

That's Inked Up: Debora Oden's Raw Linear Fields

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Debora Oden's work emphasizes repeated line, building forms out of ambiguity with shadowy structure and the implication of narrative through the organization of symbolic elements.....

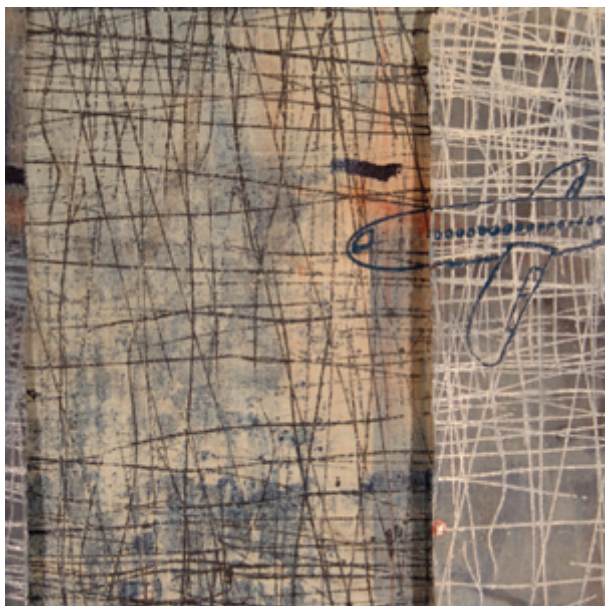


Hmm, that's a mouthful for what the viewer experiences as a purely visceral response. In fact, the visual receptors are working full-throttle in most of these images. I came across Oden's work when looking at the list of artists participating in University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point 'Monoprint 2013' workshop,(5/31-6/6/2013). (For those curious souls amongst you, I will be reviewing that workshop shortly, so stay tuned, my inked up comrades).

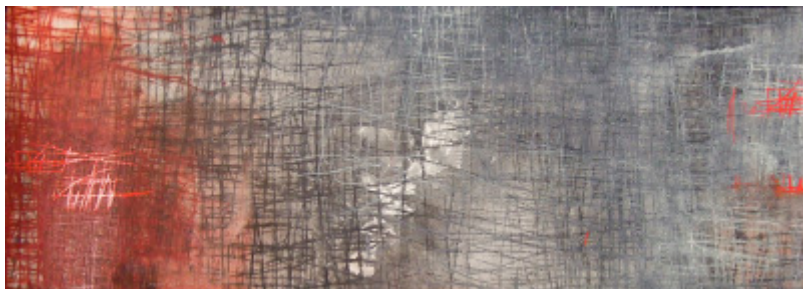
Oden's built-up linear scratches remind me of quiet spaces quiet where no one would dare to speak in normal-decibled voices. These are spaces where one hears whispers and fragmented stories ushered in hushed tones. Oden shows us some open patches which allow us a small breathing space, but they become suddenly cluttered with layers and layers of linear chaos. I wasn't able to find much information about Oden's subject for these pieces beyond the technical making of the work (which, as you all know we printmakers can figure that out, so it will not grace this article), but there seem to be inferences toward landscape, and abstracted exterior places. Her colors are sensitively woven together and the tactile nature of the work is also pleasing to the eye.



