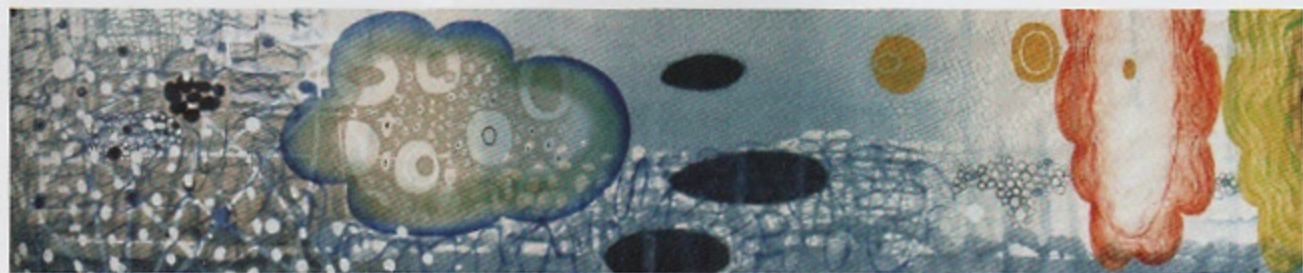
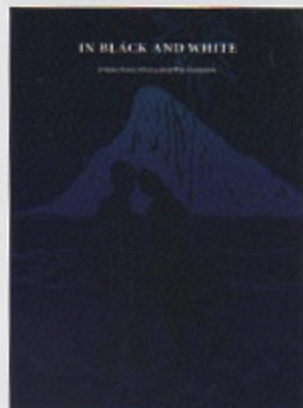


# Book Reviews



Karen Kunc, detail of *Fermentation* (2010) from the book *California Society of Printmakers: One Hundred Years 1913–2013*.



*In Black and White: Prints from Africa and the Diaspora*  
By Gill Saunders and Zoe Whitley  
144 pages, 80 illustrations  
V&A Publishing and Abrams, 2013  
\$30 / £19.99

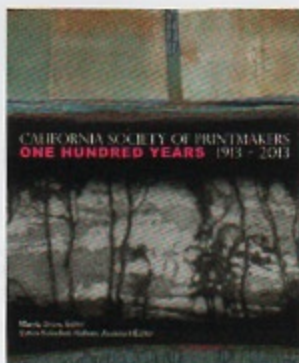
This book—and its associated exhibition of prints from the V&A's vast collection—attempts a dicey maneuver: organizing more than 50 works by several dozen artists through their relationship to Africa, and doing so without distorting cultural and individual identities. The artists here include white Africans and black Britons; people whose forebears fled from Africa or fled to it, or who had no say in the matter thanks to slavery. In a lucid introductory essay, the authors lay out the risks of essentializing such a diverse group and of ghettoizing artists who have battled to join a more global conversation.

While the catalogue does group the work thematically, it does not shoehorn the art into any overarching argument. Within chapters on place, history, memory, identity and protest, each work is treated independently with large reproduction and brief essay. The earliest piece is Wifredo Lam's lithograph *Composition*, made in 1961 but curiously timeless; the most recent is Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's 2012

etching *Siskin* [reviewed in *Art in Print*, Jan–Feb 2013]. In between there are abstract images and figurative ones, expressive linocuts and dispassionate screenprints; there is an umbrella, a coffee cup, a winter coat and two sets of wallpaper. Many of the artists enjoy international renown (William Kentridge, Chris Ofili, Yinka Shonibare, Kara Walker, etc.); others will be new to most readers. Some works promote explicit political change (the inclusion of Emory Douglas, the Black Panthers' Minister for Culture, was inspired), others are more concerned with private life. Almost all share the sense of consciously coming from the outside—of having to explain things a little more explicitly than is done between peers. The awareness that white and western is still the norm is omnipresent, sometimes expressed with anger, sometimes with regret and occasionally with a metaphorical shrug of the shoulders.

The outside can, of course, be both a source of fascination and a position of strength. As Lam explained: "I could have been a good painter of the School of Paris, but I felt like a snail out of its shell. What has really broadened the range of my painting is the presence of African poetry."

Prints, far more than other art forms, have always been in the import-export business, ferrying ideas and experiences from one place to another. Here they do so in often moving ways. ■ —ST



*California Society of Printmakers: One Hundred Years 1913–2013*  
Edited by Maryly Snow and Sylvia Solochek Walters. With essays by Karin Breuer, Daniel Lienau, Art Hazelwood, Maryly Snow, Sylvia Solochek Walters, Sherry Smith Bell and David R. Jones  
317 pages, 350 illustrations  
California Society of Printmakers, 2013  
\$50

Very few artist-run organizations survive 100 years. Still fewer find themselves fit enough at the end of a century to produce so sumptuous a celebratory volume. The California Society of Printmakers clearly takes pride in its present activities—half of this book is devoted to the work of current members—but its organizers have also taken seriously the task of documenting the Society's past. Far more substantial than the typical *festschrift*, this publication will be an essential resource for anyone studying the history of West Coast visual art.

Founded in 1912, the California Society of Etchers was from the start neither exclusively Californian nor just about etching. In a series of six essays, the authors take us through the history of the organization and of the shifting cultural terrain of California as it transformed itself from a distant outpost reflecting East Coast trends to one of the

most powerful centers of cultural production and innovation in the world. The story moves from the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco—an event that included an astonishing 2200 prints by 221 artists—on to the impact of the WPA, the influence of S.W. Hayer, the rise of Pop and the eventual ascension of the Bay Area and Los Angeles as globally-recognized centers of contemporary art.

Further enhancing the volume's value as a reference, it sports extensive back matter in the form of a comprehensive bibliography and appendices that detail members, exhibitors, shows, awards and prizes down through the decades.

Hundreds of current members are represented, yearbook style, each with a large reproduction of a single print alongside a brief biography. These artists range from recent graduates to nonagenarians and the diversity of styles and approaches defies condensation into a single summary statement. Flipping through the pages, one finds prints that are decorative, gritty, slick, funky, cute, profound and occasionally just mystifying. Landscape remains an important theme, as it has always been in California, but many of the depictions of nature are shot through with sense of foreboding and loss. There are a handful of political works, and a number that focus on ethnic identities and histories, particularly Asian and Hispanic. Several works by older artists consider mortality in stark ways. The one unifying characteristic that pervades these subjects is a deeply rooted concern with making—whether through loose and vivid etched line or the splintered edges of roughly hatched wood, the works reproduced announce themselves as the products of a particular hand as well as of the eye and mind.

It may be impossible to tell where printmaking is going, but it is clear that—in California at least—it is not going away. ■ —ST