

Fabrication History

Robert Gober

Untitled, 2011

Potato print

Edition of 16 with 5 APs

12 x 8 1/2 inches

Climb Ev'ry Mountain is a show tune from *The Sound of Music*, a musical by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II with a book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse. The original Broadway production opened in 1959 and the film version in 1965.

In both the stage and film versions the song is sung by the Mother Abbess to the aspiring but questioning novitiate Maria, as a guide on her spiritual quest.

The lyrics reproduced in this print are taken verbatim from an authorized lyric sheet published by Williamson Music, Inc. Permission to use the lyrics, unaltered, for this potato print, was granted by the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization ("R&H") on 8/18/2010.

Creating a print edition using a potato, to make a "potato print" was a technical challenge. Christian Scheidemann of Contemporary Conservation was consulted on the best way to proceed, as was Leslie Miller of the Grenfell Press, Jon Conner of Conner Studio and Andrew Rogers from the Gober Studio.

Christian began by freeze drying thick slices of very large russet potatoes, to remove the moisture from the potato without shrinking the form. The first batch of potatoes was sent to Freeze-Dry Foods Inc. in Albion, NY. These potato slices came back black and shrunken. After several attempts a suitable batch of freeze dried potato slices was made. These slices were then soaked by Christian in different dilutions of Paraloid B72, an acrylic (ethyl-methacrylate) that is thinned with acetone. These first samples were then sent to Leslie Miller who would be printing the edition. Leslie sent them out to an engraver to laser etch the text into the potato slices. This proved impossible as it is a heat producing process and the laser was "cooking and disintegrating" the potatoes.

Jon Conner was then consulted on the possibility of engraving the text into the potatoes with his CNC (computer numeric controlled) router. Leslie had a few pieces that had not gone to the laser engravers and these were given to Jon to do some milling tests. These tests revealed that the epoxy was not getting deep enough into the potato for it to be engraved in this way. Once the surface was planed to make it flat, there were too many voids and soft spots, and the potato slices just would not hold up to the engraving process.

So another round of potato slices were sent off to Freeze-Dry Foods Inc. Contemporary Conservation soaked these new slices in a solution of Hxtal, which is a clear epoxy used in joining glass pieces. The thinking was that since the Hxtal is very viscous, having a consistency somewhere between mineral oil and water that it would be able to fully saturate the potatoes.

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In late April of 2011, Christian and Andrew took these newest samples to Conner Studio in Brooklyn to see if they would stand up to the milling process and to plane the surface of the potato slices perfectly flat for printing. The Hxtal was still not penetrating through the potato and filling all of the voids, so Christian took these planed potatoes back to his studio to see if he could get them fully immersed and fully saturated in the Hxtal. Jon then milled the text into these four separate potato slices using his CNC machine, which takes a 3 dimensional rendering from the computer and “prints” it out into a material via a router and a robotic control arm that can move on an x, y, and z axis.



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Once the text was milled into the potatoes / printing plates they were sent to Leslie Miller to be printed. The printing went through a number of layout variations, always adhering to the approved unaltered text and the inclusion of the copyright information. The problem of finding a slightly aged looking archival paper for printing was solved when Bob did a test by leaving a white sheet of Borden and Riley Bond on the roof in August in intense sun for two days. This successfully aged and yellowed the paper. But by the time the entire stack of paper that was to be printed was here at the studio, the intense summer sun was gone and fall was beginning. So rather than two days of intense sun, the paper was aged on the roof in the sun for twelve to fifteen days. Andrew and Becky Kinder would take it up to the roof first thing in the morning on non-rainy days, hang it on the clothesline and bring it back down at the end of the day. This changed the tone and color of the paper as well as giving it the characteristic dents dings and creases that each print has.



The frame is a hand made artist frame, made at the studio by Bill Abbott, painted in Benjamin Moore Dulamel, and the background paper is Stonehenge pale blue 250gr, mounted to a piece of four ply cotton rag museum board.