

# Best Day Ever: Chris Chandler, analog artist



Joseph Gallivan



Chris Chandler in front of his art work at his studio, beside his Vandercook proofing press. The former sound man for the Flaming Lips lives a comfortable, analog life in Portland.

Chris Chandler has made it in Portland — twice. He had a rock and roll career and now is a visual artist. (Catch his [marvelous solo show](#) now at Elizabeth Leach Gallery through March 2.)

**Aside from his iPhone**, he's almost completely analog. Chandler prints his art on a 5,000-pound Vandercook proofing press (which he fixes himself) and blasts his tunes on vinyl through valve amps and wired speakers.

**Here's Chandler's ideal day** in Portland.

**After 30 years touring** the world as sound guy to The Flaming Lips and Modest Mouse, he's a homebody in his Mt. Tabor neighborhood.


- "I usually make breakfast for my kids (age 8 and 14) — a hand-ground coffee pour-over, and oatmeal — but on weekends, we go to [Coquine Market](#) for espresso, and they have croissants from [Little T](#) bakery," he told Axios at the bar of the art-themed NW Ninth Avenue hotel Canopy.

 **His fave bookstore** is [Monograph Bookwerks](#).

- "You walk in and (owner John Brodie) goes, 'Hey, I've been thinking about you, here's two books I've put aside.'"

**Chandler works with sumi ink**, mulberry paper and Exacto knives, not computers.

- "I'd get distracted by Instagram," he says.

 **For his valve radio, he built a tube AM radio transmitter** and he runs a tiny pirate radio station with a signal radius of a block. As it has no name and no fixed frequency, the feds won't be coming for him.

- "It has this warm sound. I can sit with it for 12 hours, but if it was music from a computer, I couldn't last half an hour."

 **Lunch** is [Por Que No?](#) because the owners have watched his kids group up.

- "Tacos, rice and beans, horchata. Nothing too fancy."

 **In the afternoon** he'll visit his friend Kurt Doslu who runs [Echo Audio](#), a mostly analog hi-fi equipment store.

- "Kurt gets to know what you like. He sends you a text and lets you take it home for a week."

**Chandler has a lifetime free pass** to the Crystal Ballroom because Modest Mouse sold out five nights there in 2004.

- Recently he saw [TV Girl](#) with his daughter and pals. "I sit in the balcony with a beer and see if I know any of the dads there..."

 **At the end of the day** the family likes the mochi ice cream at [Cheese & Crack](#).

- "It's not like a big blizzard, it's little," he says.

## Chris Chandler at Elizabeth Leach Gallery

The large-scale geometric prints are inspired by 20th-century utopian design movements and offer viewers the chance to relish balance and formal flourish.

**JANUARY 19, 2024 | JASON N. LE**

VISUAL ART

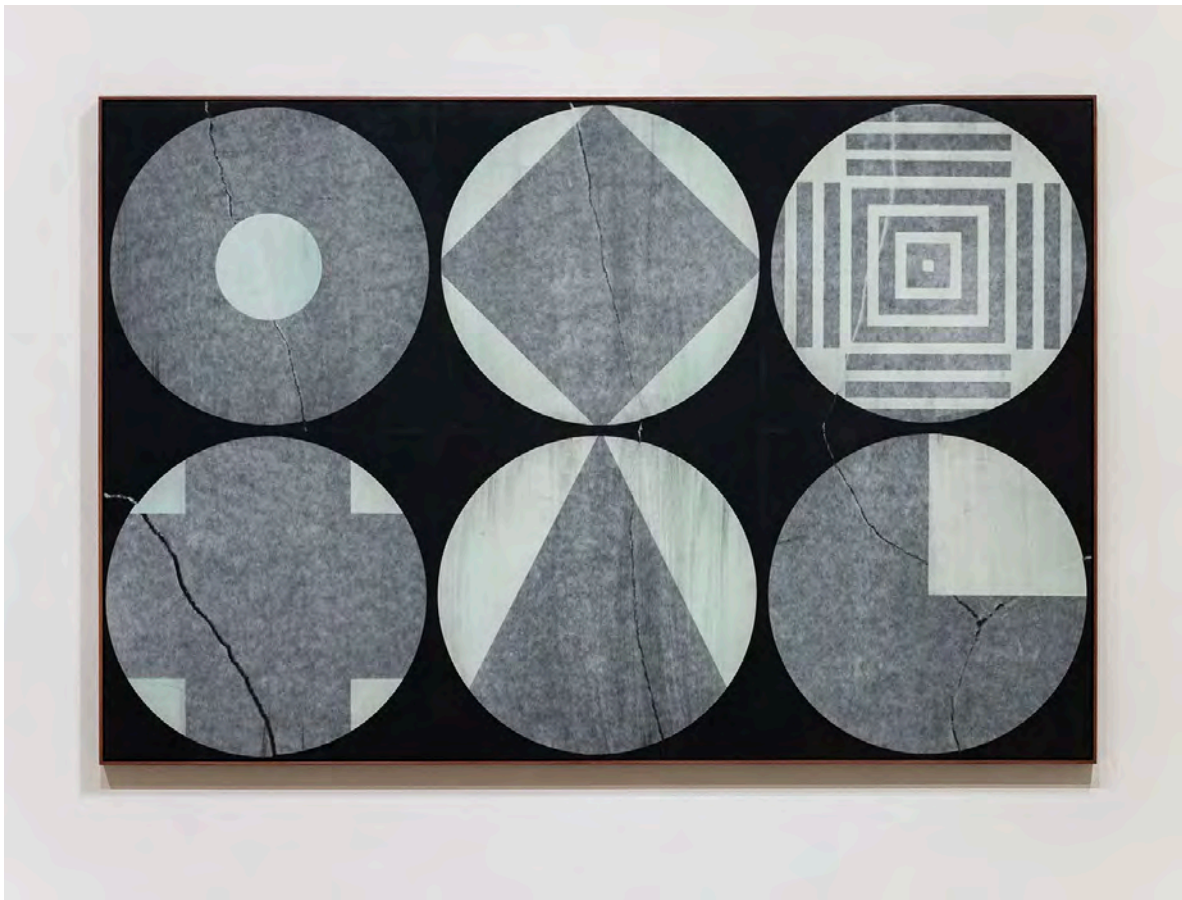


*Installation view of Elemental Forms by Chris Chandler. Courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery.*

*Elemental Forms*, Chris Chandler's first solo exhibition with Elizabeth Leach Gallery, is an intuitive lesson in searching for balance. The eight large monotype

relief prints are, as the exhibition's statement explains, a "balance between formalism and improvisation[...], a delicate layering process of give and take, of knowing when to forge ahead and when to pause." Indeed, the towering geometric compositions are a visually arresting demonstration of Chandler's ability to juggle design constraints while at the same time finding pleasure in formalism. And in this search for balance, perhaps running undercurrent, is also the important spirit of endless possibility.

For inspiration, Chandler often looks to the Bauhaus school and the Constructivist movement with admiration. Both approached art, design, and architecture with an emphasis on simple, harmonious geometric shapes, without excessive or elaborate flourish. And the influence (and his admiration) is obvious: Chandler's hard-edge shapes are tightly organized within the confines of his picture planes, evoking the graphic experimentations of the early twentieth-century movements. His lexicon is succinct, direct, and doesn't stray far from the Bauhaus or Constructivist traditions.



*Chris Chandler, ABO65, 2023, monotype relief print mounted on panel. Courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery.*



*AB065*, the only landscape-oriented print, operates almost like a key for understanding Chandler's language of shapes: six evenly distributed gray circles, contrasting from the stark black that surrounds it, bear the ghostly imprints of the squares, circles, and triangles he employs— albeit with various cutouts and removals. Like a school lesson written on a chalkboard, *AB065* reminds us of the foundational primacy of these shapes, that even the most seemingly complex and dynamic geometric forms are, really, a variation, multiplication, or manipulation of these core elements.

Even Chandler's color selections embody the Constructivist spirit: more than half the works utilize solid black shapes accented by variances of warm grays (not at all unlike *AB065*), which conjures a vintage feel to the works as if they have survived the past century since the movement was introduced to the public. It's almost uncanny: *AB057*, a square composition of two translucent red circles layered over a set of concentric alternating black and white squares, is dramatically similar, if not nearly identical, to the clothing designs of Varvara Stepanova, a Constructivist designer (whose husband, Aleksandr Rodchenko, was one of the founders and a leading figure of the movement) tasked with designing uniform clothing for the working people of Moscow.



*Chris Chandler, AB057, 2023, monotype relief print mounted on panel.  
Courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery*

Yet somehow, I will admit, the exhibition as a whole felt incohesive to me. That is, a few pieces – specifically *ABO63* and *ABO62* – seemed so different from the rest of their neighboring works. At first, I couldn't understand why or how they folded into the mix. They certainly drew upon the established shape lexicon, but their unexpected colors and compositions contrasted the industrial “graphicness” of the other works in ways that were impossible to ignore. *ABO63*, for example, displayed completely different approaches than the others, namely in its colors. They aren't found anywhere else in the exhibition: a pale, soft yellow; an ever-so-slightly-transparent navy-ish blue; a brushed gradient of orange to warm red. Its arrangement of circles and triangles takes a quieter approach, delicately layered to obscure their totality. I found myself less focused on what was recognizable and instead delightfully relishing in the shapes' interactions with one another.

After standing in the gallery for some time, I found the bright blues, yellows, and oranges of *ABO63*, despite their relative vibrancy, to be an attractive buoy of relief in a sea of black/gray/red. It's a funny deception of sorts, actually, as *ABO63* is one of the first works seen upon entering the gallery. Don't get me wrong, it gives a striking first impression: it is warm, ethereal, and alive, with fewer immediately recognizable shape configurations and an enticing veil-like translucent layer that parts in the middle like partially-drawn curtains. But it's just so markedly different from the rest of the body of work. It establishes an expectation that the rest of the pieces, once you turn the corner, will carry the same torch.



*Chris Chandler, ABO63, 2023, monotype relief print mounted on panel. Courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery.*

Similarly, I found *ABO62* to also be attractive in its outlier status. Being one of the larger prints, *ABO62* is pared down and minimal. A blue (the same as in *ABO63*) circle in the upper portion matches the width of the panel, reaching the upper and side edges of the picture plane without compromising its integrity, while five identical obtuse triangles stack below it. While the background is not empty (a close look reveals a faint grid), it is a focused use of negative space that calmly yet confidently directs attention rather than gesturing towards a lack in the composition. In other words, it is a successful, poetic “less is more” approach that contrasts the fullness of its surrounding works.

Normally, I wouldn’t think too much about something like this. After all, outliers in a set are often the hallmark of new direction. However, the visual continuity of the other works – the in-your-face hard edges of the black circles, the dramatic swaths of red upon brushed gray backgrounds, the weighty, heavy fullness of their organization – just seemed to push *ABO63* and *ABO62* towards exile by cause of difference. But frankly, I’m not sure if, in this case, this is to be read as a misstep.



*Chris Chandler, ABO62, 2023, monotype relief print mounted on panel. Courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery.*

I found myself thinking about the utopian interests of Constructivism, their desire for new approaches to art and design that reflected the modern urban and vehicled the ideals of a socialist society. In my opinion, this is a demonstration of a kind of world-building, of envisioning the contours and details of new spaces. But the crucial question to ask of such a vision is: whom does that kind of utopia serve? Certainly it can't be everyone. Although the constitutive parts of Chandler's elemental forms are comprised of the same building blocks, *AB063* is a testament to the importance of difference— that maybe difference, the predecessor of possibility, is another elemental form needed to configure new worlds.

Take, as another way of thinking about this importance of ever-unfolding possibility, the portrait-oriented *AB061*. By layering solid black shapes, whose hard-edge boldness tends to command visual attention, and by removing parts of their whole, what lies beneath is revealed: more shapes, more compositions. The removal does not read as a lack, rather it functions like a window, a glimpse into another possible configuration of geometric elements. Shape dances with its own absences to create new shapes, as if we could crop the compositions or zoom in and out *ad infinitum* and continually discover new possibility after new possibility, even while (re-)using the same foundational tools. The work suggests constant evolution, and accompanying this, constant visual pleasure.



*Chris Chandler, AB061, 2023, monotype relief print mounted on panel. Courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery.*



*Elemental Forms* is not simply a mimicry of the modernist aesthetic movements. To use Constructivism as the only rubric for understanding the work would be a disservice to the work Chandler has done to balance his inspirations, his predecessors, and his own attuned understanding of spatial relations. Regardless of whether or not you intimately know the history of Constructivism, it's very apparent that Chandler has an eye for graphic design— particularly a fun, mostly serious eye. Across all the works, he demonstrates a keen awareness and skill for toying with formal elements of arranging shapes on the picture plane. Yet there is a tuned simplicity to the works: his geometric compositions are stern and not at all shy, speckled with surprising moments that evidence the presence of his hand, allowing space for both the trained and the casual viewer to appreciate shape and color. *Elemental Forms* is a bold debut for Chandler at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, and it will be exciting to see what new forms emerge in future iterations.



## VizArts Monthly: New year, new art

The new year brings new exhibitions to galleries and art venues across the state. Jason N. Le introduces some highlights.

**JANUARY 3, 2024 | JASON N. LE**

VISUAL ART, VIZARTS MONTHLY

Dearest readers, welcome to 2024!

The other day, my colleague and I were chatting about the trends and tendencies we hope to see in the 2024 visual arts scene. The first thing that came to my mind was more collaboration! I've written about collaboration before, but I'll repeat myself because I love how creative minds across Oregon's art scene come together to share a collective vision informed by their individual perspectives. The cross-pollination of creative and deep thinking is one of the things that makes our visual arts scene what it is. You'll find me on this hill for a long, long time. (If you're curious, our other 2024 visions are a return to paintings laden with pictorial symbols, more thinking about the gallery space as a single, cohesive installation à la the 1960s-expanded-sculpture scene, and more research-based curatorial practices.)

And once again, this month's selections have not let me down. This month's group exhibitions focus on time and its passage. The works themselves are not explicitly about time explicitly, but rather reflectively, considering the generational shift of creative minds. Where group exhibitions like *Distinct Visions* at Don Dexter Gallery or *Northwest Masters* at Russo Lee Gallery celebrate influential legacies or the maturation point of one's career, *Dialogues* (appropriately named!) at The Patricia Reser Center for the Arts showcases new voices finding their paths. On a different scale, Juan Miguel Santiago's *On Breaking* at Gambrel Gallery thinks abstractly about the experiences of longing and heritage felt by the immigrant diaspora, which evolves in shape as its generations continue in new or familiar places. It's as if the presence and

passing of time is felt, yet perhaps willingly ignored in the way these contemporary voices are speaking to and with those that came before them.



*Work by Chris Chandler. Image courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery*

*Elemental Forms*

Chris Chandler

January 4 – March 2

Elizabeth Leach Gallery

417 NW 9th Ave, Portland (Tues – Sat 10:30am – 5:30pm)

For his first solo exhibition with Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Chris Chandler presents his latest series of large monotype relief prints, *Elemental Forms*. Chandler, who also runs Neu Haus Press in southeast Portland, typically works by tearing and re-assembling relief prints pulled off his Vandercook proofing press into large-scale, bold, geometric compositions unafraid of color and strong shapes. It's a unique process with stunning results, at once aware of the rules and expectations of his medium yet ready to bend and manipulate them to fit his improvisational approach to Bauhaus/Constructivist-like formalism. While you're there, make sure to also check out *Vessels + Forms* from the Estate of Deborah Horrell, an elegant yet visually arresting exploration of the glass vessel form by the late artist.



