

# PRINTING THE WEATHER: THE LANGUAGE OF RAIN AS A SOURCE FOR AN EVOLVING PRINT LANDSCAPE

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Contemporary printmaking has introduced unusual combinations of techniques and materials, extreme scales or incorporation into three-dimensional constructions. While some printmakers remain faithful to traditional printing techniques, others have begun to extend practices towards an expanded field, in which printmaking enters into dialogues with other and non-human languages. In this article I investigate the intersection of printmaking and rain in the work of Dutch designer Aliko van der Kruijs. Developing a technique she termed 'pluviagraphy' to record visually rain events at particular coordinates of time-space, her 'Made by Rain' series probes the relations between weather, matter, colour, time and space. Looking across the prints featured in this article, the question arises how falling rain as part of the material world becomes part of that recorded world when registered as a mark on a surface. Further, how printmakers might work with different surfaces to begin to probe such questions. A key concern of van der Kruijs' practice is the reframing of printmaking as a liminal site of interdisciplinarity in the context of examining the surfaces between adjacent disciplines. This manifests in a visual conversation informed by the rhythm of the rainfall and printmaking process. The result is an expanding body of research surrounding interdisciplinary practice, mark-making and how printmaking might function at the boundaries of other disciplines.

## INTRODUCTION

Printmaking in all of its forms examines how we perceive and understand surface, layers and space within the act of building an image. It questions which materials, textures and patterns constitute the skin and structure of the print. Conventional understandings of printmaking have tended to concentrate on the material characteristics of a cut surface, ink and what happens when their interface is transferred to

paper. However, the boundaries that once defined printmaking have blurred. From the cutting-edge experiments of the 1960s (Samuel 2019; Coldwell 2010), printmaking has developed in many new directions, and over the last 20 years prints have become ever more innovative and diverse (Noyce 2012). Contemporary printmaking has co-opted architecture and sculpture, fashion and furnishings, science and dataspace. New and hybrid forms of contemporary printmaking have introduced unusual combinations of techniques and materials, extreme scales or incorporation into three-dimensional constructions. While some printmakers remain faithful to traditional printing techniques, others have begun to extend practices towards an expanded field, in which printmaking enters into dialogues with other and non-human languages.

Tim Ingold observes that 'much has been written on how we see landscape; virtually nothing on the relation between visual perception and the weather' (2005: 97). Print processes offer fertile ground to explore ideas such as how the language of rain could be a direct source for an evolving print, at once temporal and spatial, and where more than an observation of nature, the visual patterns become a depiction of its essence. Consequently, through printmaking we encounter ways to capture the patterns of a living, moving phenomenon in a more collaborative and instinctive way, rather than as a stylized rendering. In this article I investigate the intersection of printmaking and weather in the work of Aliko van der Kruijs. Dutch researcher and designer, van der Kruijs studies the relations between weather, matter, colour and space. Her prints emerge from a curiosity for natural processes as a source for the development of patterns and materials. In her project 'Made by Rain' (2012 onwards), the designer expressed the intention to 'catch' the rain visually on a material that is close to the body, enabling people to 'wear the weather' (Holden 2020). Her idea originated in 2011 when van der

Kruijs found her grandfather's calendars in which he had recorded the weather every day. Her first 'travelling concept' of 2012 led to an ongoing programme of work. The designer developed a technique she termed 'pluviagraphy' to record the falling of raindrops on textile and porcelain surfaces as visual accounts of rain events at particular pockets of time-space. The marks of the print are not made all at once; every drop overlays and thickens parts of others. Each raindrop is captured as a circular mark which contains that moment of falling as well as landing and consequently raises the potential for a surface mark to express duration. This series is an ongoing project, featuring a collection of weather imprinted on surfaces from different times and locations around the world.

At the root of printmaking is the impulse of the artist to take a significant idea and transform it through process. The advantage for printmakers today is the extent to which they are able to use the languages of science and technology to assist and augment their explorations of process and ideas. The visual languages that arise in van der Kruijs' work reveal the designer's fascination with time, the sublime, the impermanence of passing weather conditions and their impact on light, shadow and reflection. The transformation of van der Kruijs' surfaces are a result of natural forces, wind and rain, meaning that transformation is also context dependent. Captured on fabric and made into scarves, the images become wearable prints, resulting in an experience as much as an object; equally so for the prints captured on functional porcelain plates.

