

Martha Willette Lewis

***After Picasso: The Constructed Image***

Me, Picasso & the delight of ordinary magic:

Cubism is so deeply entwined in how we look and perceive and what we KNOW about things in space... Picasso did not, to my knowledge discuss physics, but it's all about it: time shuffling at different speeds, the simultaneity of the objects presented, the implications of multiple dimensions, the play of flat planes, opacity and transparency, and the weird (and totally great) incorporation of everyday real world objects like newspapers into the fictitious realm of the painted picture plane. Cubism broke the 4th wall in painting, our world collides with the one in the painted window in ways that are exhilarating, speed-driven, and oh-so-modern.

Cubism is the thrill of looking, crystalized.

My takes on it here are a 3-dimensional drawing (a "membrane" or "'Brane") flying in its chamber, and a flattened 'brane, a crumpled 3-d model then crushed flat, inked and printed, from the series: *So Attracted*. This collection of hand embellished monoprints was produced by Planthouse Gallery in New York, as an edition and then re-worked by me, adding color and line, using both sides of the translucent rice paper, on a terrace overlooking the Mediterranean Sea one summer, with the air full of salt, pine, and sunshine. Not that dissimilar to Picasso, working not far away, in Antibes, many years before me. Each print from *So Attracted* became a marker of time that summer, a Calander of making, of rendering, flattening, and depicting hidden dimensions, possible relationships and making images that are and yet are not things. Put the whole series together and the Calander becomes a stop-motion animation of a flow of time.

Both works shown here reference ideas in physics and mathematics. One aspect of working with paper that is of special joy to me is the way transforms from smooth and flat to complex and sculptural so instantly and violently. Both artworks shown here feature a lack of scale, creating elements which could be massive or tiny or simultaneously both. The faceted forms on the 'branes echo natural structures such as geological masses, insect wings, or icebergs. This geometric likeness can lend the works an eerie familiarity and liveliness to something which is not a picture, but which still evokes the world around it.

The initial impetus - the concept of two "membranes" crumpling upon impact as multiverses floating in a "bulk" -- is a massive event of epic proportions. A second iteration is modest and small: a discarded idea, a scrap of paper balled up and chucked out. This scrap has remarkable characteristics, though. It is minutely detailed, with intricate folds and volutes, and it has surprising properties -- some of which still mystify scientists: the power to protect from impact, strange properties with sound experiments, and the ability to bear much more weight than its flat twin. As one mathematics paper on the subject succinctly put it: "A crumple is the visual residue of a climatic event". There is implied movement and force along with the aspect of the discarded, the frustrated, the left behind, the abandoned idea....

The piece of paper I am drawing on goes in my hand and I crumple it. I trace and follow the crumples, carefully coloring the folds and volutes. I then ink it up and smash it on to another flat sheet of paper. The result is a fact, evidence of this complex object and my action. I then extrapolate, drawing lines, connecting bodies: attraction, repulsion, the magnetic dance towards and away from each other.

Classical subject matter, crystalized and faceted into myriad shards. Breaking up, coagulating. Movement frozen, and the joy of play.

This is what Picasso essentially means to me: the pleasure of looking, the pleasure of making, manifested visually.

Bio:

Martha Willette Lewis is a visual artist, curator, educator, and radio presenter who has exhibited nationally and internationally. Her work often intersects with the history of science and human knowledge, and includes painting, drawing, site-specific installation. Blueprints, floorplans, diagrams, maps and schematics all play major roles in her repertoire, which freely combines disparate scales and forms of imagery to find new dialogs and terrains.

Martha's work has been exhibited at The Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, The Tricycle Gallery and The Oxford University Botanical Gardens in the UK., and in the USA at The DeCordova Museum, The New Haven Museum, Central Booking Gallery, Geoffrey Young Gallery, Planthouse Gallery, RealArtWays and The Tides Institute & Museum, to name a few.

She was the inaugural artist-in-residence at the Yale Quantum Institute, with whom she continues to collaborate, and was resident artist at the school of Architecture at Hong Kong University in 2021 where she taught drawing and site-specific installation. This fall she is in residence at Lost & Found Lab in Cos Cob where she is engaged a collaborative, multi-media project meditating on the global climate Crisis. She has degrees from The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art and Yale University School of Art. More of her artwork can be seen at martha lewis.com <http://www.marthalewis.com/> and on instagram at @marthawlewis. When she is not at her studio Martha can be found on the airwaves at WPKN 89.5 fm and at wpkn.org.