# Overview

## LEONARDO DREW



*CPP1*. Flat bite toner transfer with aquatint printed in blue. 48-x-36-inch image on 56-x-42-inch sheet, edition 10. All images printed by Sam Carr-Prindle in 2015. Visit crownpoint.com for more information.
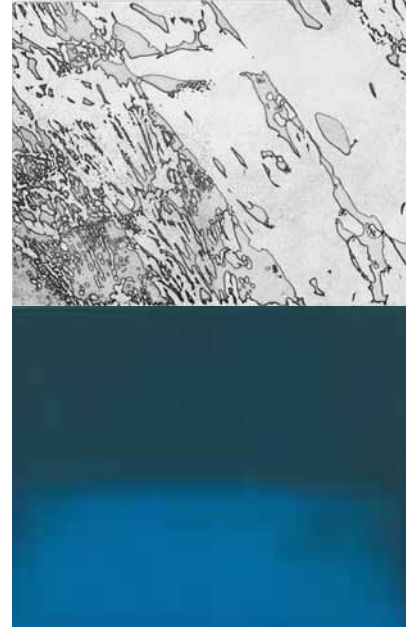
*CPP2*. Flat bite toner transfer with hard ground etching and aquatint. 48-x-36-inch image on 56-x-42-inch sheet, edition 10.

**Just before Leonardo Drew arrived** for a project here at Crown Point Press, a pack of photographs of his sculpture works landed on my desk. This upset me. For more than fifty years I've been battling the erroneous idea that printmaking is connected to reproduction, and it worried me that our newest artist might be thinking along those lines.

I had jumped to a wrong conclusion, however. It turned out that Drew was not thinking of reproduction. His photographs were of tight grids of material, mainly scraps of wood bundled together in an ordered framework, and we did transfer them onto plates. If you'd like to see how they came out, you can search for grids, or intimations of grids, in the prints numbered 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7. "I

*CPP3*. Color aquatint with flat bite toner transfer. 16-x-13-inch image on 25-x-22-inch sheet, edition 15.



*CPP4*. Aquatint with flat bite etching printed in blue and black. 14½-x-9¼-inch image on 23½-x-17¼-inch sheet, edition 15.
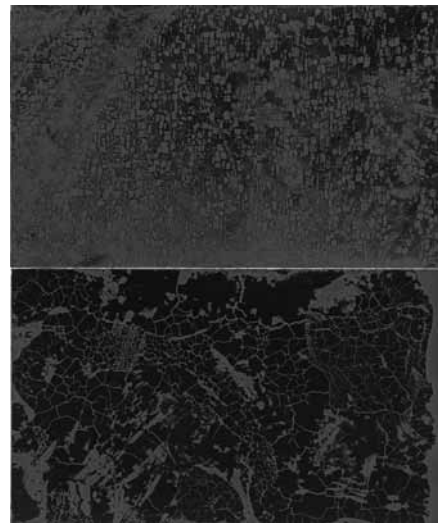


*CPP5*. Flat bite toner transfer with hard ground etching printed in graphite on gampi paper chine collé. 12-x-10-inch image on 21-x-18-inch sheet, edition 15.

need the photos to start," Leo had said. "I don't intend to draw."

"I don't intend to draw." That was a big surprise. I knew that he could draw: while still in high school he was offered a job as an illustrator at Marvel Comics. (He went to Cooper Union instead.) And, having seen the film about him in the "Art 21" television series, I had formed an opinion that his particular approach to sculpture has something to do with drawing. I saw lines everywhere. On the one hand, he would haul up great tree branches to create erratic perpendicular lines and layer them over horizontal lines made of boards stacked one upon another. Or, on the other hand, he would fill a wall with discrete short horizontal lines made of fragments of construction debris.

If you have seen the film, or otherwise are acquainted with Drew's sculpture, you know there are grids nearly everywhere. Grids of metal, grids of wood, grids of cotton batting, sometimes with personal items—shoes for example—scattered in. The work is extremely ambitious.

