

When one etches into a plate and prints it, the resulting marks are exactly that: the impression of an etched plate on paper. They carry a visceral, illusionary, vexing, and paradoxical quality. They feel like what they are—marks made over time, and marks made in an instant. That is the irreducible nature of a print.

A print is often described as a reversal, where right becomes left. I do not experience it this way. Instead, I understand it as a form of mirroring—closer to bilateral symmetry than inversion. Because of this, I am able to relay to the plate sensations of my own physicality, my body.

As an etcher, I sometimes think of myself as a small scribe behind the Etch-a-Sketch glass. When I look at my prints, I feel that I have been drawing behind the paper. I stand facing myself. As with a mirror—where the reflected figure seems to reverse direction, yet requires a mental turning to occupy its position—a print asks the same of us. It is not a reversal, but an imprint—no more, no less.

In this way, an experienced etcher is not working in reverse, but from the inside out. Both the maker and the viewer are confronted with a kind of visual palindrome.

If the medium can be the message, as Marshall McLuhan suggests, then what of the medium itself? As William Ivins described, it is fluid—shaped by its time. This suggests a continually evolving field of printmaking, one that spans processes from drypoint to digital. It is my intention to work within that continuum—to practice and to teach printmaking as both a physical and conceptual language.

In my work, forms are sometimes sure-footed, sometimes less so. They evolve and turn, and I rely on a sense for which I do not have a proper name to slow that turning—to allow a form to coalesce. These forms may arise from observed natural structures or feel entirely invented.

Within the hand-pulled print, color and form can operate as separate investigations into meaning, effect, and response. I am comfortable within this fluid hierarchy, where either may take precedence, and that relationship is not resolved until I determine the work is complete. This structure gives me the greatest access to meaning, and it is complex enough to hold my attention. It is also how I make my way in the world.

Printmaking, for me, is not a method of reproduction, but a way of encountering oneself. For me, printmaking is a direct expression—a kind of feedback loop—between consciousness and the human condition. The bilateral symmetry of plate to print reflects our bodies, our imprint. It becomes a way of looking at oneself in a mirror: a psychological means of facing oneself through the act of making. This occurs throughout the processes intrinsic to print—in conceiving, in making, in reflecting. I remain continually intrigued by

what this process reveals, emotionally and aesthetically. It may not always show me what I want to see, but it is compelling enough to sustain prolonged investigation

—Shelley Thorstensen