

ARTIST STATEMENT

John Graham

*The Artist's Book **VISIONS FROM THE TEMPEST** was inspired by William Shakespeare's last play, 'The Tempest'. Many view this work as his last symbolic farewell to art. The play revolves around Prospero, the deposed duke of Milan, who rules an island kingdom by magical powers. The men who betrayed Prospero are ceremoniously shipwrecked by a wild tempest fabricated by his magic. Ironically the same island where Prospero is serving out his banishment saves them. Prospero lives on the mysterious and tropical island with his daughter, Miranda. They have trained the wild-spirited monster Caliban, a mythical hybrid creature, as their servant. Ariel, a spirit, also attends to Prospero. During a key moment in the play, Ariel prompts Prospero to forswear revenge and forgive the men whom took who stole his Dukedom from him.*

The play illuminates a plethora of themes but perhaps the most important is that love is about granting freedom to others. This play like many of his other works suggests that if individuals grapple with the challenge of becoming self-aware, they may change. Shakespeare's vision of life was dynamic: he illuminates this in his work with lyricism, wit and fantasy. He imagines a complex, volatile freedom that may lead people as readily to destruction as to grace.

*The visuals that I choose isolate and represent the play, reflect my interest in lyrical prose charged with dramatic psychological intent. I did not choose to exclusively represent the classically recognised key moments in the play. Instead, I was drawn to different passages or citations because they resonated for me in a particular personal way. Ultimately, **VISIONS FROM THE TEMPEST** was intended not to illustrate the play, but rather to act as a complement to the spirit of the work.*

I choose to portray and faithfully dress each protagonist in period Elizabethan costume to reflect the spirit of the era. The style of the woodcut markmaking of the book resemble graphics of the same era but also reflect strong influences of German expressionism that occurred at the beginning of the 20th century. I also opted to use a form of collage expression in depicting the physiognomy and the bodies of the characters. In fact, the final preparatory drawings for many of the puppet-like characters were composed from assemblages of body parts from figure study sessions. I especially enjoyed animating the figures with gestures that reflect the communicative nature of Italian culture - even though this is an English play! The visual resolution of Caliban was influenced by some a number of sources including period notions of monsters and the potent drawings of the Jean Michael Basquiat. Finally, watercolour was introduced over the black & white printed images to augment the mood, to soften the contrasts, and to create the illusion of more spatial depth.

V I S I O N S

from *The Tempest*

This Artist's Book was conceived, created, printed and water-coloured by John Graham. Several awards have greatly assisted in the realization of the bookwork. Firstly, the artist gratefully acknowledges the kind support of the Vermont Studio Center for granting a Full Fellowship Residency in 2000. The artist is equally appreciative of the support of two other later grants that were dedicated to the realization of this Artist's Book. In 2000, the artist received an Artist's Project Grant from the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council for this project. The artist later received an Artistic/Creative Grant from the Office of Research of Memorial University of Newfoundland in 2001 to also complete the book.

The images were sketched and the carving process commenced at a spring residency at the Vermont Studio Center in the 2000. The carving process continued through to the summer of 2001 in Newfoundland. The wood blocks were hand-printed and the text was screen-printed during summer residency in 2001 at the Banff Centre for the Arts. The woodcut prints were hand-painted and the book finally assembled at St. Michael's Print shop of St. John's, Newfoundland in the late summer of 2001.

Information:

Paper type: Arches White Laid (120gm)

Edition size: 20

Date of Publication: Feb. 15, 2002

Format: (double sleeve) accordion format with clam-shell case

Size: (image) 12 1/2" x 11 1/4" (case) 14" x 12" x 2"

Media: relief woodcut with hand-coloured water-colour / screen-printed text

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