

Denise Hawrycio  
Situational Prints Situational  
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**Prints** Situational

3. Stitch mark applied after autopsy

The initiation of prosection begins at point A and extends to point B

4. Hand of corpse in natural position

5. Made by wig plate into

OTHER





# Stochastic Art in a Rough and Tumble World

## – Denise Hawrysió's Situational Prints

**Bill Jeffries**

Anyone seeking an introduction to Denise Hawrysió's printmaking might consider re-visiting Robert Filliou's idea that "art is what makes life more interesting than art." Filliou's circular formulation of the reciprocity between life and art points to another notion of Hawrysió's, that, following Picabia, there is no temple of art; it is the world outside of the museum/studio that is the source of art's spirit. How then does a print have 'more' to do with the world outside of art, how does it become 'situational'? Imagine a printmaker's studio in the middle of the night. An earthquake strikes. Concrete chunks fall onto blank etching plates, gouging them. The artist then prints those marks, on their own or layered with others. Life, in the form of a seismic event, takes on a richness owing to its ability to record its own actions. This story explains in fictional form how a rogue etching plate can find its way onto the bed of an etching press. It is an allegory of the type of process that has informed Denise Hawrysió's printmaking over the past twenty-five years and a hypothetical example of how conceptualized practices can be incorporated into printmaking.

Hawrysió's prints emerge from her ongoing dialogue with contemporary theory. Her influences include the work of Hanne Darboven, On Kawara and Joseph Beuys as well as strategies drawn from Earthworks, Happenings and Fluxus. Early on in her life in art, Hawrysió knew the serial music of Philip Glass and Steve Reich and of 'language-as-drawing' as characterized by the work of Cy Twombly. As a result, much of her work has an aleatory quality manifested by a panoply of collective forces she employs as tools of her trade, including mechanical, human and geological phenomena. She seems to conceive of the printmaking plate as both a mini-landscape and a stage for cultural production, in which her semi-controlled acts of marking plates micro-mirror the macro marks left by Earthworks artists such as Michael Heizer.

The artists Hawrysió encountered after moving to San Francisco in the early 1980s paved the way for another aspect of her printmaking process: the unpredictability of socially engaged, performative art. San Francisco was then home to very particular modes of production: artist groups such as Survival Research Laboratories, conceptual artists like Bonnie Sherk, and performance artists such as Tom Marioni. And if Beuys's blackboard text scratchings were an influence on Hawrysió, his art of social engagement was even more so. She has, for instance, cold-called farming families to ask them to mark or draw on her etching plates. Ordinary people have marked her plates with their messages – their words and scrawls are a record of directness and unmediated simplicity, of a type that no one schooled in art could ever make.

While some of Denise Hawrysió's prints include texts written by her collaborators, others, especially the recent *MacDowell Bed Studies*, use ironic text juxtapositioning. These texts present a quasi-conceptualist deadpan tone that informs viewers about the artist's intentions, while positioning the work at the intersection of fiction

and truth, history and myth. While in some cases the artist's intentions may not be borne out by the object one sees, other resonances do relate to actual subject matter – her 1979 diptych *West & East* shows a fascination with the pounding freeways outside of Kingston, echoing the work of Jack Chambers and presaging Tom Sherman's video work *You can't watch TV and drive a car at the same time*.

This exhibition comes at a time when printmaking's stock has fallen. Art schools and university art departments throughout North America have closed, or are contemplating the closure of their printmaking departments. In many cases the theoretical turn that art has taken since the 1970s has not worked in printmaking's favour, as many printmakers have allowed the shift to conceptualized practices to pass them by. Hawrycio, in contrast, has seized upon the diagrammatic and cartographical possibilities that presented themselves in other art forms and has incorporated them into her prints.

The global dialogue that has valorized 'process' in art over the commodified object has generated much discussion and many creative solutions to the problem of how to remain idea-oriented while still having something to see and/or sell. Denise Hawrycio's procedures and obsessions reflect that conundrum. Her use of quasi-rational repetitions and palimpsestic layering has created a very distinctive graphic vision, one that has been committed to research, social issues and the expansion of the boundaries of her chosen medium. Combined, Hawrycio's prints add up to a twenty-five-year testament to one artist's belief that there is no more an end to art than an end to anything else – everything continues, and one medium in art has as much potential as any other.

