

## Curator's Statement

In the fall of 2000, I went to Germany for five weeks as the Zygote Press representative for the Ohio and Dresden printmaking exchange. Looking through the prism of that time and place, I chose the artists and the work for *Connections II: Ohio Artists Abroad*. Those who went not as visitors but as observers and chroniclers and whose work reflected their immersion in the new surroundings created the most direct, honest and passionate art.

German Expressionists have long inspired KIM VITO. Every evening after teaching, she took her sketchbook and etching plates down to the banks of the Elbe River and drew from observation. Utilizing plant forms and landscape as subject matter, Vito's work underwent a dramatic change from representational to abstraction. Shapes, lines, fragments and transparent layers reference the passing of time.

In 2002, ANDREA JOKI encountered some of the worst floods in Dresden's history. She recalls a quiet, almost melancholy atmosphere punctuated by the sounds of rubble and sandbags dragged through the streets. At the Grafikwerkstatt, she formed a friendship with printer UDO HAUFE. Before her return to Cleveland, the two artists decided to continue their dialogue in print. Their work addresses themes of fictional mapping and discovery.

JENNIFER CRAUN noticed that there were few birds in Dresden so she incorporated the image of a homing pigeon into her work to represent the freedom to stay or leave and the longing to return to places of previous memories. Pregnant with her first child when she left on residency, her work focused on issues of home and place. Craun documented her thoughts and activities in a commonplace book of words and images using correspondence, maps, diagrams and ephemera.

Married in life and in art, the collaborative work of DIANA DUNCAN HOLMES and TIMOTHY RIORDAN is a response to place, time and myth and the play of words and images. During their two month stay in Prague, they used the front page of the Czech newspaper *DNES* as a diary. Combining found materials, including maps, stamps, posters, tickets and photographs, they collaged and drew, wrote and recorded their everyday experiences.

MICHAEL LODERSTEDT was intrigued by globes, maps, stamped metal grates, candle holders and embroidered fabrics found in the flea market: "The embedded narratives in these objects speak of the strong connections to domestic life, to difficult work and the rewards of a virtuous life. . . I have attempted to bring them together with images from science in an effort to imbue them with a fictive cosmology."

The unrealistic ideals of happiness and perfection in the lives of women in the 1950s are the subject of PHYLLIS KOHRING FANNIN's work. Using humor to deal with pain, Fannin was inspired by the Puppet Theatre in Prague. Animated figures and

household items are combined with dressmaking patterns found in the flea market and books and magazines given to her by German women she met in Dresden.

The satirical anti-war novel of World War I, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, is the inspiration behind GRETCHEN STEVENS COCHRAN's installation. Avoiding war by being arrested, Švejk characterizes the passive resistance of a people who endured decades of occupation. The Czech language has fifteen ways to say "maybe"; Švejk is the Master of Maybe and a national hero. *Švejk's Chess* alludes to a Soviet era game room located behind a bar that hid the entrance to an underground art gallery.

BRUCE E. CHECEFSKY films are based on unrealized scripts and previously made Eastern European experimental films lost or destroyed. Using contemporary and antiquated technologies, Checefsky's films are original interpretations, not historical reconstructions. *Moment Musical* is a commercial: photographs of jewelry, porcelain and glass are animated to music by Ravel. *IN NI (others)*, excerpts from an asylum inmate's diary, describes Nazi atrocities during the occupation of Poland. Film footage of Jews on their way to the death camps refers to the wider scope of the genocide.

The mixed media prints of STEPHANIE E. SYPSA are metaphors for rescuing fading memories. She was reared on the Mississippi Gulf coast where her family still lives. Sypsa witnessed the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina the year before she went to Germany. Dresden's rebuilt Frauenkirche, travels to the Berlin wall site, Pompeii and Roman tombs connected her to the tragedy at home. A trip to Sachsenhausen added new meaning: a statement against those who would deny the Holocaust.

NICHOLAS HILL's mother survived the bombings of England during the Second World War though her home was destroyed. Hill's childhood visits to the family and the memory of the devastated Coventry Cathedral connected him to Dresden on a personal level. Avoiding illustrations of any particular place or building, Hill abstracts emblematic shapes – especially bridges and domes. His use of color evokes images of the Dresden firestorms of February 1945.

Referring to the Czech history of alchemy, LAILA VOSS elevates mundane materials into "good objects": the cobblestone streets are transformed into a column of stone, an iconic shape representing the history of architecture. The daughter of missionaries, Voss has lived in many countries and knows the isolation one can feel when there is a language barrier. The text panels and audio track are vocabulary lessons to bridge the communication gap.

Belief in the artist as shaman imbues the work of MARK SOPPELAND with magic. Using light to illuminate and transform his found object sculptures, Soppeland addresses the human need to search for and possess things. Visits to the ossuary and alchemy museum at Kutná Hora, near Prague, and the shrines and churches in the Czech Republic continue to inform his work.

While the works on exhibit are the immediate, tangible effects of the residency experience, a ripple effect is also in motion across the ocean as artists expand their new world views through collaborations, teaching and exhibitions. These professional partnerships are connections among Ohio artists abroad, their exchange counterparts and you, our audience.

With most grateful thanks to the Ohio Arts Council for their continued enthusiasm, generosity and support,

Wendy Collin Sorin