

In 1999, I walked into the lobby of the Lannan Foundation in Santa Fe, New Mexico, with James Turrell. I made a comment to Turrell about how beautiful I found the light patterns on the wall. He smiled and explained to me that I was looking at a wall painting by Kate Shepherd, not light coming through the doors or windows. This experience was my introduction to Kate Shepherd's art. Although I instantly knew I had to work with this artist, it would be another ten years before we mounted our first solo show of her work in our gallery. Over the ensuing years, we have included Shepherd's work in several group exhibitions and mounted four solo exhibitions to date. We have shown prints, drawings, collages, paintings, and most recently, a wall painting.

Our current exhibition premieres a new body of unique prints in a series called *Protest Posters* that the artist has continually developed since 2007. In collaboration with master printer Luther Davis, Shepherd conceived of a strategy whereby serially printing the same image in subsequent layers would yield infinite variations of color and form. By changing the registration and orientation of the paper, as well as the color and opacity of the inks, each print in a series becomes a uniquely multilayered form. Creating unique prints is certainly a novel use of the screenprint medium, which is best known for its flat graphic effects frequently printed in large editions, as in Andy Warhol's prints. In each iteration of *Protest Posters*, Shepherd has used color to evoke a wide range of references, spanning from the intensity of the Texas sun to Sister Corita Kent's prints of the 1960s.

The artist's first foray into an all-grisaille palette followed her most ambitious explorations of color in her *Protest Posters* series such as *Nina Simone Sings Pirate Jenny* (2019) and *Corita's*

Sister (2021). Shepherd titled these works *News*, evoking commonalities between the rows of headlines in palpable black ink that cascade down the vertical format of a printed newspaper, which she reads daily. The *News* prints are printed in an exceptionally nuanced tonal range of gray semitransparent inks. The thought that this restrained palette might be too limited in scope gave Shepherd pause, and it would be six years before she dedicated herself to executing these works in the spring of 2021. I thank my colleague Josh Pazda for helping me understand Shepherd's process and rigorous exploration of gray which manifests a sequence and variation that is rhythmic and luminous. The black ink upon the white paper seems to suggest dimensional space with a source of light emanating from within it.

The subtleties of these black-and-white compositions make me think of aquatint etchings, and particularly James Turrell's *First Light* (1989–90)—a portfolio of twenty aquatints that depict images of the artist's projected light installations from the late 1960s.¹ In these prints, Turrell consciously utilized the whiteness of the sheet of paper to emulate the light in his projections. I called Shepherd and asked her if she knew this series. She said she did not, but that she was familiar with Goya's much earlier masterpiece of eighty aquatints, *Los Caprichos* (1797–98). These fantastical figurative images may seem an unlikely comparison, but they nonetheless share a sophisticated command of light and dark graphic expression with Shepherd's prints. Additionally, the suggestion that Goya veiled or concealed the content of his satirical images to avoid punishment from the Spanish government resonates with Shepherd's metaphorical sublimation of news subjects into total abstraction.

Hiroshi Sugimoto's minimal black-and-white photographs of seascapes, which are simply images of water and air, also come to mind. Sugimoto's comment that each time he views the sea, he "embarks on a voyage of seeing" seems an apt summary for the experience of looking at Shepherd's prints. Whether we know the title or reference points of these works before or after we first see them, it is the act of seeing and the effect of the light coming out of the dark that stay with us.

Hiram Butler

Note

1. Immediately following the publication of *First Light*, the portfolio was exhibited at three consecutive venues: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (July 26–November 13, 1990), Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, TX (November 17–December 30, 1990), and Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA (February 8–June 30, 1991).