

## STANDARD DEVIATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

## STANDARD DEVIATIONS

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The show *Standard Deviations* is composed of fifty-six relief prints based off of the combination and reorganization of two hundred and fifty linocuts. Within my work I am attempting to create a narrative space that uses a combination of object representations to form a single environment. The images produced by these composites relay narratives through image and viewer relationships. *Standard Deviations* deals with the altered perception, degradation, and rehabilitation of human and material components. It notes narrative and ethnographical values through image distortion, resulting in an exploration of mankind's self-integration with objects of pseudo-natural landscapes.

The depictions used within the final compositions redefine and reshape the purposes and definitions behind the original human and inanimate objects for the sake of finding meaningful mythology within the everyday. Individual images of works included.

## STANDARD DEVIATIONS

*Standard Deviations* consists of a series of black and white relief prints. The works presented are formed through the combination and reorganization of images within a set of linocut blocks. The original representations are used as picture parts that are then woven together to create an open-ended narrative (Fig. 1). Within my work I am attempting to create a narrative space that relays ethnographic information through the juxtaposition of object representations that come together to form a single environment. Within each of these environments exists an entity whose relationship with the environment is responsible for creating states of enchantment and disenchantment, as the relationships between it and the surrounding objects are broken down.



Figure 1

The work presented in *Standard Deviations* gives the viewers access to a narrative space in which they are able to cultivate myth, a story interpreted in relationship to the self as a means to translate emotional circumstances. This myth, which manifests itself through the combinations of recognizable forms, serves to transmit personal, ethnographic information to the viewer, who becomes the decoder. These fertile grounds for myth are presented through everyday objects, fractured bodies, and the comparisons between the two that are utilized in order to visually relay a being engaged with an ever-changing world.

Myths are ethnographical vessels wherein abstract qualities are realized. When a myth is presented in a way that it involves objects residing in material culture, the social relationships surrounding that material culture will feed and perpetuate the cultivation of myth within the viewer (Cull). The visual imagery presented within each framed unit of *Standard Deviations* depicts a being in a state of enchantment/disenchantment.

Enchantment exists when as the combined elements form a whole resembling the dream like other, and disenchantment exists when the representational picture parts are recognized and the image is once again separated out into its individual forms. As the combinations of elements create a new environment, a state of enchantment is presented. By utilizing the imagery on the original blocks for their forms, shape, and line, a world existing outside of the current known reality is created within the pictorial space. When this new environment is composed from a group of existing elements and familiar, pictorial representations, the mind seeks to separate these images once more, causing disenchantment to come into play. In Suzi Gablik's *The Reenchantment of Art* she states that:

“Our prevailing sense of disenchantment... is not simply a matter of the intellect; by now it has been woven into our personalities, attitudes and behaviors... We are so incredibly addicted to rational modes of perception that if we are ever to change the basis of our experience and correct...our overidentification [sic] with rationalism- we will need to go beyond the limiting patterns built up by our present environment and renew our connection with the collective dreambody [sic].”

(Gablik 46-47)

Because the dream effect presented is not dream, but merely an illusion of dream, the being presented is converted into a world of disenchantment, of rational modes of thinking, of identifiable objects. This delayed identification period in which the viewer experiences the disenchantment of the enchanted image is displayed in *Untitled Number 26* (Fig. 2), when the viewer identifies the figure’s seemingly twisted body as a combination of two distinct picture parts: a human face, and three pig skulls.

At first the image is read together as a distorted character, but once the separate elements reveal themselves, the image loses all of its previous fictional connotations. During this delayed identification period, things are, but are not, freely removing context and symbol, while at the same time relying on them to create a safe place for the viewer to cultivate their own mythic narratives based on their association with the images of material culture presented. It is here that the viewer is allowed to enter into the realm of the metanarrative.

“According to this philosophy [of the metanarrative], everything we experience is subject to our interpretation of it. We cannot evaluate anything from an objective

standpoint because we unavoidably make assumptions based on our interpretations” (“Lit Quest”).

