



# VCU

Virginia Commonwealth University  
**VCU Scholars Compass**

---

Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

---

2006

## Journeys

Diane Rohman  
*Virginia Commonwealth University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>

© The Author

---

**Downloaded from**

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/1270>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact [libcompass@vcu.edu](mailto:libcompass@vcu.edu).

## **Journeys**

Documentation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Diane Rohman

Master of Art Education, Frostburg State University, Frostburg, Maryland, 1989

Bachelor of Science, Frostburg State University, Frostburg, Maryland, 1986

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia  
May, 2006

## Table of Contents

Artist Statement.....	iii
Journeys.....	1
Bibliography .....	12
Appendix .....	13
Figure 1. <i>Under the Shadow</i> .....	14
Figure 2. <i>Sahara</i> .....	15
Figure 3. <i>Paths and Barriers</i> .....	16
Figure 4. <i>Departure</i> .....	17
Figure 5. <i>cam.el (kam/'l),n</i> .....	18
Figure 6. <i>Signs of Wear</i> .....	19
Figure 7. <i>Rupture of the Water Bag</i> .....	20
Figure 8. <i>Eight</i> .....	21
Figure 9. <i>After the Desert</i> .....	22
Resume.....	23

## **Artist Statement**

My art is about journeys, mapping, and layering. Two archetypal images in my work are the camel and the desert. Much of this imagery was inspired by my personal journey over the Sahara and into Western Africa. On another level, this journey connects to my metaphorical journey through life.

As a printmaker, my art is very process oriented. Printmaking itself can be thought of as a kind of journey. My trip or the process is more important than the destination or the final result. Like the desert, my images are constantly shifting and transforming through the process of working. Printmaking with its alchemical overtones, layering, and unique surface qualities becomes a natural extension of my imagery.



## JOURNEYS

My art is about journeys, mapping, and layering. The process of making art is a journey in itself. Much like planning a real trip, I begin the process with a detailed plan, a metaphorical map, and a final destination in mind. But like a real journey there are always a few diversions, some roadblocks, and the occasional side trip along the way.

My journey begins with an actual trip. During the summer of 2004, I had the opportunity to travel to Western Africa to the country of Mali with a group of artists and art educators. The journey began in the capital city of Bamako located on the lush river valley of the Niger River. We crossed road blocks manned by guards armed with machine guns to visit the sacred mosques of Jenne. In a tiny bus, we crossed flooded, washed out roads on our way to Mopti. Covered in red dust, we traveled unpaved roads to the sandy plateaus of Bandiagara and Songha. In temperatures averaging over one hundred degrees we climbed steep rocky cliffs to the villages of the cliff dwelling Dogon people. We retraced the ancient salt and spice routes to Timbuctu, once the center of Islamic learning and culture. Part of the allure of Timbuctu is its remote location in the middle of the Sahara. Even with modern four wheel drive caravans, it is a long difficult journey through the isolated, seemingly endless desert terrain. Sand storms arose from out of nowhere, blackened the sky like an approaching storm, and disappeared just as quickly. From Timbuctu we traveled into the desert on camelback to visit a Tuareg camp. The Tuareg, known as the Blue

People of the Desert because of their dark indigo clothing, are a nomadic people. They welcomed us to their caravan with the usual aggressive vendors and with song and dance. Their songs praise God for the caravan, the stars, and the sweet life of the desert. In Africa, death is never far from life. Everywhere, I was amazed by the strength and the resilience of these people who survive daily hardships and make their home in the harshest of environments.

It was here, in Africa, that I started to really think about the theme of the journey and how it relates to my art. Traveling to Africa was so much more than just a vacation or even an adventure. I was constantly exposed to new images, new processes, and new ideas. To survive there, I had to look at my world through different eyes.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875-1961) speaks of the notion of archetypes, those universally recognized symbols which recur repeatedly in world mythology. In Jung's view, these archetypes provide the link between the individual and the collective unconscious- a section of the unconscious mind made up of memories and images shared with all humankind. One of the archetypes he speaks of is *the journey*.

