

David Avery

Artist Statement

In these times of the potential disruption of everything we have come to think of as “Culture” (civilization?), I suppose that I am hopelessly conservative. For me, the act of facing a prepared copper plate connects me with four hundred years of culture through the tradition of printmaking, not only because of the masters of that art and the influence of their literary counterparts (Rabelais and Jarry will be noted in my work), but through the potential for subversion in the political, social and psychological spheres that is associated with the printing press. In this era of total disruption, when any neophyte with a mobile device can create a masterpiece with the punch of a button, I find engagement with the constraints of a centuries-old, time consuming technique to be particularly rewarding, especially from a subversive standpoint.

A practitioner of traditional black and white etching in San Francisco for over 30 years, I often find in the works and techniques of the master etchers and engravers inspiration or a point of departure for my own work—a bridge between past thought and contemporary issues, one that sheds light in a unique way on such concerns. In the past, prints were often used to address contemporary issues of the day, sometimes cloaking a pointed message in the trappings of classical mythological or religious themes. More recently, I have tried to utilize the same techniques with regard to current curses of humanity to invite viewers to make their own connections between the follies of our present day and those of the past.

Where do my ideas come from? The same place as everyone else’s—the brain. Or more precisely, they come from the interaction between experience and imagination that takes place within the brain, and I tend to think of my discovery of images in terms of receptivity rather than “inspiration” or “creativity”. If anything, my intent in pursuing a carefully worked out and highly detailed image is to work towards an inward goal unbounded by a set beginning or end, rather than trying to make some inner vision tangible. Even a simple nursery rhyme, once you start picking at it, will reveal layer upon layer of associations and further meanings. I consider my work successful to the extent that it continues to generate multiple interpretations, releasing this capacity for receptivity to the mysterious and the ambivalent that reflects the essential vibrancy of life.