



ARTIST

Lynn Schwarzer

TITLE

Untitled, from the series 'Images of Labor'

DIMENSIONS

5.25 in H x 7 in W

MEDIUM

Inkjet Prints

CATALOGUE NUMBER

1986.048

CURRENT LOCATION

1114-2D

DESCRIPTION

"A shirt could require up to 20,000 stitches. Women in the 1820s could finish no more than six to nine shirts a week, laboring twelve to fourteen hours a day for six days. For this they would be paid, on the average, twelve and one half cents per shirt."

LYNN SCHWARZER

BORN

1955

BIRTHPLACE

Syracuse, NY

GENDER

Female

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Light Work Gallery, 1989
Light Work Grant, 1986

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

ESSAYS

Lynn Schwarzer's use of computer graphics technology is influenced by her experience as a printmaker. In her computer generated work she still makes marks, albeit via clicks on a 'mouse', and slowly builds an image that includes choices about size, color, content, form and number of reproductions. Computer work is less tactile and less physically demanding than hoisting a litho stone. Multiple editions can be generated instantly by few keystrokes. Through the computer drawing as a language is electronically translated to an illusion of texture with the dots and colors that are the new building blocks of the artist. Schwarzer's linear perspective on this synthetic process and her interest in women's labor issues are merged in two series of computer images exhibited in the Light Work Gallery during November 1989. The playful slingshot on the cover of this CONTACT SHEET, from her series, Hand Operated, recalls a primitive means of power and transcendence at the same time. Other images in the series are simple renderings of singular objects centered on a colorful grid of dots. The small, 5x7 inch, Xerox inkjet prints have the integrity and simple elegance of the functional tools they represent. In her series, Images of Labor, Schwarzer addresses the life and death stories of women who have made sacrifices to industry since the early 19th century. She uses Deluxe Paint III software on an AMIGA 1000 computer to layer texts borrowed from statistical reports and published interviews over images of tools, from microscopes to sewing needles. Playing off the schoolbook simplicity of object and caption the viewer is drawn by the elementary colors and further by the compelling texts that matter-of-factly expose corporate greed and a system of production that measures the value of the employee as one with her product. One text informs us that a woman is equal to approximately 3,000 pockets sewn per nine hour shift. In other texts it is pointed out that on the job disabilities, diminishing eyesight and reproductive problems, make women disposable to their employers and vulnerable to half-lives of extreme poverty. Despite the sense of rage and powerlessness we experience on behalf of the women Schwarzer has selected to narrate, there is a distance we are granted by her use of technology. The artist fills that gap between fact and illustration with the authentic voices of anonymous women, giving them an opportunity to be active agents for change. Women employed in computer operation still suffer monotony and risks in computer operation, and computers have the added feature of automatically monitoring their output. Not ironically, Schwarzer capitalizes on the resemblance of computer prints to the knots and stitches of needlepoint, creating a subtext that begs the question of a more human post-industrial approach to labor, one that respects the natural pattern of women and their family's lives. Lynn Schwarzer lives in Hamilton, NY and teaches at Colgate College. Gina Murtagh (c)1990