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Expensive Schindlergraben
binding for *Shoe is
Undone*, 2003.
55.5 x 20.5 cm, edition
of 10, Sunshine Editions.

Words by Des Cowley

Sunshine exchange

At Impact7 conference, held at Monash University, Caulfield, in late 2011, printmaker John Loane delivered a keynote lecture that focused on his then quarter-century relationship with artist Mike Parr, in particular the cycle of large-scale self-portraits. When asked, during question time, whether he considered himself a genuine collaborator in the making of these monumental intaglio prints, Loane was hesitant, stating he saw his role as that of facilitator, rather than collaborator. His task was to furnish the technical expertise to allow Parr to translate his vision into print. Loane's response brought forth objections from a number of those present; several of whom argued that much of Parr's work in this medium might not exist, and certainly not in its present form, without Loane's critical input.

I was reminded of John Loane's address when speaking with printmaker Adrian Kellelt about his new enterprise Sunshine Editions. Kellelt, initially studied printmaking at the Victorian College of the Arts, and since 2000 has been employed in the printmaking department there. Despite an initial focus on his own art, he has increasingly, in recent years,

shifted his printmaking activities to working with other artists. Though this decision was a gradual one, his resolve was strengthened by a twelve-month stay at the Jamarind Institute in New Mexico, a non-profit centre for fine art lithography that trains master printers, and, in particular, encourages them to work collaboratively with other artists. Kellelt arrived back in Melbourne in 2013, determined to pursue this collaborative practice with local artists.

The first major project he embarked upon was the Sunshine Suite, a selection of 22 lithographs made with six artists—including Jon Campbell, Nadine Christensen, Richard Lewer and Fiona McMenagie—which was presented at Darren Knight Gallery in Sydney and Hugo Mitchell Gallery in Adelaide in April-May 2017. It was the first time any of the artists had worked in the medium of lithography, and Kellelt's role as collaborator and master printer was critical to the success of the show.

The establishment of Sunshine Editions coincided with Kellelt's move in 2017 to the suburb of Sunshine, in Melbourne, where his studio and presses are now located. He continued to work with Jon Campbell, and

his printing of Campbell's lithograph *Blah Blah Blah*, in an edition of ten copies, was the first work issued by the newly founded Sunshine Editions. It was his following project, however, a large-scale artist book by Phil Day—*Shoe is Undone*—that testifies to the growing ambition of Kellelt's new collaborative venture.

Adrian Kellelt had previously undertaken several workshops—Advanced Colour Lithography and Plats Lithography—at the Lancaster Press, and it was there he met Phil Day, in 2017, when Phil was engaged in drawing directly onto a stone in preparation for his lithograph to be printed. It was this chance meeting that led directly to *Shoe is Undone*.

I was surprised to learn that it was Kellelt's suggestion, rather than Day's, that they make a book together. Prior to *Shoe is Undone*, he had no prior experience with artist books; whereas Day can point to a long personal history of making books. In 1997 he founded, along with Ingrid Hagen, the Finlay Press, and by the time the press closed in 2009 had produced twenty limited-edition books, firstly at Goulburn and later Braidwood, featuring prints by G.W. Bot, Petr Herel, Robin

Wallace-Grubb, Day, Hansen and others. Since moving to Melbourne in 2010, Day has established Mountains Brown Press, issuing around fifteen artist books to date.

When first viewing *Shoe is Undone*—the copolophon of which bears a combined Sunshine Editions and Mountains Brown Press imprint—what is immediately striking is the sheer physical scale of the work. The book comprises eleven lithographs—printed in black—along with nineteen pages of text in Phil Day's hand. The lithographs, for the most part, feature close-ups of a number of disparate objects—a lettuce, a torch, a brick, a tennis ball, a conifer nut—arranged in formations that suggest a series of frozen moments. There is an intense anonymity to these objects; they impart something of the solace we intuit in the late work of Philip Guston. At the same time, the stark shading of the lithographs imbues these objects with a menacing quality; they seem to echo the standard tropes of noir fiction. Empty of human presence, these silent and eerie scenes resemble narrative snapshots, and we can only hazard a guess at the before and after.

Phil Day's choice of iconography reflects his interest in everyday things. These objects—a nail, a shovel, a grate, a carpet, a street lamp, a water pistol—

represent entities that, in their unchanging character, impart constancy. Even when removed from their everyday context, and arranged in new and unfamiliar ways, they continue to inhabit their thingness. In a world of flux, their unvarying forms, so perfectly aligned with their function, impart a sense of solace. It is as if Phil Day is fabricating a personal alphabet of objects, while at the same time toying with the tradition of the still life.

