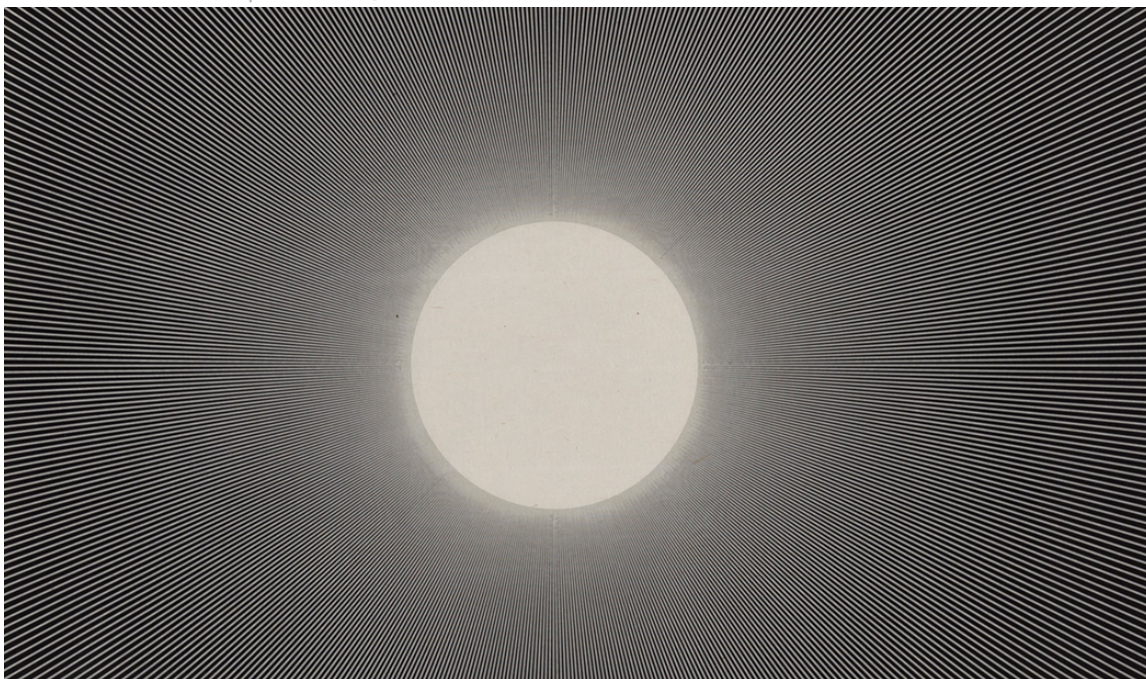


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## Extensions of Man: Marsha Cottrell's Laser Printing Love Affair

BY MARGARET CARRIGAN | OCTOBER 11, 2016



Detail of Marsha Cottrell's "Untitled (1:15:43pm)," 2016

(All images: Courtesy of the artist and Anthony Meier Fine Arts)

Given their austere geometric minimalism and limited color palette, Marsha Cottrell's works on paper can appear cold and mechanical at first glance. Using laser printers as her medium, the New York-based artist creates abstract compositions from shapes generated by vector software. Yet, the mathematical precision the software offers is complicated by the artist's manual manipulation of the handmade papers she uses as she feeds them in and out of the printer. The result is a body of work that foregrounds a synergy between man and machine. After the opening on September 16 of her first solo show on the West Coast at Anthony Meier Fine Art, Cottrell spoke with ARTINFO about her labor-intensive processes.

**Can you talk a little bit about the software you use to produce your “Spectral Sun” and related series and how that works?**

The images with spots of light or black circles originate in the file as a vector-based line. I’m using the software’s ability to digitally reproduce and change the size or position of that line. In the "Spectral Sun" and related "Untitled" works, I think of the void that appears on the paper — and unexpected lines and other errors — as a kind of phantom. The printer is able to interpret the dense network but it breaks down at a certain point, and the circular area that shows up on the paper differs from what I’m seeing on the screen. I’m thinking about that slippage.

Sometimes I’ll be really excited about mysterious and pronounced black or white lines — not in the file — appearing in a test run, and they’ve vanished by the time I pass the final sheet of handmade paper through. At that point I start trying to retrieve whatever it was...occasionally succeeding and often not. It’s about capturing an accident that seems to have no particular logic behind it. Sometimes I print the same file two or three times on top of itself; registration isn’t perfect and suddenly there’s something unexpected that resonates. It doesn’t always work out, however, so I throw away a lot.

**With regard to your “Aperture” series, I understand that there are no digital files for these. How does that compare to, say, the “Spectral Sun” and related works, and why does it make them unique?**

When I say there’s no digital file that corresponds to each image, I mean that the image on the paper doesn’t represent a document that exists in the computer. Imagine a digital photograph you might be printing: it looks more or less the same on screen as on paper. In terms of the “Aperture” series (as well as the

“Interior” and related grid-based works) I’m building the image on the paper as I go.

Take a shape — a rectangle, for example. I’m thinking of that shape as a template sent to the printer to mark the paper. After modifying the template’s position or tonal value on the screen that same sheet of paper is sent through and the printer marks it again. With the printer I’m layering those variations according to improvisation. In the end there’s a file but it’s extremely skeletal.

**You have a new platinum print in your show currently on view at Anthony Meier Fine Arts. Can you tell me about your interest in platinum as a medium? How does the conceptual nod to the 19th century inherent in the platinum printing process influence these works for you?**

I began experimenting with platinum and other early contact printing processes back in 1999. I wanted to eventually have the freedom to make larger work, so I was trying a lot of different things. With the platinum, the paper is hand-coated with a metal-infused, light-sensitive solution and exposed to UV or sunlight with a negative. I was thinking about possible correlations with the laser printer technology, where a laser beam records information on a light-sensitive drum inside the toner cartridge. Also, the concept of the original in the age of mechanical — and now digital — reproduction, which I think is highlighted in the way I disregard the multi-copy capabilities of both photography and the printer in favor of a unique and tangible original.

**Laser printing has such a specific connotation of a workplace environment and, indeed, your interest in using laser printers grew out of your own work experience for a magazine publisher. Do you feel that the idea of work/labor informs your practice?**

I think a lot of the imagery in my work is connected to this disembodied experience of sitting at a computer. But my process actually incorporates various types of labor: that of the office setting where I sat for my job in front a computer all day, and the kind of labor I grew up with. When I was a kid my mother was in graduate school studying ceramics; I helped with sawdust firings where the surface of pottery was blackened with carbon. We made everything by hand, including linoleum blocks for printing holiday cards.

In my work this experience merges with the mental labor associated with sitting in front of a computer. When I first started working with the computer I thought, "How am I going to physically relate to this thing? How can I make it part of my body? What kind of sound can I get out of it?" I approached it as a kind of extension of my hand or body — something from which I might be able to extract feeling.