

DIEU DONNÉ LAB GRANT PROGRAM
PUBLICATION SERIES NO. 10

Mel Kendrick *Loopholes*

Dieu Donné
315 West 26th Street
New York, NY 10018
T 212 226 0573
F 212 226 6088
www.dieudonne.org



Initial Notes, Later Developments: Seeing “Loopholes”

by *Lynne Tillman*

For over twenty years, Apfelbaum has challenged, tested, pushed, and questioned the boundaries and definitions of different media, materials, and methods in her journey toward a multivalent vision of contemporary art. For thirty years, meanwhile, the mission of Dieu Donn e has been to actively support artists in their investigations toward the creation of innovative work in the area of hand papermaking. When Dieu Donn e invited Apfelbaum to participate in its Lab Grant Residency program, no one could have predicted how her explorations of techniques and ideas she had never before pursued would break new ground in reimagining what art could be—operating somewhere between and including printmaking, paper-making, drawing, painting, and sculpture.

Apfelbaum realized three projects at Dieu Donn e which, together, reflect the complexities and contradictions that ongoingly define and invigorate her work. Her art is founded on a constructive disregard for conventional distinctions between categories including abstraction, representation, minimalism, expressionism, conceptualism, color field, pattern, and decoration. Her practice has no single allegiance to painting, sculpture, installation, or drawing and is simultaneously controlled and intuitive, cerebral and gestural.

I am very attracted to that notion of a hard logic that is found in an unexpected place—in a world where everything is supposed to be simple and beautiful, things often turn out to be more complicated. I like the idea of doing pieces that are very beautiful and intuitive, seductive even, but that turn out to be more complex, to have more layers and more structure than people thought. In the end it's more interesting that way. (Apfelbaum as interviewed by Claudia Gould, *Polly Apfelbaum*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, 2003)

During her 2002 Lab Grant residency, Apfelbaum began *Star Power* (2006), a series featuring four colored sets of “flags.” Apfelbaum's interest in the political content and graphic punch of flags first manifested itself in an installation she did for the Lodz Biennale in Poland in 2004, and then in a silkscreen portfolio, *Flags of Revolt and Defiance* (2004), for which she chose thirty-three revolutionary flags of organizations ranging from the National Organization of Women to the Polish peasant insurrection to the Black Panthers—over which she imposed her own system of flower symbols that she appropriated from Warhol. *Star Power* adopts a visually striking, simple, uniform motif throughout the series even as it draws on the historical iconography of the flag as a container of meaning and emotion for a broad range of cultural and political constituencies and movements. Each of the four sets in the edition is comprised of five 6 x 9 inch sheets—the first sheet has one star, the second has two stars, the third has three stars, and so on up to five—specifically arranged by the artist. Highly color-saturated pigments were used to build up the eye-popping stars that suggest military insignia on a uniform or symbols on a flag—lending them object-like qualities that are further accentuated by wrinkles radiating outward on the surrounding handmade paper.

Seductive explosions of color balanced by an equal attentiveness to line characterize all three of Apfelbaum's projects for Dieu Donn e. The centuries-old debate over drawing vs. color is rendered moot in Apfelbaum's oeuvre in general, particularly since the early nineties when she began cutting into dyed patterns on synthetic fabric and placing the pieces on the floor. Essentially drawing directly *into* color, she set into motion, in now signature works such as *Eclipse* (1996), *Reckless* (1998), and *Black Flag* (2001-02), a fluid, ever-dynamic and mutually complementary symphony of color and line. With her recent impulse to engage in a more personal and direct process of drawing, Apfelbaum

