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readers of AT HOME nominated.

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Read blog entries exclusive to AT
HOME written by Kimberly Reuther,
the genius behind DesignSpeak, a
new blog created for the St. Louis
design community.

FACT CHECK: IN THE SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2009 ISSUE OF AT HOME, THE MURPHYS' KITCHEN (PG. 42) WAS DESIGNED BY KATIA CAVALLINI WITH TALISMAN STUDIO, 6614 CLAYTON, 314-363-0380. WE REGRET THAT INFORMATION WAS INADVERTENTLY OMITTED.

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FINE PRINT

PELE PRINTS PUSHES PRINTMAKING IN NEW DIRECTIONS...SOMETIMES BY TAKING IT OFF THE WALL.

Just so you know, Pele Prints is not named after the soccer player. "But at least people know how to pronounce it," laughs Amanda Verbeck, who founded the press in 2006. The actual reference, she says, is the Hawaiian goddess of lightning, volcanoes, and fire—Ms. Verbeck is often referred to as "that redheaded printmaker from St. Louis"—but she says she also likes the metaphor of the volcano. Lava flow "is one of the few ways new land is created," she says. "The process can be tumultuous, and it's not always pretty. And I think that any artist will tell you that creativity can feel that way. And it's just a bringing forth."

Tucked inside a midcentury South County warehouse (you can sometimes hear forklifts beeping outside the door), Ms. Verbeck's tidy, well-lit studio is not just a solitary artist's retreat, but a laboratory for one-on-one collaborations with other artists, including painters, sculptors, installation artists, and photographers, some with no experience in printmaking. "But even if I'm working with Laura Berman, who is a printmaker, I don't want to do a project with her that she would do on her own," she says. "It really is all about the collaboration, what each of us can bring to the table."

Pele's focus is fine-art monoprints, meaning each image that comes off the press is unique. "A good way to think of it is as a vocabulary of plates—different shapes and colors—and we like to combine them in different ways to make different phrases," Ms. Verbeck says. Pele also uses a number of processes, including photolithography, woodcut, relief, intaglio, and screenprinting and handwork. For the 90 prints in painter Brandon Anschutz's "Drop" series, some were patterned with asymmetrical diamonds in white and army green, while others were smattered with speech-balloon shapes in colors like tangerine, purple, and teal; another local artist, Gina Alvarez, used Pele's 4- by 8-foot large-format press to print a series of abstract wood blocks in a prokaryote shape. The blocks were then inked onto delicate Japanese paper, which Ms. Alvarez cut out and collaged over the original print.

Though Ms. Verbeck curates the artists for Pele Prints, she also accepts contract work, and if the project is unusual, so much the better. When local knitwear designer Nina Ganci of Skif International approached Pele with an idea of printing



PELE PRINTS,
9400 WATSON, 314-750-7799,
PELEPRINTS.COM

on sweaters—with two giant floral wood blocks in tow—Ms. Verbeck embraced the project, relishing the chance to experiment with materials and process. In part, it was this project that inspired Pele Projects, her newest endeavor. "It's all about bringing art off the wall," she says. "It's still print-based, so we are staying true to that. It's also still in a collaborative spirit, so it's always with another artist and myself."

Pele Projects debuted in September at Schlafly's Art Outside, selling Ms. Verbeck's necklaces, printmaker Roxanne Phillips' handbags, and a series of table linens designed by Ms. Alvarez. Ms. Verbeck says some people have raised eyebrows over her embrace of craft (which she notes is a four-, rather than five-letter, word in the art world). But she points out that "Kiki Smith does jewelry; Sol LeWitt designed dining-room tables. My feeling is they can coexist, and it doesn't dilute the fine-art prints to bring them off the wall."

Though intensely collaborative by nature, Ms. Verbeck does do solo work, which she describes as autobiographical—and it is—but in unexpected ways. Her portrait of her grandparents is the city block plat for Plack, a village in the former Czechoslovakia where they grew up. After cutting out the space where each grandparent's house stood, she then printed colored silhouettes of the buildings' footprint at the bottom of the page. She made a similar one for her parents and one for herself.

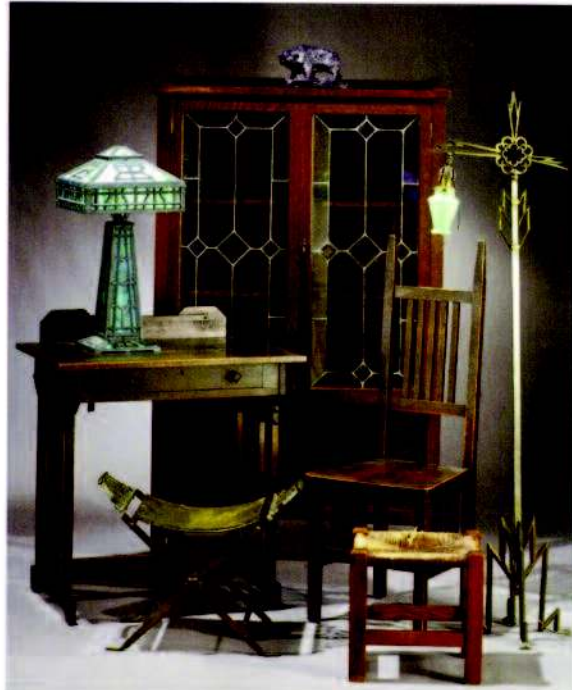
Because Pele is one of several St. Louis publishers known for large-scale prints (a tradition begun by Peter Marcus and Washington U.'s Island Press), there's something else unexpected when Ms. Verbeck pulls open the bottom drawer to her flat files: Her prints are tiny, sometimes in scale as well as subject matter—one series is even based on microscopic images of pollen spores. Holding them up, she laughs. "It's sort of funny," she says, looking like she's surprised even herself. "I guess I had a bit of what I would call a reaction to the scale." —STEFENE RUSSELL

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