

**Michael Miller: An Appreciation**  
**January 8 – April 3, 2016**  
**Curated by Gregg Hertzlieb**



The Brauer Museum of Art presents a retrospective exhibition of the incredible work of Michael Miller (1938-2014), an artist who was skilled in a wide range of media and who created prints, drawings, paintings, and printed constructions that involve innovative uses of traditional and experimental methods. A remarkably talented draftsman, Miller was able to blend illustration styles familiar to him from his youth, surreal and imaginative creations reminiscent of Chicago Imagism, a lively sense of humor, and a keen critical eye for human nature, to produce works that reflect virtuoso technique and a high degree of sophistication in content.

As Miller's student and friend, I consider this exhibition to be important to me personally. I always admired Miller's sense of experimentation and embrace of new media; consequently, I thought it might be interesting for me to try an electronic publication to accompany the exhibition, something I could continue to update with new images and thoughts as the exhibition progresses. Please continue to scroll down so that you can read my analyses and background information on these pieces as I ponder these complex, playful, and enigmatic creations.

While Miller changed subjects and approaches throughout his career, what seemed to stay constant was an animating spirit of life that made visible currents and patterns felt more than seen. The constant he identified was change, and as his subjects undergo various abstracting metamorphoses before your eyes they paradoxically become more familiar; you are comforted by the artist's welcoming manner of making sense of an ongoing peculiar human drama.

Gregg Hertzlieb, Director / Curator  
Brauer Museum of Art

Michael was a wonderful artist, a gifted teacher, and a committed colleague who retired from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago after many years of service. He began his career at SAIC in 1973, serving at different times as Department Chair in Printmedia, Chair of the Graduate Division, and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs alongside teaching legions of students for 40 years. His notable work in Korea with alumni and faculty was key to the development of SAIC's current relationships both there and here with its Korean constituency.

Michael's patience and kindness always set the bar high for productive teaching, for he was a gentle, wise soul and his students benefitted greatly. Of course, Michael was also an accomplished artist, and his legacy of prints and printed objects will be with us for a long time to consider, reflect upon, and find joyful meaning. His work about the human condition was redolent of the humor and affable spirit he himself so beautifully carried.

Michael Miller was funny. And wielding this humor, he was able to get things done, get things said, go deep, and go strong. He was a pleasure to work with and until the very end was committed to the ideals of an artist's life rich in play, openness, and integrity.

Lisa Wainwright  
Dean of Faculty and Vice President of Academic Affairs  
School of the Art Institute of Chicago

### **Selected Collections**

Brauer Museum of Art, Valparaiso University  
Skopelos Art Foundation, Skopelos, Greece  
Shinsegae Corporation, Seoul, Korea  
Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, University of Texas  
Musée d'Art Contemporain, Chamalières, France  
Art Institute of Chicago  
Brooklyn Museum  
Philadelphia Museum of Art  
Springfield, Mo. Art Museum  
Princeton University  
Texas Tech University  
Rochester Institute of Technology  
University of Delaware  
Charles Russell Museum, Montana  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (Artist's Book Collection)  
Banff Centre for the Arts (Library and Archive), Banff, Alberta, Canada  
Joan Flasch Artist's Book Collection, School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
Seoul Museum of Art  
Museum of Contemporary Photography



**Michael Miller (1938-2014)**  
*Torso, 1989*

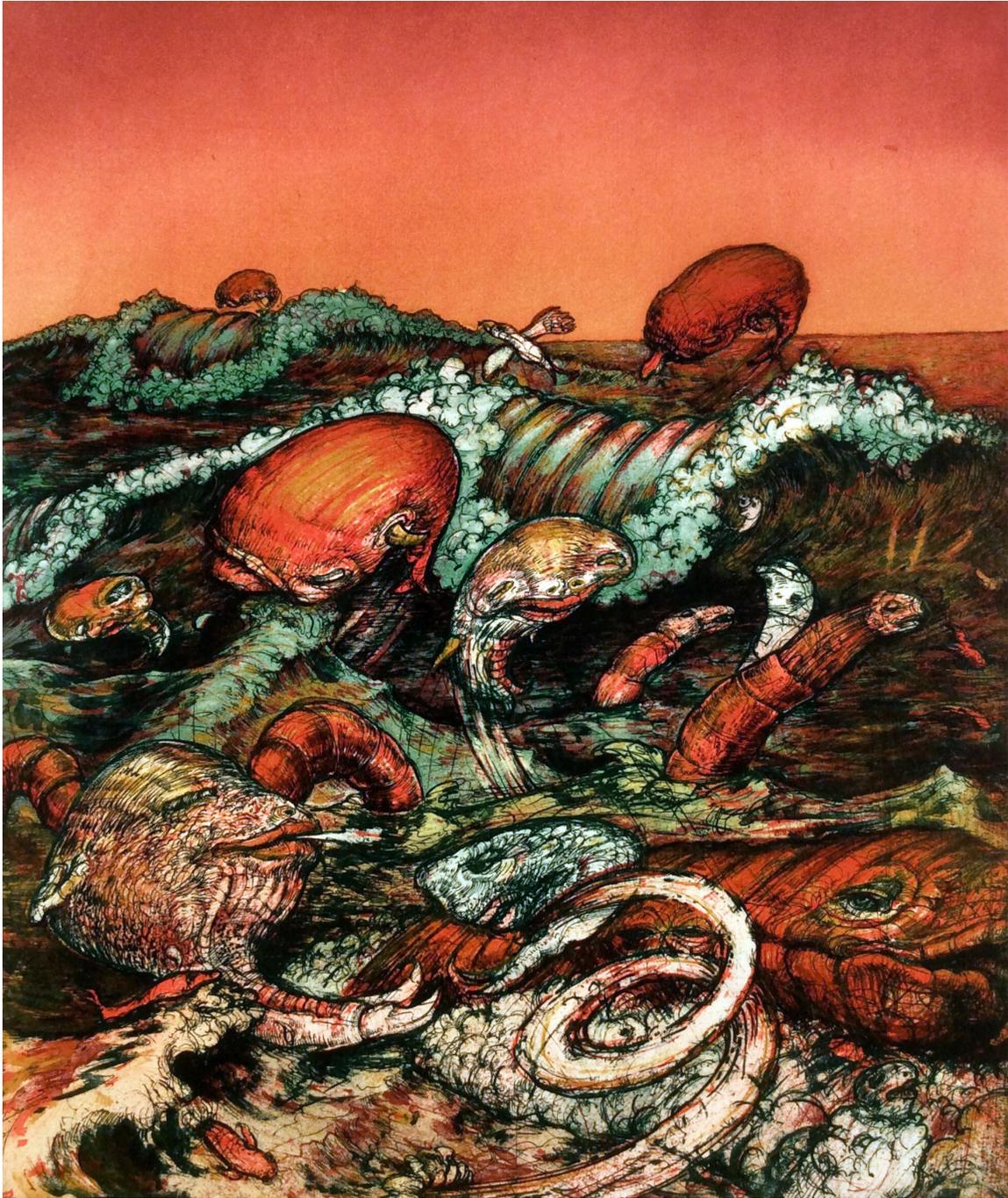
Hand colored etching on paper, AP, paper: 15 x 11 inches, image: 3 ½ x 2 ¼ inches  
Private Collection

The first work from the exhibition that I chose to focus on is this small hand colored etching from 1989, created at the time that Miller was working on his portfolio titled *Torsos*, represented in the exhibition by two examples that will be treated as this online catalog continues to develop. As Miller's graduate teaching assistant at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago during 1988-89, I saw him working on the *Torsos* portfolio of hand colored etchings and admired them very much. I saw these prints as potent blends of concept and means of execution, with the etching needle drawing forth tattooed bodies and the flesh of the bodies perhaps soothed by the application of watercolor. Printed on paper (a support that in the past was actually made from skin), the *Torso* prints offer a powerful viewing experience with Miller acknowledging the materiality of the plate and process.

During lunch break in etching class one day, I waited in Michael's office for him to return so that we could eat our sandwiches together. As I waited, I saw a black and white proof of the *Torso* piece reproduced just above. I was intrigued by it, at that time comparing it in my mind to the other *Torso* etchings I had seen in the print shop in various stages of completion. It clearly belonged to the series and yet was not included in the final portfolio. The piece, I felt even at the time, depicted or represented a torso at the same time it seemed to offer a narrative aspect—that is, while other *Torso* prints used the body part as a vehicle for allusion, abstraction, metaphor, with the isolation and fragmentation key to the pieces' content, this one presented something of an intact character, with the bound personage reminiscent of and sexually charged as Chicago artist Robert Rauschenberg's 1970s paintings of bound and sewn acrobats. The faint drypoint line just beneath the head of flowers serves as a possible indicator that Miller may have considered focusing on only the torso before deciding to let the figure stand in all of its surreality.

I mentioned earlier Miller acknowledging the nature of his materials. On three sides, the artist accented the edges of the printing plate with etched lines, reminding viewers that while Miller is giving life to a new creature, a new being, that being exists only in the world of the print and is inseparable from the visceral language of plate and ink. Depending on the handling or treatment of both, etchings can present sinuous and elegant lines or can draw attention to the unique challenges of scraping into a surface, etching lines with a corrosive agent, and applying and removing black ink to various degrees on a small scale. Miller keeps the process apparent rather than transparent, with plate tone, intentional and unintentional plate scratches, an occasional hesitance or tentativeness of line all adding to an awareness, even painful awareness of bodily existence. The figure appears to be tortured, the lines themselves even have a confined aspect—in an etching, lines are, in fact, elongated pools holding the printing ink—and yet the effect in overall consideration is one of beauty, a beauty that arises from the subject proclaiming its identity through means perfectly suited for such a proclamation.

The tattooed nonobjective patterning on the body and abstracted plant and flower forms reside within the figure, but in the context of Miller's larger body of work they refer to a cosmic matrix or structure that seems to animate Miller's art at every stage. To read more about this matrix that I seem to perceive, please visit this online catalog page again in a couple of days so that I could explore this idea more in the context of another one of Miller's remarkable works.



**Michael Miller (1938-2014)**

*Feeders and Breeders, 1973*

Color etching on paper, 3/20, paper: 23 x 19 inches, image: 18 ½ x 15 ¾ inches  
Collection of Kathleen King

*Feeders and Breeders* is one of the earlier prints in the exhibition, dating from 1973. During this period, Miller was investigating the subject of creatures arising from primordial seas, some similar to simple aquatic creatures, some reptilian, and some on the verge of a mammal-like character. The bodily patterning from Miller's *Torso* etching discussed just above is a localized manifestation of similar patterning and repetition that Miller engages again and again; in this color etching, viewers can see the beginning of a grouping that he abstracted to various degrees depending on his intents for the particular works. While the creatures emerging from the sea seem to have individual characteristics, they overall seem to represent an arriving force, free from their watery confines to try their luck on the dry land. Miller presents an onslaught of feeders and breeders, driven by biological impulse to eat and reproduce in environments and contexts suitable for such activities necessary for life. While the creatures no doubt correspond roughly or approximately to actual species, enough idiosyncrasies in their features exist for viewers to perhaps smile at the whimsical appearance of these beasties and perhaps bring some sense of empathy or identification to them. Humans from one point of view too are feeders and breeders; while human activities seem to carry much urgency each day, nevertheless, nourishing and propagating lie at the heart of most things that people do. Miller's invading gang may not represent people directly, but evolution points to a life form transition in prehistory from water to land that makes the scene recognizable from an expanded view of earthly life, one offered with playful stylization. Viewers recognize the theoretical nature of such a depiction, made easier to digest by a shared awareness of the lack of glamor in emerging from the depths but at least sharing such origins with fellow humans.

