

# A 2016 STATE OF MIND

## PRINTMAKERS TACKLE THE ISSUES

Why is it that certain facets of our life become bigger than life? Why do some issues eat at the core of who and what we are – and cause us to passionately focus on it – to make change? When we grasp the gravity of why “this” (whatever it may be) is important to us, why do we tenaciously persevere to make a difference? Quite simply – “because it matters.”

Those passions, those drives, those desires to make a difference are executed differently by different people. For civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., it was spearheading peaceful civil disobedience protests. For journalist Gloria Steinem, it was portraying a Playboy bunny in the Playboy Club to later write about the sexist treatment firsthand in her book. For athlete-activist adventurer Erik Weihenmayer, it was to conquer the summit of Mount Everest and to later lead others with special challenges to live active and purposeful lives and attain new heights – including guiding six blind Tibetan teenagers up the north side of Everest.

While perhaps not as grandiose or earth-shattering, the artists featured in the “2016, A State of Mind” exhibition by members of The Boston Printmakers at the Lamont Gallery on the Phillips Exeter campus in Exeter, N.H., are making a statement nonetheless. And they are making a difference.

Traditionally, printmaking has been known as an important vehicle for social change, and this particular election year has certainly provided lavish amounts of fodder to select from. “The artwork presented in this exhibition parallels the



heightened emotional state of the 2016 presidential election,” said Bob Tomolillo, secretary of The Boston Printmakers and organizer of the show along with committee members Sandra Cardillo and Christiane Corcelle, “and when the viewer absorbs the artwork and understands the printmaker’s intent, undoubtedly the effect will be powerful.”

The range of topics is vast. They offer an honest reflection of our times and an independent personal vision of the artist as a printmaker. Energy conservation, LGBTQ rights, global warming, national security, immigration, animal rights, voter suppression and privacy are some of the challenges facing us in today’s world. Over 80 artists from 33 states and Canada, working in a variety of techniques and styles, tackled the issues. It was challenging to select only a handful to feature from the 148 images.

Several of the printmakers felt an affinity with animal rights issues. Massachusetts printmaker Nancy Diessner was compelled to create a series of photopolymer, multi-plate prints, which included “Blindsight XI,” a disturbing image of a deer. Her series featured animals killed by a big game hunter who prized them as trophies: the largest horns, the most beautiful specimen, or the last of their kind from around the world. She found the creatures in a Montana taxidermy shop where they were undergoing restoration. Her artistic goal was to give the creatures a new world in which to exist and to honor the relationship with animals and nature, as well as to offer a commentary on the human impulse to kill and stuff animals so that we can admire and possess them.

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Nancy Diessner, *Blindsight XI*, multi-plate intaglio, 2015, framed: 37" x 31".





Melody Knight Leary, *From Here To God*, 2012, Photopolymer Intaglio with chine colle' and watercolor, 15" X 7".

Gloucester, Mass. printmaker Coco Berkman explained how the reductive process of printmaking forces one to think backwards, twice, when creating the piece. In printmaking, she explains, you're always working with a reverse image. Her work, "And So...The Bear," also an animal rights piece, is about a bear behind bars that she "met" in South Korea who affected her deeply. "He was huge and

brimming with life force," she said, "but alone and pacing in a small cage." In a land that used to be inhabited with many wild bears, today there are no wild bears and very little wildlife. Born in the United States, she believes that there is endless arguing over standards of living while we continue to abuse whatever natural environment there is left. "I grieve for our wildlife – our sacred animals fading into a mist where only dreams and legends will remember them."

A color reduction woodcut print by Cathie Crawford, "Likeness of Being," underwent eight runs through the press before completion. The Illinois artist captured a heron in a photo and then rendered it as a woodcut print. What's fascinating about this work is Crawford's ever-enamored obsession with the changing hues of water, sky and land. She uses color for emotional impact, and she is especially

attracted to water for its restorative powers – a source of replenishment and rejuvenation. While her art does not tend to be political, she said she's seen the bleaching of the coral reefs as a scuba diver, and witnessed the disappearance of the Mer de Glace glacier in France. She's concerned about global warming and the impact of fossil fuels on the environment.

Covering the social interaction/communication topic, a couple of artists resorted to more traditional renditions in their art. David Avery, a California-based practitioner of traditional black-and-white etchings, has been drawn to the works and techniques of the master etchers and engravers of the past 400 years. His beautifully executed "Too Close to the Sun" is a variation on the 16th century Dutch artist Hendrick Goltzius' "Icarus." The images of that time were often commentaries on the political struggles of the day. Avery finds the classic pieces serve as a bridge between past thought and contemporary issues, shedding light in a unique way. A close look at "Too Close to the Sun" shows a classic rendition with a contemporary twist. Apparently this modern Icarus has not gained wisdom from the knowledge acquired through the cell phone in his palm...



David Avery, *Too Close to the Sun*, 2016, etching on Van Gelder Simili Japon paper, edition of 30, 6" x 6".



"An Unsustainable Conversation," by Norberto Marrero Pirez, a Cuban artist, is a book that represents his thoughts as a social commentator on the power struggles within a society. In his discourse on existence, love, loneliness and spoken and unspoken words, Pirez asserts that true communication has ceased to be an essen-

and polarized. The New York artist feels the image of the two obviously dichotomous subjects (body language, ethnic background, contrast of black and white...) emphasizes that our country's views have become more agitated and polarized. Too many of us have become extremist, he said. Indeed.

meaning nor social-change nuances, she simply encourages us to step back and catch our breath.