This article examines a number of questions raised through van der Kruijs' practice, concerning how processes inherent in printmaking and other fields (here meteorology and textiles in particular) might be brought together to open up new possibilities of reading surface and space and to evoke new apprehensions of temporality. These questions include: How can nature collaborate with the printmaker to design prints? What is the nature of non-human made marks in printmaking? How does it feel to capture the act of rainfall from within, rather than as an external observer? If this process is about capturing a specific bounded time-place in a print, where those boundaries are described by rainfall, what else could we use to circumscribe such pockets? In these spaces of curiosity the article intentionally poses more provocations than it answers and hopefully stimulates new discussions about the potentiality of printmaking across disciplines.

Before examining van der Kruijs' approach, in the following pages I touch on the context of other rain patterns and how a diverse range of printmakers have encouraged us to see rain in their mark-making. This sets the scene for exploring van der Kruijs' own print language of rain. The latter's rain prints present a lens to look at different temporalities within printmaking processes and images, and to explore the relationship between different scales of movement patterns. In so doing, I suggest van der Kruijs' method offers diverse aesthetic and conceptual possibilities for considering the relationship between surface and meaning in print and can be seen as part

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of broader investigations into the innovative source languages of printmaking.

## SEEING RAIN THROUGH MARK-MAKING

Throughout art history and into contemporary creative practice, a steady flow of printmakers have chosen to explore weather from aesthetic, climatology and cultural points of view. It is beyond this article to provide a comprehensive review of the printmakers who have taken rain as a subject. However, it is helpful to situate van der Kruijs' work in a wider context in respect of the representation of rain and variation in mark-making, which I hope this section does. Rain was a recurring subject for many Japanese Ukiyo-e woodblock print artists in the 19th century. These artists developed a variety of techniques to depict different types of rain, as well as staging weather conditions to create atmosphere in a scene. Prime examples of 'rain' prints include those such as 'Sudden Shower over Ohashi Bridge' (1857; see Figure 1) and 'Rain shower at Shono' (1834-5) by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858) who became dubbed 'the poet of rain' for his sensitive handling of rainfall. Many later Japanese woodblock artists pursued the rain theme, including Hasui Kawase (1833-1957), Shiro Kasamatsu (1898-1991), Hiroaki (Shotei) Takahashi (1871-1945) and Hirokazu Fukuda (1944-2004). In Japan, the typical monsoon season, known as 'tsuyu', is marked by heavy summer rains for around six weeks in June and July. Typhoon or 'taifu' season generally occurs around Autumn and is accompanied by a torrential downpour. For the Japanese, rains were perceived as a blessing and a necessity. While the Japanese language evolved to encompass a surfeit of words to describe the different types of rain, across printmaking we find a variety of visual languages seeking to capture the patterned ephemerality of rainfall.

Figure 1 shows Hiroshige's 'Sudden Shower over Shin-Ōhashi Bridge and Atake' (c.1857). In this print Hiroshige uses a dramatic bokashi gradient to represent the oppressive dark clouds overhead in the grey sky. The bokashi fades down the page before darkening again into the rich blue of the water under the bridge. Rain is present visually as thin black lines moving diagonally right to left across the view and implied in the bodily postures of the figures on the bridge, sheltering under umbrellas, a coat or hat. The expertise needed to carve these straight lines in close proximity to each other meant that, beyond their poetic significance, cutting rain was also considered a challenging skill test for the block carvers (anon 2016). The print demonstrates Hiroshige's ability to capture the sensation of a violent rainstorm. Yet, while we feel the weight of the downpour and its suddenness, there is no sense of the rain's wetness or of its landing – no ripples, puddles or reflections. A feeling of movement is choreographed from the use of angles - the bridge in relation to the riverbank, and the people hurrying across the bridge in relation to the boat in the midground - rather than from the falling rain itself.



Figure 1

### Figure titles and information

Figure 1: Sudden Shower over Shin-Ōhashi Bridge and Atake (Ōhashi Atake no yūdachi) (c. 1857). Utagawa Hiroshige. Woodblock print Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY, USA. Public domain.

American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright was inspired by the thin, overlapping layering techniques of Japanese space. Wright understood Hiroshige's woodblock prints as products of this spatial comprehension (Kuma 2008) and according to Japanese architect, Kengo Kuma, respected Hiroshige for his translucency and continuous sense of space. In 'Sudden Shower' Hiroshige required multiple layers in order to express the spatial extension of the scene. With no vanishing point, the foreground is emphasized by the linear rain. As a background, he uses colour gradation to indicate the relative distance of the riverbank, while in-between, the uses of varying diagonal arcs continue the space and eye beyond the frame. In this print, rain is something that comes between the viewer and their vision of the scene; the language of long thin lines becomes marks to look through as much as look at.

