

About the Exhibition

Pati Hill: Photocopier, A Survey of Prints and Books (1974–83) explores the initial phase of the cross-disciplinary practice of Pati Hill (1921–2014). Untrained as an artist, Hill was a published novelist and poet before she started to experiment with the copier as an artist's tool. She was not alone in recognizing the creative possibilities of what she called "a found instrument, a saxophone without directions." However, her literal approach to the medium—"having come to copying from writing"—coupled with her lucid texts about it, have proved prescient, especially regarding its potential for self-publishing and image-sharing that we take for granted today.

Unlike many artists who flirted with this instant-duplication process—a medium whose affordability and use of plain paper made it revolutionary—Hill sustained her commitment to xerography (Greek for "dry writing") for 40 years, celebrating the medium's instantaneity and accessibility as well as the way in which "copiers bring artists and writers together." In a 1980 profile in *The New Yorker*, Hill remarked: "Copies are an international visual language, which talks to people in Los Angeles and people in Prague the same way. Making copies is very near to speaking."

Hill employed the copier as both collaborator and muse. The inspired writing of her 1979 book *Letters to Jill: A catalogue and some notes on copying* remains a jargon-free primer on the medium and serves as a core resource for the show. The following description of a photocopier that appears on the front of the announcement of her 1978 exhibition at Franklin Furnace helps illustrate her relationship with the machine:

This stocky, unrevealing box stands 3 ft. high without stockings or feet and lights up like a Xmas tree no matter what I show it. It repeats my words perfectly as many times as I ask it to, but when I show it a hair curler it hands me back a space ship, and when I show it the inside of a straw hat it describes the eerie joys of a descent into a volcano.

The objects Hill chose to scan are visually transformed yet faithfully convey their intrinsic properties, as well as those of the copier. She appreciated the machine's capacity to duplicate at life-scale and produce "human-vision-sized pictures" with "eye-accurate" details. Hill learned to favor the rich blacks of IBM's "Copier II" as well as its flaws and shallow perception of depth, which gave the originals that she isolated on its platen the potential to be read as symbols.

Thanks to a chance encounter on a transatlantic flight with designer Charles Eames in 1977, Hill secured a two-and-a-half year loan of this particular model, which IBM delivered to her home in Stonington, Connecticut. Direct access to the machine made it possible for her to copy a dead swan (found near the local beach), a process that took five weeks and resulted in a suite of 32 captioned prints that suggest a myth of metamorphosis. Hill also used the copier to modify appropriated photographs, which she sequenced into the pictorial narratives that comprise *Men and Women in Sleeping Cars* (1979) and extend the detached prose of her novel of familial dissolution, *Impossible Dreams* (1976).

Informed by a hieroglyphic symbol language she developed, much of her work from this period sought to fuse text and image into "something other than either." Hill applied the copier as a vehicle for this research, using her prints to experiment with the conventions of the caption, the book, and the gallery exhibition. By 1979, her interest in testing the limits of the medium inspired her to "photocopy Versailles", a project that would occupy her for the next 20 years and lead her to work with colored toner, frottage, and photogravure. A selection of initial attempts from this effort—scans of paving stones, an espaliered pear tree, and other materials gathered from the grounds—are included in the exhibition, along with a sampling of her publications.

Major support has been provided by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage.