Although not necessarily touting a particular social cause, Bob Tomolillo's "Empathy" is a lithographic drawing that is enchanting because it's so creatively different. The Massachusetts artist's fasci-

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tial component in social interaction. He feels strongly that we don't really listen to each other but rather read a text message in cryptic, banal language, leaving a huge void in our ability to relate to others.

Addressing the exhausting issue of politics, Dennis Revitzky's linocut, "Two Worlds," illustrates that our country's politics have become more agitated

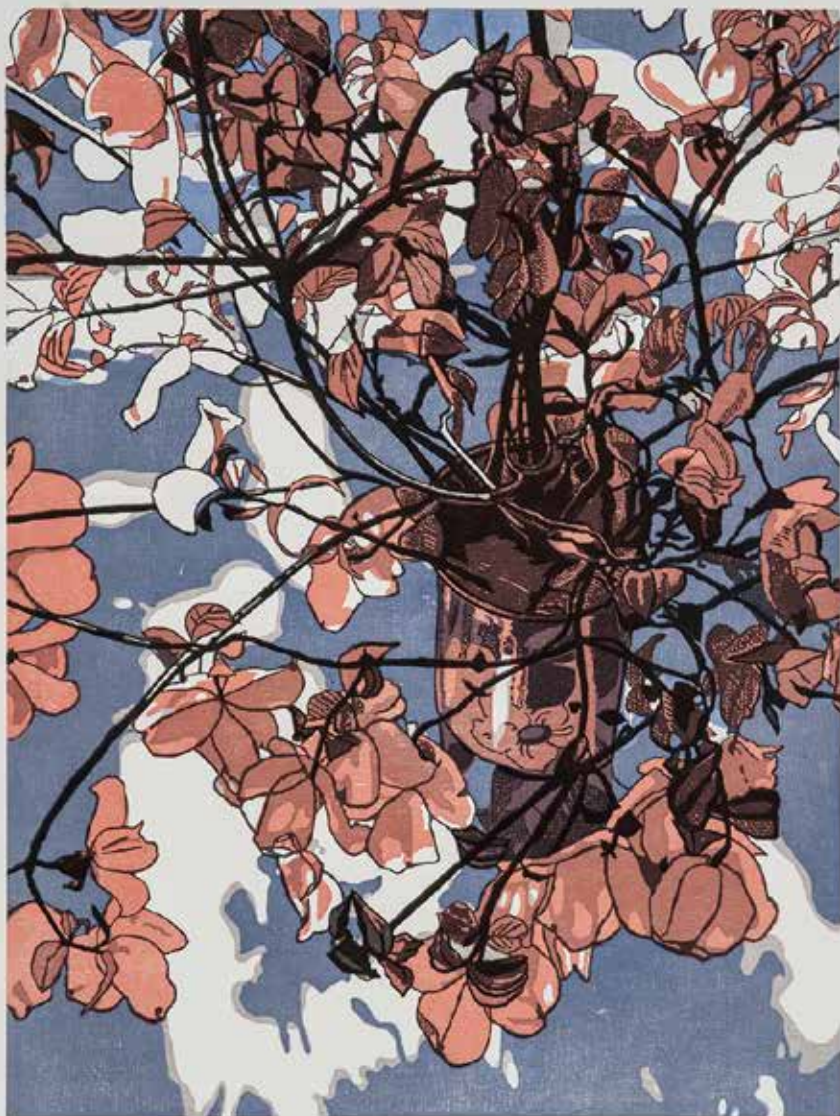
By self-admission, Massachusetts artist Jane Goldman listens to too much NPR, adding that it helps her focus on the big picture, the cosmos. But by focusing on the intimate and precise, as in her woodcut, "Blossom, Var. 2," she takes light and the natural world as subjects and manipulates the interplay of light and shadow that creates meaning. Not heavy with political

nation with the shape of letters began with his study of Egyptian hieroglyphics and how the shapes of the letters elicit emotional responses because they made a connection to life as it existed at that time. He created a visual play of animated letters embarking on a metaphorical journey – as pilgrims might – congregating around a sacred sight.

Connecticut artist Melody Knight Leary's "From Here to God," a photopolymer intaglio, chine collé piece, is a study in how our existence shifts through life. Using a bird as the mechanism, she takes us through the milestones – birth, adulthood, middle age and, if we're lucky, old age. Mazes, which are juxtaposed in the piece, symbolize life's many twists and turns. Leary believes the piece demonstrates how our mindset determines if we have a good life or not – it's a matter of attitude. You are your choices.

Addressing a popular topic that tugged on a lot of the artists' heartstrings in this show, Sandra Cardillo's woodcut, "Endless Journey," poignantly depicts the plight and struggle that immigrants often experience. Choosing to portray the disenfranchised in silhouette form, the Massachusetts artist captured the courage it takes to undertake such perilous journeys and to endure the hardship in order to seek a better life for their family.

Collectively, this Boston Printmakers' exhibition will challenge you to visit, rethink or consider anew the important issues that are part of our world that can and do affect us in so many ways. It's sobering and simultaneously uplifting. Why? Because ultimately, what you do, who you are, does matter.



Jane Goldman, *Blossom Var. 2*, 2016, woodcut, 22 1/2" x 29 3/4".

| Linda Chestney