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ABSTRACT

As a printmaker and conceptual artist I work within notions of autobiography to move swiftly between the perspectives of my child-self and that of my current-self. My artwork is heavily process oriented allowing these shifts in perspective to become opportunities for my own growth and reflection as I work and rework the metal plates.

I see my history presented in a visual language while exploring formal print techniques such as intaglio, chine-collé, and multiple plate color processes in a style after Mary Cassatt. In printmaking there is a unique opportunity to study states of an image from beginning to end, each mark that is added, covered, or burnished away in the metal changes the state of the plate and so alters its history.

In my work I explore orders of experience and practice revisions of presentation. I gather the visual and emotional information from my childhood perspective that seems most connected with my adult ways of seeing. I have explored from memory and the tales of a local storyteller, and then revisited original recorded versions, carried storybooks that I had as a child and reconsidered them in terms of their aesthetic sensibilities: of color and line paired with narrative. Most recurrently I have reflected on my mother's homes and their organized palettes, creating a series of prints referencing the spaces that are seared in my mind.

Considering the work of other artists and individuals that are part of my experience I feel motivated to accept the fact that my history belongs to all that have formed it, and it exists in a series of states. I believe that my future, too, will be heavily influenced, then realized, through expressions of self and perspective.

So in each act of expression there is opportunity for realization, and out of realization an actualized concept to hold close or move away from. Through expressing my past and current perspectives in print I hope to know myself more immediately in order to participate meaningfully in community dialogue, and from self-reflection/realization find motivations to grow and change.

At German and Polk:
An Artist's Autobiography

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To write my biography through my work is to create historical objects that record my past and current states— states of being, states of mind, and states of consciousness. My intention as an artist in making these objects and in keeping these records of self is bound to my identity as a learner. To consider my influences as they relate to formal choices in my art making (subject matter, palette, mark and perspective) is to consider how these influences relate to the formal opinions and larger social perspectives I assume and state throughout my learning process.

In my work I explore orders of experience and practice revisions of presentation. I gather the visual and emotional information from my childhood perspective that seems most connected with my adult ways of seeing. I have explored from memory and the tales of a local storyteller, and then revisited original recorded versions, carried storybooks that I had as a child and reconsidered them in terms of their aesthetic sensibilities: of color and line paired with narrative. Most recurrently I have reflected on my mother's homes and their organized palettes, creating a series of prints referencing the spaces that are seared in my mind.

Considering the work of other artists and individuals that are part of my experience I feel motivated to accept the fact that my history belongs to all that have formed it, and it exists in a series of states. I believe that my future, too, will be heavily influenced, then realized, through expressions of self and perspective. In a reflective working process I find my history reveals

perspectives which offer insight, or rather, foresight into future possible selves.

It was during a period of reconnection with the work of Lou Ann Holman, a performance and folk artist from my home state of Indiana, that I initially realized the weight of childhood influences influences, and how they affect my perspective and world view. At that age of seven or eight my parents had taken my brothers and I to our local public library to see Lou Ann perform a collection of her stories entitled *Growin' Up a Hoosier*. Her stories as I remember them were narrated in both her child voice and her adult voice and centered on her relationship with her grandparents on her mother's side. My family purchased her cassette tape and from then on car trips and lazy afternoons were accompanied by Lou Ann's voice and stories.

After the loss of a friend last autumn, I found myself in a severe state of agitation and reflection. Unable to relax, I worked off steam pacing around the college, finding comfort in repetitive action and keeping busy. I imagined Lou Ann's voice during this time and the tales of her mischievous child self. While I moved around campus I remembered the excited energy of little Annie Holman collecting worms to go fishing with her grandfather. I retreated to her grandmother's house to the paper-doll window seat, and the backyard bush that she crouched behind to sneak late summer snacks. Her grandmother kept a tin cup of sugar nestled under the rhubarb plants so Annie and her sister could enjoy the summer bounty.

I heard the intonations in her speech. I heard her punctuation as her pitch rose and fell and her words were cut short or came slowly to a full stop. While accommodating my new grief into my existing state of being I began to notice how my manic movements and expressions mirrored the fast-forward speed of her excited voice, and my pauses for reflection matched the quiet of her tender recollections of time spent with her grandfather. I contacted Lou Ann directly through her website and purchased a digital copy of the cassette tape I had worn slow, and felt the peace that I longed for when her CD arrived and I could engage with her call rather than my own recalling.

Listening to her work, I realized the sacred spaces of my own experience. I remembered my mother's homes as organized living spaces which included little havens inspiring careful attention, shifts in mood, and hallowed behaviors from any visitors. Chairs were by sunlight and most often TVs were off. There were a few jars of candies scattered about, and collections of objects referenced trips and people.