The layerings of process that define Hawrycio's project – chance, texts, drawings, collective involvement, erasures, mirror images and repetitions – are all based on her application to printmaking of the Situationist idea of 'the construction of events.' Her constructed events are newly inventive explorations of the Dadaist project of returning the everyday to art. If the everyday can be elevated by being re-positioned in art, then the pitfall of beginning with the aesthetically rarefied subject can be avoided and art will continue to be open to both urinals in galleries and random markings made on printing plates. Hence, Hawrycio's prints can also be seen as mirroring consciousness – just as the world imprints itself on the mind via the senses, she asks the same of the world in relation to her plates: she asks her plates to go get imprinted, go see what the world has in store for them. Her printing plates, sometimes like flaneurs absorbing the passing scene, at other times like adventurers seeking experience in site-specific encounters, have brought back messages, both formal and subject-related, that would never have found a place in art but for Hawrycio's particular creative vision.

# Denise Hawrycio and the Imprint of Engagement and Indifference

Ian Wallace

Denise Hawrycio has used a variety of media over the past twenty-five years, including video, installations and photography. But the foundation of her practice, continued from the beginning to the present, is printmaking. Printmaking, like painting, is one of the media that is both in the foreground and the background of much contemporary art. Like painting, it carries with it the burden of the appearance of outmoded technique. On the other hand, both painting and printmaking have unique qualities that respond to current objectives in much contemporary art, particularly in their ability to carry a direct representation of 'touch,' especially in the case of painting, and 'imprint,' which is particular to printmaking. I define 'touch' as that direct inscription of the hand of the artist in the material, and 'imprint' as the direct impression of objects or representations or gestures into a transferable material. Hawrycio's printmaking makes strong and specific use of both of these techniques, both as an attraction and as a refusal.

But much contemporary work is torn between the continuation of 'romantic' attitudes of unique personal expression conveyed by these techniques that emphasize the hand of the artist, the signifying gesture, and those more generic, mechanical and impersonal approaches that dominate the mass cultural landscape. Although aesthetic motivations are still mostly distinguished and legitimated by their historical position as personal expression, this is opposed by certain provocative attitudes of avant-garde art, which reject traditional aesthetic approaches in favour of more modern, or perhaps postmodern, impersonal processes. Like many artists of her generation, Hawrycio had to negotiate her attraction to traditional media in relation to issues that came out of conceptual art in the late 1960s and 1970s. After conceptual art, these traditional media could not be taken for granted. Artists had to respond to certain critical formulations that challenged the notions of 'touch' and 'imprint' that preoccupied gestural painting throughout the modern period. This was central to the struggle between neo-expressionist painting and postconceptual, critical photographic practices of the early 1980s. Despite the *rapprochement* that has followed since then, it is likely that this struggle is not yet, nor perhaps ever need be, resolved. In any case, it continues to influence artistic choices. Hawrycio's printmaking reflects the conundrums of this historical situation and, this is, in part, what makes her work interesting.

Hawrycio's decision to continue with imagery saturated in 'imprint' and 'touch' is strengthened by her entanglement with critical conceptualism, both as an aesthetic attitude and as politics. She has attempted to overcome the potential *recherché* appearance of printmaking as a medium by employing a variety of interactive processes to generate imagery and content. This simultaneously gives her work the cogency that situates it in a social context and capitalizes on the possibilities of gesture. But these interactive processes, these 'engagements' with the world, are also a distancing mechanism. She has largely taken her own 'hand' out of the arena of 'touch' and substituted other personal or mechanical input. 'Engagement' is beset by 'indifference.'

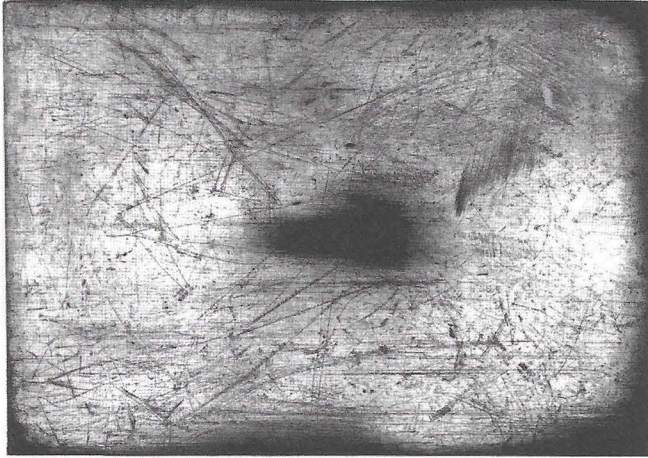
Marcel Duchamp in this sense is the originator of postconceptual painting. His strategy of 'indifference' influenced directly or indirectly a chain of avant-garde technical strategies such as the 'drip' method of Jackson

Pollock, the mechanically generated *linea* of Piero Manzoni, the 'fire and wind' paintings of Yves Klein, the 'piss' paintings of Andy Warhol, the 'blind' drawings of Robert Morris, through to more recent strategies by Francis Alÿs, Albert Oehlen and Daniel Richter, to name only a few; all of which combine, usually in a very impure way, performance and painting. The self-dramatizing gestures inherited from romantic, expressionistic painting are given a radical twist by essentially anarchistic, indifferent, mechanical and intentionally accidental methods, and effects that reject personal expression, yet mimic its appearance.

