1982

Emotion and Fantasy Are My Favorite Subject Matter

Carlos Llerena Aguirre
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I had a neoimpressionist education. Painting and drawing were my only love, and I thought printing was too rough and lacking in fine detail. It was only when I visited Europe in 1975 that I realized the full potential of the printed image. There was something magical about seeing Rembrandt’s house—the preparatory brush drawings, the engraving tools, the handmade press, the innumerable trial proofs. I was also inspired by Heinrich Kley’s drawings, Max Klinger’s engravings, and Edvard Munch’s color woodcuts. I soon bought an etching press and went to work.

That same year I became interested in color woodcuts, finding black and white too somber for certain subject matter. I began to experiment with the principles of the Japanese ukiyo-e (“pictures of the floating world”). Zen philosophy was very helpful; I let the nature of the wood flow along with my own.

Emotion and fantasy are my favorite subject matter, whether I am working on my own or on assignment for a publication. The emotional content is more significant for me than technical ability, which is simply the means to express an idea. I do not believe in perfect editions. Every print is unique, not only in color combination but also in the feeling of time and space.

I use my work as an instrument of communication. Publication allows millions to view a print within a short time of its creation and becomes the means of a dialogue between the artist and the world.

Since I was fourteen I have kept a daily visual journal. I record lines and colors, fantasies and passions, and my honest and intense reactions to reality. My drawings come from within, like a waking dream, a psychic experience that remains linked to the physical world. This is the source of my art and the beginning of every picture.


Published by SURFACE, 1982
Above: Woodcut for *Ms.* magazine.
Carlos Llerena Aguirre, 1975.


Facing page, above: Woodcut for *Psychology Today.*
Carlos Llerena Aguirre, 1980.

Facing page, below: Woodcut for the *New York Times.*