The story of this evolutionary transition is told through the medium of color etching, with precise color registration the most difficult aspect of this challenging process. In his skill at registering multiple colors, multiple plates, Miller brings viewers a scene to behold at the same time he subtly encourages enthusiasts, admirers of technique, to witness the seamlessness with which he brings the image into existence. Miller uses technical control to convey the churning energy of the sea that then gives rise to these peculiar agents or ambassadors of development's next stage. With their thick lips and gaping maws they are poised on the edge of two ecosystems, realizing that just ahead may be places that better suit their emerging or gradually changing physical traits. While their quest and metamorphosis seem to involve conscious adaptation or intent, the creatures do not exemplify notions of progress but rather constant and ongoing change. Miller uses his technical abilities and confident sense of imaginative draftsmanship to capture a shift of awareness, where natural forces prompt developmental directions that from a larger perspective are mere pulses in a circuit, but up close resemble the fleshy odyssey to dry land that unfolds in this piece. Miller primes viewers for the shape shifting that they will experience in his art as he himself evolves and reacts to conditions of various kinds.



**Michael Miller (1938-2014)**

*Alphabet*, 1975

Etching on paper, 19/50, paper: 19 x 23 inches, image: 11 ½ x 15 ½ inches

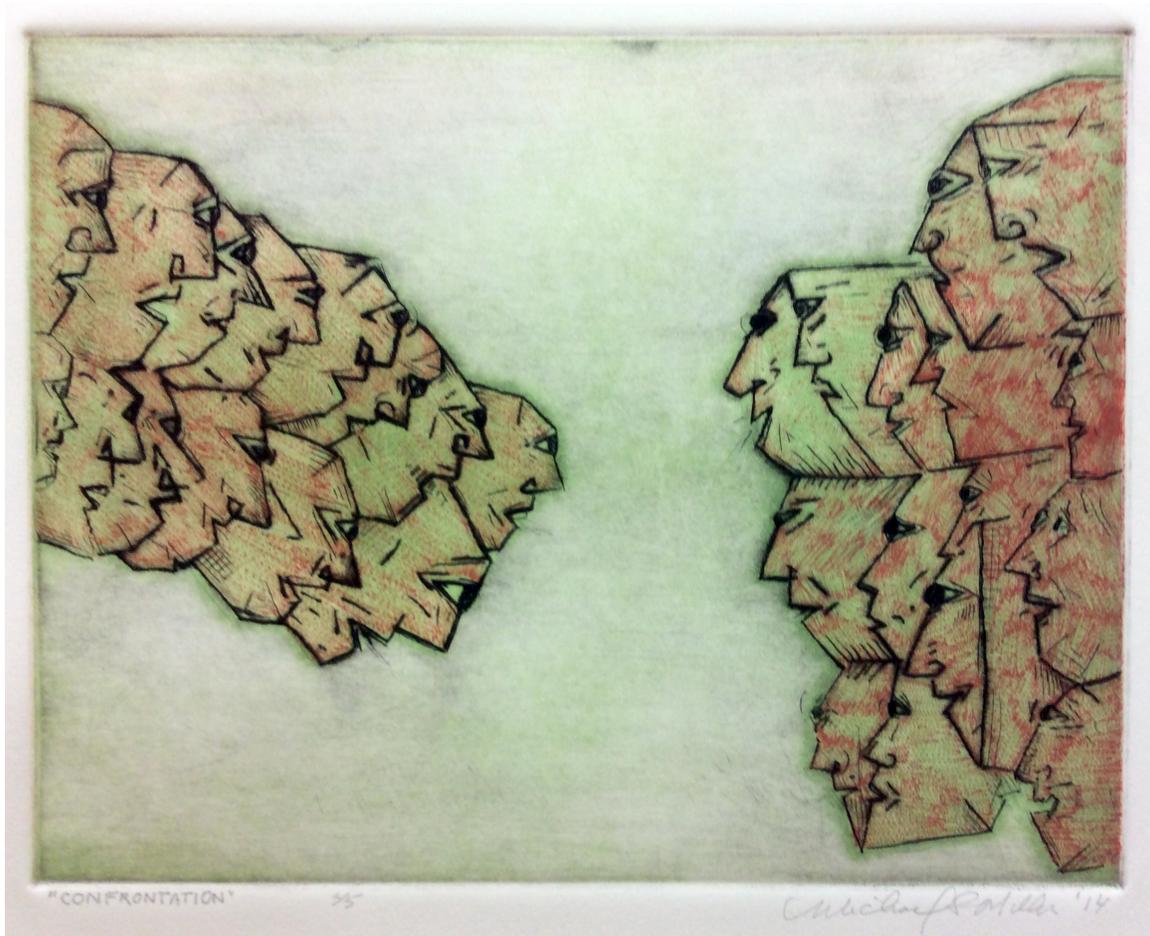
Private Collection

The creatures from *Feeders and Breeders*, perhaps slightly more mammalian here, return to writhe and twist and contort themselves into letters of the alphabet in a print that nicely shows Miller's sense of humor and spirit of invention. Where the earlier print presents the life forms riding the cusp of a wave toward a new arena for life, this one removes them from a natural context and instead places them in a pattern, a tableau, where beasties must assume the roles of and configure themselves into the various letters. The matrix into which they fit themselves is artificial, but their internal tasks within that matrix enable viewers to look past the letter shapes to investigate their actions and positions.

This etching involves just one plate of black line work printed on the sheet; *Feeders and Breeders* presents a greater technical challenge to print. Yet once again Miller's skill is evident, with the line work fluid, animated, and rich throughout the image. Through careful yet lively line activity, he creates a scene bustling with energy and movement, even as a squint on the viewer's part brings the alphabet into visibility.

This print, like *Feeders and Breeders*, offers a moment of transition. Whereas the earlier print, however, treats the transition in narrative terms, *Alphabet* enables viewers to move from a literal scene to a kind of schematic. As the vantage point ascends and the creatures become less portrait-like in their representations, they become generalized characters that can shift into any shape, any contortion required of them. The collective life forms can even stand for components in a vast and pulsing or throbbing nature that matches the actions of impersonal agents with the circuitry that drives them on a microscopic level.

*Alphabet* from 1975 once again enables Miller to present building blocks, essential elements that are delightful and interesting in isolation as letters that the creatures strive to become, as parts of the overall etched and printed composition, and as indicators of a natural reality that is simultaneously messy and highly measured and deliberate. This is a print that bridges the gap between Miller's tales of evolution and his abstract rendering of interactions on a grand scale, seen in works still to be discussed as this online catalog continues.



**Michael Miller (1938-2014)**  
*Confrontation*, from *Head 2 Head: Confrontation Series*, 2014  
Portfolio of nine color drypoints, 4/5,  
paper: 13 x 15 inches, image: 8 ¼ x 10 ½ inches  
Produced in collaboration with Yoorim Kim and Kun Young Chang, Bon  
Bindery, Seoul, Korea, and Angee Lennard, Spudnik Press, Chicago, Illinois  
Collection of Kathleen King

The portfolio *Head 2 Head: Confrontation Series* is the last portfolio Miller completed before his death. It is a beautifully produced portfolio in which Miller treated themes important to him that, as seen in previous catalog entries, had their origins in earlier works but in a much different visual form. Here, surging masses of humanity, clusters of heads, offer a din of imagined voices as the heads additionally pulse like spots of light on a circuit. The prints in this portfolio powerfully present Miller's distilled vision of patterns that generally stand in for people in a mob, secure in a group that is in turn unsettled in its restless quest for safety and security.

While Miller throughout his career strove to embrace new technologies, new innovations in print and image making, he nevertheless found traditional processes to be meaningful and effective; in fact, Miller would on occasion combine new approaches with traditional ones, with the final image being the main goal. Fascinatingly for his final portfolio, he chose drypoint as the method by which he would create the portfolio pieces. Drypoint is the most direct, the least technically complex method of creating an image on a plate and is done by the artist scraping right into the plate with a sharp stylus to create a groove that would hold ink. Whereas engraving is a similarly direct process, the burin used in engraving produces a cleaner groove or line; a drypoint line, on the other hand, kicks up a burr from the displaced plexiglass, zinc, or copper of the printing plate. This burr holds ink and gives drypoint lines the lovely feathery character for which it is known. Miller's choice of drypoint for the *Head 2 Head* portfolio seems to communicate his general mastery of the various print processes, as well as his understanding that the concept or idea drives the selection of medium. The image scraped onto and into the plate also imparts a sense of urgency of communication—Miller takes pains to convey the idea that a conversation can be something of a collision when crowds and voices become literal masses.

The atmospheric field on which the head and faces masses are situated is the result of tone left over from the multiple inked and registered plates. The color is largely localized in the masses but in its residue provides an environment of some visual depth and richness. The angular faces, all caricatures to varying degrees, operate as a collective at the same time that viewers can enjoy the particular facial expressions within. For Miller, the confrontation in *Confrontation* offers an opportunity for dialogue, but dialogue as an objective is less driving a principle for the two masses as a chance to intersect forcibly or peaceably. The agents are individuals and cells, with both subject to the possibility of communication becoming conflict, encounters becoming pleasant or unpleasant in the space of a moment.

With the faces and heads of *Head 2 Head*, Miller uses direct, expressive, angular, and at times wispy and poetic line work to create a world, one that is micro and macroscopic paradoxically and simultaneously. Viewers realize through their looking that while they personally operate in the world, they are also parts of larger groups of a variety of natures that propel them. Sometimes these groups transport to realms of welcome cooperation, and sometimes they clash, the spectacle of which is enduringly interesting in its frank truth.



Michael Miller (1938-2014)  
*Bubblehead*, 2000

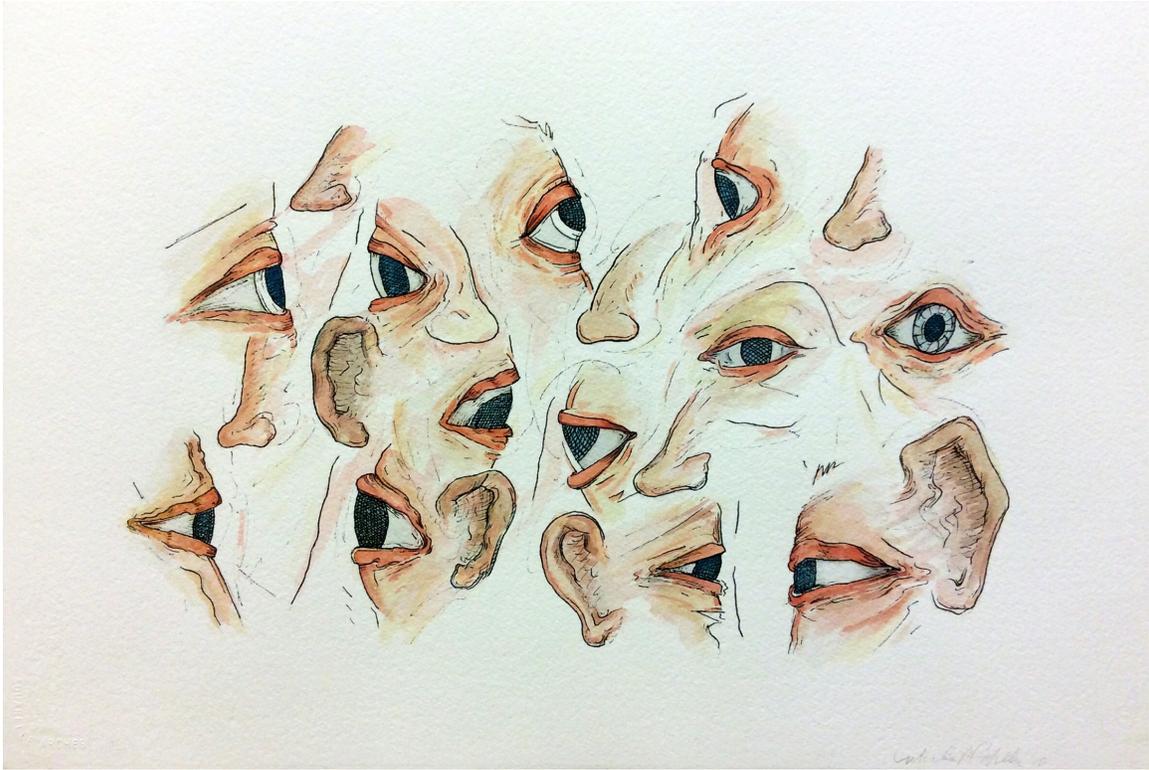
Inkjet print construction on paper, 9 ½ x 7 ¾ inches  
Collection of Kathleen King

During the times I talked to Miller either in the SAIC print shop or in his studio, I always noticed that while I was earnestly trying to master line etching he was personally taking to the next level the notion of what a print can be. Miller freely combined processes and took advantage of digital means to add levels and layers of meaning and complexity to his creations. By 2000, he was working with a shadow box format to present elaborate constructions that combined found and created imagery into works of playful invention and social critique.