This development is important because if, “Stories give meaning to what otherwise would be meaningless” (Chopra), and we are “addicted to rational modes of perception” (Gablik, 46), then *Standard Deviations* paves the way for the viewers to have an active role in the process by developing their own narratives based on ethnographical self discovery.



Figure 2

I chose to compose these relief prints from a catalogue of carved linoleum blocks. Due to the relatively small size and shape of the blocks, when combined with one another, they were able to transform from element or picture part to complete image without



becoming so integrated that they were unable to change back. By utilizing this character attribute to my advantage, I was able to rearrange, block off, and move elements around freely in order to achieve acceptable pictorial spaces for utilization within the final printed compositions. Color was also an important consideration in this process.

Limiting the work to black and white helped unify the images of disparate objects into a believable environment. This elemental unification can be observed within the composition of *Untitled Number 27* (fig. 3) where the various elements that compose the scene, although wildly diverse, come together to create one cohesive space. The final composite image, through one color printing, graphic images, and shallow pictorial spaces makes reference to illustration and documentation. By setting up a scene or image where not all the information is given, a story is needed to complete the thought.

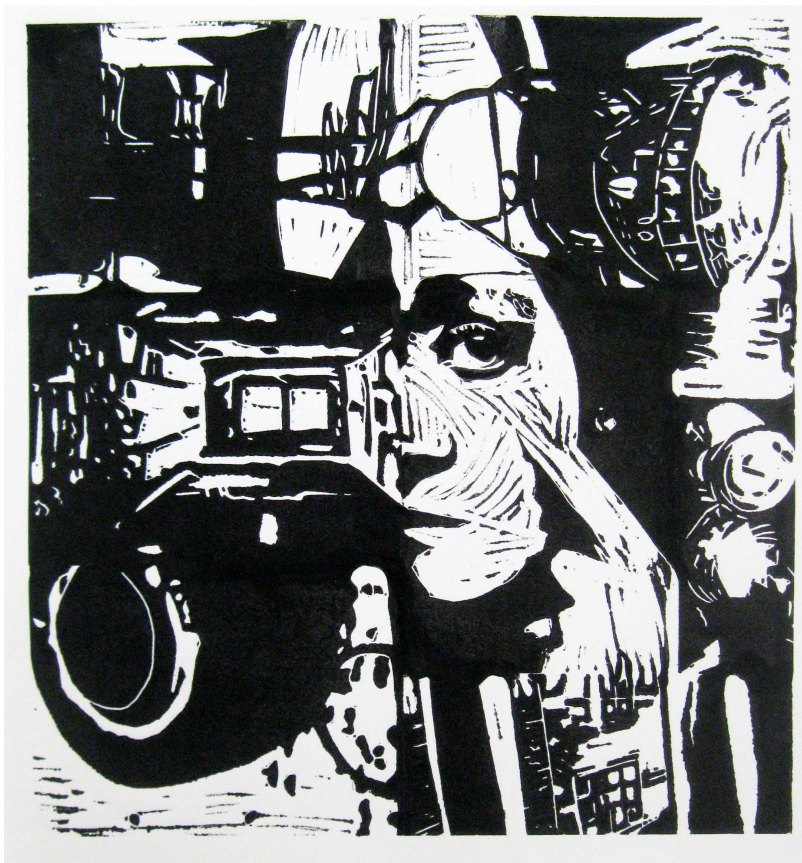


Figure 3

It was important that the images reflecting material culture were produced independently from their final compositions and not in conjunction with them. Because the pictorial representations on the blocks had to be tied back to the everyday, they consisted of known elements, available and readily found. This made them more accessible for personal signification, and more capable of being recognized as their original forms in order to engage in the disenchantment of the image.

