

BACK TO BASICS

Two Artists' Return to Drawing

By Michelle Vachon

Sketching a moment in a few black lines to keep it intimate. Revisiting color and composition on paper, away from computer screens.

For her "Cambodian Journal" series at Java Cafe and Gallery, Valentina DuBasky decided to slay away from color. "I wanted it to be personal, an intimate journal of my experiences—color would have made it something else."

Also, she added, color may have distracted from the story each drawing is meant to convey while black and white tends to focus viewers attention on the essentials in a sketch.

The series exhibited until the end of the month covers DuBasky's visits to Cambodia between 1994 and 1998. Although the US artist made her first trip to the country shortly after the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement in 1991 and has traveled here repeatedly over the years, the situation in the country and her task during that period have made those years special for her. In 1994, DuBasky toured the country on a book project to photograph how landmines were affecting people's lives.

This was a time of roadblocks by soldiers and armed clashes between the Cambodian government and Khmer Rouge forces in various parts of the country.

DuBasky recalls landing by plane in a field in Battambang province where she was planning to photograph a demining platoon

at work "That weekend, Battambang [town] was besieged. I had the experience of waking up to the sound of shelling, and being conveyed out a few days later."

Drawings on exhibit show a soldier walking barefoot, his boots tied by their shoelaces around his neck; a villager leaning over a landmine, as if he was about to lift it; and a transport truck loaded with people on a country road, the text underneath explaining that some passengers were not told there were landmines on that road.

One drawing refers to DuBasky's 1998 visit as part of the Joint International Observers' Group to follow the 1998 national election process. The group consisted of Americans and Australians with extensive experience of Cambodia, she said.

DuBasky illustrated that period with a drawing of a man with three heads, Bayon temple style, and a Western suit and tie. "I was trying to explain the search for national identity," she said, as the country attempted to balance the traditional and the modern.

Looking at her 35 previous drawings exhibited together made her want to sketch the country's current chapter, especially the changes taking place in some areas and the fact that they have had limited effects on the countryside, DuBasky said.