The archetypal theme of the journey is not new to art or to literature. One need only look at such classics as Homer's *Odyssey* and Dante's *Inferno* or to Mali's own tale of *Sundiata*. In these stories, a hero is sent on a quest in search of some type of knowledge from which he returns transformed. In *The Hero's Journey: A Guide to Literature and Life*, educator Reg Thomas writes, "The

journey is a process of self discovery and self-integration, of maintaining balance and harmony in our lives. As with any process of growth and change, a journey can be confusing and painful, but it brings opportunities to develop confidence, perspective and understanding.” Through taking the journey, we discover our true life purpose. “All human beings have a destiny and a unique part to play, but only by completing this journey of becoming who and what we really are can we make that contribution.”<sup>1</sup> Personally, I discovered an exciting new world in Africa but I also found a new way of looking at my world and at my art.

In Mali, I found a wealth of images suited to my ideas. The camel and the desert have always been important symbols in my art. The desert symbolizes hardship and asceticism. The major characteristic of the desert is that it is an uninhabitable place with little water or vegetation. Water, being necessary for existence, is a symbol of life, birth, and hope. The desert, in contrast, is arid and barren. It is a place devoid of life, a spiritual wasteland.

In his famous poem, *The Wasteland*, writer T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) describes such a place:

Here is no water but only rock  
 Rock and no water and the sandy road  
 The road winding above among the mountains  
 Which are mountains of rock without water  
 If there were water we should stop and drink  
 Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think  
 Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand  
 If there were only water amongst the rock<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Reg Thomas, and Susan Thompson. *The Hero's Journey: A Guide to Literature and Life* (Napa, California: Ariane Publications, 1997) 65.

<sup>2</sup>T.S. Eliot., *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1971) 49.

I inserted these lines from *The Wasteland* as a text layer in the digital print *Under the Shadow* (Appendix, 1). They were also the inspiration for my painting *Sahara* (Appendix, 2). The painting shows a rocky road winding through the desert. A storm is brewing and the wind is blowing. It is a scorching dry wind that slashes across the desert. The road is torn and scarred, more of a barrier or an obstacle than a path. It is the road less taken. Yet, it is still a path and there is a glimmer of hope on the horizon.

The desert is more of an allegory. It is something to be crossed rather than to be lived in. It is an obstacle that must be overcome on the way to a better world. In the Bible, the desert is a place for soul searching, purification, and enlightenment. The Israelites had to wander in the desert before they were allowed to enter the Holy Land. Jesus was tempted in the desert. St. Anthony at the age of thirty-four gave up everything he had and went to the desert where he lived the rest of his life in complete solitude. Insight and spirituality come after surviving the test, after crossing the desert.

I am attracted to images that represent both paths and barriers. I recently completed a small series of abstracted images which I named *Paths and Barriers* (Appendix, 3). These images began as digital photos taken of a handmade fence. They were then completely abstracted in the computer program Adobe Photoshop and printed on a variety of textural backgrounds. On a similar theme, the lithograph *Departure* (Appendix, 4) is a self portrait. In the print, I am standing against a natural fence, similar to those I saw being built in Africa. This

fence holds back a tumble of dried brush and thorns threatening to overtake the path. I am looking out at the horizon as a caravan of camels passes through.

The camel is a feminist image, an image of persecution, and a symbol of perseverance and survival. There is a relationship between the woman who is able to carry life within her body and the camel that is able to carry water as life in its hump. When the camel has one hump it resembles the swollen pregnant body. With two, it has a resemblance to the female breasts. The camel is found in regions of the world where women are severely repressed. It is an animal which has been domesticated and socialized from childhood to be a beast of burden. Yet, it is able to adapt to the harshest of environments, carrying within its body the strength that enables it to survive.

The camel has adapted to its life in the desert. The color of its body blends in with the colors of the sand. Its broad feet allow it to walk on the hot sand without sinking. During the course of evolution, the camel lost all but two of the toes on each foot and developed fleshy pads increasing the surface area of each foot. It has thick lips allowing it to eat the prickly plants of the desert. The camel has a double set of protective eyelashes enabling it to close one transparent eyelid and still see where it is going during the frequent sandstorms of the desert.