Moving forward a hundred years, French artist Yves Klein focused on earth and its elements in his Cosmogonies series. His interest in natural phenomena manifested in a small series of 'rain paintings', executed in the early 1960s, in which the artist exposed specifically pre-prepared canvas to rain, often by tying it to the roof of his car (Vergne 2010). The drops left marks on a blueish background, resulting in a dispersed and random pattern of darker spots on the painting's light surface. This shows an example, not dissimilar to van der Kruijs' in which the artist conceived the process of making and then allowed nature to complete it. Vergne (2010) suggests for Klein, it was 'about embracing perception in the spirit of John Cage, a continuous, timeless awareness of and engagement with pure sensibility, liberated from materiality—a pure aesthetic experience of the world' (Vergne 2010).

We find a more graphic approach to depicting rain in the work of lino artist, Ewa Medrek and her use of variations on the vertical line to depict falling rain. In Figure 2 she focuses on the landing of the rain and we start to see circles of ripples as the falling drops impact the surface beneath them. These are stylized ripples and the ever-expanding circles imply duration through their expansion; the time and weight of the falling line expands horizontally once the drops have hit the ground.

A Japanese influence and circular lines denoting ripples combine in British artist, David Hockney's work. For The Weather Series (1973), Hockney looked to the woodblock prints of Katsushika Hokusai and the paintings of Claude Monet. In 1972 Hockney created a painting he titled 'The Japanese Rain on Canvas'. The canvas was stained on the floor and the rain painted on later. Hockney was aware in his own work as well as in the Ukiyo-e prints that the act of rendering the rain as marks meant that the subject is 'not just the weather: the subject matter is drawing... Because in each one the problem was not just making a representation of the weather, but how to draw it' (Tyler 2013). For 'Rain' (1973), seen in Figure 3, Hockney exposed his work to the rain: 'I loved the idea of the rain as it hit the ink, it would make



Figure 2

the ink run' (Tyler 2013). The resulting print shows not only the artist's impression of ripples caused by the falling rain but the runs triggered by the rain hitting the surface and interacting with Hockney's colour. In 'Rain' Hockney includes white diagonal lines to indicate the fall of the rain, each line ending with an indication of a splash, present as a soft curving v-shape. Neither pure geometry of circles and lines nor a lifelike depiction of nature, this third way of mark-making means the rain changes what is there without having pure authorship of its own marks.

In another example, 'Curious Printmaker', Emily Harvey (2018) experimented with ways to print rain drops after she had observed a graded pattern of beaded condensation drops which formed on an acetate sheet she had left outside to dry. Spraying textured paint onto the droplets, the paint stuck to the dry areas of acetate and formed a film on the water drops which could be washed off. This resulted in clear areas of acetate where each drop had been. She repeated the process experimenting with the marks left by rain, a watering can and a plant spray bottle. An increase in water led drops to combine into larger patterns. Harvey found the easiest way to print the acetate plate was to roll ink onto the sheet and treat it as a relief print. She also tried inking as intaglio, mixing the ink with oil to make it runny and then rubbing it into the rough spray paint, before wiping it off with a rag and polishing with newspaper. Harvey's experiments demonstrate rain mark-making as a language in becoming; one built on the value of transiency and imperfection and explored further in van der Kruijs' work as the rain assumes greater agency for its visual language.

## MADE BY RAIN

Researching the weather, van der Kruijs noticed that since the 1950s rainfall has increased by about 4% due to climate change. Typically this change is communicated using weather charts, satellite images and graphs. The rainfall itself becomes an immaterial event that cannot be archived, only remembered and often only then in numerical form (Holden 2020). Once in numerical or digital code the rain assumes an immateriality that severs its haptic connections to its substance and materiality. By blending the languages of art and science with rain, there arises an opportunity to give the rain a surface to speak for itself. Printmaker and researcher, Paul Laidler observes in his own work, 'I like the feeling that I get when looking at the finished print in that it doesn't look like I made it – something else is present that I hadn't anticipated' (Coldwell and Laidler 2012: 113). Opening up a surface to a natural phenomenon as co-creator results in a print that is not fully controlled by its human artist and open to the joyful possibilities of unanticipated results. In 'Made by Rain', van der Kruijs provides a period of suspension where the surface is the space that 'holds' the process of making and makes it present.

