

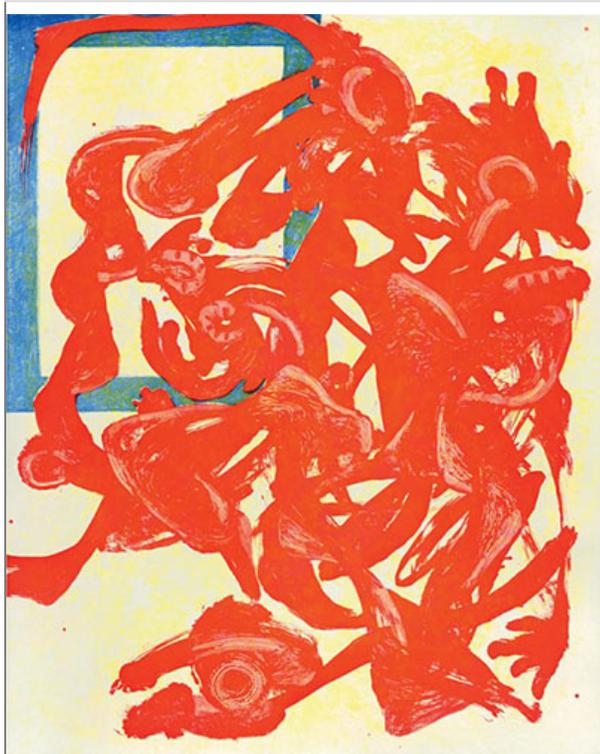
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# Charline von Heyl @ Crown Point Press

DECEMBER 18, 2014



Nightpack (Red, Yellow and Blue), 2014, 44

$\frac{3}{4}$  x 35  $\frac{3}{4}$

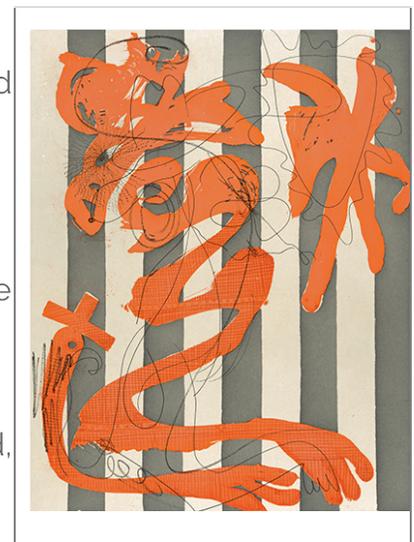
With her penchant for stylistic shifts and lexicon of visual moves, the German-born painter Charline von Heyl has been called one of the most influential artists working today. One of 17 artists represented in *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World* that just opened at MOMA, von Heyl is definitely having a moment. A suite of etchings on view at Crown Point Press is an opportune time to consider her graphic work.

von Heyl is nothing if not flexible — cancelling and subtracting intuitive moves, constructing unstable, open-ended formal juxtapositions into befuddling works that remain in a constant state of flux. We glimpse something almost recognizable before it dissolves into lyrical passages of

swooning paint, only to be stopped dead by a flat-footed block of pigment shoring up tumorous appendages. But second looks offer different experiences of the same work. The only constant in von Heyl's work is its continual renewal. She practices at the highest level, working against type, style and knowing. She interrupts herself and is not afraid to be clumsy, goofy or downright odd. She has referred to her process as "brutal detachment," erasing compositions by inserting "some other element into it or over it, something that refuses to fit until it is a fact."

Working with Crown Point von Heyl presents two suites of prints. *Nightpack* is a group of four large etchings, 44  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 35  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches on 52  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 42  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch sheets. In each, the central image is a roiling mass of vaguely

figurative forms. The work evokes Picasso's muscularity, as eyeballs, thick hands, and bent arms grapple for purchase and stability. In *Nightpack (Red, Yellow and Blue)* this consists of a central mass of red ink bursting from a frame of blue over a pitted washy ground of pale yellow, with red gestural flaps suggesting cockscombs and bird beaks, qualities that give the work a barnyard, hard scrapple urgency. von Heyl speaks of "our slapstick eternal now." And in *Nightpack (The Lost Weekend)* she inks a cartoony bottle into a four-fingered hand, bringing to mind scuffling scenarios of drunken benders.



Dust on White Shirt  
(Stripes), 2014, 24 x 19

Six small etchings, 24 x 19 inches on 31 x 25 inch sheets, are more complex. Each plate begins with a loose, gestural line drawing. A swirling dance of line forms a figurative shape possessed of a fedora, breast, hand and curling tale. It is beast and human, male and female, a polymorphous actor on a shallow stage. *Snoopy (Black V)* keeps the central drawing clean, with only a black boldfaced V printed over a shimmering linear sun. The other three versions, *Schatzi*, *Letranger*, and *Schmutzi* are overlaid with painterly blots and daubs adding richness and increased movement to an already active idea. The eye is drawn up and around the swirling surface of the plate to end at the bottom right with a disquieting open rectangle edged with what seem to be teeth, like an animal trap or gaping bestial jaws.

Beginning with the same amorphous linear drawing, *Dust on a White Shirt (Evil Eye)* and *Dust on a White Shirt (Stripes)* incorporate additional images drawn in the same gawky

manner that von Heyl used in the *Nightpack* prints, as well as a ground of gray vertical bars. These prints are autonomous abstractions referring to nothing other than themselves. They are pure open-handed exercises in graphic mark making. Joyful, confounding and moody, this is a small, but important show of a singular artist working in her prime.

–JULIA COUZENS

*Charline von Heyl: Ten New Etchings @ [Crown Point Press](#) through January 2, 2014.*

Watch [a video of Charline von Heyl](#) at work.

### **About the Author:**

Julia Couzens is a Sacramento-based artist and writer whose work has been widely shown, most recently at the di Rosa Preserve. Her drawings and hybrid objects are in museum and public collections throughout the U.S. These include the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts; Berkeley Art Museum; Oakland Museum; Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina; and Yale University. She lives and works on Merritt Island in the Sacramento River delta.

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