Inescapably, we fall into reverie. We idly daydream, mindfully or otherwise, meandering along pathways of memory and desire. Some warn that while musing, we “waste” time, become too “lost” in thought, lapse into illusory notions, or risk descending into melancholy. Others caution that because the word reverie derives from both the French, to daydream, and the Middle French, resver, to hallucinate, it embodies the potential not only for revelation but self-delusion. Yet artists notoriously cultivate reverie and become especially alert to the way such journeys allow us to savor pleasant sensations, explore anxieties, and make transformative discoveries. In recent decades, advances in brain imaging and neuropsychology have reshaped debates—among artists as well as scientists—about the formation of memory and identity. Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman has pointed out the astonishing degree to which we react automatically and overestimate our capacity for rational decision-making. In Thinking Fast and Slow he argues convincingly that we alternate between contrasting modes of thought—both of which are fallible. He proposes that we visualize our brain function as “an uneasy interaction between two fictitious characters: fast-reacting automatic and emotional System 1 and slow, effortful, attentive, and evaluative System 2 (“the person who we think we are”). Acknowledging that so name or personify complex physiological processes commits a “sin in the professional circles in which I travel,” Kahneman states that such fictions are necessary to clear communication and comprehension.

Like many contemporary artists creating art both “fast and slow,” Serena Perrone embraces such necessary fictions. She not only explores the dangerous allure of narrative fallacies, but the way imaginary constructs can convey valuable insights and internal truths. Examining the myriad forms of reverie, both pleasurable and perilous, her artworks present multiple ways of thinking simultaneously—intuitively projecting and analytically reframing diverse concepts of self and time. Her works confront the loss, longing, and fear that well up unexpectedly in reverie as well as the redeeming power of art to transform and mediate intense emotions. Her imagery draws from diverse sources—both volcanic and unsettling—ranging from childhood memories of family separation to her observations of volcanic phenomena around the world, including sites in Italy, Japan, and most recently, Iceland. Although her mesmerizing figure groups and landscapes revel in reverie, they are also critically analytical and self-conscious.

Perrone’s art also demonstrates affinities with the writings of Craig Arnold, a celebrated poet whose obsession with exploring volcanoes in countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, Columbia, Italy, and Japan led to his disappearance and presumed death in 2009 on the island of Kuchinoerabujima, Japan. Swelling through a form of solipsistic communion with the sublime, Arnold described himself as a Volcano Pilgrim and wrote an eponymous blog that described his journeys to the summits of various volcanoes until just before his death. In a blog entry dated April 26, 2009, he describes intervening to prevent a weasel-like creature from crossing a dangerous road and then adds: “If nothing else you have saved a life today. A life other than your own, that is. Danger has a way of cutting through melancholy, the real fear blinding you to the fear dimly imagined. If you could only always just have escaped death, you would never be sad again.”

One might wonder whether there really is a consciousness of dreams. A dream can be so strange that it seems that another subject has come to dream within us. To convince ourselves that they are really ours, we must retell/relive these dreams. Afterwards, we make up accounts of these, stories from another time, adventures from another world.

― Gaston Bachelard, La Poétique de la Rêverie

“Odd as it may seem, I am my remembering self, and the experiencing self who does my living, is like a stranger to me.”

― Daniel Kahneman, Thinking Fast and Slow

In Our Cinematic Lives, 2008, color etching and aquatint with chine colle, 15 x 18 inches

Serena Perrone: The Art of Reverie and Other Necessary Fictions

By Andrea Packard, List Gallery Director
Later that day, with greater levity, he writes:

"...as she writes:

Made Flesh

..."

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..."
contradicting and fragmentary modes of representation prompt us to wonder to what extent the familiar world we see is as fragile and treacherous as it appears. Perrone’s ambitious series in the Realm of Reverie (2006 –2008), which is composed of fifty works, is a follow-up to her series in In the Realm of Reverie

Perrone’s series over a dozen overt scenes representing different historical periods, cultures, and geographies. Each scene is observed from a tree branch by her identical twin or alter-ego whose self-observance demonstrates a distinct mode of experience, from the ritualistic, task-oriented, or playful to the reflective and speculative or discerning and self-aware. Collectively, they represent some of the cycling modes of consciousness that alternately shape human experience. Like such complex and often paradoxical images of childhood, Perrone’s recurring images of houses and buildings allow us to both glimpse the lived, further imbues the scene with temporal and geographic accuracy. However, in this work, like so many of Perrone’s pictures, the aura of specificity contrasts with ample evidence of the artist’s fanciful inventions: the improbability of the lone child holding a lit candle while sitting in a swamp, the fact that the child looks directly at us with a slightly perturbed expression; and the flat decorative quality that makes the scene appear as if it were a children’s book cover. In contrast to the girl’s calm and in contrast to the softly sophisticated realism of the distant vistas, the imagery defined by the woodcut print is even more inventive, theatrical, and surreal. Framing motifs such as the Baroque finials and floating spheres in the corners of printing. In contrast to the dark metallic golds and umbers of the woodcut ink, she portrays the greenish brown and gold balcony, undulating tree canopy, and dark cloud patterns. Such visions contrast with the comparative immediacy, clarity, and drama of geometric. This woodcut print is even more inventive, theatrical, and surreal. Framing motifs such as the Baroque finials and floating spheres in the corners of the image, evokes a sense of a place where memories are produced. Yet like memory, the balcony is surprisingly fragile, flat, and flattened rendering of the surrounding grass and foliage. On closer inspection, we see that the space could easily crumble or imaginatively reconfigure. The symmetrical layout of the woodcut scenes, disclaims any hint of a disturbing or unsettling scene. The two mediums comment on each other, questioning the space could easily crumble or imaginatively reconfigure.

