



*Broken and Contingent Stories*, 33.67 x 50.50 cm, 2017 (linocut).

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# ENGRAVING THE PLOT



*Cast Off the Path, Going Nowhere - Deus Abconditus*, 37.07 x 24.99 cm, 2016 (linocut).

I

Let's say the engraver conspires with his accomplices, plots a robbery, an onslaught, a furious attack that will end up contorting the plate's serene, tempered surface into a labyrinth of grooves, cracks, and channels. Into trenches that won't flood with mud, but with ink.

The jubilant battle, if it was a happy one, leaves an imprint on the square plate—to the eye, a jungle of liana threads, threads in black ink. In this tight labyrinth, this unheard-of, snarled mess woven on a delirious loom, blinding flashes of white light pop up on the paper.

I would like to introduce some of the engraver's accomplices—we could call them partners in crime, subordinate *plotters*. These collaborators help properly engrave the conspiring carver's *plot* through consecutive *plotting* on hard metal and wooden surfaces, or on softer linoleum.

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Photos courtesy of the author.

I'll only mention a few, the most illustrious, important ones: Sir Acid, so biting and insidious; Mademoiselle Drypoint, always sharp, splicing heartrending asides; Sir Burin, a laggard, old-fashioned gent, clad in long-standing glory and countless years, the old accomplice of those genius *plotters*, now an aged pariah, a dethroned leader of ancient, ornate and impeccable Nordic confabulations, of Nurembergian, cryptomedieval *plots* in Renaissance garb.

Then we have the Gouges, elderly ladies with clangorous laughter, some high pitched, some delighted in their round chuckling, and some so horizontal they barely seem to trace a smile.



*Girard 1*, 46.96 x 32.79 cm, 2014 (linocut).

## II

The highest of plotters has gathered his accomplices. They come blanketed in the deepest silence, the strictest stealth. The hand that moves them —so to speak— awaits their arrival. The hand is an old friend—, diligent and agile, mistress, as it were, of her resources (we will later find this not to be completely true). Like any hand that deems itself a hand, she's terribly manipulative and dominant —or so she'd have it. We always hear people say, "such and such an artist has quite a good hand," and she won't hesitate to take all the credit —the triumph of invention and skill—, and her five fingers would even seem to puff up, swell, and burst with sheer arrogance.

But “the hand that moves the hand,” the one who —allegedly— plans the assault or battle, the one mentally weaving the engraving, so to speak, remains utterly unknown, at least to the accomplices here gathered. They heed that hand’s call, but nobody really knows who it is, not even Sir Acid, who’s so subtle and sharp. The gathered only know the crafting hand and her five fingers, and her partner in crime, the slovenly, clumsy one who shows up to help her out every once in a while.

The hand with the five fingers, the skilled right hand mediating for the first *plotter* (the engraver) does not always —we must admit— dominate the situation. I’ll explain more later on, but this fact stems from nature, the very nature of the *plotted plot*, that is, of the lines weaving across the plate’s surface.

Sometimes, to cite a quintessential case of either utter independence or partial insubordination, Sir Acid —so capricious and unpredictable— suddenly feels compelled to conspire with the environment, and since he barely makes contact with the hand (his immediate boss), when it comes to the task that concerns us, he can undertake small, or not so small, acts of treason. We must admit these crimes or transgressions against the original plan are not always in bad faith.

Yet the other accomplices celebrate Sir Acid’s wrongdoings with secret, sly glee. More than anyone else, Sir Burin is the softest, most law-abiding one, the most sensible and circumspect of them all, given that he’s persisted since the olden days, when the *plot* of life seemed to have been conceived with more discipline and rigor. Thus, wanting to escape his scholastic, rigorous asceticism, he might wish to emulate the capriciousness of Sir Biting



*Broken and Contingent Stories 8*, 33.67 x 50.50 cm, 2017 (linocut).

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Acid, but when he tries, his summersaults that seem like buffoonery but are really dreadfully mistaken slips, deviations from the perfect groove toward which his eons-old obedience would drive him, end up *unplotting* the *plotted*, removing him from his *plotlike* vocation and causing raucous laughter among everyone else, given his feigned and ill-assumed freedom. . . . However, we will admit that he knows—and is the only one to know—that true freedom lies in the *well-plotted plot*.