In the case of Hawrysió's work, however, there is a narrative dimension and social content that takes her work beyond a merely anarchistic refusal of romantic engagement. But this narrative element is also indirect and given to processes over which she has no (or at least minimal) control. Her content seems to be largely about the removal of her persona from the work itself, and she dramatizes and ironizes this absence. Her prints are more 'event-structures' than pictures, since the image is generated more from a social situation filled with irony and alienation than as a pictorial concept per se. By giving the origination of imagery and content over to strangers, she has violated one of the sacrosanct values of romantic art. These works contain genuine examples of naïve art (some of the writing borders on illiteracy) represented within the framework of a self-conscious, postconceptual intellectualism. This is the conundrum of some of the best art today.

Hawrysió's 'antiaesthetic' is loaded with social and psychological implications. One could say that by relinquishing her control over content and gesture itself, she has freed herself from 'ego art' and 'masterful intentions.' By letting somatic restlessness trace 'dream-shiftings' onto her etching plates (which were placed under the wheels of her bed at night), she has removed conscious will from artistic intention. These 'plates,' in which hallucinogenic imagery is inscribed, become memory traces of 'real' phantasms. Her 'abstractions,' in this sense, are generated by means that are other than aesthetic and arrive at compositions that are indifferently 'natural.' Is then Hawrysió essentially an 'abstract' artist, in the sense that the individualistic will of the artist is 'abstracted' or removed from the generation of the inner artistic content of this work?

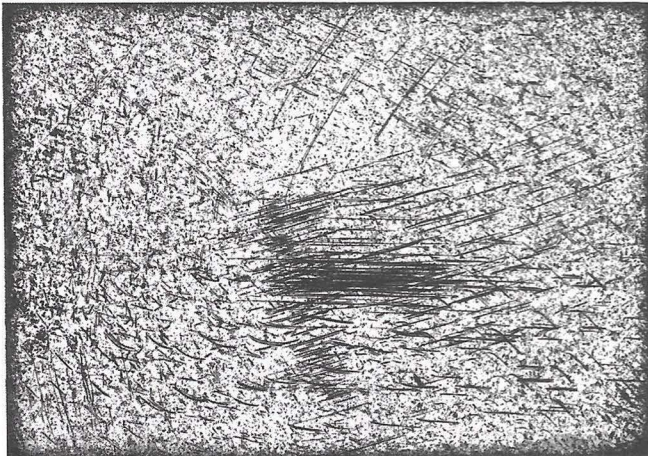
Conversely, the intention of the work, as indirect as it may initially appear, is nevertheless quite precise. By specifically choosing people who are themselves naïve or indifferent to aesthetics to arbitrarily introduce their drawn images and messages onto the etching plate, Hawrysió introduces an ambient, almost uncommitted, relation to the social world. Each plate is subtitled with a short, often ironic, narrative, in which artistic transgression is saturated with charm. Nevertheless, the imagery is not independent of the method by which it was generated. In fact, it clings to it. The critical effect of these works, the confounding of our expectations, is based on the latent discrepancy, the almost absurdist relation, between image and text, between engagement and indifference. They are as much a joke about the historical conundrums of artistic technique, as they are about social emancipation or creativity and the unconscious. This complexity of intention and effect is the radical strength of the work.



I had this old etching plate in the studio for a long time. Every time I saw it I felt uncomfortable because it was empty and dull. I always intended to mark it and finally I couldn't bear it any longer and attached it to the bed of a Start 3/4x6 panel saw so that the operator marked it with the wood as he worked. I am not sure, but I think it has something to do with art and its perpetual referencing back to itself.

