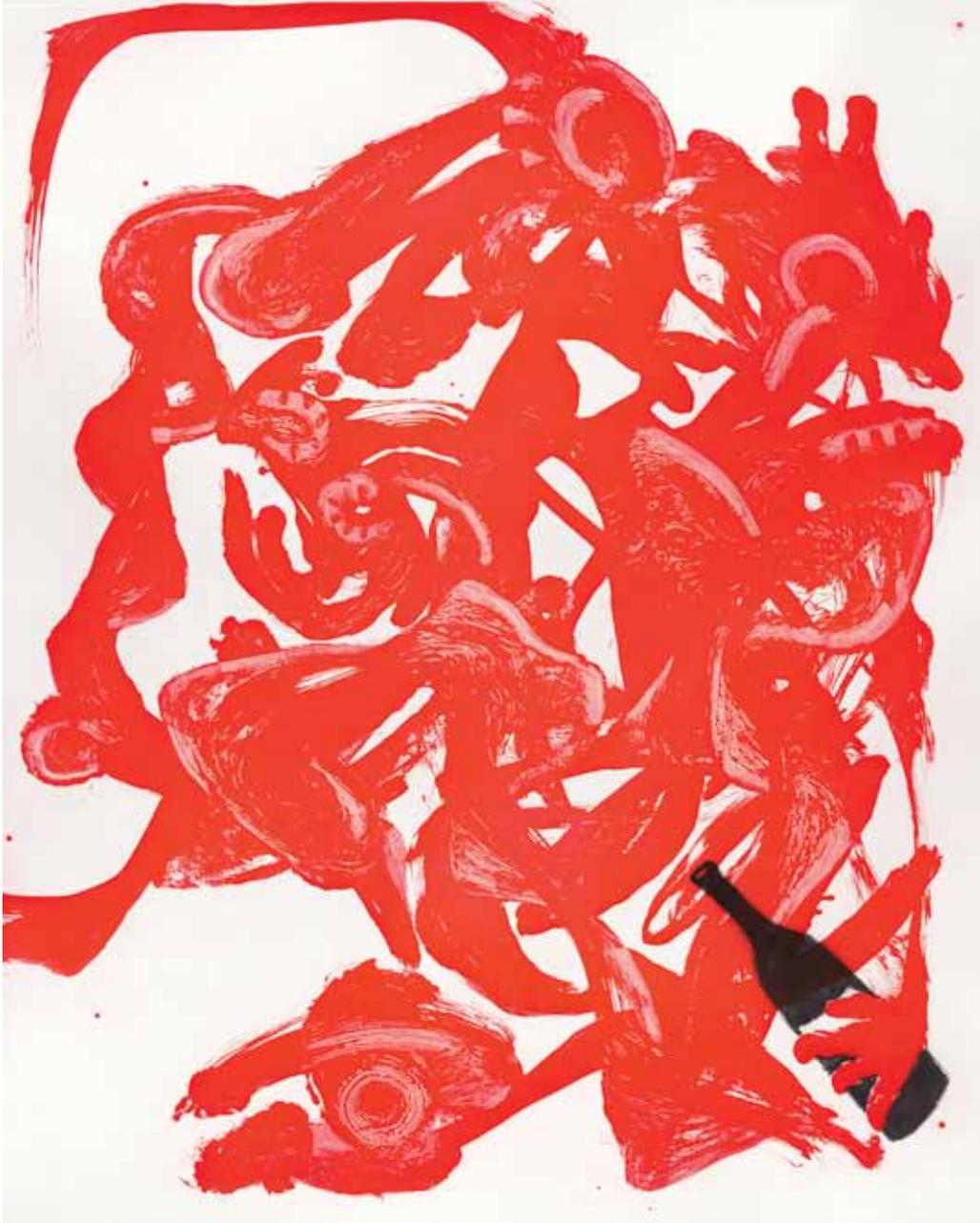
In the next proof, the poem was gone. "I'm proud of myself that I obliterated it and was able to do so completely," Charline said. "I like to obliterate things. My paintings have a lot of secrets underneath." In working on copper plates, most people use a sharp tool to scrape away the metal surface if they want to remove something from it. But Charline, instead, burned off the poem, painting strong acid over it to create pits and washes in place of the

letters she had so laboriously drawn.

The background plate with pits and washes is used in three of the four members of the *Nightpack* group. "In printing you have pieces of a puzzle and once you get going you just keep putting them together," Charline said. "They all seem like the same image, but they are so different!"

