**PAST PRESENT**

Curatorial Statement

*Past Present* highlights the history of print as reflected in contemporary art practices. Why do some artists revel in history, when others choose to reject it? To understand the new, sometimes you have to look to the old. This exhibition features the work of six artists and one artist collaborative: Peeter Allik (Estonia), Rob Carter (USA), Phyllis McGibbon (USA), Thomas Neulinger (Austria), Lothar Osterburg (USA), Projeto Lambe-Lambe (Brazil), and Andrew Raftery (USA). These artists explore the language of the past to illuminate the present. Their investigations reveal the ways in which history continues to influence the contemporary discourse of print.

For a picture, surviving even a few years let alone a few hundred is no small feat. When images from history travel through time, they carry a kind of hard-earned authority - a testament to their endurance. Sometimes this authority, or staying power, can be attributed to the imagery, or the context of the moment, and still other times to the historical technique; often it’s an undefinable combination of all three.

Phyllis McGibbon etches copper tubes with segments of Sixteenth Century artist Albrecht Dürer's *Sudarium of St. Veronica* so the Saint’s legendary gesture of compassion can be reproduced endlessly. McGibbon speaks of “an endless loop” wherein imagery moves between time periods and cultures. The Brazilian collaborative Projeto Lambe-Lambe also appropriates from Dürer in the form of large-scale murals. *Dürer's Rhinoceros*, famous for its inaccuracies, is wheat-pasted in neglected spaces all over the world as if to remind people that misinformation is an eternal presence. Meanwhile, Austrian designer Thomas Neulinger processes images from history into contemporary design. Appropriating the work of Baroque artists like Hendrik Goltzius, Neulinger juxtaposes it with minimalist compositions and smart color choices breathing new life into the old masters.

In some cases, the artists of *Past Present* are less concerned with history’s imagery than its technique. Andrew Raftery uses a burin to engrave the drama of an open house, an American family buying a home. It’s a timely subject at a moment when the real estate market has foreclosed on a historic number of Americans. When
depicted through the technique of engraving, it seems to signify that homeownership and the affluence that it once implied is already a thing lost to the past. Estonian Peeter Allik makes linocuts that deliver harsh critiques of material society in a mash up of historical styles. His carving tools carry a message—history will be our judge.

Architectural history is also a point of departure. Rob Carter’s *Stone on Stone* is a stop motion video focusing on Manhattan’s Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine—a unfinished 20th Century recreation of 13th Century medieval architecture. Carter posits that the design of the Cathedral “unintentionally symbolizes those eventful years of indecision, tragedy and changes in the meaning and purpose of the city’s architecture and landscape.” Meanwhile, Lothar Osterburg reconstructs and photographs the imaginary prison architecture of the 18th Century artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi. Osterburg’s recreations are miniature, even absurd, but the finished images assume a monumental quality in part because the artist borrows authenticity from an obsolete medium, photogravure. Carter uses digital technology and Osterburg uses antiquated processes but each explores the tenuous relationship of reality and fiction, time and timelessness.

In 2011, artists have access to an incredible range of technology, from the state of the art digital tools to polymer plastics and materials previously unimagined. But for all the endless options, there are times when history, not the future, offers the clearest solutions to a problem. The artists of *Past Present* are wholly contemporary in their conceptual conceits, but each engages with material and concept to explore what the past may teach us about our present and our future.