

Artist Statement – Jason Scuilla 2009

In 2007 I was awarded a University Research Grant enabling me to return to Rome, Italy for a two-month residency at the Il Quadrato Di Omega Print shop. I am currently working on a body of artwork inspired by the Ancient Etruscan pottery, Byzantine mosaics, as well as sculptures and frescoes of the Medieval and Renaissance I studied during this residency. Originally based on actual prints, frescoes, and sculptures from Italian art, the imagery has since developed into a personal challenge to express the complex emotions of power, art-making, and sexual interaction.

Included in this body is a series of erotic large-scale etchings and sumi ink carvings on wood panels. Beginning with no preliminary drawings, I explore the wood-grain of the birch plywood, and the smoke patterns in the grounded etching plates until it suggests to me an erotic interaction between two figures. Originally inspired by Bernini's Pluto and Proserpina sculpture in the Villa Borghese, and the intertwined nudes of Michelangelo's Last Judgment, the imagery has since developed into a personal challenge to express the complex emotional power of sexual interaction.

Another suite of prints included in this body of work is a series of religious etchings inspired by Italian frescos. The catalysts for these prints are specific Italian Renaissance master works of art that have an emotional impact on me. I start by educating myself on the religious narrative depicted in the fresco, then study the formal elements of composition, in order to simplify the image down to its essential, emotion producing elements. I extract these elements from the work, and use them to create my own unique image. For example, my print, "Villa with Spirits (The Dance of Salome)" began from a preliminary study of the Massolino's St. Catherine Cycle in San Clemente, a small church in Rome, Italy. Gradually, through hours of drawing and re-drawing, the piece was transformed into an image of Salome, just after her infamous dance for King Herod. Through my process, the once claustrophobic interior space of Masolino's composition has been transformed into a fragmented roman ruin open to the elements. In the background a decapitated John the Baptist can now be seen rising to the heavens.

The Monumental fragments of Italian sculpture in Rome have inspired several prints in this body of work. Most recently, the large foot fragment in the courtyard of the Capitoline Museum has influenced my image making. While in Rome I was able to visit the Domus Aureas, Emperor Nero's pleasure palace, and learned the interesting story of the Colossus of Nero. According to legend, a colossal statue of the malicious roman emperor Nero once stood where the colosseum stands today. It is believed that Nero ordered the burning of peasant housing developments in order to make room for his colossal portrait. Inspired by this and other chilling stories of Nero's reign as emperor, I'm in the process of creating a series of intense, gnarly, foot fragments of what I imagine the foot of Nero could have looked like, if it were to be a reflection on his character. I have taken imaginative liberties on these images, enlarging the foot to an impossibly large scale and disregarding the original idealized roman form for a more grotesque interpretation.

Throughout Roman history, artists have chosen to depict emotional power through imagery of sexuality, religion, and art creation. Today, the United States of America is the most powerful, dominant society, and shares many of the same vices as Ancient Rome. As an American artist of Italian descent, I choose to investigate these themes through printmaking, an art form famous for challenging the accepted norms of society. My practice follows this established tradition in the history of printmaking, best described by Frank and Dorothy Getlein in *The Bite of The Print*. "...many a first rate printmaker has deceived himself and others into thinking that what he really wants to do is reform our vices. He doesn't at all. He wants to point them out, laugh at them, weep at them, shrug his shoulders at them, but above all to insist that they are there."

Getlein, Frank, and Dorothy Getlein. The Bite of the Print. New York, NY: Bramhal House. 30.