# Curated Things to Do in Portland This Week: Shane Torres, Beethoven's Ninth, Karl Denson's Tiny Universe

There's still plenty to do this "Dead Week."

By [Matthew Truherz](#) and [Portland Monthly Staff](#) • December 28, 2023



## Chris Chandler

**OPENS JAN 4** | ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY, FREE

Chandler's monotype relief prints are constructed from abstractions of sounds and words, song titles, and sometimes the music itself—drawing from his former career as a sound engineer and tour manager. He prints geometric shapes and letters with analog typography methods before tearing and reassembling them into new forms, creating bold, Bauhaus-inspired designs that feel at once static and alive with rhythm. This show, *Elemental Forms*, is his first with the gallery.

# Chris Chandler. Machine theory

11 May — 18 Jun 2023 at the Alchemy Gallery in New York, United States

15 MAY 2023



Chris Chandler, Machine Theory. Courtesy of the artist and Alchemy Gallery, New York

Alchemy Gallery is excited to announce Machine Theory, a solo exhibition by Chris Chandler.

The exhibition opens on May 11, 2023 and runs through to June 17, 2023 at Alchemy Gallery. An opening reception will be held on Thursday, May 11, from 6 to 8pm.

Machine Theory focuses on the study of relative motion between numerous machine components and the forces that act on them. Chandler adopts elements of this theory with his large-scale printworks, working in modes of deconstruction and reconstruction with modular type and letterpress printmaking.

Machine Theory pays homage to the tools Chandler uses in his practice, namely, a Vandercook 232P letterpress machine, Alpha-Blox, and Futura Schmuck woodcut fonts. Chandler and his father describe his artmaking practice as “Art-Mechanica”, a nod to his beloved letterpress machine and inspiration for the exhibition’s title, Machine Theory. As Chandler puts it “using the mechanics of ‘the machine’ to guide the process of the print.”

Chandler's printworks communicate an admiration for the Bauhaus and Constructivist movements, and a fondness for the origins of graphic design and typography. Chandler's sizable works are the product of a deep understanding and appreciation of the tools used in his studio. They reveal Chandler's intimate connection with letterpress tools of old, and his experimentation with layers of predominantly neutral and primary colors, bold repetitive patterns, and constructing and deconstructing the modular letterpress type. The large-scale and unique pieces that comprise Machine Theory celebrate abstractions of simple alphabetic forms, minor tears and blemishes created by Chandler's touch, and creases from wheat pasting; a practice carried on from his career as a tour manager in the music industry.

*It's an age-old rivalry—man versus machine. It's almost too trite to mention it, boarding on old hat. And yet still, we find ourselves in fear of being conquered—of the machine so seamlessly simulating humanness that even the keenest among us would not be able to tell intellect from the algorithm. Even so, every new technology has its day in the sun before night falls on its formidable novelty. New machines become old machines—from fearsome to humdrum or, worse yet, irrelevant. And what of those that fall to obscurity? It is no longer man versus machine but machine at the mercy of man. And, in this almost tender bond, man begins to learn more of himself through the machine's own vulnerability as glitches and defects turn into intriguing chance encounters.*

*As a sound engineer for 30 years, Chris Chandler's relationship with technology has long played a central role in his life. However, his real bond with a machine came when he bought his first 5,000 lb Vandercook 232P letterpress in 1996. He taught himself the craft by printing posters and album covers for the bands with whom he worked. It wasn't until after he retired from the road that his practice shifted toward abstraction and into the realm of fine arts. Largely inspired by modernist typography originating out of the Bauhaus, he uses modular-type woodcut blocks to construct his compositions. He often starts with a phrase or a song lyric and organizes the modular wood blocks to spell out the words before slowly deconstructing each letter until all legibility is lost. In this way, he diverges from his Bauhaus predecessors and Maholy-Nagy's "clarity of the message". Communicability is here exchanged for more intuitable forms of knowledge, sensed rather than read. Black squares, quarter circles, and triangular points—the building blocks of all possible written words—merge, abut, and overlay to produce new optical effects. This concern with the elemental components of form also harkens back to the forebears of abstraction, most notably Kazimir Malevich. However, Chandler's black squares are less expressions of the supreme reality of geometrism than they are meditations on the boundaries of typographical expression.*

*Much like the artists of the Bauhaus, Chandler openly embraces the machine in his art. However, unlike the Bauhaus, his interests lie not in mass reproducibility but in finding the irreproducible through an inherently reproducible medium. To do this, he works in collaboration with the machine, merging intention with chance. The tearing*

*of wheat paste stretched too thin creates cracks through the composition, like veins in marble. Running blank sheets through the press to clean off excess ink leaves echoes of the previous print; each echo grows fainter with every pass, a poetic dissolution into an empty page. Or the markings produced from a rag wiped across to clean a block generates a weathered quality. These echos or remnants are layered like palimpsests, one atop another, suggesting a sense of movement, depth, and narrative.*

*Akin to a Cagian attention to silence, Chandler remains attuned to what his machine quietly discloses during moments between more active thought. Like when he runs the machine, passing the print back and forth through the press. An otherwise rote task provides a moment of generative reflection. He watches as his machine relays his compositions back to him in fragments, upside-down, and backwards—providing insight into new perspectives. Chandler doesn't just direct his medium and tools, but listens and allows them to inform his practice and designs. The Brazilian neo-concrete artist Lygia Pape comes to mind, who, like Chandler, plays on the material properties of her medium to generate expressive tension in the composition. Chris Chandler's collaboration with his machine results in a beautiful merging of the organic and the manufactured, where fear has given way to a fertile union between man and machine.*

(Words by Bronwyn Roe)



## Alchemy Gallery

Alchemy Gallery's mission is to celebrate that process artistically, by fostering the development of artists at all levels, in all mediums, and championing their art with the right audiences of quality collectors.

[Gallery profile](#)

Location  
New York, United States

Founded in  
2022

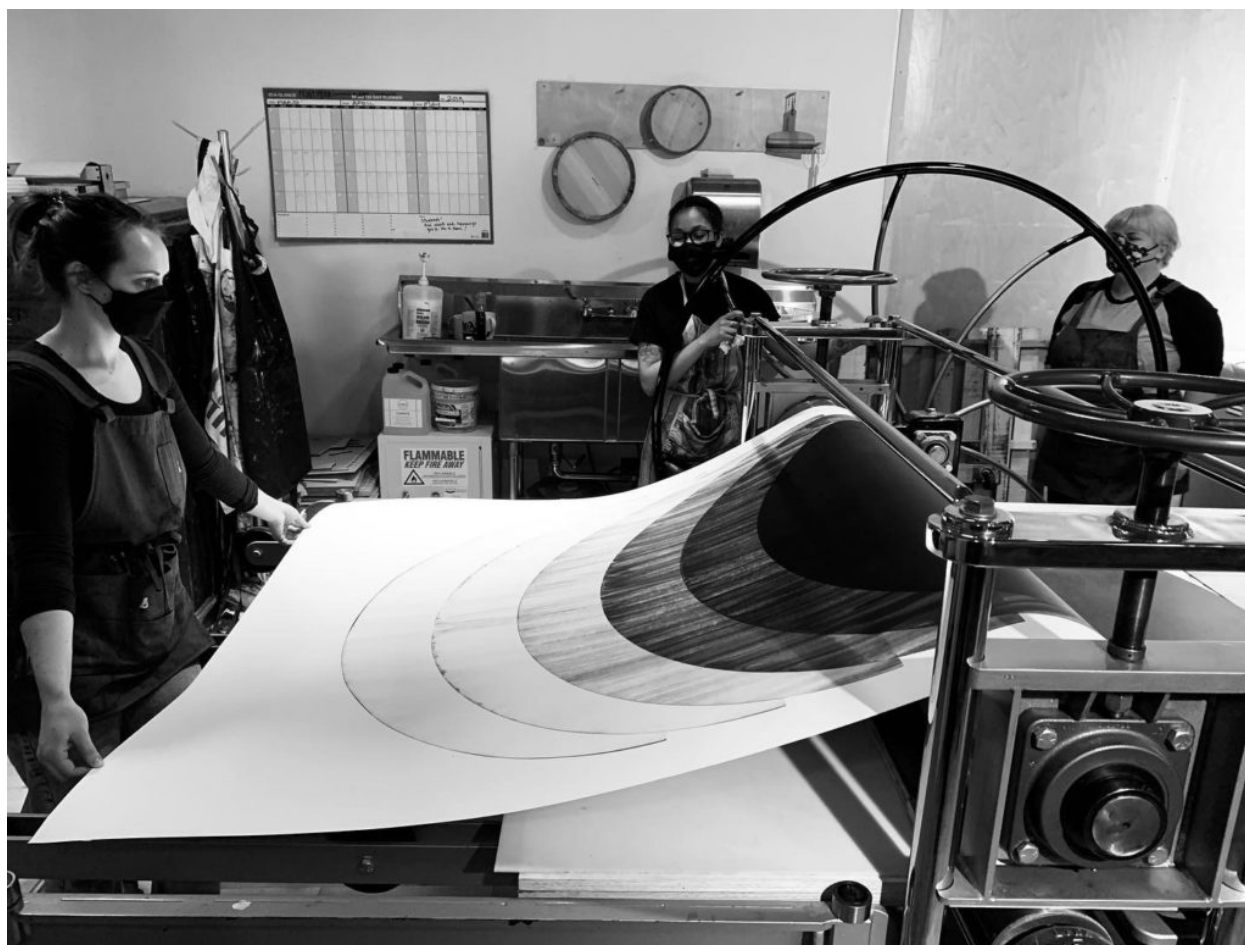


1. Chris Chandler, Machine Theory. Courtesy of the artist and Alchemy Gallery, New York
2. Chris Chandler, Machine Theory. Courtesy of the artist and Alchemy Gallery, New York
3. Chris Chandler, Machine Theory. Courtesy of the artist and Alchemy Gallery, New York



## Intentional Misregistration

Shara Chwaliszewski



Students from the MFA Print Media program and Watershed Center for Fine Art Publishing and Research, PNCA.  
Photo courtesy of the artist.

“I like how the registration kind of goes off here,” Chris Chandler explains, leaning as he gestures. Chandler and I are walking around the gallery, talking about his recent show, *Modular Shifts*. Much of his work as a large-scale abstract letterpress print artist incorporates layers and torn areas, resulting in little disruptions of information, interruptions that the eye skips across as the brain inserts its own connections. “I like to disjoin a bit,” he continues, “so it just breaks it up and it’s not these complete shapes or circles; it has that disconnect which I enjoy.”

Challenging the conventions of letterpress through these subversions of tradition, Chandler’s practice is at once autodidactic, disciplined, and iconoclastic; open to the opportunities presented by chance and error; and fostered by engagement with other

artists. Chandler's printmaking is a second act, and his thirty years blending and balancing sound for touring bands informs his work. Musical references come up often in our conversation, often serving to reveal structure, a constraint Chandler both accepts and challenges.



At work mixing sound. Flaming Lips Tour, San Francisco, 1999. Photo courtesy of the artist.

We are standing in front of *The Space Between Us*, a rare collaboration between Chandler and rubber stamp artist [Savvas Verdis](#) created during the height of the pandemic. Chandler prefers to work alone or with an assistant in his Portland studio, using a 5000-pound Vandercook 232P letterpress machine and large-scale woodblocks. "We were supposed to get together and do a project and the pandemic hit. Verdis came up with the space between us line which means two things to him: one is I'm in Portland, he's in London, and then also he teaches economics. During the pandemic, we all saw more class separation, the spaces between the wealthy and the poor. So I printed the words underneath. You can see them kind of bleeding through, and you can also see it through the tears."



*The Space Between Us*, 2021, Monotype relief print on Kikakura paper, mounted on panel, framed in Walnut, 48" x 48" x 2". Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

Although they don't feature in all the pieces he makes, the tears are one notable characteristic of Chandler's style, and they set his work apart from most printmakers. As we look more closely at *The Space Between Us*, he reminisces about an early show of his prints. "The first show I was doing was with a print group that was teaching and wanted to show some of my work. They panicked thinking it all got destroyed in shipping, like someone went in with a knife or their keys and tore it all. They liked it after we talked about it, but the initial thought was fear. I had to explain to them that was not the case; it was supposed to be that way."

Chandler taught himself printmaking during his sound engineering days. He laughs as he says, "I never took classes, and I never went to school, so I didn't learn the correct way to do it. A lot of the way I do it I made up as I went along. Maybe I can't unteach myself the way I do things. It seemed to come naturally. I did posters and a lot of ephemera when I was on the road. We did popcorn boxes for a party, things that were meant to be cool but disposable. When I quit touring and wanted to do my own art, I had the idea of using the letterpress machine as my way to make art. So instead of the paintbrush or instead of whatever I chose a huge 5000 pound machine."



Standing in front of *Modular Shifts*, the 18' x 10' relief print installation that gives the show its name, Chandler considers a potential project. "I would like to take like a wall like this and use these patterns but do it like it's a drumbeat. So that circle would be the kick, that would be the snare." He trails off, his gaze not so much at the mural on the wall but the ones building in our heads as he speaks. "I want to try and do patterns in a bigger way. Not that anyone would know that's a drumbeat, but they might see different rhythms."



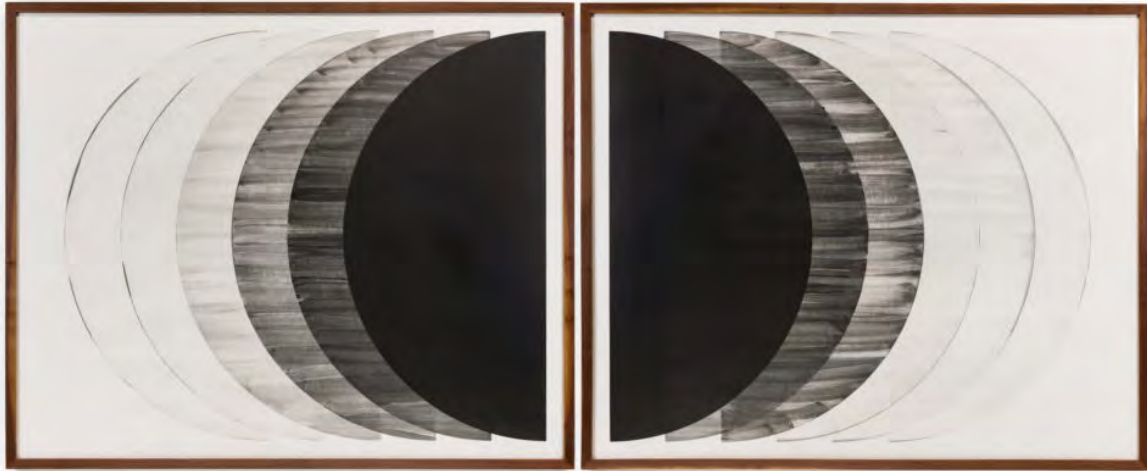
*Modular Shifts*, 2022, Relief print installation, 18' x 10'. Courtesy of the artist and Washington State University, Vancouver.

