

## EMILY MASON *The Intuitive Print*

RUSSELL JANIS | MAY 14 – JUNE 14 2015

BY JESSICA HOLMES

“If you ponder a rose for too long you won’t budge in a storm.” The work of octogenarian artist Emily Mason shares roots with those words by poet Mahmoud Darwish, on the importance of adhering to one’s intuition. For Mason, who has been making abstract work for over five decades, intuition has always been the catalyst. Though primarily known as a painter, she has also been making prints since the late 1980s, and in a small but lush show of these lesser-known works, currently on view at Russell Janis in Williamsburg, her instinctual acuity is on full display.

Mason was vexed by those earliest attempts at printmaking, for she felt the conventional methods, which by nature must be carefully controlled in order to achieve the desired results, were at odds with her own creative process. She has said that the most important component of her practice is to “get the mind out of the way,” and that a work is complete when “you get a little feeling in your stomach.” After doing some research, she became aware of the printing technique developed by Joan Miró in the 1960s, whereby the artist applied a mixture of carborundum and glue directly to a plate, allowing for much more flexibility of expression. With this as a starting point, Mason evolved her own method, eventually painting the mixture onto plexiglas plates—which had the benefit of allowing light to shine through—and experimenting with the eventual composition of each individual print by stacking the different plates atop each other. Mason frequently layered another plexiglas plate onto an older individual print weeks, months, or occasionally even years later, changing its composition as the day’s mood suited her. Close consideration of a print reveals the fruits of



Emily Mason, “Untitled” (2001). Carborundum monoprint on paper, 18 × 19”. Courtesy of Russell Janis.

this layering, and a careful viewer can occasionally see the reuse of plates in disparate works, done in varying colors or situated in a different orientation. Physically manifested, time itself is a component of each print, along with the paper, carborundum, and ink.

The results of these efforts are singular prints (each work at Russell Janis is a monotype—because of her working process, Mason does not edition them) that have all the mystery and emotion of any painting. Mason uses color as if she is exploding kaleidoscopes or Rorschach tests on the page. Her mastery is so deft that limiting the discussion to visual terms does the work an injustice. In “Untitled” (1998) rich swathes of marine blues are edged by phosphorescent green, and one has the sensation of the body meeting the ocean’s bracing, plankton-laced water. In another print, “Untitled” (2001), a film of periwinkle is layered beneath a shocking, electric yellow that can be felt in your teeth, like a sugary lemon meringue. These works,



Emily Mason, “Untitled” (1998). Carborundum monoprint on paper, 18 × 19”. Courtesy of Russell Janis.

hung across from each other on opposite walls of the gallery resonate, as traces of the same plexiglas plate used several years apart in each instance, are visible in the compositions of both prints.

“Iced Over” (2010), is a tempestuous standout. Over swirls of tangerine and black that are reminiscent of a tiger’s stripes, a whorl of gunmetal gray seems to rise from the bottom of the paper. The foggy opacity seems intent on blotting out the vibrant color beneath, which in turn struggles to pierce its shroud. Dense gray and lucid orange are locked in a churning and restive *pas de deux* that thumps in the gut. Meanwhile, you can feel—without touching—the fuzziness of “Untitled” (1999), its deep maroon and magenta both blended with and slashed by a swath of purple-gray. Anxious to join the eyes in this game of looking, the other senses are pricked. Time with Emily Mason’s work could make synesthetes of us all. ☞

## SARAH PETERS

ELEVEN RIVINGTON | APRIL – MAY 17 2015

BY SARA CHRISTOPH

In the mythological tales of ancient Greece, the power of a “seer” was her ability to see through time—both a blessing and a curse. The visions oracles gave to the community came at a cost. Ostracized or mocked as madwomen, seers could never comfortably inhabit the present. Cassandra, who infamously prophesized the fall of Troy, was cursed to be perpetually dismissed and enslaved when her proclamation came true; Tiresias, who lived as both a man and a woman, was later struck blind by Juno for siding with Jupiter. To see too much was to be unstable: living between the past and the future, between transcendent sight and blindness.



Sarah Peters. Installation view. Courtesy of Eleven Rivington.

A similar slippage of time and sight occurs in the work of Brooklyn-based artist Sarah Peters. As sculpture, the work flickers between multiple eras—at once ancient, modernist, and hyper-postmodern. With her recent pieces in bronze—the subject of a small exhibition at Eleven Rivington—Peters marvelously adopts the stylized stateliness of ancient Mediterranean statuary. Her cast, life-size heads carry delicately groomed hair atop elegantly structured faces, and though eyes are left as cavities, each head somehow maintains the clear, forthright gaze of an emperor or goddess. The bronze busts could fit within the Roman sculpture court of the Metropolitan Museum, or, with their chic beards and tinge of disaffection, at a coffee shop on Bedford Avenue.

The academic bust is a staple in Peters’s practice, a rich foundation from which she continues to spin idiosyncratic twists of form. Unlike Greco-Roman portraiture or American neoclassicism—art historical periods which clearly enthrall the artist—these sculptures do not reference specific historical leaders. Rather, each bust adopts the generic, aristocratic posture historically reserved for men of influence (say, Augustus or George Washington), then quietly subverts.

Take “Portrait of a Bearded Man with Triangular Base” (2015), an older, philosopher-type, balding with a long, stratified and symmetrical beard. Seen in profile, the angular force of the beard thrusts the head forward and echoes the force of the futurist sculptures of Umberto Boccioni. Instead of machine-like arms and legs projecting the body into space, he’s all beard, and the energy seems to originate within the head as if in a trance. Boccioni and his war-minded compatriots appropriated the idealized bodies of Greco-Roman art for their masculine vigor; here, Peters presents the ancient body as a capsule of the mystical—elevated by a different incarnation of force.

Then there’s “Portrait with Open Mouth” (2014) the most audacious of the series. A female head with



Sarah Peters, “Portrait with Open Mouth” (2014). Bronze, 12½ × 7 × 8”. Courtesy of Eleven Rivington.

perfectly thinned eyebrows and precisely waved hair, she is a flawless exaggeration of Imperial Roman portraiture. Yet it is her mouth, which hangs agape, that catapults her into the now. Burnished in bronze, her mouth mimics one found on a sex doll: smooth, symmetrical, and cavernous. (It is notable that only the female figures have open mouths, the countenance of each man is clenched and covered by a formidable beard.) Peters’s sly turn of appropriations, from Imperial Rome to fetish object, is savvy and intelligent.

In the workshops of first century Rome, the eyes of statues were often filled with glass or ivory in an effort to bring the bronze likeness closer to life. In Peters’s iteration, the eyes of each sculpture perform the opposite—as gaping holes on all but one, their absence emphatically points to a hollowed interior. Neither buried in the past nor a mere figment of the future, Peters’s sculpted heads gesture toward an enviable fluidity that is timeless. ☞