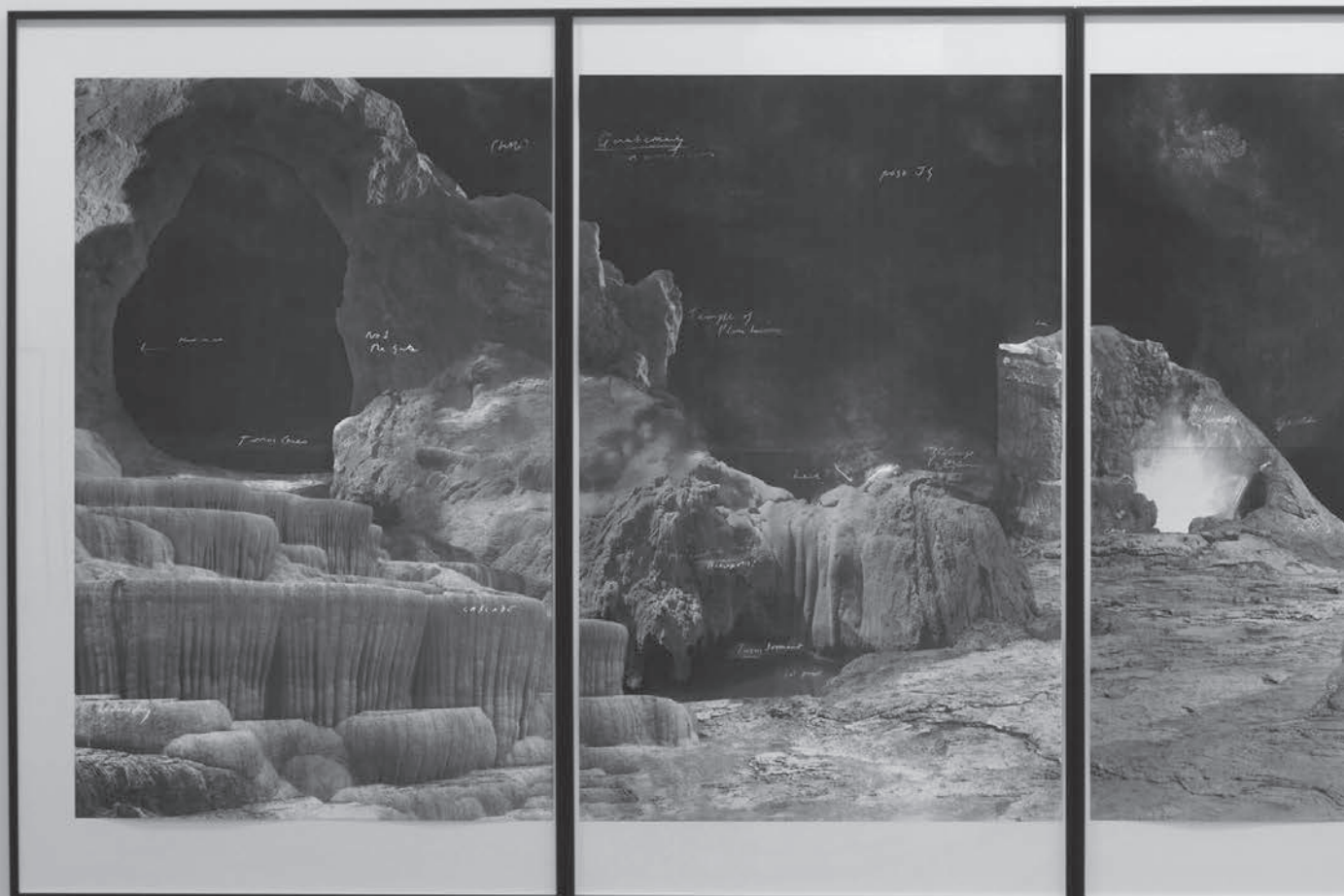


INTERNATIONAL

Printing Danishly



Tacita Dean, *Quaternary*,
2014, photogravure, 199 x 647.5 cm (paper), edition of 8, printed
by Julie Dam, Thomas Jennions & Mette Ulstrup. Published by
BORCH Editions. Image courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris



Kirrily Hammond spends time at a Copenhagen print studio with an impressively international scope.