Exploring the notion of home as inescapably alluring and elusive. These works immediately bring to mind the writings of Gaston Bachelard (1884 –1962), whose place” where memories are produced. Yet like memory, the balcony is surprisingly fragile, flat, and flattened rendering of the surrounding grass and foliage. On closer inspection, we see that the space could easily crumble or imaginatively reconfigure. The symmetrical layout of the woodcut scenes, disclaims any hint of a disturbing or unsettling scene. The two mediums comment on each other, questioning the

Phantom vessels and the Bastions of Memory (v)

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If Bachelard were alive, I imagine that he would appreciate the way Perrone’s prints both express a nostalgia for lost spaces—the wellspring of our imaginative being—and encourage deliberative reflection; he would also admire Perrone’s insistence on spicing the beauty of her images with an edgy and idiosyncratic specificity that prevents them from becoming saccharine or picturesque. As he cautions:

“Over-picturesqueness in a house can conceal its intimacy. This is also true in life. But it is much starker in dreams. For the real houses of memory, the houses to which we return in dreams, the houses that are rich in unalterable oneirism, do not readily lend themselves to description. … All we communicate to others is an orientation toward what is secret without ever being able to tell the secret objectively.”

For Perrone as well as for Bachelard, the “reality” of each image is not connected to its verisimilitude—its likeness to actual places—but its orientation toward engaging the poetics of space, memory, and identity. Although it is tempting to explore the rich trove of personal stories that have informed Perrone’s prints, her art continually reminds us that the search for essential sources inevitably proceeds through a series of fictive and culturally laden filters. Critiquing notions of unitary meaning, Perrone celebrates the inventiveness of the mind as it continually constructs new frames of reference, alternately suspending disbelief and reasserting deliberative analysis. Probing not actual places but successive ideations of childhood, home, and travel, Perrone provides us with gateways for both reverie and mindful elasticity.

Footnotes

3. ibid., pp. 28-29.
8. ibid., p. 121.

Acknowledgements

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I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Swarthmore staff members who so often enhance gallery projects and have contributed to the success of Serena Perrone: Jennifer Rahilly, Bill Maguire, Bernard Deles, June Cianfrana, Doug Hansen, and Betsy Lee. It has also been a great pleasure to work with Cade Tompkins, who represents the artist. Many thanks to Cade Tompkins Projects, Providence, Rhode Island for enhancing this exhibition and publication with crucial logistical support, information, and funding. Last, I would like to thank Serena Perrone for her artistic vision, collegial approach, and generosity of spirit.

All images appear Courtesy Cade Tompkins Projects, Providence, Rhode Island.
Tristessa: Reappearance of the Vanished Fillicudi (iii), 2006, woodcut with silverpoint and goldpoint drawing, 48 x 72 inches

The Origin of Self-Sacrifice (iv), 2006–07, woodcut with silverpoint and goldpoint drawing, 48 x 72 inches
Spanning the Nebrode: The View of Here from There (vi), 2008, woodcut with silverpoint and goldpoint drawing, 48 x 72 inches

Into the Waking World (vii), 2008, woodcut with silverpoint and goldpoint drawing, 48 x 72 inches
Prints from Maintaining a Safe Distance and Going to Bed, 2012, photolithography and silkscreen with overlaid color on fabric, suite of 10 prints, 11 x 15 inches each
Fictive Homelands, 2009, all images in this series are woodcut and silverpoint on Mylar, 9 ¾ x 12 inches.

From upper left: Point of Departure, Echoes Sounds like Tumbling Stones in the Water at Dusk, Escape from the End of the World, Blessing the Hunters of Fish, Slaying the Shadow of Nemesis, The Auditory Evidence of the World of Animals, in Desperate Search of the World of Plants.

Adventures in Echolocation: Somnambulist, 2010, drypoint with chine collé, 16 x 20 inches.
Serena Perrone

Education
2002 MFA Printmaking, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI
2000 College of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL

Selected Solo Exhibitions
2013 Serena Perrone: Riverside, curator: Arandas Packard, List Gallery, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA
2012 Serena Perrone: Maintaining a Safe Distance and Living to Tell, curator: Andrea Packard, List Gallery, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA
2011 Opera/Opera: A Kinship Exchange, Project of the Philadelphia Art Alliance, Eastwick, Philadelphia, PA

Selected Group Exhibitions, Portfolios, & Collaborations
2014 Our North, curator: Marianne Barney in collaboration with Photographic Projects and the CREATE Center for Art and Innovation in Smart Environments, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH
2013 Winter/relating with bitten, Art League Houston, Houston, TX
2011 Paper Tales, curators: Ron Kharland, Community Arts Center, Washington, PA
Winter/relating with bitten, Art League Houston, Houston, TX

Publications
Perrone, Serena: In the Realm of Reverie, riSD/Sol Koffler Gallery, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI, 2012

Other Philagrafika 2010 projects:
- Selected Public Collections
  - Avenir Foundation, Woodbridge, CT
  - Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH
  - Detour: A Print/Painting/Performance Exchange, Philadelphia, PA
  - Full Spectrum: Prints from the Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia, PA
- Pittsburgh: Printmaking without Limits, Pittsburgh, PA
- Pervasive: Printmaking without Limits, Screenprint Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

Selected by C.E. Bringer Studio, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, Philadelphia, PA

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- Full Spectrum: Prints from the Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia, PA
- Pervasive: Printmaking without Limits, Screenprint Gallery, Philadelphia, PA