To initiate the final printed narratives, a human component was chosen. The human element was always chosen first because it is this, through its relationship with the surrounding objects, which dictated the atmosphere of the final composition. The human representation is what allows the viewers to interject themselves into the work and find their relationship within the piece based on their history with the signs and symbols utilized. Secondly, surrounding elements are chosen. These elements were first chosen due to their formal relationship with the figure, and then considered for their symbolic qualities. These elements were rearranged and combined to create an atmosphere, location, or additional bodily sections for the figure. They also helped to create visual depth within the pictorial space. The juxtaposition of elements is scrutinized in order to best produce fertile ground for the viewer's developing mythologies. Additional elements are added to formally complete the pictorial space. In this last step, blocks are chosen for their possession of a continuing element, a similarity of line, shape, or texture that can be found or continued from one of the adjoining constituent images.

The blocks were inked and the final desired image was printed with undesired features masked out. These cropped or removed areas remain visible within the debossment around the piece. Within these indented areas, an image continues to be

present, even though ink is not. Since the final compositions produce fantastical, enchanted, scenes from everyday elements, it is important that final compositions relate back to the blocks, so that the disenchantment of the image may occur. Therefore, all blocks are represented in their entirety. The original block is forever evident and part of, yet separate from, the final image, whether it contains ink or not.

After printing, some pieces were worked back into with ink to touch up areas that broke the continuous shapes of the final composition. This process helped link images together, creating an uninterrupted visual flow. By linking the elements together, they enter into a symbiotic relationship, often creating new elements through their associations. An example of this is visible within *Untitled Number 34* (fig. 4).



Figure 4

What appears to be a “knight” chess piece is displayed prominently, however, closer inspection reveals that there never was a “knight” figure to begin with. The image of a rocking horse is cut off by the plate’s boundaries, which allows for the back of the

knight's neck to be formed by the side of a bus seat. The silhouette of an old church forms the left side of the square it rests upon, and the right hand side is developed in the negative space created by crumpled paper. Here the figure of the knight never exists, but is formed by disparate elements and is completed in the mind of the viewer.

When the blocks are combined to form a figure and ground, a fractured space is created. The people depicted within the plates are also fractured elements. No human figure is ever depicted fully. Within the compositions, busts, facial features, and bodily elements serve as representational stand-ins for an entire human entity. In *On Longing* Susan Stewart states that, “by a process of projection and introjection of the image, the body comes to have abstract ‘form’” (125). Meaning that, a whole body is not necessary. The viewer will identify a mouth or hand as a stand in for a whole entity. Often times an image of a single body part can cause the viewer, through known signifiers, to identify the being's full form. In *Untitled Number 40* (fig. 5), we are able to see just how this process works. The being presented is warped and consists of only two parts, yet it is understood as fully human. In *Untitled Number 18* (Fig. 6), it can be noted that a difference in the size and gesture of parts, in relation to other part objects, can affect the outcome of internal narrations.



Figure 5



Figure 6

The bodies presented in *Standard Deviations* are “grotesque” because they are in a “state of becoming” (Stewart, 105). They are never presented in a whole state, but are made into whole entities through developed relationships with their surrounding elements. Elemental relationships with the body are achieved with simulation and integration. In *Untitled Number 30* (fig. 7), the body is simulated nearly in its entirety. An inverted glass bottle forms the center of the chest and upper stomach, the ellipse of a nearby soda can suggests nipples, the curve of the shoulder is rendered by the shadows of a building, and the hips are suggested through the placement of a cordless drill, a cloudy sky, and a mannequin child. In contrast to *Untitled Number 30*, which displays environment as body, *Untitled Number 16* (fig. 8) portrays body as environment. Here the body is integrated with the surrounding elements and is made complete solely through the viewer’s recognition of a left eye.



Figure 7



Figure 8

Within the images presented in *Standard Deviations*, one reality or simulation, can be part of several realities or simulations at the same time and all of them can be

equally true (Lacan). This is demonstrative of Lacan's views on the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. Here the real is the object (image on the blocks), the imaginary is what you imagine it being in relation to the self (relationship identification within the completed composition), and the symbolic is an alternative meaning that has the power to place more importance on what is said/not said (interpretation). Since the final forms are produced through combinatory measures, an interpretation is greatly influenced by the simulated image's surrounding components and the personal history of the viewer in question.