To create the fabric prints van der Kruijs experimented with two techniques. For the first, she superimposed a water-soluble ink sheet

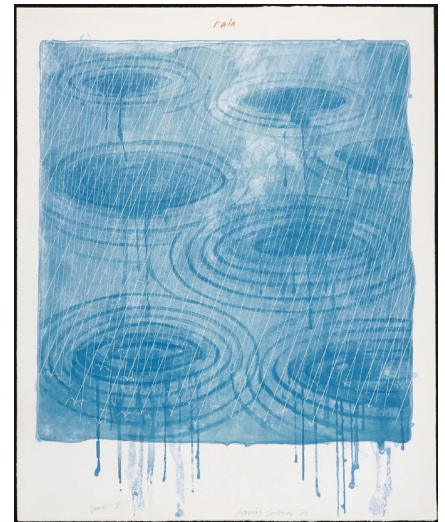


Figure 3

Figure 3: Rain (1973). David Hockney. Lithograph. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte, Reina Sofia. Edition/serial number: P.A. IX. Register number: DE01415.

over a white textile. Rolling out the fabric on a flat surface, where raindrops hit the ink sheet it dissolved, and the ink bled onto the white fabric beneath. For the second technique, the designer worked with the TextielLab of TextielMuseum Tilburg, to develop a fabric in which the ink and the cloth combined as one. It was possible to create a textile impregnated with a film coating sensitive to water and which registered the rain drops directly. For both processes, the fabric was exposed to five minutes of rain, at which point the surface was fixed to preserve the rain pattern; Figure 4 shows the process of capture. Each rainfall creates a unique print.



Figure 4

Figure 5 shows a test piece exploring how digital printing inks respond to water before they are fixed. In this experiment, duration of the falling drop is condensed into a colour point on the surface, producing a chromatography of rain.

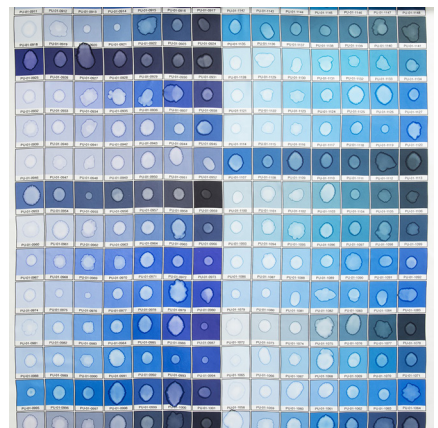


Figure 5

Each 'Made by Rain' textile comes with a handmade notation of the location, date, time interval, millimetres of rain, and weather circumstances under which the pluviagraphy was conducted (see Figure 8). Consequently, the textiles form a collection of weather data as visual recordings of a specific envelope of time-space. Figures 6, 7 and 8 show the variation in the resulting prints. Individual drop marks are held separated from a puddled rain or a rain-soaked pavement and the experience of being wet. Each print image embodies notions of instantaneity and simultaneity as the drops are isolated like specimens in a petri dish. The detail in Figure 7 highlights the difference in shape and pattern of the drops during a period of hail.

The patterns and layering of marks embrace concepts rooted in Japanese aesthetics such as irregularity ('fukinsei'), simplicity ('kanso'), and nature ('shizen'). In Japan, where there are more than fifty ways to describe rain, there is a different notion of rainfall. The designer was curious how 'Made by Rain' could translate to a three-dimensional ceramic form in an extension of the Japanese tradition of using ceramic decoration to tell a story – here, a story about rainfall. Her porcelain collection follows the textile range and was developed during a three-month creative residency from September to November 2017 in Arita, Japan. In a collaboration with the potter Fukusengama, van der Kruijs created a process to print on porcelain with the rain. Together they investigated how to achieve a contemporary approach to traditional Arita ware and create a patterning on the porcelain by using rain, trying several experimental stages of glazing to fix the pattern during firing (Holden 2020).

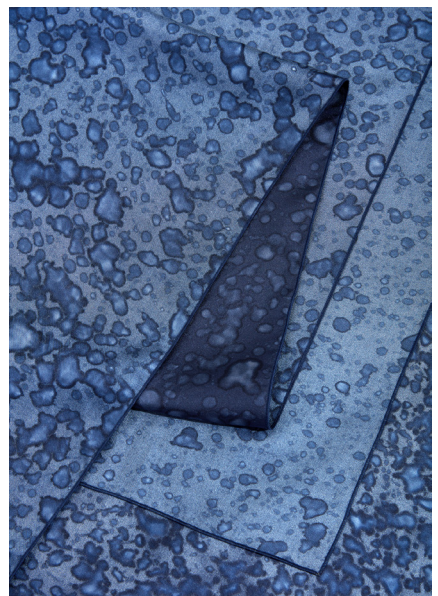


Figure 6

Figure 9 shows the style of patterning achieved on the plates. The rain was imprinted on plates of a 32cm diameter made by Fukusengama; like the textiles, each captures a notation of the location, time and weather circumstances of the plate's exposure to the weather. Employing natural and chance processes, these prints – on fabric and on ceramic - are experiments that attempt to harness the spontaneous behaviour of natural phenomena as active co-producers of the print. The raindrops vanish but simultaneously make

Figure 4: The treated fabric capturing the rainfall. Photograph by Alike van der Kruijs. Courtesy of Alike van der Kruijs.  
 Figure 5: Test samples (2016). Cooper Hewitt collection.  
 Figure 6: Made by Rain. Examples of prints. Photograph by Lonneke van der Palen. Courtesy of Alike van der Kruijs.

themselves known on the print surface in a layering of temporal-spatial slices. 'Made by Rain' poses a question about the condition of seeing rain as much as recording it. Instead of evaluating prints on the basis of their similarity to actual events or situations (or to the works by artists such as Hiroshige or Hockney), what is required is to question the indexical content and conditions that make something like these images possible.

