

SIMULTANEOUS: SERIPOP & SONNENZIMMER

by Caroline Picard

Composing Landscapes

"We've been friends and fans of Seripop since the early 2000's when we (Sonnenzimmer and Seripop) both began making screen printed posters... Though our aesthetic is notably different, our work tends to be much more pushed back and quiet, they have a similar use of formal exploration and material experimentation that guides our processes. In the end they merge intuition with structure in some way. Developing the show in tandem, we both kept in mind that this would be a shared space, so I think the bodies of work both function individually and as an exhibit." —Sonnenzimmer

Simultaneous: Seripop & Sonnenzimmer, curated by Austin-based Julia Hendrickson, platforms the work of two ambitious collaborative duos—the first, Seripop from Montréal comprised of Yannick Desranleau and Chloe Lum; the second, Sonnenzimmer, made up of Nick Butcher and Nadine Nakinishi and located in Chicago. What is interesting about the show is the way two simultaneous agendas emerge—each unique, lush, and graphic. These aesthetics, though strong and settled in their respective objectives, are nevertheless complimentary. It's a frequency thing. There is a rhythm to the show, and the artists' interactive pleasure is contagious. In the work of these two pairs, two visual approaches emerge like musical themes; distinct in and of themselves, they nevertheless congeal, creating a copacetic, energetic environment.



Enclosure Painting 1, 2015. Screen print and dye transfer on quilted canvas. 45 x 60 inches.

Both Sonnenzimmer and Seripop began as poster artists moving through the music-and-poster scene. Sonnenzimmer's roots harken back to *Punk Planet* and an apprenticeship with Jay Ryan; since then, Nick Butcher has toured the country off and on with his own musical interests as Nadine Nakanishi has delved deeper into the politics of typography and layout. Their poster/music production shifted into a design studio that doubles as their artist studio. A parallel narrative emerges with Seripop, who started as AIDS Wolf, an internationally touring band, and made posters. Seripop grew interested in the way their posters changed over time once installed in public space and transitioned away from music into a focused, studio art practice. "Our antecedents as poster artists informed the way we composed with images and materials in the gallery," Desranleau said in a recent email correspondence. "We saw posters in the street layered and decaying, revealing information from previous posters underneath... There was an interesting story going on there, with the material showing a kind of cumulative history of its making, manipulation, and subsequent exposure."

Seripop's installations occupy space with aplomb. One work in the gallery's outer landing, *Re: The Stiffness That We Could Not Overcome Through Pries and Tries* (2015) reads like a three-dimensional cartoon diagram of the painting process. Think of Roy Lichtenstein's later sculptures: in *Three Brushstrokes* (1984), Lichtenstein translates three strokes of paint into his stereotypical comic/pop vernacular, only to translate that interpretation a second time into three-dimensional space. Seripop is looser with its approach to dimensionality and scrappier with materials: sheets of translucent plastic hang from the gallery ceiling. These layers are printed with abstract color and pattern in select areas as three pairs of olive green hobby horses add a vertical line between each set of hanging plastic sheets; lying flat on each hobby horse are two strips of variously colored carpets. Two yellow and black Styrofoam tubes appear as well, as though illustrating chords of paint. Looking at the tableau from the side, one is overwhelmed by the dimensional mess of it all; the diagonal lines of the hobby horse legs play against the architectural peculiarities of the room—the slatted wooden floor, for instance, or the angle of a nearby wall. When examined straight on, however, an abstract picture congeals. Suddenly it is as if Seripop has made a playful dissection of abstract painting processes.



A Tree, a Hand, a Precarious Contraption, and two Diagonals in the Background, 2013–2015. Screen-printed paper, polyurethane foam, wood, upholstery vinyl, rope, sand bags. 168 x 252 x 192 inches

If Seripop shows how painterly sculpture can be, Sonnenzimmer wants to make flat abstractions immersive. There is something Beverly Hills 90210 about their color scheme: think ESPRIT from the early 90s. Sonnenzimmer's artist book serves as a kind of program or guide for the show consisting of a five act-play (with act four on the cover) that reads like a surreal concrete poem. It features two characters, English and Sound, who morph into other things.

"Sound and English continue walking. They exchange roles and drab conversation, one describing generally, one more specifically. And then they melt, then quickly re-emerging as Framework and Dilemma." —*Impossibility, Construction* —*Language*, Sonnenzimmer, Edition of 50, 2015, p. 16.

The weather provides an on-going backdrop to the progression, as does the studio-created font (created as a result of this show) with which the text is printed. One has a feeling that this book is a kind of hand, conveying the mindset that yielded Sonnenzimmer's fabric, silk screens, paintings, and music contributions. Book in hand, one is invited to wear a pair of headpyles with an original music composition; two enclosure paintings hang like kimonos off of nearby walls; silkscreens are framed like equally enigmatic scores for concepts: a green, blue, pink, and white print bears the title "English", with "Cloudy Judgment," "Whereabouts", "Orchestra", and "Roof top" printed above in sections like a diagram of parts. As a result of these many facets, Sonnenzimmer's abstraction becomes a totally immersive environment. What does it mean to wear a painting on one's back while standing in front of Seripop's installation? "We wanted to create an environment, one conceptually connected to theater while respecting and questioning the legacy of gallery-oriented art," Sonnenzimmer said in a recent interview. "For us, making two of the works wearable invited direct participation by the viewer, but also made any viewer brave enough to wear one of the enclosure paintings part of the artwork."



English, 2015. Screen print on paper and mat. 20 x 16 inches. Edition of 10

I've worked with Sonnenzimmer closely over the last five years and consistently rely not only on their design expertise but also their intuition. Inhabiting this show felt like entering another parallel conversation. Seripop's larger installation in the inner gallery explodes with Fort Thunder-esque bravado, creating a psychedelic mash up of peeling, heavily printed wall paper, a larger than life hand, and a two-by-four and sandbag mountain-like structure. Their color scheme is decidedly brighter than Sonnenzimmer, but somehow the two groups in tandem, produce an ecology with a single point of origin. "We still use a lot of screen printed paper in our work but even surfaces end up having dimension and expanding into space," Desranleau wrote. "As artists we are free to explore materiality and decay in a way that would be impossible if we where still pursuing design." The seductive tableau draws you further into the room, where the source of the ambient headset sound is discovered: two white records spin on a low table. Each has a plastic painting protruding on its surface, preventing the record from completing its surface. More of Sonnenzimmer's screen prints, and painted tapestries hang on the wall. Suddenly it dawns on you. Perhaps this feels like to be a painting.

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Simultaneous: Sonnenzimmer & Seripop is on view at The Center for Book and Paper Arts through April 11, 2015.

Caroline Picard is an artist, writer, and curator based out of Chicago. She founded the Green Lantern Press in 2005 and founded Sector 2337, a new contemporary exhibition space and bookstore.

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