The camel's characteristic hump stores fatty tissue. By storing most of its fat within the hump, the rest of its body is able to act as a radiator for cooling, allowing the camel to adapt to the extreme temperature changes of the desert. Through the oxidation of this fat, the camel's body is able to manufacture water

allowing the camel to survive for as long as seventeen days without drinking water. During a long journey, the camel may lose as much as forty percent of its body weight in water. If the camel is not getting enough food and water, the hump will flatten and sag.

Several of my prints focus on the camel's hump. A large camel's hump carved into a woodblock provides the background for the print *cam.el (kam/'l), n.* (Appendix, 5). Inside the hump there is a small image of a camel's skeleton. A second small woodblock provides the definition of the body. An aquatint is printed over this hump. The aquatint provides text corresponding to the different parts of the camel's body. Near the hump, it reads; *If a camel is starving, its hump shrinks (the hump may even slip off and slide down the camels back).*

The collagraph print *Signs of Wear* (Appendix, 6) focuses on the two humps of a Bactrian camel. The texture of the plate and the collage additions emphasize the rough matted fur of the camel. It also includes text, reading: *The spots on their chests look as though they have rubbed or been bitten off, but are natural, not a sign of wear.* The text I choose to include in my work is meant to be evocative rather than specific or direct. It often has several levels of meaning. Some passages are autobiographical. Others become feminist and political statements, making analogies to the people of Africa and to women in general.

I have always enjoyed writing. The first time I considered combining text with my images was in the color etching *Rupture of the Water Bag* (Appendix, 7). The text surrounding the image is taken from a medical journal describing the

breaking of the water during the process of labor. The camel here becomes a symbol of fertility and of childbirth. Much as the camel carries water, symbolic of life, within its hump, the pregnant mother carries life within her swollen belly. In the background, there is a ghostlike image of a Great Mother figure nourishing the earth with the milk streaming from her breasts. The water represents the waters of birth, the maternal, and the spiritual. There is another relationship between the camel and fertility. One of the first forms of birth control originated with rocks being placed inside the camel's uterus to prevent her from conceiving on long journeys.

The camel has a very distinctive personality. It was raised from birth to be a beast of burden, a freight transporter. The young camel learns to carry a saddle and small light packs. The size and weight of those packs are gradually increased. The camel is humble. It kneels down to accept its heavy load and is very docile when it is treated properly. However, if the camel is mistreated it will throw a fit of rage, kicking, spitting, and biting and will stubbornly refuse to move. The camel demands respect and will get it.

The camel is competitive. When walking, it will not let another camel pass it. The camel is self sufficient and prepared for future hardships. When the camel has the opportunity to drink, it will drink enough to sustain it beyond its present thirst. My lithograph *Eight* (Appendix, 8) shows eight camels drinking from a spilt basket of water. Each camel reacts differently to the situation. My etching *After the Desert* (Appendix, 9) depicts a proud graceful camel with its head held high.

Above the camels head is a dry bone. The text reads, *Camels that graze in the desert can go all winter without water and often may refuse to drink if water is offered to us.*

Like the desert, my work is constantly shifting and transforming through the process of working. As a printmaker, my art is very process oriented. Printmaking with its complex techniques and historic alchemical overtones becomes a natural extension of my imagery. The physical layering of the actual surface reinforces the conceptual layering I am striving for with the image.

I love the unique surface qualities of a print – the dense blacks, the deeply bitten lines, the movement of the gouge across the plate, the ragged edges, and the unexpected areas of false bite left on the plate. I love the thick tactile inks, the layering of colors, and the way a sheet of chine colle, a type of collage paper attached during the printing stage, bleeds into the surface of the image.

I like the fact that the surface is more than a brushstroke but the result of a series of carefully orchestrated steps coming together. Sometimes the final image is close to the original vision. More often it tends to take on a life of its own, forcing me to think through the medium. To quote Stanley William Hayter, a twentieth century master printmaker, "The fundamental thing that is useful in a workshop is that the thinking is done in the medium itself. You find what you want during the operation by means of the operations."<sup>3</sup> These are the side trips and the unexplained pit stops that make the journey memorable.

---

<sup>3</sup>Martia Sawin. "Stanley William Hayter at 84". *Arts Magazine* (January, 1984): p.60.



