

## Talking Prints

A Lecture by Keith Brown  
Wednesday, February 10, 2010 6:30 pm  
Victoria Building, UCLAN

**Talking Prints** is a gem of an idea. Organized by Artlab in collaboration with the Lancashire Artists' Network (LAN) and funded by CADG, it strives to bring the best of contemporary printmaking to the northwest. Master printers from across the UK are invited to show and discuss their work with an emphasis on current research and new technological developments.

As a printmaker and temporary transplant to Preston from the United States, **Talking Prints** is the perfect way to familiarize myself with contemporary UK printmaking practices and at times be completely inundated with new ideas and concepts.



Keith Brown's February 10<sup>th</sup> lecture on his three dimensional prints is a case in point. Brown is one of the foremost digital sculptors currently working in Europe. His work embraces a wide range of digital media, including, 2D, 3D, 4D, time-based installation and video animation. He is the Professor of Sculpture and Digital Technologies at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Brown began his lecture with slides of his early sculptures in which he used tree trunks as his medium. Over the course of several years he created specialized saws to meticulously cut the trees into specific sizes. He then rearranged the slices or shapes to create something completely different from the original image. The laborious effort of both machine and man in these endeavors involved vast

amounts of time to create a finished sculpture. However for Brown the beginnings and ends of the work are always the most important.

Brown's "cloning" technique on tree trunks involved taking slices from the trunk to create a "clone" of the trunk, albeit a smaller version as the second cut was always smaller. He transformed the tree from one entity into two or more related objects.



His early computer work involved the computer as a design tool for his wood sculptures. He designed the sculpture on the computer and then physically translated the image into cut slices of wood. Gravity prevailed and he was limited to the physics of earth in his computer designs.

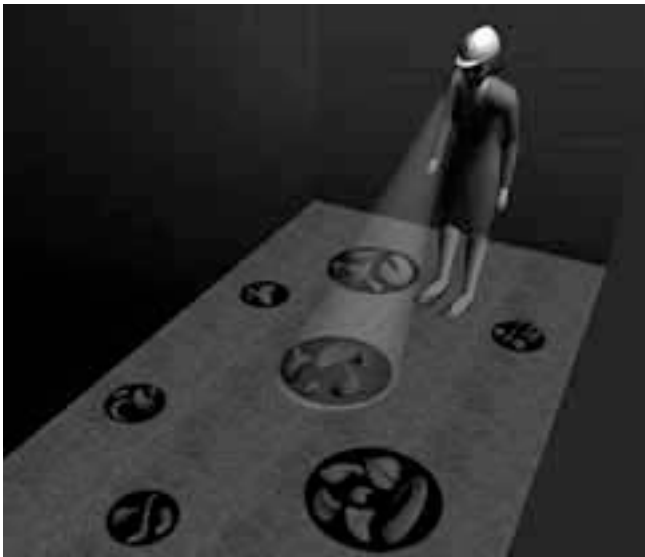
As computers and software evolved Brown eventually went virtual and began sculpting directly on the computer. The computer freed him from the physical constraints of gravity and allowed him limitless possibilities. As with his earlier work, in his virtual sculpture he has no preconceived idea what the outcome will look like, he lets the medium take him there.

Brown's three dimensional modeling of Torus knots with CAD (Computer Aided Design) allowed him to let the sculptures inner workings inform its extremities. The Torus tube turns in from one side and out on the other in perpetual motion. It uses the inside, outside and infinity. In 3 dimensions Brown's sculptures move within and pass through each other in a way that the physical world would not allow.

As technologies progressed, Brown translated his virtual sculptures into physical ones via rapid prototyping. In the WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) process, the virtual model and the physical model are almost identical. In the additive manufacturing model a machine uses data from a CAD drawing and lays down successive layers of liquid, powder or sheet material which builds up the model from a series of cross sections. The layers are joined together or fused automatically to create a physical sculpture from the CAD design. Rapid prototyping is cost prohibitive therefore actual sculptures tend to be small.



Brown has also worked on virtual sculptures in a series of deformed spheres. He wrapped the spheres with bitmaps of various images such as the surface of Jupiter and, reminiscent of some of his earlier work in the 70s, clouds and sky. Virtually (pun intended) his palate is limitless.



He concluded his lecture with a series of images of his recent installation at Media and Interdisciplinary Arts Center, Auckland, New Zealand. For that installation he printed spirals and other natural forms on lenticular lenses. These are an array of magnifying lenses designed so that when viewed from slightly different angles, different images are magnified. The lenses in lenticular printing use technology to give an illusion of depth or to make images that appear to change or move as the image is

viewed from different angles. Placing the lenses on the floor causes the print adapt to the topography of the floor or other surface in the same way Brown uses a bitmap in a virtual sculpture. The nature of the lenticular lenses required a special room with no light source. To illuminate the lenses, Brown created a special “hard hat” with a headlamp which lit up each lens for the viewer.

The journey from wooden sculptures through Torus knots, bitmapping with colors of the universe and back to prints/sculptures utilizing natural forms made for a very quick hour in the lecture theater and left this two dimensional printmaker enlightened and wanting more. It is a real pleasure for me to be associated with both Artlab and LAN.

*Martha Oatway is President of Washington Printmakers Gallery in Silver Spring, Maryland, a practicing printmaker and a member of Artlab at UCLAN.*