



O K T P

CAIO FONSECA

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Last year Caio Fonseca returned to Paulson Press and created four new prints that relate to his earlier work but also foreshadow his recent, more reductive paintings. For this conversation, we went to visit him in his large East Village studio and shared a glass of wine with him and art critic Daniel Kunitz, who writes on art and culture for a number of publications, including *The Village Voice*, *Vanity Fair*, *Harper's*, *Men's Vogue*, and *The New York Sun*.

—Kenneth Caldwell

Q: Last time we met, we spoke about some of the similarities between mak-

ing prints and painting canvases. Can you talk about the differences?

Caio Fonseca: What's fascinating to me is the vast difference of *means* required to arrive at a finished image. In making etchings, I'm forced to thoroughly deconstruct and then reconstruct the many elements that go into the eventual image. In painting, when I place a mark down, it stays there and I react to it. In etching, because the final product will only emerge at the end of the process, what's needed is to keep a clear vision of the whole while executing the many separate facets that must eventually come together.

In making etchings, I paint without color, I draw backwards on metal, and not withstanding all these seeming impediments, I find it compels me to keep the vision of the whole in clear focus while attending to the minutiae.

Q: Daniel, how do you see the prints as different from the paintings?

Daniel Kunitz: They have a sense of this physicality, but they're very approachable, in part because of the size, but also because of the way they're made. They have a tactility, but it's not just the strings. It's the edges and the way that they're framed that draw people in.



(left)

Three String Etching Green Point, 2006

Color aquatint, spitbite aquatint and sugarlift etching with chine collé, string & handstamping; Paper size: 29" x 34", Edition of 50

(below)

Three String Etching Arrancia, 2006

Color aquatint, spitbite aquatint, and softground etching with chine collé, string & handstamping; Paper size: 37" x 45 3/4", Edition of 50





When I look at them, I tend to focus on the things that make them so different from the paintings – like the way the paper and the surfaces are completely different, the way the ink takes or doesn't take in certain areas. It is very different from the way paint adheres, and just changes the way it might be perceived.

Q: How would you contrast the use of color?

Caio Fonseca: In *Three String Etching Giallo* and *Three String Etching Lunella*—and this is something that would never occur in painting per se—I was able to experiment with changing colors and values, albeit while using the same plates and forms. The result is two thoroughly different etchings linked only in composition. Undoubtedly the workaday process of printmaking invites you to abandon your studio habits. This can be vexing at times, but ultimately it's where the freshness comes from.

Q: Daniel, Caio's work changes over time, but there isn't usually a radical shift.

Daniel Kunitz: When you're watching an artist all the time, what seems like incremental change feels much larger. Scale is relative. Just listening to Caio talk, you can get a sense that he's always looking for what he can strip away. A lot

of the innovation comes from seeing the things, in any given moment, that he can take away.

In the recent paintings, there's a lot of color taken away. You also get these little rectangular moves. Even when he's using a normal sort of underpainting and then overpainting, that's taking away. And then in the most recent works, he's taking away the overpainting. But there's always a matter of taking things down to that moment's notion of what is the most essential thing.

Q: But the work isn't minimal. The surfaces offer a lot of richness.

Caio Fonseca: I have tried to give the surfaces of my etchings as much of a physical and tangible surface as possible. Renee and Pam have helped me maximize the saturation attainable in the color. Incorporating actual strings into the etching gives relief and proportion. Getting this vibrant, tangible surface is difficult, but to my eye worth every effort.

Daniel Kunitz: But you get such a strong sense of the paper as paper too, which I think is really interesting. They're a nice complement to the paintings, because they have such different qualities or are made totally differently from the



(left)

Three String Etching Lunella, 2006

Color aquatint, spitbite aquatint, soapground, sugarlift and softground etching with chine collé, string & handstamping; Paper size: 39 1/2" x 50 1/2", Edition of 50

(right)

Three String Etching Ombra, 2006

Color spitbite aquatint, soapground, aquatint, and softground etching with chine collé, string & handstamping; Paper size: 31 3/4" x 25 1/2", Edition of 50

paintings. And yet they don't feel like something focusing on the imagery of the paintings.

With so many etchings and prints, the problem is that you're getting a summation of the painter's imagery. And your etchings have their own physical quality and their own presence, their own place in the world.

Q: Do you ever look at your paintings through the prism of etching?

Caio Fonseca: Yes. It's an invitation to examine the essence of new ideas without relying on my studio habits. It's almost like looking through other eyes, like when you look at a painting through a mirror. ✎