

ARTIST STATEMENT FOR “GIANT SIZE DRUG ABUSE POSTER CARDS”

This series of drawings uses flip cards created for high schools in the United States, circa 1970. The teacher would stand in front of the class, showing the image on the front of the card to the students while reading the text from the back side. The questions below the text would then be used to begin a discussion while gauging student comprehension and re-emphasizing the important points of each card. The cards are numbered and the ‘story’ takes us through a predictable progression of events: why the child might take drugs in the first place, the bad things that will surely happen as a result, the corrective actions adults can and must take and of course the eventual happy ending. As part of my appropriation of the story, I have rearranged the narrative inherent in the original series suggesting another possibly darker outcome.

Originally I chose to trace the text from the rear of the card as part of a larger body of work which includes tracings from various types of printed matter. These images generally take two forms; selective reproductions from a single source like a newspaper, or textual collages whose juxtapositions derive from multiple, unrelated sources such as junk mail, brochures, magazines, maps and museum ephemera. In this work, I trace the text on the flip-side of the card and overlay it onto the front side image. This is partly because I found the drawings used to create the original images quite compelling, as well as indicative of certain attitudes and beliefs about drug use during the late 1960’s when these were created. I also enjoy juxtaposing the beautiful and free flowing, sketchy quality of the original drawings (which have been turned into lithographs and mass-produced) with the decidedly imperfect hand-traced copy of the mechanically produced text.

The action of tracing can be related to several things. One is the notion of a rote or non-creative activity, perhaps evoking a student who must stay after school and write something over and over again on the blackboard, or the sense of doing exactly what you are told, or of repeating something many times until it has been internalized. But the activity of painstakingly re-drawing something so small and intricate might also be compared to the work of Medieval scribes copying precious ancient manuscripts and religious texts. This sort of activity can also evoke a trance-like state associated with many drugs. And in a strange way, perhaps similar to the action of certain drugs, the vellum of the drawing tends to obscure the image beneath, especially as the viewer comes closer to read the text, while paradoxically revealing more of the image below as one moves farther away from it.

Brian C. Moss, 2002-2005