

Kristin Carlson Becker ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Mark-making is at once an expressive and a logical process, inexorably related to two primary acts, writing and image-making. Tension exists between these two expressions: Writing conforms to rules of language while images offer a greater freedom of interpretation; at the same time, the written signifier of a word is visual, comprised of graphic symbols. The dual nature of language as visual and verbal expression—the tension thus inherent in all mark-making activities—provides the artist-writer with the generative limits and expressive space from which to best make work that can intimately connect with its audience.

My work explores how gestural and mechanical mark-making activity links visual and verbal expression, allowing writing, drawing, and reading processes to occur organically. Working in multiples modes simultaneously—regarding image-oriented and language-oriented mark-making as partners—I cultivate an enhanced ideation process that ultimately leads to artworks that are richer both as visual and textual compositions for having such complex beginnings.

For my current body of work, I begin each piece simply, writing a message to a person who is important in my life, usually a friend or relative. Then, using the message as inspiration, I create a visual manifestation of the idea through printmaking. My goal is to make a private object of communication that is visually and verbally enticing for a public audience. In addition to playing a role in the visual aspects of the work, the language in these pieces functions like poetry: The viewer may enjoy the pieces for their textual and visual aesthetic qualities with or without concern for logical meaning. Likewise, I add complexity and additional intimacy to the pieces by exploring tactility: Many pieces are double-sided, incorporate collage, and fold into envelopes, inviting additional associations with the history and physical presence of letters and documents.

In her lecture *What is English Literature* from Lectures in America, Gertrude Stein writes:

And how are they the island daily life the English island daily life. But they are. And they are because of their poetry, and the poetry is because of the reality of all the life that is shut in, so completely sweetly, so delicately really shut in with their daily life.

(Stein, Gertrude. *Lectures in America*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975, p. 19)

In addition to influencing my writing practice, Stein has greatly impacted my conceptual framework for finding art-making impulses. As is common in “daily life,” much of my day-to-day joy comes from sharing relationships with people. As Stein describes, there is inherent poetry (or one might say beauty) to be found in “all the life that is shut in,” which I interpret as being both the mundane details and the private/personal aspects of life. Consequently, the personal messages I use as catalysts for my art all have inherent poetic qualities. Though the private/personal meaning may be obscured in the printmaking process, the emotion and aesthetic nature of the impulse remains apparent in the final artwork.

I am influenced by many artists whose work incorporates the collection or observation of details from daily life. Lynda Barry’s graphic novel What It Is (describing her creative process), William Christenberry’s serial photographs of decaying southern buildings, and H. C. Westermann’s autobiographical sculptures and illustrated letters stand as prime examples. Likewise, I am influenced by visual artists who explore the dual verbi-visual nature of language, including numerous conceptual artists from recent art history, practitioners in book arts, such as Johanna Drucker, contemporary poets such as Lisa Jarnot, and artists who engage in teaching literacy, such as Wendy Ewald.