Even when I work in other mediums, I think like a printmaker. For example, I can never begin working with a stark sheet of white paper or an empty white canvas. I must first lay down a collaged background or a thin wash of paint reminiscent of the plate tone. I like to build up and scratch through heavy layers of paint as though I were working through a reduction print.

I recently started integrating computer generated imagery into my work. I found that images could easily be layered in Adobe Photoshop, then layered again with other computer transfers, text, handmade papers, and printed textural backgrounds, which could then be drawn over or scratched back into. I start with original digital photographs but transform them into something entirely different.

The piece *Signs of Wear* (Appendix, 6) is a combination of digital photographs with printmaking processes. I started by building a collagraph, a plate made from various collaged textures, with sheets of cardboard and layers of string and glue. I cut the cardboard into two shapes, the silhouette of a camel's humps and the background. The background text was written in reverse in glue to create a raised surface. I then inked and wiped the background like an intaglio plate. I rolled the letters with blue ink and printed them like a relief print. An image of a bone was cut from another plate, inked in a purple oxide, and attached with a collaged chine colle piece of rice paper to the top of the plate. I made the plate holding the camel with pieces of string, torn pieces of burlap, and scratched areas of heavy glue so it would resemble the texture of the camel's fur.

I took many photographs of the desert, the camels, and the people while I

was in Mali. After returning to my studio, these photos were cropped and altered in Photoshop, printed on papyrus paper, and collaged onto the original collagraph print. I then used oil pastels to blend the colors of the photos into the background, so the images from a distance resemble the clumps and patches of the camel's worn fur. The final addition to this work was a piece of mudcloth I made during a visit to an artisan workshop in Segou. Mudcloth is a traditional African craft which has recently become a symbol of national pride. The cloth, not unlike a print, is the result of a long series of steps involving painting, dyeing, and oxidation. Originally, the mudcloth was sewn into *pagnes*, the skirts worn by African women. The images on the cloth are all symbolic. Their patterns weave a story, often a tale of morality. The symbols I chose to use in my mudcloth tell the story of a journey. One begins the journey torn between following two paths represented by the parallel lines. The camel's hoof is a symbol for travel. Along the way, one must avoid being lured by the crooked path, until one reaches the goal of unity at the end.

As I worked on this particular piece, it was constantly changing, transforming, and evolving. Through the layering of imagery, media, and technique, the image became stronger and richer than what I had originally envisioned at the start of the project. Like a real trip, the best part of art making is not the final product or the destination but the process and the wonderful journey of getting there.

The completion of my Master of Interdisciplinary Studies degree at Virginia Commonwealth University has also been a type of journey in itself. I began the

process with a detailed plan and a charted course. It has been an exploration of new ideas, techniques, and processes. The introduction of computer imagery into my work was like learning a new expressive language. My trip to Africa became the catalyst that helped to define my imagery. Now, preparing for my final exhibition and graduation, I have almost reached the destination. It has been a wonderful memorable journey.

## Bibliography

Ayres, Julia. *Monotype: Mediums and Methods for Painterly Printmaking*. New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1991.

Campbell, Joseph and Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Cooper, Helen A. *Eva Hesse: A Retrospective*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Eliot, T.S. *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1971.

Lorca, Federico Garcia. *Poet in New York*. (Ben Belitt, trans.) New York: Grove Press, 1980.

Saff, Donald and Deli Sacilotto. *Printmaking: History and Process*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.

Thomas, Reg and Susan Thompson. *The Hero's Journey: A Guide to Literature and Life*. Napa, California: Ariane Publications, 1997.

Vogel, Susan M. *Baule: African Art Western Eyes*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

**Appendix**  
List of Figures

- Figure 1. *Under the Shadow*, digital print, 10"x8", 2005.
- Figure 2. *Sahara*, oil on canvas, 48"x36", 2004.
- Figure 3. *Paths and Barriers*, etching with digital transfer, 27"x20", 2003.
- Figure 4. *Departure*, lithograph with chine colle, 14"x14", 2003.
- Figure 5. *cam.el (kam/'l),n.*, etching and woodcut, 29"x23", 2000.
- Figure 6. *Signs of Wear*, collagraph with collage, 31"x26", 2005.
- Figure 7. *Rupture of the Water Bag*, etching, 33"x30", 1998.
- Figure 8. *Eight*, lithograph, 19"x25", 2002.
- Figure 9. *After the Desert*, etching, 34"x28", 2001.



