



Prix de Print No. 6

Ann Aspinwall: Fortuny

Juried by Peter Power

The Art in Print Prix de Print is a bi-monthly, open, juried competition.¹ Entries are submitted digitally along with an optional artist's statement. They are reviewed by an invited outside juror who is given no identifying information about the artist.

This iteration of the Prix de Print has been judged by Peter Power.

Fortuny (2014)

Suite of three screenprints. 21 1/4 x 28 3/4 inches each image, 28 1/2 x 35 1/8 inches each sheet. Edition of 10. Printed and published by Aspinwall Editions, New York. \$800 each, \$2,100 the set.

There is a certain engaging familiarity to Ann Aspinwall's suite of three screenprints. They suggest details or studies of images previously encountered but yet not fully registered.

Each of the three prints is a diptych of vertical rectangles in bold, vibrating colors. Though Prix de Print jurying is, of necessity, done through digital images, I can imagine that from a distance they would read as luminous, almost monochromatic blocks, reminiscent of some of the work of Ellsworth Kelly or his transatlantic peers Imi Knoebel or Blinky Palermo.

At such a remove they catch our attention like public graphics, generously sharing a known language of color and form. This familiar territory invites a closer look, which reveals a nuanced and kinetic sense of shimmer and fold. The colors and lines are hot, electric and chemical—almost post-photographic, a flash akin to an X-ray.

Although these works employ an established visual language, the artist avoids being derivative or conversely overstretching for singular originality. Acknowledging the history and forebears behind the work, she writes that the series "celebrates the colors and materials of Mariano Fortuny."

The Spanish-born Fortuny (1871–1949) was a multifaceted designer and admirer of Richard Wagner. His operatic unity of score, lyric, dance, painting and set design became a design principle for Fortuny. He was a lighting engineer, architect, inventor, director and set designer. Successful design, he insisted, is the result of a designer's knowledge of materials and ability to work at all stages of the design and manufacturing process.

In the late 1880s Fortuny moved to Venice, where he founded the fashion and fabric

design house for which he is best remembered (and which still operates under the family name). Crisp, lasting pleats were a hallmark of his garments and form the impetus for the ribbon-like line that vibrates throughout Aspinwall's images.

Although expertly produced, these prints are refreshingly absent of any contemporary high-tech hoopla or excessive labor. One hand-drawn stencil and a flat per panel: two colors, simple and effective. This simplicity gives the work a quiet authority and saves it from the shortcomings of a considerable amount of contemporary printed work. These images are not trying to say too much.

Series and nuanced variations within a defined format are strategies most commonly associated with modernism. In Aspinwall's suite this strategy makes me think of another genre of visual art and design that is seldom considered as critically substantive in our secular age: popular ecclesiastical decorative arts. Each of these prints is in itself a diptych, and the suite displayed in full gives us six variations on a theme. Their optical radiance call to mind stained glass. This might be an indulgent stretch, but I am thinking of Gerhard Richter's recent digital prints and how they probably owe as much to his stained-glass work in Cologne Cathedral (2007) as they do to his paintings. I suppose it is all circular in the end.

I like these prints for what they are, how they are made, where they come from and how they allow me to wander off in disparate directions with just the necessary amount of suggested direction. ■

Notes:

1. There is no entry fee, but entries must be associated with an active Art in Print subscription.

Peter Power is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Printmedia at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Ann Aspinwall: Fortuny

Page 2



Above: Ann Aspinwall, *Fortuny III* (2014). Below: *Fortuny I* and *Fortuny II*.

