

Truth and Isolation

By Tegan Forbes

The Okanagan Print Triennial 2012 (OPT 2012) is both a celebration of a traditional medium and a path-finding departure into the profound depths and tactility of contemporary printmaking. This group of original work by twenty artists offers explorations into the fragility of one's physical self, our collective responsibility for the environment, and the dilemma of how individuals seek to express the weight of complex and transient emotions. The creative application of digital technology has given new dimensions to the handcrafted print, and has reawakened the importance of printmaking in contemporary art. The print no longer needs to be contained on a flat rectangular page, and the haptic experience of transferring an image from one surface to another serves merely as a starting point. American artist Judy Pfaff's prints are famous for their use as architecture directly installed in the gallery space and have developed a new ambient discourse. Through the articulation of creativity and material accomplishment, each artist in the OPT 2012 invites the viewer to explore the subtleties of physical wholeness and emotional attachment through shifting perspectives on memory, landscape, and introspection.

Embracing the Obstacle by Claude Arseneault applies the pluralism of hand-articulated and digital printmaking techniques, such as photogravure, etching and aquatint, alongside digital work. The trapped meanings of collected memories that lie in the subconscious arena gently find liberation through the soft visual ambiguity of line and texture. Arseneault invites viewers to temper their perception of the world and enter into her realm of recollection and beauty.

Derek Michael Besant's series titled *Fallen* adds to a conversation on angst with his poetically choreographed images of women surrendering to a fall from the sky. Besant's series places the viewer somewhere between witness and rescuer to the unfolding event. Through a combination of printmaking techniques including ink transfer, screenprinting, and varnish stencils Besant evokes questions pertaining to security, and the individual's gravitational pull towards truth. Perhaps this work is suggesting that systems of support have failed beyond repair and the veil is now being lifted from our eyes.

Mark Bovey destabilizes our sense of place, perspective, and location, with his detailed drawn images of boats, sea creatures, and flying machines emerging

from a flat surface of rich, black swirls. Ephemeral dream space is a familiar location demonstrated by Bovey through rich fluidic swoops of inky brushstrokes that offer curious commentaries on inconspicuous scenarios emerging from the paper's surface. Through the use of tone transfer, etching, spit bite and relief-printing, Bovey leads the viewer down a subliminal path where anxiety frames the coexistence of past and future memories.

Robert Creighton's minimal figures are shaped onto the paper and appear floating over its surface. Creighton uses mixed intaglio with *chine collé*. His deliberate use of textural interference creates suspended tension, as the figures contemplate their relationship to the empty space of the page. Creighton's prints could be perceived as allegories on how partnerships, individual isolation, and loneliness are translated onto a two-dimensional surface.

Investigations of the human condition through the recollection of plant life are echoed in Elizabeth D'Agostino's delicate print-based installations. Her work is a reminder of the intrinsic human kinship with environmental rhythms. D'Agostino outlines an ethereal pattern of how to remember the transparency of earthly fragility.

Memory and history also resonate in harmony in April Dean's work, reconciling a renewed sense of physical interconnectedness. She uses woodblock, photo intaglio, and wax on rice paper to articulate volume and texture. Dean's organic objects oscillate between the tenderness of fragility and being worn through the passing of time. These delicate balances present an eloquent parallel describing how the human body resonates through life.

The cyclical elements that affect the course of a society are reflected through the intensity of Pamela Dodds' woodcut prints. Piercing white lines rhythmically emerge from the cover of blackness, forming a symmetrical composition that speaks of wholeness and unity. Dodds' prints communicate the ongoing cycle of loss, pain, and survival that is embedded into our collective soul.

John Graham expresses his mythological storytelling through the process of etching, resulting in decadent layers of colour and texture. Indentations, scratches and surface marks on the substrate show the symbolic relationship of physical fragility and the awakening desire to emerge through the soft shifting plane of introspection. His fanciful figures transcend the surface of his prints, as they emerge from the realm of the unconscious. Graham's print titled *Weightless Meaning* creates an organic hybrid space, full of idiosyncratic appeal that beckons the viewer to listen to the unfolding memoir.

The physical manifestation of human detachment from the amoebic landscape screams into being through Valerie Guimond's bold and evocative imagery. Her screenprint titled *Oeil de Béton* shows the details of a stark, bony figure filtering oxygen through an ancient gas mask. The ravaged female body communicates a lifetime of being denied sustenance. The emotional impact of distress and suffering confronts the viewer, accentuating the need to turn away from what provokes discomfort.

The etiology of human responsibility is complex and multilayered. However, by reflecting on the nature of interior knowledge, consciousness can reawaken to inspire feelings and memories of belonging. Liz Ingram translates shimmering pixels of lucent ink dancing across the photographic human form as an embodied sense of liberation. The combination of digital print and drypoint provoke sensations connecting light, water, and shadow. Ingram entices the viewer to enter her realm of wonder and uncertainty, rekindling fundamental oneness and connection with nature.