At this time, let me point out an important aspect of Miller's work that relates to this particular piece: Miller's sketchbooks are true treasure troves of fascinating images. Throughout these sketchbooks (one of which is included in the Brauer exhibition, a 2004 sketchbook from Seoul), viewers can see the artist working out the configurations of various characters and using various representational styles. Miller once said to me that he was mildly disappointed that his best ideas, those ideas that were freshest and reflecting lively and spontaneous line work, were in his sketchbooks. His solution, a solution that he recommended to me for great benefit, was to reproduce in various ways those very sketches instead of trying to recapture the initial energy through redrawing. The head in *Bubblehead* contains the expressive drawing in Miller's sketch but interestingly breaks the gestural passages and textures into layers that are carefully printed, cut, and assembled. The collar area in its directness of draftsmanship seems to reinforce *Bubblehead* as an elaborate doodle that shows meticulous attention throughout, especially in the lacelike filigree of the cut areas rising just above the surface of the larger image. Viewers are drawn to the spontaneity, the casual nature of the creation that is belied by the means of execution; the character is somewhat broadly rendered but very much a character of commitment, a person of interest.

*Bubblehead*'s nose and the background of the image are photo derived, grounding this being or creature in the actual world; he is a product of this place with a nose for deals and opportunities in the realm of the market. His winged profile calls up associations of speed and victory, as he looks ever upward buoyed by the prospect of some solid quotes. As much as he appears within himself to be confident and assured, he is a bubble after all destined to eventually burst. One wonders if the abstract glyph to the upper right of the central figure represents an abstract balloon in the process of exploding while carrying a cargo of eggs—while *Bubblehead* is comic in its overall effect, perhaps the consequences of the character's behaviors are actual and problematic, with real consequences. The character's delusion produces short-term gain but long-term damage. Viewed in this way, Miller's piece from 2000 is truly prescient.

*Bubblehead* and other shadow box inkjet print constructions in the exhibition from the same period seem to play off the notion of dimensionality in terms of literal construction and layers of meaning, ways of achieving depth that give greater substance to the themes at hand. He was both physically and conceptually exploring the idea of printmaking growing beyond the limitations of matrices or even limits established by centuries of orthodoxy. The visual and even verbal puns that emerge connect essentially to Miller's art and personality.



**Michael Miller (1938-2014)**

**Untitled, 2010**

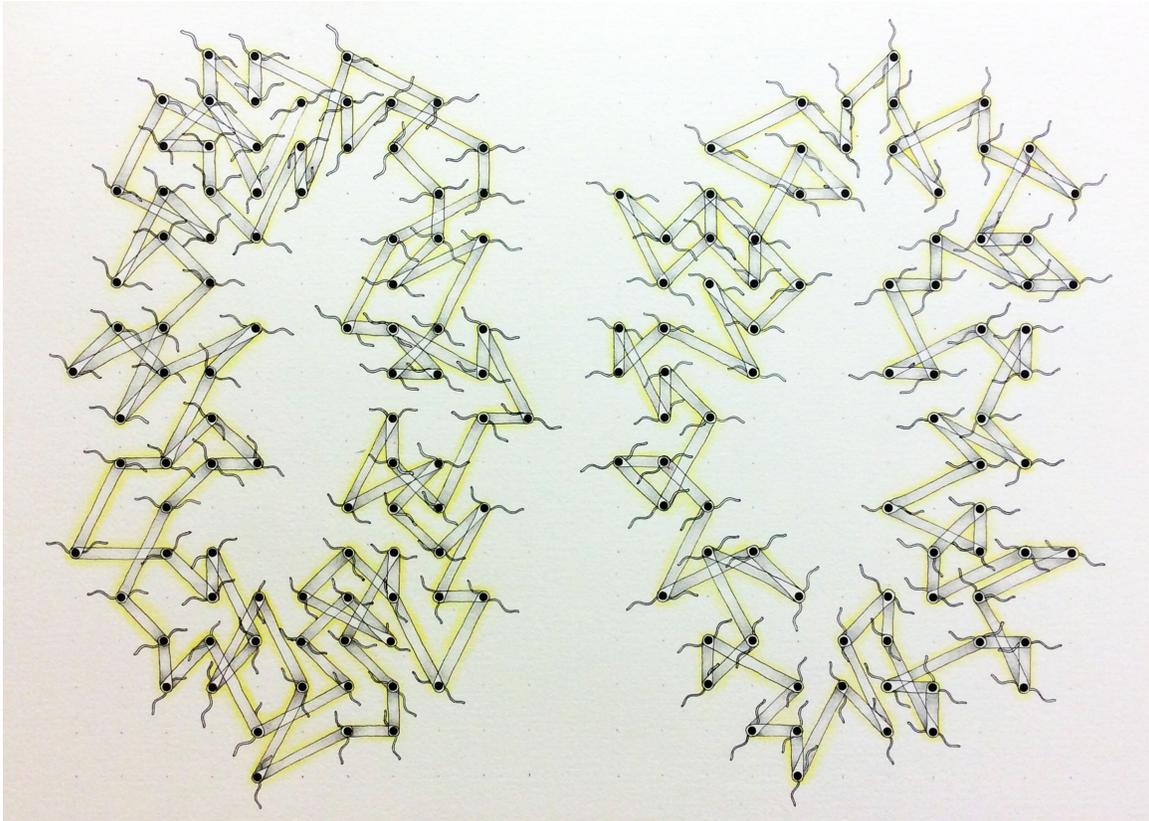
Watercolor and ink on paper, 15 x 22 ½ inches  
Collection of Kathleen King

Shortly after I heard from Miller that he had cancer, I visited him at his studio to begin discussing a retrospective exhibition of his work. I had not visited his studio for quite some time and was eager to see his new and recent creations. The hand colored linocuts with black backgrounds that will be treated in future entries I was somewhat familiar with from his website and catalogs, but among those works were prints and drawings that featured a flesh color and that depicted eyes, noses, and faces. These flesh-colored pieces were new to me and frankly surprising. I was familiar with faces and characters becoming components in a circuit or linked on a chain, or even surging in a mass. However, the faces and features treated in such a straightforward manner, with the abstraction serving not the mechanistic nature of the linked chains but instead more of a portrait-like purpose, offered to me a new aspect or dimension of Miller's art.

Please know that by referring to the color I noticed as flesh, I am referring to the color of my flesh and Miller's flesh; I would use a more descriptive term for the color, but my reference enables me to make a difficult conceptual point. Perhaps Miller's focus on the human body, or at least elements of it, in this piece and others I noticed arose from his awareness of his own mortality and the state of his own body. The patterned masses of heads and faces make an abstract point and speak to generalized states of being and operations, but this particular drawing brings together eyes, noses, and ears that while stylized seem to emphasize thick and lumpy skin, even red or irritated especially around the eyes. Perhaps through viewing himself in reflection, literally and figuratively, the artist chose to share his identification of noses, eyes, and ears as peculiar, tender things that in isolation effectively stand for the fragile creature that is the human organism. Despite our best efforts to present distinguished profiles, we are all ultimately composites of skin and bone that wear on our faces these odd structures that enhance and/or protect sensory organs more deeply within our heads. The composition of facial details here is balanced and delightful from a design perspective, but the selected features also impart a message of empathy, as Miller urges us to smile at these curious funnel-like configurations and folds of skin and realize that similar models grace our own faces during the limited time of our lives.

Eyes, noses, ears, and wrinkles lightly jostle on the picture plane until ears strongly resemble eyes, and eyes and noses become a portion of a face until the noses drift off to join other faces while eyes shut like mouths—the design throbs as viewers feel the swellings and ride the contours of these organic forms. Miller's graceful pen lines of various densities give the surface a sense of immediacy, as do the passages of watercolor that both define the forms and create an atmosphere from which the forms emerge. Like in the hand colored etchings belonging to the *Torso* series, Miller with the pigment touches on flesh; that is, he lightly applies a skin color. The words "touch on flesh" can assume varied meanings in the context of this drawing, however. The artist addresses mortality through his frank portrayal.

The sound that seems to arise from this grouping is a dull, thick chatter that becomes the noise of a crowd but belonging to, dissipating in, the wind, ephemeral, mildly ridiculous, vaguely disturbing, real and here and now.



**Michael Miller** (1938-2014)  
Untitled (double-sided drawing), 1982  
Ink and watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches  
Collection of Kathleen King

Here we have a drawing by Miller that is simultaneously and paradoxically representational and nonobjective. The two circuits or loops depicted are composed of links of various sizes; as much as the links cross over or double back on themselves, they nevertheless follow a logic with the pivots on either end that would apparently enable the circuits to be extended into larger loops. Viewers likely have seen enough similar structures, perhaps the chain on a chain saw or bicycle, to bring some sense awareness to the configurations here in order to feel bodily the sensation of unfolding, disentangling, the structures of linkages. Presented as they are, the chains crackle with a nervous energy due to their areas of overlap made frenetic by the angularity of the shapes, the peculiar wavy lines emerging from each joint, and the glowing yellow that suggests a current of pulsing electricity. The loops move and writhe while remaining still upon the sheet, crisply delineated.

The design unfolds logically or operates under conditions that seem sensible, and yet the literal nature of the design moves viewers into the realm of metaphor. As to why the chains or circuits here need to follow these patterns or directions that make physical sense, one answer could be to bring about a nonobjective rhythm that satisfies formal observation. And yet the links in the circuits have a specificity that draws attention to the care with which they have been rendered—and then the general abstract aspect of the composition seems less than primary. Miller wishes to capture something, a quality that may lie within considerations of rhythm and energy but is broader in its applications.

While earlier works from the 70s show gatherings and gangs of fanciful creatures ascending the evolutionary chain before our eyes (in *Feeders and Breeders* and *Alphabet*, for example), here Miller has abstracted the formal and conceptual abstractions of those earlier pieces. If the surging biological beasts were stand-ins for the clumsy and desperate actions of humans to survive, the animated links in this drawing draw the point of view way back, or perhaps intensely closer, until features or characteristics become simple indicators of utility or functionality. The black dots of the linkage pivots, the aforementioned wavy lines reminiscent of protruding hairs, and the jostling steps along the chains read enough as vaguely human traits for viewers to bring a sense of empathy or identification to the various shapes. Miller stylized his organic subjects until they became mechanistic, and then imparted enough idiosyncrasies to the mechanistic chains that they connected to human concerns on a macro and micro scale. We see these circuits or chains intellectually, as well as warmly enough to understand that in the chaos of days we become these links that bunch up on occasion but then just as soon untangle in order to face a new snare, just as cellular activity buzzes with similar stops and starts.