## READING RAIN

In a two-dimensional space, van der Kruijs creates the memory of a three-dimensional event and adds a fourth dimension (time), so as to reveal both the theoretical background of the print concept and an extension of it. If we only talk about van der Kruijs' work in terms of its final visual appearances, we risk missing the complexity of the event underpinning each work's layers and process, and which accounts for the pointillist aesthetic of drops, mutated through repetition and spread. An explication of each print reveals how it references on top of simply what it references. The method directs the viewer's attention towards the idea of time itself – the duration it took the drops to fall and the spatial coordinates of their capture and composition. Time is preserved in the form of an individual moment and then blended in the ultimate surface of the print.

The resulting image materializes and enfolds different temporalities. While a photograph is a representation ripped from an infinite continuum of reality, freezing raindrops mid-fall fragmented and incomplete, van der Kruijs' print is an accumulation. The photograph is regarded as having a direct relationship with reality, whereas 'Made by Rain' has primarily an indexical, direct proportion, to the matrix; even though in both processes, something is transmitted, and something is transformed. Reading rain in her work evokes experiments with the capture of temporal continuity and the entanglements of these within and across the print surface. Consequently, the relation between the weather and the print is really one about the relation between medium and surfaces. We cannot limit ourselves to visual surface when looking at these prints; the entire printmaking process is an essential aspect of its substance – not wholly in the sense that Ruth Pelzer Montada (2012: 54) would challenge where 'techniques' and 'technology' have played such a crucial role in printmaking's history at the expense of metaphorical content or image communication. Rather, these images form 'information spaces' that contribute to a narrative of rain, each with its own localized characteristics.

Clifford and King (1993) suggest that a local temporal patterning can in turn contribute to local distinctiveness and to 'ecologies of place' (Thrift 1999). Here, for example, five minutes of rain in New York on this day at this place during this time, becomes a print that is both a still visual image and a perpetual flow of data. Therefore, it offers a glimpse into new forms of cartographic and cinematic printmaking. As each single image enters a sequence with other images (of different time-space coordinates) together they form a series of rain distribution. When viewed serially the macro-structure

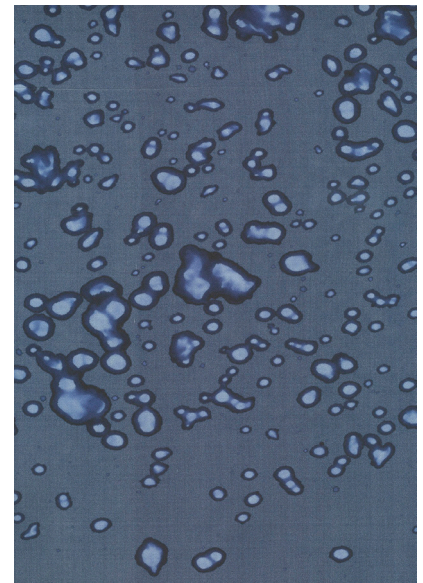


Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

Figure 7: detail - hail. Photograph by Alike van der Kruijs. Courtesy of Alike van der Kruijs.  
 Figure 8: Detail with location. Photograph by Lonneke van der Palen. Courtesy of Alike van der Kruijs  
 Figure 9: Rain pattern on porcelain (2017). Waterschool, Rotterdam. <https://smb-waterschool.nl/en/library/made-by-rain-ceramics/60>

reveals the overlapping complexity of time itself. For example, in each individual print, the spatial interval between drops relates to a change in the level of rainfall at a particular location. This temporal reading is presented spatially, and via different shades of blue. It also fluctuates across the series as a whole, with some prints composed of larger droplets or larger sets of droplets than others. Consequently, time is represented as a crosswise axis – between each droplet of an individual print and across a series of prints seen as a whole.

The 'Made by Rain' prints assert a certain position through their process and material surface; we are not pulled to see the work as photographic or as illustrative, rather it triggers a relationship which Rosalind Krauss (1985: 203) describes as a 'visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object'. Yet, the series retains a space of anticipation. The surfaces of these prints are complex in their construction for what appears to sit upon the surface-space as well as within it. In 'Made by Rain', the transformational is the imagined space of the surface as layer upon layer it becomes through its own direct accumulation; for a period, as with the ukiyo-e prints, the print resides in the in-between, in those layers that come together.

