

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Faye Hirsch, "Passport, Please," *Art in America*, June, 2011

Art in America



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MULTIPLICITY

PASSPORT, PLEASE

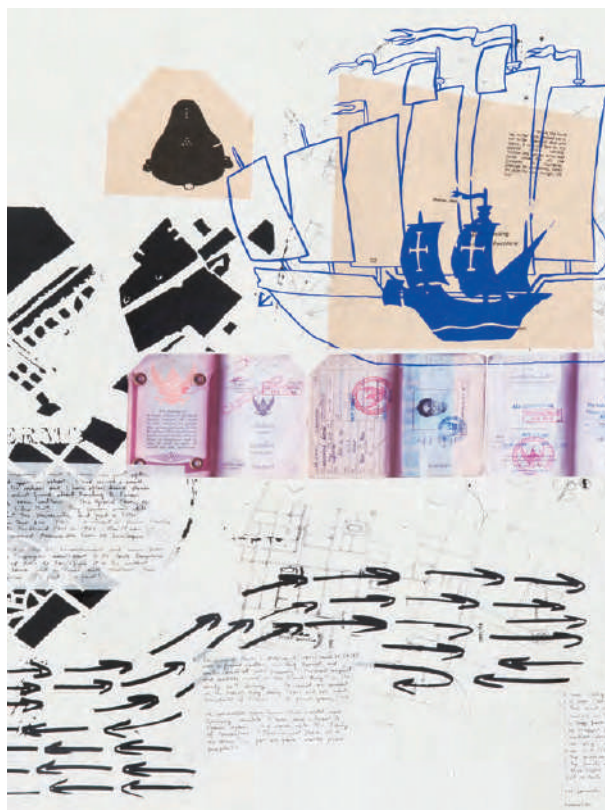
Rirkrit Tiravanija has created a landmark print, 84 feet long, based on 20 years crisscrossing the globe.

BY FAYE HIRSCH

RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJIA has never been known as a maker of elaborate objects. In a market-driven art world, he has remained, since the early '90s, a steadfast conceptualist whose immaterial projects, enmeshing daily life and creative practice, have earned him a key role in the development of relational art. At galleries and museums around the world, he has prepared meals and fed visitors, broadcast live radio programs, installed social spaces for instruction and discussion, set up apartments—where he or visitors might live for the duration of a show—and dismantled doors and windows, leaning them against walls. At two of the three venues for his 2004 retrospective, the “display” consisted of a sequence of empty rooms referencing (in their proportions and an accompanying audio) his selected exhibitions over the years.¹

When Tiravanija does make objects, they are generally of a modest nature—most often multiples and ephemera connected with exhibitions. At his show this spring at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in New York, for example, he set up a room where an assistant screenprinted white T-shirts with his signature terse, block-print headlines, ranging in tone from vaguely political (LESS OIL MORE COURAGE) to hospitably absurd (I HAVE DOUGHNUTS AT HOME). They cost \$20 apiece.

So it is no mean irony that this quintessential anti-object artist has just completed a monumental print project—among the most adventurous in the recent history of the medium—demanding three years' work, dozens of laborers, a generously furnished shop and a small forest's worth of paper, and requiring, for its ideal viewing, a considerable stretch of wall space. Still, for Tiravanija, who enlists



the participation of many people in the realization of his works, collaborative printmaking on a grand scale is not an entirely illogical step. “Art is a site that produces a specific sociability,” wrote the curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud, whose essays and shows on Relational Aesthetics have often embraced Tiravanija's projects. Here, however, “sociability” has yielded a marketable, and potentially profitable, commodity.

All artwork this article Rirkrit Tiravanija's *untitled 2008-2011 (the map of the land of feeling) I-III*, inkjet prints, offset lithography, chine collé, color silkscreen, approx. 3 by 84 feet. Photo D. James Dee. Courtesy LNCPS.

Signed in April 2011, Tiravanija's print, *Untitled 2008-2011 (the map of the land of feeling) I-III*, is 3 feet high and 84 feet long. Made up of three single-sheet scrolls that are meant to be displayed end to end, it is an elaborate montage of inkjet

CURRENTLY ON VIEW

*Publisher's Spotlight: The LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies at Columbia University, at Pace Prints Chelsea, New York, through July 9.