Figure 1. *Under the Shadow*, digital print, 10"x8", 2005.





Figure 2. *Sahara*, oil on canvas, 48"x36", 2004.

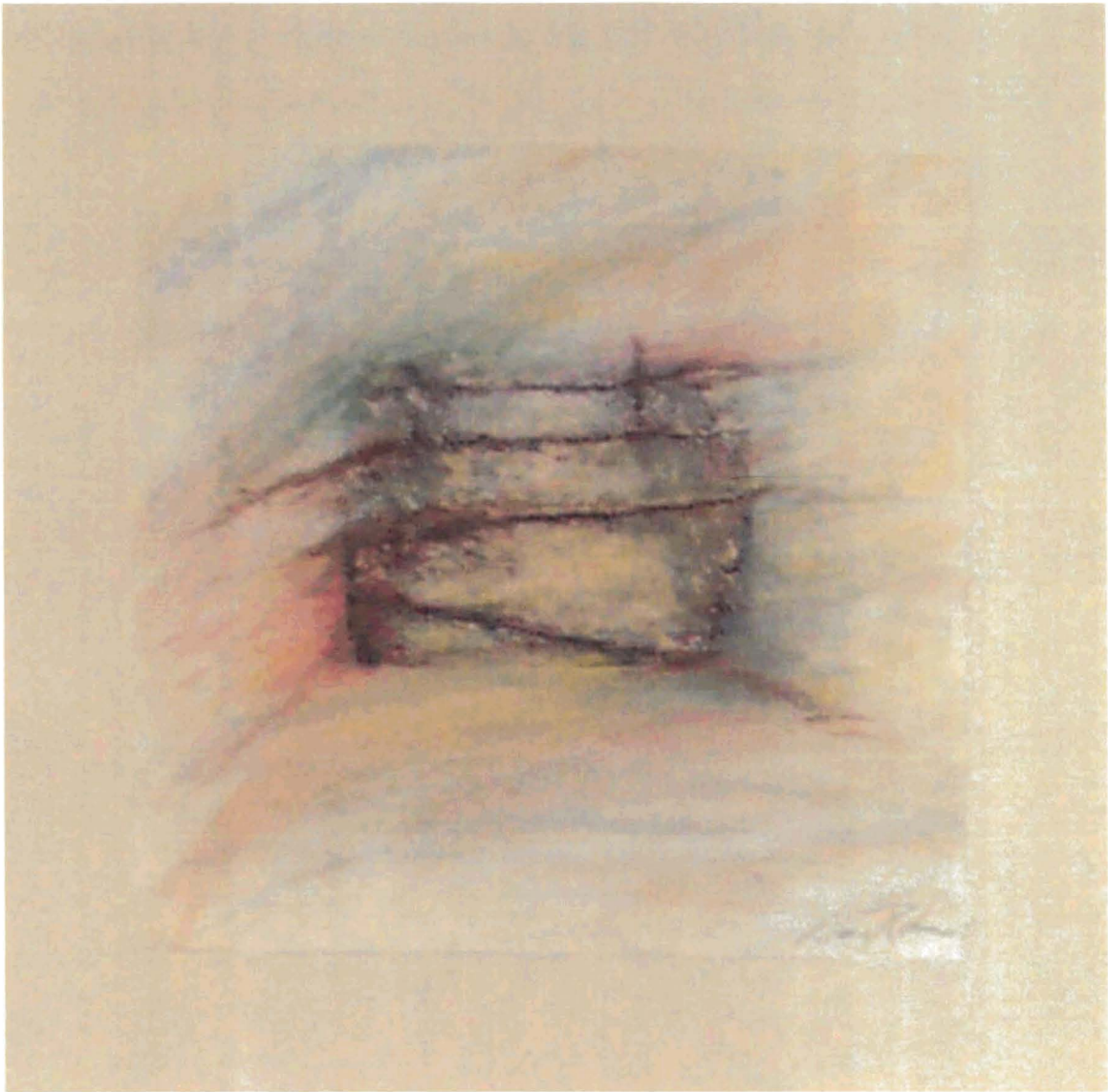


Figure 3. *Paths and Barriers*, etching with digital transfer, 27"x20", 2003.