When I ask Chandler what ambitions he has as far as scale, he begins by talking about the transition from the music industry to full-time art-making. It was then that the scale of his work shifted. "I got invited to Print Week in St. Louis, right when I got out of touring, and they said bring your posters and talk about poster-making. I thought, everybody does that, and my wife said: do something big. Take what's on the page and put it on the wall. Like when somebody walks into a venue, you've got the band on stage, you look up, you see it. I wanted to figure out a way to do that."

*Modular Shifts*, Chandler informs me, will be recreated on the outside of a building. "I've done two or three of these about this size. A developer wants to take a piece like this and have it on the outside of their building, six stories tall. What they'll do is they'll come look at this, they'll take a picture of it and get closeups, then they'll give it to a mural artist who will recreate it as a painting, but they'll try and get all the [tears and] inking marks." Like scale and abstraction, these inconsistencies are now considered worth preserving as hallmarks of Chandler's work, but he tells me, "when I



started doing this and posting about it a lot of printers would reach out to me and said hey, I can help you, why are those marks on there, why is it torn, you don't have to do this, why is it this way? They were struggling with it. Printmakers are the nicest people around and so willing to help and willing to share information, but also I think that it's a very precise and technically driven practice and when they see you get done with a print after you've worked so hard on it and you tear it, it's a bit of a "why did you do that?" moment for other printmakers."



*Fade-Out*, 2022, Variable relief print on Mohawk Cotton paper, 11' x 54.5" Edition of 5, co-published with Watershed at PNCA/Willamette University. Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery

"It's not for everyone," Chandler continues with a wry smile, as we look at *Modular Shifts* and *Fade-Out*. "The ink wiping that I like to do came from when I was cleaning a wooden block and ran a page and thought it was kind of cool. I worked up this system of inking by hand with the rags and diluting the ink with burnt plate oil and Gamsol [mineral spirits], and I vary it depending on how dense I want the color. The trick with the ink wiping technique is control. I control the exact amount of ink that's on the rag, as well as the pressure, so it takes a little bit of time for me to figure it out." Those inconsistencies enliven the lines and shapes that begin as separate marks, coalesce into lines that connect and then disconnect, their registrations slightly off, reaching towards each other across divides. In all directions the motion stutters across the barriers, providing a little frisson, a thrill of something slightly askew. "I like it," Chandler explains, because it adds movement and depth to the piece; it adds something that's not normal in the print world."

What's normal, or at least conventional, in the letterpress print world, is smaller work that transmits encoded visual information. Words. *Alpha-Blox*, one of the modular types that Chandler uses in his work, consists not of individual letters but of "curves, straight sections, L's, T's, U's and other patterns,"<sup>[1]</sup> so that letters as well as borders can be built from the parts. Chandler acknowledges that "when you think of letterpress, at least when I do, you get a lot of people that mention wedding invites, broadsides, smalls, things like that, you don't think of a big piece." Chandler uses two-

foot square wood type versions of the metal type, printing, repeating, and combining the disassembled letterform segments to create his abstractions. They're not informational in the way people expect letterpress pieces to be, and certainly nowhere near the same size.

Other works float on the wall, empaneled and framed, hung but still seeming unconfined, as if they were about to tear themselves strategically and reveal a new layer. The tear concept, Chandler tells me, came about through capitalizing on error and good advice. "I had come up with the idea of printing pieces and wheatpasting them on panels. When I did the first one, I had my design, I had my four [printed] pieces, 48" by 48" ready to go. I went down to the lumber store to get a piece of plywood and I told them I needed it cut down; they said it's fifty cents a cut and it's not going to be accurate, but we'll get it close.

I got back to the studio, and it wasn't even close. There was all this space where the [four] prints weren't connecting. My friend Max Collins, a street artist who works with wheatpaste, said, 'when I wheatpaste I'm up two stories, three stories or wherever and I'll tear the print and move it to the edge, so it makes the edges all the same. From two stories down you don't see the little tear. He said let's just do that, so it's all even; we can see how it fits and don't worry about the tears.' We did that, and I just sat there and stared at it, for about a week.

Then I was in my studio and my friend Lisa walked by, and asked what I was doing. I said I'm looking at this and I really like it, but I don't know if I should tear it or leave it. She said that's easy: if you want to be a designer, don't tear; if you want to be an artist, tear. The tears were a lot more at the beginning; I tamed it down a little bit, got a little more calculated."



AB039, 2022 Monotype Relief Print on Awagami Kozo paper, mounted on panel, framed in Walnut, 48" x 48" x 2".  
Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery

That mix of intention and experimentation results in pieces that may not appear related to Chandler's original ideas. Chandler considers plans a useful starting point from which to diverge as opportunities for exploration present themselves, a sometimes necessary "you are here" to navigate from and towards. When I ask Chandler how his designs come together, he gives me an example: "I have little 2" x 2" cut outs of all these fonts, backed with a little cardboard. I carry them in a bag and lay them out in designs and stack them. Like a little laptop, but analog. That's a good way for me to start building ideas and shapes and that's what I do for the bigger pieces like Modular Shifts. The smaller ones come together more just when I'm at the press; I'll be just messing around with them and [they] kind of come together as we go."

With some of the bigger 4' x 4' or 4' x 8' prints I'll spell out a word or a letter, and then I'll start scrambling it. I have a loft in the studio with a big open space, so I'll spell out the word, go up in my loft and look down, run down the stairs, and turn a few pieces and run back up, run down, and turn a few pieces, and just go back and forth until it turns into something. That way it's a starting point, but also abstract. People

may never figure out the word, but you can tell [looking at Modular Shifts] that's maybe a V, that could have been an E at one time and an O or number 8. So, it's all familiar for some reason but not obvious which I like."



Chris Chandler's Studio. Courtesy of the artist.

The titles of Chandler's work are numbered, a reference to his love of music and a way to provide a loose chronological organization. Standing in front of AB039, he explains that "when you'd collect Impulse Jazz or Blue Note records everything would have a number on it, so 001 you know that probably came out, what, 1966; it was kind of early on, and you can kind of see the trajectory. AB039 is the 39th Alpha-Blox one.



You can look at all these and say okay that's what he was doing at that time. I like that linear footprint that you leave as an artist."

The next step is his first show with Elizabeth Leach. Recently signed by the gallery, Chandler has plans to add a sculptural and interactive dimension to his inaugural show, scheduled for early 2024. Again, as with the drumbeat mural he talked into being earlier in our conversation, Chandler shares ideas on work he dreams of making. "One thing I'm working on is making blocks, two feet by two feet by two feet, with shapes wheatpasted onto each side. We'll have maybe eight cubes in the middle of the room, and people could come by and redesign it or reshape it." He pauses, his gaze going off into the distance again. "So then you'd have the walls covered with prints and have something in the middle of the room that you can walk around, a kind of sculpture that'll give you the middle space."

And then, as so many times throughout our conversation, Chandler is talking about music and how his love of early punk rock sparked a new line of inquiry. "When I was fourteen, I got to spend some time with this band The Clash. I took a bunch of mediocre photos backstage, but they have a weird sense of the 80s, early 80s, just the band sitting around eating pizza or drinking a beer or hanging with the fans. I want to take some of those and recreate them, maybe one of Joe Strummer sitting up against the wall with a beer and do that in a 4' x 6' print. I've been experimenting with taking an old photo and recreating it as a wood block, and then underneath it I'll have Alpha-Blox bleeding through the tears. I'm not sure that's my new direction but it's something to have fun with and mess around with."



The Clash backstage with fans, St. Paul, MN, 1984. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Chandler continues to find unusual ways to combine and confuse visual information, often getting inspiration by capitalizing on the unplanned and unexpected. Even his choice of medium or, more accurately, how he has taken it to unexpected places through his improvisations, is unique. While there are other printmakers working with letterpress, his abstracted, oversized, and manipulated prints stand out, rhythmic messages thrumming steadily and then fibrillating breathlessly now and then, at a frequency always just beyond apprehension; a combination of the familiar and the unknown.

**Chris Chandler** founded [Neu Haus Press](#) in 1996 after he acquired his first Vandercook Press in Venice Beach, CA. Through the years his love, talent, and knowledge for this vintage craft has grown. In addition to his love for printmaking, Chris spent 30 years working as a tour manager and sound engineer in the music industry and has had the privilege of sharing his passion for letterpress with a variety of musicians, leading to intimate collaborations and the opportunity to print their work. Currently residing in Portland, Chris is represented by [Elizabeth Leach Gallery](#), Portland, OR.

Born on the east coast of Canada and raised on the prairies, [Shara Chwaliszewski](#) has made her home in the Pacific Northwest since 2006. Working in several mediums with an emphasis on discarded or found materials, she creates two- and three-dimensional images that are largely non-objective but often biomorphic. A Washington State University Vancouver alum (BA English and BAFA, 2021), and the Fine Arts Student of the Year for 2021, Shara works as a tutor at the campus Writing Center and makes art in her backyard studio.



LOCAL STORIES

## Meet Chris Chandler | Artist

May 2, 2022 · Leave a reply

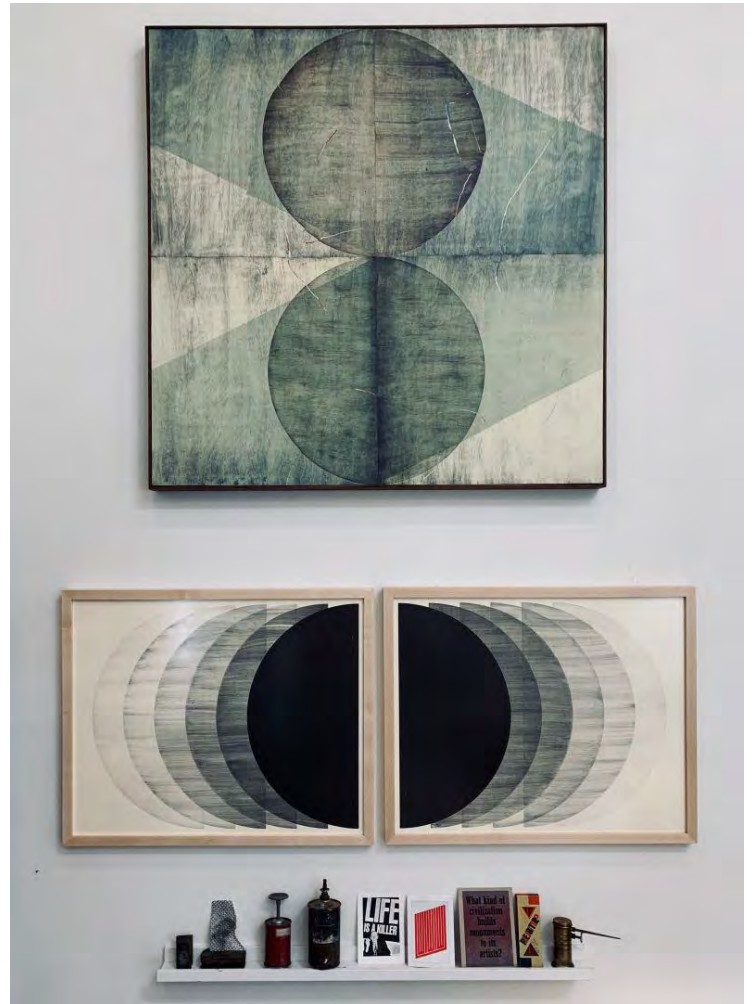


We had the good fortune of connecting with Chris Chandler and we've shared our conversation below.

**Hi Chris, what was your thought process behind starting your own business?**

I spent 30 years as a tour manager & sound engineer and was looking to retire from the road. My art practice was always in the background as I toured, and I wanted to take the next step and make it my full-time career. For me working as an artist allows the freedom to be at home and spend time with my family, which is important to me.





**Alright, so let's move onto what keeps you busy professionally?**

Recently I've signed with the Elizabeth Leach Gallery; they will be representing me as one of their artists. I'm creating a new series of works for them along with preparing for a few upcoming shows.

I'm still keeping the Neu Haus Press portion of my business dedicated to designing and printing concert posters. With shows coming back and more bands touring again it's giving me plenty of opportunities. I just finished up a poster for my friends The Flaming Lips and a new acquaintance, Patton Oswald.





Any places to eat or things to do that you can share with our readers? If they have a friend visiting town, what are some spots they could take them to?

I would start with all the amazing art galleries. From the artist run, La Loma Projects to Tierra Del Sol Gallery. The curatorial pop-up Peripheral Space and The Broad Museum always has something interesting.

I also love exploring downtown, from the architecture to the ramen at Daikokuya Little Tokyo. Any visit would need to include a stop at old hometown, Venice Beach, to walk the canals and visit the boardwalk.







**Shoutout is all about shouting out others who you feel deserve additional recognition and exposure. Who would you like to shoutout?**

I believe this response was to go with the question regarding 'inspiration'

My wife and family have always given me amazing support. My decision to leave my career at 50 years old and try to make it in the art world was not the most conventional one. They have always encouraged me to follow my passion. Another major influence was getting to spend 20 years touring with The Flaming Lips. The bands lead singer, Wayne Coyne, always found a way to motivate you to explore new ideas and ways of thinking.





**Website:** [www.neuhauspress.com](http://www.neuhauspress.com)

**Instagram:** [www.instagram.com/neuhauspress/](http://www.instagram.com/neuhauspress/)

### **Image Credits**

Evan Beasley Airyka Rockefeller

**Nominate Someone:** ShoutoutLA is built on recommendations and shoutouts from the community; it's how we uncover hidden gems, so if you or someone you know deserves recognition please let us know [here](#).







“Imperfection allows me freedom when I work, but that doesn’t mean I don’t strive for perfection. I will embrace it when it happens and then try to control that process back into the print.”

# CHRIS CHANDLER

**Portland, Oregon, USA**





collaborations with their artwork. Chris also tries to combine music with letterpress. Music has been such a defining thing in his life—"from seeing drum patterns and scores in my prints to my Fade-Out prints referencing 'fading out' while working in a recording studio or even making posters for concerts." He balanced music and art for about 20 years with traveling, touring, recording, managing, and making prints. Now, he is enjoying dedicating more time to the print studio, where music is constantly filling his work space and keeping his flow going.

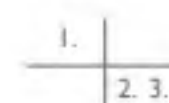
Residing in Portland, Chris is able to expand his printing portfolio and create letterpress art. He was inspired by pioneers of graphic design such as master typographer Jan Tschichold, El Lissitzky, and the Expressionist painter and printmaker Erich Heckel. He now partners with Hannah Bakken. Hannah hails from Malheur County, Oregon and works interdisciplinarily by combining printed media with performance, sculpture, and installation to explore identity, the body, landscape, and place. She is the studio manager of Neu Haus Press.

Before stepping into letterpress printing, Chris Chandler experimented with pottery and photography and struggled with waiting to see the results. "With pottery and photography you wait for your work to come back from the kiln and the film to get developed at the lab, but with printing you see the results as you go and can adjust on the spot. I love this immediacy of working." He was first introduced to letterpress in Los Angeles in the mid-90s by Bruce Licher, the owner of Independent Project Press. At that time, Chris was in a band, "Our band shared a rehearsal space and I was intrigued by his prints on the wall. It was Bruce who encouraged me to get my first press. At that time it was a means for me to create promotional posters and flyers for the band I played in, but it grew into my own creative art practice as time went on."