The most different is *Nightpack (The Lost Weekend)*, the one that doesn't use the background plate. Adding the bottle was Charline's funny and literal reaction after the image was made. "When I was drawing, I really wasn't thinking about anything but a gesture, just about putting a mark on that plate," she told me.

"Isn't that what you always do? Keep it immediate?" I said (relying on what I had read about her work).



*Nightpack (The Lost Weekend)*

"Yes, in general. But sometimes I slip into thinking about the art thing: if this could be something that hasn't been made before."

I wrote that down, and a few weeks later heard the same words from Sol LeWitt on audiotape, recorded more than forty years ago. He was asked to explain why he had written that artists are "mystics." He said, "I was trying to get away from the idea that we are rationalists. Artists are making something that hasn't been made before."

Sol LeWitt died in 2007 at the age of 79. Charline von Heyl is 54 in 2014. The two artists, in their thinking about art, are as different as day and night. Sol said his art was about ideas. Charline says she never has started a work of art with an idea. In (or accompanying) most of his art works, Sol included written descriptions of the steps taken in creating them. Charline says "a

painting is going to have a different presence if you cannot follow the steps, so I am always kind of scrubbing behind me, hiding them, or painting backward."

Sol's art was based in straight-ahead truth. Charline has spoken of "this feeling of falseness, which feels paradoxically like the one truly existential sense of self left, or possible." She cultivates contradictions.

It is a commonplace to say the world is rapidly changing, but Charline von Heyl's art, in comparison to Sol LeWitt's, seems to imply that something fundamental has cracked open in the interim between his time and hers.

Von Heyl and LeWitt do have something in common, however. Both of them, in their art, have an ongoing relationship with printmaking, especially in regard to its reproducibility, the



*Nightpack (Gothic)*

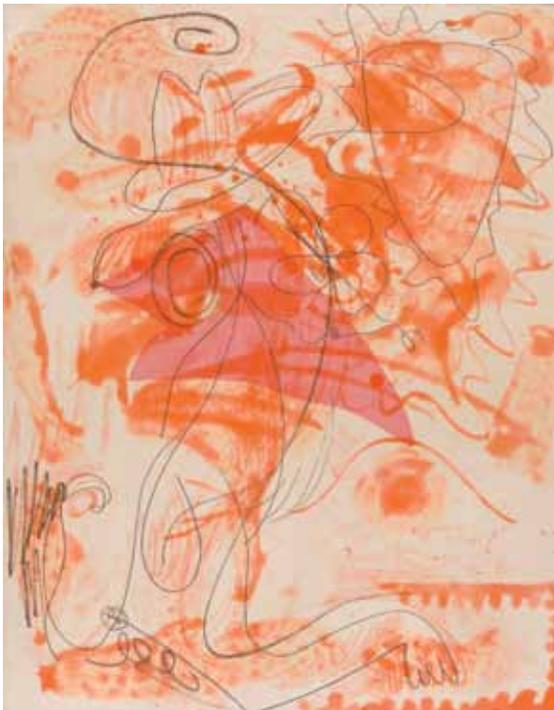
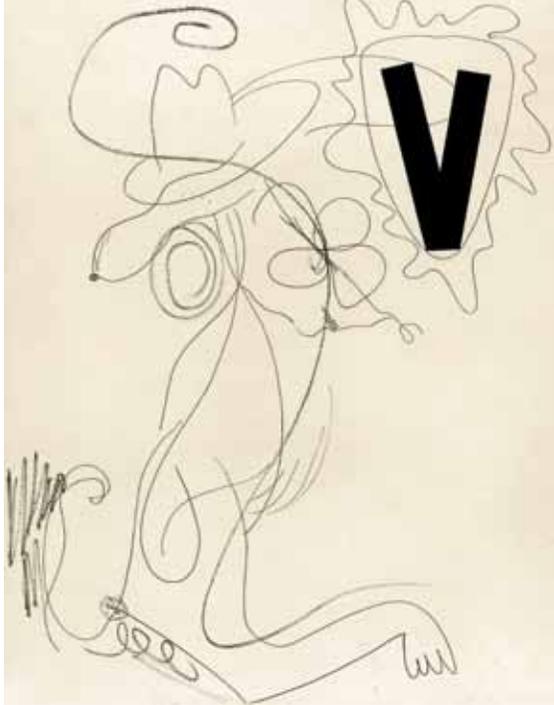
use and reuse of an image in different contexts.

Enter Walter Benjamin, a key figure whenever discussions of printmaking become philosophic. In the September 2014 issue of *The New Yorker* there is an article featuring him. He was German and Jewish, and died during World War II. His essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” written between 1935 and 1940, concerns commercial reproductive printing—this is not what we do at Crown Point, but Benjamin’s ideas nevertheless affect us. The prints we produce are printed from plates created by artists. The plates are unique. The prints are not unique, but they are not reproductions of one another or of other artworks.