In the Crown Point studio, Leo and his chief printer, Sam Carr-Prindle, started modestly, doing tests using different materials. Some prints soon appeared on the wall. Then more, and more. "He made a dozen plates in the first day," printer Courtney Sennish remembered. "He was collecting," added Emily York. "He said he didn't want to use drawing as a starting point."
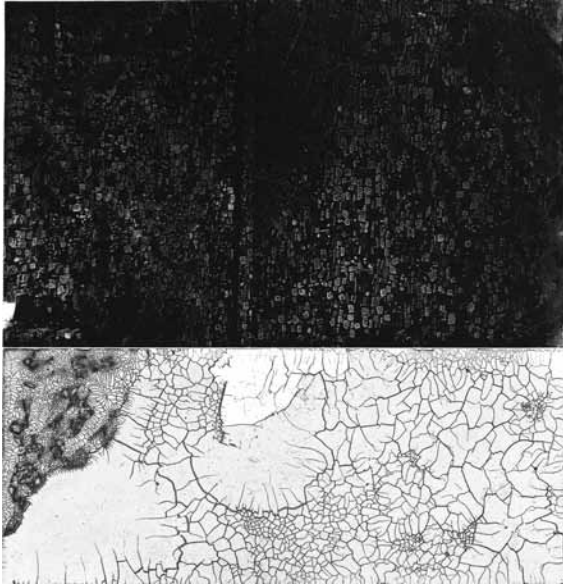
I was in and out of the studio and, at some point near the end of the first day, I walked in and saw an enormous dark form on the wall. Could the printers possibly have pulled a print that size already? No. As I moved closer, I saw a big two-part rectangle that was actually two rubber floor mats, pinned up one above the other

with a thin gap in between. The mats stayed there almost until it was time for Leo to leave nearly two weeks later. Then miraculously (not really) they metamorphosed into the two black panels that became the print titled *CPP2*. The blue one on the cover of this newsletter, *CPP1*, has the same top panel, but a different lower one.

In a video I shot of Leo in the studio, the two black floor mats dominate the wall as smaller proofs accumulate around them. Each proof is from its own plate, different from each other one. I showed the printers the video. "For a long time, I thought we were doing

CPP6. Flat bite toner transfer with hard ground etching. 13½-x-13-inch image on 22½-x-21-inch sheet, edition 15.



CPP7. Aquatint with hard ground etching printed in blue and black. 13½-x-13-inch image on 22½-x-21-inch sheet, edition 15.

tests," one of them said, "But Leo didn't go back into anything. He just kept pulling in more plates, side-by-side, not layered. None of the marks were dictated by his hand."

"The top part of the small one, Number 4, is a good example," another printer put in. "He rolled out asphaltum [which resists acid] on our glass slab, and pressed the plate into it face down. Then we put the plate in the acid. It's a flat bite, with beautiful marks that he didn't actually draw."

That was an early step in understanding the process. Aquatint and hard ground were the techniques Drew mainly used. But, as Sam pointed out, "As soon as he understood the processes, he tried to subvert them. For instance, after we put a hard ground on the plate, he wanted to try to get the ground to crack."

"How did you do that?" I asked. "I've never seen that kind of cracking before."

One of our summer workshop people had been doing it, the printers said, and they had notes on the process. They started with a traditional wax hard ground rolled on a plate. The next step was to paint raw fresh egg white over the ground, and as the egg white dried it cracked the ground in an unpredictable design. Then the plate was etched normally in an acid bath.

"And what about the other main element in the prints, the white forms against dark? Did Leo draw those?" I asked.

"You could say he did," Sam replied, "But not in the way you'd expect. We started out making a cracked ground, and instead of spreading the egg white thinly, he dropped blobs of it on the plate. For the black image, we put on a dense aquatint for the background. In the large print with the blue panel, he shook the aquatint rosin on the plate, so it would be more uneven."