In 1996, he founded Neu Haus Press when he acquired his first Vandercook press in Venice Beach, California. Through the years his love, talent, knowledge, and collection of this vintage craft has grown. In talking about his process, Chris says, "My first consideration is usually asking myself: Where it is going to go? Am I making a wheat-pasted mural outside or a smaller work to be framed or mounted on a panel? I am guided by what paper I am drawn to, what blocks I want to use or custom make for a specific work. Honestly though, most of my considerations come with the process of the printing. I will put down the first few colors, go home and sleep on it, come back in a day or two and add the remaining colors, go home and sleep on it, repeat until I decide it is done."

From 30 years working as a tour manager and sound engineer for bands, Chris has had the privilege of share his passion of letterpress with musicians through

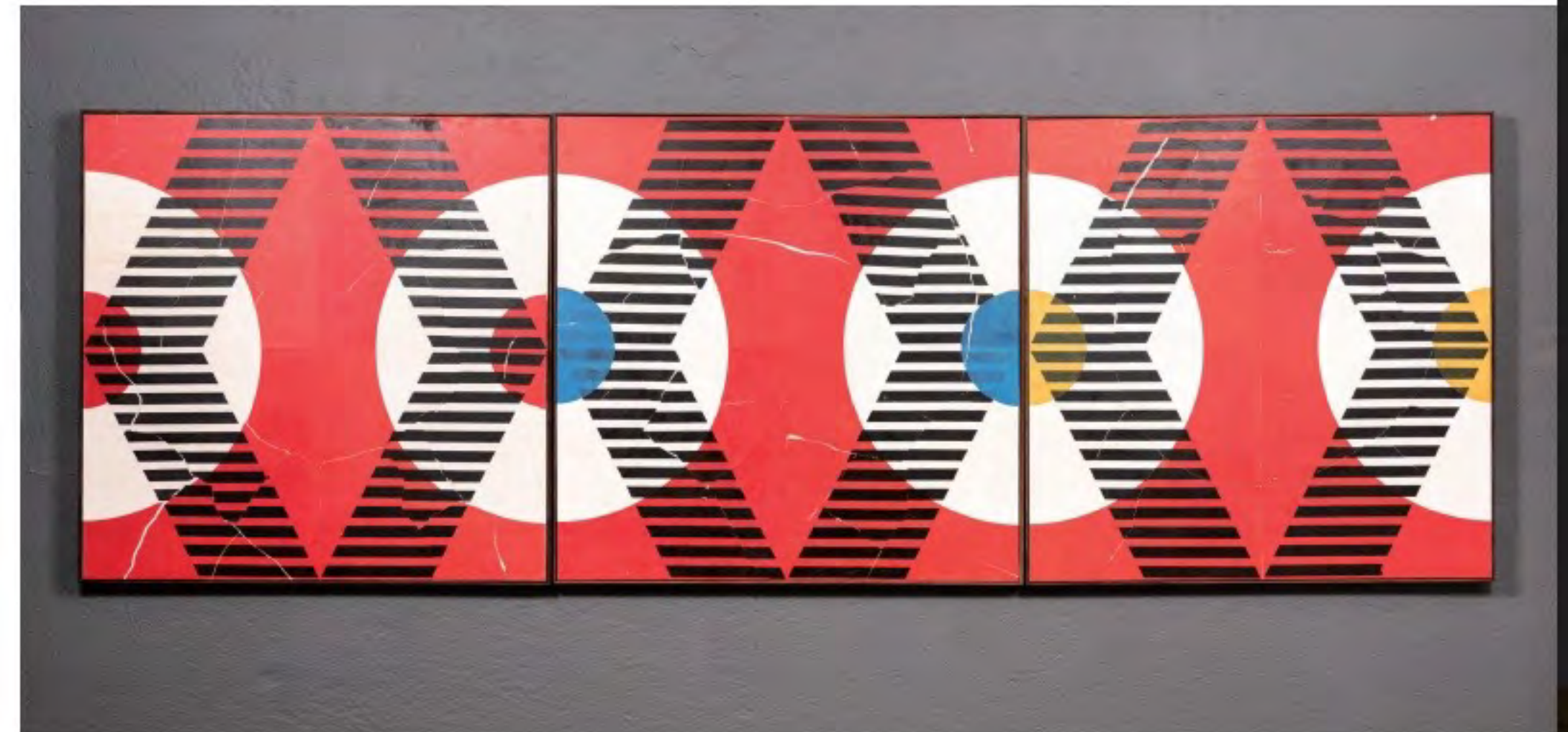
1-3. Chris Chandler and his Neu Haus Press. Photos by Airyka Rockefeller.







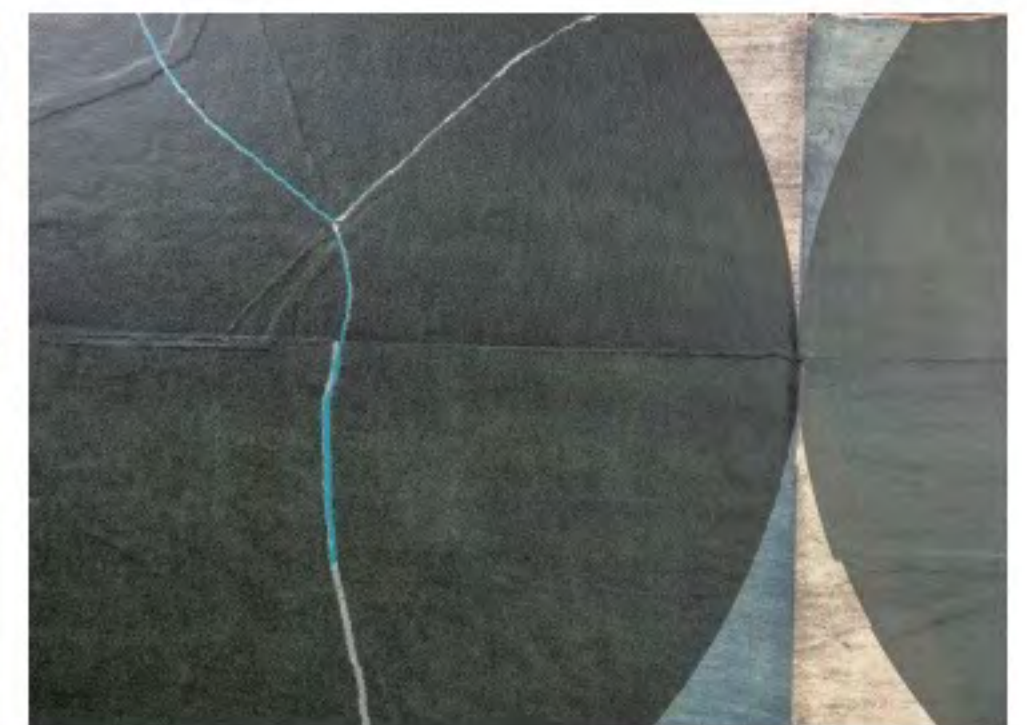
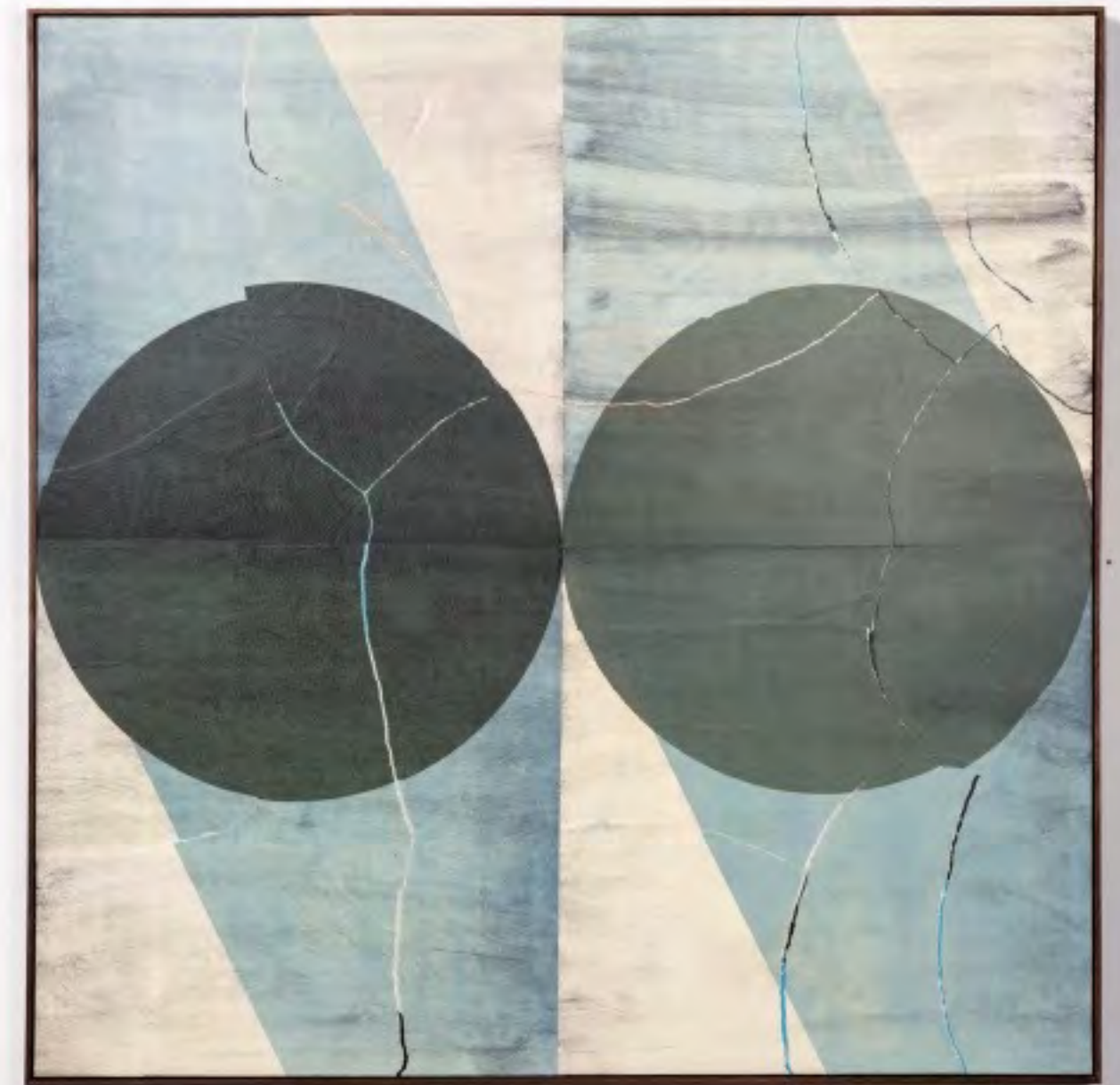
▲ In 1944, American Type Founders (ATF) introduced Alpha-Blox, an impressive system of both solid and linear shapes that could be combined to create all manners of typefaces, ornaments and pattern in one or two colours. Chris recreated and re-envisioned the font in large wood block form. Printing on his Vandercook 232P and with the assistance of Max Collins's use of wheat paste as an adhesive, Chris has created billboards as large as 14' × 20'.







▲► Linear-Reverse exhibits large-scale relief monprint works by Chris Chandler of Neu Haus Press. Chris uses the lexicon of his large-scale Alpha-Blox to plan his overall compositions and patterns, yet allows for freedom in his layering of colours, dimensional play through wood grains, and visual reveals of colour and texture from wheatpasting the prints to panel surfaces. The resulting works focus on beauty and simplicity in design, visual associations within abstraction, and the endless possibilities of working iteratively within a modular system.







▲ Linear-Reverse highlights the importance of Chris's creative process, and the collaborative dynamic between him and his Vandercook press. He simultaneously works within the confines of the Alpha-Blox design, and the freedom of monoprinting, creating a body of work where each piece is individualised and is a record of the constructive conflict between artist and machine, showcasing the beauty that can result from the reproductive nature of working within analogue print processes.



**01 Your printing isn't controlled in terms of the method—the unexpected and imperfections matter more in your works. What does “imperfection” mean to you?**

I feel that I do actually have a very controlled method of production that comes from noticing moments of imperfection in what I make. When I was younger, I had a perfect, brand-new guitar that I was afraid to touch and use. However, after my brother dropped it, I felt freed to use it and like the stakes weren't as high anymore. I feel like my way of working goes back to moments like those in my youth. Imperfection allows me freedom when I work, but that doesn't mean I don't strive for perfection. I will embrace it when it happens and then try to control that process back into the print.

**02 Colors and geometric graphics take the lead in your works. What's your color scheme or design philosophy?**

Usually, my design philosophy is centered around “less is more” and using repetition in a way that allows for difference and shifts in the patterns I use in my woodblocks. I would say my color schemes change with each print until I find what I like for each one. Lately, I have been drawn to working first with a flat color for the first layer of ink, usually a cream with an aged look. These flats give a layer of dimension to the print that I hadn't achieved before by just printing my compositions straight onto the paper.

**03 How do you describe your own style?**

I bounce a lot of ideas off of my father, who is also an artist. He and I talk about our own term “Art-Mecanica”: you have to be a mechanic to keep your presses running, constantly fixing and repairing them, and also these machines can dictate your style and process. So there is always a machine and artist working together to create. I would describe my art style as this: I am a person using this massive tool to make my art and that molds the style that is present in my work.

# INTERVIEW WITH

# CHRIS CHANDLER

**04 As a sound engineer, you are known for sticking with analog tapes and consoles rather than moving to the digital world. Why?**

The first time sharing it with clients I worked with would have been the Flaming Lips. I introduced my work to them through my concert posters and helping to do merchandise and from there I went to work with a couple of other bands until I retired to be a full-time artist. As a sound engineer, I was known for sticking with the analog tapes and consoles rather than moving to the digital world. I find the same to be true in my art, using “analog” machines from the 20's through the 50's. From the maintenance and restoration of these machines to the design and printing, I find that I'm more connected to the pieces of the process, not just the results. I embrace the limitations of analog like only having 24 tracks to make a statement instead of endless digital options. Analog printing functions similarly. You have to make intentional decisions and can't get overwhelmed by endless possibilities.

**05 You've held several events and exhibitions. The recent exhibition, Linear-Reverse, has received lots of attention. Could you tell us more about it?**

That show was in Oklahoma City, my home away from home when I spent a lot of time with the Flaming Lips and I was happy to go back there for a show. The exhibition opened right when Covid-19 hit, so the space was only open for a couple of days before it had to close. The gallery put together a virtual show which I am grateful for. It was huge that people were able to see it from all over the world and not have to be in OKC to see it. It was nice to be back in Oklahoma City as a print artist and not a working tour manager. This was my biggest solo exhibition and it was a great experience to see everything together in one space along with a big mural which is always fun for me.