A key concern of van der Kruijs practice is the reframing of printmaking as a liminal site of interdisciplinarity in the context of examining the surfaces between adjacent disciplines. This manifests in a visual conversation informed by the rhythm of the rainfall and printmaking process. The result is an expanding body of research surrounding interdisciplinary practice, mark-making and how printmaking might function at the boundaries of other disciplines.

## CONCLUSION

Increasingly printmakers seek ways to explore the unknown potential of more traditional methods, either through use of different paper surfaces, working on an unprecedented scale, combining with digital techniques or simply broadening the definition of 'printmaking'. Engaging with the sciences brings new creative opportunities – not only access to new technologies and its artistic possibilities, but also access to new types of data and concepts open for a printerly re-purposing and reinterpretation.

Looking across the prints featured in this article, the question arises how the falling rain as part of the material world becomes part of that recorded world when registered as a mark on a surface. Further, how printmakers might work with different surfaces to begin to probe such questions. The surfaces that make up the landscape mark nothing less than the limits of materiality itself. Thus, the print appears as an interface not between substance and medium but between materiality and immateriality. Our experience of the weather is invariably multisensory, it is just as much auditory, haptic and olfactory as it is visual. For printmaking this suggests possibilities to trigger the senses through expanded print forms and to find ways to convey a wider sensory experience through mark-making, while simultaneously provoking questions into the source languages of printmaking. Equally, the means by which human printmakers might collaborate with natural forces and in ways which enable

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the latter to inscribe its own marks. As elsewhere artists such as Rodrigo Arteaga ([www.rodrigoarteaga.com/Convergence](http://www.rodrigoarteaga.com/Convergence)) explore the ability to print with nature using mycelium and microbes as 'ink', shifts in the conceptualization of 'print' begin to position nature as a sort of material substrate for printmaking, and philosophically and ecologically ask questions of the ways in which the processes and materials of printmaking are changing.

'Made by Rain' is one strategy to integrate printmaking into an expanded field and it has sharpened our awareness of the responsibility the materials themselves have in the final result. Other concepts that could become new strategies within the process of printmaking are processes of transference, transmission and translation between humans and non-humans and across language disciplines. These concepts are practical and descriptive for matrices that could define different types of printed output, and further to articulate the idea that time can be just another one of the materials that constitute a work of print.

As records of rising or falling rain levels, each of the referenced prints serves to visualize the translation of a period of time into a document of rainfall in a specific time-place. In this sense, work by Hiroshige as much as by van der Kruijs raises the dual consideration of printmaking as a form of documentation, in parallel to the consideration of this documentation itself as printmaking. In one, an artist designs the communicative experience of the particular type of rain he has witnessed at a particular place and time, in the other the rain itself designs the print. One might claim this to be a matter of matter itself, of rain and its properties, but it is also about the printmaking as entangled in the natural world.

The exploratory nature of van der Kruijs' work encourages us to push the boundaries of printmaking practice and think beyond our immediate disciplinary contexts. With insight and passion in bringing the worlds of meteorology, textiles and printmaking together, and from creating experimental surface coatings to capture a printscape, van der Kruijs raises awareness of the often unseen or overlooked around us. In so doing we are drawn into the idea of print as an ecosystem – one that not only comprises printmakers, material/tool makers and studios, but a complex entanglement of creativity in conversation with our living systems. And with all the printmaking potential that unleashes.

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IMAGE GALLERY



Figure 1: Sudden Shower over Shin-Ōhashi Bridge and Atake (Ōhashi Atake no yūdachi) (c. 1857). Utagawa Hiroshige. Woodblock print. Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY, USA. Public domain.

Figure 2: Pluie bleu foncé (2022). Ewa Medrek. Linocut. Photo by Ewa Medrek. Courtesy of the artist.

