

For me, printmaking is a direct expression, as in a feedback loop, of consciousness and the human condition: the bilateral symmetry of the plate to print reflecting our bodies, our imprint. It is a direct method to look at ones self in the mirror; a psychological means to literally face one self while making work. This phenomenon occurs throughout the processes intrinsic to print: in the conceiving, in the making, in the reflecting. I am consistently and continually intrigued by what this process offers emotionally and aesthetically. It may not always be what I want to see, but it is revealing and it is compelling enough to warrant continued and prolonged investigation.

As I see it, when one etches into a plate, and prints it, the resulting marks are just that – the impression of an etching plate printed on paper. They have that visceral, illusionary, vexing, paradoxical and enchanting quality. They feel like what they are – marks made in time and marks made in an instant. That's a print, irreducible. It's not a reverse of the plate – where right is left and left is right, but mirrored, like bilateral symmetry. Because I see print in this way, I can relay to the plate sensations of my specific physicality, my body.

As an etcher, I am the little scribe behind the Etch-a-Sketch Glass. When I look at my prints, I see I have been drawing behind the paper. I stand facing myself. I recognize that the person one is in the mirror points to their right when one you point to one's left. Looking in a mirror, you have mentally placed yourself in the mirrored image's position. You have mentally turned around. You are facing yourself. A print, in fact, is the same. It is not a reversal, but an imprint – no more or less.

In this way, when an experienced etcher works on a plate, etching out metal and manipulating the surface, an experienced etcher is not working in reverse where right is left and left is right, but from the inside out. We, the viewers, as well as the etcher viewing the print on paper are literally faced with a literal kind of visual palindrome.

Some of us really believed Marshall McLuhan. The medium can really be the message. But, what of the medium? What if the medium, as described so eloquently by William Ivins, is an ever-changing, fluid reflection of the times? This has got to make for some exciting printmaking, in the right (literal)hands and (virtual)heads. It is my desire to be one of those sets of hands and heads, to practice and to teach printmaking in all its permutations, from dry-point to digital, the layers of print as real and as mutable as our world.

Sometimes when I work, things are sure footed, sometimes less so. Always, forms evolve. They turn and I rely on a sense for which I cannot find a proper name to hesitate the turning, to coalesce a given form. Sometimes this is founded upon observed natural forms, artifacts. Sometimes the form feels invented. Sometimes it jumps, for example, at metaphors for light or color, natural and unnatural, or a host of other associations.

In the medium of the hand pulled print color and form can be separate investigations into meaning, effect, response. I am very comfortable with that fluid hierarchy: form and color are unlinked and either can assume a dominate role which is not determined until I call the print done. This arena gives me the best ability to get at meaning, and it is complicated enough to serve the purpose of entrancing my attention. The way I work is also how I ultimately make my way in this world.

Shelley Thorstensen