GET IMPRESSED

THE REVIVAL  
EDITED BY WANG SHAOQIANG

# GET IMPRESSED

THE REVIVAL  
OF LETTERPRESS  
AND HANDMADE  
TYPE

SANDU

EDITED BY WANG SHAOQIANG



DECEMBER 17, 2021 · REVIEW

## ART-MECANICA: CHRIS CHANDLER'S INNOVATIVE EXPERIMENTS WITH LETTERPRESS AND VINTAGE MODULAR TYPE

By SHAWNA LIPTON

Chris Chandler, artist and founder of Portland-based letterpress studio Neu Haus Press, received a Stumptown Artist Fellowship with a companion exhibition currently on display at the Downtown Flagship location. Reimagined for Chandler's *Art-Mecanica*, the cafe has some of its tables removed and the high walls painted ivory to showcase the large chromatic prints hung on the walls. Inspired by typography, Bauhaus design, and 20th-century avant-garde aesthetics, Chandler's current body of work calls particular attention to the printmaking process. The functionally collaborative nature of his printmaking practice is facilitated by the tools he uses to create, namely, a [Vandercook 232P letterpress machine](#), [Alpha-Blox](#), and [Futura Schmuck](#) woodcut fonts.

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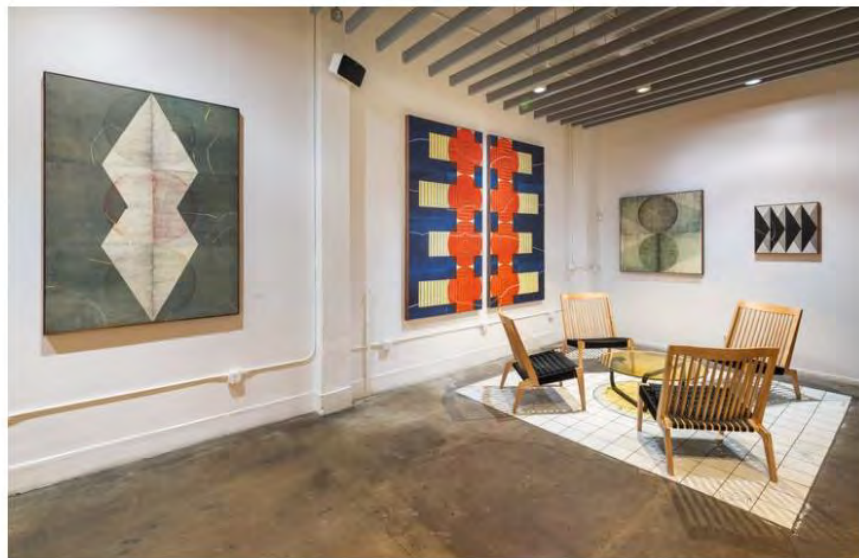
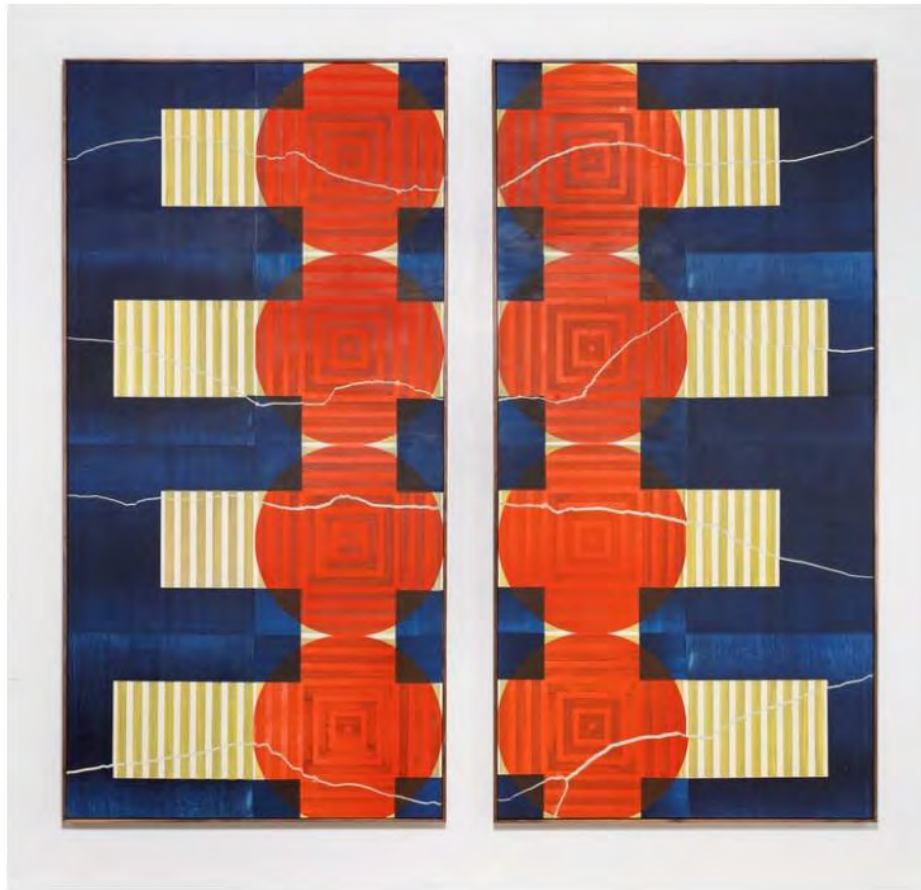


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Vandercook Presses were a popular form of proof presses in the 20th century. Vandercook's geared presses were more manageable and more precise for an operator to use at the time of their invention, representing efficiency and technological innovation. The show's title, *Art-Mecanica*, is a nod to the mechanical device that enables the printing process, even though letterpress printing is now considered more of a labor of love than an efficient technological process. Chandler is insistently analog. His print practice centers on finding infinite variety and experimentation using a limited set of materials.

Fidelity to these building blocks and insistence on analog processes gives Chandler's work distinctive character and form. Working with a limited set of materials and tools still provides plenty of room for experimentation with the letterpress, layering colors and patterns, constructing and deconstructing the modular type. This show plays with text as shape, blurring lines of legibility and abstraction. There is an iterative nature to the repeated graphic forms across large-scale prints, fadeouts, and diptychs in the show. Still, the slight imperfections, tears, and creases created from wheat pasting distress the prints, leaving a trace of the artist's hand, making each piece unique.

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The work plays with setting and resetting modular typefaces, which are fonts that break down letters, borders, and decorative elements used for printing into parts. **Futura Schmuck** is a modern and geometric font composed of circles, triangles, and squares. It is a retro-futurist typeface that has lived up to its initial advertising as “the typeface of today and tomorrow” because it is still popular ninety years after its creation. **Alpha-Blox** is a modular type introduced by American Type Founders in 1944 that breaks the alphabet down into its most fundamental elements, lines, and curves. The font is highly impractical, requiring significant time and patience to assemble into legible lines of text, borders, and other typographic figures. For Chandler, the design and aesthetic of the Alpha-Blox offer seemingly endless combinations. Each of Chandler’s Alpha-Blox prints is named “AB,” with a number indicating the order that they were made. These generic and systematized titles point to Chandler’s emphasis on materials and process.

For this show, bright prints bookend the exhibition welcoming the viewer into the space and beckoning to a colorful red and blue diptych at the end. All but two of the works on display were created in the past year and feature bolder, more saturated colors than some of Chandler’s earlier monochrome and grayscale works. “Fade Out: Blue Diptych” provides a spectrum of blue tones fading out in concentric semi-circles like the cycles of the moon. During the ongoing pandemic, the artist did not feel that anyone needed a further provocation to experience dark night of the soul. In this way, the show celebrates seeing art in public. These pieces feel like works you want to linger near, live, and work beside, appropriate for a communal gathering space.

As a body of work, there is cohesion to these pieces. One that stands out from the rest is a collaboration between Chandler and London rubber stamp artist Savvas Verdis. Rubber stamping is another print process and a different way to play with text as form. Every print in the show employs type, but Chandler's solo works deconstruct and break down fonts into abstract shapes and patterns. This print features the words "The Space Between Us" against a bold red circular background. With social distancing, people have become profoundly aware of the space between bodies and their physical proximity to one another. *The Space Between Us*, 2021, represents how the two artists worked together without being in physical proximity due to the pandemic. The print creates a connection between the artists as collaborators and the viewers as readers.

*Art-Mecanica* has solid visual references to modern design, dramatic scale, and a scrappy approach to experimentation that leaves room for organic flaws and idiosyncrasies. Chris Chandler brings bold and innovative variations to the centuries-old art of letterpress printing.





*Art-Mecanica is on view October 15th, 2021 - January 12th, 2022 at Stumptown Coffee  
Roasters Downtown, 128 SW 3rd Ave, Portland, OR.*

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Chris Chandler (he/him) founded Neu Haus Press in 1996 when he acquired his first Vandercook Press in Venice Beach, CA. His love, talent, knowledge, and collection of this vintage craft have grown through the years. From 30 years working as a tour manager and sound engineer for bands, he has had the privilege of sharing his passion for letterpress with musicians in collaboration with their artwork. Chris can expand his printing portfolio and create letterpress art by residing in Portland, OR with his wife and two children.

Shawna Lipton (she/they) is Academic Director of the Hallie Ford School of Graduate Studies at the Pacific Northwest College of Art. She received her Ph.D. in Literature and Cultural Theory from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.



**Chris Chandler, Art-Mecanica installation at Stumptown Coffee Roasters in Downtown.**

MARIO GALLUCCI

Chris Chandler's Bauhaus-inspired graphic prints in brooding neutrals and moody primary colors fill the expansive walls at the flagship Stumptown Coffee Roasters downtown. The sizable prints are made using a Vandercook 232P letterpress machine, one of the most widely used presses in the 20th Century. Chandler uses Alpha-Blox, a system created in 1944 by the American Type Founders, composed of solid and linear shapes to create a vast range of typefaces, ornamentation, and patterns printed in one or two colors. Alongside the Alpha-Blox system, Chandler re-imagines the Futura Schmuck font created by typeface designer Paul Renner in a large woodblock format. He plays with the endless combinations of geometric forms, often associated with the **New Typography** and Modernist movements, which brought graphics to the forefront of art and printed materials. Inspired by Renner and Jan Tschichold, Chandler deconstructs words and phrases, creating endless combinations of configurations and shapes, resulting in a fresh approach to manipulating text-based work. There are additional layers in the letterpress prints, evidence of the mechanics from the analog printing process, and further interference from wheat pasting, showing a relationship and dialogue between an artist and their tools.

*Oct 15-Jan 2, Stumptown Coffee Roasters Downtown, 128 SW 3rd*





## At home in Portland, Oregon with Chris and Toni Chandler

"We'd rather leave a place empty till the perfect puzzle piece comes along."



Airyka Rockefeller

Oct 3, 2021



***Good morning,***

***I was recently in Portland photographing the art studio of Chris Chandler, a letterpress artist whose stark, graphic work has the spatial sensibility of Bauhaus design or, perhaps, Russian Constructivism (we share a love of both). Chris's work is rich with bold lines and shapes wherein sharpness effortlessly sidles up against curves. It is wrought with the help of a Vandercook proof press, a workhorse invented in 1909. Each object in his studio—thoughtfully and artfully arranged as if in a museum, tidy and sparse—seems a beacon of a bygone era still gracious enough to serve us today. After shooting his marvelous work space I was curious if Chris's honed in studio aesthetic would also echo within his living space, so he let me visit his domestic realm.***

*For some reason I assumed Chris's home would be a space in which Bauhaus met Constructionism (then fell in love with dapper Dada, only to eventually leave Dada and commit to Industrial, with an occasional smooch from Pop) in some tangled affair. Those were the strands I picked up on in the presence of his artwork. I was wrong to assume anything, however, because when I visited Chris and his wife Toni's home it was nothing like the bright, modernist, nearly industrial interior of Chris's studio. Instead, there was so much radiant, time-worn, dark wood, an almost gothic-romantic spectrum of art and objects, and a far-from-the-city feeling.*

*Nestled into a green hillside, bordering a large swatch of trees, Chris lives with his wife Toni and their two young children. Blending stylistic forces, their home is a personal mash-up intended, it would seem, for rest and resetting, recharging, coziness, play and comfort. For the kids, there were nooks galore; nooks so fanciful and generous in detail and intentionality it made me envious—not so much for the rooms exactly, but for childhood itself. The kid's spaces were magnetic, but because both children were struck painfully shy in my presence, I decided it was intrusive to photograph their private rooms, so I left them out of this REALM issue.*

*Among nearly ceiling-high collections of records, the art of many friends and musicians, audio equipment, books, religious ephemera, vintage objects, and vernacular photography, there were, of course, trains and cakes and dinosaurs and video games, markers of pleasure and play. Toni, who works in the world of hotels and hospitality, has imparted a distinctly feminine, old-world aesthetic into their home; there is not the stark minimalism of Chris's studio space, but a shared, commingled aesthetic of both their sensibilities, all infused with objects notable for their references to personal lineage, personal interests, and particular comforts.*

**Hello! Chris, I'm familiar with you as a letterpress artist, but I know you had a previous career as a tour manager and sound engineer. How did your career in music affect where you now call home?**

*Chris:* I was still touring full time when we bought this house. The appeal was the seclusion and peaceful setting. After living on a tour bus, coming home to a house surrounded by nature was a wonderful break from the crazy, tour-lifestyle.





**Toni, I know you work in the hotel industry and am similarly curious if that career has affected the way you live at home.**

*Toni:* I used to iron every bedroom's bedding with perfectly curated amenities. We would have bands stay with us while on tour, too scared to sleep on the bed, let alone pull back the covers and mess up the sheets. I've come to terms that our home isn't a hotel; it's meant to be *lived in*.

**Did you both know this was the right home for you when you first encountered it?**

*Toni:* Chris was actually in Portland placing an offer on another place when we finally got some photos of this house. This was pre-smartphones, so they were emailed to me at work in NYC. They weren't staged photos; in fact, they weren't good photos at all, but I fell in love immediately. It was like nothing we'd seen. I called Chris and told him to get out of the house he was bidding on and to get this one: *this was our house*, and he trusted me. I wouldn't say it was my style or Chris's either, it was just the perfect blend. The walk-in shoe closet didn't hurt either.

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My favorite vignette of your home is the stairwell. I love its peachy, mottled walls, the collection of dangling rosaries and the portrait of a man in India staring down from above. The combination packs a punch! Could you tell me about your collection of rosaries and religious objects?

*Toni:* Rosaries keep finding their way into our lives! The first, a clay rosary, was from Chris's parents, who picked it up in San Miguel, Mexico. The coloring and texture felt good against the Venetian plaster walls of the staircase; not a practical place to hang anything really, but it worked. The smaller, wooden rosary is from one of my favorite housekeepers at the hotel. She brought it back from Ethiopia while visiting her family, as a gift. The largest rosary is from Italy and hung in my mother's bedroom for as long as I remember. She recently passed, and I knew I wanted it for our home.



You once rented your house to have a television crew shoot in it. Did you end up seeing the show, and what was it like to witness your personal space being “lived in” by a fictional family?

*Chris:* The premise of the episode was about a young boy that was possessed by a demon. A scene showed another demon breaking through the window in my son's room and kidnapping the little boy from his bed. I can't imagine my son watching that and ever getting a good night sleep in his room again.

*Toni:* I was most excited to see that a zucchini cake I made sitting in a glass covered cake stand was in a prominent scene!