This drawing finely points to a shift that occurs throughout Miller's career. The stylization and abstraction that Miller brought to so many of his works rides the edge of caricature or exaggeration for effect. Some creations face this caricaturing impulse head on and embrace it for general political effect or social commentary. Others manifest it fairly obliquely, as is the case with this particular piece. Still other works, though, like those in and around the *Torsos* series, engage their subjects more viscerally and in a more narrative fashion. Rather than explore the reduction of subjects to essentials, Miller brings in allusion and the interplay of selected elements to establish meaning. In future catalog entries, we can explore the links as they remind us of a chain of being, and in addition we can witness an occasional link expand into a portrait of the curious guises we wear as skin.



Michael Miller (1938-2014)

*Worried Man*, 1997

Ink on paper in polyurethane, and wood, 13 x 11 x 3 inches

Collection of Kathleen King

*Worried Man* provides another example of Miller challenging conventions and attitudes regarding what a print or work on paper can be. While works on paper typically rely on the paper surface as being a unifying matrix or support, here the artist suspends meticulously cut paper shapes in layers and layers of polyurethane, with the dried and hardened polymer being the unifying agent of the piece. *Worried Man* is as sculptural as it is pictorial, with the materials surprising viewers with their innovative use while at the same time offering visual and verbal puns.

Like Ray Martin, Miller's longtime colleague in the SAIC printmaking department, Miller referred back frequently to representational and caricature styles of the 1950s and 1960s in his works. Some of the cut paper assemblages in the exhibition from around the year 2000 could easily be the cover art for the 1956 book *The Organization Man*, with Miller visually exploring the idea of order and authority. Perhaps his years in the military, combined with advertising styles and imagery he saw in the media and popular culture, combined in Miller's work to produce a satirical and whimsical commentary on growing consumerism, a corporate mindset, and a skeptical view of systems and apparatuses of authority and conformity. His figures, earnest characters set in fields of units and pattern, so often resemble the common man of the mid twentieth-century who uncertainly looks at the growing standardization of the world around him.

In past exhibition statements, Miller has mentioned his enduring interest in political cartoons and illustration. The artist's own use of cartoons or a cartoonish style has a postmodern aspect, with Miller not only rendering his subjects in a stylized graphic fashion familiar to him and arising from his roots but also relying on viewers' own experiences with twentieth-century graphic methods or types of shorthand. He wields these artistic styles like pen or brush strokes so that the content of particular pieces comes not only from the literally depicted scenes but also from the juxtaposition of styles that resonate historically with their plentiful connotations. Miller wishes for viewers to situate his draftsmanship historically at the same time he wishes for them to delight in the spirit of invention within each work.

*Worried Man* captures the pensive look of a man sealed in amber. The amber is the polyurethane that has turned color over the years, resulting in the works in this series gaining a poignant aspect; like prehistoric insects, Miller's subjects become frozen in time and preserved and yet also call attention to the passing of time and a slow march toward decay. The worried man's face with furrowed brow atop a large and peculiar tie, with the calendar behind and particular dates larger in size for additional hallucinatory effect, all contribute to the feeling of a man who faces time and change at the same time he realizes that such forces will easily overwhelm him. Miller's line work for *Worried Man* is skittish—the line work is sketchbook line work that Miller reproduced and worked back into, as was his common tendency in order to preserve the animated and largely unedited spirit of the spontaneous sketch. The contrast between this energetic line approach on a small scale and the polyurethane encasement is effective, with the worry on the subject's face seeming very real, very immediate, and the frozen calendar and amber-colored slab of polyurethane speaking to the notion that the subject's worry is perpetual.

The worried man is a man who experienced the worry of staying human, staying relevant, staying alive, and such impassioned pursuits are as temporary as people are. The message that Miller presents is through this temporary man who wears the fashions of the past and is captured intact for our present and future edification. In his concerns about time, he transcends time by embodying the concept that human worries about how much time we have constitute a human constant, timeless in nature.



**Michael Miller (1938-2014)**

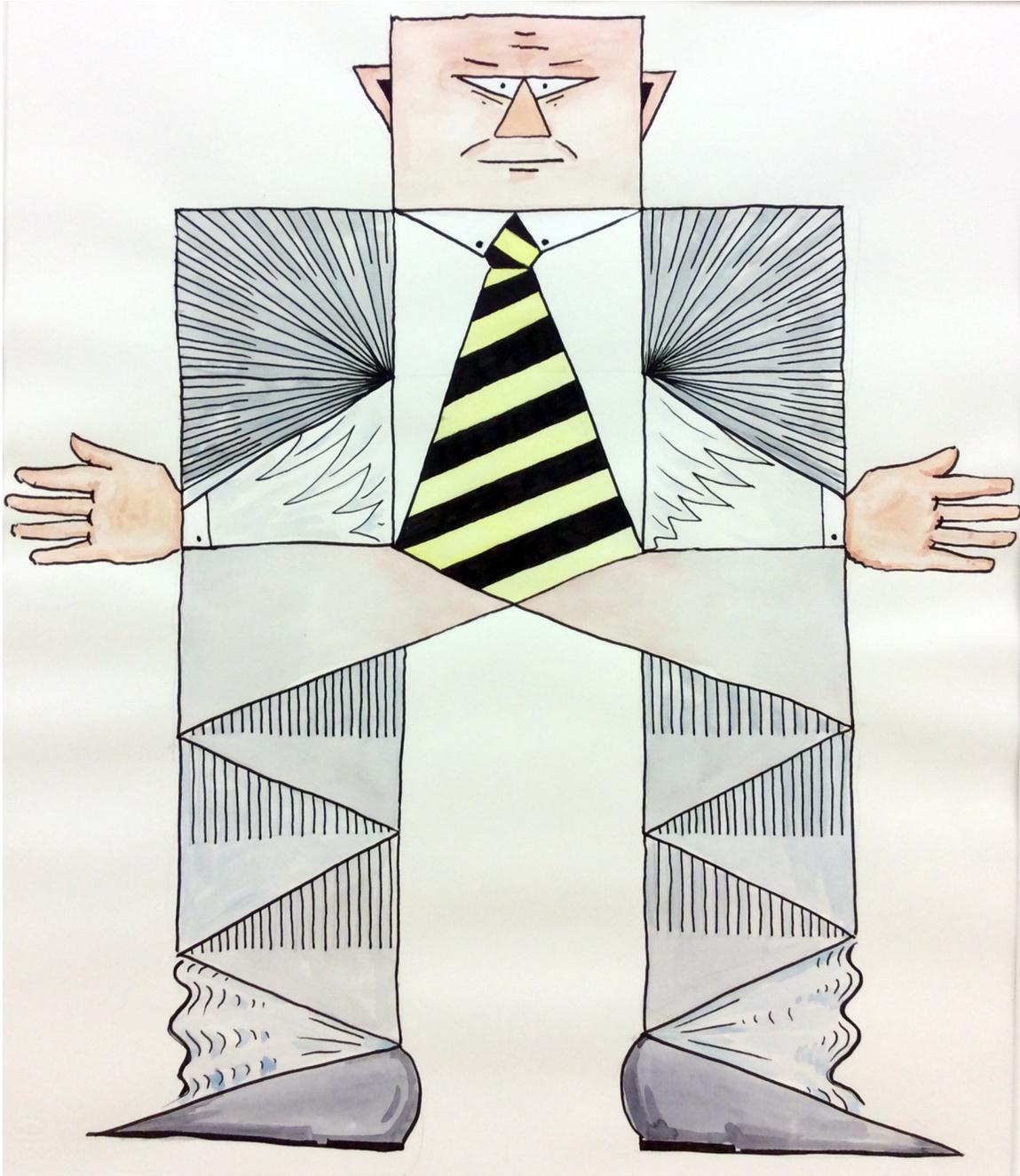
*Another Dance*, 1988

Hand-painted acrylic transfer on wood panel, 30 ½ x 31 x 1 ¾ inches  
Collection of Kathleen King

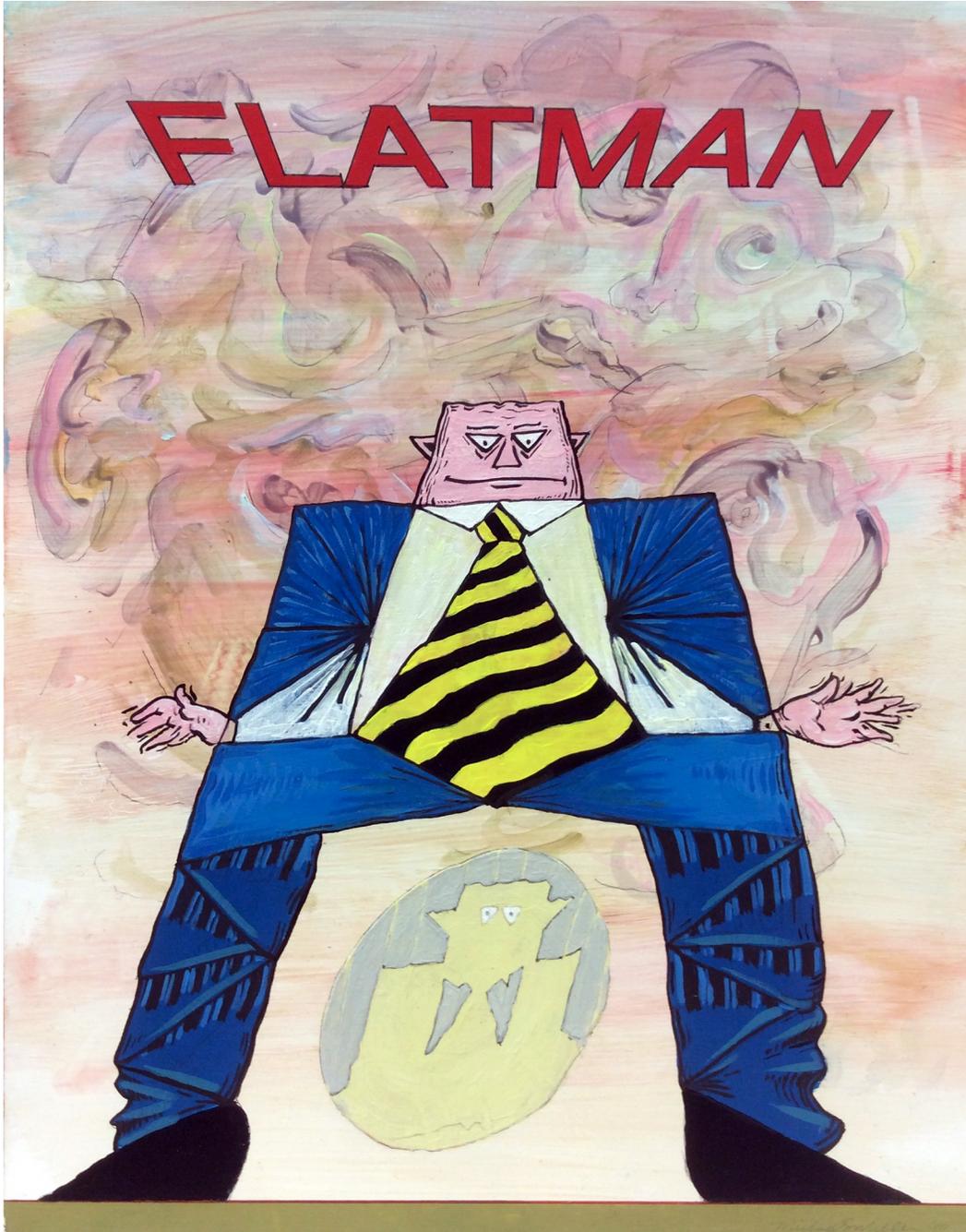
Miller's *Torsos* series began as small hand colored etchings from the early 1980s. The markings and images appearing on the torsos read visually as tattoos; the artist's light watercolor dabs of coloration in primary and secondary colors reinforced this reading, as did the black line work brought about by a needle (the etching needle). Even the paper support tied in conceptually, with viewers perhaps subconsciously thinking about parchment and vellum as paper-like surfaces but made from skin. The *Torsos* etchings in their small scale achieved a critical mass of references and interpretations, all the while connecting to the psychosexually charged nature of Chicago Imagism, with, for example, images of isolated body parts in restraint seen in the work of Jim Nutt, Christina Ramberg, and Robert Rauschenberg, and images of tattooed torsos seen in the work of Ed Paschke. The etchings also connected effectively to neo expressionist creations coming out of New York, with an emphasis on direct, even crude figuration and an interest in classical references.