Figure 4. *Departure*, lithograph with chine colle, 14"x14", 2003.



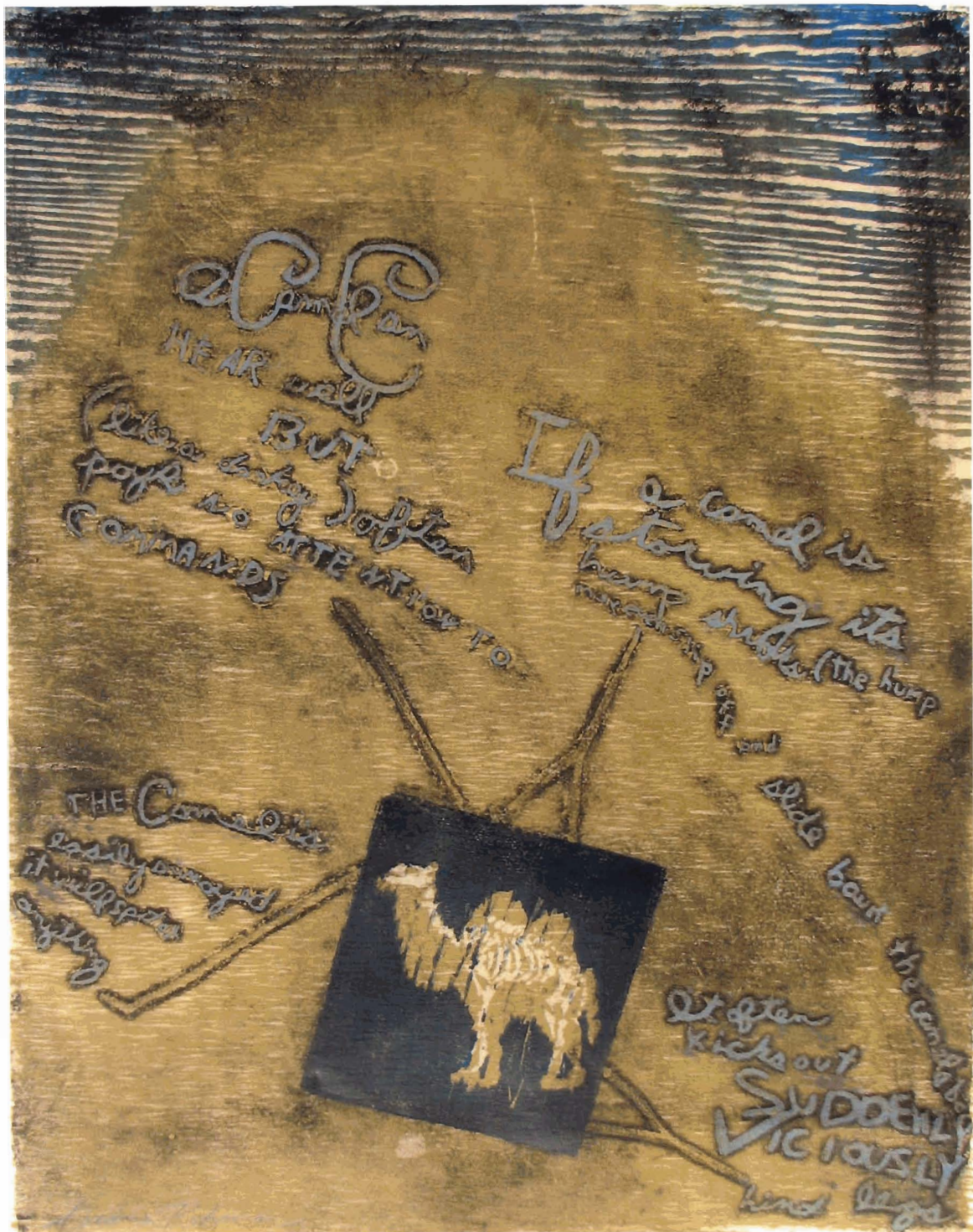


Figure 5. *cam.el (kam'l), n.*, etching and woodcut, 29"x 23", 2000.





