

Louisa Rorschach Residency Interview

SJ: What is your primary artistic medium? Tell me what you find compelling about that material and process?

LR: I am a printmaker; I work with wood and linoleum. I fell in love with it through a class that wasn't even about printmaking. It was a basic graphics class. This one assignment was to make a pinhole camera from a soda can, take a picture from an unusual point of view, and then turn the developed image into a 5 x 7 inch lino block print. I took a photo of a tree looking up from the ground at the base of the trunk, and it turned out so interestingly. I really enjoyed the process of making that photograph into a print.

I'm a big process person, and I focus on translation between images. You have the tree in real life which is three-dimensional and has color and texture, and then the photograph which is two-dimensional and in shades of gray, and then the print which only has positive and negative space.

In my printmaking, I try to retain the integrity and the identity of an object as it goes through all these processes, and reduce it as much as I can to its essence, whatever makes it what it is. I'm constantly asking how much do I need, or how little can I have, and still be able to recognize it? There's just something about that process that I connect with, and so I keep working with it.

SJ: Where do you look for creative inspiration?

LR: I look all over the place. I think it depends on what my goal is for a certain print, or what I'm in the mood for. When I take from nature, it's usually trees. I like their forms. I like the colors of fall foliage; I want to try to see how close I can get to re-creating those colors, that blend, the way the light hits on those shapes. How well can I imitate that and make it happen again on a two-dimensional piece of paper?

I was an art historian before I became a printmaker, and so I have a lot of painters that I really admire and whose work I love. Sometimes I'll take a painting or a sculpture [to translate into a print]—I think it's interesting to take something that's colorful, or three-dimensional, and break it down again and again until I just have lines.

SJ: What is your biggest creative challenge at this point?

LR: I'm sort of a slow starter, and a perfectionist, and I really take my time with a concept. I want it to be right, especially with reductive work. Once you make a cut, you can't put it back. I need to know that I'm making the right cut. So I guess just getting over that and pushing myself to make more, and also pushing the boundaries of what I'm comfortable doing in my art, seeing if I should try something new that I've never considered.

SJ: And finally, artists often face economic as well as creative challenges. Talk to me a little about finding that balance, or what you've done to make that work.

LR: To be honest, I have not been very good at making that work in the past two years at all. I've been working in retail and babysitting. I live in New York City, where the cost of living is very prohibitive. I found out the hard way that needing to make a living doesn't leave a lot of time or space for art, especially when it's an equipment-centric art like printmaking. You can't work just anywhere if you need a press.

But I'm learning. The more I realize that this is a priority in my life, the more I am going to put into making sure that I can do it. Hopefully I can find a way to make art and eat and have a place to live all at the same time. That would be great!

Louisa Rorschach is a New York based printmaker. During her three-month residency at the Guild, she will be making new prints, working on grad school applications, and delighting us all with her amazing homemade granola.