Miller clearly saw much potential in the torso subject and expanded his treatment of the subject beyond the *Torsos* portfolio. In *Another Dance*, Miller presents a torso with arms raised, and on the chest of the torso is an image of a skeleton beating a drum—the skeleton is from one of Hans Holbein's *Dance of Death* woodcuts from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. *Another Dance*, with the word *dance* in the title referring to the Holbein series, arises directly from one of the hand colored etchings in the *Torsos* portfolio; interestingly in the portfolio, Miller printed the skeleton image from a plate separate from the torso plate. Miller's impulse to repurpose, revisit, recreate images but in different scales and media, is clearly seen here, with the skin of the torso appearing both tattooed and flayed, revealing layers of tissue beneath the skin. Skin as paper or paper as skin gives way to the image essentially bonded to the wood surface, the means of application a mystery but satisfying in its ambiguity, given the image's iconic nature. Miller likely used photo or photomechanical means to transfer literally and figuratively the image from its diminutive source, the original etching, to the wood panel. The artist has brought something new into the world, an object that resonates with strangeness and simultaneously, paradoxically, familiarity. The bond between concept and means of execution results in an image that declares itself with confidence, even though the precise nature of the content or theme resists verbal articulation. *Another Dance* is mildly disturbing, enigmatic, but also arresting in its juxtapositions, visceral point of view, and sense of internal unity that, as mentioned before, resists precise description.

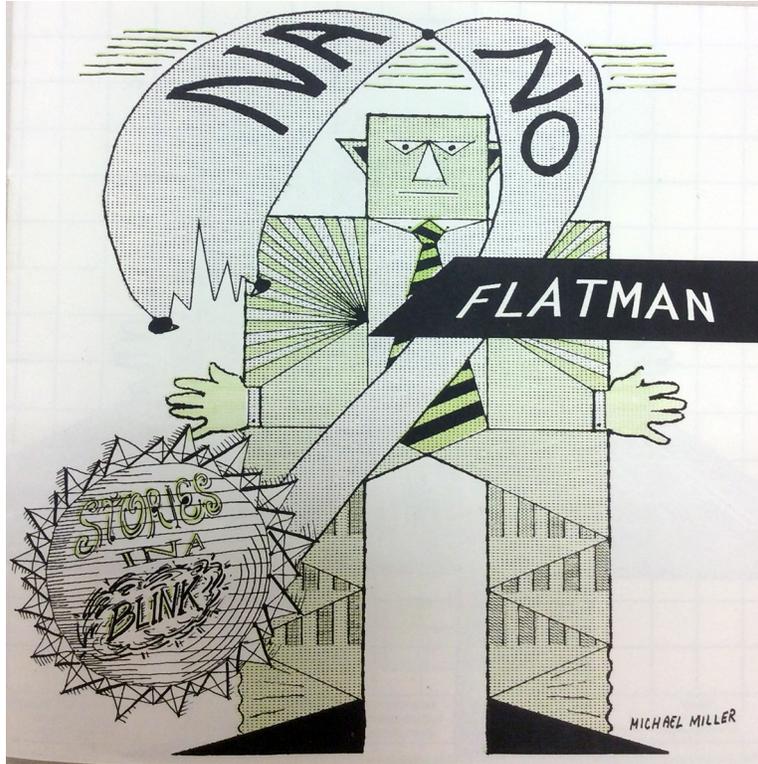
Perhaps what is felt as right and resolved in the piece is the raw torso on the raw wood, with color soothing but ultimately defining the frankly presented subject. Right on the surface is Death banging out beats of the human heart, each beat drawing the body closer to the end of the song. The torso raises its arms in a manner inevitably and unmistakably reminiscent for particular viewers of a crucified body; while Miller was Jewish and demonstrated no apparent interest in Christian subjects, still the torso position is uncomfortable, full of effort, possibly defensive in its surrender. *Another Dance* presents a dance that people have been participating in throughout human existence, with the imperfect body, subject to the effects of time, wearing its scars and encounters. Meanwhile, the pounding is our figurative and metaphorical heart, tapping out moments while urging us onward.



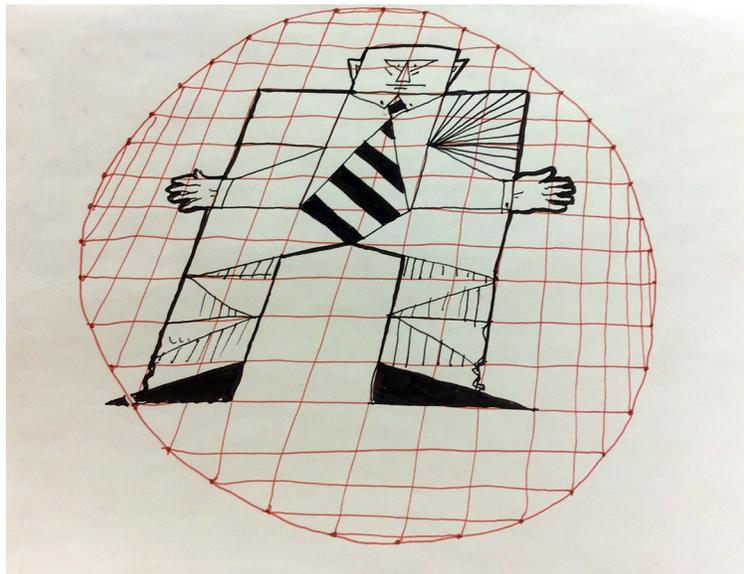
**Michael Miller (1938-2014)**  
*Flatman, 2004*  
Ink and watercolor on paper, 22 x 15 inches  
Collection of Kathleen King



**Michael Miller (1938-2014)**  
*Flatman, 2010*  
Acrylic and ink on Masonite, 14 x 11 inches  
Collection of Kathleen King



**Nano: Stories in a Blink, featuring work by Michael Miller**  
*Square Comics #3, 7 ½ x 7 ½ inches*  
Sara Ranchouse Publishing, Chicago, Illinois, 2005



**Michael Miller (1938-2014)**  
**Sketchbook-- Seoul, 2004**  
Mixed media on paper, 7 ½ x 10 ½ inches  
Collection of Kathleen King

The four works reproduced above have as their subject an enigmatic character, a favorite character of Miller's that he treated in various media frequently from approximately the year 2000 until his death. The character is Flatman, something of a superhero for the artist in the sense that through his physical and conceptual malleability Flatman is able to assume an amazing number of shapes and convey a wide range of symbolic meanings. Whereas superheroes typically save humanity from peril, Flatman enables Miller to explore the fullness of representational approaches; the character is a vehicle for the artist's investigations into all that art can do—illustrating, resembling illustration, and highlighting the limits of illustration through art's embrace of ambiguity.

When I first saw Flatman, I immediately thought of Flat Stanley, the main character of the 1964 children's book written by Jeff Brown and illustrated by Tomi Ungerer. Flat Stanley was a fascinating character to me because his flatness, brought about by his being flattened by a bulletin board, enabled him to do things and solve problems that were impossible for fully rounded human beings. I suspect that Flatman was fascinating to Miller for similar but likely more complex reasons. The first Flatman image reproduced above from 2004 presents a simplified, stylized schematic, with body part positions and the folds of fabric compressed into lines and light washes of color. Like da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, this 2004 Flatman presents his bodily configuration proudly but not so much in the service of considerations of proportion. Rather, Flatman here demonstrates that the shift from observation to imaginative transcription deals heavily with abstraction. Through his schematic, Miller seems to indicate that the move from the world around us into the world of art automatically seems to involve conceptual consideration of the logic of the subject that then can inform as much manipulation of this subject as the artist wishes. Flatman is basically Miller observing the human form and then saying, "I can reduce this elaborate form to the language of two dimensions, a language that encompasses gesture and pattern." In the pictorial realm, any pose, any position is possible for Flatman since he exists in a place where considerations revolve around innovation and invention.

The Flatman painting on Masonite gives richer surface treatment to the Flatman subject and with its gestural atmosphere conveys more of a narrative feel. The high degree of stylization and abstraction Miller brings to the character, as well as his appearance in the *Nano* publication, connect Flatman to comic books and commercial illustration, but Miller never seems to bring an extra level of warmth to the character. Instead, through the inclusion of peculiar glyphs and details (the odd circle between the legs of the Masonite Flatman and the red grid in the sketchbook drawing, for example), Miller grounds Flatman in metaphor, ambiguity, and appreciation for formal issues. Passages of pattern arising from the abstracting process described earlier become areas of their own delight, while Flatman as a character rides the edge of illustration by wearing a cartoonish outline but not precisely or specifically engaging in any clear activity or fulfilling any clear objective.

The super nature of Flatman lies in his ability to show viewers that art exists as a field without limits, save for the limits of the imagination of the fond and attentive creator. Miller's three-dimensional manipulations of Flatman, reserved for another catalog entry, offer further proof of the richness the artist found in this subject.



**Michael Miller (1938-2014)**

*Stomach Knot, 1997*

Hand-painted acrylic transfer on wood panel, 30 x 22 x 1 inches

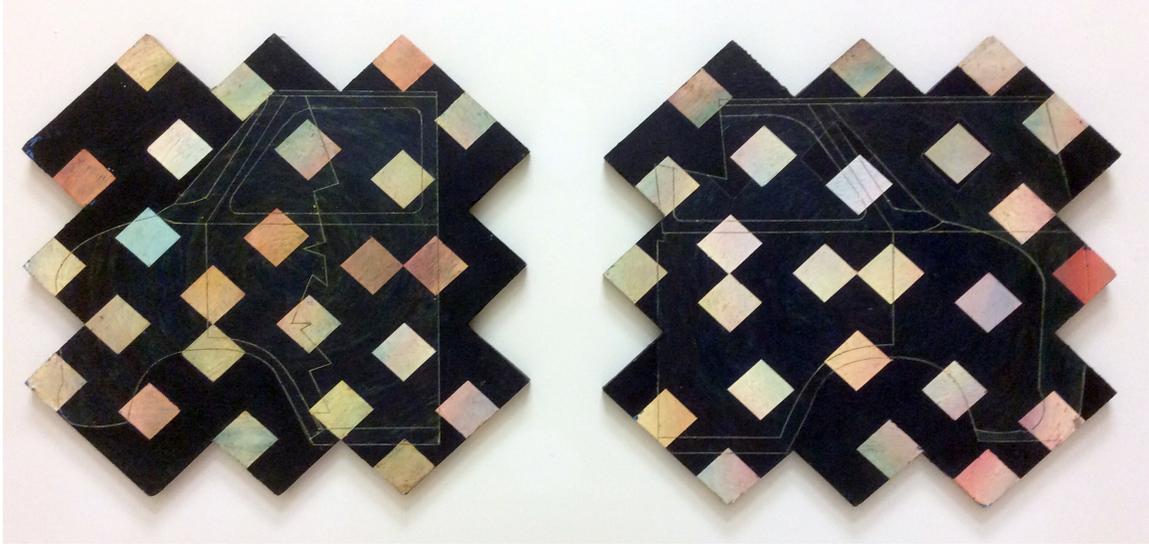
Collection of Kathleen King

*Stomach Knot* from 1997 offers yet another example of Miller examining the many images, many icons, in his body of work and taking those images in new directions through changes in size, format, coloration, and juxtaposition. In this piece, the central subject is a sketchily delineated torso containing what seems to be a ball of fire or energy that keeps blue cloud forms at bay. The background is composed of graphic passages taken from a woodcut by Albrecht Dürer, the 16<sup>th</sup> century German artist whose work in printmaking endures as inspiration to all working in the discipline. Miller combines a quotation from this Renaissance figure at the same time he uses innovative techniques and personal mark making to create an image that is both contemporary and steeped in history.