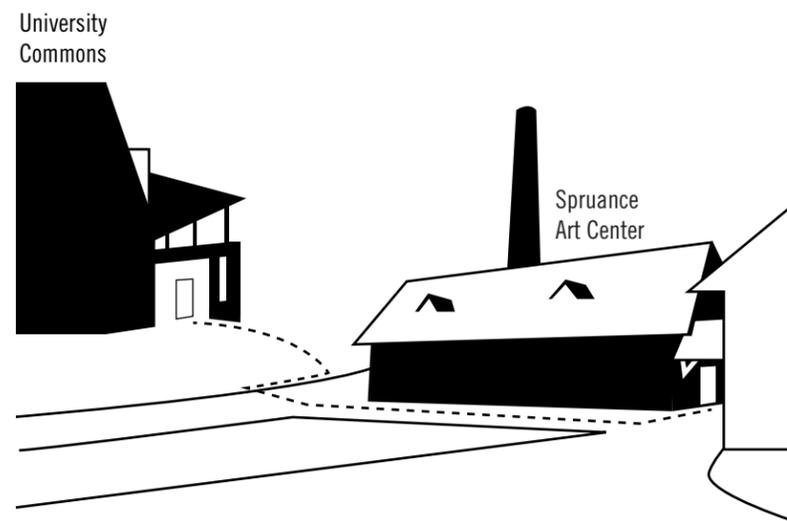
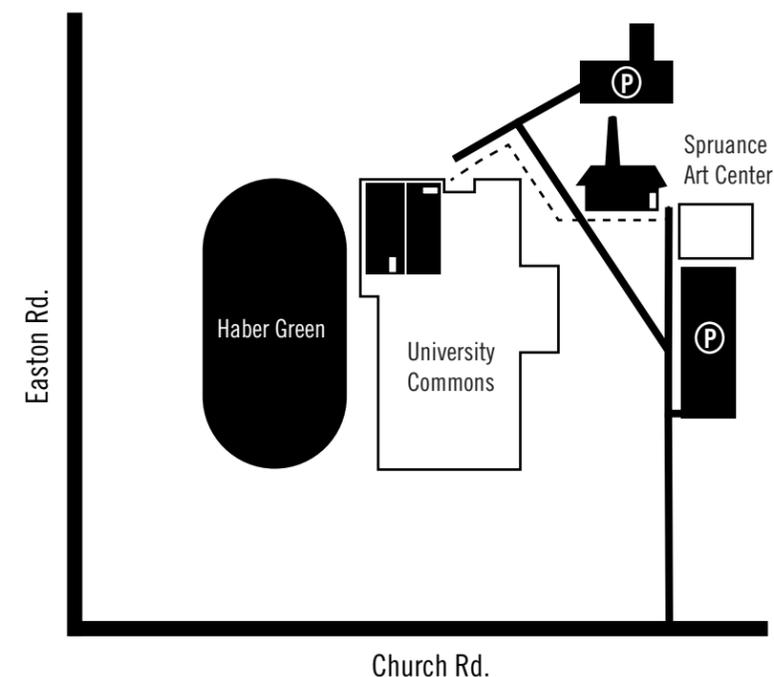
gallery.arcadia.edu.



Map of the Galleries

Map Key

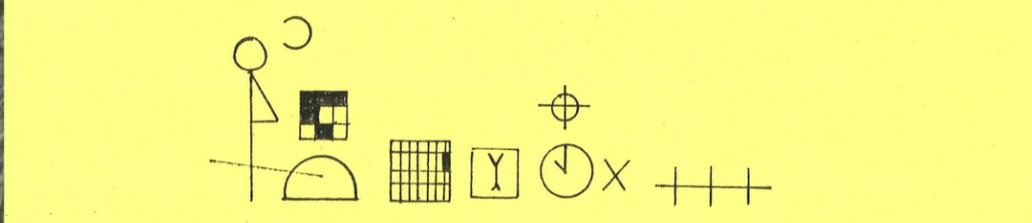
- Ⓟ Parking
- Gallery Entrances
- Best Route
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The Galleries at Arcadia Present

PATI HILL PHOTOCOPIER
A Survey of Prints and Books (1974-83)

February 25-April 24, 2016



Arcadia University Art Gallery

FIRST PICTURES

Making photocopies of her manuscripts in the early 1970s, Hill became intrigued by the images of her fingertips she noticed in their margins. She recognized the photocopy as a quick and affordable means – “more truthful to details than a photograph”—to record small objects she had collected and cherished but wished to discard. Hill cropped the resulting prints and began mounting them onto white backing boards, which she first exhibited at the Kornblee Gallery in 1975 and combined with the poems that appear in her book *Slave Days*.

GARMENTS

In 1976, Hill began composing prints of clothing, working with originals that were larger than the copier platen and introducing abstraction into her work. Many of the prints in this series were made surreptitiously on copiers at IBM’s New York headquarters. (A friend of Hill’s who worked for the company facilitated weekend access.) The prints were exhibited at the Kornblee Gallery in 1976 and six images were published along with short texts in the literary journal *New Letters*.

COMMON OBJECTS AND COMMON ALPHABET

With the help of designer Charles Eames, IBM loaned Hill one of its Copier II models in 1977. Enabled to work freely, she returned to the subject of objects, this time attempting a universal understanding of generic forms rather than the preservation of personal memories. Hill struggled to perfect her methods, attempting to create relationships between her images without repeating shapes or themes.