**Pencil Stories (Panel Saw), 2006,**  
etching and digital text

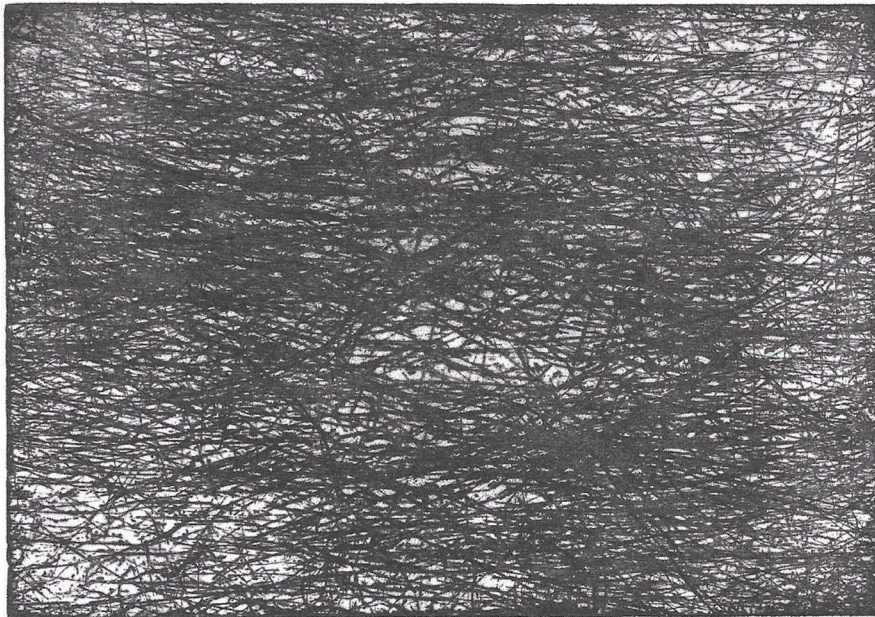
A panel saw is a standard piece of machinery for any professional woodworking business. At Dobb's Joinery in Herne Bay, on the Thames Estuary in Kent, England, I fixed an etching plate to the bed of their panel saw for a period of one month. The resulting marks became a record of their daily activity of cutting wood panels.



I had this old etching plate in the studio for a long time. Every time I saw it I felt uncomfortable because it was empty and dull. I always intended to mark it and finally I couldn't bear it any longer and placed it on a speed bump so that it was marked by the cars that ran it over. I am not sure, but I think it has something to do with art and its perpetual referencing back to itself.

**Pencil Stories (Speed Bump), 2005,**  
etching and digital text

Nearly every residential street in London has speed bumps installed for the purpose of 'traffic calming.' Traditionally known in the UK as 'sleeping policemen,' these costly and controversial devices do make many streets safer, but they can also increase noise pollution and cause wear and tear on vehicles. I placed the etching plate face down on the edge of one of my local speed bumps, where it was run over again and again, sometimes flying across the road, only to be picked up and placed again on the speed bump, for the duration of one day.



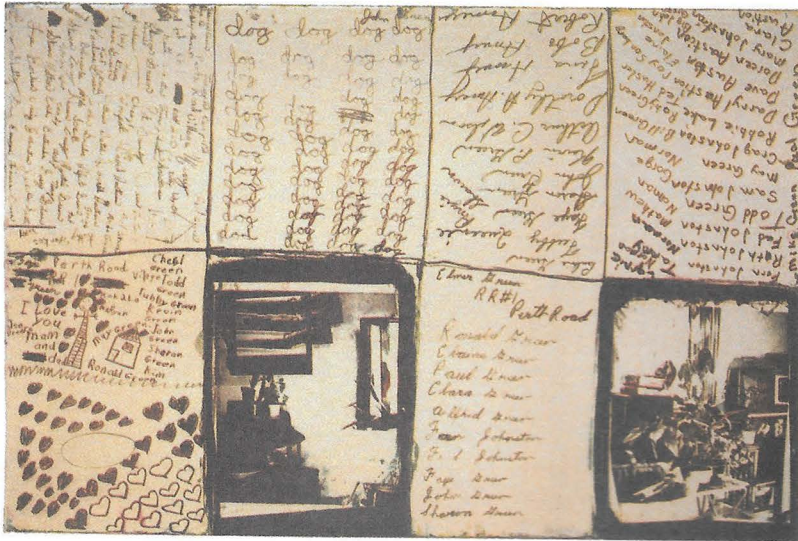
I had this old etching plate in the studio for a long time. Every time I saw it I felt uncomfortable because it was empty and dull. I always intended to mark it and finally I couldn't bear it any longer and I placed it on the summit of Rundle Mountain and it was marked by the rocks and scree as it slid down the mountain. I am not sure, but I think it has something to do with art and its perpetual referencing back to itself.

**Pencil Stories (Mount Rundle), 2006,**  
etching and digital text

Mount Rundle is one of the most recognizable mountains in the Canadian Rockies and has been featured on innumerable calendars, paintings and photographs. The layers, which form the steep, limestone cliffs at the top of the peak, were named after the mountain itself and are known as the Rundle Formation. These limestone cliffs are what make Rundle such an alluring mountain to climb, but they are also what make it difficult, as the hiker

has to scramble over tedious loose mountain scree for up to an hour, something that has contributed to its share of call-outs for Parks rescue services.

