

ENTERTAINMENT

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Page A7

Impractical maps

By John Seven

North Adams Transcript

NORTH ADAMS — Printmaker Kristin Carlson's work demands a landscape as its subject, as filtered through her own psychological space.

Her prints will be part of The Phylogeny Projects at the Branch Gallery, 18 Holden St., as part of Downstreet Art.

Carlson's print work is inspired by her own experience of place. When she began printmaking, it was with an interest in depicting very specific structures, but her focus began to shift as she encountered old maps, particularly medieval ones, that fascinated her.

"I started to feel like depicting entire neighborhoods or places on a little bit larger scale than individual buildings," Carlson said. "It was just an exciting idea for me because I do a lot of walking and thinking activities and I started to feel that the overall movement through the space was what started to interest me more than the buildings themselves."

Carlson's interest was less in realistically representing the places than presenting multiple perspectives on one map, which saw her placing buildings and objects in different directions on the print that were impossible to see in real life. This was but one of the layers that made up the final image. There was the layer of the building itself, then its relationship to other buildings, then the patterns these relationships created in an aerial view and, finally, Carlson's own paths through the space that she put down on the print.

The spaces she chose to capture were those she had spent a lot of time in, often places she lived. Places like Providence, R.I. and Vienna all found their way into her printmaking, as well as text meant to focus and elaborate her relationships with them.

"It's about a growing attachment over time to the places that you live and the longer you live in them, the more things happen to you," said

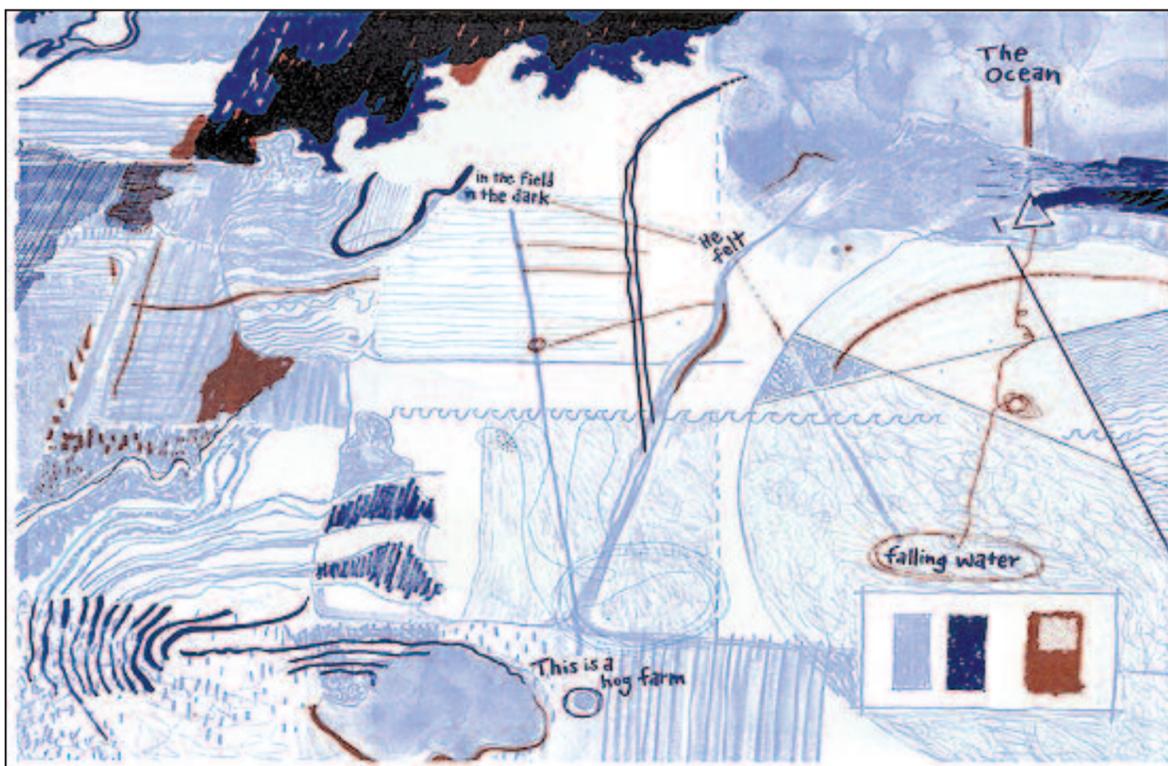


Image courtesy of Kristin Carlson

'This is a Hog Farm'

Carlson. "There are stories written into the roads on the prints. It's not something that I would expect the viewer to sit down and read — you might read a little bit of it — but it's more the idea of evoking that sense that things have happened and there were memories implanted in the place."

The perspective always represented her personal experience, although she is interested in the history of the places, and sometimes might fold in memories relating to a friend. It's a personal map that is as much autobiography as it is about the space it captures.

"It's perhaps what you wish you had, when you were in the space, and didn't know anything, so you knew where you should go and which advice you should follow," said Carlson.

This was especially true in foreign cities like Vienna, which maps her comfort level

with the surroundings, and the paths she chose in that city as the most sure ones.

"There were certain times when I knew where I was going, and it was such a relief to have somewhere that I knew where I was walking," Carlson said, "because it's such a confusing city. I was self-conscious about looking like a tourist, so I really enjoyed it when I knew my route because you have to worry about having a map out, whereas many other times I needed to be constantly looking. So, you can see, there's a heavier part of the path, lines on the print, of one direction that was much more heavily taken, and that would be my most common route that I knew the best."