**You've interspersed your collection of artworks with humble, personal family photographs going back generations. How do you decide how to pair 'artwork' with your personal, lineage-related collection of photographs?**

*Toni:* I love mixing mediums and styles while still connecting them to make a cohesive collection. I'll sometimes hold onto a particular piece, frame or photograph for years before finding the fit; it's like building a puzzle. Everything has a meaning or connection; we rarely add things for purely decorative sake. We'd rather leave a place empty till the perfect puzzle piece comes along that fits for us.

*Chris:* Honestly, I take more of a minimalistic approach. I have a few of my favorite pieces and photos prominently displayed but my wife has the sensibility of making it work all together.

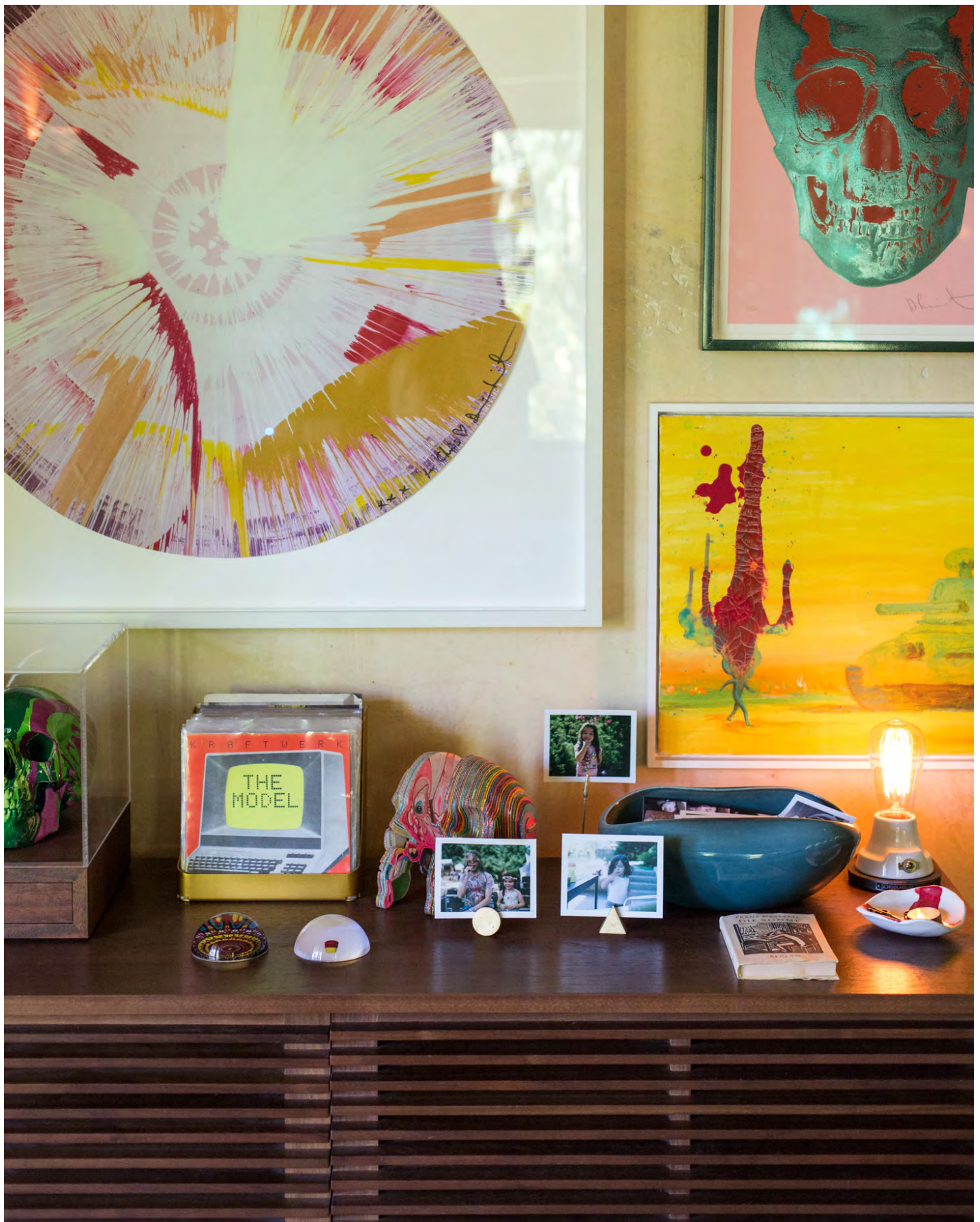


**Do you talk with your children about the art you live with?**

*Toni:* We do to some extent, without making it an art history lesson yet. They definitely have their opinions about pieces, which they like and why. They're observant of other art when we're out and about, recognizing similar pieces. We try not to emphasize the monetary value of the pieces—we don't want them to think of them as precious—allowing them to be objective. I feel it's important to showcase their *own* art alongside. Leo had a 'kitchen gallery' showing one of his collections for several months that took up a whole wall--he was very proud.







What's your most beloved collection at home, and why?



*Chris:* My record and book collection. I go to both in times of joy and celebration and also to help me get through the lows.

**What do you do at home that you wish you did more often and would recommend others do as well?**

*Chris:* I get up before the family to have a little time to myself to read while drinking coffee in the living room. I need that peaceful moment to think about my designs and projects; it helps me focus before the day gets crazy. The living room with the fireplace, dark wood and original windows showcase the views. Looking out the windows, surrounded by trees and green space, is always relaxing for me.





Note the miniature, paper-doll-like cut-out of Chris and Toni's daughter, hovering amidst the glassware.

**If your home was an album, what would it be?**

*Chris:* Nick Drake's *Five Leaves Left*.

**Have you ever learned something that abruptly changed your thoughts about home or how you live? What did you learn?**

*Chris:* We did learn that a previous owner died in the house. He wasn't found for a couple of weeks and his cats got hungry and started to eat him. But that didn't change anything. Well, only to be sure to keep our cats well fed.





Yikes! I do *not* like the sound of that. What's the very best advice you ever received on how to co-habitate with another person?

*Toni:* Chris's father gave us some advice when we first moved in: *a home should always be in flux.* Art, furniture, décor shouldn't ever stay stagnant.

Do you have any boundaries/rules at home accessing virtual spaces for yourself or your children?

*Toni:* We got pretty lucky with our kids; we never had to edit or child proof our home for them. They have always been very respectful, considerate and cautious, and that goes the same for their rooms and belongings too. The kids will post the occasional sign on their bedroom doors that the other isn't allowed to enter but it's usually short lived.

## Delving Deeper...



Find out more about Chris's letterpress work and [Neu Haus Press](#). Take a [studio tour](#) if you're in Portland; it's worth seeing his large-scale letterpress pieces, plethora of music posters, and unique collection of tools—in person. Each object that Chris uses to make letterpress prints is imbued with care and use, and is (at least to my hyper-sensitive self) loaded with energetic presence.

## Etymology Interlude...

*Type* (noun)

Originating in the late 15th Century, *type* means "symbol, emblem," from Latin *typus* "figure, image, form," from the Greek *typos*, meaning "a blow, dent, impression, mark; figure in relief, image, statue; anything wrought of metal or stone; general form, character; outline, sketch."

The root of *typos* is *typtein*, meaning "to strike, beat."

As early as 1713, the noun "type" was extended as the invention of printing blocks made of metal or wood came into use. Now letters or characters carved on their faces, usually in relief, adapted for letterpress printing usage, also were known as 'types.'

By 1842, in English, *type* came to mean "general form or character of some kind."

By 1888, *type* also was used as a **verb**, meaning "to write with a typewriter". It's wild to think that as new technologies were invented—a handwritten symbol, replaced by a printing block, and then a little typewriter stamp—the word itself changed meaning. however. In 1836 *type* meant "to symbolize." This origin of *symbolize* can be traced back three hundred years, to 1590, when it seems to have meant "to foreshadow."

Words tell such stories, don't they? They are endlessly changing, as is our technology.

## Consider Home...

A space that, like a good tool, will hold up through many decades, improve with time, develop patina, and make you curious about the eras before your own. The best architecture will outlive us. In that sense, buildings, rooms, and even furniture may have an animistic sensibility or spirit, something the Dutch trend-forecaster and textile design academic Lidewij Edelkoort believes as well. Her calm, metered conversation about intelligent design on [the Time Sensitive Podcast](#) absolutely delighted me with its wisdom and directness. I really feel like you're going to like this one.

For further delight, I recommend viewing the Hungarian Film [My Twentieth Century](#), streaming on [Kanopy](#). It's a whimsical, evocative film about separated twin sisters aboard the Orient Express on New Year's Eve in 1899, a century that fully realized the use of *electricity* as well as the invention of the railroad, telegram, cinema, and yes, the *Vandercook* letterpress—creations that changed how we perceive and engage with space, time, place and information/story. *My Twentieth Century* was released in 1989, when Socialist rule in Hungary transitioned to democracy—another transformative threshold.

My last recommendation this month, especially if you're interested in understanding spatial dynamics, design and book or printmaking, is to look into Fortunato Depero and his 1927 masterpiece of graphic design and bookmaking—*Depero Futurista*. Chris has a copy of it front and center in his living room, and told me it's where much of his inspiration is born on his quiet mornings at home before work. It too made my jaw drop and my hands shake with a serious dose of beauty. Sadly, it's out of print, but—[here you can enjoy, at least virtually](#), its gorgeous spreads and innovative spatial concoctions.

Until next time,

Airyka

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By Airyka Rockefeller · Launched a year ago

Home is a personal, physical and philosophical space. Via interviews and images, I'm asking creative people who inspire me how they select, collect, cohabitate and live consciously and artfully at home, now.





WERKSTATT

# Chris Chandler

## Neu Haus Press

Es ist schon spät, als wir uns mit Chris Chandler und Cassie Ferguson von Neu Haus Press verabreden. Zwischen Portland und Dortmund liegen 9 Stunden Zeitunterschied. Während ihr Tag gerade erst beginnt neigt sich der unsere schon lange dem Ende zu, und das Feierabend-Bier wartet ungeduldig im leise sum-menden Kühlschrank. Besonnen erzählt Chris uns von seinem Leben, seine unnachgiebige Ruhe strahlt



Bild: © Neu Haus Press

**müheles durch den Bildschirm durch. Er ist ein Amerikaner wie er im Buche steht, eben ein echter Self-Made-Man.**

Hier in Deutschland kaum bekannt, hat sich Chris in den Staaten schon lange etabliert, seine Kunst, sein Umgang mit Farben, Formen und modularer Typografie hat ihn zum Erfolg geleitet. Nichts davon ist über Nacht passiert, stattdessen baut Chris auf seine vorangehende Karriere in der Musik-Branche, verwebt jahrelang Letterpress und Beats, kommt an seine künstle-

## Musik hören sehen

rischen Grenzen und weit darüber hinaus. Erst vor vier Jahren dann wagt er den Sprung, wird selbstständig, er und seine Vandercook-Letterpress. Ein Vollzeit-Abenteuer, wie er es nennt.

Um Chris' Kunst zu verstehen, muss man ganz vorne anfangen. Irgendwann in den Neunzigern. Chris ist Tour Manager der Band Modest Mouse, später dann für die *Flaming Lips*, Tontechniker und selbst auch Musiker, hat viel Zeit tourend, weltenbummelnd verbracht. Auf dem Hurricane in Deutschland hat Modest Mouse schon gespielt, Chris ist inspiriert von der deutschen Musik, den harten Beats, bis heute. Irgendwann dann wächst die Nachfrage nach Album-Covern, Postern. „Also hab ich einfach eine kleine Andruckpresse gekauft. Nun ja, wenn ich so drüber nachdenke war sie eigentlich ziemlich groß. Sie ist in meine Garage eingezogen, sie zu benutzen, mit ihr zu drucken und zu gestalten habe ich mir dann selbst beigebracht.“ Es überrascht uns nicht, denn Autodidaktik verfolgt uns in unseren Gesprächen wie die Motte das Licht. Und es klingt so leicht. Ein Autodidakt und seine Letterpress. Für Chris aber ist es ein Prozess, immer während, und immer wieder experimentierend, probierend. Langsam erst tastet sich Chris an die Kunst heran, die er heute entstehen lässt. Er beginnt mit Covern und Postern für seine eigene Band, druckt später Poster für Künstler\*innen wie Billie Eilish, und tourt fast schon nebenher mit den *Flaming Lips* durch die Welt. Für Chris ist diese Zeit prägend. „All meine Arbeiten sind aus Musik entstanden, aus diesem Leben davor. Ich kenne mich in der Kunst nicht aus, Künstler bin ich auch nicht. Aber ich kenne die Musik. Und ich kann Beats nachahmen und drucken. Ich kann Fade Outs nachahmen. Ich kann die Musik nachahmen. Und das ist worauf meine Arbeit, meine Gestaltung aufbaut, diese musikalischen Bewegungen und meine Inspiration vom Reisen und Touren.“

Das ist, was ihn ausmacht. Musik und Letterpress werden eins, ein Druck, ein Poster. Ein kurzer Abstecher in die Welt der Auftragsarbeiten später,





Bild: © Neu Haus Press

und er entdeckt Alpha-Blox für sich, ein modularer Font, den Chris auf riesige 1,2 x 1,2 Meter Holzplatten repliziert. Installationen entstehen, massive Poster und Drucke, die er miteinander, übereinander, nebeneinander verknüpft und verwebt. So entdeckt und erfindet er den modularen Font neu, schier endlose Kombinationsmöglichkeiten entstehen. Zwei Jahre lang experimentiert und druckt er mit den Alpha-Blox, bis die Pandemie seine Kreativität zum erliegen bringt.

