

Artist Statement

12-2007

Foul Play

“I love the expression ‘foul play.’ It’s just a ball out of bounds, isn’t it? Or a poke in the nethers. But the sound, the associations. Foul- a word meaning noxious, polluted, stinking, vile. And play, such a happy, childish word, all smiles and blond curls in the sunlight.”¹

When I was about 7 years old my parents gave me one of the first art tools that I can remember using. I think it was called, “Trace and Color”. It wasn’t a tool then; for me it was all about making pictures, having fun and playing around. Basically, it was a small light box that came with a set of colored pencils, a ream of thin white paper, and a booklet of different things to trace. My distant memory recalls the images being mostly of children doing varied activities, canoes, campfires, dogs, trees, slides, etc. The idea was that you would trace the different characters to create your own “original” composition to color in. A similar process has propelled me into my current body of work almost 30 years later.

This new series, “Foul Play”, consists of large, cut paper drawings with thick, dark pencil lines. There is a labored intensity in the process since the lines are hand drawn and colored in with graphite. Each stroke indents the heavy paper that subtly shows the gesture of every mark. The pieces are layered physically as well as metaphorically with multiple narratives from many sources, while giving equal balance to both the content and the physical process.

There is a ritualistic aspect to the making of my drawings with a definite performance and sequence of actions. The whole process is not inflexible, though. I am always making subtle changes and adapting to unforeseen circumstances. Because of the obsessive nature of the work, it becomes meditative and ceremonial.

I build the drawing from several sources, including adult comic books, coloring books from the 50’s and 60’s, comic books, traditional Chinese cut outs and handicrafts from other cultures. The drawing starts by tracing lines onto vellum. The vellum is laid over the different source materials where the lines are extracted. Each drawing is unplanned and spontaneous but also selective and intentional. Every line reacts and helps to build from the previous one. The finished study refers to some structural or architectural blueprint each with its own personality.

The small study is then projected onto large-scale paper where the outline is traced again. This outline is then hand colored with #6B pencils. One drawing may take 8 to 20 pencils, depending on the size.

After filling in the lines, I start to cut and remove parts of the negative space with an exact-o knife. Not all of the shapes are removed, leaving some recognizable parts and suggestive configurations. Figuratively, I like the idea of playing with camouflage where

the act of concealing evocative interactions with playful imagery creates multiple narratives and possibilities. There is an element of sabotage as well. By cutting the paper, I am in a sense, deliberately damaging or destroying the drawing and the efforts it took to draw and color it.

The second layer is usually done on buff or gray colored paper, which I associate with the discolored newsprint of coloring books that have yellowed and worn with age. This layer adds another dimensional element to the drawing. It is a spontaneous and organic process. The lines are not drawn out ahead of time or even projected, but cut on the fly, created in direct opposition from how I create the top image. The two layers are separate entities that come together to form a relationship. They are independent of each other but together they help to complete the drawing. I think of the history of two opposing pages in books that have been pressed together for so long that each has a faint impression of the other. Or where the paper, due to its age and its thin quality, starts to show the picture from the next page, infiltrating the top figure and creating a ghost image.

After cutting away the organic and curvilinear lines on the buff paper, I add a third sheet of paper, a reflective material called Mylar. The Mylar shows through the sinuous open lines, reflecting parts of the viewer's body and the surroundings. Distortions are created that play with space and illusion. At certain angles, the Mylar looks similar to the graphite lines, but changes as the viewer moves. This layer adds something menacing, confrontational and voyeuristic to the drawing as a whole.

While looking at the finished drawing the first impression is one of sparkling stars, bubbles, pretty flowers, curly bows and puffy hats. Further investigation may reveal genitalia, orifices, and X-Rated, behind closed doors activities. All the shapes start to play and bounce off each other exploring the nervous tension and sexual energy inherent in the images. They are disguised among tangled, web-like lines that crisscross from the four corners of the page, weaving figures into a form of abstraction.

¹ Cathleen Schine, "The Dead and the Naked.", *New York Times Magazine*, October 28, 2007.