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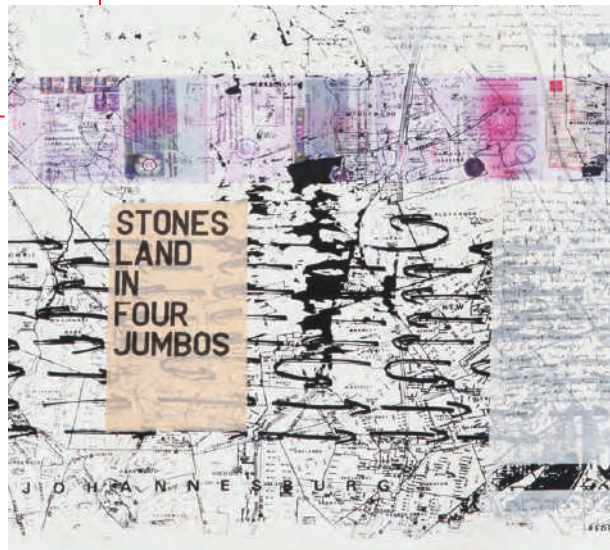
printing, offset lithography and screen-printing, and was produced in an edition of 40 (plus 10 artist's and two printer's proofs). It is currently on view in New York at Pace Prints Chelsea, in an exhibition of recent editions from Columbia University's LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies, where it was created. Subsidized, in part, by an endowment from the artist and printmaker LeRoy Neiman, the center has deeper reserves than many private workshops. In addition, because it is a teaching institution, there is always a ready supply, through work-study, of student labor. The center is known for producing time-consuming, often materially innovative prints by artists such as Ellen Gallagher, Sarah Sze and William Kentridge. Still, as Tomas Vu, the Neiman Center's artistic director and master printer, observes, "Rirkrit's is

certainly the most ambitious project the center has ever undertaken."²

Several master printers, shop managers and (at least) 40 students worked on the project at one time or another, overseen by Vu (and coordinated with the often absent Tiravanija by his assistant Danny Baez). Sometimes as many as five people together had to maneuver each print onto the press, taking care not to damage previous layers. Tiravanija was present only in spurts (mostly when fulfilling his teaching duties at Columbia, where he is on the studio art faculty). Arriving at the workshop, he would print out images from the Internet, draw on films, and instruct the printers about composing the disparate elements in his absence. (One is reminded of how, often, he sets a situation into motion at a particu-



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lar exhibition, then leaves it to others to carry out over time.) "I started out vaguely knowing what I wanted to do," Tiravanija says, "but there was no plan. As it developed, I started to see and add things—which drove Tomas crazy." To which Vu responds, "It was the right way to do it. We wanted to stop Rirkrit way early on. But in the end it was definitely worth it."

TIRAVANIJIA IS FAMOUSLY peripatetic, and indeed, the subject matter of the print specifically concerns his movements through the world, and through life—his physical and temporal passage. A Thai born in Argentina in 1961, he is the son of a diplomat. He attended art schools in Canada and the U.S., and came to professional attention in New York in the '90s. Tiravanija is notoriously difficult to pin down, and his peregrinations were clearly a factor in the long gestation of this project.

Running in a continuous strip through the center of all three scrolls is a digital copy of the artist's passport, page after page, chronicling 20 years of travel and foreign residency, from 1988 to 2008.³



Studio photos this page
Rebecca Lax/LNCPS.

On these pages, in repeated photographs made as the document was renewed, we see the artist get older, while noting the many places he has visited, which, according to him, mainly correspond to exhibitions. Around the stable yet constantly changing central band is a dazzling array of images: city plans (again, referring to the cities where Tiravanija had shows); big abstracted mazes from archeological and architectural sites; symbols representing various types of human experience (for example, time-zone lines, or arrows referencing urban flow—the latter an allusion to drawings by Louis Kahn, Gordon Matta-Clark and the Situationists); and representational vignettes, among them images of the ships sailed by Christopher Columbus and, a half-century before him, the Chinese explorer Zheng He, little known in the West. The ships are reproduced according to their relative scale:

Zheng's is much bigger, delivering a lesson in the selective priorities of historical memory, one of Tiravanija's favorite themes.