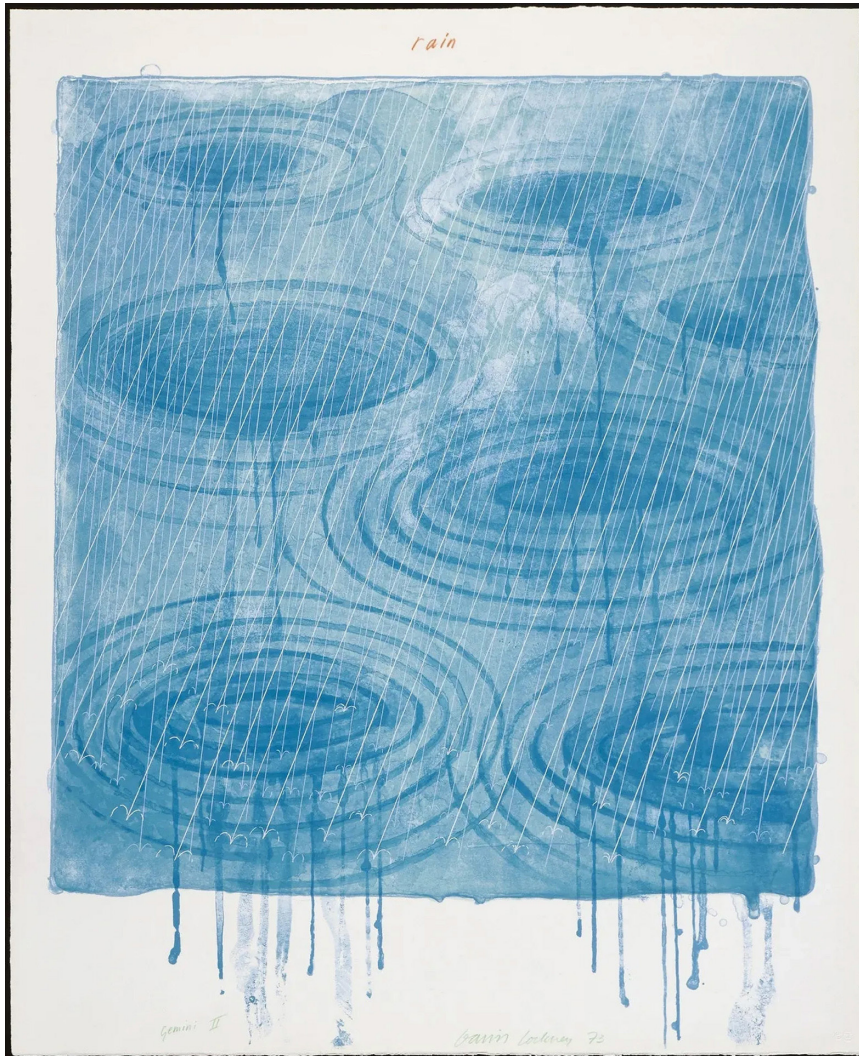


Figure 3: Rain (1973). David Hockney. Lithograph. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte, Reina Sofia. Edition/serial number: P.A. IX. Register number: DE01415.

Figure 4: The treated fabric capturing the rainfall. Photograph by Alike van der Kruijs. Courtesy of Alike van der Kruijs.