"More dreamy," I replied. Then we talked about my videotape, which shows Leo creating that plate, and we agreed that what he is
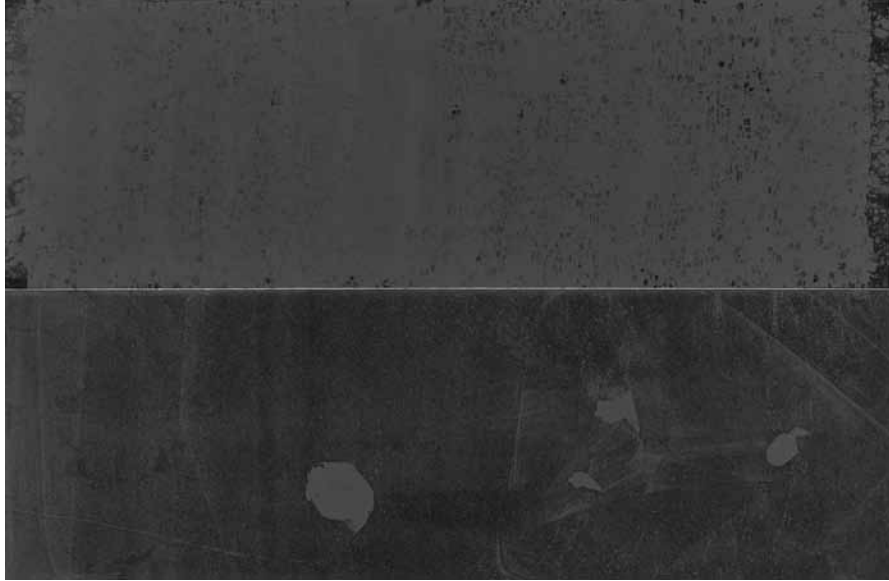


Leonardo Drew (right) with printer Sam Carr-Prindle in the Crown Point studio, 2015.

doing is a kind of drawing. I said "dreamy," I think, because on the tape you can hear Leo's choice of music playing in the studio. It is occasionally dreamy, but mostly classic jazz or R&B.
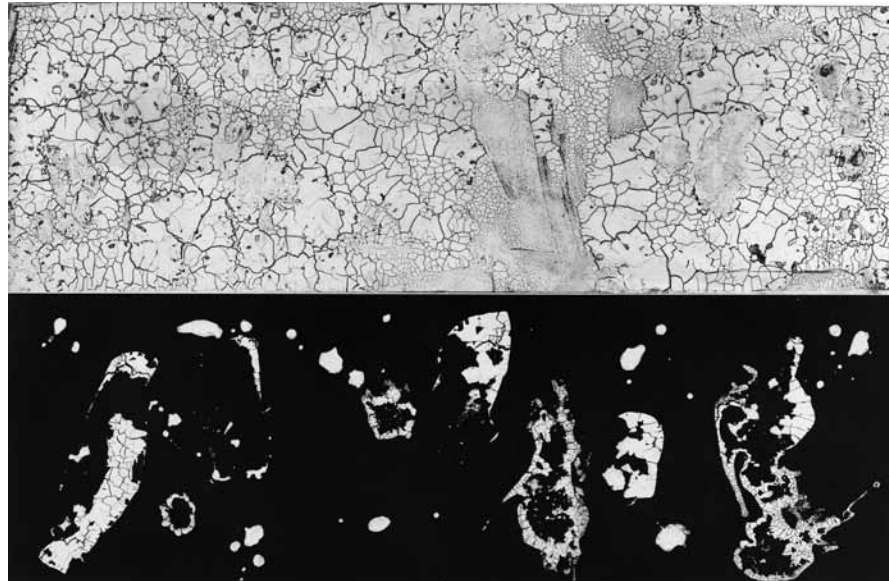
"In the video, you mentioned that he could sand the plate," one of the printers said to Sam. "Did he ever sand anything?"

"Only at the beginning. At some point I realized he just wanted to keep moving, do more, make more entities. He stacked and restacked the pairs, and he would add something—color, for instance, or chine colle. But he didn't want to rework plates."

