



Each has his or her place  
in the procession

Chris Dorosz

# Each has his or her place in the procession

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Since 2000, I have cultivated a hybrid photographic-painting-sculpture practice through which I explore human physicality. Drawn from Walt Whitman's 1855 poem *I Sing the Body Electric*, the title *Each has his or her place in the procession* encapsulates my interest in pervasive media, muted individuality, and inexorable human flow.

Procession is a photographic body of work of the figure-models or maquettes I carve from foamcore for an ongoing series of sculptural paintings titled *Stasis*. By breathing another life into them as printed images, this process is not unlike the constant recycling of news-streams from which they are drawn.

As figure-objects they become iconic in their ability to symbolize ideas larger than the individuals represented. These days we may think of an icon in relation to technology and all that implies in terms of speed and simplified emotional reference, but as a symbol of spiritual transcendence an icon has the power to stop us with its incredible stillness. It becomes a doorway onto larger ideas through the individuals represented.

A figure could be a politician, a celebrity, a criminal, or an otherwise anonymous individual whose image now resides in the vast internet archive. A figure could also represent wider concepts - personal or political conflict, economic or social station, gender, or sexual identity. Identity specificity falls away, replaced by a burgeoning anonymous figural taxonomy. I mold these figures in a daily carving practice, reconstructing the flat images I source as three-dimensional forms that, when photographed, interrupt our perception of scale and material. Do the intimate sculptures sparkle like snow, or is the pock-marked surface more like bone? The material quality of each figure inevitably changes as they are handled in the studio, yellowing over time, forming yet another taxonomy that may be overlaid on the work.

Ultimately my intent is to impose a stillness and quiet over the chaos of the world in repurposing the parts of my practice concerned with an impulse to archive along with the monastic practice of daily carving all the while slipping visually between photography and sculpture. ■



Self-portrait carving at desk. foamcore maquette | 2022



Woman  
laying flowers  
by  
War Memorial  
Dresden  
2015

Vogue  
Editor-in-Chief  
Anna Wintour  
at  
Met Gala  
New York  
2013

Woman  
leaving  
concert ground  
after  
shooting  
Las Vegas  
2017

Drug dealer  
detained  
in narcotics  
operation  
Albuquerque  
2012

Lynne Cheney  
at  
National Republican  
Convention  
Madison Square  
Gardens  
New York  
2014

Recruit  
at  
Military Entrance  
Processing  
Station  
Knoxville  
2008

Student  
passing  
riots  
London  
2011

Man  
holding  
dead child  
after bombing  
Aleppo  
2016

Associated Press  
cameraman  
holds  
wounded arm  
Gaza  
2017

Young boy  
climbing over  
apartment rubble  
Aleppo  
2013

Tourist  
watching cleanup  
after  
truck attack  
New York  
2017

Man  
rescuing dog  
during  
Hurricane Harvey  
Houston  
2017

Princess Beatrice  
waiting  
outside Public  
nightclub  
London  
2010

Attendee  
at  
oligarch Boris Berezovsky's  
funeral  
Brookwood Cemetery  
London  
2013

Sex worker  
standing  
along roadside  
San Paulo  
2014

Greta Thunberg's  
handler  
at  
Climate March  
New York  
2020

Soldier  
carrying  
boy  
Kosovo  
1999

Woman  
wins  
tickets to space  
with  
Virgin Galactic  
Antigua and Barbuda  
2021

Narcotics officer  
patrolling  
meth bust  
Springfield MO  
2012

Migrant worker  
carrying  
bundled child  
over border  
near  
El Paso  
2019

Mourner  
weeping during  
Amy Winehouse's  
funeral  
Golders Green  
Crematorium  
London  
2011

Mother and child  
covered  
with plastic  
outside  
railway station  
Shanghai  
2020

Naomi Osaka  
eliminated  
during  
Olympics  
Tokyo  
2020

Mother and daughter  
arriving  
George Floyd  
funeral  
Houston  
2020

The following conversation took place in early March—not live in San Francisco, as originally planned, but as a series of letters written from the dramatic unfolding of life's procession: a vigil for a century-old mother in Seattle, a wedding in Los Angeles, a horrific invasion of Ukraine. The "life flow" rendered in Dorosz's figures figured into each of the exchanges, which are excerpted here.

## A Fabulist and a Philosopher on the Majestic Dimension of Chris Dorosz

BY CAROLYN COOKE AND BRIAN SWIMME

**Carolyn:** In "Each has his or her place in the procession" Chris Dorosz invites us to wonder what makes humans human, what connects the individual to the cosmic whole. The taxonomy includes:

*"Man rescuing dog during Hurricane Harvey Houston 2017"*

*"Recruit Knoxville TN Military Entrance Processing Station 2008"*

*"Princess Beatrice waiting outside Public nightclub London 2010"*

As a philosopher and an evolutionary cosmologist, how would you describe the relationship between a foamcore maquette of a nightclubbing Princess Beatrice and the cosmos?

**Brian:** The foamcore Princess Beatrice is a maquette of cosmic evolution. To understand this, we need to remember that conscious self-awareness emerges with humanity. With this in mind, we can appreciate the majestic dimension of Chris Dorosz's work. This artist

makes a bold declaration to the cosmos: "I am your mirror." This does not come from grandiosity. Each figure has a place in the procession.