In the art world of today, many painters employ production teams, and sculptors (who often produce art in editions), along

with photographers and filmmakers (who usually do), use assistants and fabricators routinely. Their approaches to making prints at Crown Point are similar to the ones they use in their own studios at home. Walter Benjamin was one step further when he explored, as Alex Ross explains in *The New Yorker*, “what it means to create or consume art when any work can be mechanically reproduced.” This question, Ross continues, “has grown ever more pressing in the digital age, when Bach’s complete cantatas or the Oxford English Dictionary can be downloaded in moments.”

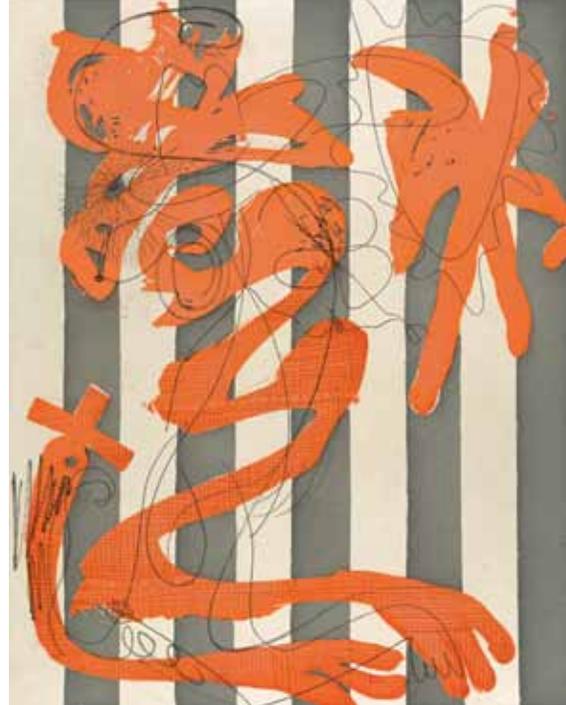
Benjamin anticipated the technology-enabled world with pleasure. “For the first time in world history,” he wrote, “technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual.” Examples of “empty rituals of



Top: *Snoopy (Black V)*; *Schatzi*. Bottom: *L'étranger*; *Schmutzi*. Small etchings 24-x-19-inches on 31-x-25-inch sheets, edition 20. Printed by Fanny Retsek.

society,” he said, are the notion of the artist as “genius” and the idea that works of art hold “eternal value.” Charline von Heyl in an interview remarked that “Walter Benjamin defined *image* as ‘dialectics at a standstill,’” and she added, “I don’t see a reason not to go for that.” Dialectics—back and forth, give and take. If an artist can catch that once in a while at a momentary standstill, the art might be disconcerting at first, but it also might be something that hasn’t been made before.

Charline von Heyl is German, grew up in Bonn and studied at the Dusseldorf Art Academy where many of the German painters collected by American museums taught or were students: Jörg Immendorf, Albert Oehlen, and Martin Kippenberger are some of their names; Sigmar Polke, Markus Lüpertz, and Georg Baselitz also were part of her formative scene. Their “anarchistic approaches to painting really rocked my understanding of what painting can do,” she has said.



*Dust on a White Shirt (Evil Eye); Dust on a White Shirt (Stripes).*

Von Heyl now lives in New York, where she moved in 1994, the year she had her first exhibition in the Petzel Gallery, where she still shows. Her first museum survey in the United States was in 2012 at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. Upcoming, her work is part of an exhibition of new painting called “The Forever Now” at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, opening December 14, 2014. The press release describes the exhibition’s theme as “a profligate mixing of past styles and genres that can be identified as a kind of hallmark for our moment in painting.”

—Kathan Brown

***If you'd like to see Charline von Heyl working on her new prints in the Crown Point studio and hear her first responses to them, go to [www.magical-secrets.com](http://www.magical-secrets.com) to find my new 20-minute video. Or, you can buy the video on DVD for \$10 through our bookstore. KB***



Charline von Heyl in the Crown Point studio, 2014.

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### **In the Crown Point Gallery**

"Charline von Heyl: Ten New Etchings"  
November 5, 2014-January 3, 2015

### **In New York**

Visit us at the IFPDA Fair. Booth 204  
Park Avenue Armory at 67th Street  
November 5-9

### **In Miami**

Art|Basel Miami Beach  
Booth A11  
December 4-7

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