



Abstraction Machine (poison),
2010-13, cat. no. 1, detail, one of six (photo: T. Harrison)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The artist thanks Ethan Seltzer, Interim Director of the School of Art and Design, and Wm. Robert Buckner, Dean of the College of the Arts, for their support of this exhibition; Sue Taylor, Professor of Art History, for her thoughtful essay; Mary McVein and Travis Nikolai for their assistance with the installation; and April Ramirez, Arlington Clubhouse Manager, for facilitating all aspects of this project.

Design by Terry Fox, A+D Projects

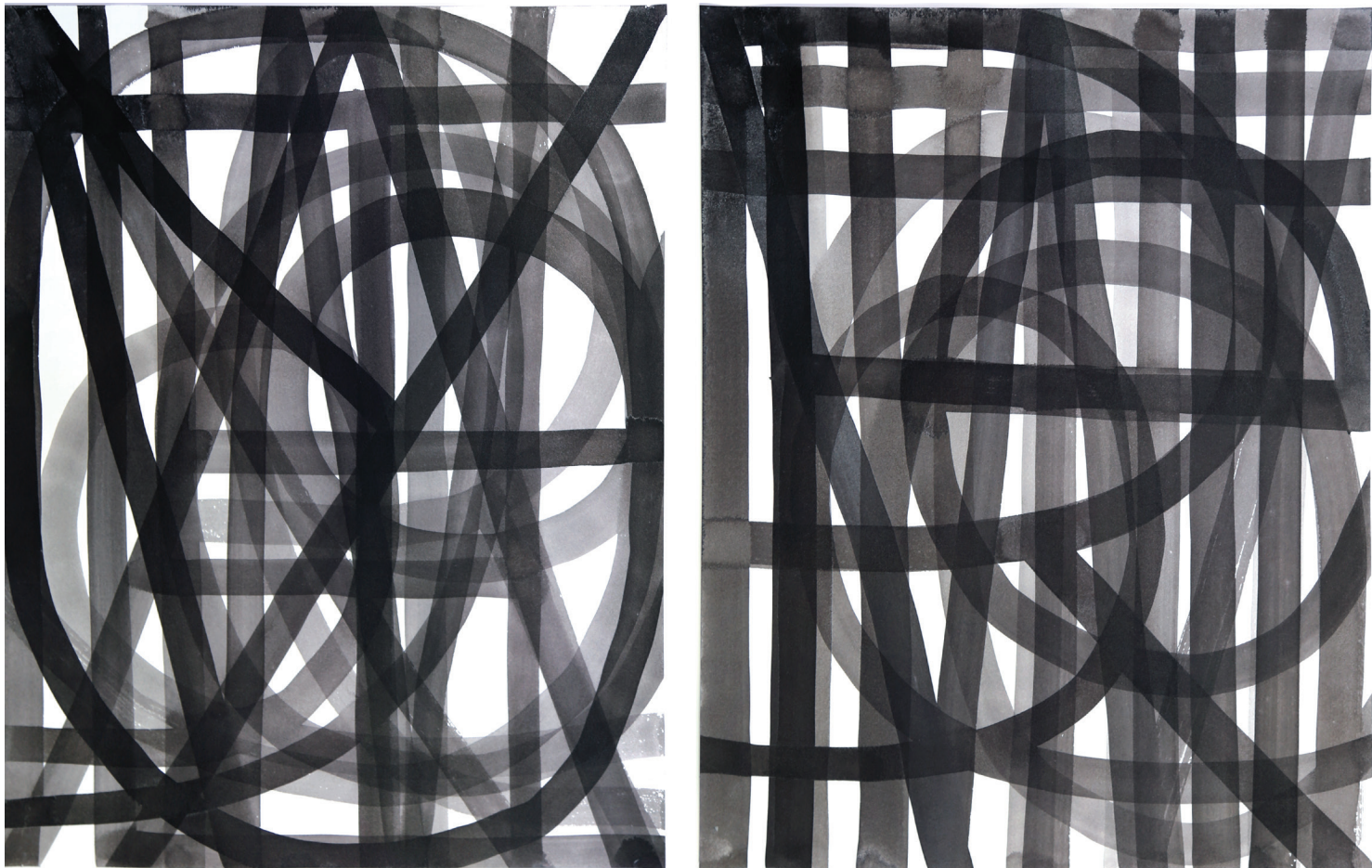
COVER IMAGE *Unalphabetic #3 (Uncrushable),*
2012, cat. no. 4 (photo: T. Harrison)

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Pat Boas
Encryption Machine

THE ARLINGTON CLUB
811 SW SALMON STREET
PORTLAND, OREGON
30 JANUARY–19 JUNE 2015



Yellow Triangle . . . with Three Thicknesses (RT Page 39), 2013, cat. no. 7, detail (photo: T. Harrison)