Texts abound. A headline from a Johannesburg newspaper stands out in bold uppercase letters (like those on his T-shirts): STONES ARRIVE IN FOUR JUMBOS. This announces the first concert played by the Rolling Stones after the fall of apartheid, an event that coincided with the first Johannesburg Biennale in 1996, in which Tiravanija participated. There are also copies of notebook pages with the artist's handwritten texts, which he composed specifically for incorporation into the print: recipes, memories inspired by the project and an original short story. Spilled beverage stains add a quotidian eloquence. A road map not only of Tiravanija's comings and goings, but also of his recurring themes and pet art historical sources, this is the only print I can recall that charts an artist's entire career.

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For those who know prints, the project should ring bells. In 1953, Robert Rauschenberg enlisted John Cage to help him make his now famous *Automobile Tire Print*. Inviting Cage to come down to Fulton Street in

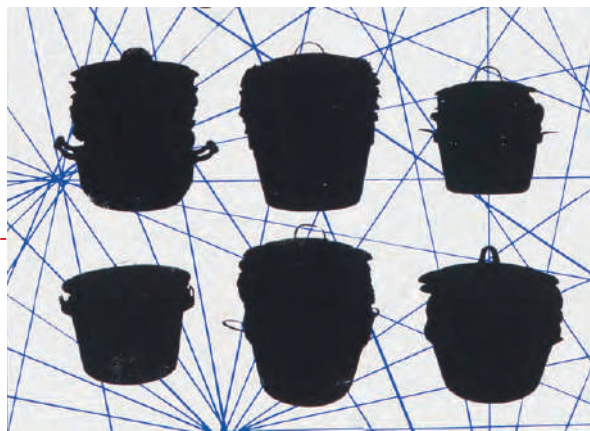
Center. Vu began scheming about jacking up a car and running paper along the tires as they spun. Tiravanija objects: "It would get the mark, but it would not be real. For the print in Japan I was actually on the road, driving."

As for Broodthaers, the mussel pot has been, for Tiravanija, a particularly resonant emblem of the fusion of art and life; Tiravanija has himself often included similarly tiered Thai lunch pails in his projects. Having recently returned to the Neiman Center, Tiravanija is now completing three smaller, more conventional offset lithos that depict, in grids, the repeating silhouettes of the urinals and mussel pots, along with Thai signage. Thus he continues, in a retrospective vein, to link his practice to that of these two modernist precursors.

"TIRAVANIJIA MOST OFTEN if not always leaves both his exhibitions and works untitled," the artist wrote, in third person, in the catalogue for the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen leg of his 2004 retrospective. He continued:

Also always within the parenthesis . . . we can see that Tiravanija wants to direct our attention to the subtext, or subtitle, of how we can direct our thoughts and ideas towards the experience we are having with his works.⁵

Considering the print's parenthetical subtitle, *the map of the land of feeling*, one wonders if, in this work, Tiravanija has not taken what for him is an uncharacteristi-



Lower Manhattan in his Model A Ford, Rauschenberg had Cage drive the vehicle over 20 sheets of typewriter paper glued together and placed on the street in a long strip, over which Rauschenberg slowly poured black house paint. "[John] was the printer, and the press," Rauschenberg later said.⁴ Tiravanija acknowledges that precedent for his print, with its long, central, unifying strip; indeed, he has taken the influence a step further. For the past 10 years, in Japan, Tiravanija has been working on another print—"one kilometer long," he reports—for which he inks a tire of a car that he drives over paper laid down on the street. (Technically, the drive was made over only 100 meters—a tenth of a kilometer—but the print is being multiplied 10 times to equal the intended length.)⁵ In fact, Tiravanija suggested a version of this when he first arrived at the Neiman

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Rauschenberg is not the only explicit art historical reference. Punctuating the scrolls in silhouettes of blue, red and black ink ("my kilometer marks, in a way," says Tiravanija) are images of a urinal and a mussel pot—allusions, respectively, to Duchamp and Broodthaers. Duchamp, recalls Tiravanija, inspired him fundamentally:

I started making art because I saw the Duchamp urinal in a slide show—that and Malevich's *White on White*. I didn't know anything about art. I wanted to be a photojournalist. Within a period of two months [in an art history class in high school, in Ottawa] I saw these two works, and I just stood up and said, "I have to look to see what it is to be an artist." So I applied to art school.