"We thought he wanted to make a lot of plates and then

*CPP8*. Flat bite toner transfer with soft ground etching printed in graphite on gampi paper chine collé.
14-x-21½-inch image on 22-x-28½-inch sheet, edition 15.



*CPP9*. Hard ground etching with aquatint. 14-x-21½-inch image on 22-x-28½-inch sheet, edition 15.

choose," said another printer. "But he used nearly everything. At the end, of course, some combinations were eliminated. But the plates were not changed."

"For a long time we didn't know if we had anything for sure, and then all of a sudden we had everything," Sam concluded.

"I didn't know what would be on the other side of it," Drew said in an interview on the videotape. "But, look!  It's alive!"
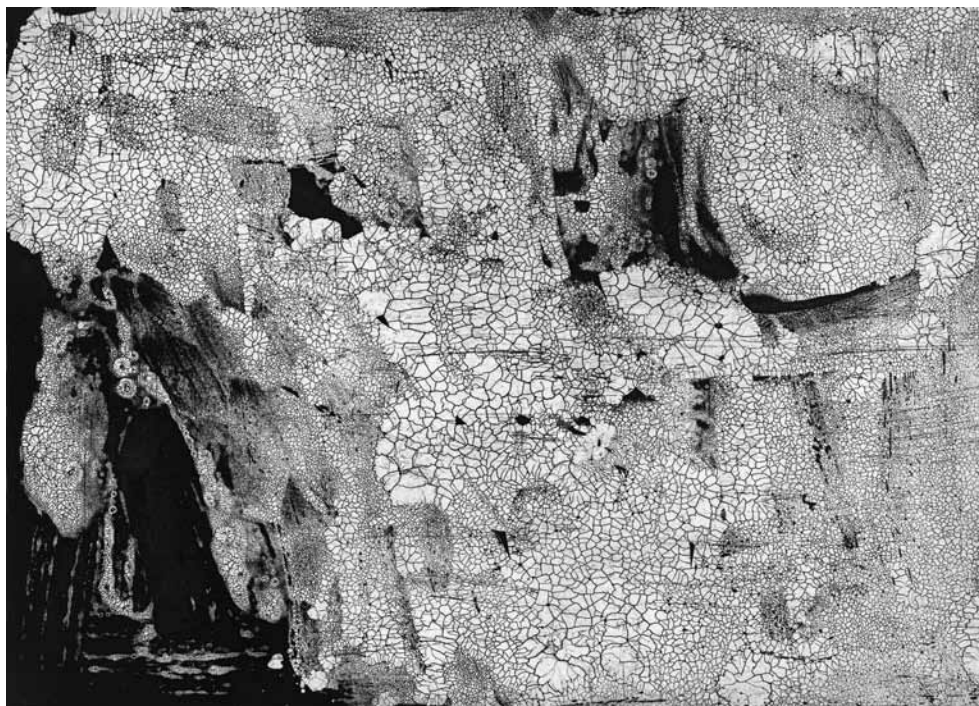
To me, these prints have a liveliness that is different from the energy in Drew's sculpture. For one thing, he has lost (or very nearly lost) the grid. For another, he has created tactile surfaces without using size or physical dimension as elements. Drew's new etchings are so distinctly dense that they must be seen in person to be fully grasped. Even the two largest (which, for prints, are quite large) are diminutive compared to his sculpture.  But each one, large or small, can hold its space.
—Kathan Brown

*CPP10*. Color hard ground etching with aquatint. 18-x-25-inch image on 27-x-33-inch sheet, edition 15.



*CPP11*. Hard ground etching with aquatint. 18-x-25-inch image on 27-x-33-inch sheet, edition 15.

**In the Gallery:**
Leonardo Drew: Eleven Etchings
February 24-March 31, 2016

**Visit Crown Point Press in New York:**
The Art Show, Park Avenue Armory
March 2-6, 2016