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The Orthographic Characters (in no particular order)

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THE ORTHOGRAPHIC CHARACTERS
(IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER)

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

by
Alison Christina Frank
B.F.A., University of Regina, Canada, 2001
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ABSTRACT

My work focuses on the development of playful and absurd combinations of small creatures that co-exist in a state of odd logic. The creatures share a vulnerable, somewhat fragile, quality, yet are assigned vital force in their existence. This juxtaposition is metaphorical for certain aspects of human existence. The *Orthographic Characters* is the title of a series of prints and paintings I have created that form a non-linear narrative. Each piece is inspired by the alliteration of one alphabet character. The writings form a bizarre, feverish context for the characters.
In a realm, lacking a proper name, mischief was brewing. It was a realm with unconventional rules and communication. Some days it fostered and promoted unmovable transportation. On other days it could not even support three-dimensionality. The world was full of strange events. The unusual cast of creatures were never quite sure what was occurring or why. There did not seem to be much logic. Still, they became somewhat accustomed to this state of flux. The irrational slowly became rational. The nonsense just made sense.

However, there was reason and a controlling force over the realm that the creatures didn’t know about. Secretly at work were twenty-six characters who did know what was happening. They were twenty-six very mischievous characters. They were characters of the alphabetic kind. They called themselves the orthographic characters. As children, these characters were quite innocent. They loved to arrange themselves in circles and loops and streams of never-ending nonsense. Some twenty-two years ago, their presence had very little effect on the realm. Their structures would sound in the realm like muted tones of chatter and hisses. As the characters grew, they became clever and could affectively arrange themselves into words. This was the moment when creatures, places and all sorts of oddities began appearing in the realm. The older the alphabet got, the more playful they became. They began to multiply. Then they began arranging themselves in words within games they called poems, lyrics, labels and sometimes even medical terms. This threw the realm into utter chaos. The creatures could not grasp what was happening. However, they did become suspicious at times.
One particular season, the orthographic characters were fixated with matching and duplication. They decided to play a new game. Letters of the same species would guide different words. These words would gather and pile up. They called it “alliteration”. The alliterations brought together disparate concepts. Headaches, hills, howls and hors d’oeuvres were all now related. The haziness of the phrases formed feverish dream-like circumstances for the creatures of the realm.

**Enclosed and Encased**

The alliterations formed narrative pictures. This often meant that the characters were faced with the confinement of an illustrative setting complete with restrictive borders. This made them a little bit antsy. There was the “Vexed Vampress in the Vignette”. Others heard the “Nauseating Noise in the Niche,” which kept them awake all night. They felt very inhibited. Several stringy entities found it “Essential to Exhibit their Elastic Extenders while Encased in the Ellipse”.

**Altered Aesthetics**

Others felt liberated with the unusual new logic. There was excited anticipation in the possibility that anything could happen. Everyone remembered the “Helium Hedgehog Happening”. The hedgehogs enjoyed their altered state for a while and inspired others to accept the current conditions of fluctuation.
Paraphrase to the Playful

The “Helium Hedgehog Happening” eventually was “Hindered”. It was inevitable and those things happen. However, the orthographic characters felt it was an opportunity to send warnings to the creatures. They could express their great wisdom. “Yield to provoke Yesterday’s Yoke”, Y spoke emphatically to M. In return, the “Marvelous Mug Manoeuverers Murmured Maybe Mayhem”.

Fragility and Vulnerability

“Meanwhile Midge appeared, unable to Modernize, Magnifying the Meat Modifications”. Then Midge disappeared. Their existence was fairly unstable due to the fact they were dependent on the whims of the orthographic characters. This held them on the verge of craziness. There was usually “Lunacy Lurking” somewhere. It made them “Unstable, Unruly and even Uncoordinated”.

Passing in Phrases

They tried to justify their insanity. L said he incurred his lunacy through a sting from a “Wee Winter Wasp in the Wind”. This seemed unlikely. Q said he thought he saw a giant grasshopper in a Santa hat that may have been a wasp. However, Q’s reliability was questionable. He had been sighted with sharp objects. Therefore, no one could verify the event for certain. Part of the problem was that the alliterations would manifest in a glimpse and fade. Many of the episodes were temporal and fleeting. The creature’s memories were short and divergent.
Presentable

Part of their fragility was linked to the uncomfortable, disparate objects and pieces of which they were composed. Despite their awkwardness, the creatures did what they could to improve their appearance and existence. They adorned themselves with all crafty things like feathers, ribbons and pins. Sometimes their choices were not very tasteful or practical. Formerly agile spiders were rendered uncoordinated with their limbs of straws, ribbons and beads.