To create this work, Miller combined photocopy transfers and hand painting and used a pine board as his surface. An interesting blend of technologies emerges, with the artist photocopying a reproduction of a woodcut and then combining that photocopy with photocopies of sketches from his sketchbook, and then sparingly adding color to particular areas. Dürer's woodcut is updated, but updated in a way that draws attention to the handmade surface of an image that employs technology but in a way that reveals its seams and even its limitations. This print collage is an artifact that presents its surface as a visceral one, arising from experimentation but also commemorating its subject in a bold and direct fashion. Miller challenges the definitions of print and painting, ultimately focusing on the final piece and the way it relates to that which is within, and that which is without.

The stomach knot of the title seems to be the energy ball in the torso, resembling a literal heart while crackling with lightning stylized in a nearly cartoonish fashion. Like in *Another Dance*, another torso image discussed earlier and involving transfer and hand painting on a wood support, Miller expanded on his initially inspiring *Torsos* portfolio to examine the body fragment in greater depth or in a fuller context. With his integration of Dürer's imagery, Miller pays homage to the earlier master at the same time he locates his work on the same continuum. Beneath and in the turbulent woodcut sky, the torso and its fiery heart belong and exist, perhaps testifying that the struggles of whatever nature that captivated the past burn in the hearts of contemporary artists who despite innovations still find truth and relevance in traditional processes.

Dürer's prints frequently treat biblical subjects and portray God as an animating but indistinct force. Miller's torso seems to swell with a heart barely containing its energy, and while my intent is to describe the print I believe I could have fairly said the same thing about the artist himself when he was alive. Miller as an artist undoubtedly felt constant inspiration as he experienced the world and creativity around him, and perhaps this feeling of inspiration was felt equally in the brain and in the chest or torso. Considering the notion of inspiration as "breathing into" is meaningful in thinking about this piece as relating to Dürer's work, in that perhaps the stomach knot of Miller's title comes from the thoughts that fill his heart and drive his hand. As much as the torso is a home or container for inspiration, man itself is a modest holder for themes and stirrings of imagination that are much greater than any lone figure.



**Michael Miller (1938-2014)**

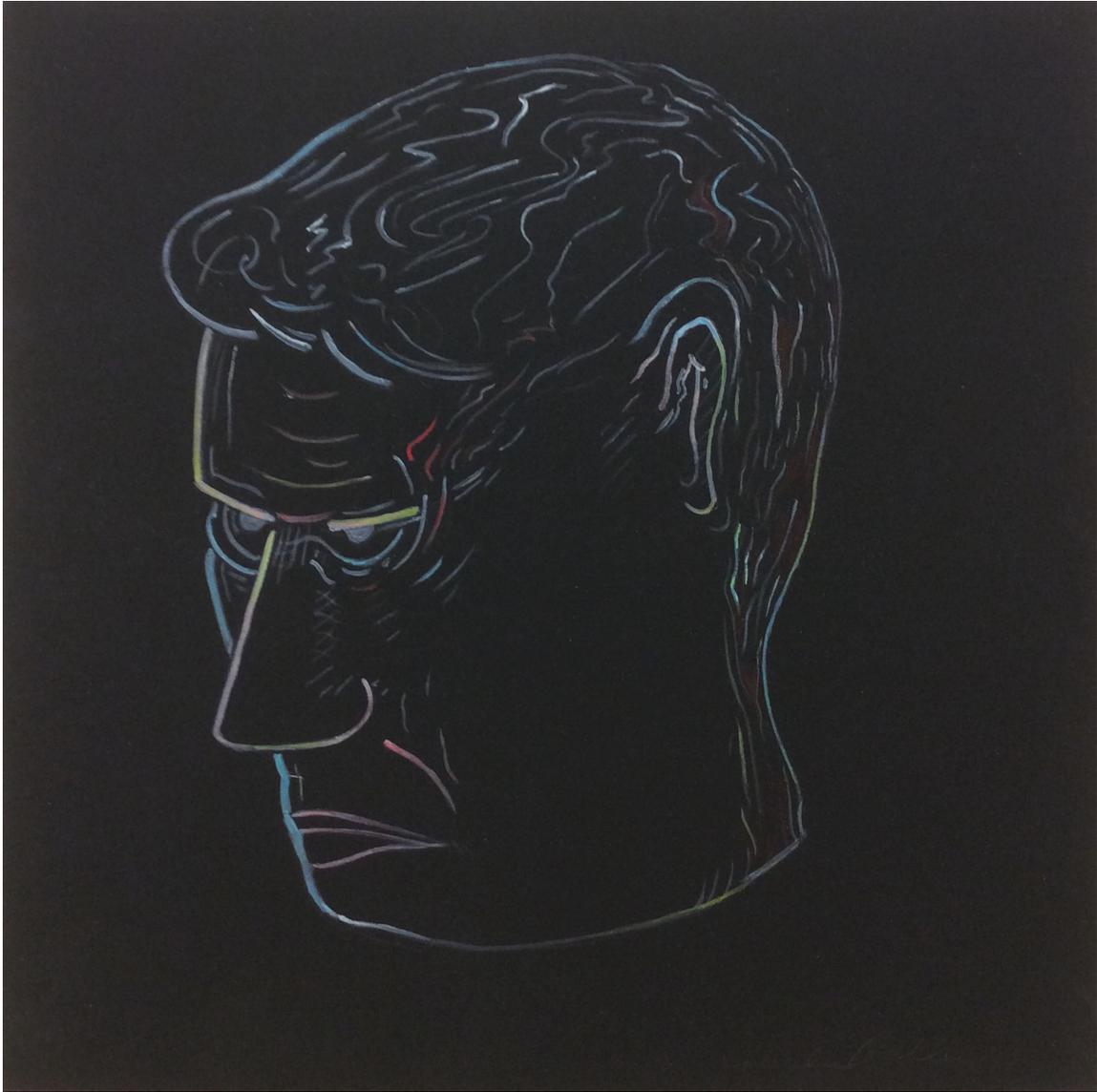
**Untitled, 1983**

Oil and colored pencil on wood, diptych, each panel 22 x 24 x 7/8 inches  
Collection of Kathleen King

The subject of the van is treated in two works in the exhibition: The one illustrated above and a mixed media printed piece titled *Van Puzzle* (which actually is a puzzle, the simplicity of its design belied by its conceptual complexity) are unique in the exhibition, in that Miller selected and manipulated the central subject rather than invented it. When I attended the School of the Art Institute, I saw an article in a campus publication where Miller discussed some of his new work—the series he was working on at that time dealt with airplane and glider wings as their subjects, and these images in their diagrammatic nature seemed selected and then manipulated in much the same way as the van painting above. The contours of the wings and the van are presented in a straightforward manner, without embellishment, delineating the source object for the purpose of viewer recognition.

The previous catalog entry on *Stomach Knot* involved discussion of the torso lines as establishing something of a cage for the energy force within. The colored pencil lines representing the contours of the van also establish a framework, but more for the purpose of formal exploration than narrative ends. The subject of the van takes viewers into a visceral realm that relates or connects to the automobile, with attendant sense memories informing the abstraction. The black oil paint, while elegant and fascinating in its texture, is somewhat tarlike, serving as a background for the colored squares that flicker as elements in the abstract design but never quite assert themselves as the primary objects of importance. Through its materiality, Miller's painting challenges painting conventions at every turn: The diptych format, wood surfaces, and irregular contours of both panels strive to foil the format of the stretched canvas, just as the subject in its impersonal, schematic nature seems to inform in ghostly fashion the more assertive though enigmatic geometric abstraction behind it. The painting is about structure, a structure discernible through taking apart that which was assembled and putting it back together through intuition and analogy. Miller has created a van that urges viewers to see a van and notice how the rhythms, the pieces, the parts, the essence of the thing becomes a thing through the metaphor of correlation on a level more recognized than understood.

This piece to my mind endures in Miller's work as peculiar, representing a mode of thought or mode of working apart from those forays into his imagination and the characters inhabiting there. Yet curiously enough, this piece belongs with the others and reveals the same hand at work, methodically and carefully revealing through juxtaposition and metaphor. Here is a work within a body that is driven by design.



**Michael Miller** (1938-2014)  
*Floating Head*, 2010  
Acrylic on paper on wood, 10 x 10 x 1 ½ inches  
Collection of Kathleen King

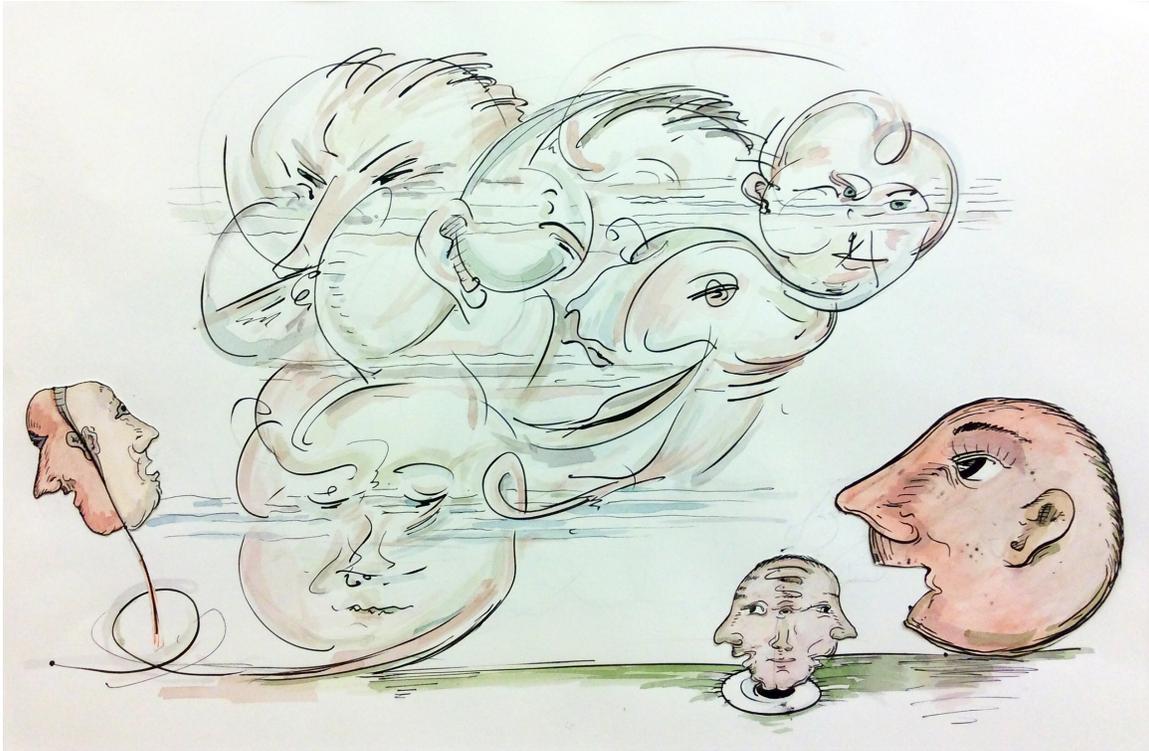
A curious presence in Miller's exhibition is his *Floating Head* from 2010. When I was in graduate school and occasionally visited Miller at his studio, he told me about his success in mounting paper and board to a reinforced wood surface, resulting in works on paper and board having a presence like paintings, as opposed to glazed, matted, and framed. The smallness of this piece and the immediacy of the surface draw viewers in so that they can have an intimate encounter with this pensive personage.