A SWAN: AN OPERA IN 9 CHAPTERS

Hill spent months searching for a perfect white feather to copy for her *Common Objects* until finally receiving a tip that led her to a dead swan near the beach. She found the courage to copy its body and then took the bird to the local butcher so that she would be able to copy the organs and eventually the skeleton. The resulting 32 captioned prints that comprise *A Swan* are arranged to fit the given exhibition space. The work attempts to obscure the limits of drama by referencing and defying elements of opera, mythology, literature, machine-made art, and American politics, all amidst symbolic images and allusive texts in a story of myth and metamorphosis. Hill’s *Opera* was shown at the Kornblee Gallery in 1978, as well as in the group exhibitions *Electroworks* (George Eastman House, Rochester, New York) and *La Photocopie* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris).

MEN AND WOMEN IN SLEEPING CARS

This series from 1979 continues Hill’s exploration of the copier’s capacity to modify photographs by altering brightness, contrast, and focus. Working with staged promotional photos from the Campagne Internationale des Wagon-Lits in Paris, Hill attempted to bring attention to “stillness” as a unique occurrence: luxury trains can be rendered obsolete as time and technology move on. She explained that the work tries to “give an idea of how one thing leads to another. In this case, how the doorknob leads to the corridor which leads to the dining room which leads to... home again, safe and sound.” Believing that her works with photographs were a temporary transformation, not a desecration, Hill described each arrangement of images as evoking a short story or novella. The exhibition was presented at Kornblee Gallery in 1979.

HONORS CLASS

Arcadia University honors students had the unprecedented opportunity to do primary research and development for *Pati Hill: Photocopier*. The first semester class began as an introduction to Hill’s work with students examining her art, literature, and personal documents, as well as pursuing their own research, narrowing their focus to particular areas of interest.

The second semester class has immersed itself in Hill’s work to prepare for the exhibition opening. These students focused on advertising for the exhibition, developing a comprehensive understanding of Hill’s symbol language, creating an online presence for Hill and her work, as well as building the informational content for the exhibition. Their research will continue throughout the semester, culminating in final presentations in April.

Commons Art Gallery

INFORMATIONAL ART

Hill began collecting examples of what she called “informational art” in 1962, the year she “quit writing in favor of housekeeping.” These printed images ranged from product assembly directions and advertisements to labels and diagrams. The lack of personality that distinguishes these generic drawings along with the effectiveness of their sequential narratives reflect Hill’s interest in international public signage systems that began to appear at the time. The conflation of image and text employed by these forms of communication relates directly to the effects Hill eventually explored with the copier.

IMPOSSIBLE DREAMS AND ARTISTS BOOKS

Although it appeared in 1976, Hill’s illustrated novel *Impossible Dreams* was begun years before her first encounter with the copier. (An excerpt, without images, was initially published in the *Carolina Quarterly* in 1974.) In the context of this narrative of familial dissolution, the 48 images suggest film stills and help to augment Hill’s lean prose. Obtained with permission from 20 different sources, these photographs were photocopied to unify their differences, a result analogous to that achieved in Hill’s grid of *Common Objects* (on view in the Spruance Gallery). Three copies of the book are presented here paired with their original prints by photographers Robert Doisneau (Chapter 36), Eva Rubenstein (Chapter 64), and Lucien Herve (Chapter 93).

SYMBOL LANGUAGE

In a culmination of Hill’s interest in the communicative potential of images, Hill attempted to create a universal symbol language that would use glyphs to facilitate widespread, effortless communication. Inspired by her bilingual daughter’s early difficulties with grammar but proficiency with hieroglyphics, Hill devised a system of pictographs that used symbols to represent objects, actions, and emotions. Mindful of its limitations, Hill ventured to have the language taught at Dean’s Mill School in Stonington, Connecticut by elementary teacher Betty Henry.

DREAMS OBJECTS MOMENTS

Dreams Objects Moments (1976), can be interpreted as Hill’s response to the frustrations of limited access to her copier of choice. In 1975, having become enamored with the effects of IBM’s “Copier II”, she made several formal requests to the company to lend her a machine, all of which were declined. Hill wrote in *Letters to Jill* that the “shallow, literal descriptions of dreams” in this book convey her “feelings about copier work without requiring the use of a copier.” The publication followed her 1976 exhibition at the Kornblee Gallery, also entitled “Dreams, Objects Moments”, which was comprised entirely of typed texts on colored paper hung on three walls—green for dreams, pink for objects, and yellow for moments. Hill proposed that reading the texts in this order would deconstruct the viewer’s conception of the three as different entities. “Not everybody liked my exhibition,” Hill admitted. “Some said they preferred reading sitting down, and quite a few said they did not think it gave a stereopticon effect the way I claimed.”

