

Sheila Sloss

I think I am slightly unusual for rarely sketching things first; I prefer the spontaneity of working directly onto plates or adding to prints. I like the excitement of not knowing exactly what will happen in a process of layering and collaging images. Image and concept are definitely to the fore in the final print, but I revel in having a wide technical vocabulary. Personal photographs are often

incorporated into my prints and manipulated in some way, although I also value the handmade mark linking them. There is always a story unfolding behind my images if one keeps looking. Sometimes right at the start I have a moment's insight as to what the final image might look like and I quickly do a thumbnail sketch of it. When it's going off the mark, a glance at that thumbnail usually tells me why!



Watching – Dancing Dresses II, 2004.
Photolithography, collagraph, screenprint, 45 x 55 cm
(17¼ x 21¼ in.)

As a child I used my dolls' house and dolls to enact what I thought would happen in my adult life. When I looked at it again, 25 years later, I took the opportunity to reflect on what I had imagined.

The two illustrations shown here come from a series of five basic images. All the backgrounds are the same; they represent different scenes in the same room at different times of the day. The title of 'watching' in this series of prints refers to being an observer of life. It is signified by the empty chairs and the dynamic between them and the objects in view. The background 'wallpaper' is the interior of the dolls' house. It almost has the luminosity of a back projection, enhancing the viewer/watching theme. Each image is displayed with an equal white border, acting like a window frame. Although I had thumbnail sketches of the ideas, from the start I didn't want to define them exactly, preferring to let the image develop as I got immersed in it. I worked on four or five prints of each image, adding new layers or repositioning pieces of print as you might work into a painting until it achieves what you want. In that sense, each one is a monoprint. Each object in these prints has a significance to me. When I started using such personal references I feared it would be seen as narcissistic; but of course no one is unique and

Watching – Domestic Chaos I, 2004.
Photolithography, collagraph screenprint, 45 x 55 cm
(17¼ x 21¼ in.).



the viewer may see echoes of her or his own life in the prints.

Watching – Dancing Dresses II depicts three party frocks that were mine at different ages. They are fantasy wear for special occasions: a dress bought for a portrait photograph at age one; an expensive netting frock given to me when I was twelve and had nowhere to wear it; and a red-satin mini dress I purchased at twenty-one, to look cool. The dresses are empty because the owner has grown up; they are party memories and dreams recording time.

Watching – Domestic Chaos I features a 'grown-up' doll. Curiously, when I had finally packed her away as a child, she was wearing a knitted dress and a plastic set of pearls. I don't think this is what she was bought in. Her dilemma is that she is dressed to go out, but the domestic life threatens to keep her prisoner. The odd sizes of the objects in the image link

importance to scale: the cutlery is enlarged from dolls' house size; the cupboard and table are almost true (doll) size; my current Alessi kettle flies in for good measure and, as ever, Grandad's empty kitchen chair looks on.

Technically, these are extremely complicated to print. What made it feasible is that they are images I had already worked on previously. The photolitho plate was made five years ago for an earlier work on the dolls' house theme, but then not used. The walls are simple, dry-printed collagraph. Some objects had already gone through other transformative processes before I added them in screen. Screenprint dances on the surface of the other processes, giving spatial layers.

I have made a lot of work on these themes since my father died ten years ago and I cleared out the real house. I think these will be the last; I too will move on to different themes.