

Michael Miller: Graphic Pantomimes

Michael Miller finds his images in the vastness of our visual record. He is a scavenger and recycler not only of available images and ideas, but also of processes and his own inventions. A Professor of Print Media for forty-plus years, within the body of his printed *oeuvre*, Miller has employed traditional as well as photomechanical methods of printmaking, but also produced singular works on paper that are combinations of these processes. Indeed, his career trajectory parallels the greatest expansion and acceptance of print vocabularies in history, making his hybrid objects which commingle traditional and industrial technology mirrors of what is possible in and expected of works on paper today. Most recently, in his *Voices* series seen here, he has combined various media without regard to foregrounding traditions of printmaking practice. Yet, at the same time, the present work references historical styles of artists whose work often was disseminated in the popular press—satirical artists and political cartoonists such as Saul Steinberg, Robert Crumb, and especially the great editorial artists of the late-18th and early-19th centuries, whose work appeared in the early manifestations of a daily newspaper.

Like his exemplars, Miller finds his subject in the power struggles that exist between classes of people—authority—as well as those that exist internally—imagined, or constructed, but based on lived experience. His tools reference common drawing techniques, such as hatched and crossed-hatched linear patterns (*Angleheads*), grids composed of dots which ground the compositions, and repetitions of lines in arabesque

that he uses to create hilarious parodies of mental states (*Headchain*, *Loopman*, and *Yellowheads*, for example).

Moreover, just as Pop artists such as Roy Lichtenstein fetishized the look of half-tone dots used in reproduction, Miller shows here that he is a connoisseur of line qualities. The artists who he admires employ lines to define their subjects' appearance, mental state, as well as poke fun at or criticize their attributes or presumed status and authority. In the *Voices* works, what appear to be hand-drawn, autographic lines are often cut, scanned, copied, or otherwise resized from an original mark. This imparts various twists of meaning from a tentative, vulnerable state to a sarcastic, self-parodying exposé.

Perhaps even more devastatingly witty is Miller's use of corporate graphing concepts to organize the compositions in *Bubbleheads* and *Headstring*. Often used to mind-numbing effect in lectures by people who know less about the subject than those being lectured to, one can well imagine that the artist has suffered through countless meetings in which charts of this type are used to quantify ineffable ideas. Sadly, in today's world, most of us can relate to this terror in the conference room experience. Thus inspired, in *Voices*, Miller has created a suite of sarcastic yet appealing visual equivalents for painful commonplaces of contemporary life—in the workplace, and in the mind.

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