Looking into the Light - artists' books by Randi Annie Strand

Norwegian artist Randi Annie Strand’s current printmaking project takes inspiration from light refraction. The artists’ books and films created for her Prism series are separate yet intertwined, and each is unique. As she explains: a book is three-dimensional, interactive, you have to touch, act, it has many time-and space sequences to be experienced. All this allows it to potentially move towards sculpture, installation, film and performance.

Prism is a continuation of many years of research on transparent sheets in books, building variations through printed overlaps, as a way to play with the illusions of colour, space, time and order. “The sheets blend together in a way which makes it almost impossible for the viewer to predict the next page’s exact pattern and colour formation, or to remember precisely the last one. The image is fleeting, transformed with each turn. I have tried to create a space for contemplative experience, displaying the ever-changing character and relativity of existence, where different elements are influenced by, and adapt to their surroundings.”

“How Japanese papers behave when you build layer upon layer fascinates me. The sheets are porous, and seem to consist as much of air as matter as they let through so much light. Some areas have a glassy luminescence like a screen monitor (similar to viewing layers in Photoshop). This feeling of glass and air is something I have tried to play with in the Prism series. My approach lies in the idea that clear light is refracted and creates many colours, I wanted to split those colours, and – through the format of the book - put them back together.”

Strand’s method is to ink the plate and print through hand cut paper stencils which she cuts very precisely in order to create the illusion of the whole. “I’ll print a lot of sheets in various colours using different stencil shapes. Then the really time-consuming puzzle begins; to create a process of progression where colour and shape become interesting throughout the book. I can spend many days, even weeks on a single book. It is not possible to plan in advance as each sheet affects the entire process. The combinations of possibilities are almost endless.” Prism is a work in progress but also the result of Strand’s working over many years within a similar framework which allows a fluidity of practice as well as a formal structure of making.

“It is fascinating for me to see how the three-dimensional effects almost double due to the colour gradations within two-dimensional fields. You are constantly discovering new formations along the way. The biggest surprise was how much spatial effect turning the stencils gave, everything became more diagonally oriented. Mixing sheets with and without white fields between the colours also provided some surprising results.”

Strand talks about the books' dramaturgy, and the act of reading as a performance. Viewers often turn the pages back and forth, testing the patterns created by overlays of page upon page in each direction. The physical encounter gives the audience plenty to relate to: the material, fragility, action, the visual changes. People become aware of their own movements in relation to the books. The films, on the other hand, give a stronger focus on the linear changes and make that progression more accessible. The colours flicker over each other as you scroll, before the sheet falls into place and the image is "locked". The fleeting and fixed constantly change places. Time and space sequences in a book are traditionally separated, I have tried to break down this divide to create a coherent space. Filming the books isn’t just another way of conveying them - they are separate artefacts in their own right, but a way of creating a space where the fleeting is set against the fixed.

There are deeply intense complex compositions between 2D and 3D visual elements within Prism. “The tactility of the books might not have a digital equivalent, but I believe a lot of the materiality can be conveyed through film. I look at the films mostly as books, because they reference this familiar form of their origin and contain the basic elements of it. I see my activity as an exploration of possibilities for the book form, trying to raise an awareness of it and the elements of it that we can take for granted - or not. The definition is not so important - but to be invited to dance – a dance around a space or a dance that creates a space onscreen.”

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