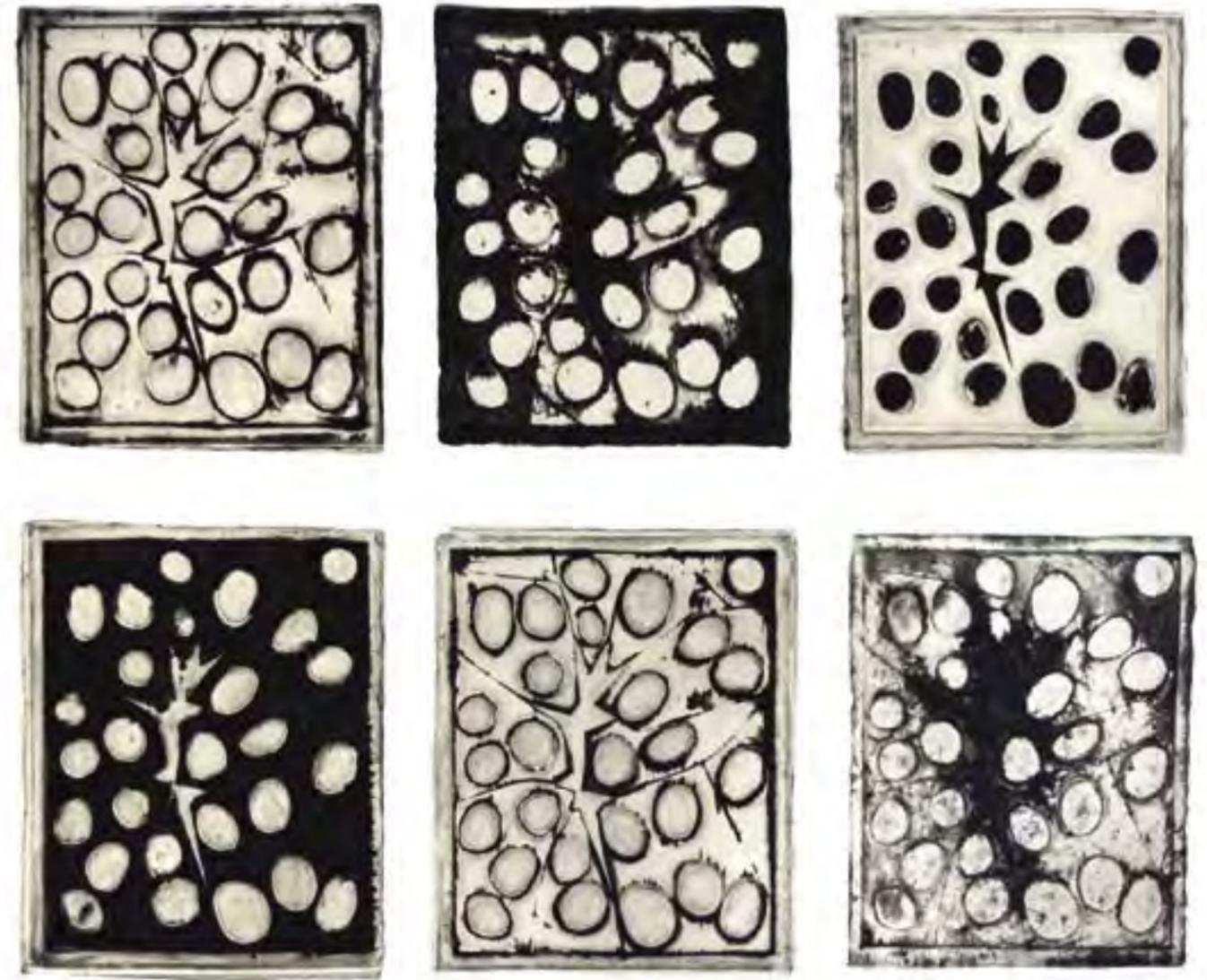
began to doodle flowers by hand on brightly colored synthetic fabric. *Power to the Flower* (2007), Apfelbaum's second edition project with Dieu Donn e done in conjunction with their Collector's Series, consists of fifty individual flower pieces in addition to four sets of eight flowers whose shapes she took from Warhol's appropriations of flowers, and then drew by hand. Devising a system of color and form, Apfelbaum selected eight different shapes and twelve different colors, and executed every possible color-shape combination (there are ninety-six). Working with artistic director, Paul Wong, she made Mylar stencils from the shapes and set each of them within a geometric square on a wet sheet of black pulp. Brilliantly colored pulp of a density different from that of the black ground was used to fill in the shapes which when dry, created dense, flat emblems with crisp silhouettes and a rippling in the paper that are vestiges of the inventive process.

The freedom offered by the Dieu Donn e project to investigate previously untried possibilities ironically led Apfelbaum back to her own work. Not only did *Power to the Flower* reinforce the realization of how important drawing is to her art making, it returned to a recurring flower theme in her oeuvre that goes back to 1989 in works such as *Daisy Chain*, in which flower dingbats taken from the Warhol print SAS, were first drawn and then fabricated into blocks of raw wood. Other works, too, such as *A Pocket Full of Posies* (1990) and *Wallflowers* (1990), as well as the more recent *Love Park* series (2006) of woodblock prints—based on hundreds of flower doodles done on acetate that were transcribed into wood blocks of pure unmodulated color and then arranged and embossed on paper—are richly layered in how they bring flowers into play with a mix of references to Warhol, Pop Art, popular culture, Matisse, Abstract Expressionism, Pattern and Decoration, and 1960's flower power—each replete with their own battery of aesthetic, idealistic, political, and graphic associations. Viewed in the context of today's political and military developments, Apfelbaum's flowers and flags combine seriousness with whimsy in works that channel the anxiety and uncertainty that accompany our daily existence along with the ever present hope for the transformative power of peace and love.

