

Difficulties in Translation

Brian C. Moss

Language is hard. Understanding others is even harder. At the center of any relationship is an uncertain navigating of intended meaning. Communication between even the most familiar of us can malfunction; it can even go sideways. “I didn’t mean that,” we say, when we clarify or defend our point of view. Whatever we intend to say, or whatever others hear from us, something indefinable can often get lost in translation. Despite these difficulties, the effort to communicate persists and we may still find comfort in the dialogical nature of relationships.

These relationships include our art. In the case of Brian C Moss, his life and his art has a daily dialogue with the printed word. Moss’s discipline of combing the news cultivated from on-line sources such as philly.com, the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, filters into his conversation with others and makes their way into his art. Brian is a socially conscious reader who explores the world of politics and religion through media texts.

Difficulties in Translation represents a 32-year conversation between Professor Jeffrey Morton and Moss. First initiated in college, and through their years in Philadelphia, this pair has wrestled through the role that religion plays out in their respective lives, notably the space between believer and skeptic. With a critical eye, Moss looks at Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - the religions of the sons and daughters of Abraham – and their recent appearances in news media. He finds visual, symbolic, and social echoes between them, both in their beauty and ugliness. Moss questions the role of religion, or more notably, the way a sacred text can be translated through a fundamentalist lens. Such translations have arguably led to a racially motivated shooting in Charleston, S.C. in the United States, beheadings conducted by ISIS in the Middle East, and seemingly perpetual turmoil between Palestine and Israel. How can beauty be associated with such harm, he wonders. As both Morton and Moss might suggest, the question points back to what we believe about the image.

Jeffrey Morton, October 2015