Saskia Jetten constructs a bold chronicle of personal reflection by means of outlined portraits on banners of silk and cotton fabric. Her images emerge from the interplay of stone lithography, linocut and woodcut. Jetten's series titled *Passing* incorporates the fantasy of masks and disguises that reveal the often absurd and playful elements of the authentic self. Her three-dimensional surrealist portraits seem playful at first glance, however an undercurrent of melancholy through self-reflection emanates from the work.

Congruent with human despair, ecological systems are forced to relinquish themselves to the mercy of the fractured landscape as depicted in Eveline Kolijin's prints. Charting the cycle of human interference with environmental sustainability, Kolijin gives a visual voice to the artificiality of society that demonstrates increasing detachment from primal origins. Her use of strong colour and geometric patterns through etching, linocut, and *chine collé* denote the perseverance of organisms as they strive to adapt to the repercussion of environmental disaster. Her print titled *Gulf of Mexico Deadzone* is in specific reference to the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

The collaborative team Rodney Konopaki and Rhonda Neufeld scrutinize the significance and peculiarity of human touch that emphasizes the articulation of mark making exclusive to printmaking. Through the synchronicity and spontaneity of teamwork drawing, their intaglio images present hectic, chaotic patterns that seem to vibrate in resonance with the specific locations in which they were working. Konopaki and Neufeld's collaborative form of printmaking is intent on expressing the alliance of partnership and solidarity of joint metamorphoses.

Jenn Law is another artist who explores narrative without the presence of the figure. She replaces the figure with a lush understanding of colour that seeks to elevate from the surface of the paper. Using screenprinting and letter transfer, Law's prints explore the education of language acquisition through organic mimicry. Her *Entangled Bank* series speaks to the ubiquitous human condition of metamorphosis that is communicated through the impact of layers, colour, and language. From an evolutionary perspective, Law's work suggests that our human qualities are learned through abstract thought.

Mitch Mitchell implements his memories of space through the recreation of imagined architectural, human territory, using photogravure, photo-lithography and *chine collée*. Mitchell's constructed landscapes offer the viewer no sense of a familiar reference point to help interpret scale, mass, and weighted space. Glistening topographical forms disorient the viewer because of the artist's ambiguous manipulation of perspective.

The disjunctive qualities of analogue and digital print are exquisitely expressed through Shawn Reynar's use of lithography, intaglio, screen and digital techniques. Cohabitation of his digitally generated lines in relation to the precision of controlled handmade marks build layers of texture in Reynar's carefully manicured compositions. His *Generated Line/Essential Tremor* series explores the tension between the spontaneous and the controlled elements of configuration, resulting in a sculptural sensibility.

Pudy Tong's artistic direction evolves from his self described "pseudo-philosophical effort to orient oneself in the world." Tong's adapted television images in his print titled *President Obama on October Employment Numbers* re-examine our media-saturated society, and explore the contradictions of lost clarity through the overexposure of a single repeated message.

Dana Tosic's use of the female form is also heightened by the use of colour and transparency. In *Everyday Ephemera #1*, sections of the female torso gently go through the slight repetition of mundane tasks. This sequencing of the non-linear time line of the screenprints is given prominence by the formal architecture of the diptych and triptych.

Óscar Valero takes a closer look at pattern and memory through the act synthesizing language into its most basic form. His prints communicate personal touches latent with sympathetic imperfections, inviting the viewer to indulge in the subtle nuances of human communication. Through the texture of Braille and sheet music without words, Valero's prints show scratches of content that are searching for structure.

Ericka Walker presents a perspective on the interrelatedness of human culture's destructive force with its natural surroundings. Through her potent graphic propaganda-style work with its nostalgic imagery, Walker speaks of how lived history paves the path for new a future. Her multi-coloured lithograph titled *Labor* reflects the symbiotic relationship between farming and machine-based warfare, exhibiting how both sides of a conflict claim civilians and landscape as enemies.

The OPT 2012 is full of sensation, linking materials to ideas that deepen the conversation about evolution and the range and depth of human emotion. Printmaking continues to develop, change, and grow. Artists challenge and utilize new printmaking techniques, heightening the potential of creative tools. Rich investigations that are communicated through art become a mirrored reflection of our modern world. Perhaps the most effective way to summarize the diversity of contemporary printmaking is to say that artistic practice evokes an astute awareness about the choices that affect society as a whole, along with the ambition to nourish the power of human resilience and inspiration.

Tegan Forbes is a professional artist and educator. Her work focuses on revolutionary and social art practices. In 2011 she returned to the West Coast from New York City, where she had been part of a collective of artists working with inner city youth designing and painting murals in urban areas. Forbes' artistic background is in print media. She has taught at the Vancouver Island School of Art, the Alberta College of Art & Design (Calgary) and at Concordia University in Montreal. As an artist she has participated in projects at the Banff Centre and at the Bauhaus University in Weimar, Germany. Her art practice is inspired by street art and its role in community narratives.