Trine Søndergaard, *Untitled 2*,
2021, photogravure, 70 x 70 cm (plate),
edition of 18, printed by Julie Dam,
Thomas Jennions & Mette Ulstrup.
Published by BORCH Editions.
Image courtesy BORCH Editions

The print studio of Borch Editions

occupies one floor of an old chocolate factory in the Amager district of Copenhagen. It is an expansive and well-equipped space with seven presses, a huge aquatint box that fills an entire room, beautiful light-filled workspaces, a small residency studio for visiting artists and a print gallery. A long central corridor leads into the main studio and is filled with exhibition invitations, photos, working drawings, state proofs, maps and postcards—all ephemera from a long and productive history of working with artists since the 1970s. In that time the founder and owner, Niels Borch Jensen, has gathered a small and professional team around him, including three master printers: Julie Dam, Tom Jennions and Mette Ulstrup. The gallery regularly features exhibitions of recently published work and is complemented by a second gallery in Berlin.

The kitchen is the heart of the studio, where everyone gathers to share a generous Danish lunch of smørrebrød (open sandwiches on ryebread with toppings such as herrings, eggs or salami), and to discuss upcoming print projects, the latest politics or art world news. Artists, curators or collectors often visit and join

the warm hospitality. You get the sense that this has been an important part of the daily routine for many years—memorabilia from past artists-in-residence fills the walls and thankyou notes cover the fridge.

Borch Jensen first established a small print studio in the centre of Copenhagen in 1979, with the aim to create ambitious, experimental prints with artists he admired. One of his early projects was with Keith Haring. The pair decided 'to make the biggest print they could', resulting in the huge 140 x 240 cm etching *Medusa Head* (1986). Borch Jensen soon found that his burgeoning specialisation in large-scale prints meant he needed more space, so in 1988 he moved the studio to its current location on Prags Boulevard. From the beginning, Borch Jensen formed enduring working relationships with artists from around the world. Tacita Dean, Georg Baselitz, Fiona Tan, Per Kirkeby, Trine Søndergaard and Julie Mehretu, among many others, have made repeat visits to the studio to create significant bodies of work that are editioned and published by Borch Editions. Often the connection to these artists has happened organically—Georg Baselitz learnt of the studio through the work of Per Kirkeby, and Tacita Dean was

introduced to Borch Jensen and the team by Thomas Demand.

Baselitz has been making prints with the studio for more than thirty years. Usually Borch Jensen and/or Mette Ulstrup make an annual pilgrimage to Baselitz's home and studio in Germany. They spend an intensive week proofing with him and then return to Copenhagen with plates to be finalised and editioned in the following months. Over the years, Borch Jensen and Ulstrup have developed a close working relationship with Baselitz and now have an intimate knowledge of his practice. They seem to be able to pre-empt the specific plate tone or aquatint that Baselitz will want before the proofs are sent to the artist for final approval to commence editioning. There are more than 300 of his prints in the studio archive and these provide an opportunity to study the development of his work and to see how his imagery evolves in each series of etchings.

Another artist with a long-term relationship with Borch Editions is British artist Tacita Dean, who first collaborated with the studio in 2001. Since that time, she has produced more than seventeen significant series of prints with the studio. I have long



been an admirer of Dean's work since I first saw it in depth at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) in Melbourne in 2009. A lithograph from the archive, *Film Still for ACCA* (2013), is part of a series of prints that stemmed from a film commissioned for the Tate Modern titled *FILM* (2011). These works feature sprocket holes running either side of the central images, in a direct reference to the analogue technology that generated them. Analogue technologies are central to Dean's artistic practice, so it is no surprise that printmaking is an integral part of her oeuvre. The techniques of photogravure and offset lithography enable her to reproduce poetic found imagery or stills from her films, often layered with handwritten scripts, to create rich, tactile prints that have a feeling of immediacy.

In August 2020, Dean's enormous photogravure *Quaternary* (2014) was displayed as part of the Chart art fair.¹ Measuring 199 x 647.5 cm, the work was leant against a wall, unglazed and daunting in its beauty, ambition and vulnerability. The work features a volcanic landscape created from found nineteenth century albumen photographs of Yellowstone National Park. The grand black and white

vista is an apocalyptic scene, layered with the artist's white notations scrawled across the image. Photographs and texts were combined in a technically demanding process into one seamless photogravure. Without a protective layer of glass over the print, the dark matt surface is reminiscent of a blackboard and the white text appears to be written in chalk, to be erased at any moment. The artist's hand is ever-present in this otherworldly image.

