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4th Annual New Prints Review

Plus: Tomma Abts, Mark Bradford,
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Miler Lagos

Colombian artist Miler Lagos has worked primarily in sculpture, usually reworking a material so that it contradicts the properties intrinsically associated with it. His "Cimiento" series is an example. In Lagos' words, this sculptural print is "a reflection on the support, origin, root or foundation on which humankind has represented its ideas."

Lagos stumbled upon this project while working on a series of sculptures in concrete inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's war machines. The sculptures were to be separated by a "trench" made from stacks of paper printed with Leonardo's sketches that he would cut into with a power sander. While cutting the paper, he noticed that it smelled like burnt wood and it got him to thinking that paper, despite its historic status as a cultural product, still retains many properties of its material origin.

For his new project, the artist turned to "Apocalypse" (1480), Albrecht Dürer's set of wood engravings, as a way to establish a connection between a medium and its subject. Dürer's prints were done in a period of spiritual turmoil, when the end of the world seemed near and inevitable. Lagos is an artist living and working in a country where a non-declared civil war is being played out in the dense jun-

gle, so the relation between Dürer's visions of despair and their embodiment in the form of a wood stump seems particularly apt.

Each one of the logs in Lagos' "Cimiento" series is created from a stack of six thousand sheets printed with one of Dürer's engravings. The artist painstakingly cuts the stack into a rough sculptural shape with an X-Acto knife and then refines the form with a power sander, which burns the paper's edge, imbuing it with a distinctively woodlike color and smell. The diagonal cuts reveal the "grain," as the drawings, repeated on each of the sheets, appear three-dimensionally through the entire body of the "log." Each stump is an original piece, made with a different engraving. For some, the viewer is encouraged to peel off a sheet of paper, a gesture that replicates the democratization of knowledge that print has fostered from its inception.

Lagos, who had only seen Dürer's engravings in books when he first started the project, later went to Nuremberg to visit the house where the engraver was born, only to find that there are no originals in the museum—only reproductions—because of conservation concerns. In a personal ritual of homage to the German master (and to the history of printmaking itself), he placed one of his sculptural prints in front of the house and let the wind blow the sheets away. It was a poetic gesture that celebrated the distribution of printed matter from that point of origin more than five centuries ago.

—José Roca



Miler Lagos, from the "Cimiento (Foundation)" series, sculpture made from carving on sheets of printed paper (approx. 20 x 40 x 35 in.), 2007. Courtesy Nueveochenta-Arte Contemporaneo, Bogotá, Colombia