As I began my descent from Rundle's summit in the summer of 2006, I placed my etching plate on the loose mountain scree and the plate slipped and fell down the limestone slopes. I picked up the plate further down the scree where it got stuck, placed it face down again and let it slide, repeating the process until the plate finally reached the tree line.



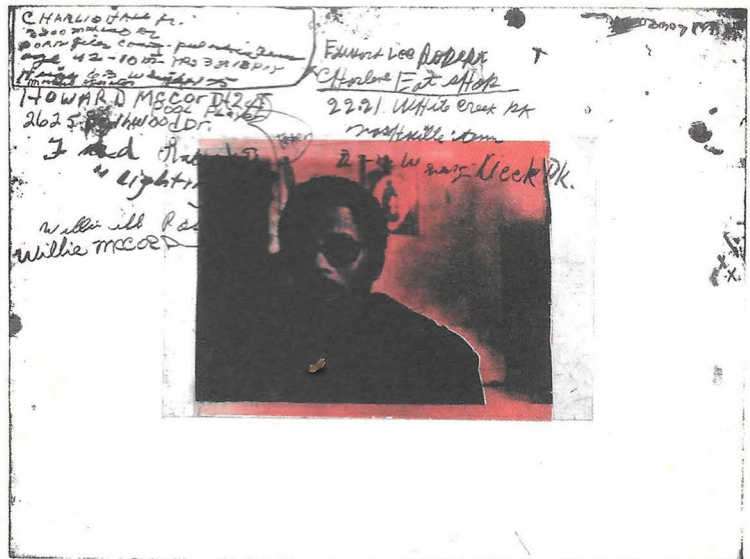
**Perth Road, 1980, offset lithograph**

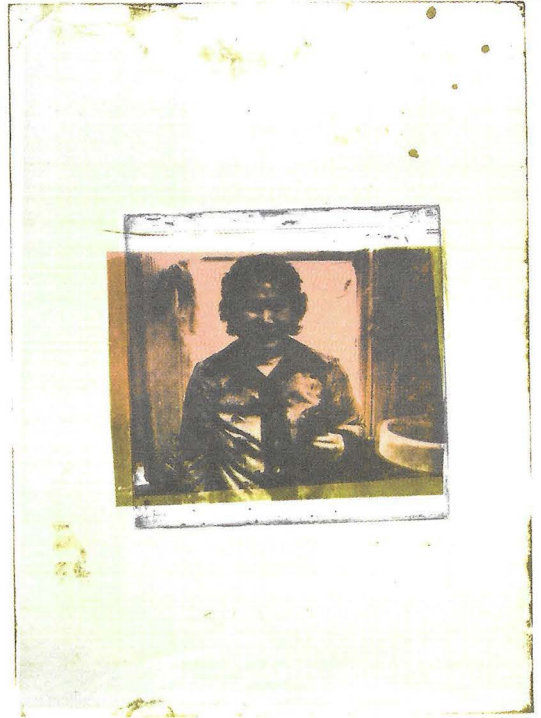
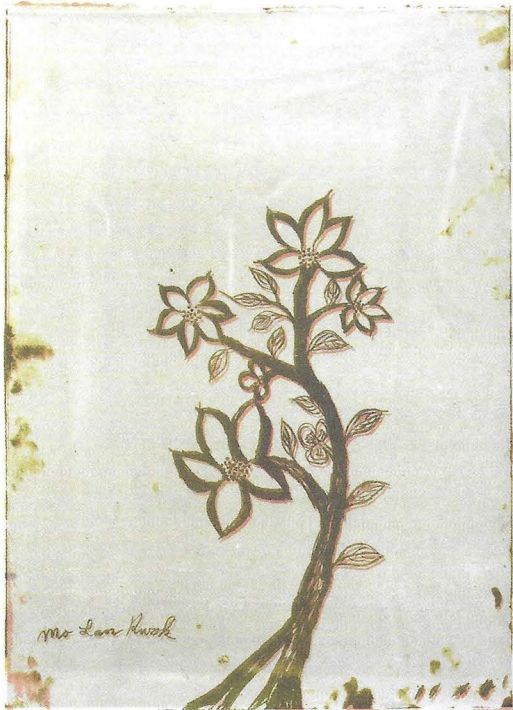
Perth Road is one of those amazingly long Ontario roads that lead straight out of a city into the countryside for some 60 miles; in this case, from Division Street in Kingston to the remote town of Perth in Lanark County. Driving straight out of Kingston on this road to a more or less random point, I stopped by chance at the Green family home and, knocking on the front door, explained that I was making an artwork and invited everyone in the household to participate. The family decided to divide the plate into different sections, one for each member of the house. I later filled the two remaining spaces with photographs that I took while in the house.

