

Cash flow

Charlie England breaks down the visual properties of printed money to make us question our notions of value. By Charlotte Edwards. Portrait by Andreas Papadopoulos and Claire Waffel

When Charlie England first started a series of work based on English banknotes, he called up the Bank of England to discuss their money-printing techniques. 'The guy I spoke to got really suspicious, asking how I knew all this stuff,' remembers the north London-based artist. 'I said, it's all on your website! It says exactly how the paper's made, everything...' But following the production process of banknotes to the letter has proved – rather ironically – prohibitively expensive for the 2004 Royal College graduate. England uses the same computer program to draw the intricate layered patterns that comprise his works, and often embellishes them with engraving and holographic details, but he prints them digitally rather than using lithography.

Still, it was never England's intention to replicate banknotes (which is probably just as well). 'My work is less about money than about the associations we make between money and value,' he explains. 'By redrawing a banknote, by breaking down its structure and then reappropriating it as something purely aesthetic, you view it with different eyes. From that point, you can start to question the value of the thing it represents: a promise, a concept, a lump of gold that doesn't even exist any more.' His first investigation of the decorative properties of printed money was using the imagery found on English notes. Square in format, and presented in perspex vitrines as though to reclaim their misplaced value, these delicately beautiful works

included England's own visual intervention, providing a new layer of narrative: imagery of the plant in Debden where banknotes are printed and, ultimately, sent to the furnace. 'I wanted to draw money being destroyed, and to draw it in its own style,' he says. 'It's like when a currency gets devalued, its material worth disappears and all that's left is the way it was drawn. It's not a completely dry conceptual vehicle that goes round and round – it's drawn to look beautiful.'

This work was featured earlier this year in a group show at galerie schleicher + lange, Paris, who will also be including England in their FIAC presentation in October. For his first solo exhibition, at the brand new Wyer Gallery in Battersea, south London, he will show 16 images based on notes in 16 different currencies, presented as eight diptychs. In each work, England has set an iceberg adrift amid all the swirls and cross-hatching, a symbol of a shifting terrain that cannot be pinned down or owned, and of the hidden rhetoric that lurks beneath even the most innocuous-looking object. 'In the past, I've used patterns from passports and tax discs,' England says. 'I'm interested in the things that certify us as citizens. They exist, and the patterns on them exist, to give us a sense of security and place and worth, and that's where my work lies.'

'Charlie England: The Hell in Hello', 15 Sept-13 Oct, Wyer Gallery, London (thewyergallery.co.uk)



Right: Charlie England, *Into Forever, Two Hundred Kroner*, 2005, cotton/wood pulp paper, digital print, silk screen, holographic foil, matt varnish, 40 x 40cm **Far right:** Charlie England photographed in London, July 2005