Figure 6. *Signs of Wear*, collagraph with collage, 31"x26", 2005.





Figure 7. *Rupture of the Water Bag*, etching, 33"x30", 1998.



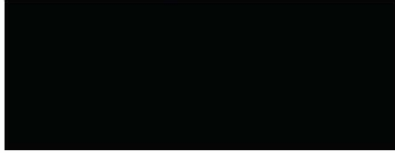
Figure 8. *Eight*, lithograph, 19"x25", 2002.





Figure 9. *After the Desert*, etching, 34"x28", 2001.

## DIANE ROHMAN



### EDUCATION:

- 2006 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. Specialization in Printmaking and Computer Imagery.
- 1989 Master of Art Education, Frostburg State University, Frostburg, MD.
- 1986 Bachelor of Science, Frostburg State University, Frostburg, MD. Major in Fine Arts. Summa Cum Laude with Departmental Honors.

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

- 2004-2006 Art Teacher, South River High School, Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Edgewater, MD.
- 2004-2006 Art Teacher, South River Evening Alternative Education School, Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Edgewater, MD.
- 1990-2004 Art Teacher, H.H. Poole Middle School, Stafford County Public Schools, Stafford, VA.
- 1988-1990 Adjunct Faculty, Frostburg State University, Frostburg, MD.
- 1988-1990 Adjunct Faculty, Allegany Community College, Cumberland, MD.

### RELATED EXPERIENCE:

- 1987-1989 Gallery Coordinator, Stephanie Ann Roper Art Gallery, Frostburg State University, Frostburg, MD.

### PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

- 2004-Pres. Maryland State Teacher's Association, Annapolis, MD.
- 1999-Pres. Roving Artists, Washington, DC.
- 1995-Pres. Fredericksburg Center for the Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, VA.
- 1990-Pres. National Art Education Association, Reston, VA.

### EXHIBITIONS:

- 2006 *Journeys: VCU Thesis Exhibition*, Fredericksburg Center for the Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, VA.  
*Compositions*, The Evolve Urban Arts Gallery, Washington, DC. Michele Hoban, curator.  
*A New Year-A New Beginning*, Friendship Heights Art Center, Chevy Chase, MD. Jerry de la Cruz, curator.
- 2005 *Invitational Exhibition*, Fredericksburg Center for the Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, VA. Peter Frederick, curator.

**EXHIBITIONS (continued):**

- 2005      *Teachers as Artists*, Anne Arundel County School Board, Annapolis, MD. Suzanne Owens, curator.  
*Roving Artists' Group Show for Tsunami Relief*, Friendship Heights Art Center, Chevy Chase, MD. Sherry Metz, curator.
- 2004      *Artomatic 2004*, Washington, DC.  
*Roving Artists' Summer Spectacular*, Georgetown University Hospital Art Gallery, Washington, DC. Mary Bird, curator.  
*Roving Artists' Holiday Show*, Friendship Heights Center Art Gallery, Chevy Chase, MD.
- 2003      *The Earth and All That's in It*, National Gallery Center, U.S. Geological Survey Center, Reston, VA. Mary Bird, curator.  
*Roving Artists*, National Women's Democratic Committee, Washington, DC.  
*Scanners VI*, Frame and Design, Fredericksburg, VA.
- 2002      *Artomatic2002*, Washington, DC  
*Arlington Arts Center 2002 All Media and Juried Exhibition*, Ellipse Gallery, Arlington, VA. Claudia Gould, juror.  
*Small Works*, Colonial Art, Fredericksburg, VA. Paula Rose, curator.
- 2001      *Intermission*, Wilson Center Gallery, Washington, DC.  
*Virginia Artists 2001*, Fredericksburg Center for the Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, VA.  
*Far Away Places*, Wilson Center Gallery, Washington, DC.  
Artemis Zenetou, juror.
- 2000      *Fire & Ice*, Wilson Center Gallery, Washington, DC.  
Manon Cleary, juror.  
*Seasons*, A. Salon, Washington, DC. Rick Weaver, juror.  
*New Works*, Wilson Center Gallery, Washington, DC.  
F. Lennox Campello, juror.  
*Printmaking Invitational*, Fredericksburg Center for the Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, VA.