In presenting us with objects and scenes at once hyper-real and dreamlike, Day is intent on mining scraps and offcuts from his own past. The book's opening lithograph is a case in point: it features a book about dinosaurs—*Life Before Man*—that Phil owned as a child, placed next to a pair of jeans, draped casually over a chair, reminiscent of the way his father draped his trousers at day's end. It is tempting to see in these constructed scenes a longing for misplaced childhood. But these memory-works, with their air of isolation, are anything but exercises in nostalgia. These things confronting us, though allusive and enigmatic, are palpably present. In the absence of the artist, they reveal and conceal in equal measure.

Phil Day's decision to handwrite his text, in pencil, directly onto the blank pages, reflects his continuing desire to move away

from the typographic perfection of his earlier letterpress books. Initially inspired after seeing facsimiles of manuscripts by James Joyce and Lewis Carroll, he has increasingly been drawn to the immediacy of the handwritten. The process of inscribing stories directly onto paper embraces the gestural and the temporal, with all of the imperfections this entails.

The text of *Shoe is Undone* is an extract from a work in progress, the projected second part of a longer work entitled *Valve Nothing*.¹ The handwritten words, around 15–20 per page, are stretched and elongated, almost to the point of illegibility. They exist as much for mark-making as for meaning. *Shoe is undone. Uneven faces. Mum taught me to tie my shoes. Bury ears. Only knot I know.* The magnitude of the words on the page—the polar opposite of Robert Walser's *Microscripts*²—seems to demand a new graphic mode of reading.

Aside from Kelett and Day, there is a third partner whose work was integral to the project. Day met Swiss binder Suzanne Schmollgruber during the Australian National Conference of Bookbinders, held in Canberra in December 2016, at which they both delivered a paper. Finding common ground in the 'book', Schmollgruber





scene

Adam Kellett with his lithography print at Sunshine Editions.
Photograph: Tobias Fitz

opposite

top left clockwise

Phil Day, *Shoe is Undone*, 2013.
Lithograph, 33.5 x 76.5 cm,
edition of 6, Sunshine Editions.

Phil Day, *Shoe is Undone*, 2017.
Lithograph and handwritten text,
33.5 x 76.5 cm,
edition of 6, Sunshine Editions.

Phil Day, *Shoe is Undone*, 2017.
Lithograph, 33.5 x 76.5 cm,
edition of 6, Sunshine Editions.

Phil Day, *Shoe is Undone*, 2017.
Lithograph, 33.5 x 76.5 cm,
edition of 6, Sunshine Editions.

expressed an interest in working together. It strikes me as a testament to the trust involved in this collaborative venture that Phil, having not previously seen an example of Schmolzgruber's work, sent the printed and handwritten sheets of *Shoe is Undone* to Ascona, Switzerland, leaving all binding decisions to her. In the end, she opted for a 'stick' binding, a non-adhesive binding technique whereby each section—in this case made up of four leaves each—is individually sewn onto metal rods at the spine. The resultant binding is both elegant and functional, allowing the book to open on a flat surface, and the pages turned, without strain. The decision to use a white handmade card for the cover, minimally embossed with the title, makes for a delicate tonal contrast with the dark shading of the lithographs inside.

When I ask Kellett to describe his role in the production of *Shoe is Undone*, he—like John Loane—opts for the term 'facilitator'. And, like those who objected to Loane's use of the term at impact7, I too want to argue otherwise. According to Day, it was Kellett who, having witnessed his drawing directly on stone at Lancaster Press, suggested the use of aluminium plates for printing the book—a print process that leaves little margin for error. It was Kellett who proposed the scale of the book, and who

suggested printing the images, without margin, to the edge of the page, and who, when Day expressed concern about the amount of black in the prints, pressed for even darker hues. In the same way, I similarly view Suzanne Schmolzgruber's contribution—both her creative approach and mastery of her craft—as being critical to the success of the book. Perhaps, in the end, there is no feasible answer to the question: where does the collaborative relationship between the printmaker—or, on this occasion, the binder—and the artist begin or end? Phil Day's *Shoe is Undone*, a monumental artist book that warrants our attention, is the outcome of a complex creative process whereby artist and artisan come together in a mutual exchange involving dialogue, trust, expertise and shared passion, in this case for print and for the book.

Notes

1. 'John Loane with Phil Day' at impact7: Interactions & Correspondence, July 27–September 2016. See also Sally Eric, 'Hinter Phil: John Loane also facilitates the work of others' in *Synthes: Making/Revealing* 1 August 2014.
2. See Des Cowley, 'Moulding Brown Press, the recent artist's books of Phil Day', in *Impact*, vol. 48, no. 1, autumn 2013.
3. The first part was published as *Phil Day: A Chair in a Day* (Oen Bradwood, Finlay Lloyd, 2017).
4. Robert Walker, *Monochrome* (New York: New Directions, Christine Burgh Gallery, 2010).