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## CARMON COLANGELO: PRINTS

Farrell Learning and Teaching Center Gallery  
School of Medicine – Washington University in St. Louis

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### CARMON COLANGELO

How do we situate ourselves in a never-ending flow of cultural forces? Amidst the visual plunder of contemporary life, what details grab us? Which ones anchor us? To encounter the work of Carmon Colangelo is like finding yourself immersed in a confluence of multiple spaces where images stream by in a uniquely coded language. Spiders, eyeballs, rabbits, fuzzy dots, skeletons, pills, bulletin board fragments and cartoon characters make up the sinuous syntax of Colangelo's work. His art stems from the traditions of printmaking but also brings hybridity to the discipline, merging collagraph, silkscreen, monotype and digital printing techniques. A range of ideas emerges regarding the human condition in a fast world of continually fluctuating systems: biological, scientific, technological, and social. His work addresses current issues such as genetic research and globalization, yet layers them with popular mythologies in a compelling, non-confrontational tableau.

The human body acts as a fixed motif, reoccurring in many of Colangelo's works as a transparent silhouette. In *Bride and Groom* (silkscreen & digital print, 2006), male and female figures appear in a diagrammatic space, their contours filled with superimposed arteries and their heads replaced by a unifying hand executed with delicate line work. Like an improvised narrative, the head/hand form combines with the upside-down shape of a rabbit. "The print is one of several inspired by the book, *Body Bazaar: The Market for Human Tissue in the Biotechnology Age*, that tells stories about an unsuspecting population of health care consumers who are unknowingly mined for new biological properties," states Colangelo. The body's genetic and reproductive subtext establishes an undercurrent theme throughout the show.

*Gray's Anatomy* (collagraph and digital print, 2006), incorporates appropriated images from anatomical reference books. The pictorial space depicts an Italian frescoed garden of pleasure and pain teeming with birds

and body parts, such as eyeballs, blossoming like fruit from the plants. In the lower right hand corner, a disfigured skull and two warped hands hang like fragments of peeled flesh, stretched digitally, invoking the spirit of Hieronymus Bosch.

The work *Devolution*, a large format print, derives from Colangelo's earlier spider drawings. He implements cut outs, both in paper and digital formats, to reveal spider parts through floating, window-like circles. A blue translucent overprinting evokes the optical feeling of a TV or computer screen. The simplicity and directness of *Devolution* lies in its series of abrupt horizontal zips of color. Normally considered undesirable in a print, these compressed, brightly colored bands cover the lower half of the composition, offering a rich palette of directional shifts. Turning a technological error into a structural device, the stripes situate the print between the tradition of collagraph and a playful response to the mode of digital printing.

Although Colangelo produces small and varied editions of five to six prints, his creative activity is similar to painting and drawing. An ongoing process of manipulating scanned drawings and concealing previous layers with mark-making techniques builds a sense of depth in the work. The resulting multiple layers reveal formal and conceptual decisions. The history of each print can be deciphered from curious juxtapositions, fragmented body parts, scale shifts or the repetition of particular elements. In *Mirror, Mirror*, and *Cornered*, Colangelo clones previous works and, with a computer, places them into printed picture frames. These are further reconfigured into prints that show corner spaces filled with pictures hung salon style. The reexamination process allows for new associations within the strata of his images, while at the same time, those very images stretch, warp, bend, and even dissolve during the scrutiny.

For the artist, layers not only represent the process but also carry a metaphor about the inherent potential to alter, translate and combine images within his artistic practice. The art making technology itself, which duplicates, clones, mirrors, and distorts, is the metaphor for a system or language that Colangelo pushes for its expressive possibilities. In regards to this comparison, Colangelo states, "Transition and translation are key factors in my mind." He continues, "I think about the flow of the work and the work in *Configured/Disfigured* is made up of transitions: changing and shifting the images, letting them evolve through a series of translations from drawing, to scanning, to redrawing and printing, etc. This action becomes an integral part of the concept, especially since my images are constructed in layers and respond to the happenstance that inevitably occurs. The process is meant to lead the work and is never preconceived, so transitions and decisions about where to go, from one place to the next, are important."

The way Colangelo navigates his ideas and images, as *Configured/Disfigured* suggests, requires the ability to maneuver through multiple currents. The points of junction, where such currents meet, are naturally of his own selection and configuration. Perhaps the fluid nature of the place from which Colangelo creates causes the distortion of certain images, while simultaneously offering serpentine paths for our consideration.

— Jill Downen

This essay accompanied the exhibition *Carmon Colangelo: Prints* (September 2007 – February 2008) at the Farrell Learning and Teaching Center, School of Medicine, Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

Mr. Colangelo is the Dean of the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis and holds the E. Desmond Lee Professorship for Community Collaboration in the Arts. He has exhibited widely, from Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. to Argentina, Canada, England, Puerto Rico, and Korea. His works are in collections at the National Museum of American Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University. He is currently showing his latest work at the Bruno David Gallery in St. Louis.

Jill Downen is an artist. She exhibited her latest work with the Bruno David Gallery during the 2005-2006 Season. Jill Downen was a 2004 *Great Rivers Biennial* award recipient. Ms. Downen holds an MFA from Washington University as a Danforth Scholar and a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute. She currently teaches at the Washington University Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts.

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## BRUNO DAVID GALLERY

3721 WASHINGTON BOULEVARD (IN GRAND CENTER) ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63108-3611 USA  
314.531.3030 / [info@brunodavidgallery.com](mailto:info@brunodavidgallery.com) / [www.brunodavidgallery.com](http://www.brunodavidgallery.com)