



OBSERVER *arts*

October 22, 2012

Controlled Experiments

'PROCESS 01: JOY,' AT P!;
'KATRÍN SIGURDADÓTTIR: ELLEFU,' AT ELEVEN RIVINGTON;
'ETEL ADNAN' AT CALICOON FINE ARTS

By Will Heinrich

GALLERIES

When Dutch designer and typographer Karel Martens came to P!, graphic designer Prem Krishnamurthy's new exhibition space on Broome Street, to see the first-ever full show of his letterpress monoprints—installed alongside the aggressively heart-breaking social photography of

Chauncey Hare and Christine Hill's installation *Volksboutique Small Business Outpost (Chinatown Division)*—he insisted on some changes. It was the day before the opening, but Mr. Martens felt it was important that the hanging of his prints reflect the loose, spontaneous way in which they had been made. His is the kind of loose spontaneity

that results from diligent practice and rigorous editing.

Mr. Martens works slowly, rolling one simple, cheery color at a time onto washers, circuit boards, pieces of Meccano (which are like metal Legos) or "furniture"—the low metal blocks normally used to cram inked letterpress type into place—and then printing simple, graphic forms on found paper with its own aesthetic or historical interest. One Venn-diagram-like figure made from overlapping round C shapes in yellow, blue, pink and white is printed on tissue paper from a box of chocolates; several of the prints use archive cards from the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, which were themselves designed by onetime museum director Willem Sandberg, and which record, in elegant crow quill handwriting, restorations to works by Gerrit

Rietveld and Hamish Fulton.

The thoughtful restraint of these experiments allows them to bring into subtle relief the narrow overlap between archiving, curating, and creating, and the intimate interplay between form and function; they creep up on beauty from behind. *Untitled*, circa 2005—the dates are approximate, because Mr. Martens's work is always in progress—shows a six-sided, solid orange-red figure with the outline of a cube drawn in three-quarters view. The color doesn't obscure but rather highlights the printed legend of an archive card from the Moravian Museum in Brno, and the shape, like a Zen painting signed by Yves Klein, at once stamps the card with a new function as art and serves as the product of that function. Claiming nothing, it claims everything.

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Installation view of *Process 01: Joy* at P!.

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