Niels Borch Jensen is now in his sixties and has an expansive knowledge of printmaking. Nevertheless, he continues to experiment with techniques and refine his print processes. Most recently he began to use discarded commercial printer toner in addition to rosin in his huge room-sized aquatint box. This has improved control of the melting process and made the aquatints more robust in acid. To consider using toner was quite a leap of faith, especially considering the size of the aquatint box. It is quite a spectacle to see the whole box rotating on its axis to activate the particles for an aquatint. Borch Jensen had to climb inside to sweep out some of the existing rosin before adding toner. He would like to trial the use of Picco resin next. This is a synthetic product that

(above)

Julie Mehretu, *Fourth Seal (R 6:7)*, 2020, From the portfolio *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, photogravure, aquatint, open bite, sugar lift aquatint, 170 x 208 cm (paper), edition of 18, printed by Julie Dam, Thomas Jennions & Mette Ulstrup. Published by BORCH Editions. Image courtesy BORCH Editions

produces a finer aquatint and does not dissolve in alcohol, making it suitable for use with photogravure.

Borch Jensen has a practical, open and curious attitude with everything he does, and he encourages artists to experiment while making prints. Some of the artists do not have a printmaking background, and this can be an advantage as it facilitates open-minded and varied approaches to making prints. Technical expertise is always on hand when needed, from Borch Jensen and the three master printers. Borch Jensen has made some very helpful videos for the website, with some of the clearest explanations of the different techniques that I have heard.²

My connection to the studio began in June 2020 with a long-term project to catalogue the extensive archive of prints. Every edition produced in the studio includes a workshop proof that has been retained for the archive. The first archive of workshop proofs was accumulated between 1979 and 1987, and subsequently donated to the Vejle Kunstmuseum with support from the New Carlsberg Foundation.³ The Vejle Kunstmuseum lies about 240 kilometres west of Copenhagen and holds the country's largest collection of graphic arts outside of the National Gallery of Denmark.

Borch Jensen is looking to find a home in a museum collection for the second archive of more than 2000 prints that date from 1988 to the present. It is a collection with an international scope, demonstrating the broad reach of Borch Jensen, with work by close to 150 artists from across Europe, America and Mexico. This archive needs to be thoroughly documented before it can be offered to a museum—hence my role at the studio. I have the fascinating task of studying each one and recording details about the technique and processes, as well as the specific printers and publishing information. At times, my own printmaking and curatorial background has not been enough to identify the more unorthodox techniques. Fortunately, Borch Jensen has an amazing ability to recall how each print was made, as well as supply an anecdote or two about the artists and their time in the studio.⁴ This has proven invaluable for cataloguing the archive, as well as intriguing to learn more about some of the artists, especially those from the surrounding Scandinavian art scene such as Tal R, Olafur Eliasson or Elmgreen & Dragset.

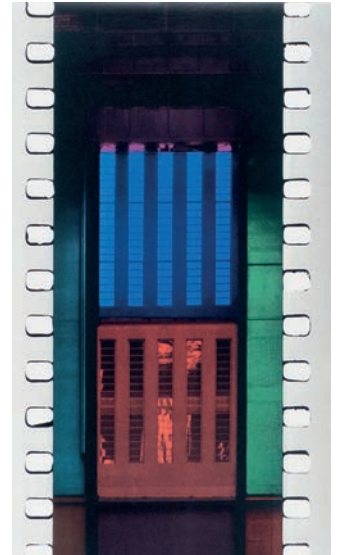
I have enjoyed being amid the familiar sights, sounds and smells of a print studio, and watching the master printers making work. There is usually a calm atmosphere, which enables the intense focus and attention to detail required for precision editioning. I have also had the occasional opportunity to use the equipment to make



some etchings of my own—it is a privilege to have this kind of access alongside advice from some very experienced printers. An additional bonus is to be surrounded by friendly Danes who are helping me improve my Danish. Fortunately, the archive database is in English and my cataloguing process is not slowed down by the challenges of learning a new language.