In this work is a character that reflects Miller's inventive imagination, at the same time it reminds one of mid 20<sup>th</sup>-century advertising and popular culture images that Miller found interesting, and that influenced his more social commentary oriented pieces all the way to the end of his life. The floating head subject could perhaps be the stern countenance of someone in a comic strip, but the isolation of this subject and the painterly stylization lead viewers to consider it as a bearer of artistic content, a face revealing in its existence on the black background.

The pigment on the black surface subtly glows, resulting in yet another visual paradox to match the many discussed in this catalog. While the acrylic is clearly applied, the coloration seems to emerge from the surface at the same time it rests on top of it. Light emerging summons up associations with television and video; while the subject is not as visually assertive as a character like Max Headroom, still it is unearthly in its fade in and out of clarity. Through analog means, Miller has created a cyber being who wears an expression of unease as he attempts to figure out in what realm he belongs.

*Floating Head*, like *Bubblehead*, *Flatman*, and *Worried Man*, is reminiscent of Ray Martin's work. Martin and Miller both extracted and modified images and characters from popular culture in order to explore their personal relevance as well as point to this persistent sense of such individuals being lost or displaced in the marketplace. The disillusionment, the disorientation is sad sack, vaguely comical, but poignant when consideration shifts to deeper levels. The floating head is curious and surreal, but the furrowed brow is representative of real concern that transcends its air of mild kitsch. Martin and Miller both appropriated and did so with senses of irony, with their results saying more about their backgrounds steeped in particular styles and veins of visual culture.

In the exhibition, the floating head seems mostly preoccupied with where and who he is. He sees the richness of his artist's accomplishments around him in the gallery and tries to reconcile his existence and appearance with all he observes. Perhaps he will conclude that time will preserve him and locate him clearly in a realm where thoughts of the nature of existence are welcome. His seeming puzzlement regarding meaning is all too familiar to viewers who likely will continue to ponder such matters themselves.



**Michael Miller** (1938-2014)  
**Untitled** (double-sided drawing), 2004  
Watercolor and ink with collage on paper, 15 x 22 inches  
Collection of Kathleen King

Miller's untitled drawing from 2004 above presents a scene or tableau of his disembodied heads interacting, as opposed to drifting as a mass across environments in and on the sheet. The mark making is fluid, establishing in part a breezy feeling to the narrative scene that in its peculiarity or surreal nature is particularly reminiscent of works by Seymour Chwast. Here, Miller retains the cluster or vortex of human heads but introduces spaces and a separating out of characters to explore aspects of metamorphosis and representation.

Faces of a human identity or structure reflect a playfully cartoonish or sad sack look through the artist's style of caricature. Exaggerated features communicate a light hearted mood; viewers are more engaged by the strangeness of these seemingly smiling beings than alarmed by the distortions and disembodiment. The face in the cloud form in the upper left strongly resembles blowing faces representing the wind in medieval and renaissance works, especially prints, while two of the forms to the right resemble aquatic and amphibious beasts populating Miller pieces like *Feeders and Breeders* and *Alphabet*. Miller revisited his themes and subjects throughout his career, resulting in the creation of a lovely consistency and fine opportunities for viewers to witness evolutions in concept and draftsmanship.

Beneath the swirling cloud mass are more physical creatures, two of which present split or multiple faces. The double face on the left looks much like a cut paper construction from the *Chicago Series* Miller was working on at the same time, while the one on the right visually hearkens back to Cubism's examination of multiple points of view shown simultaneously. The surreal nature of Miller's scene, however, is such that the cubist face seems not as much a cerebral representational exercise, but a capturing of the likeness of a creature in the process of transforming or actually possessing multiple features. In the breeze, these personages take flight and change, perhaps prompted by the light and atmosphere in which they find themselves.

Faces so often offer the first indicator of identity, and in this image Miller gathers faces possibly of vapor that create tempests as much as they are composed of them. The vaporous faces drift above and through strange creations that derive their identities from visceral change at the same time they operate of levels of metaphor to comment on human life in general. The twin faces spiraling up on the left read like theater masks, with comedy and tragedy shifting rapidly back and forth until the faces spin and assume a continuous, and continuously changing, appearance. The multiple guises we present to the world result in appearances so varied that the single, static view is what ultimately appears contrived, while the composite countenances, though grotesque, ring true.

The large flesh colored face on the right was collaged on to the surface, an act that reinforces the concept of layers of substance or existence in the drawing. Miller evidently liked the particular head and felt that it belonged in the context of this drawing. Similarly, Miller began another drawing on the other side of the sheet but finally devoted time to finishing to a much higher degree the work reproduced here. As opposed to a formal exercise, Miller chose and created a portrait of a place, one inhabited specifically and worthy of sustained and proper treatment. The floating, bodiless heads of the artist's imagination continue to cluster, swirl, act and react as a human group in all of its idiosyncratic glory. Sometimes, though, the cluster invites and expands in the air, reaffirming to artist and viewer the enduring fascination of a face in a place in space.



**Michael Miller (1938-2014)**

*Flatman Expanded and Flatman Compressed, 2005*

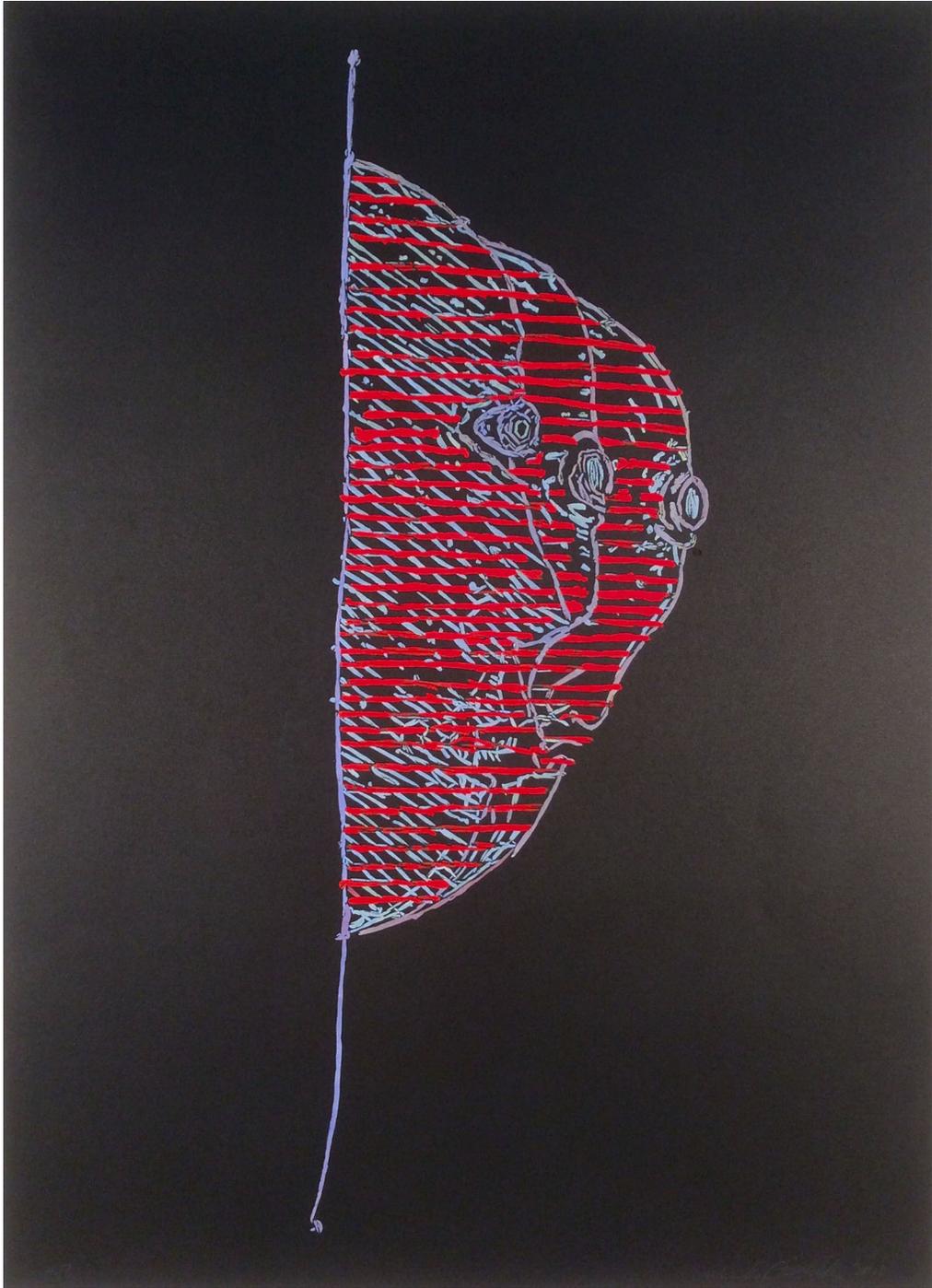
Inkjet print constructions on paper, styrofoam, and wood, each 11 ¼ x 6 x 6 inches  
Collection of Kathleen King

With these constructions, Miller takes his *Flatman* character literally to the next dimension. Within manufactured, widely available domes and bases that Miller adapted for his purposes, two Flatmen stand, meticulously cut out and assembled using paper, wood, and foamcore. The titles indicate that the figures are collapsed and expanded Flatmen, with the expanded figure strongly resembling other Flatman representations in the exhibition and the collapsed figure in its peculiar shape nearly becoming another creature of some sort; its thought balloons seem to indicate the creature's displeasure with his compressed state. As we have come to expect from the artist, Miller was never content to simply or merely repeat depictions of his chosen characters. Instead, he saw each work as a potential or opportunity to add complexity and additional psychological shading to his enigmatic cast of symbolic personages. These cut out figures are playful and inventive at the same time they are precious and remarkable in their skillful execution. Miller was able to create elegant works that still communicated humor, experimentation, and delight.

Miller's careful filigree passages of cut paper show that while the Flatmen are able to leave the confines of the two-dimensional surface, they are still not entirely substantial or of a completely solid nature. Spaces surround them and run through them, reducing their composition to networks of lines that spread into patterns that provide structural support. Flatman can be a figure of lines and panels that can draw himself together into something narrower and tighter, depending on pictorial and sculptural needs, as well as the needs of a particular imaginative scenario. The comic resemblance here lies in the graphic stylization that looks familiar, even though the enigmatic ends to which Miller directs this stylization approach relates ultimately to the ambiguity of fine art more so than any specific narrative. Flatman's malleability as a character and form stands metaphorically for the advanced abstractions through which an artist can explore any number of options; Flatman is art, and art is what Miller potently examines through personal and steadfast manipulation.

