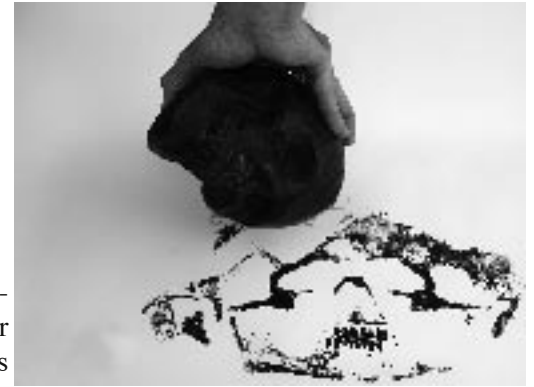


# The Complete Interview with artist Marcelo Balzaretti.

By Jennifer D Anderson



One of the most interesting things about working at Hiromi Paper International is meeting and talking with the artists who come into our store for paper. Last year when Marcelo Balzaretti came in I was excited to see images of his work. He combines very basic, if not primitive, printmaking processes and contemporary video technology, as he uses prints as the cells of an animated sequence. Shown on an LCD screen on the gallery wall his fish print animations, flicker and move like a real fish moving through water. Marcelo lives and works in Mexico, but his work has been shown in various locations around the world. The following is an e-interview between Marcelo and myself:

Question:

What is your training in printmaking and when did you learn about and start making fish prints?

Answer:

I got involved in printmaking in 1997 at the National School of Visual Arts of the National Autonomous University of Mexico after finishing a B.F.A. I started my training with courses in woodcut, etching and engraving. Three years ago, while working on a series of prints from three-dimensional inked matrixes such as reproductions of a sheep's head, a skull or my own face and body, I found the book *Gyotaku The Japanese Art of Fishprinting* by Yoshio Hiyama and after reading the first pages decided to start working on it.

Question:

If I am correct, you make prints and then create animations using those prints. Where did this idea come from and what made you pursue it?

Answer:

Since the beginning, I focused my research in a way to bridge the gap between existing conditions in Mexican printmaking and the contemporary art context. I combined medias such as sculpture, printmaking, and cinematography so that one media adds significance to the other by revealing something about the other's nature.

For example realizing that no matter which workshop they come from, 50 prints from an edition will always have differences. Spread or stacked the prints can easily be seen as a sequence. I display this sequence as a moving image to reveal something about printmaking's nature: a whole consisting of different moments or each print as unique. Some animations are made from copies printed traditionally as an edition; others are altered intentionally on the plates or inked in different ways.

Question:

I also see your work as an interesting dialogue between cultures and processes. Would you agree with this and if so does it affect your final product?

Answer:

In my recent work I explored printmaking's capability to produce an image by inking three-dimensional objects and stamping them on paper. By pushing the printing processes to a confluence zone, the photographic likeness of the so produced image vanishes resulting in an almost automatist drawing method.

I started working on three-dimensional matrixes while reviewing printmaking history and discovering the Shroud of Turin, simultaneously a monoprint, relic and icon that served as a departure-point image for the occidental visual culture. When an inked object is registered on a paper or fabric, some areas of the so produced image are almost photographic, while others remain like bold drawing or simple ink blots. I liked the fact that judged for its results, without the need of pushing it to the

boundaries or combining it with any other media, the process itself remains in a liminal zone within photography, drawing and printmaking.

After researching the Turin Shroud, I felt Gyotaku fish printing was very close to my work, not only for its apparent similarities, but because I noticed that in his book preface Yoshio Hiyama defends fish printing by comparing it with photography. He attributes artistic value to its ability to exactly register the size of a fish in a beautiful manner. The author conceived Gyotaku as a register method comparable with photography, it means that he found a similar connection to the one I did in the Shroud series.

Fish printing offers me the possibility to continue exploring this process free of prevailing concepts in a way that let me decide a complete new set of references to work with.

Question:

What inspires you to get into the studio and make art?



Answer:

For me, art's importance is in its ability to establish new relationships with the world we live in.

When I started in the arts, I got related with contemporary art topics and art statements that establish personal project, language and the specific mechanism of a medium as a work source. The first thing I found that could be modified by art was some aspect of our relationship with art itself.

I wanted to combine the development of technical skill and the knowledge of a medium's particularities with the search of a personal method. I decided on printmaking to prove my ability to establish strategies capable of producing new relationships in the medium itself.