A delirious, abstract expressionist-like patterning collides with austere, linear structures in *Basic Divisions*, 2006-07, a dazzling third project Apfelbaum completed at Dieu Donn e. Apfelbaum used a marbled paper technique for the backgrounds, separately mixing and pouring on felt all the various color pulps, then drawing through it with a tool to realize elaborate, decorative motifs. Superimposed over these painterly compositions are 1/4 inch solid graphite

lines drawn in minimal geometric configurations derived specifically from a chart in a book about flags. Framed and installed like flags, *Basic Divisions* juxtaposes and breathes new life into disparate visual systems, annexing the staid and celebratory connotations of a flag's programmatic visual vocabulary while mining various modes of painterly practice—all the while honoring and extending traditions of papermaking. *Basic Divisions*, *Power to the Flower*, and *Star Power* are all arresting achievements resulting from the successful and inspired collaboration between Apfelbaum, an artist with an ebullient spirit making meaningful and formally exciting work, and Dieu Donn e, an institution that is an unwavering advocate for the artist—both resolutely and wholeheartedly committed to the investigative process in contemporary art.

Lynne Tillman is a novelist, short story writer, and critic. American Genius, A Comedy, her fifth novel, was published in 2006. Her previous novel, No Lease on Life, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in fiction (1998) and a New York Times Notable Book of the Year. Her stories have appeared in many anthologies and journals, including Bomb, The New Gothic, Black Clock, The Literary Review, McSweeney's, and Cabinet. Tillman's art and literary criticism has been published in Art in America, Artforum, Frieze, Aperture, Bookforum, Nest, and The New York Times Arts and Leisure and Book Review sections. Her collection, THIS IS NOT IT (2002), contained stories and novellas that responded to the work of twenty-two contemporary artists and had originally appeared in artists books and museum and gallery catalogues. She is Professor/Writer-in-Residence at The University at Albany, and in 2006 was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship.



1



2

1
Caption for multiple works
2
Detail of work



Untitled, 2007
handmade paper with pigment
80 x 60 inches
(203.2 x 152.4 cm)

Exhibition

Mel Kendrick

Loopholes

February 15–March 30, 2008

Reception: Friday, February 15, 6–8 PM

About the artist

Through the Lab Grant Program, Kendrick experimented with paper pulp-casting of large, two-dimensional, wood relief sculptures. Kendrick's use of this technique reflects upon his prints, bronzes, and rubber castings of wood sculptures, developed throughout the 1980s and 90s. During his exploration of handmade paper, Kendrick employed a variety of techniques, including watermarking, stencils, and the multiple layering of wet sheets. Kendrick's experimentation led to several large-scale and tiled works, produced in collaboration with artistic director, Paul Wong and staff.

Kendrick's 2007 exhibition, *Red Blocks* at David Nolan Gallery was described by critic Nancy Princenthal as "...stealthily potent...[defying] intuitive spatial sense in a way that is, like any good puzzle, deeply engrossing" (*Art in America*, January 2008, p. 120). Kendrick has exhibited widely since his first solo exhibition at Artists' Space in 1974 and was the recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 1978, '81, and '94, and the Academy Award for Art given by the American Academy of Arts & Letters in 2002.

Kendrick's work is in many important public collections, including: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, DC; Dallas Museum of Art, Texas; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania; Walker Art Center, Minnesota; and many others. Kendrick lives and works in New York City.

Dieu Donn 

Founded in 1976, Dieu Donn  is a nonprofit artist workspace dedicated to the creation, promotion, and preservation of contemporary art in the hand-papermaking process. In support of this mission, Dieu Donn  collaborates with artists and partners with the professional visual arts community.

The Lab Grant Program, initiated in 2000, provides mid-career artists with a twelve-day residency to collaborate in hand papermaking at Dieu Donn . Through this program, Dieu Donn  intends to produce exciting new work with artists who have a mature vision and long-standing commitment to artistic practice, thereby raising the profile of hand papermaking as an artmaking process and breaking new ground in the field. Past participants in the program include: Melvin Edwards, Dorthea Rockburne, (2000); Jane Hammond, Jim Hodges, (2001); Robert Cottingham, Polly Apfelbaum, (2002); Glenn Ligon, Kiki Smith (2003); Jessica Stockholder, Arturo Herrera, (2004); Mel Kendrick, Kate Shepherd, (2005); Tony Fitzpatrick, Do-ho Suh, (2006); Jon Kessler, and Ursula von Rydingsvard, (2007).

This is issue number 11 of the Dieu Donn  Lab Grant Program publication series documenting the residency program for mid-career artists.

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Cover

Mel Kendrick in the wet-floor studio at Dieu Donn , January 2008.

Inside cover

Polly Apfelbaum

Power to the Flower, 2007

stenciled linen pulp paint on abaca

8 x 10 inches (20.3 x 25.4 cm)

edition 9 of 50

