

Water Mark

Water is to the world what blood is to our bodies.

Leonardo Da Vinci c. 1513, found in "vetturale di natura" ("the vehicle of nature")

In *WATER MARK*, on view from January 17th to April 4th, 2010 at Gallery Stratford, Gerard Brender à Brandis, Brian Holden and Lucinda Jones explore the Grand River and the surrounding landscape using several different printmaking techniques, including wood block engraving, mono-print and serigraphy.

The three-person exhibition is formally organized around the appearance of 'water' in the natural world and its contemporary representation in print. *WATER MARK* showcases the framed fine art prints of Brender à Brandis, Holden and Jones, as well as each print maker's source material.

WATER MARK demonstrates diverse approaches to creating and exhibiting prints in a museum context: *Water: the Great Giver and the Great Taker-Away*, a series of forty-five small black and white wood engravings by Brender à Brandis is installed in a salon style; *Water in the Wilderness: Northwestern Ontario*, a series comprised of twenty-four various print media editions by Holden, is showcased in grid-formation; while Jones' 2009 suite of seventeen colourful mono-prints, entitled *Experiencing Water*, hangs linearly.

Together, Brender à Brandis, Holden and Jones' source material includes a selection of quotations, sketchbooks, photographs, and digital clips as well as a variety of printing tools, printing screens, engraved wood blocks and metal plate surfaces. These documents and tools are presented in two display tables and on a small TV monitor stationed near by. The juxtaposition of source images with print equipment and finished edition prints illustrates the varying nature of fine art print processes, as well as illuminates the interrelationships and differentiation between the artists' array of print making styles and conceptual content.

Locating water in the landscape as a source of imagery and conceptual inspiration can be traced to artists like Leonardo Da Vinci (1452 –1519), Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), and Japan's best-known artist, Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). For instance, Leonardo's fascination with water results in numerous illustrations of waves, currents and water falls as well as diagrams of machines for moving water and excavating earth to create canals to allow for its flow. Dürer's celebrated watercolor, *Dream of a Deluge*, shows the duality of water: its ability to give life and to take it away; while Hokusai is principally recognized for his woodblock print, *The Breaking Wave Off Kanagawa*, which depicts the impending threat of giant breaking waves above helpless boaters, while Mt. Fuji sits unmoved in the distance.

Like their antecedents, Brender à Brandis, Holden and Jones image water both as presence and representation using a range of historic and contemporary print making techniques.

Stratford based artist Brender à Brandis is currently finishing an edition of books on the Grand River. The master printmaker, wood engraver, typesetter, bookbinder and poet, was born in the Netherlands. The artist came to Canada with his family in 1947. After living in British Columbia and Nova Scotia, the Brandises settled in Ontario, where Gerard attended McMaster University and achieved a degree in Fine Arts and Art History. The writer, Marianne Brandis links her brother's practice of book making and engraving to traditions dating back to mediaeval scribes and the Gutenberg Press. She explains that it is Brender à Brandis' graphic reference to nature that connects the lyricism found his work to that found in the work of his Art Nouveau precursors, William Morris, Charles Ricketts, and Charles Shannon.

Brender à Brandis' work *Water: the Great Giver and the Great Taker-Away*, presented here derives from a series of images of the Grand River. While working on this suite of woodblock engravings Brender à Brandis realized how often he had depicted the transparent substance in prints over the years, and that water signified something sacred and precious to him.

His handmade books and engravings are represented in several important public collections including the National Gallery of Canada, Art Gallery of Ontario, the Hamilton

Art Gallery, the Confederation Art Centre just to name a few. He has illustrated a number of his sister's historical novels, created books on Cape Cod, the Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland, as well as the musical instruments mentioned by Shakespeare and much more.

Brender à Brandis himself explains that his fellow Thunder Bay based artist Holden creates strong images of water in which the animal or insect plays an essential role, for instance, in one print, "the image of a water strider says so much about water -- its refraction is the core of the piece, and the notion of "walking on water" has powerful mythical qualities."

Holden's connection to water results from the artist having lived the majority of his life along the shores of Lake Superior, the largest body of fresh water in the world. Holden offers up his experience of these remote wilderness waters by extending his vision to include the practice of documenting his trips into the bush using both still and video cameras, and follows by translating these images through to the application of ink on paper. Holden's series *Water in the Wilderness: Northwestern Ontario* comes from his fascination not only with landscape, which is a prominent component in many of his images, but also from the structures and forms found in the many varieties of organic life. In this series Holden illustrates the important interconnectedness that exists between the landscape, living things, and the element of water.

Active as a visual artist for over thirty years within the Thunder Bay Arts Community, Holden also gives instruction in the visual arts through Community Arts and Heritage programming and through the Ontario Arts Council Artist in Education program. His work has been regularly presented in exhibitions at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, the Definitely Superior Gallery, the Lakehead Visual Arts, the Ottawa School of Art, and the St. Joseph's Heritage Centre.

Jones is an accomplished printmaker with expertise in various printmaking media techniques including: Etching, Collagraph, Woodcut and Linocut. She holds a Fine Arts Degree from the University of Western Ontario. Consequent to her degree she continued to study art at Concordia University where she took printmaking for 2 years with a focus

on Etching, Relief Processes and Lithography, while also working in the Photographs Collection at the Canadian Centre for Architecture.

Her art practice is rooted in depicting the natural world. She seeks to capture nature, first with her digital camera, and second through the abstract use of elements found in her photographic images, such as line form and colour. However, rather than reproducing the photographic, Jones' suite of mono-prints visually work to create a sense of what lies beneath the surface of moving water by relying on repeated abstract and arabesque applications of fanciful plant like patterns and undulating forms. In *Experiencing Water*, the artist's approach to evoking underwater scenes viewed during aquatic passage recalls abstract art, where repeated patterns and forms constitute an infinite pattern that extends beyond the visible material world.

Inspired by the work of Wassily Kandinsky, one of the first artists to create a purely abstract painting in 1910, and Helen Frankenthaler, whose paintings show spontaneous and direct nonfigurative gestures and forms, Jones takes up the abstract expressionist approach to portraying the emotional and spiritual aspects of nature as pure form in her print based works. Jones explains that, "What interests me as a printmaker and non-representational artist is not an image of water's surface image but its internal aspects, its weight, its energy and its movement within itself. My main focus is to manifest the energy of life, which is constantly moving and changing. My intent with this body of work is to draw the viewer into a world within the beauty and movement of water."

The veteran printmaker opened 'Lucinda Jones Printmaking' in 1991 at the Riverworks Building in St. Jacobs, Ontario where from 1991 to 1996 she demonstrated printmaking techniques to the public and sold artwork to visitors from all over the world. During this period, Jones has also offered printmaking courses to adults as well as workshops for kids in schools through the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery. Working in Stratford since 1997, the artist took up residency in town in 2005 and now maintains a studio in her home.

Carla Garnet