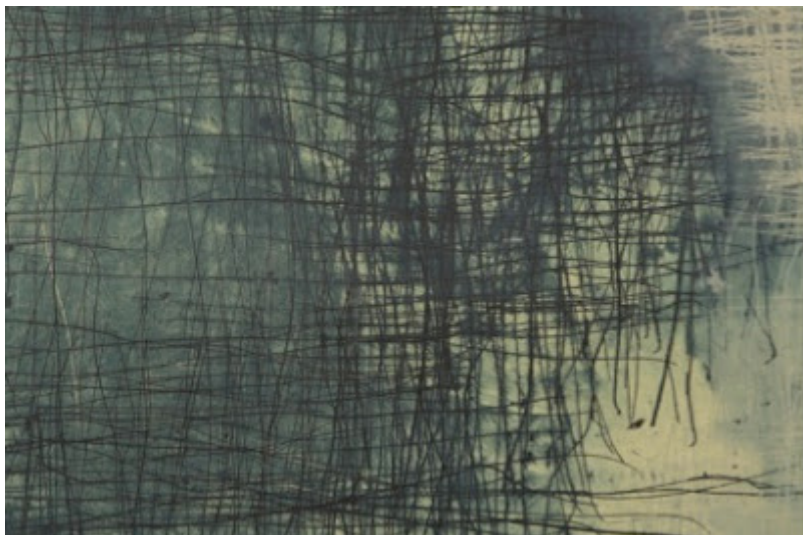
I do appreciate the 'drawing-ness' of these prints and her willingness to let all the lines show, regardless of whether they work or not, and they mostly work. The rawness of her overlaid lines, like the frayed out feel of a old curtain sheer, reveals more about oneself and the acquiring and unraveling of one's life experiences. Oden is letting us inside of herself, seeing all the goo and sinews of her memories and her nerve-endings. It can be uncomfortable for some to comprehend the work in this context, but it feels correct. Some of the pieces have a tiny deliberate addition of three red dots, like dots of one's own blood, but more likely they represent energy chakras. This adds some metaphysical aspect to the work, but I 'get it' without them just as well.



Once in a while Oden puts in some recognizable object from the outer world, like the airplane above. They are drawn more playfully, but quite frankly, they do not add meaningful interpretation to the work. It's almost as if the artist doesn't trust herself to let the lines just 'be' enough. If she lost and found the plane instead of letting us truly see all of it, then it could add to the piece more effectively. The print below expands the spatial depth for us, and brings a connection with the field painters and the abstract 'oneness' of Mark Rothko. Here, we are inside the composition, walking through the lines, with the lines, in a space with out heaven or earth. Her pops of red bring us in with the picture, as though they are living souls that we have found in a fog.



Yet my favorite of this group is this last image. Cool greens and dark blue-grey-blacks permeate the surface. We are walking along at a river's edge in late summer, at dusk, under some heavy-hanging willow tree branches . Here, the air is heavy with moisture and dew, but our oneness with nature is complete, and voicelessly understood. Oden is well on her way to creating an abstract language of line as we've seen before with the likes of Cy Twombly, but in her case the work is less superficially gestural. Her lines are measured, but not deliberate. They communicate effectively without needing to be violently aggressive. There is an organic fact-finding in her drawing approach, and as I said before she is comfortable with our seeing 'all' of her creative process, which goes against the grain of a lot of printmakers who work and re-work their image, making the most microscopic corrections to perfect their image. I applaud Oden's release from such constraints and hope more 'artists' will embrace printmaking in a similarly free and courageous manner.



EDUCATION

M.F.A. University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE

B.F.A. University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Savannah College of Art and Design, Savannah, GA

University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point, Stevens Point, WI

University Place Art Center, Lincoln, NE

Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lincoln, NE

FELLOWSHIPS and AWARDS

Individual Artist Fellowship-Encouragement Award, Nebraska Arts Council, Lincoln, NE

Residency Scholarship, Anderson Ranch, Snowmass Village, CO

A-Z Recognition Award, Roots and Crown, Great Plains Museum, Lincoln, NE

The Arton Paper Award, 77th

Annual International Competition: Printmaking, The Print Center, Philadelphia, PA

Vreeland Award for Fine Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE

Kimmel Fellowship in Studio Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE

Eisentrager-Howard Assistantship, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE

UNL Graduate Assistantship, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE

Regents Tuition Fellowship, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NE

Lincoln Print Group Travel Award, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE

Coleman Award for Printmaking, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Museum of Nebraska Art, Kearney, NE

Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO

The Dose Makes the Poison, Folsom Gallery, University Place Art Center, Lincoln, NE

Recent Work, Folsom Gallery, University Place Art Center, Lincoln, NE

What Ships Are Built For, Eisentrager-Howard Gallery, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE

New Prints, Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts, Nebraska City, NE

Large Drawings, The Rotunda Gallery, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE

COLLECTIONS

Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, NE

Shook Hardy & Bacon, Kansas City, MO

Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, NE

Department of Fine and Performing Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE

Department of Art, University of Dallas, Irvine, TX

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