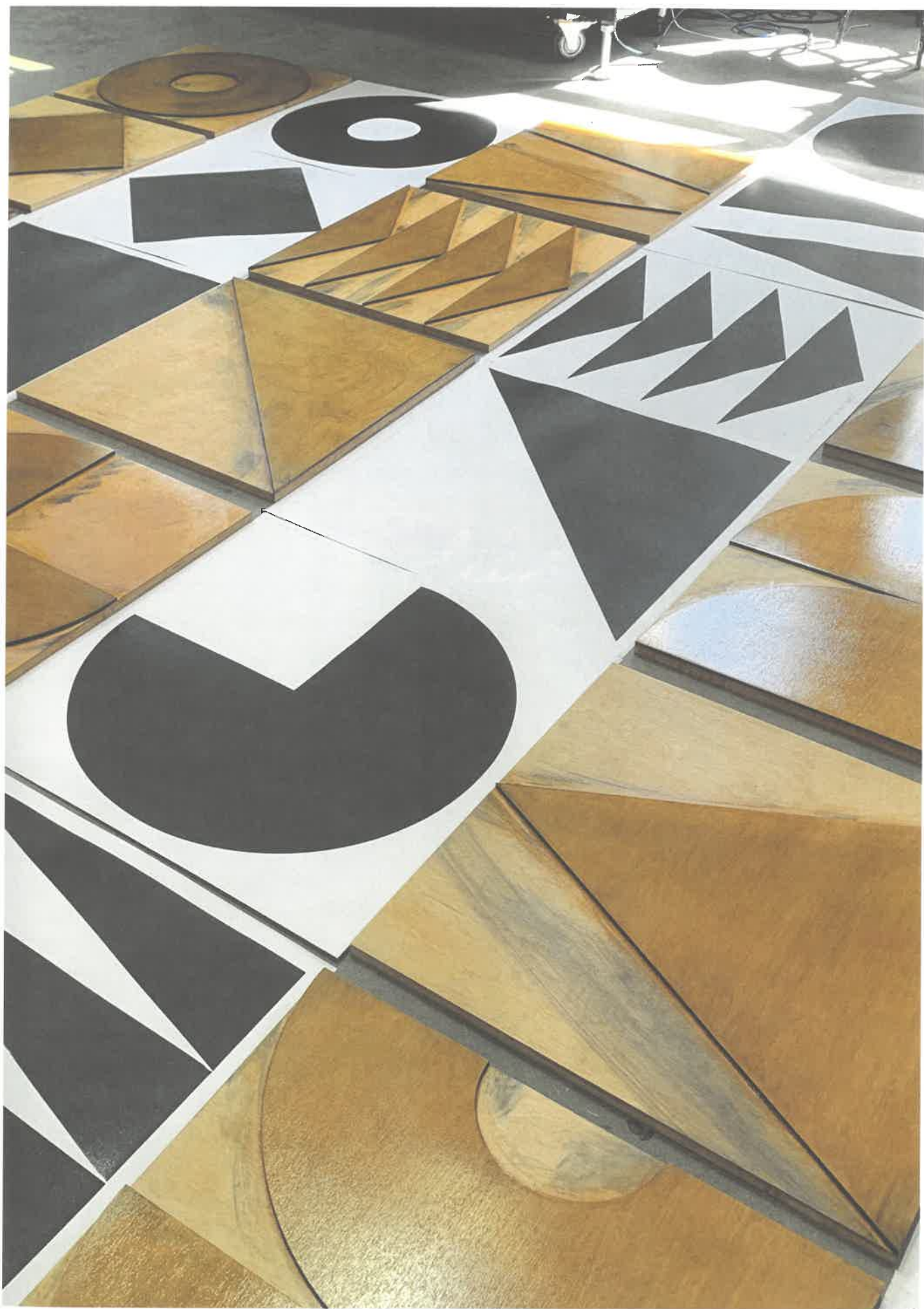
Ruhig, schon fast distanziert erzählt Chris vom Ringen mit seiner Kunst. „Ich war über die Alpha-Blox hinweg. Es war während der Pandemie, und ich war deprimiert und hatte wie viele andere Mühe,

Kunst zu machen und das alles zu verstehen. Ich wollte in dieser Zeit alles aufgeben und abschließen.“ Chris steht auf, wühlt kurz auf dem Tisch hinter sich herum und zieht einen Druck hervor. Ein Halbkreis, aus blauer Farbe, wiederholt gedruckt, verliert langsam aber sicher seine Opazität. „Dies wird als Ausblenden bezeichnet. So etwas würde ich im Audiostudio machen, wenn ich am Ende einer Aufnahme einen Song ausblende. So wollte ich meine Alpha-Blox und meine Werkstatt ausblenden und sie verschwinden lassen, auf dass sie nie wiederkommen. Also nahm ich den Block und verringerte seine Farbigkeit langsam, als Symbol des Aufgebens. Und ich warf es auf den Boden, machte ein Foto davon und schloss die Tür. Und das war es.“ Bis er das Foto einem Freund schickt. Und es inspiriert Chris weiter zu denken, weiter zu machen. Statt an den Alpha-Blox hängen zu bleiben, wirft er sie beiseite und entdeckt die Futura Schmuck für sich.

Ähnlich der Alpha-Blox, vergrößert Chris auch die Schmuck, und kreierte seine eigene, übergroße Schrift. Die großen Holzschriften baut er selbst, denn es ist Teil seiner Kunst. „Es geht darum, es selbst zu machen und das Holz zu schleifen, das Holz zu lackieren. Alle Kerben zu kennen und die Holzmaserung kennen. Dieser Prozess spricht mich wirklich an. Man kann das zehnmal hintereinander ausdrucken, und keines davon wird genau gleich aussehen. Ich würdige das wirklich. Für mich sind immer gleiche Drucke langweilig. Lass es uns zerreißen und ändern und anders machen.“ Diese Mentalität verleitet ihn häufig zum Experimentieren, zum Annehmen von vermeintlichen Fehldrucken, zum Überwinden von scheinbar unumgänglichen Umständen. Aus Frust entstanden die Fade-Outs, und zu klein zu geschnittene

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Chris Chandler

Holz-Fundamente führten dazu, dass die Drucke zerissen und collagiert wurden. Das Holz neu zu schneiden zu lassen, dem Plan folgen komme was wolle und dadurch Verschwendung zulassen, das war niemals eine Option. So entstehen in regelmäßigen Abständen neue Arbeiten, neue Techniken und Versionen von

Formen und Farben. Unverändert aber bleibt Chris' Leidenschaft für analoge Techniken. Digitales Arbeiten hat da für ihn keine Relevanz. Er lacht kurz auf. „Ich habe einen Computer, aber ich weiß nicht so recht wie ich ihn benutzen soll.“ Also schneidet er seine Formen auf Papier aus, legt die kleinen Quadrate nebeneinander, verschiebt und überlappt sie. Mit kleinen, bunten Stickern markiert er die Anordnung und Farben und überträgt diese dann auf das lebensgroße Format. Schere und Papier, viel mehr braucht es nicht, befindet Chris.

Seit einiger Zeit ist auch Cassie mit dabei. Die Kunst-Studentin unterstützt Chris mit seinen Drucken und Installationen, packt mit an. Der Diskurs zwischen den Beiden ist wichtig, die Unterstützung unabdingbar. Immer mehr Ausstellungen und Kollaborationen entstehen, Chris' Wissen rund um Modulare Typografie ist eben so gefragt. Trotz allem bleibt Chris sich treu. Schon immer ist er in seinen Arbeiten erkennbar geblieben, von Konzert-Postern zu Ausstellungsstücken. Die Musik, die seine Kunst ausmacht, man kann sie fast hören, wenn man vor seiner Arbeit steht.





# The Goose Cube, an art installation in a box, is ideal for the solo selfie seeker

Published: Feb. 02, 2021, 8:30 a.m.



Steven Ochs, with his daughter, Oswin, at the Goose Cube. Photo by Fernando Cabrejos

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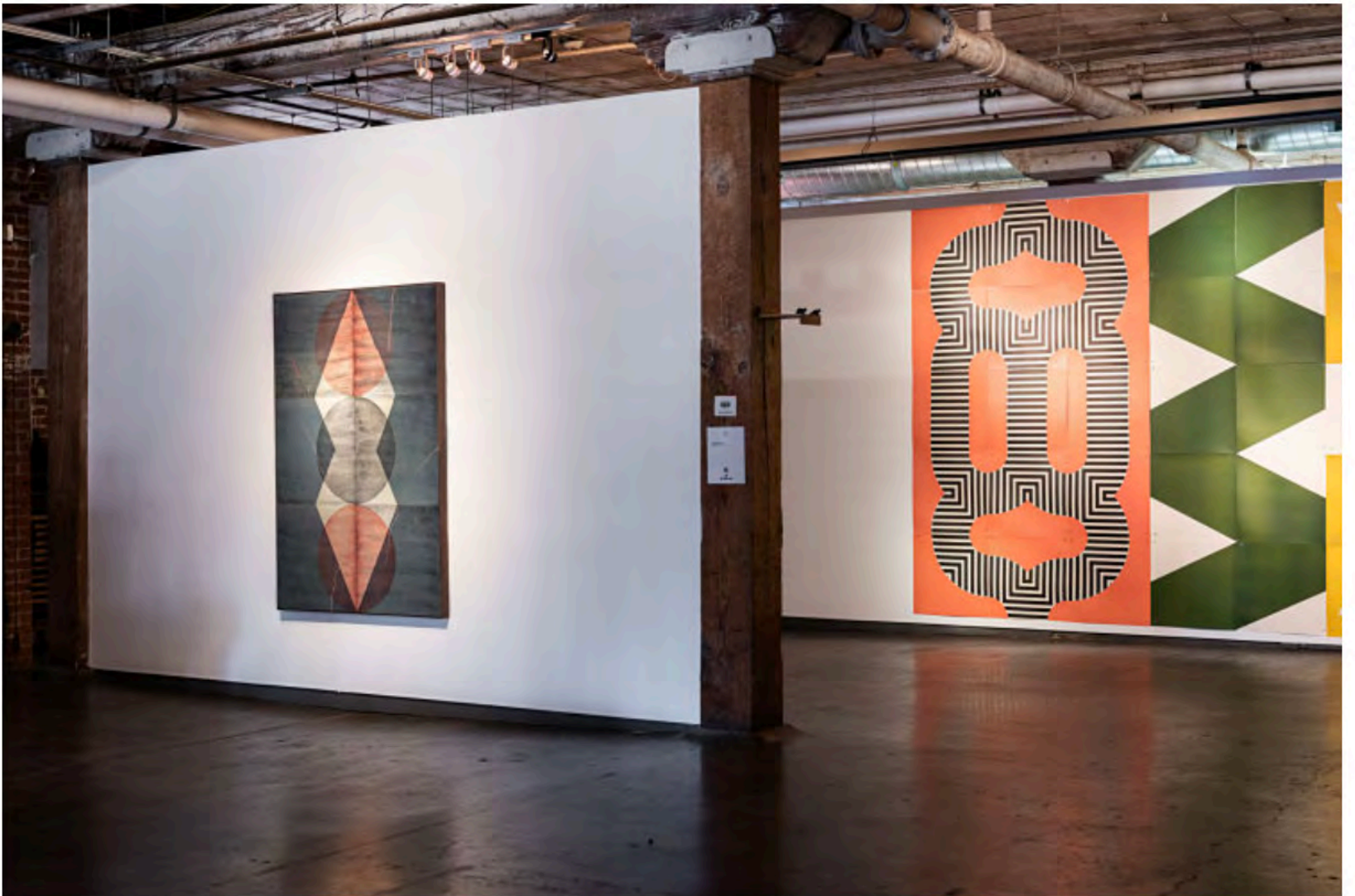
# NEU HAUS PRESS: LINEAR-REVERSE EXHIBITION

posted by POP MEMBERS ♦ April 15, 2020



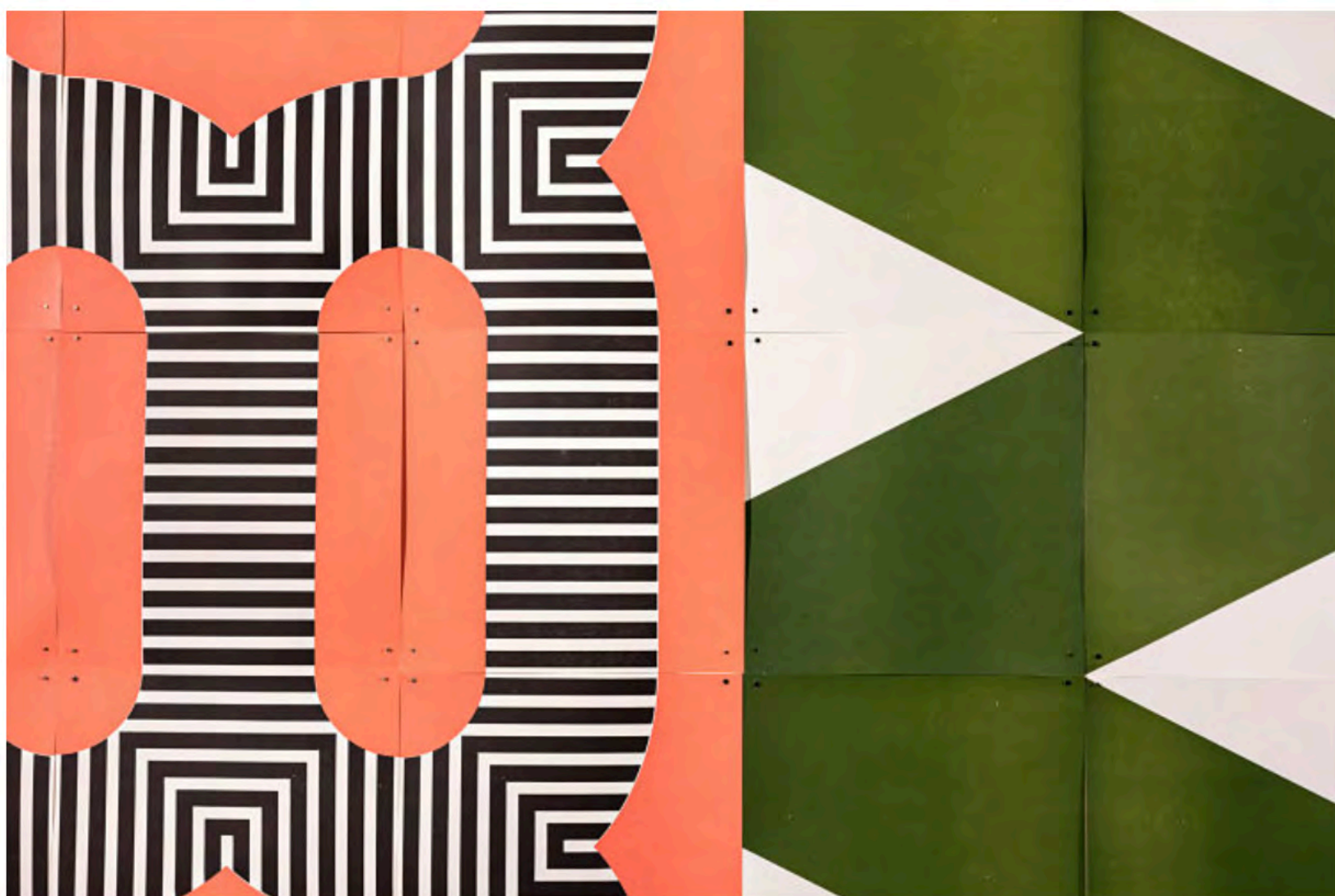
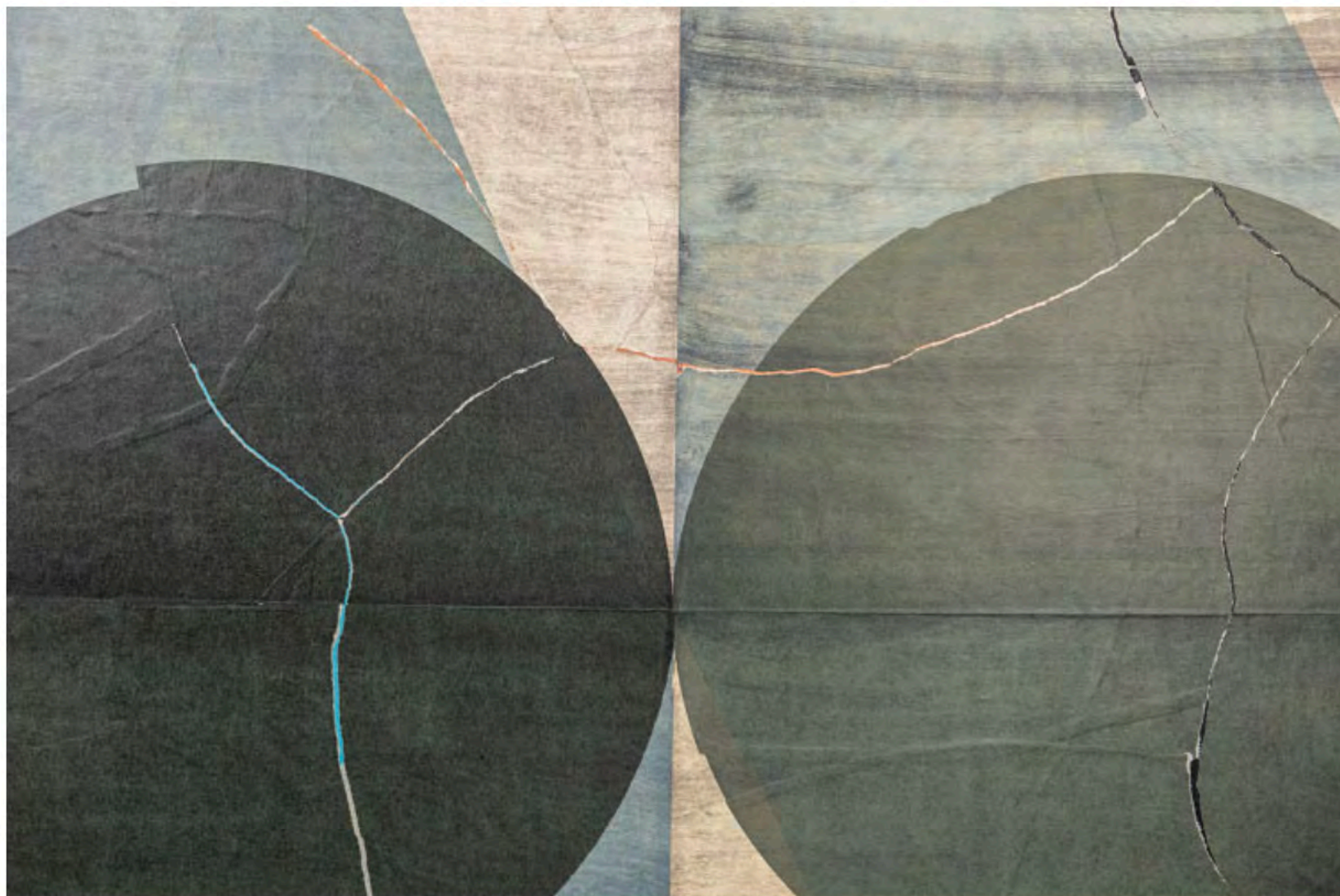
*Linear-Reverse* exhibits large-scale relief monoprint works by Chris Chandler of Neu Haus Press. The pieces are currently on display at [ARTSPACE](#) in Untitled in Oklahoma City. While the gallery is currently closed due to the ongoing crisis, art viewers far and wide are able to see the show through a [virtual tour](#).





