

GALLERY TALK

New Britain Museum of Art / NEW/NOW Gallery

Sunday, March 9, 1-3 at 2 p.m.

GRATITUDE FOR TODAY and MY ORIGINS

Thank you, Douglas. First of all, I want to thank you and your helpful & capable staff. Special thanks to James and (esp.) John for helping me mount and install the show. To my incomparable assistant, framer, friend, and artist-in-her-own-right, Laura Savard-Bodwell : my gratitude is beyond words.

I am honored and delighted to be showing my work in this beautiful new wing of the museum. I feel that I have come full circle because I spent my childhood in nearby Farmington, and my mother and father, George and Mary Cheney, were very active in this museum, as well as the Wadsworth Athenaeum. Although they are no longer living, I feel their presence with me tonight, in this space dedicated to both of them. This exhibit is the closest I can come to sharing my work with them. My mother studied art at the Maryland Institute, and my father studied architecture at Yale, so I feel I come by the art gene from both sides. As a child it seemed I was born with a pencil in my hand. I was always drawing, and begging my grandfather for more pads of paper. But I think what gave me the greatest joy and sense of freedom as a child was to walk out in the woods and sit by an old tree or at the edge of a stream and build an imaginary village, a miniature world. Houses made of twigs, acorn caps for bowls, stones and pine needles-these were my medium, and to a great degree natural materials are still central to my work. They are imbedded in the collagraph plates I make, the installations I construct, and the imagery I draw from.

THE FRAGILE WEB OF LIFE

Nature is what sustains me, what inspires me, and I turn to it when, in the words of the poet Wendell Berry, "despair for the world grows in me." Here I find what he calls 'the peace of wild things.' Like many people I have grown increasingly concerned about the degradation of our environment, the loss of many of the species that contribute to this fragile

web we call life. We are not separate, above, apart. We are related, interconnected to all, and what happens to the earth happens to us. I have been making "Earth Envelopes", like the three behind me, since 2002, to invoke this idea of interdependency. Here is turtle laying her eggs, and inside this one a snake with hers; inside of the Cave piece, there is evidence of the human hand (palimpsest).

INNER TERRAIN

I call this show "Inner Terrain". There is a wonderful short poem by the German poet Rilke that speaks about the "inner." I will say it for you:

Ah, not to be cut off,
not by the slightest partition
shut out from the law of the stars.

The inner---what is it?
If not intensified sky,
hurled through with birds and deep
with the winds of homecoming.*

*Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Stephen Mitchell, Rainer Maria Rilke/
Last Poems, Okeanos Press: 1989.

The inner--- what is it? If not intensified sky, hurled through with birds
and deep with the winds of homecoming.

What beautiful words!

So here is the surprise: the outer world is in us. What makes the stars
makes us---we are elementally the same. And the outer world can be a
mirror for the feelings, desires, wounds and joys in us. The piece that
reflects that feeling for me is titled "Deep with the Winds of
Homecoming", and it is to the right of the door as you enter. It can be
read like an open book, with the linear elements from nature (inked pine
needles) flying in and out (breaking the picture plane).

HEALING THE BREAK

Let's look at a series that reflects this idea of the outer world being a mirror for the inner. Here is the story. In 2006 I broke my wrist badly. I needed surgery to implant a titanium plate and 10 screws. I was beside myself, unable to work in the studio. So I read. I came across an article about the rediscovery of animals thought to be extinct deep in the jungle of Papua New Guinea. They were so unafraid of people the scientists could pick them up and cradle them. That night I dreamed of a golden-fronted bowerbird (one of the "extinct" animals pictured in the article*) flying into my wrist and knitting the bones in place. I later made collagraph plates in the shape of my hand, forearm, and the bowerbird, and went to Peregrine Press to make the suite of prints. Because my wrist was still in a cast, Tom helped me (a first!). When I went back to the surgeon, he said I needed no physical therapy. Making the art strengthened and healed me on many levels. On later reflection I realized the connection back to the outer world, and the need for the break to heal between us and other creatures.

** This article is in the reference book in the gallery if you want to read it.

MONHEGAN ISLAND & STONES

I have been fascinated by stones all my life and never tire of painting them. On Monhegan Island, Maine where I live part of the year, the rocks have been wave-washed, tumbled by glaciers, rubbed smooth by time. They surround me on the island. Monhegan itself is one big rock. I love this island, the artists I share it with, and the stones. I have tried to transplant Monhegan to this room, through the watercolors & monotypes of stones, the installation, the "Navigating by Heart" series, and the artist's books. Please take time to see how you change the installation on the floor and how it changes for you as you move.

----Kate Cheney Chappell

PRINTMAKING: a footnote about my process.

I have always been a painter. I had been trained in etching and traditional printmaking techniques in Paris in the 60's. Fifteen years ago I was introduced to monotype. I took workshops in monoprint techniques, and a whole new medium opened itself to me. I love the pure surprise of the process. It freed me to experiment. There is a great variety of mark, texture and layering possible in printmaking. The monotypes, collagraphs, and mixed media pieces in this show began with plates moving through an etching press, transferring through weight the imprint of imagery on paper.

MONOPRINTS: Most of the works here are monoprints. That means the image is not painted directly, but created on a plate made of copper or Plexiglas or, in the case of collagraphs, on matt board treated with gesso, marked, and sealed. Vibrant oil-based etching inks are rolled onto them with a brayer. The image is then printed onto paper using a large etching press (I use a French Tool press or a Charles Brand press). The image is then transferred to the paper under extreme pressure by running it by hand-turning a wheel that turns a heavy roller over a moving steel bed. This process may take many passes, with layers of color and imagery building with each pass. I usually like to do a suite of monoprints instead of one monotype at a time. That way there is a chance for the imagery to transform through layering and placement. You can see this in the 8 collagraphs from the "Healing the Break" series. I made the actual plates in the shape of hand, forearm and bird, different on both sides. Another suite of prints, "Wintering Over" was done in a single residency in the winter of 2007 at the Vermont Studio Center.

INSTALLATIONS: There are two installations in this show. The one you see first is on the wall as you enter. Titled "Armistice," the line of arrowheads with reed shafts as you come in the door. The second one is on the floor in the adjacent room: "Go Inside the Stone," named after the first line of the poem "Stone" by Charles Simic. Even though they are different from the framed pieces in the show, they still have printmaking in them. Can you guess where?