I remember my room in our first house in Indiana with orangey shag carpet and a closet big enough to hold my wooden kitchen set. I remember the joy of that retreat, shutting the door and pulling on the light. From inside I developed extensive dialogues and histories for the characters I imagined, and could play every role. The feel of quiet places, intimate spaces, playing alone and undisturbed, those memories are part of my being; I can still slip away in my mind for safe haven; I can still see the world through that sacred imaginative lens.

How much of my memory is authentically mine, how much has been modeled from little Annie Homan's memories and big Lou Ann's style of telling? In this state of wonder I explored other influences, particularly visual, from childhood in an effort to learn more about my current self. I remembered a reproduction of Mary Cassatt's *Little Girl in a Straw Hat and Pinafore* (1886) that was, according to my father, a painting of me as a child, never mind her blue eyes. It hung in our living room. *Two Children at the Seashore* (1884) hung in the stairwell above the light switch where I would sit and chat on the telephone as a teenager. Throughout my life in each museum I have visited I have searched for work by Cassatt and felt both elated and surprised when I've found it. Her portraiture and the color relationships in her painting and intaglio prints appeal to me both aesthetically and compositionally, but also quite intimately as part of my history, part of my home environments.

Further still, I obtained copies of my first illustrated readers, Little Bear by Else Holmelund Minarik with pictures by Maurice Sendak, and I Am a Bunny by Ole Risom, illustrated by Richard Scarry. I noticed their subdued blues and greens, vibrant reds and oranges, and could see my current work as it directly related to those palettes. While I read and re-read these stories I found and was able to name direct influences in color relationships and styles of mark making in my own current work.

Over the last few years my interest in art making and particularly printmaking has lead me to a number of galleries and museum exhibitions

where the work has reinforced my interest in subject matter and storytelling. A particularly significant experience for me was a 2009 retrospective at the Guggenheim which displayed the work of Louise Bourgeois paired with her voice, in her native French, narrating the stories of her making. To stand between the legs of her giant spiders and hear tales of her family's textile operation gave the viewer unique perspectives and purposeful points of entry into the work.

I worked closely with artist Asuka Ohsawa in her Brooklyn studio in preparation for her project *Little Red Riding Hood's Scooter Squad* which appeared in the Deitch Art Parade in 2007. There I had the opportunity to gain some history and further perspective on her work which consists mostly of large scale drawings and paintings that present re-imaginings of well known (often Disney animated) fairy tales and legends, starring sexy subjects accompanied by familiar animal friends. Her sense of humor is conveyed through subject matter; her style with clean lines and crisp color application delivers a vibrating humor and social observation directly to the viewer.

At Mount Holyoke in 2010 I created an installation entitled *Pyxis* as an exploration in de Saussure's theory of the sign. As explained by Donald D. Palmer, the sign is a "combination of a signifier" (the sound image or visual image) "and a signified" (the concept) (Palmer, 19). Palmer further explains that de Saussure believed that there is no inherent or implicit connection between the signifier and the signified, merely conventional relationships between words and meanings.

I wondered about the significance of a ring, a wedding band, and its relationship to legal marriage. Several things contributed to my interest: I had seen a show a year earlier at the Metropolitan Museum of Art focusing on the Italian Renaissance and the Ring; the man that I loved with was from another country and marriage might provide a means of living together legally; my parents were recently divorced; my brother was recently divorced. Privately, legally binding contracts are signed. Publicly wedding bands are exchanged and worn to represent that contract. I wondered how two rings could signify the same idea, “marriage,” all over the world, while the commitments and terms of that agreement are so culturally and personally unique to each pair that wears them. I chose the rings as my signifiers, and set to work to come to terms with how I read them.

In the installation I explored the signifier/signified relationship from that most sacred space in my home, my closet. I manipulated light and fabric so that my living space was entirely blacked out and blocked off; the viewer was given a partial view through the closet door. Further inside was opened chest filled with the final signs— my wedding band signs— of hair, and objects of sex and love.

A connected string of yarn held articles of clothing (his sock, her shirt, my underwear) all stitched with an image of two rings entwined. Below the chest was a stack of books whose authors and protagonists were my education: Willa Cather, Lucy Maude Montgomery, bell hooks. A poem and

contract accompanied the space. The production stood as a parallel for the development of my ideas and opinions relating to marriage and its symbols.

I let my artwork speak to me and what I heard in that closet was many voices. I heard my mother, and little Annie Holman at her window seat, I imagined every crawlspace I had explored and heard my child voice whispering adventure tales or crying quietly and listing grievances.

