

Iskra Johnson | Artist Statement

METHOD

My way of working is deeply influenced by the craft and aesthetic of printmaking. I bring a background in Japanese woodblock, etching, lithography and silkscreen to my explorations of digital and mixed media processes. Due to early exposure to solvents, I am now unable to work in a traditional printmaking studio and this has pushed me to devise my own techniques to create the appearance and processes of printmaking without a press.

I am fascinated with finding new ways to combine the latest of digital methods with human touch. Through my transfer prints I incorporate the tactile nature of traditional monoprint with plates output from my computer, printing onto wood, paper and other surfaces. I am currently developing new work on Venetian plaster that incorporates painting, bas relief and image transfer in variant editions. My archival prints on paper are created from layers of photographic and mixed media imagery digitally assembled with imaging software. They are not “reproductions” of an original, but a contemporary extension of the long tradition of printmaking. Although the method is digital, great care is taken to bring ink and paper into a physical connection that has a quality of “printness” equal to that of analog methods. Each innovation in technique I develop takes months to refine, and I approach my studio like a laboratory, always asking, what if?

MEANING

It is important to me that my work not fit neatly into one category, but that it blur mediums, asking people subtle questions about what is photographic? what is drawn or painted? what is digital? what am I seeing and how do I see? My goal is to destabilize the viewer so that they are not quite sure what they are looking at, and can explore the ambiguity that comes from not being able to categorize by media or predictable pictorial space. We live in an age of accelerated change, and the struggle to come to terms with impermanence and ambiguity is the narrative of my work, whether the subject is Seattle’s construction boom and reconfiguration of place or the cycles of transformation in nature.

For the past five years much of my art has focused on the urban industrial environment. The patina of erosion and use that I find in the surface of these sites resonates with human story and purpose, and I find it obsessively beautiful. As the processes of gentrification and de-industrialization create a monolithic landscape of unscarred newness I feel compelled to document what is being lost. It is important to bear witness. As we are confronted with change and our relationship to it, how much of the past do we value and hold onto, how much do we let go to reach into the future and make it our “now?” In my work I try to bring these sometimes neglected questions into human scale, mediating through the elements of surface and iconic structure to a deeper conversation about history, change and sense of place.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2016 Seattle Art Museum Gallery, "Contemporary Printmakers" Seattle, Washington
- 2016 Museo Gallery, Garden Show (Group, Invitational), Langley, Washington
- 2015 Linda Hodges Gallery, "Seattle Seen," (Group/Invitational), Seattle, Washington
- 2015 Alexis Hotel, Invitational, "Waterways", Three-person, Seattle, Washington
- 2014 Linda Hodges Gallery, "Making & Breaking," (Group/Invitational), Seattle, Washington
- 2014 Steele Gallery, Gage Academy, "Any Day, Artists on Death," (Group/Invitational), Seattle, Washington
- 2014 Seattle Art Museum Gallery, new architectural works for May, Seattle Washington
- 2014 Zeitgeist, "Excavations: The Big Dig & Other Stories," (Solo), Seattle, Washington
- 2013 Seattle Architecture Foundation, "World/City: Exploring the Architecture of Global Relationships," (Group/Invitational), Seattle, Washington
- 2013 Bainbridge Arts & Crafts, "New Media: Digital Art", (Group/Invitational), Bainbridge Island, Washington
- 2013 Phinney Gallery, "Painters Under Pressure: A Decade of Discussion", (Group), Seattle, Washington
- 2013 Seattle Art Museum Gallery ongoing, new architectural images for February exhibition, Seattle Washington
- 2013 Steele Gallery at Gage Academy, Watercolor Exhibit with Tom Hoffmann and others, (Group/Invitational) Seattle, Washington
- 2013 Prographica Fine Works on Paper, "The Bleak View" (Group/Invitational), Seattle, Washington
- 2012 New Era, "Walk the Line" (Group/Juried), Seattle, Washington
- 2012 Seattle Art Museum Gallery, "Contemplations of Nature", Seattle, Washington
- 2012 Fraker/Scott "The Black and White Show" (two-person) Seattle, Washington
- 2011 Collective Visions Gallery Washington State Juried Competition, Bremerton, Washington

CORPORATE COLLECTIONS

Group Health Cooperative
King County Portable Works
Short, Cressman & Burgess

GALLERY REPRESENTATION

Seattle Art Museum Gallery
drizl.co, a new online gallery based in Seattle, opening nationally in 2016

EDUCATION

- 1985 B.F.A. in Painting, University of Washington, Seattle Washington
- 1975–83 Private studies in calligraphy and sumi-e with Sensei Ishii, Lucy Liu, & Lloyd Reynolds
- 1990 Certificate in Writing, University of Washington year-long certificate program

RELATED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 1984– Principal of Iskra Design, specializing in calligraphic & identity design