For the exhibition, Chris took advantage of his Vandercook 232P with a 30" x 32" printing bed, in order to experiment with the modular Alpha-Blox font in large form. Alpha-Blox was created as a movable font by the American Type Founder in 1944, and was sold to printers as an alternative to the usual restrictions of lead type fonts. The font never took-off with popularity, but being attracted to the creative possibilities, Chris used the Alpha-Blox type to create large-scale, woodcut versions of the complete set, pushing the limitations of letterpress printing.





Working quickly and responsively through the process of letterpress printing, he embraces unexpected interactions, and revels in the unique monoprint results that emerge. Chris uses the lexicon of his large-scale Alpha-Blox to plan his overall compositions and patterns, yet allows for freedom in his layering of colours, dimensional play through wood grains, and visual reveals of colour and texture from wheatpasting the prints to panel surfaces. The resulting works focus on beauty and simplicity in design, visual associations within abstraction, and the endless possibilities of working iteratively within a modular system.





*Linear-Reverse* highlights the importance of Chris' creative process, and the collaborative dynamic between him and his Vandercook press. He simultaneously works within the confines of the Alpha-Blox design, and the freedom of monoprinting, creating a body of work where each piece is individualised and is a record of the constructive conflict between artist and machine, showcasing the beauty that can result from the reproductive nature of working within analogue print processes.







# Form from Function

Words by  
VINCA POWER

Photos by  
EVAN BEASELY +  
ARICKYA ROCKEFELLER

Art and music collide  
for Chris Chandler  
of Portland-based  
*Neu Haus Press*, who  
creates striking prints that  
draw from the cyclical  
nature of life.





"The presses themselves serve as ongoing inspiration for what to make. How big can I go on this thing? Great, let's do that and see what happens."

CHRIS CHANDLER



**F**orm follows function was the battle cry of mid-20th century modernist designers, where the superfluous was damned and functionality prevailed. There is much about Chris Chandler and his work that harks back to those days, but he moves beyond this rigid approach to bring form from function. Evoking the Bauhaus style, Chris' prints play with colour and familiar but not-quite-placeable shapes. "I am influenced heavily by artists like El Lissitzky, Jan Tschichold and Erich Heckel for their bold and simple designs and their continual use of reds, blacks and whites. German expressionism has been in my life from when I was a kid and saw a woodcut print by Emil Nolde in an antique shop while on my paper delivery route," he explains.

Drawing on Russian and German mid-century artists and typographers, it's no surprise that his solo exhibition *Linear-Reverse* borrows from a modernist innovation. Alpha-Blox is a modular lettering system devised by American Type Founders in 1944, which deconstructed the alphabet into its component parts and allowed users to build it back up again in infinite combinations. Chris uses not only the form of Alpha-Blox to create patterns from its pieces, but also the essence, making billboard-sized work made up of lots of smaller prints which could be reconfigured into endless designs. Indeed, the exhibition takes its name from the two styles of Alpha-Blox, the linear: the inner fill of each shape, and reverse: the negative space around it. By working with these abstracted shapes in large format, Chris transforms something as everyday as the alphabet into immense, fun, colourful designs. "Working large came about through a conversation at The Portland

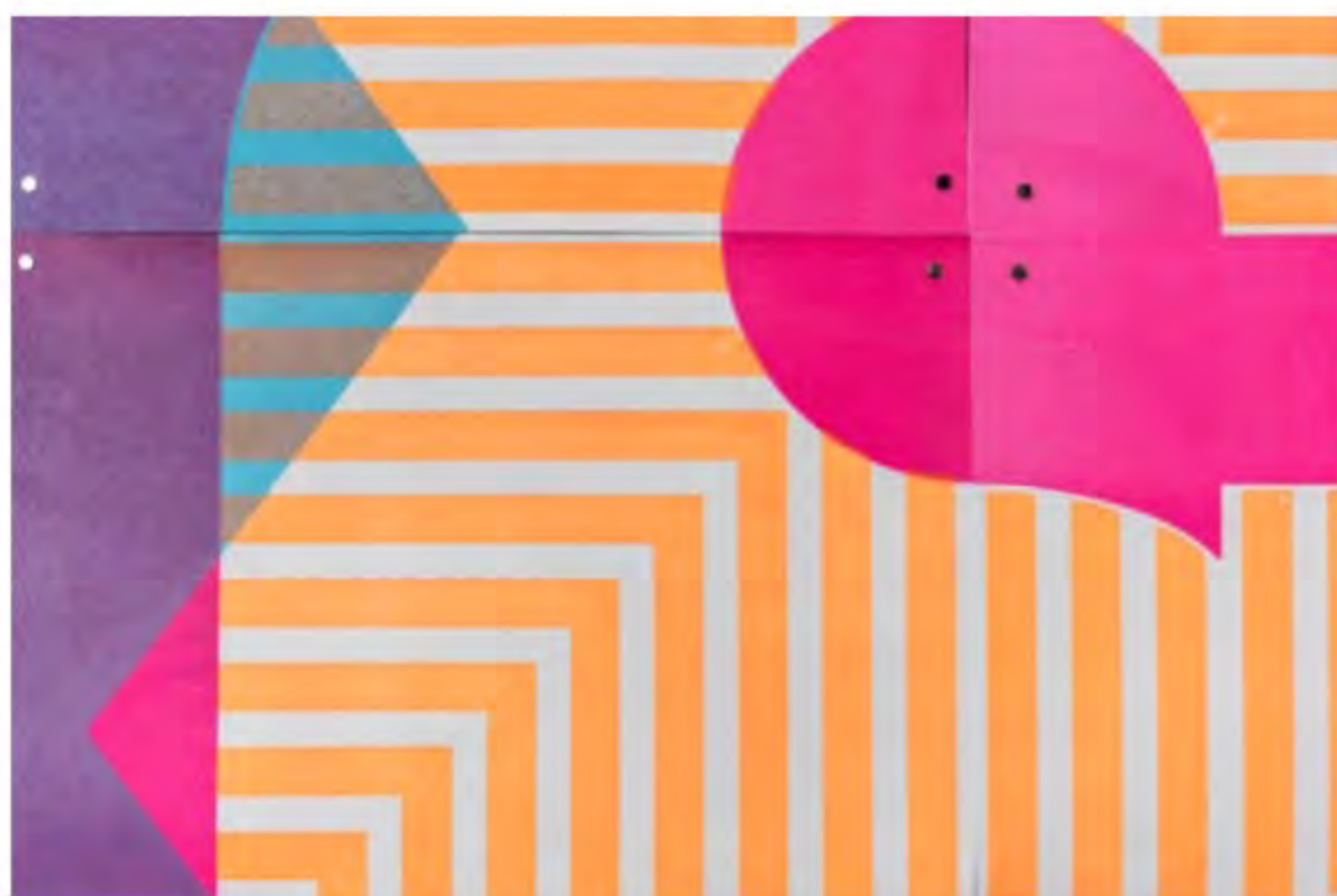
Letterpress Fair a few years back about how to push the boundaries of the presses I have. So the presses themselves serve as ongoing inspiration for what to make. How big can I go on this thing? Great, let's do that and see what happens".

Chris' first foray into printmaking was back in the mid-90s when Bruce Licher of Independent Project Press showed him the ropes. "Our bands shared a rehearsal space and I was intrigued by his prints on the wall. It was Bruce who encouraged me to get my first press and other equipment as a means to create promotional posters and flyers for the band I played in," he remembers. He didn't waste much time, and after acquiring a Vandercook Universal III (in production 1959-1974) from the International Printing Museum in Los Angeles, he set up Neu Haus Press in Venice Beach in 1996, before relocating to Portland, Oregon in 2006. Hannah Bakken, Neu Haus Press' studio manager, is enthused by the tale: "This story of printmaking finding Chris is so emblematic of how print can just pull people in and before you know it you're on a life trajectory that is all about ink and paper. Sometimes it just finds you, and it found Chris through the music industry."

The first 20 years of Chris' printing life was split between time in the studio and time out on the road as tour manager and sound engineer for different bands. "I would get off tour, head directly to the print studio to make posters and concert merch and then get back on tour to repeat the pattern." Chris credits his time in the music industry as a major influence on his printmaking, particularly working with The Flaming Lips. "We would always try to make the Lips' live shows bigger and more spectacular and I think that

"This story of printmaking finding Chris is so emblematic of how print can just pull people in and before you know it you're on a life trajectory that is all about ink and paper."

HANNAH BAKKEN







transferred to my print style. Take the print from the page to the walls and make it more of a large-scale visual experience," which is evident in his enormous billboard project. Music is never far away for Chris, who has recently been working on a series titled *Fade-Out* which captures the experience in the music studio of a song fading out, or as Chris puts it, "letting it disappear into nothingness which would end the recording, but also be a time of group celebration for the work we just completed." In another nod to the mid-20th century, Chris' musical influences come largely from German Krautrock, and the subtle complexity in the endless repetitive sound which often goes unnoticed. "This comes out in my art," observes Chris, "you can see the larger panel works or prints from a distance and have one experience that looks repetitive or simple, but closer looking reveals the depth, tears in the prints, ink layering and the complication becomes more apparent."

As a self-taught printer, invention, intuition and embracing mishaps have been vital. With limited access to materials in the early days, Chris used the few letterpress blocks he had to conjure up new patterns on the back of shopping bags, and he thinks this way of doing things has stayed with him, allowing him to see the beauty in the imperfect, be it a fingerprint, footprints from his children, varied editions or his recently adopted process of monoprinting by wiping blocks and selective inking. Hannah enjoys watching Chris turn the unexpected into processes: "Chris has a way of working that is very intuitive, but his process does not solely rely on intuition for results. He takes what he learns from intuitive moves and makes it intentional. He sanded his Alpha-Blox in a plan to maintenance them,



**"Chris has a way of working that is very intuitive, but his process does not solely rely on intuition for results."**

HANNAH BAKKEN

but found printing these blocks with less shellac allowed the beauty of the woodgrain to come through. A surprise became a system and I have seen that this is largely how his compositions and final works fully emerge into what they are."

To plan out his large-scale modular prints, Chris uses a low-fi method: scissors, paper and tape. He has paper copies of each block, measuring about two inches, which he configures on a cutting mat or board until he's happy with the design. He'll start out with two colours, mixing on the press as he goes, and figures out the rest from there, "mostly on the fly", as he says. The departure of the Alpha-Blox prints from Chris' usual Bauhaus-inspired colour palette is thanks to a Japanese publication from the 1930s called *Haishoku Soukan* or *The Complete Collection of Colour Combinations* by Sanzo Wada. "When I get stuck on trying to decide on a few colours, these combinations and pairings are so pleasing and beautiful and often things I wouldn't think of using on my own. It helps me break away from the black, red and white that I so often use."

In the studio, you'll find Chris listening to the minimal sounds of Brian Eno and Lawrence English, who help

**"You can see the larger works from a distance and have one experience that looks repetitive or simple, but closer looking reveals the depth, tears in the prints, ink layering and the complication becomes more apparent."**

CHRIS CHANDLER

him find the mood he needs to get into the flow, slowing his thought processes and blocking out anything beyond the art in the moment. But the noise outside the studio is unignorable at the minute. The daily protests in Portland have garnered worldwide coverage, and Neu Haus Press has been offering their resources to the protestors, printing hundreds of signs emblazoned with *We Can't Breathe* and *No Justice No Peace* for Don't Shoot PDX – a local art, education and civic engagement organisation – to distribute in the community. Hannah explains the driving force: "The resource of a printing studio and our resource of time to create these materials is something I want Neu Haus to keep giving. For us, this pandemic and socio-political moment has emphasised the importance of words, of print and of what the role of the artist is to fostering community and communication." Planned exhibitions may have been put on hold, and this has given Chris a chance to work on new production techniques and expand the shop into a new location, but he and Hannah are keen to start welcoming people into the space for workshops, and to simply talk and learn from each other again.

Chris is currently working on a series of prints based on photographs he took of The Clash as a teenager. He got to spend some time with the band, and was welcomed wholeheartedly, something which profoundly affected him, and that he carried into his career as a tour manager. "That moment still sticks with me in my art making and I want to make visual works to rework the candid photos and share that moment of time in a large-scale experience." He can also be found toiling on new large panel works that take the Krautrock 4/4 motorik drum beat and reimagine it in Alpha-Blox form, producing relentless repetitive patterns with a feel of constant motion and life. Hannah astutely notes, "Sometimes there is a linear trajectory to Chris' thoughts and process, but also a reversing and circling back to ideas or processes or mistakes or colliding inspirations in his life. The iterative and repetitive nature of print is such a great metaphor for life – we repeat, recreate and refine, and I love how Chris' work speaks to all of this." T

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# pressing matters

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