Mademoiselle Drypoint's behavior is entirely different. Though the hand, the right hand with the five fingers, believes she moves her, it really is Mademoiselle who moves the hand, and not just the hand, but the whole arm, like an ice-skater vigorously gliding across the mirrorlike, metal plate.

Drypoint is a persnickety young lady; she's delicate and energetic at the same time, and though she can be docile before the hand's design, her incisive, punctilious, defiant abilities often not only



Girard 3, 33.67 x 50.50, 2015 (linocut).



Girard 3, 33.38 x 48.73, 2015 (linocut).



*Cast Off the Path, Going Nowhere - Heading toward God's Funeral, 33.29 x 21.76 cm, 2017 (linocut).*

**But “the hand that moves the hand,” the one who —allegedly— plans the assault or battle, the one mentally weaving the engraving, so to speak, remains utterly unknown.**

keep her from heeding the hand's commands, but also from abiding by whatever was coldly *plotted* at the very beginning by “the hand that moves the hand,” the *first plotter* (the engraver).

Thus, with her incisions, tears, and uneven grooves she leaves in her wake, and with the shavings and leftovers at the edge of each groove —such velveteen black!— she yields pathos, expression, and emotion to the square upon which the engraving's *plot* is *plotted* out. She leaves frayed threads, loose strands in the engraving's tight knitting, on the woven surface of grooves, of strings that become grooves, of hollow paths, of threads that . . . Never mind, I'll say no more of Mademoiselle Drypoint, whom we cherish so deeply. . . . I'll simply add one thing we believe to be of utmost importance: we believe Drypoint's disobedience, her contempt for the plans drawn by the *first plotter*, that is, the engraver, is most likely due to what we might call a higher obedience. And while we have no hard proof, as a hypothesis, I will say that the *first plotter* is not the *first plotter*. In other words, “the hand that moves the hand” is also moved by another hand, which is moved by another hand, and so on and so forth, until we reach the true, *First Plotter*.



*Cast off the Path, Going Nowhere - God Eclipse*, 36.26 x 24.25 cm, 2017 (linocut)

### III

The *Treatise on the First Principles of the Surface Engraved by the Hand of Man*, by Protuberantus Lineum, speaks of “the plotting lines created on the plate’s plot, constituting the plotted plot on the printed stamp,” which might sound like a convoluted tongue twister, and continues —using a poetic license that would seem strange given the author’s rigor, whose vocabulary here is no less strange, almost phenomenological in a way that would seem inappropriate for his time, but that we still deem worthy of citation— as follows: “end up turning this, the printed stamp, into a mirror of the world of sorts, a clear-surface-being-thus-clarified and reflecting (and revealing) —a metaphor for— the shape in which the intricate labyrinth of forces —namely the forces of the world— make up the plots of our lives: all that is tied and clinging to our destiny with everything that is and comes into being throughout the course of our lives.”

When speaking of the fabricating collusion of the *first plotter*, namely, the engraver, we must point out that, like Lineum, we believe that our efforts to secure the final image in fact succumb to the need to create something akin to a mirror of the world, of life in the world, not because of the subject of the image itself, but, according to Protuberantus Lineum, “because beyond this subject, in life itself, in the world’s becoming, this intertwining of lines that weave an image elicits creation, and in the course of our lives, these various lines —countless, hidden to the eye yet byzantine and secret— create the image of what we are, and even the very image that we fabricate of our own lives; this canvas woven with myriad, baffling, motley lines, overlapping to the point of tangling into a knot . . . makes us what we are.” Later, Lineum adds, “Woe to the innocent who might attempt to untangle such a tangle of thread,” concluding his book with the following enigmatic line: “About the Weaver, we know almost nothing.”



Somber Portrait, 27.31 x 40.96 cm, 2008 (linocut).

The *first* plotter is not the *first* plotter. In other words, “the hand that moves the hand” is also moved by another hand, which is moved by another hand, and so on and so forth, until we reach the true *First Plotter*.

#### IV

I sit in my study at my workplace. I’m the *first* plotter, the conspiring engraver. A linoleum block awaits: brown, inert, opaque. My accomplices stand by me, those ladies and their clangorous laughter, my gouges. I draw, then I engrave. An image will come through, woven with the minutes, hours, and days I might spend on it. Then, over the years—many years—only remnants of the woven-engraved image will remain, then only the threads, and then nothing. Time will devour it, like it ravages our own lives, and while we live, it would seem we are but the fleeting images created in this world, in the *plot* of life. About the Weaver, we know almost nothing. **MM**