To create a static, meditative space within the gallery, the prints were displayed side-by-side and evenly spaced. The work was positioned to create a space where the viewer is free to interpret the illustrations apart from, and entwined with, each other. All the works in the show are untitled and then given a number in relation to how they appear on the wall because, as Roland Barthes states in the *Rhetoric of Image*:

“When it comes to the ‘symbolic message’ the linguistic message no longer guides identification but interpretation, constituting a kind of vice which holds the connoted meaning from proliferating, whether towards excessively individual regions...or towards dysphoric values” (Barthes, 275)

The original linoleum blocks are displayed on a pedestal in the center of the room. The viewer is to connect the original element to the compiled counterparts and notice the symbolic and contextual differences between the two elements. Rosalyn Krauss, in her book *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, states that the horizontal objects in a three-dimensional space are in relation to nature, while an object placed vertically in a three-dimensional space is in relation to man. When the blocks are

displayed horizontally they are nature, while when displayed vertically, they are nature perceived.

The work created in *Standard Deviations* deals with the altered perception, degradation, and rehabilitation of human and material components. The depictions used within the final compositions redefine and reshape the purposes and definitions behind the original human and inanimate objects, and their objecthoods. This work can be likened to Claes Oldenburg's large sculptures of inanimate objects. By taking purpose and context away from the object it is transformed and given new meaning, while still retaining its identity. Oldenburg's *Soft Viola* consists of a hanging sculpture of a viola that appears soft, deflated, and fabric like, the objects presented within *Standard Deviations* retain their form while their function is stripped away from them through a relationship with a human component, much like the birdcage in figure 8 or the still life in figure 5.

The sculptures of contemporary artist David Altmejd can be offered as a comparison to the treatment of the human form in *Standard Deviations*. When dealing with the human body *Standard Deviations* focuses on creating visual images in a state of becoming. The human element within them is created in correspondence with the surrounding environment, dependent on its simulation or integration with surrounding forces. In *Center* by Altmejd, a hair-covered body is pictured, whose spine, spread apart by cupped, dwarfed hands, reveals its sinuous nature. Holes form in the body represented in *Center*. Human and naturalistic elements intertwine to form a body created by these two opposing entities. Altmejd's *Center* and *Untitled Number 30* (figure 7) rely on structural hints that mimic human form in order to display a clearly defined human



element. In *Center* and *Untitled Number 30* the environments are portrayed as body. In Altmejd's *The Pit*, the human figure is barely noticeable, save for some hair and what resembles an ear, small hands scalloping across its surface, resembling growths, plant like in origin. In *The Pit*, and *Untitled Number 16* (fig. 8), the body is portrayed as environment. Within these two works the form is integrated with the surrounding elements and is made complete through hints of recognizable human-like components. The viewer knows the body exists even though they are being presented with very little information regarding it. While Altmejd's work focuses on the human component being built out of, and mimicking the natural environment, *Standard Deviations* focuses on presenting the body of and within a human environment. It explores the new environments made by humans as ecosystem and finds harmony between man and the unnatural or manmade. *Standard Deviations* shows how people relate and adapt to aspects and objects of our contemporary world, how we think of ourselves within our surroundings, and how these manmade objects become natural components of our landscape.

*Standard Deviations* transforms an object's identifiable form and function and integrates the human figure into a structural relationship with surrounding elements. This work is reminiscent of what Susan Stewart states in *On Longing*, that "this childhood is not a childhood as lived; it is a childhood voluntarily remembered, a childhood manufactured from its material survivals" (145). We are emotional creatures that attach meaning and value to objects, and while, "No doubt one would have to sink into profound daydreaming to be moved by the vast museum of insignificant things" (Bachelard, 142) the way a viewer processes these everyday objects speaks greatly of

their personal, mythological developments. In a world where materiality and the self are intertwined, symbolic deviations come standard.

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