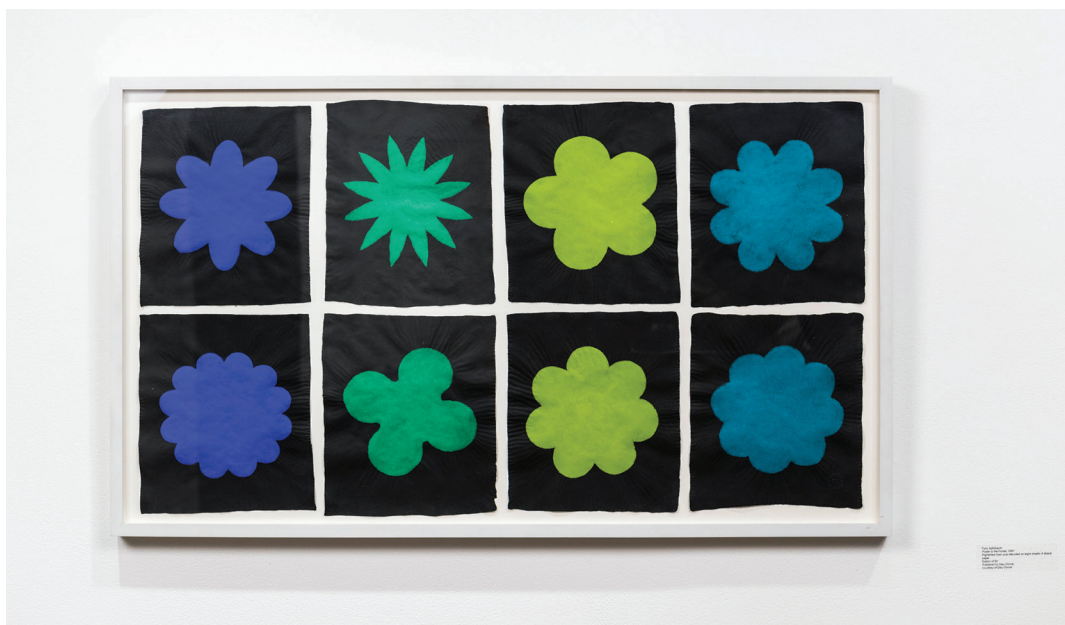




Collaborative Histories: Dieu Donne

AN EXHIBITION REVIEW BY JENNIE HIRSH

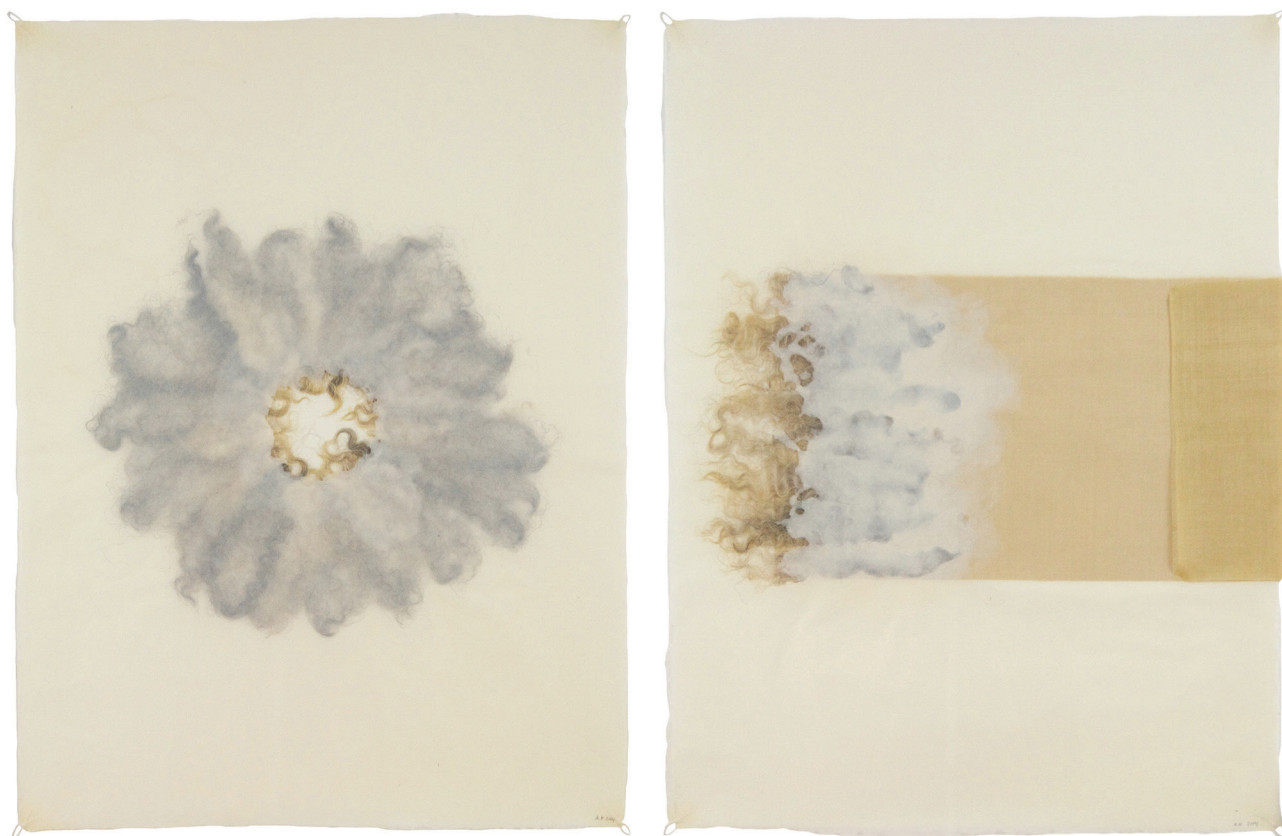
"Collaborative Histories: Dieu Donne"
The Print Center, Philadelphia
January 9–April 21, 2018

Polly Apfelbaum, eight components from Power to the Flower, 2007, 10 x 8 inches each, stenciled, pigmented linen rag pulp on carbon-black-pigmented abaca base sheet. Variable edition of 50, published by Dieu Donne, New York. Installation view in "Collaborative Histories: Dieu Donne," at The Print Center, Philadelphia. All photos taken by Jaime Alvarez, and courtesy of The Print Center, Philadelphia, unless otherwise noted.

Recently at The Print Center, "Collaborative Histories: Dieu Donne" presented viewers with a dual opportunity: they were treated not only to 25 objects representing 15 individually tantalizing artworks, but also to a rich introduction to the aesthetic diversity and tactile possibilities that handmade paper offers to artists. This elegant show demonstrates that paper is not merely a passive support but rather an active medium that deserves far more attention than it is typically granted, perhaps due to paper's quiet and unassuming nature. A selection of works produced by both Dieu Donne (the non-profit hand papermaking organization located in New York, co-founded by Susan Gosin) and Dieu Donne Press (the personal imprint of Susan Gosin) surveys the ways in which art and craft blend seamlessly together in unique and surprising ways.

The all-star lineup of this understated but powerful exhibition includes Polly Apfelbaum, Chuck Close, Lesley Dill, Ann Hamilton, Eliza Kentridge, William Kentridge, Abby Leigh, Michele Oka Doner, Arlene Shechet, Kate Shepherd, Mark Strand, Do Ho Suh, and Ursula von Rydingsvard. In each case, the results of the artist's connection to Dieu Donne are reminiscent but depart from familiar examples of work in their respective practices.

