

PETER MILTON



Sight Lines I: Tracking Shot

Notes on: *Sight Lines I: Tracking Shot*

Tracking Shot, named after the filming technique of tracking alongside the subject of a scene while it is being filmed, is the first of three prints in a new series of 23" x 36" etchings, to be part of a set I am calling *Sight Lines*.

With *Tracking Shot* I have entered the digital world. The making of my collage/etching/engraving pieces has become so complex that I have often found myself hostage to the actual process of execution. Since my greatest motivation for a new piece tends to be solving the unresolved aspects of the previous piece, I find I can't simplify without destroying my whole modus operandi. I have to defer to the reality that elaboration is what I do best, what I want to do and where I still find the most profound satisfaction.

To my relief the Adobe software to which I turned, was surprisingly close to the invention of layers, transparent sheets and imported references I had myself devised back in 1970 for the Henry James piece, *The Jolly Corner Suite*. And it is turning out that Photoshop, with the fabled fiendishness of its learning curve, was actually created for the mind-set of wily, ruthless strategist-printmakers like me all along. Aware of Photoshop's curse as an easy enabler of the facile, I see that its blessing is its startling depth as a refinement tool, and I find that I have

slipped into a parallel universe. (I am deliberately burying the memories of groans and shrieks that were all to be heard emerging from my studio in that first universe for weeks on end.)

I must confess that my own worst personal adversary remains the computer itself, whose intimidating depths of esoterica, of importing/exporting, its totally irresponsible willingness to bloody crash and its empathy-challenged indifference to just anything involving me just finding things, remain so stubbornly elusive to a septuagenarian brain, it is a mystery to me how I could ever have taken to the Adobe program with such sang froid.

But the computer part turned out only to be the beginning and it has taken ten months struggling to work out the intaglio plate making.

While an intaglio plate has always been my objective, I have also started a small edition of a digital version of *Tracking Shot*, since this proved to be an unexpectedly satisfying print itself. In some qualities it is more than competitive with the etched print. It seems to come down to this, that some find satisfaction in the “soul” of the intaglio print, while others, particularly the myopically afflicted like me, are drawn to the sheer clarity of the digital. And there are those for whom, as content, process will always trump image.

A footnote: another problem with my old, elaborate way of working, was the amount of time I had to spend on each individual print of the edition to correct the anomalies of the final printing itself. This can take up to three hours for each print and I am hoping the digital help can relieve me—and my printer—of some of this irksome demand.

The medium for the intaglio is gelatin gravure etching. The size is 23” x 36” on 30” x 44” Hahnemuhle white. The digital is 17” x 28” on 24” x 36” archival Moab Entrada. The edition size is 75 on each.

A Few of the Sources

- 1) Two opposing interior views of the St Paul’s cathedral in London.
- 2) The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan—with a reshaping of the passages to reinvent and enlarge the dome.
- 3) The running dog, café scene and medallions—which are other quotes from that same 2006 Galleria print *Continuum*.
- 4) A film shoot of a 1926 Lillian Gish film, *The Scarlet Letter*. Time Warner Archives, much altered.
- 5) Gish’s Swedish director, Victor Seastrom, who much later played the aging man in Ingmar Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries*. Bergman died during the course of my working this image out.
- 6) Mexican girls running from a wind storm.
- 7) The two conversing men—both James Joyce. The older, much-feted Joyce of the post-Ulysses Paris years, is arguing with a younger Trieste Joyce, who is still trying to work the tangle of his Ulysses novel out. This vignette is a hidden reference to the 2004 Bloomsday festival in Dublin where I saw a private viewing of a 2004 Ulysses film (*Bloom*), and have been mentally arguing

with Sean Walsh, the director, about the Nausicca scene ever since.

8) An umbrella from a Beatles poster and a rather startled dog from the dog album of Elliot Erwitt, the same source as for the Continuum dog, whom I had turned into Cerberus, guard dog of the underworld.

There is no narrative or allegorical program to the image. It is a Magus-like place and moment. I suspect that my true subject may be that which is not there at all. Smoke and mirrors. The sheer ebullient space of the space itself.