Through printmaking I have found the unique and pleasurable opportunity to study states of an image from beginning to end, each mark that is added, covered, or burnished away in the metal changes the state of the plate and so alters its history. One final print contains a multitude of proofed opinions that have been ratified and radically changed, or subtly nudged in new directions.

Moving from installation to two-dimensional space was an easy and almost unnoticed transition. It suited my physical and emotional state. The weight of grief, the weight of a long distance relationship and the recalling of painful childhood memories were addressed in the metal plates of printmaking. Etching techniques in intaglio offered the most individualistic of mediums, and the matrix created by the metal's edge gave me a safe space to work within.

Delicate line work and minimally marked plates can exist as thin skeletal bodies of information. Their arrangements and relationships over paper read as maps and as movements. Engraving, etching and drypoint lines define these movements in strong gradients that vary in each placement.

In *Series on a Long Distance Relationship* (image 1) small etched plates are printed in series over large sheets of paper. The paper is scaled to the size of a large world map and the placement of the plates has been determined by significant geographic locations, meeting spots. The plates have been printed fully inked and in their cognates, often overlapping when meetings were in close proximity (image 2). Color was applied by hand and referenced the locations represented (image 3).

In *Prints for Winnie* and *Prints for Janet* (images 4 and 5) I paid homage to the stories of two women whom I greatly admire. For each I used a very small etched plate and handmade kozo paper to apply an abstract island image in chine collé to a larger colored sheet. The larger colored sheet of paper was scaled to the western hemisphere and the small plate images were printed in the geographic regions that each woman identified as homes. Between the kozo paper and etching paper I had applied gold threads, one for each of their children and spouses that accompanied them during the times they were at home in each location. The effect was a network of veins raised into the handmade kozo and family threads coming out from under the lightly etched print.

In prints *After Mary I* and *II* (images 6 and 7), I explored multiple plate processes and color application after the style of Mary Cassatt. I visited a set of her prints, all different versions of *The Fitting* at the Cunningham Center at Smith College, and was able to study between them her varying combination of plates and colors. I sketched out directions, like a recipe, for

myself and used these notes to create two prints referencing her work and subject matter through my own perspective. I incorporated my experience and interest in childhood memories with Cassatt's printing style and collaborated with a model in order to tell a story of reflection and admiration of the matriarchal women of our personal histories. In one print the model wears her mother's robe and reads my favorite childhood book. In another she wears my grandmother's sweater and reads poetry by Wordsworth and Margaret Atwood and "Ode to Childhood" and "Spelling."

In *At German and Polk* a series of prints, I explore memory, fantasy, and current social observations as they relate to my childhood perspective. Drawing from memory, model, and imagination, I represent scenes and views of my childhood home, as well as my childhood imagination. In *German and Polk State 1* (image 8), I present the window of my home that would look in on the dining room; the shutters and window frames are in their original reds and oranges. This was the state of the house when my family moved in. In *German and Polk State 2 and You can't leave dishes in the kitchen sink* (image 9), I present this same dining room window as it belongs in my memory following my mother's home improvements next to a view of my the kitchen where I spent much of my childhood practicing cheers and dances in the reflective kitchen windows. In *Body on Exhibit (A)* (image 10) I worked originally from a model and had in mind a short story that I had written on my first anticipated career path as a live body on exhibit in a museum. Finally *Abstract Americas* (image 11) references the time I spent outside in the natural

world and my childhood tendency to question and critique how we, the United States of America, had settled and claimed “our” lands.

I explored engraving, drypoint and etching techniques, working directly into the metal whenever possible. I have found the transfer of information to be more immediately processed, literally and emotionally, by working in this direct fashion. The burr of the drypoint marks and the deep engraved lines produce thickly inked images in order to reference the richness of memory and imagination.

Into four key plates and six additional plates I applied textures and areas for color through traditional and sugar-lift aquatint, soft-ground etching, and further applied color by hand and *à la poupée*. The colors were chosen from memory and also in homage to Scarry and Sendak using the picture books for reference between runs.

I see my artwork as my autobiography, my history presented in visual print language through exploration of traditional printmaking techniques and experimentation in color and form. I work into the plates and consider each state as a state of mind, keeping track of how and why I am making specific alterations. Each mark or erasure is an opportunity to manage a memory or experience. By tracking changes I can understand myself better.

In Art as Experience, John Dewey uses a pragmatic example of emotional perturbation and human response to illustrate artistic expression.