**Nashville Customer, 1981,**

offset lithograph and photographic etching

During a road trip to Nashville, Tenn., I brought my offset lithograph into Charlie's Eat Shop where I asked the customers and staff to write or draw on the plate. I later printed photographs taken at the event alongside the written plate.





**Mo Lan, 935 Leavenworth, SF,**  
1983, offset lithograph and  
photographic etching

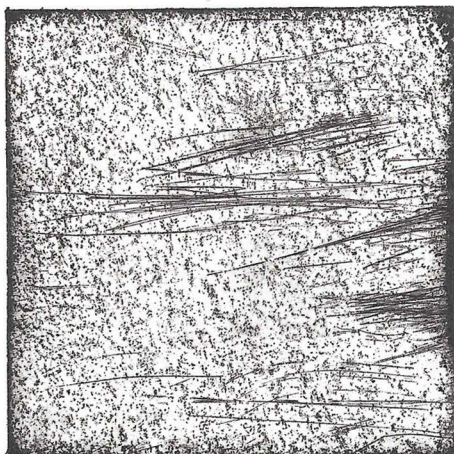
935 Leavenworth in San Francisco  
was a typical women's rooming  
house, in which single women rented  
rooms by the week, month, or year.  
The washing, toilet and eating  
facilities were shared. While I was

living there, I made this print with Mo  
Lan, an elderly Chinese woman who  
had lived in the rooming house for  
years. Mo Lan made drawings and  
paintings in her tiny little room, which  
was covered floor to ceiling with her  
work. I invited her to do a drawing  
on a litho plate and combined that  
drawing with a photographic etching  
of Mo Lan in her room.

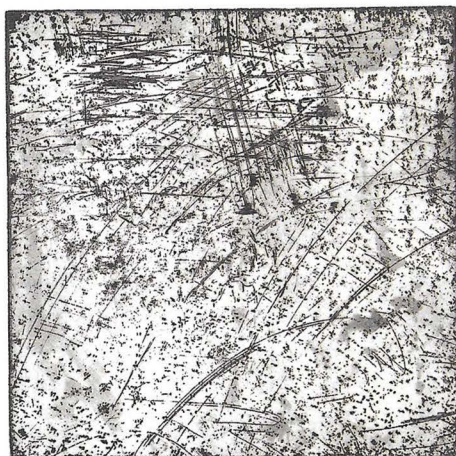
**Concurrent**, 1979, etching (top)  
and **West & East**, 1979,  
photographic etching (below)

With the typical disregard of youth  
for matters of safety, I placed two  
etching plates on the busy Highway  
401 outside Kingston, Ontario and

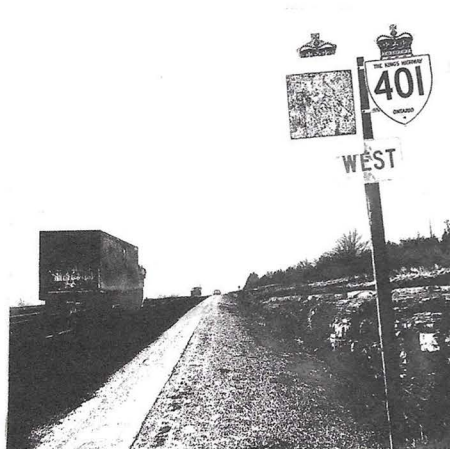
allowed cars and trucks to pass over  
them at high speed. In the resulting  
prints, the contextual photographs  
(*West & East*) remained separate  
from the marks made by the process  
(*Concurrent*), unlike my approach in  
subsequent work.