First interested in its ability to register surfaces and to produce images by mechanical means I trained for two years in a traditional printmaking workshop while studying its history. Then I spent five years exploring different aspects of printmaking, expanding my research on the particularities of the medium, both in material, formal and conceptual way. Elements of other media such as video or installation were later incorporated.

Slowly I have approached the printmaking aspects that initially interested me the most: the possibility of obtaining a register by a mechanical way. It led me to processes such as fumage, frottage, decalcomania, inkblots and other automatist m□

also to portray social, political and individual issues, related with events of every day life. I combine drawing, installation, video and animation, some times on specific site projects.

For example in Gyotaku series, decorative images are underlain by economical and social issues. Simple allegories like "big fish eats small fish" reflect diminishing, global market and social organization. I am making art in specific ways that discusses not only its inherent elements such as the role of the process but the possibility of using art to describe or even establish new relations on specific issues of the world in which we live.

Question:

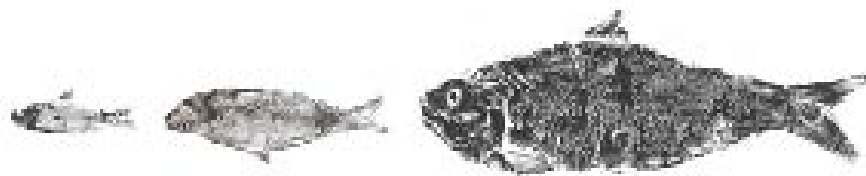
Where is your studio located? And do you like many printmakers, print in a communal shop? If so can does this impact you as an artist/ creator?

Answer:

The contact with artists, theoreticians and technical advisors I got while my training in school communal shops was a main impulse that helped me to develop new aspects of my work. After that I spent some time with friends producing group prints in large polyethylene rolls to intervene spaces.

Sharing ideas, receiving suggestions and confronting points of view permitted me to clearly state my concepts. It helped me to establish networks and get involved in exhibitions and collaborative projects. The following years have been a period of reflection, in my studio in Mexico City I have a press that I use to produce work proofs or explore specific issues, but leave editioning to established printshops.

I enjoy going out of the studio and getting involved with the people of different places. The fish prints project is being developed in Puerto Vallarta with the help of fishermen whom generously provide me with fishes.



Question:

Can you speak to the papers you use and why you prefer them?

Answer:

I visited Hiromi Paper to get the Japanese papers recommended in the book “The Japanese Art of fish printing” with the aim to develop skill in the different methods described by Yoshio Hiyama, and the quality and variety I found there really haunted me. I spent a day to decide on twenty different papers to use.

Thinner ones are the best to print Gyotaku because they suit the fish volume when wet and doesn't tear because of the large fibers they are made of. Even though some are almost transparent they still hold ink well, and produce a feeling of an immaterial floating image. (Editors note: We recommend HM-2 Kozo White and HM-3 Mino-gami.) On the other hand heavier and larger papers are excellent to back different prints and produce larger compositions. (Editor's note: We recommend HM-57 Yukyu-shi Thick and MM-7 Kozo-shi Thick.)

Question:

Can you comment on the process you use for Gyotaku, is it a direct or indirect method?

Answer:

The skull, the sheep head, my face or body were printed with water based printing ink, the first fishprints were printed with sumi ink, both with the direct method.

At the present time I work on the direct method with sumi or printing ink and have began exploring the expressive possibilities of the indirect method with sumi ink.

Instead of the prevailing illustration style I use the indirect method in a more dramatic way, this produces more complex images and offers me subtle moods in a way opposed to the direct method ability to straight carry the message.

In the aim to portray social and economic issues a taste of the long abandoned Mexican Printmaking Tradition remains, I don't ignore that a coincidence in the theme may be found, but in my work there are no goods nor bads, there are no correct policies or utopias. Refusing anecdotic I just present the thing raw as it is, there are many different species in the ocean, big, small, some times I order them in a way they produce meaning, in others I leave the public to compare them and arrive to their own conclusions.



Images:

Page 1: Marcelo printing a skull in his direct manner

Page 2: A print of Marcelo's body

Page 3 Upper: A print of three fishes

Page 3 Lower: Marcelo's animation as displayed on LCD screens in a gallery.