Pictura/Poesis/Pictura

by Sue Taylor

IN 2012, PAT BOAS was honored with the Ford Family Foundation's Golden Spot Award, which includes a residency at the Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts on the Umatilla Reservation in eastern Oregon. There she had the opportunity to collaborate with master printer Frank Janzen, producing the three lithographs chosen for this exhibition of works on paper at the Arlington Club. Boas refers to these Crow's Shadow prints as the "Unalphabetic" series (see cover). Though colorful and boldly gestural, they maintain a certain reticence, yielding their secrets only to proactive viewers who mentally trace out superimposed letters to discover the works' respective subtitles: "unabashed," "unbeholden," "uncrushable." It is an effective strategy for inviting and rewarding sustained viewer engagement: one looks, deciphers, reads, and finally ponders the possible meaning of the untangled messages. The words, all adjectives, have in common the negative

prefix "un," yet they describe positive qualities. One can imagine the series continuing—"undeterred," "unembarrassed," "unfazed"—to suggest a steadfast character empowered and autonomous. What begins as an abstract linguistic exercise yields a set of personal aspirations for courageous living.

The subsequent series of sumi ink drawings (above) evacuates color and incorporates whole phrases rather than single words. Letterforms pile up densely, bordering on the illegible. The art of calligraphy, where drawing or painting produces a text, is a point of reference here: meditating on the act of making meaningful marks on paper, Boas asks when calligraphy's inverse might occur, when writing might produce a painting. Indeed, one of these works spells out "in memory of writing," suggesting the balance has tipped, and the reader becomes a viewer—of an abstract painting. If Horace once urged poets to take painting as a model, proclaiming

"ut pictura poesis" (as painting is, so poetry should be), Boas upsets the terms of his age-old analogy. Rather than richly imagistic poetry, we have pictures infused with text. The text that underpins each work and also serves as its title, including *In Memory of Writing*, is borrowed from the title of another work of art—by Richard Tuttle, known for his subtle and poetic abstract paintings.

In Boas's "Abstraction Machine," the letters of a word become pictures, and the viewer is challenged to crack the code. One example from the series, the six-part *Abstraction Machine (poison)*, is on view here (back cover). With the six little paintings on paper arranged laterally on the wall, we "read" them from left to right as we would scan text on a page. To generate the apparently unrelated subjects of these pictures, the artist devised an ingenious system. She began by typing "poison" in the font called "webdings," which codes each letter as a graphic symbol: police car, boat, information icon (a lower case "i" inside a circle), question mark, another boat, and a solid circle (see figure 1). Boas then searched the Web for the names of those symbols to yield a set of digital images taken from the real world. So for instance, the webding for the second letter in "poison," "o," is a boat. A Web search for "boat" brings up photographic images of, among other things such as a sauceboat and a DVD of *Das Boot*, an actual yacht at sea. Finally, Boas chose from the images on the Web six motifs to translate into paintings. The process zigzags from word ("poison") to images (webdings), to words (search terms), and back into images again.

At stake here is the interplay between the textual and the pictorial, to be sure, but also between the digital image and the handmade painting. The logic of the webding code is cerebral; the paintings are sensuous. From the endless, photographically reproduced and mediated glut of the Internet, Boas enlists images for the unalienated, artisanal labor of representational painting. She does this, not in a spirit of nostalgia, but critically, from a position of resistance to the inexorable, potentially totalizing force of digital technology. Manipulating computer software and search engines in her encryption process, she gives painting the last word.



Figure 1. Webdings spelling the word "poison."

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

- 1** *Abstraction Machine (poison)*, 2010–13
Gouache on paper
Six sheets, each 12 × 9 in.
- 2** *Unalphabetic #1 (Unabashed)*, 2012
Color lithograph on paper
30 × 22 ½ in.
Edition of 12, a.p. 1/2
Published by Crow's Shadow Press, Pendleton, Ore.
Printed by Frank Janzen
- 3** *Unalphabetic #2 (Unbeholden)*, 2012
Color lithograph on paper
30 × 22 ½ in.
Edition of 12, a.p. 1/2
Published by Crow's Shadow Press, Pendleton, Ore.
Printed by Frank Janzen
- 4** *Unalphabetic #3 (Uncrushable)*, 2012
Color lithograph on paper
30 × 22 ½ in.
Edition of 12, a.p. 1/2
Published by Crow's Shadow Press, Pendleton, Ore.
Printed by Frank Janzen
- 5** *In Memory of Writing (RT Page 231)*, 2013
Sumi ink on paper
14 × 11 in.
- 6** *Two With Any To (RT Page 59)*, 2013
Sumi ink on paper
14 × 11 in.
- 7** *Yellow Triangle . . . with Three Thicknesses (RT Page 39)*, 2013
Sumi ink on paper
Two sheets, each 14 × 11 in.

All works lent by the artist, courtesy of the School of Art and Design, Portland State University. Prices by request, contact artdept@pdx.edu.