

Erik Edson: Other Stories

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Erik Edson: *Other Stories*

Ray Cronin

**OWENS ART GALLERY
SACKVILLE
20 OCTOBER –
10 DECEMBER, 2017**

Printmaking, Erik Edson would tell you, is a process of translation—that is, translating an image from one matrix to another. What begins in one form, as a singular image, is translated through various proto-industrial processes into another form, often, though by no means always, as a multiple. Printmaking, as an art genre, is relatively new—if painting's roots, for instance, are found in the caves of Lascaux, or that of sculpture in the Venus of Willendorf, printmaking is rooted in the workshop of Johannes Gutenberg and the products of his printing press. That comparative newness means that the genre's boundaries are porous. Historically, printmaking was an interstitial form, one that existed between the established arts and their publics, and printmakers have

been pushing the boundaries of their art for decades. In practices like that of artists such as Edson, and contemporaries of his like Mitch Michell, Mark Bovey and Libby Hague, printmaking is as much an approach as it is a genre, a way of thinking about images in the world, and, yes, of translating ideas about the world into images.

Edson's most recent exhibition project, at the Owens Art Gallery at Mt. Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, is part survey and part a new installation. *Other Stories*, curated by Pan Wendt of the Confederation Centre for the Arts (where the exhibition will travel in 2018) highlights Edson's strengths as an artist, one who, while he teaches printmaking at Mt. Allison, makes as many objects as he does images. Despite featuring works from the past twenty years of his practice the exhibition feels very new—the result, no doubt, of the fact that fully half of the space, the largest of the two galleries featuring his works, was given over to a large new installation called *Ruins*.

The smaller of the two rooms featured a mixture of prints and sculptures, though more objects than two-dimensional works by far. This is consistent for Edson, who has long pushed his work into three-dimensionality and has experimented with materials beyond paper. For the past ten years or more, Edson has used industrially printed fabrics in his work, layering them, sometimes in concert with inked paper though often not. His compositions describe, in materials, the



Erik Edson, *Ruins*, 2017. Gallery installation, 850 x 730 x 610 cm. Photo: Roger Smith.

act of translation that is printmaking. Edson's work is laden with ideas: its content ping-pongs back and forth from art historical reference, internal reference and allusion to habits of seeing that we all share. Always, it is the act of looking, of consciously directing our gaze, and the thought process driving it that is the subject of his works. As we look, we construct, often seeing what we expect (and thus are open to being fooled by illusion) or drawing conclusions from new information. Seeing, Edson constantly reminds us, is a kind of making. He uses found objects and images throughout his work, and a common theme is the construction of images and how much habit and suggestion is at play in that process. His interest in how we see is complemented by an equal interest in how we are fooled into seeing things that aren't there—in techniques used in theatre sets, for instance, or in camouflage and in decoys.

Sunset (2006-2008) for example, is a large, flat plywood sculpture, with its top edge cut to create the silhouette of trees and rooflines. Its bottom edge sits a few inches from the wall, while its top leans slightly into the room. The side facing the viewer is painted flat black, while the side facing the wall is painted florescent orange. Lights on the floor, between the flat and the wall, cause an orange glow to emanate above and around the sculpture. The rough and ready construction of this sculpture, with nothing present that is not necessary for the intended effect, mark it as a set piece, an object that exists solely to have us see a certain illusion—sunset in a residential neighbourhood—all the while undermining that very effect. The strategy of simultaneously creating a certain view and then making it clear to the viewer that they are being manipulated, is central to Erik Edson's work. Not exactly didactic, the works are polemical, and stage questions about the act of seeing.

Ruins (2017), which fills the largest gallery at the Owens, combines elements on the wall, free-standing, architectural objects, including a platform with stairs that acts as a kind of focus point or viewing stage—way of directing the viewer's attention. Edson uses commercially printed fabrics with areas cut out and layered, suggesting cast shadows and other forms, all of which seem on the cusp of coalescing into

recognizable images. The viewer is forced to prowl the gallery space, pacing from end to end like an animal in a cage, trying to process the various elements, trying to make sense and always coming up just short.

In *Halfway* (2016), Edson used layers of commercial fabrics, which are folded and cut to suggest fluid states and processes—pouring, dripping, seeping, flowing. There is almost a cartoonish sense at play in much of the work: black fabric suggesting holes, for instance, familiar visual tropes to create illusions that we, again, reject even as we recognize them.

Other Stories also features some of Edson's large-scale woodcuts, displayed along with his fabric constructions and installations making apparent his refusal to privilege the more traditional presentation of printmaking. Whether it be ink on paper, paint on wood, fabric on wood or on the wall, light used as added colour or even sound, in the end, it all is aimed at making, and unmaking, images. The snapping in and out of focus, the way that images cohere and then fall apart, and then cohere again as one navigates the space, gives a sort of pulse to the works in the exhibition, a metronomic cadence of seeing and understanding, deceiving and revealing. We provide the matrix for this play to occur, as it is situated in our perceiving minds. So, finally, as we look at Edson's *Other Stories*, we are the ones providing the translation.

Ray Cronin is a Nova Scotia-based writer, curator and arts consultant. From 2001-2015 he worked at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia as Curator (2001-2007) and as Director and CEO (2007-2015). He is the founding Curator of the Sobey Art Award. He is the author of numerous catalogue essays, as well as articles for Canadian and American art magazines. He was the Visual Arts Columnist for the *Daily Gleaner* (Fredericton) and *Here* (Saint John). The Arts Canada Institute and Gaspereau Press published his books *Alex Colville: Art and Life* and *Mary Pratt* in the fall of 2017.

Déjouer les sens

Samantha Gai

**CENTRE D'ART JACQUES-ET-MICHEL-AUGER
VICTORIAVILLE
2 NOVEMBRE –
16 DÉCEMBRE 2017**

Qu'est-ce que le bronze, matériau chargé de traditions et d'histoire, de la statuaire de l'antiquité au monument commémoratif du 19^e siècle, peut encore nous dire aujourd'hui? Comment concilier un savoir-faire artisanal, des innovations techniques et des problématiques de l'art

contemporain? C'est à ces questions que l'exposition *Déjouer les sens* a tenté de répondre en invitant 10 artistes québécois et internationaux à travailler le bronze de concert avec la fonderie d'art d'Inverness. Ce travail de collaboration entre artistes et artisans du bronze a permis de révéler les possibilités expressives d'un matériau plus polyvalent qu'on pourrait le croire. Il en résulte une exposition riche et diversifiée. Parmi les quinze œuvres proposées, de nombreux liens, tant au niveau thématique (écologie, mémoire, principe du vivant) que technique, se tissent et se font écho grâce à une mise en espace pertinente.

Trônant dans l'entrée, *L'Homme Soleil*, la sculpture monumentale de Jordi Bonnet, constitue une référence à l'histoire de l'art du bronze des années 1970 au Québec. Avec la symbolique du soleil, du feu et de son potentiel transformateur, l'œuvre inscrit les éléments naturels et les phénomènes physiques comme motifs récurrents de l'exposition, ainsi que le bronze dans une dynamique métamorphosable.