



The idea behind this exhibition is to take a long view of the development of the Kentler Flatfiles over their almost thirty year history. The Flatfiles are tightly focused on a few specific media; mainly drawing, printmaking, and other paper-related work. They house both the traditional and the experimental, and a great deal in between. Some artists are well known, but most are not. A tour of the files reveals a staggering range of artists and media, geographic diversity, and stylistic pluralism. The most impressive thing about the project as a whole is the fact that the files function as a largely self-regulating body of work that is in continuous flux. There is a gate-keeper, but the gate is usually standing wide open.

The ebb and flow of the file's contents represents a curatorial democracy. The notion that an ambitious international program could thrive without a tightly controlled submission and selection

process seems highly unlikely, but the Kentler proves that a democracy is possible. This lack of a rigorous exclusionary process means that the files are curated in the true sense of the word. Curate is from the Latin word *cura*, meaning to organize and care for items, not the more contemporary idea of selection.

In the exhibition catalogue for *STACK/FILE* (June 2015), guest curator Ana Torok succinctly summarized the experience of using the files in her statement about the show: "Grab the Handle. Pull it toward you. Make sure to lift as you open it... this drawer is tightly packed with white portfolios. Carefully slide each one out and stack them on the worktable behind you... begin opening the portfolios... think back to the last time you were allowed this close to an artwork." The experience of working in the Kentler Flatfiles is direct and visceral. The lack of a systematic organization in the drawers means that

users must really interact with the works of art in both a conceptual and physical way. It is, at once challenging, but also rewarding and full of delights and surprises.

A few years ago it would have been clever to say that the files are "rhizomatic," to revive an overused word from Gilles Deleuze. This metaphor of a complex, partially hidden plant of ever-changing complexity is an accurate description of the organic ebb and flow of the files. There are gaps between what is here and what the documentation says is here. Some of my initial selections had been sold, some work returned to the artist, and still more work brand new and in a special drawer awaiting final processing.

Stylistically you can see both the larger trends defining each different decade, but also many similarities of specific media. Printmaking and drawing have deeply ingrained traditions that often define boundaries and limitations, as well as similar stylistic traits.

Many of the works in the files purposefully transgress traditional boundaries and align themselves with the experimental tradition descended from the 20th century or pursue the hybridization so familiar to recent art making and demonstrating the elasticity of both media and concepts.

My methodology was to draw lines through the collection and create an analytical matrix. I started with time, looking first at the oldest and newest works, then filled in the blanks in between. I noted the range of media, both traditional and untraditional, the rampant stylistic pluralism, gender, and the many nationalities in hope of reflecting the history and current profile of the files accurately.

Lastly, I chose to hang the exhibition strictly chronologically. This allows for completely random and unexpected juxtapositions beyond the realm of aesthetic choices, but also draws a historical line through files

defined by time. By removing my taste and sensibilities as defining factors in laying out the show, the walls now reflect the lake of organization in the drawers themselves: independent, self-defining, democratic, and a bit chaotic.

Of course, objectivity is a fable in the subjective realm of culture, and if others used my same methodological ideas, the results would undoubtedly be radically different. Save the rational arbiter of time, I have made an effort to remove the aesthetics of the eye (and the I) from the process. In the end I failed, and I can see my sensibility as a curator reflected herein. As with many portraits, all one can hope for is a good likeness of your subject.

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