Carlson said that her one weakness is in the details of the buildings on the maps, and she allows herself to devote artistic time to that aspect, along with

the more ethereal and psychological parts.

"I just love detail," she said. "That's what brought me to show the landscapes to begin with, the idiosyncrasies of not only the buildings themselves, but of their relationships to one another. That is of extreme interest to me, so it is important for me to record those things in detail and to be accurate about it, because you're being accurate about the irregularities because it's the irregularities that you really are interested in."

The maps represent choices made by Carlson — that is, for whatever she puts in them that represent her interest, there are plenty of things left out. Maps traditionally do this all the time, depending on scale or purpose, but the point of Carlson's prints are more intangible outside herself, and that's what cements them as extensions of her own

mind more than replications of reality.

"You're making conscious choices about what to include and what to not include," Carlson said, "but in those situations, maps are extremely practical documents that we're using to find our ways around. These might seem more layered because they're adding that layer of practical experience."

"In a way, they are very impractical. I'm not being explicit about any one type of thing, I'm choosing to include a dog park and one of them, there's nothing else about dogs in that print. It's really nice to have the freedom to include whatever is important to me so they are extremely personal documents."

For her print "This is a Hog Farm" Carlson took this idea to the extreme — it is an imagined landscape that was the result of a game of "Exquisite

Corpse" with other printmakers who built a sentence together, swapped sections and then made prints based on the section that was given to them. Even this is based in some sort of reality, though, as Carlson spends time studying aerial photographs of landscapes, and this preoccupation is folded into the work.

"I always work with text and language, and especially the language that is in maps is very inspirational for me," she said, "but this was a little different. I do look at a lot of aerial photos of landscapes, so that factored into that print. In terms of the circular side, you see the aerials photographs of fields that have been irrigated and there's also a circular pattern, but the irrigation system is circular, so there's a little bit of referencing things that I had actually seen. This one is much more loose than the other prints."

"Some of it is directly from the 'Exquisite Corpse,' but I took the liberty of adding some of the text myself, so I believe the 'This is a Hog Farm' part of the text was not a part of the original 'Exquisite Corpse,' I believe that was my addition."

More recently, Carlson has focused mail art endeavors and architectural prints that have seen her capture unusual structures like the City of Moscow Water Department Building (located in Maine) and the Providence Fruit and Produce Warehouse in Rhode Island.

"These are about the age and the changes that the buildings have gone through," she said. "I can't tone down my love of certain things, because I always discover there's something that doesn't fit into that limitation. As an artist you go through phases when you're interested in doing certain things and it's like you have this impulse to keep doing it, but you also have to move on."

Kristin Carlson can be found online at kristincarlson.net and goodbyebuildings.com.

Jeffrey Dahmer's tragic personal legacy

By John Seven

North Adams Transcript

Books

"My Friend Dahmer" by Derf Backderf (Abrams)

Powerful and honest, there's no way that a graphic novel memoir of high school years spent with serial killer Jeffrey

Dahmer isn't going to be disturbing, but it could have also been gratuitous, self-serving and exploitative. Derf Backderf's memoir is none of those things, and it shines as a paean to that moment in young adulthood where we gain our freedom and it seems anything

The Kiosk

can happen, but how forces beyond our control can sometimes wire us for the worst.

Dahmer and Backderf attended Revere High School in the Akron, Ohio, area in the 1970s. Along with several other friends who called themselves the Dahmer Fan Club, Backderf's friendship with Dahmer was not a close one — more like Dahmer was the weird kid adopted by a group of merely quirky ones, who found acceptance through his odd sense of humor and lack of shame in displaying it. And though Backderf and buddies recognized more as time went on that there was something clearly messed up about Dahmer, experience and history did not suggest what he would eventually become, despite some darker behavior involving dead animals and alcohol, and revelations about his unstable family situation.

If anything, Backderf's memoir reads as a typical tale of growing up in a rural area in the 1970s, except with this dark mark manifested in the story that functions like a reminder of what horrors lie in the outside adult world. Every lonely, depressing or depraved example of Dahmer's life is juxtaposed with what was going on with his friends and paints a picture of how easy it once was to be marginalized during the high school years. As Backderf points out, it was a very different world in comparison to high schools today, where any kid is a potential criminal — back then, the monsters were silent and walked among us. Anyone who went to school in that era can point to a Dahmer-like person in their school and wonder whatever happened to them.

Dahmer's story is well-known now, but Backderf doesn't rely on that portion of the tale to get his point across. Instead, he brings the emotional level to one where any reader can understand how Dahmer became Dahmer. In some ways, Backderf fashions the book so that we, the read-

er, are getting inside Dahmer's skin, if not his mind, and partaking in intimate moments of not horror, but sadness.

As rendered by Backderf, Dahmer's tale is a disturbingly American one set against the backdrop of our cultural push for self-reliance and refusing to accept the worst imaginable

outcome of a strange situation. There are always losers in the pursuit of the American Dream, but some of them never had a chance to begin with, and Jeffrey Dahmer is the worst case scenario of the unfitting attempting to survive in such a world.

Portrait of the Artist



This detail from the slide show 'I Love You, Octopus' by multi-media artist Ven Voisey will be featured in his show 'Vs.,' which opens at MCLA Gallery 51 on Thursday, June 28, at 6 p.m. Voisey will offer an environment of songs, images and objects that are simultaneously dark and playful with a sensibility hovering somewhere between Joseph Beuys and Mr. Rogers. It is also his swan song as gallery manager.

Corrections Policy

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