



CELL PROJECTS

Kent Manske

I have always been attracted to work that is narrative, asks difficult questions, and sends my head and heart new places. Formal abstraction, decorative work, or work seemingly void of content rarely commands my viewing interest and has never satisfied my hunger to make things. I have often wondered how making formal work, rather than anthropological work, sustained an artist's interest. I discovered the answer when a shift in my own work revealed the intimacy and inventiveness of form without the need for implicit content. Who knew it would bring such pleasure.

I began inventing imaginary cells in 2016 to distract myself from making socio-political work, the focus of my printmaking for the previous 40 years. This new biological focus eased my mind from the all-consuming contentious Presidential election campaign that seemed more like a cannibalistic circus than a demonstration of civil democracy. This conceptual shift towards beauty and wonder soon dominated my studio practice.

The shift started in my sketchbook while traveling by train through Europe. Using a small watercolor set, I began creating imaginary biological forms. The goal was to relax and to focus my work on celebrating life rather than on the dramas and contradictions of politics and human behavior. Upon returning home these biological inventions continued to command my attention.

The first completed body of work was *Cells 1–56*, a series of screen-based monoprints trimmed to 21 inch circles and mounted on aluminum. *Cells* began exhibiting as variable site-specific installations—small clusters titled *Omnis Cellula e Cellula: All Cells from Cells* and wall size



installations titled *Genetic Garden*. The one-of-a-kind prints evolved through the loosely planned and unplanned layering of screenprinted ink that welcomed serendipitous results and unintended consequences as opportunities. Working this way was in search of new relationships with an understanding that our world is an expression of happenings—movement, change, flux—not things.

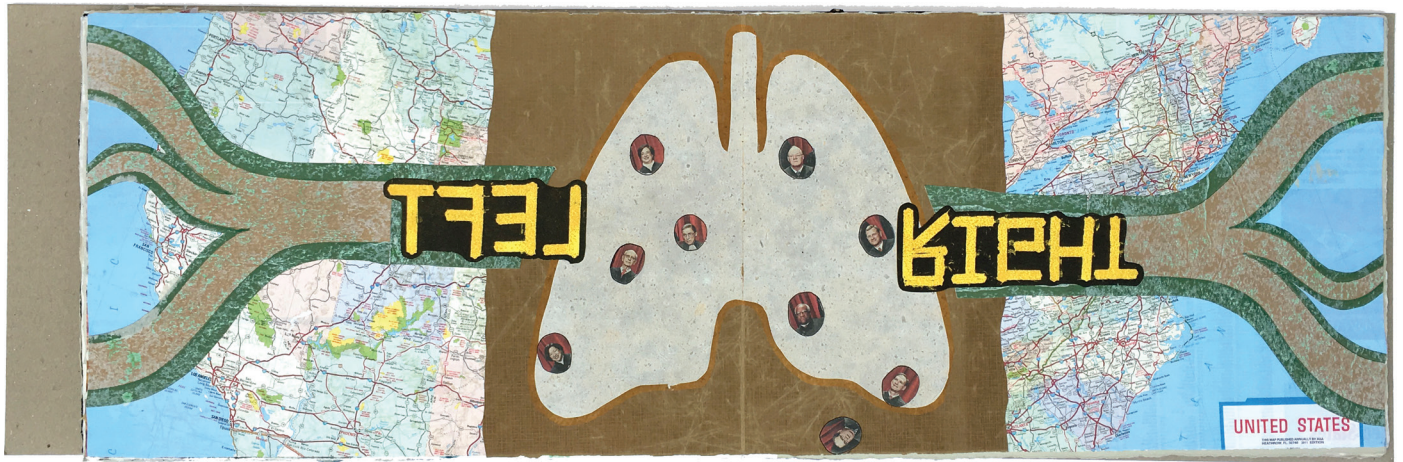
While *Cells 1–56* were evolving in the studio, I was compelled to make an ambitious political work to flush the upcoming election out of my head. The artist's book *Between the Burners* repurposed older prints,



representing back burner issues, and collaged them with new prints, representing front burner issues, to expose the vulnerabilities of concerns facing us with each four-year election cycle. The 48-page book, with embedded electric stove burners on the covers, served its purpose. It also marked a media transition for me, the introduction of print collage that influenced forthcoming cell projects including *Weave*, *Specimens* and *Symbiosis*.

Weave, an 8 by 12 foot print collage on handmade paper, looks to the wonder and beauty of natural systems, our interdependency on them and the perils we face,

and will face, if we do not respect the natural order of things. *Specimens*, a collection of 68 organic inventions, references scientific study from the microcosm to the macrocosm, from cellular biology to deep space. Each specimen is a handleable art object containing between 10 and 50 individual elements made from screen-based monoprints, discarded prints, and make-ready that were cut up, layered and adhered with wheat paste using an etching press. *Symbiosis*, a 9 by 12 foot site specific installation of 61 *Specimens*, suggests evolution, mitosis, infinity and mathematical certainty. When planning the



installation, I was thinking about evolution from a single mother cell, order and complexity without management, and understanding and reciprocity as a cycle of giving and receiving.

When *Cell Projects* first became public, I was self-conscious about exhibiting work of a formal nature. I felt my identity as an artist was through my conceptual work—using personal symbol systems to explore contemporary issues and concerns. When studio visitors began gravitating to the new biological work, it awakened something in me, providing some comfort and reassurance that what I was doing was okay, and perhaps adjusted my ego a bit. When gallery visitors shot selfies in front of installations, I laughed because that had never happened before.

It has been quite satisfying to have my own conceptions about art and my art practice change with a simple shift in perspective. I've become less rigid about following a self-described path for what a resolved work should be, and less driven to believe a completed work must satisfy a focused communication objective. Whether making formal or issue-based work, inquiry and introspection about the interconnectedness of things is what drives my need to create. It is through the creation of images, symbols and visual narratives that I explore my being and belongingness in this ever-changing, complex phenomena called life. This investigation helps me access my own truths and facilitates my understanding of the world in a broader context.

Artist Information

Kent Manske creates images and symbols to inquire, process, manage, convey and assign meaning to ideas about human existence. He uses printmaking and book publishing processes to create one-of-a-kind and limited-edition works on paper. Manske has a BFA from the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire and an MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He is a co-founder of PreNeo Press in Redwood City, CA. His work can be found in public and private collections including the San Francisco Fine Arts Museums and the Oakland Museum of California.

kentmanske.preneo.org/
kent.manske@preneo.org



Image Documentation

Genetic Garden: Cells 31–56, installation of screen-based monoprints, 192" x 96" x 2", 2018

Sketchbook, 5.5" x 4.5" x 1.25", 2016

Specimen 48, screen-based print collage, 10" x 10", 2022

Between the Burners, two-page spread, artist book, 12" x 18" x 2.25", 2016

Between the Burners, artist book, cover, 12" x 18" x 2.25", 2016

Symbiosis, installation of 61 screen-based print collages, 105" x 144", 2022