



Prix de Print No. 20

Time Machine for Abandoned Futures by Colin Lyons

Juried by Chang Yuchen

This iteration of the *Art in Print* Prix de Print has been judged by Chang Yuchen. The Prix de Print is a bimonthly competition, open to all subscribers, in which a single work is selected by an outside juror to be the subject of a brief essay. For further information on entering the Prix de Print, please go to our website: <http://artinprint.org/about-art-in-print/#competitions>.

Colin Lyons, *Time Machine for Abandoned Futures* (2015)

Gold-rush artifacts, plexiglas, aluminum, copper sulphate, soda ash, copper etching plates, zinc etching plates plates, wires, 96 x 108 x 168 inches. Unique work.

Erected on a bluff overlooking Bonanza Creek in the Canadian Yukon, Colin Lyons' *Time Machine for Abandoned Futures* uses a vast battery, made of etching plates and acid, to power the electrolytic cleaning of broken tools and machine parts left behind by the Klondike Gold Rush. Once cleared of rust, the artifacts were etched with what Lyons calls "markings of ruination."

The project takes on physics, chemistry, environmentalism and social history, but to me, as a printmaker, it is also very much about the nature of printmaking itself. And so I offer the following thoughts:

Printmaking is about traces. A finger-print on a dusty desk, a childhood scar on your knee, a transparent area on a frosted window left by a warm breath; printmaking is about something once here and no longer.

Traces are inevitable. Flowing water changes the shape of pebbles and coastlines, people live and then disappear. They leave artifacts behind, with which we speculate and imagine their owners' existence, constructing an image of our past.

Artifacts in museums attract me like a magnet. I stare and stare, sometimes without reflecting on what the object is, merely trying to keep my eyes affixed to it. There's always a feeling of potential, as if something vital is about to reveal itself in the rusty surface, but just not yet. It is as if we—the artifact and I—will both vanish in loneliness as soon as I turn my eyes away.

Rust and erosion, and wrinkles, too. These traces are loaded with information, with the dimensions of places and histories. They whisper stories rich in texture. We desire stories, always and forever. "Rather than your face as a young woman, I prefer your face as it is now. Ravaged," says the lover in Marguerite Duras' autobiographical novel.¹

"In the essay," Adorno writes, "concepts do not build a continuum of operations, thought does not advance in a single direction, rather the aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of this texture."²

Printmakers tend to plan ahead, to be never-theless flexible, to enjoy physical labor, and to be drawn to the subtle. Printmaking is a kind of education, that is to say, a means to an end (I forgot my high school math long ago but I am a better problem solver because of those

endless homework problems I did at 16). Like a tunnel full of experiences and satisfactions, it leads to wide-open space at the end. Printmaking is a manner of practice, respectful and committed, and the form of the outcome is free.

Every work of art includes the activity of performance; whichever medium it takes. There are always decisions, actions and reactions, composition and improvisation. The artist is walking, seeking, collecting materials and treating them with (critical) affection. Artists expose themselves in the field of discourse and feelings, as dancers measure and manifest gravity in their movements.

"Gold Rush." It is an historical event but also a kind of poetry. The words, joined together, suggest a flood of glittering, molten metal—incredibly beautiful but also horrifying, seductive and destructive.

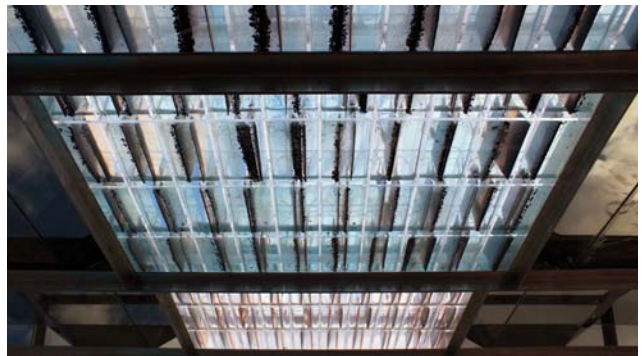
The requirement of contemporary art: something new, something old, something to look at, something to talk about.

The requirement of the heart: care. ■

Chang Yuchen is an artist who lives and works in New York.

Notes:

1. Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*, tr. Barbara Bray. (New York: Scribner's, 1993).
2. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," tr. Bob Hultot-Kentor and Frederic Will, *New German Critique* 32 (Spring-Summer 1984): 151–71.



Colin Lyons, *Time Machine for Abandoned Futures* (2015). **Top:** View of the installation on Midnight Dome in the Klondike. **Center left:** The artist using a metal detector searching through dredge tailings near Bonanza Creek. **Center right:** The roof-top battery composed of etching plates and acid. **Lower left:** Electrolytic cleaning of rust from the scavenged artifacts. **Lower right:** Object showing etched markings. *Time Machine for Abandoned Futures* was produced with the support of Klondike Institute of Art & Culture and Canada Council for the Arts. All photos by the artist.