Working Together

JOHN GRAHAM REFLECTS ON THE COLLECTIVE ENDEAVOURS, METHODS AND DIALECTICS OF PRINTMAKING.

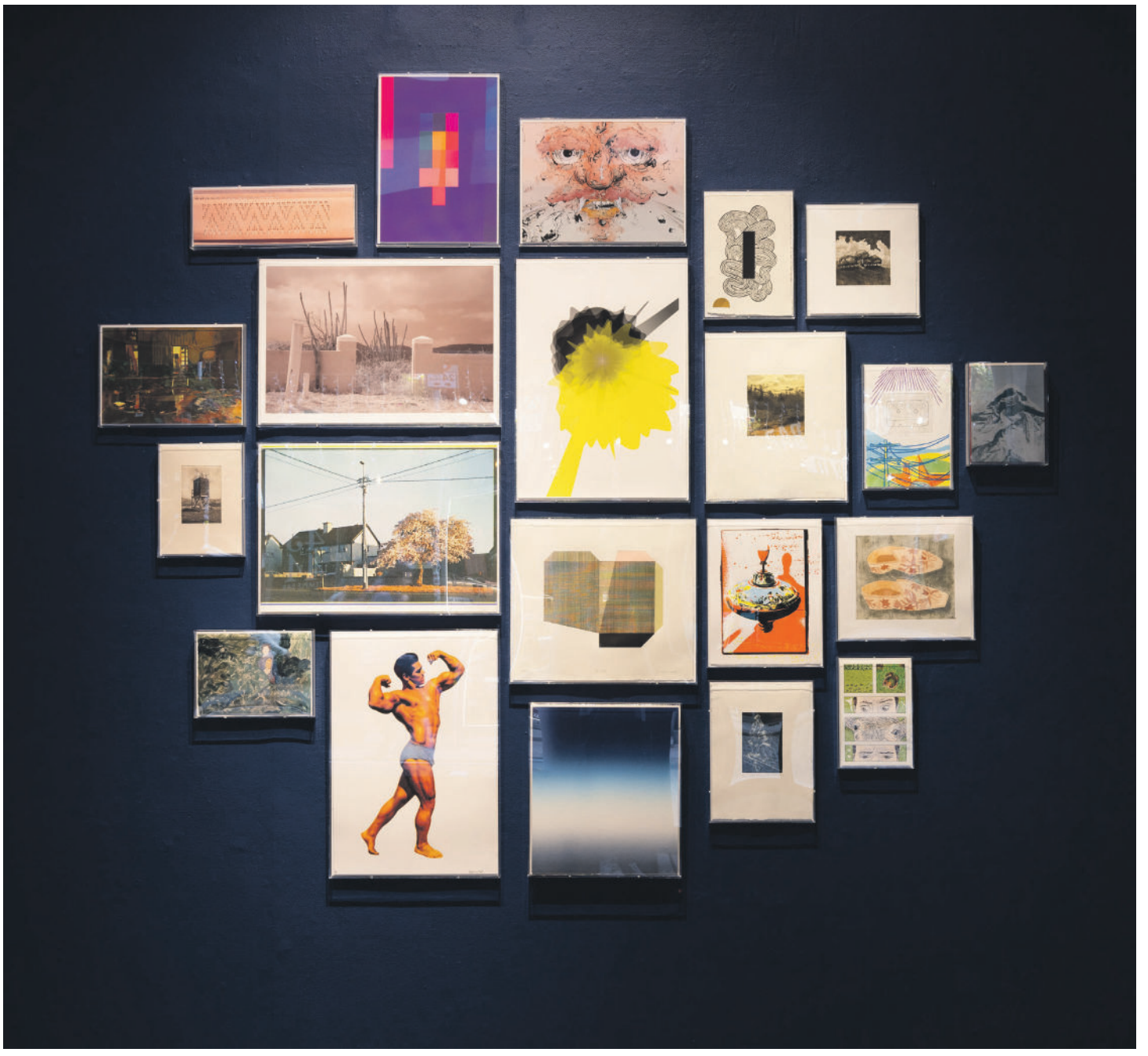
WORKING IN COMMUNAL studio spaces, printmakers share the gains and disadvantages of thinking in proximity. This hive mind, in part, produces a guild-like adherence to methods and protocols, reflected in the discrete stages of printmaking itself. The title of the show, 'Satellite Salon', speaks aptly to this state of affairs, with artists – the satellites here – showing in friendly constellation, a salon-style firmament without need of individual stars.

The Modernist trend of hanging individual artworks within halos of pristine whiteness encourages idolatry. By placement and other means, by degrees of physical and conceptual isolation, a work is deemed complete onto itself, as though it wasn't the product of everything that precedes and follows it, the processes of making and interpretation that form the living system of art. Hanging works salon-style, by contrast, replaces deities with democracy, an approach sacrificing individual preferences for wider recognition.

The numerous juxtapositions of the salon-style hang, its scrambled hierarchy of random connections, produces a montage effect, with individual prints like frames in an exploded film strip. Together as such, the artworks jostle for your attention, but in their various expressions articulate a shared language. Thinking in proximity can produce sameness but also tensions that have the opposite effect. A dialectic, if you will, where contradictions produce momentum.

Brian Eno coined the term 'scenius' to describe collective endeavours preceding so-called individual creations. The musician and producer reminds us that social conditions determine artistic outcomes. In the West, at least, we prefer to focus on exceptional individuals. But the cult of personality (and the cult of genius it accompanies) is a relatively modern invention, allied to notions of liberty, while sometimes forgetting the fraternity and equality that sets freedom in its place. In quiet revolution, the creative intelligence of the Black Church Print Studio community finds outlets in exhibitions like this one and, in more subtle ways, finds it every day within a 'scenius' of mutual exchange. I've seen technical manuals in printmaking studios, but I've never seen anyone using them. Working together, printmakers learn by osmosis. And yet, they can also fetishise technique, as though an obsession with method might compensate for absences elsewhere. I've done this myself. Because printmaking is so demanding, perhaps, but also because polishing the looking-glass of the medium itself protects me from a deeper scrutiny. Or so I sometimes believe. Though intrinsically reflective, printmaking conceals as much as it manifests, a medium enlivened by tensions of hiding and revelation.

With invited curators, a series of innovative Black Church Print Studio exhibitions have included a wide range of media and small groups of artists. Colin Martin's 'Satellite Salon' is unusual because it includes most of the studio members. Conceived as the first in a series of biennials focused exclusively on printmaking, the exhibition highlights the core discipline underpinning diverse practices. A degree of homogeneity – dictated by the framing format – also helps to highlight differences. In printmaking, proximity and physical boundaries are spurs to creativity. We think through limitations. The viewer benefits from this but doesn't need to know it; the harmonies and collisions of this lively exhibition speak for themselves.





All: 'Satellite Salon', installation view, Black Church Print Studio at The Library Project, September 2026; photograph by Lauren Hamilton Studio, courtesy of the artists and Black Church Print Studio.

John Graham is a Dublin-based artist and writer.

'Satellite Salon', presented by Black Church Print Studio and curated by Colin Martin, ran at the Library Project in Temple Bar from 4 to 26 September.
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