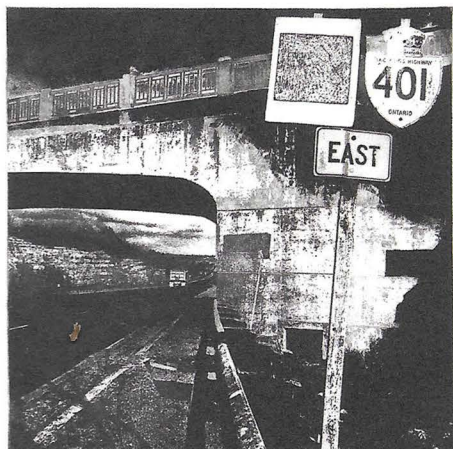
*Concurrent*



*West & East*



*West & East*



*West & East*



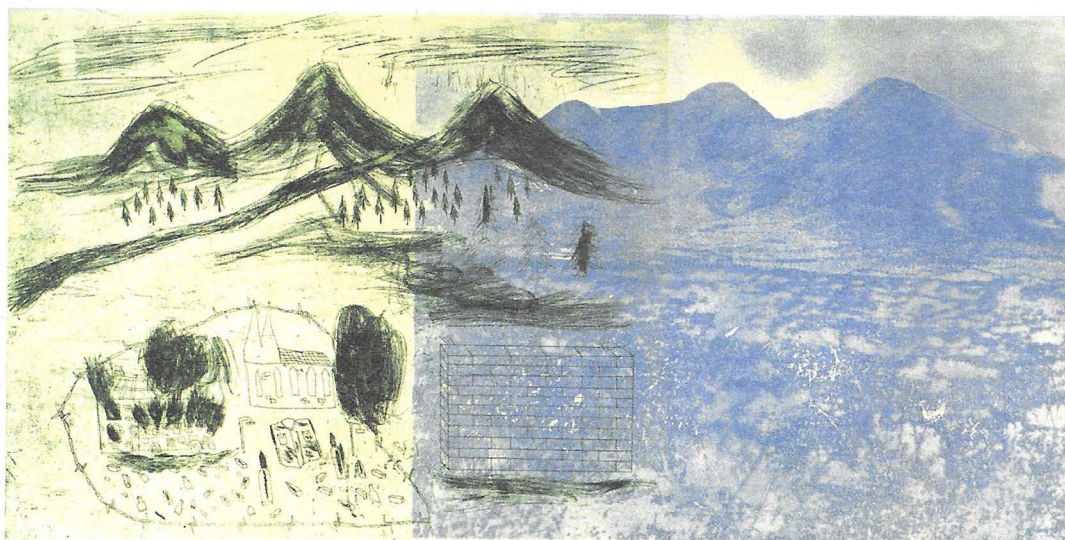
**Rocky Mountain Kitchen  
(Psychedelic), 2006, etching**

According to its website, 'At The Banff Centre, dining is a creative art. From buffets to barbeques, formal banquets to receptions, quick snacks, light lunches, or nutrition breaks, The Banff Centre does it with flair!' Behind the slick images of the

dining rooms of The Banff Centre lies the kitchen, where this etching was created. I placed the etching plate in the staff dining room for several days. I also brought it into the kitchen itself, inviting cooks and various other staff to collaborate in the making of this print.

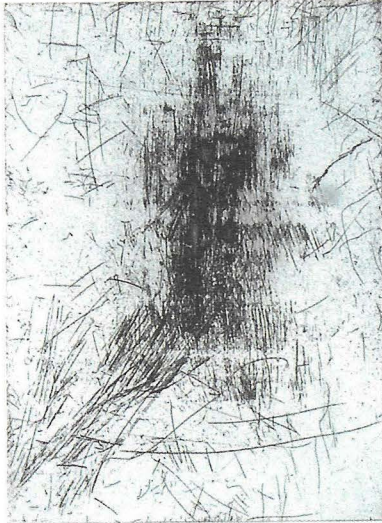
**MacDowell Bed Study No. 2,**  
2006, etching and silk-screen

*The MacDowell Bed Studies* began during a residency at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire, where I noticed that because the bed on which I was sleeping had wheels, it would move considerably during the night. I had the idea to record this movement by placing four etching plates under each wheel of the bed, and keeping a record of the dreams I had during this period. I carried out each study for one week.



**Stefan, Northern Ireland, 2004,**  
etching and photographic etching

This print was completed while I was artist-in-residence in the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Clinic at St George's Hospital, London, in 2003-2004. I gave each patient a large etching plate to draw on and then combined their drawing with my own photographic etching, which uses the patient's hand-drawn image as a point of reference.



MacDowell Bed Study No. 2  
October 13 to October 26, 2006  
Peterborough, NH., USA  
Recorded movement of the wheels of a bed onto  
an etching plate during sleep  
Principal movement October 14, 2006  
During dream where I was neglected by my  
husband and a Microsoft millionaire wanted to  
run away with me.

## Biographical Notes

**Denise Hawrysió** was born and raised in Toronto. She obtained a B.F.A. from Queen's University (Kingston, Ontario) and an M.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute. Since 1984, she has lived and worked in London, England, where she currently teaches at the University of the Arts. Previously, she taught at the Architectural Association and the Wimbledon College of Art. Hawrysió founded her own project space in London in the early 1990s, where she worked collectively with many of Britain's leading artists. She has exhibited her work in solo and group exhibitions in Canada, Denmark, Germany and the United States. She has recently curated a collective installation at the Overgaden Institute of Contemporary Art (Copenhagen), and has completed residencies at the MacDowell Colony in the United States and The Banff Centre, Canada.