Great Room Lobby

SCARVES

As a natural extension of her work with garments, Hill began working with scarves in the early 1980s. The three examples presented here demonstrate a transition from her use of the grid as an ordering system to the more gestural possibilities achieved by moving her subjects across the copier platen. Both approaches extend Hill’s interest in language and writing. *Understanding Your Chinese Scarf* (1983) is a lexicon of seemingly infinite forms derived from a single original. The lines of *Long Spotted Scarf*, on the other hand, suggest a form of calligraphy. Hill made the latter of these two works by running 12” x 18” sheets of paper through the copier multiple times.

TOWARD VERSAILLES

Hill moved moved to Paris in 1980 intent on “photocopying Versailles,” an ambition that emerged from her desire to work with an expansive subject that was consciously at odds with the constraints of the copier. She began with small, portable subjects there, ranging from a nearly weightless bellpull to cobblestones held just above the platen (lest they should crash through the glass) and went on to scan an espaliered pear tree, including its roots and the ants living inside them. Obtained in the middle of winter from a nursery on the site, the tree bloomed unexpectedly once she brought it into her studio, making it impossible for Hill to cut the plant into pieces as she initially intended. This effort marked the beginning of the production of large-scale works—prints arranged in grids, often made with colored toner—that document the details of the palace, its grounds, and fountains. The works resulting from this five-year process were later shown at Versailles itself in 2003 as well as at the L’Orangerie des Musées de Sens in 2005.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Pati Hill (1921-2014) was born in Ashland, Kentucky and raised in Virginia. Demonstrating an interest in writing and art from an early age, she took courses for a year at George Washington University and, in 1940, moved to New York, where she became a successful fashion model. In 1947, Hill relocated to Paris to introduce the first American collection for the couturier Molyneux. In the early 1950s, however, in an effort to concentrate on her writing, she moved to a derelict cottage in Montacher, Yonne, where she completed her first two books, a memoir about her year of solitude in the French countryside, *The Pit and The Century Plant* (1955), and a novel about her childhood, *The Nine Mile Circle* (1957), which *The New York Times* favorably compared to the work of William Faulkner. With the encouragement of George Plimpton, she began publishing her short stories in *The Paris Review* and in 1957, after she had returned to the United States, took up residence in New York City and Stonington, CT.

In 1959, Hill met publisher and art dealer Paul Bianchini, whom she married in 1960. (Bianchini’s New York gallery was one of the first commercial venues to exhibit Pop art.) In 1962, Hill gave birth to a daughter and published her first book of poems, *The Snow Rabbit*, illustrated by poet Galway Kinnell. Despite multiple residencies at MacDowell and Yaddo into the early ’70s, Hill did not publish again until 1975, when *Slave Days*, her first book to include images of her copier prints, was produced with the assistance of her Stonington neighbor, poet James Merrill. New York gallerist Jill Kornblee gave Hill five solo exhibitions at her 57th Street Gallery between 1975 and 1979.

In 1976, Hill received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts for *Impossible Dreams*. Instrumental support followed in 1977 in the form of a two-and-a-half-year loan of a “Copier II” from IBM, thanks to the influence of designer Charles Eames. Hill moved to Paris in 1980, where she spent five years photocopying the details of the palace and grounds of Versailles, eventually presenting the resulting large-scale composite works on the site as well as at other venues in France. In 1989, Hill and Bianchini opened Galerie Toner in Sens, a small town 75 miles southeast of Paris, where Hill had settled in the late 1980s. Dedicated to presenting art made with the photocopier, the venue’s Parisian counterpart opened three years later. Hill remained committed to the medium and encouraged its use by others, both novices and veterans alike. She continued publishing books and organizing exhibitions until the age of 91.

Venues that have exhibited Hill’s copier prints include the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, Franklin Furnace (in New York City); the Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, and the Cabinet des Estampes de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France (in Paris); Musée Lambinet (in Versailles); L’Orangerie des Musées de Sens, France; Gallery Modena, Bologna, Italy; and the Stedelijk, Museum, Amsterdam. Her artwork is included in the permanent collections of Bayly Art Museum (Fralin Museum), University of Virginia; the Bibliothèque Nationale de France; and L’Orangerie des Musées de Sens, among others.