Dennis Olsen
artist statement about the work

“Tales and Trails” Two person exhibition with Meredith Dean

In 2009 I began a series of intaglio portraits of fictitious characters using a technique of hand-drawn frottage and the sampling of the tool marks used on Canadian, British and Brazilian banknotes, among other sources on Mylar sheets. These are then converted to intaglio plates and printed by hand in a traditional manner, using chine colle. As the Mylar drawings emerge distinct personalities are formed and I allow them to develop unhindered. Like authors who frequently say that their fictitious characters take them in unexpected directions, such journeys lead me to places that I have never visited and demand a resolution that can only be described as discovery. I permit myself to explore themes I have never used in previous work: humor and silliness, vulnerability and pomposity, anger and tenderness. The project grew quickly into a body of work that resembled inhabitants of a village—a village that exists in no specific location and at no historical time.

Early on I began to write short narratives suggested by each finished portrait. These narratives resemble what some are calling “Flash Fiction”, in that I limit myself to three sentences or less to relate a story. I approach the writing of these short fictions with the same intuitive method that informs the drawings. Where these characters come from remains a mystery to me and I do not wish it to be otherwise. I am continually intrigued by their presence and want my viewers to share my sense of discovery. To engage the viewer further I have sometimes written the narratives on the wall next to the framed works, or alternatively, the narratives can be written on the labels for each work. This allows the viewer to first examine the portrait and then read the narrative. I have observed viewers who continue to go back and forth between the image and the text, and are thus slowed down and engaged.


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