**Ian Wallace** is a Vancouver-based artist and writer.

**Bill Jeffries** is the Director of the Simon Fraser University Gallery.

## Acknowledgements

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The SFU Gallery extends its gratitude to Denise Hawrysió for her extraordinary assistance in realizing the exhibition. Thanks are owed to Ian Wallace for his essay on the work and to Greg Ehlers of SFU LIDC for his photography. The Surrey Art Gallery, Janis Lipzin and Anne Maheux generously lent prints from their collections to the exhibition. We acknowledge the British Council for funding the artist's travel to Vancouver.

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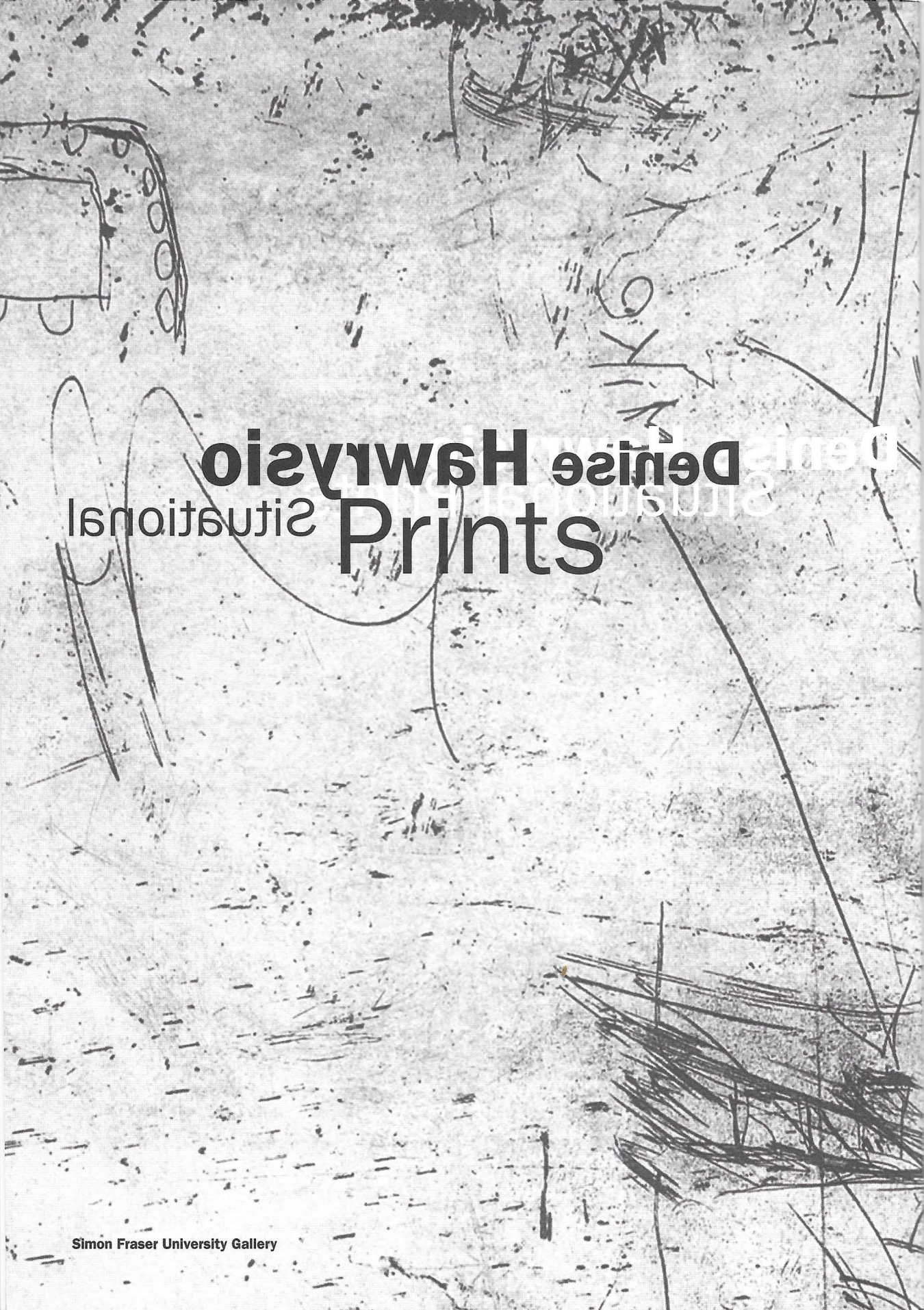
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