While I have been busy with the archive, the whole printing team has been focussed on making large etchings by New York-based artist Julie Mehretu. Measuring 170 x 208 cm, the scale of Mehretu's prints invites the viewer to be immersed in their fluid abstract marks and areas of saturated colour. There is an amazing sense of depth achieved through careful layering of open-bite etching, photogravure and sugar-lift aquatint, in combination with subtle shifts of colour across the compositions. The process of achieving the final prints was fascinating to watch. There was close consultation with the artist at every stage, which meant the proofs were sent back and forward from the artist's studio (COVID-19 restrictions

(above)
**Thomas Jennions, Mette Ulstrup,
Julie Dam and Niels Borch Jensen**
with proofs of Julie Mehretu's
Slouching Towards Bethlehem 2020.
Image courtesy BORCH Editions



meant Mehretu could not travel to the Copenhagen studio). The three printers, Dam, Jennions and Ulstrup, together with Borch Jensen, would regularly stop and carefully consider each proof, discussing small adjustments of tone or colour before sending them to Mehretu for approval. Through working closely on previous projects and having many conversations with the artist, the master printers have developed an intimate understanding of her practice and they were able to successfully translate her painterly aesthetic into sumptuous etchings. The final portfolio of four works is titled *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* and was shown in Mehretu's recent solo exhibition at Marian Goodman Gallery in New York. It was also acquired by the Danish New Carlsberg Foundation for the collection of the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk.

Just before Christmas, local artist Trine Søndergaard dropped into the studio to discuss her new series of six large photogravures (*Untitled*, 2021). They were to be editioned for her forthcoming exhibition at Gl. Holtegaard, a beautiful gallery set in a historical homestead just north of Copenhagen. Each print features the head of a woman who is turned away from the viewer. The subject's long hair shows the first signs of ageing with subtle whisps of grey. The series recalls the still, quiet paintings of Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864-1916), whose domestic interiors were often populated by lone women facing away from the viewer.

Søndergaard's poignant contemporary images prevent recognition of the subjects. As such, they are non-portraits and become images that carry more universal concerns. They speak to the invisibility of older women in society, as well as the passing of time.

Trine Søndergaard is a photographer, and she chose to produce this series in the photographic intaglio technique of photogravure. The tactile materiality of these black and white prints is immediately evident. The matt surface of the soft printmaking paper and the rich tonal range made possible with photogravure, create an illusion of depth that is quite different from that found in the lustre of photographic paper. The images have a muted greyscale which creates a velvety layer of silence. A silence unfortunately echoed at Gl. Holtegaard, where Søndergaard's exhibition *Nearly Now* remained closed to visitors for its entire duration due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Denmark was among the first countries to go into lockdown in early March 2020, and while there was a reprieve in the second half of the year, in late December 2020 most things were forced to close once more for another lockdown. Now it is coming into the European summer, vaccinations are well underway and the restrictions are easing. Whilst some projects at the studio have continued throughout this period, hopefully soon everything can resume, and it can be the usual hive of activity.

(above left to right)

Tacita Dean, *FILM stills*
2011, offset lithography, 77 x 47 cm (paper), series of 14, edition of 24

Tacita Dean, *FILM stills*
2011, offset lithography, 77 x 47 cm (paper), series of 14, edition of 24

Tacita Dean, *FILM stills*
2011, offset lithography, 77 x 47 cm (paper), series of 14, edition of 24

Tacita Dean, *FILM still for ACCA*
2013, offset lithography, 75 x 42 cm (paper), edition of 25

All above images printed by Julie Dam, Niels Borch Jensen. Published by Niels Borch Jensen Editions. Courtesy BORCH Editions

Notes

1. Chart is an annual Nordic art fair established in 2013, which is usually staged at Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, Chart 2020 took place in individual gallery spaces across five Nordic capital cities.
2. <https://borcheditions.com/printmaking/>
3. The New Carlsberg Foundation or Ny Carlsbergfondet, was established in 1902 by the brewer Carl Jacobsen and his wife Ottilia Jacobsen. It aims to promote the role of art in Danish society through various forms of financial support, including the acquisition of art for Danish museum collections.
4. Niels Borch Jensen is currently finalising a book that documents this history of more than forty years editioning work by a large variety of artists. Titled *No Plan at All*, it will be published by Hatje Cantz in September 2021.

Kirilly Hammond is an Australian artist, curator and roving cataloguer, based in Copenhagen.

