

Paul Chan : digital worlds

Author

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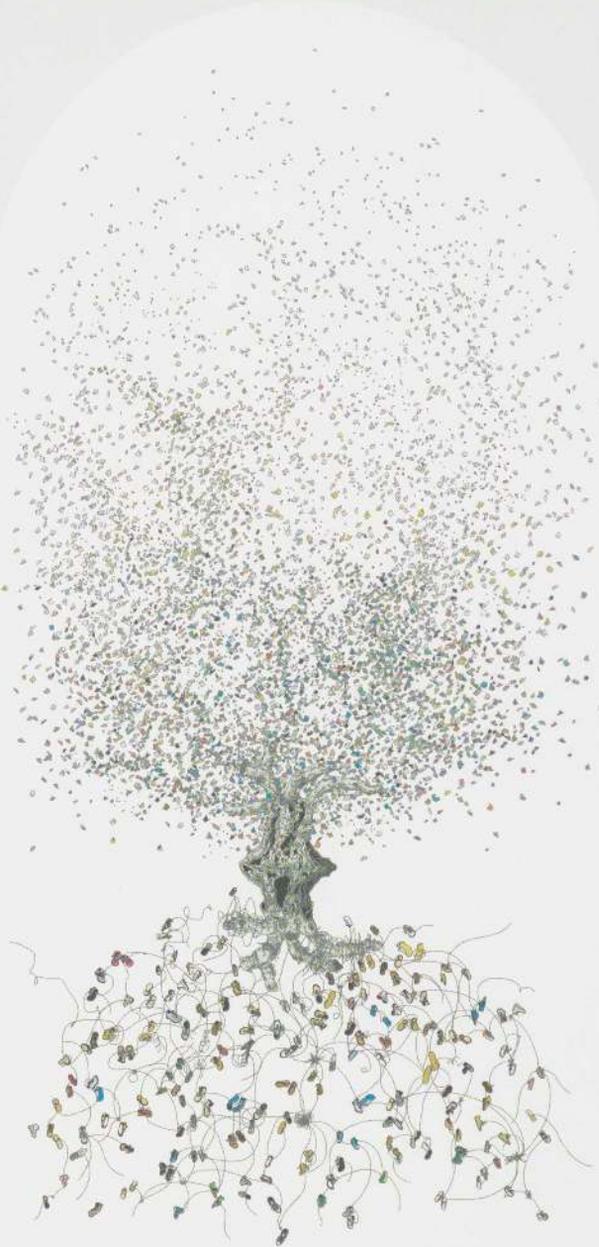
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PAUL CHAN

Digital Worlds

Known for his mesmerizing digital animation, Paul Chan (born Hong Kong, 1973) also works extensively with prints, drawings, and sculpture. The more than fifty prints made by the New York artist to date are mostly related to his animations, which typically blend a psychedelic cartoon style with biting political and cultural undercurrents. Printmaking enables Chan to temporarily break with his work in animation and elaborate on an otherwise fleeting moment from his moving images. His process involves drawing on a computer with a mouse or digital drawing tablet and then printing with the latest digital technology, providing him with great fluidity in color, scale, and detail.

Chan created the monumental **Worldwide trash (thanks for nothing Hegel)** at the same time as the digital animation **My birds . . . trash . . . the future**—a foreboding work with a complex array of references from the Bible and eighteenth-century etchings by Francisco de Goya to mid-twentieth-century writings by Samuel Beckett, contemporary hip-hop culture, and current political events. To make the print, Chan selected details from the animation



Worldwide trash (thanks for nothing Hegel). 2004. Digital print, 7' 4" x 44" (223.5 x 111.8 cm). Publisher: the artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Printer: Silicon Gallery Fine Art Prints Ltd., Philadelphia. Edition: 5. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Linda Barth Goldstein Fund, 2005

and then fashioned a mirrored motif of two tree trunks. The image of the lone tree is a reference to Beckett's play **Waiting for Godot** and Goya's **Disasters of War** etchings, but the print is playful and ethereal when compared to the apocalyptic message of the animation from which it derives. Here the tree bursts with colorful wind-swept papers, an image inspired by the artist's travels in the Third World, where he felt that the generally barren landscapes' most vibrant element was often the trash. The arched shape of the print, along with the motif of ascending papers, adds a religious undertone. The tree's roots are an elaborate tangle of shoes—a nod, perhaps, to the urban practice of tossing shoes over trees, lampposts, and power lines, sometimes a sign of gang activity, but other times a harmless prank.

Created a year earlier and quite different in tone and format, Chan's small-scale print series **Deadman 1–5** is also related to his digital animation, in this case **Happiness (Finally) after 35,000 Years of Civilization—after Henry Darger and Charles Fourier**, a bizarre narrative of social critique, sexual freedom, and violence. A major reference is the work of Darger (1892–1973), a reclusive artist whose fantasy worlds include frolicking girls who don male genitalia and battle armed men. The prints in this series relate to the final sequence of Chan's animation, where men who have invaded the community of girls are shot dead, although by whom exactly remains ambiguous. Chan isolates the costumed men in their pools of blood and provides a deadpan overhead view that emphasizes the finality of their deaths. The revolvers the men apparently drew too late are each inscribed with a phrase in tiny print: "A Theory of Justice"; "Discipline and Punish"; "Critique of Pure Reason"—titles of seminal works by philosophers whose theories on society and politics jibe with Chan's thematic concerns.

Judith B. Hecker, Assistant Curator
Department of Prints and Illustrated Books

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Deadman 1–5. 2003. Two from a series of five digital prints, each: 19 x 13" (48.3 x 33 cm). Publisher: the artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Printer: Silicon Gallery Fine Art Prints Ltd., Philadelphia. Edition: 5. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Harvey S. Shipley Miller Fund, 2004