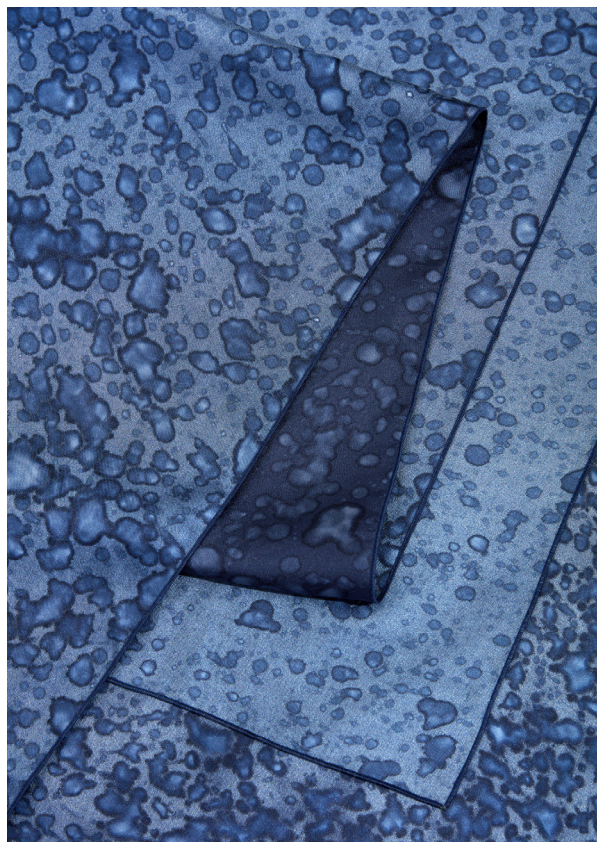
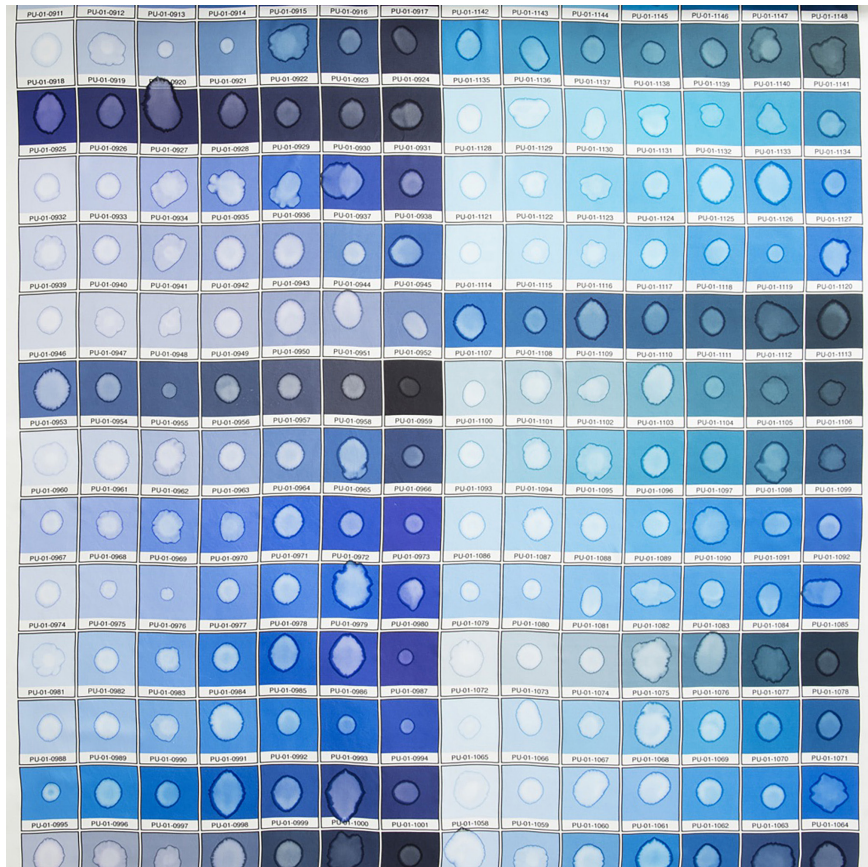
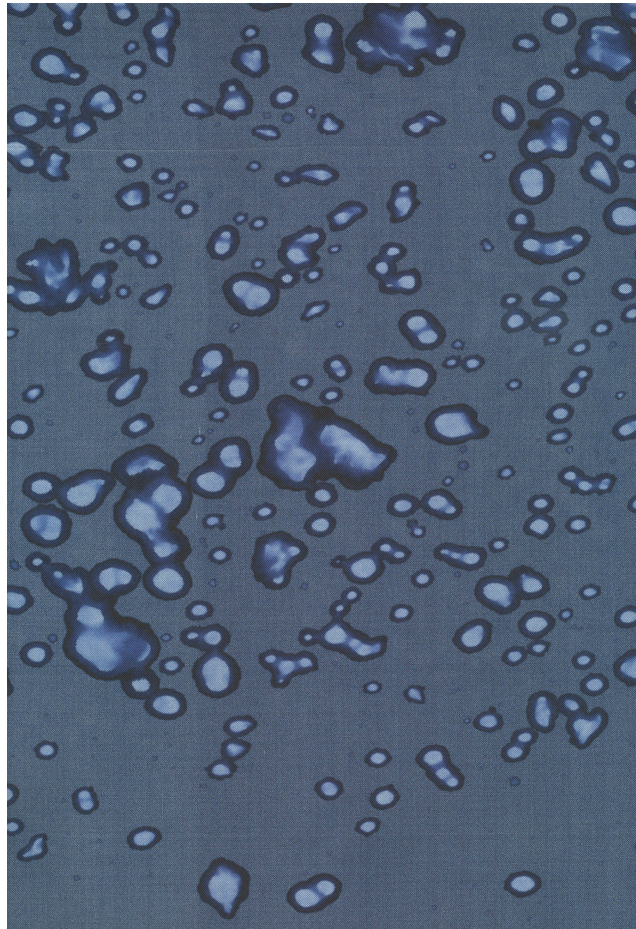


Figure 5: Test samples (2016). Cooper Hewitt collection.

Figure 6: Made by Rain. Examples of prints. Photograph by Lonneke van der Palen. Courtesy of Aliki van der Kruis.



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Figure 7: detail - hail. Photograph by Alik van der Kruijs. Courtesy of Alik van der Kruijs.

Figure 8: Detail with location. Photograph by Lonneke van der Palen. Courtesy of Alik van der Kruijs



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Figure 9: Rain pattern on porcelain (2017). Waterschool, Rotterdam. <https://smb-waterschool.nl/en/library/made-by-rain-ceramics/60>