The Flatmen in these domes are specimens, simultaneously sculptural and pictorial. They reflect the patience and dedication of their execution and satisfy aesthetically just as viewers examine the domed creatures and ponder their previous existences before their capture. If glazing a painting or work on paper removes the object from the world and encourages respectful contemplation through that remove, then the Flatmen assume greater possibility of existence because they are encapsulated, enshrined. They are beings that gained life and now are able through their preservative homes to present themselves. They live.

These Flatmen are yet more examples of things that Miller has brought into the world. They approximately follow the logic of this world, but to our interest as viewers they expand, compress, allow for air to pass through them at the same time they achieve bodily substance. The movement of their elusive characters is the movement of thoughts and ideas passing through the mind and hands of a creator who has much sensitivity for the creative process and the creations that demonstrate such a process.



**Michael Miller (1938-2014)**

*Wall Heads*, 2010

Hand colored linocut on paper, AP, 28 ½ x 21 inches

Collection of Kathleen King

One of the later pieces in the exhibition is this remarkable hand colored linocut. While organizing Miller's retrospective exhibition, I was consistently impressed by the way Miller was able to create his prints and unique works by using the most challenging, labor intensive methods. Linocuts are a type of printmaking using linoleum to make relief prints that many children learn while in school. The process can be fussy and difficult, yet Miller was able to make a linocut that shows a true mastery of the process and that in its appearance reminds viewers of light and color seen in digital products. His execution is flawless, and the finished work belies the labor-intensive nature of the medium.

The wall heads that comprise the subject seem to be peering in as witnesses to some unfolding activity. They are the attraction in the depicted scene, and yet they too have arrived to observe the action of seeing. The black of the background is evenly printed color on the surface of the white sheet; the lines cut into the block did not receive ink and were then hand colored with vibrant tones. The wall heads glow on the sheet set in the black, and with the sketchy variances of line quality they exist astride the fields of the hand drawn and the digitally or electronically realized. Their quirky expressions indicate that they too are adjusting to the peculiarity of inhabiting the world of art. They exist through and for the gallery, and yet their expectations for themselves are unclear. They own their natures but find themselves within a world that values their existence but does not specify the nature of their participation.

The wall head characters later reappeared in Miller's *Head 2 Head* portfolio and seem to have been characters or themes that especially interested the artist. Using the hand colored linocut technique in such a virtuosic manner was something that Miller enjoyed for a number of years, resulting in works of various sizes that dazzle with the effective combination of rich color and a uniform black background. With these wall heads, they present the fun paradox of the subjects tentatively seeing, content and confident enough in their existence to venture outside of merely displaying themselves for aesthetic enjoyment. Perhaps what Miller investigates with this piece is the phenomenon of the artist making something that then takes on its own identity that the artist must then try to recognize or comprehend. Here, the wall heads are now ready to venture into a furtive examination of the gallery itself, wondering what is happening and how they might relate to such happenings. The confrontation offered here is the heads confronting their surroundings and confronting the fact that they are seeing and being seen, curious and even perilous states for the clustered heads.

I personally am impressed to see in this work late in the artist's career a level of technical sophistication that is truly jaw dropping. The fact that Miller challenged himself at every turn, and that he used traditional as well as new methods to realize his artistic goals, is admirable and inspiring.



**Michael Miller** (1938-2014)  
*Gradual Surrender*, 1990  
Color woodcut on paper, 1/3, 45 x 34 inches  
Collection of Kathleen King

In this final entry to the Michael Miller catalog, I want to discuss this large color woodcut that I remember being a key part of Miller's exhibition in 1990 at Printworks Gallery in Chicago. I saw this woodcut grow out of the artist's *Torso* series, with the skeletal central figure from Miller's *Another Dance* piece discussed earlier and before that from a particular *Torso* hand colored etching. To the torsos, Miller began surrounding these forms with symbols and images essentially tied to his life and interests. While the *Torsos* presented a fair number of conceptual complexities, they largely relied on their iconic natures to convey meaning. With this work and works that followed, the autobiographical references increased so that the works became surreal exercises in resolving juxtapositions. The large scale of this woodcut and the enigmatic images within establish it as something of a summary statement, with the precise content of the statement left to the viewer to formulate.

The banner and green laurel that set off the skeletal subject, as well as the delicately patterned background, give this large print an air of the sacred or ceremonial. Through these visual flourishes, Miller sets off the drumming figure as one worthy of attention and study. Instead of a skull, the skeleton, a Holbein *Dance of Death* figure, wears a bird head, and behind the head is a representation of the dentures of Miller's mother. Personal icons combine, recombine, and accent the drama of this ambitious woodcut, flawlessly printed. In an attempt to present a visually powerful autobiographical summary, Miller searched his memory and imagination for images that lay at the heart of his awareness, that inspired him and motivated him to a high degree. Even though the exact meaning of the forms is forever outside verbal articulation, still the authority of use is such that viewers are without question and find themselves constructing their own narratives.

*Gradual Surrender* endures as a masterpiece in printmaking because it shows the artist giving in to the things that matter to him. He has created an emblem, a coat of arms, that highlights his considerable technical skills and that shows that the icons in an artist's life arise from highly personal responses to subjects and objects that may be of a generally ordinary nature. Miller saw the sacred in the everyday, and through his inventive treatments and interesting use of scale and juxtapositions he encourages us to see the sublime in the everyday, the vast potential for meaning in the careful selection of things that surround us, and that speak to our imagination.

Woodcut can be a cathartic medium and was thought of in those terms by expressionist artists who used the angularity of cut forms to speak to states of mind. Miller's piece here is less about using the medium symbolically and more about using the elegant crispness of the contours to offer an image of dreamlike color and clarity. The gradual surrender of the title seems to be the artist realizing that the only real poetry is that which comes from an unavoidable confrontation with all that pursues one in life and that cannot be explained save through faithful transcription. Miller surrendered to the void, and the rewards will continue to pour in as we spend years attempting to understand what he said about himself, and what he said to us.

**Michael Miller: An Appreciation  
Exhibition Checklist**

Unless otherwise noted, all works are Collection of Kathleen King

*A Program for Survival IV*, 1971

Etching and aquatint on paper, 5/5, 22 ½ x 15 inches (paper), 17 ¾ x 11 ¾ inches (plate)

*Feeders and Breeders*, 1973

Color etching on paper, 3/20, 23 x 19 inches (paper), 18 ½ x 15 ¾ inches (image)

*Cluster*, 1974

Color etching on paper, studio proof, 19 ½ x 22 5/8 inches (paper), 16 x 17 inches (image)

Untitled, 1974

Ink on paper, 22 x 30 inches

Untitled, 1975

Etching on paper, 21 ½ x 14 ½ inches (paper), 14 ½ x 11 inches (image)

*Wave Maze*, 1976

Linocut on paper, 4/25, 22 x 28 inches (paper), 18 x 24 inches (image)

Untitled, 1981

Etching on paper, edition of 25, 22 x 30 inches (paper), 14 ½ x 23 ½ inches (image)

Untitled (double-sided drawing), 1982

Ink and watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches

Untitled, 1983

Oil and colored pencil on wood, diptych: each panel 22 x 24 x 7/8 inches

*Van Puzzle*, 1985

Mixed media, triptych: each element 7 x 14 ½ inches

*Another Dance*, 1988

Hand-painted acrylic transfer on wood panel, 30 ½ x 31 x 1 ¾ inches

*Torso*, 1989

Hand colored etching on paper, AP, paper: 15 x 11 inches, image: 3 ½ x 2 ¼ inches

Private Collection

*Torso*, 1989

Hand colored etching on paper, 3/3, paper: 14 ¾ x 11 inches, image: 2 7/8 x 4 1/8 inches

Private Collection

*Gradual Surrender*, 1990  
Color woodcut on paper, 1/3, 45 x 34 inches

Untitled, from the *Torso Series*, 1990  
Hand colored etching on paper, 3/3, paper: 14 3/4 x 11 1/8 inches, image: 2 5/8 x 3 inches each plate  
Gift of Gregg Hertzlieb  
Brauer Museum of Art, 2001.50

*Charms*, 1990  
Color woodcut on paper, 2/5 20 x 31 1/2 inches  
Private Collection

*Alphabet*, 1975  
Etching on paper, 19/50, paper: 19 x 23 inches, image: 11 1/2 x 15 1/2 inches  
Private Collection

*Friday*, 1996  
Hand-colored etching on paper, 22 x 15 inches (paper), 16 x 11 inches (image)

*Stomach Knot*, 1997  
Hand-painted acrylic transfer on wood panel, 30 x 22 x 1 inches

*Worried Man*, 1997  
Ink on paper in polyurethane, and wood, 13 x 11 x 3 inches

*Elevator*, 1997  
Ink on paper in polyurethane, and wood, 9 1/2 x 8 3/4 x 2 3/4 inches

Untitled, 2000  
Inkjet print construction on paper and wood, 14 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 1 1/4 inches

*Third Eye*, 2000  
Inkjet print construction on paper, 15 x 12 x 1 1/2 inches

*Bubblehead*, 2000  
Inkjet print construction on paper, 9 1/2 x 7 3/4 inches

*I Swear*, 2002  
Inkjet print construction on paper, 12 1/4 x 15 3/4 x 1 1/4 inches

*Debate*, 2002  
Inkjet print construction on paper, 12 1/2 x 15 1/2 x 2 inches

*Overheard*, 2003  
Ink on paper on wood panel, 25 1/2 x 26 inches

*Overheard*, 2003  
Inkjet print construction on paper, 13 1/2 x 25 inches (paper), 12 x 23 3/4 inches (image)

Untitled, 2004  
Inkjet print construction on paper and wood, 21 x 17 ¼ x 2 inches

*Flatman*, 2004  
Ink and watercolor on paper, 22 x 15 inches

Sketchbook-- Seoul, 2004  
Mixed media on paper, 10 ½ x 7 ½ inches

*Men's Choir*, 2004  
Watercolor and ink on paper, 15 x 22 inches

Untitled (double-sided drawing), 2004  
Watercolor and ink with collage on paper, 15 x 22 inches

*Chicago Series*, 2004-2005  
Inkjet print construction on paper and wood, 14 x 17 x 1 ½ inches

*Chicago Series*, 2004-2005  
Inkjet print construction on paper and wood, 9 x 8 x ½ inches

*Flatman Expanded* and *Flatman Compressed*, 2005  
Inkjet print constructions on paper, styrofoam, and wood, each 11 ¼ x 6 x 6 inches

*Nano: Stories in a Blink*, featuring work by Michael Miller  
*Square Comics* #3, 7 ½ x 7 ½ inches  
Sara Ranchouse Publishing, Chicago, Illinois, 2005

*Flatman*, 2010  
Acrylic and ink on Masonite, 14 x 11 inches

Untitled, 2010  
Watercolor and ink on paper, 15 x 22 ½ inches

*Head Circle*, 2010  
Hand-colored etching on paper, 14 x 18 inches

Untitled, 2010  
Ink and acrylic on paper mounted on board, 16 x 20 inches

Untitled, 2010  
Ink and acrylic on Masonite, 20 x 16 x 1/8 inches

Untitled, 2010  
Ink and acrylic on Masonite, 20 x 16 x 1/8 inches

*Wall Heads*, 2010  
Hand-colored linocut on paper, AP, 28 ½ x 21 inches

*Floating Head*, 2010

Acrylic on paper on wood, 10 x 10 x 1 ½ inches

*Discussion*, 2011

Hand-colored linocut on paper, AP, 20 x 28 ½ inches

*Head 2 Head: Confrontation Series*, 2014

Portfolio of nine color drypoints, 4/5, 15 x 13 inches

Produced in collaboration with Yoorim Kim and Kun Young Chang, Bon Bindery, Seoul, Korea, and Angee Lennard, Spudnik Press, Chicago, Illinois