An irritated person is moved to do something. He cannot suppress his irritation by any direct act of will; at most he can only drive it into [a different channel] he may remember that certain amount of regulated

physical activity is good medicine; and set to work 'tidying,' 'straightening,' 'sorting. . . generally putting things in order (Dewey, 77).

Ordering the objects around him in turn orders his emotions. There is an emotionally fulfilling and objectively meaningful transformation that comes from reexamination and reorganization of experience in a moment of need or crises. Works of art, like punctuation, should draw us from climax, the moment of crises, to a distinguishing and decipherable pause, or accent, or exclamation. We can read this punctuation through form, implicit instructions that guide our experience. Art can be a conversation.

"All language, whatever its medium, involves what is said and how it is said, or substance and form" (Dewey, 106) Dewey states. In an active and successful communication between a work of art and its viewer, a story and its listener, or a book and its reader, often what is being held, being absorbed, being listened to is also examined for historical reference, the artist's influence. The work after all is "formed matter" (Dewey, 109–114) and whatever prior knowledge and experience the creator brings to the table should inform the working process. Here the art work involves both product and its coming to be, noun and verbal action, meaning and the artist's original concept.

Dewey often uses the word 'interpenetration' to describe relationships that work on one another and into one another. Matter and form have such a relationship. Matter must appear first, the raw materials, the native emotion, in

order to be acted upon; without form matter cannot be fully expressive, it cannot bring the viewer to a full and consummating experience. The experience for the viewer is the active receipt, through the mediatory object, of the artist's interests.

History and autobiography are interpenetrable. In A Theory of Autobiography James Olney explains, "autobiography is in one sense history, then one can turn that around and say that history is also autobiography" and so historians/autobiographers impose "their own metaphors on the human past" (Olney, 36). I consider my current body of work as autobiographical, and so my history, too. I aim to present my history as accurately to the viewer as I imagine it to be and therefore referencing and including those perspectives and aesthetics that have permeated my being and become part of my own ways of seeing, recalling and expressing.

This exploration of history, this looking back to significant experiences and influences in order to study and reconsider my current state of being, has been an exercise in capturing my experiences, my influences, and my subsequent perspectives. Honing myself to recognize my marks in relation to the marks of others, I feel in better conversation with my work and derive pleasure from the experience of making.

I believe that in each act of expression there is opportunity for realization, and out of realization an actualized concept about my situation or current social perspective to hold close or move away from. Through expressing my past and current perspectives in print I hope to know myself

more immediately in order to participate meaningfully in dialogue with my neighbors, and from self-reflection/realization find motivations to grow and change.

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CD-ROM Information

1. *2 of 4 from Series on Long Distance*
2010 monoprint 20" x 26"
hardground etching, drypoint, aquatint,
2. *2 of 4 from Series on Long Distance*
2010 monoprint 20" x 26"
hardground etching, drypoint, aquatint
Detail #1
3. *2 of 4 from Series on Long Distance*
2010 monoprint 20" x 26"
hardground etching, drypoint, aquatint
Detail #2
4. *Two Prints for Janet*
 - a.
2010 intaglio 11" x 8.25"
[handmade kozo paper, gold thread]
hardground etching, chine collé
 - b.
2010 intaglio 11" x 8.25"
[handmade kozo paper, gold thread]
hardground etching, chine collé
5. *Two Prints for Winnie*
 - a.
2010 intaglio 14.25" x 8.25"
[handmade kozo paper, gold thread]
hardground etching, chine collé
 - b.
2010 intaglio 14.25" x 8.25"
[handmade kozo paper, gold thread]
hardground etching, chine collé
6. *After Mary I*
2011 intaglio
12" x 15.5", Rives BFK, 22" x 20"
engraving, softground etching, drypoint, aquatint
7. *After Mary II*
2011 intaglio
16" x 12", Rives BFK, 22" x 20"
engraving, hardground etching, drypoint, aquatint

8. *German and Polk State 1*
2011 intaglio
12" x 9", Rives BFK, 22" x 20"
engraving, hardground etching, drypoint, sugarlift, aquatint
9. *German and Polk State 2 and You can't leave dishes in the kitchen sink*
2011 intaglio
9" x 12", Rives BFK, 22" x 20"
engraving, hardground etching, drypoint, sugarlift, aquatint,
10. *Body on Exhibit (A)*
2011 intaglio
9" x 12", Rives BFK, 22" x 20"
engraving, hardground etching, softground etching, drypoint, aquatint,
11. *Abstract Americas*
2011 monoprint
9" x 12", Rives BFK, 22" x 20"
engraving, hardground etching, roulette, drypoint