

Overview



Alyson Shotz, *Sequent*, 2013. A portfolio of five color aquatints with collagraph embossing. Each image measures 11½ x 11¾ inches on a 13¾ x 13¾ inch sheet. Edition 20. All images printed by Ianne Kjørliie.

ALYSON SHOTZ: SEQUENT

“It’s a neat trick for a stationary sculpture to engage viewers the way a film would, but that is just the kind of work in which this artist specializes,” wrote Sarah P. Hanson in the May, 2012, issue of *Art+Auction*. When Alyson Shotz first visited Crown Point Press in early 2013, she was engaged in creating a 56-foot-long commissioned sculpture in the Li Ka Shing Center for Learning and Knowledge at Stanford University, a few miles from San Francisco. The sculpture takes the form of a “glimmering, undulating lattice [that] appears lightweight and ephemeral—like a scaffold made of dragonfly wings,” according to the press release. It is truly beautiful; it hangs in the lobby ceiling and is covered in a material that reflects light in iridescent colors.

The title of the sculpture is *Three Fold*. Shotz folded a single form in three different ways to design the work. When she arrived at Crown Point Press, she had the idea of folding in her mind.

Here, rather than folding by using a 3-D computer program as she does in planning her sculpture, Shotz began by folding paper. At some point she folded paper that was freshly printed in colors similar to those that bounce off her essentially colorless sculpture. Our colors, which she found appealing, are created with aquatint, a printing process invented in the 19th century to simulate watercolor with its inherent light.

After running a colored folded sheet through the press, Shotz realized the ink was coming off (we call it offsetting) in films that



Alyson Shotz, *Sequent II*, 2013. A series of four color aquatints with collagraph embossing. Each image measures 25¾ x 25¾ inches on a 30¼ x 29¾ inch sheet. Edition 10. Shown here: *Sequent IIa*.



Sequent IIb



Alyson Shotz in the Crown Point studio, 2013.

registered subtle differences in pressure caused by the sheet's layers. She asked the printers to place a folded sheet on a background plate inked in a different color and send it through. The ink in the background printed solidly but ink from the folded paper transferred in different densities depending on the folds. Of course, a sheet of paper is not a matrix that can hold ink for transfer in a controlled way—it is not a plate—so the ink films were not as beautiful as they are in the finished prints. But the idea was there.

The next step was to make plates that would hold ink in the densities printed by the folded papers. Shotz sees *Sequent*, her portfolio of five prints, as one work in five parts, each part more complex than the previous one. Although backgrounds remain stable, the folds in the foregrounds increase exponentially. Each image adds a new color while retaining the colors previously used. Since each color, including the background, requires a plate, two plates were used to print the first print, three for the second, and so on to six plates for print five.

Shotz folded prototypes for all five images and the printers made aquatints to match the densities of the color films from each of them. After we'd made the plates, the folded paper prototypes weren't needed to print the colors, but we did end up using them. We employed a process called *collagraph* (from *collage*) and shel-lacked the prototypes to turn them into plates capable of repeatedly going through the press. Then we printed them without ink to emboss the paper. Our process of printing always embosses to



Sequent IIc

a degree, embedding the ink in the paper, but when many plates are used only the final one embosses strongly. Because we printed the folded prototype as the final plate, each print shows all the embossed edges of the original folded image.

The small prints in *Sequent*, the portfolio, served as tests for *Sequent II*. Shotz and the printers used the same procedures for both groups, but the *Sequent II* plates, somewhat more than two feet square, are approximately double the size of the portfolio prints. At first the colors were also the same. But then Shotz had a brilliant idea: print everything in one color. She started with a red from the earlier prints and ended lightening it to pink. The four images have from three to five plates each, and the ink is all the same. The variations in tone come from the varying depths of aquatints bitten into the plates to match the varying layers of paper folds.

Ethereal is a word that pops into my head to describe these pink prints, and now that I see it written here I am finding it and similar words scattered through a file of clippings of reviews of Shotz's exhibitions and commissioned works. Roberta Smith in the *New York Times* (2007) writes of "Space Exploration, Conducted on a Spiral," and Hilarie M. Sheets in *Art News* (2010) of "Turning Piano Wire into Light." The Guggenheim Museum in New York purchased one of Shotz's works named "The Shape of Space" and later mounted a group show titled "The Shapes of Space." Shotz's work is also in the Whitney Museum, the



Sequent II d

Hirshhorn Museum, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among other public collections. Some examples of her other titles are "Geometry of Light," "Fluid State," and "Infinite Space."

Forty-one years ago in 1972 Dorothea Rockburne made a series of magnificent folded prints at Crown Point Press. They were printed folded and then unfolded for presentation. They are titled *Locus* and are part of her series called "Drawing Which Makes Itself." You can find pictures of them on the website of MOMA, New York. These are earth-bound works. Shotz admired them before beginning her two *Sequent* series, which (in the pink version, at least) are gossamer. I remember Rockburne talking at the time about the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty, and of body experience. Recently (in *The Brooklyn Rail*) she wrote that in the 1970s she was engaged with "the topological premise of neighborhoods, borders and parameters."

Shotz, much younger, is using parameters of light and air and weightlessness—which are, perhaps, not parameters at all. Both Rockburne and Shotz employed the formal mechanism of a folded sheet of paper and the medium of etching, but in the time that separates their projects at Crown Point Press the world changed. Good artists make art that holds a kernel of its time.

—Kathan Brown

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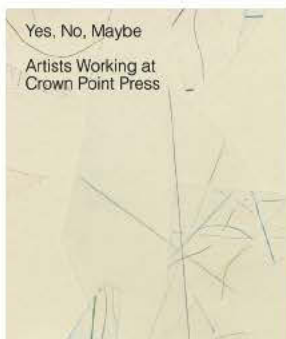
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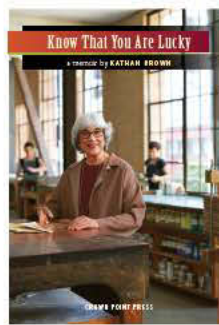
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ALYSON SHOTZ: SEQUENT

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