Certain works, such as Ann Hamilton's *poche* (2014), thematize the delicacy and structure of the layers and weavings that constitute paper itself. With literal "pockets" created in the abaca paper that sit atop raw sheep wool encased in the paper, the two 24 x 18-inch panels are both architectural and anatomical, mimicking the sorts of spaces hidden behind and between building walls and allude to the way the organic coats the body and hosts other features. Looking at the center of the left panel's circular shape, it is discomfitingly like being just under a scalp, peering up through the hair. Hamilton's attention to detail and texture are particularly striking in this intimate, two-dimensional work that paradoxically insists on its own sculptural plasticity. Similarly subtle in its neutral and natural tones, Michele Oka Doner's artist book edition *What is White* (2010) consists of translucent abaca surfaces onto which white cotton pulp has been



Ann Hamilton, poché, 2014, 24 x 18 inches each of two panels, raw sheep wool, silk and linen thread in abaca paper. Edition of 15, published by Dieu Donné, New York. Courtesy of Dieu Donné, New York.



Michele Oka Doner, What is White, 2010, 18 x 30 inches (open), artist book with cotton pulp stenciled on abaca base sheet. Edition of 30, published by Dieu Donné Press, Princeton, NJ. Installation view in "Collaborative Histories: Dieu Donné," at The Print Center, Philadelphia.



Do Ho Suh, *Staircase*, 2013, 14¼ x 11½ inches, thread, cotton paper, methyl cellulose. Unique, published by Dieu Donné, New York. Installation view in "Collaborative Histories: Dieu Donné," at The Print Center, Philadelphia.

stenciled. The dense yet delicate pages read akin to the instant when a snowflake hits a cement surface, just before melting into a heap of accumulated precipitation or disappearing into a liquid pool.

What characterizes so many of the works in this exhibition is this ability to suspend corporeality and defined forms. Do Ho Suh's *Staircase* (2013) extends his affinities for investigating spectral architectural elements in a flattened pictorial plane. At 14¼ x 11½ inches, the work captures the fleeting nature of a sketch, here with cobalt-blue thread. With woven threads cast into paper, Ursula von Rydingsvard's *Kasia* (2016) redefines the possibilities for what a tapestry can mean, challenging the viewer to see how different fibers react to one another both physically and aesthetically, as the black and red threads are simultaneously trapped within and breaking free from the handmade paper that lies below, above, and between them. Also noteworthy are the eight 8 x 10-inch composite works from Polly Apfelbaum's *Power to the Flower* (2007), each of which reads like a muslin panel waiting to be sewn into a quilt. The potency of the colored-linen pulp in bright hues defy the lightness of their makeup.

This show reminds us to think carefully about paper's potential: it is possible not only to look at, but also into its surface, as staged in Chuck Close's *Watermark Self Portrait* (2007). The elusive subject comes and goes according to the passage of light through it. What

seems utterly dramatic in this work, which measures just 11¼ x 9¼ inches, is the way in which Close's face is within rather than on the surface, reifying the spectral nature of paper, an argument at the heart of the show's thesis. Also in the case of William Kentridge's *livre d'artiste* book edition of poems by Wislawa Szymborska titled *Receiver* (2006), this ghostliness, normally associated with the artist's haunting animations that dance between expressive drawing and cancelling erasure, is expressed through photogravure, etching, drypoint and letterpress, a series of techniques that comeingle on individual sheets as well as through overlaid, translucent sheets. We see how communication, both internally within the images and the poetry, and in exchange between the two, expresses the apologies that come with recognizing the shortcomings of memory over time, and moves both physically and emotionally between the media, devices, and temporalities.

Like the relationships that this show celebrates, the exhibition itself is a team effort between John Caperton, the Jensen-Bryan Curator of the Print Center, in Philadelphia, and Cynthia Nourse Thompson, director of the MFA Book Arts + Printmaking program at the nearby University of the Arts. As such, the show and its viewers have been the beneficiaries of careful consideration of both the curatorial and the artistic expertise and collaboration presented in this fine exhibition.