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Etched in light: A solo show by Elin Rødseth

By Victoria Hofmo
Brooklyn, N.Y.

“Passersby” explores the loneliness and comfort of the strangers who fill our lives



Norwegian printmaker Elin Rødseth is having her first solo show in Brooklyn's Owen James Gallery. Perhaps it is fitting for her, when you examine the breadth of her own artistic studies: receiving both a Bachelor and Masters Degree in visual arts from The National Academy of Arts in Oslo (where she was born and raised); as well as studying art in Hangzhou, Florence, and New York.

Owner Owen Houhoulis opened the gallery because “I wanted to return to working with emerging artists. For many years I worked for galleries that dealt with well-established, mostly American artists. While I loved the work, my own personal interests lay in discovering new things and people, who were influenced by and talking about things other than what I saw around me in U.S. I love research, and curating, in addition to global history. I love having the ability to create a space to show the fruits of my research, and to give young artists like Elin a voice in New York, which remains the most important center for contemporary art in the world.”

The exhibit’s provoking title is, “Passersby,” and shows joyful and haunting images of those we pass on the street. Norwegian artists have long depicted city living. I am thinking of Munch’s, “Evening on Karl Johan Strasse,” depicting how a population-dense area can counter-intuitively lead to alienation. Rødseth’s pieces, unlike Munch’s, are not dire. Instead, the majority of her pieces are solitary, a choice that gives these city dwellers a tender vulnerability. Although most are faceless, they are not soulless.

With the world as his oyster in terms of artists, why did Owen choose Rødseth’s work for a one-woman show? It was due to her theme, articulation, and unique craft. Owen elaborates: “I first saw a work by Elin at the Manhattan Graphics Center, where I was taking a night class with my wife. Her work struck me as quite interesting and different. I looked up more of her work and kept track of her over the next couple of years while I was setting up my own art gallery. I knew that I wanted Elin to be one of the gallery’s first shows. I love the intimate scale of the work, and muted colors. She is able to really push the boundaries of the print techniques that she uses, and the effect is just fantastic. Elin is also a good fit for the gallery because we have a very international program, showing artists not only living in New York but Europe and Southeast Asia as well. I am thrilled to be able to work with Elin on this show, to present her first solo exhibition.”

I was able to chat virtually with the artist, to learn a little more.

Victoria Hofmo: Elin, where did your interest in art begin?

Elin Rødseth: As almost any other kid I used to love drawing and painting. It was the best. When I look at the drawings from my childhood they seem to be in the same visual landscape that I am working in now. It was always pictures of human figures with lots of details and emotions.

VH: Why did you choose printmaking?

ER: Printmaking gives me an appreciated distance to my motives. Some of the information disappears in the process and what appears on the paper is a peeled, rough, and mirrored version of the original. I also like that the possibilities of reproduction can be used as a visual effect. The process is very exciting since you don’t get to see the result before the end of the process, when the treated plate is inked and pressed against paper.

VH: Your pieces in this show are photopolymer on paper. Can you explain photopolymer so that the average bear can understand it?

ER: Photopolymer is a light-sensitive film on which you can transfer any kind of image using UV-light. The film is attached to a plate and exposed with UV-light. After exposure, the plates are etched in water, cured, and printed on an etching press. You print it the same way as any intaglio print. I learned the technique when I stayed in New York for a year after graduating from the National Art Academy in Oslo. I was a scholarship student at Manhattan Graphics Center, and I learned the technique from Douglas Collins.

VH: How does it feel to have your first solo show in N.Y.?

ER: I am very excited about it. I have gathered a lot of inspiration in the city, so it feels delightful to show my works there. I came over for the opening night, and got to meet many nice people. I loved the gallery space and how my works were presented.

VH: Your theme is interesting to me. Every day we pass so many people, sometimes with a smile and other times as if they are shadows. What inspired you to focus on this theme?

ER: As mentioned, I have always been interested in making pictures of people. I think I am very concerned about the people that surround us. They are such a big mass, and sometimes they feel like wallpaper. But if they were not there, I would miss them so much. They are strangers, but we live so close upon them. When I am going to sleep I can hear my unknown neighbor above me walk around on my roof.

VH: Has your "Passersby" project changed your relationship to the people you pass on the street? If so, how?

ER: I always look for characters or atmospheres that I can use as motives or moods in my pictures.

VH: What are you working on now?

ER: Right now I am working on a series of large-scale prints. Next month I will be taking part in a group exhibition here in Oslo.

VH: What are your future hopes or plans?

ER: I have a lot of ideas of pictures I want to make. My plan is to continue working in my studio in Oslo. It would be fantastic to exhibit my works in the U.S. again sometime in the future, and in Norway too of course. I am looking forward to working, and to exploring my themes and techniques further.

VH: Is there anything you would like to add?

ER: Some Americans have told me that my pictures look Scandinavian since there are so few people in the pictures, and since the visual language is so timid. I think it is interesting how our surroundings shapes our expressions.

Rødseth's work can be seen at the Owen James Gallery through April 25 in Brooklyn., at 61 Greenpoint Avenue, Suite 315. Hurry!

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