Observation Association

Although the alliterations formed separate situations, there were parallels to one another. Often these correlations appeared as visual links. Visual information would repeat, spread and transmit as if normal. This infliction and infection seemed to be a principal force present in this realm. It had disease-like nature and some characters tried to intercept it or, at the very least, intimidate it. “The Gemini germ was greeted by the garish grin of a garfish gastropod.” However, it was perpetuated by the antics of other characters. “An insane little ingredient imitated an ingénue’s identity and invoked infection and irritation.” In this case it emanated as a stringy substance. It meant hindering, stringy limbs for others it infected. There was also a repetitive occurrence of pins that was first noticed by an Ookpic. It was spotted by others and they also began noticing the pin-hole punctures left behind. The seemingly random appearance of the piercings often just startled them. The punctures affected some of the creatures on a deeper level and they were acutely aware of the sting. Anyway, it was the repetition made them suspicious.
Disorientation, Disorder and Disarray

Many were perplexed. Others were confused. At times, they were very leery of one another. Even a Kleenex appeared “quite questionable”.

Unnerved

“Pursuit of the puncture provocateur? The pestilent pin-cushion panicked.” The pin-cushion seized his pestilent peach partner. They made their escape and, in doing so, created a “ZigZag”.

Curious Encounters

“The Ookipic and the Obscurity.” It was an awkward moment for the two. They were foreign to each other and unsure what to make of one another. Was there potential danger or was it another joke? Most of the time these odd meetings just left the creatures puzzled. The orthographic characters liked to create alliterations that arranged for creatures to be introduced. It was about confrontation with the new. Strangers, new situations, unfamiliar paths and other peculiars were presented. The Orthographic characters liked to watch the reaction. “They fled fearing furiosity for they found fragments of frosty forms, freakish fumes and a full-grown frown.”

Pleasant and Peaceable

The orthographic characters liked to be mischievous and cram the creatures into scenes where they would become irritated and fussy with one another. The creatures
were fairly resistant to this in their innate avoidance of aversion. This prompted the orthographic characters to work harder to accomplish there devilish schemes and pranks which they delighted in. They began plotting the next game they could arrange for the realm. However, for now, the creatures had managed to remain gentle and good-natured. In fact, at the present, a composed couple carefully arranged themselves within a square in preparation for a photograph on a card intending to send regards far away. It was in completion of X’s alliteration:

“XoXoXoXoXoXoXoX”
My thesis work focuses on the development of playful and absurd combinations of small creatures that co-exist in a state of odd logic. The creatures share a vulnerable, somewhat fragile, quality, yet are assigned vital force in their existence. This juxtaposition is metaphorical for certain aspects of human existence. I hope that humor is created through the expression of my characters and the various circumstances they encounter.

I have created a series of prints and paintings that form a nonlinear narrative. Each piece is inspired by the alliteration of one alphabet character. The writings form a bizarre, feverish, dream-like context for the subject matter which involves odd creatures in ridiculous events.

Visual images in each piece are incited and encouraged by the texts. The texts coupling each painting are presented separately, framed as a miniature work themselves. When presented together, the “alphabet” is arranged in random order to add to the disorientation the alliterations already form. The images are encased by odd-shaped frames, each with its own unique design and variation in color. The frames seem to morph around the gallery as the shape and dimensions of each piece vary. They warp, twist, swell, and squish their way through the space. The fluctuation in form allows for a less rigid environment for the characters and greater potential for their authority.

The alliterations form a confusing and nonsensical world. It is a world of disguised images of my own experiences and memories that come together in an assemblage of confusion and instability. The creation of this atmosphere is drawn partly
from the altered, nightmarish state I go into when dreaming at night. It is the momentary entrapment with many of the familiarities of this world rearranged into illogical conditions. Visually, the work mimics the alliterative in repetition of formal elements. Stripes appear throughout the work. Three or four tones of one color appear in a single piece.

The characters in the work are trying to put the pieces together and find their way around this world. Sometimes their actions help, sometimes they do little, sometimes they are just observing.
“M”
Oil on Canvas
2004
“M”
Detail
Installation view 1

Installation view 2
“O”
Colored Pencil
2004
“L”
Oil on Board
2004

“L”, detail

“L”, detail
“I”
Intaglio
2003
“E”
Intaglio
2003
“P”
Acrylic on canvas
2003
“P”, detail

Pursuit of the puncture provocateur?
The pestilent pin-cushion punicked.

“P”, detail
“X”
Intaglio
2004
“V”
Charcoal
2004
“V”, detail
“W”
Oil on Canvas
2004
“W”, detail
Installation view 3
VITA

Alison Frank was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, on June 21, 1979. She is the daughter of Gene and Gwen Frank. She grew up in Bateman, Saskatchewan. In 2001, she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts, with a concentration in printmaking, from the University of Regina, in Saskatchewan. In the fall of 2001, she moved to Baton Rouge to pursue a Master of Fine Arts at Louisiana State University, which she will be awarded in August 2004.