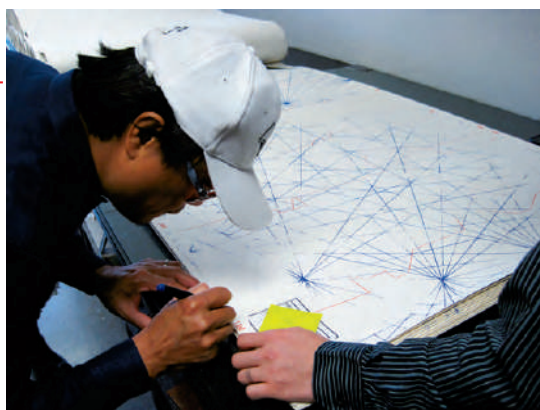
cally sentimental turn, as he looks back over 20 years. One is also reminded of Jasper Johns—in particular, of the title of Johns's homage to Frank O'Hara, *In Memory of My Feelings*, and of his works titled "Souvenir," which reproduce within their compositions a passportlike image of the artist. Even if inadvertent, the connection to Johns, whose prints are so much about the recycling of motifs and themes in his own art, and the consequent contextual alteration of meaning, is striking. Tiravanija's own practice has involved restagings of his participatory exhibitions, sometimes more than once, and each time they are subtly altered

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in content and effect, depending on the particular place and circumstances.

In fact, the passport itself is an object that Tiravanija has returned to on several occasions, specifically as an index of his movement through the world. For a project and exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1998, Tiravanija published a three-volume catalogue in the form of a passport: *Rirkrit Tiravanija: Untitled 1998 (On the Road With Jiew Jeaw Jieb Sri and Moo)*. It reproduced images connected to a cross-country road trip Tiravanija and a group of Thai art students made from Los Angeles to Philadelphia, visiting monuments and artworks along the way (*Spiral Jetty*, Rudolph Schindler buildings, etc.). Some of these images reappear superimposed on the passport pages in the Neiman print. In addition, for the past seven years, Tiravanija has engaged an artist in Thailand, Disorn Duangdao, to hand paint facsimiles of his passport. "He was very skilled, and he needed a job," says Tiravanija, "so I had him copy my passport by hand. And then we put it back together as an artist's book.



Tiravanija signing the print.
Photo Kari Higdem/LNCPS.

He's done three of them so far—and he's working on another right now."

Embedding his passport in the mass of cultural information that determines and overdetermines historical and artistic subjectivity, Tiravanija charges the impersonal, bureaucratic document with meaning. He charts a borderless place—perhaps the land of "feeling," but

surely that of the contemporary "global" artist constantly on the move. Tiravanija only remarks that he has a "terrible memory," and that the print was made to help him remember. It is a typically understated observation—one that leaves the complexities of interpretation to the observer, an active participant in Tiravanija's sociable enterprise. o

- 1 "Rirkrit Tiravanija: A Retrospective (tomorrow is another fine day)," Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (Dec. 4, 2004–Feb. 6, 2005), and Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (Feb. 10–Mar. 20, 2005). There was also audio with a text co-written by Tiravanija, Bruce Sterling and Philippe Parreno, which became a radio play, at the Serpentine leg in London (July 5–Aug. 21, 2005).
- 2 Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are taken from interviews conducted with the artist and Tomas Vu at the LeRoy Neiman Print Center, Columbia University, Mar. 7, 2011. (An artist in his own right, Vu is also showing prints in the Pace show.)
- 3 Because he has so many residency visas, Tiravanija must carry the whole passport bundle (including expired passports with current visas) with him during his travels, in order for customs officials in various countries to review its history. He regards it as a single passport, and I refer to it as such throughout this article.
- 4 For a wonderful little video documenting Rauschenberg talking about the print, go to smoma.org/multimedia/videos/23.
- 5 There is no information about whether the print will be edited. According to an Apr. 15, 2011, email from the artist's studio assistant Glorimarta Linares, it is being published by Hiromi Yoshii Edition, Tokyo, in collaboration with Tokyo Wonder Site and SIDE 2, and produced at a workshop in Yokohama, Kanagawa, Japan.
- 6 Rirkrit Tiravanija, "No Ghosts in the Wall," *Rirkrit Tiravanija: A Retrospective*, Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 2004, as reprinted in Claire Bishop, ed., *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, London, Whitechapel, and Cambridge, MIT Press, 2006, p. 152.