**CC:** "Humanness" isn't just biology and chemistry, but also physical presence, gesture, and emotion.

**BS:** The full vision is ineffable. At most, one can experience an intuition that even something as tiny as a princess's whereabouts fits into

a vast scheme of meaning. This realization—that the whole is real, and is involved—is the foundation of all great works of art.

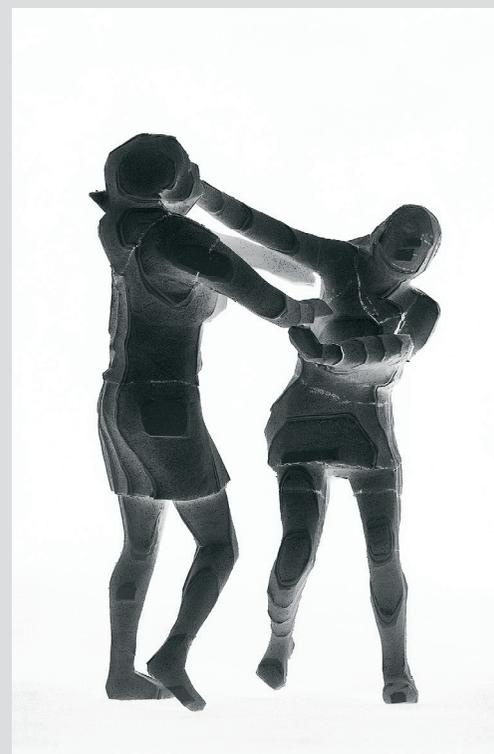
**CC:** Dorosz's maquettes acknowledge the poignant specificity of experience. If I were a nonhuman being asked to extrapolate from these figures about what habits shape human awareness, I might notice a theme of persistence within the overarching fact of annihilation. Dorosz's use of industrial foamcore suggests the scrappy, thermoplastic



**Revenge**  
2022 | Inkjet Print



**Forgiveness**  
2022 | Inkjet Print



**Conflict**  
2022 | Inkjet Print



**Sorority**  
2022 | Inkjet Print



Mourner weeping during Amy Winehouse's funeral Golders Green Crematorium London 2011  
2019 | Inkjet Print

nature of human imagination. The foamcore is nicked and pocked and yellowed by time and handling. But the human-made substance persists, as Dorosz says, like bone.

**BS:** The fragility of the foamcore suggests an eternal value in our ordinary lives. Dorosz's art enhances the intimacy of our relationships, and that is why it will travel through the centuries.

**CC:** The relationship of a man, a dog, and hurricane might not mean much to a thousand-year-old redwood tree, and yet that tree also exhibits persistence within the looming fact of mortality. The scale is different, but the tree, the man, the dog, the hurricane, and even Princess Beatrice in her tiny, temporary royalty, are all part of a whole. Do you think that this is how we recognize art when we see it—as a mirror of or a glimpse into the ineffable? Does the “majestic dimension” of art like this have anything to do with its being constructed of throwaway, single-use materials?

**BS:** Yes, exactly right. The majestic theme of Dorosz's work is persistence within the looming fact of mortality. We delight in the theme because it cuts into our essence. We humans are a desire to persist, even though we find ourselves inside the looming fact. Do I write these reflections because I care about a “Man rescuing dog during Hurricane Harvey Houston 2017”? Not exactly. I write for the joy of being in relationship with you. Even if this is my last day. There is the meaning of “Man rescuing dog during Hurricane Harvey Houston 2017.”

**CC:** You raise the great question: how to spend time even if this is my last day. And especially if this is my last day! I want to spend mine like Chris Dorosz, or as I understand your proposal, in devotion and defiance: devotion to something time-consuming, like carving figures or writing the unsayable, and in

defiance of the Looming Fact. The important thing about our limited time, it seems to me, is to spend it willfully.

**BS:** I felt it yesterday at Safeway. The cashier looked at my cart which was filled with nothing but firewood and her eyebrows shot up. I thought, “Dorosz would see eternity right there.” That gesture, too, belongs in the ultimate, unfinished taxonomy. It took all Dorosz's devotion to give expression to the unsayable insight that eternity rides in each anatomical gesture.

**CC:** Maybe what “travels through centuries” in a work of art is that schmear of willful human time and attention. One of my favorite residues of Dorosz's project is the box of maquettes piled up together. This is what fourteen years of devotion and defiance can look like: a lesson in value.

**BS:** I think Dorosz would agree that “devotion” describes the monastic practice that led to these foamcore pieces. This devotion began well before Dorosz. Foamcore exists only because its component parts came forth in volcanos. Earth could build volcanos only because stars constructed the elements of carbon, phosphorous, and oxygen. Fourteen billion years went into the construction of this remarkable Procession. Foamcore is ephemeral, but in Dorosz's hands it can awaken an insight into the unsayable, one so intense life is forever changed. ■

*Carolyn Cooke is the author of three works of fiction: **The Bostons**, **Daughters of the Revolution**, and **Amor & Psycho**. She teaches in the Department of Interdisciplinary Arts at CIIS.*

*Brian Thomas Swimme, a professor in the Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness program, teamed with Carolyn Cooke to create a new genre, “autocosmology,” art that explores autobiography as a manifestation of the fourteen-billion-year cosmogenesis.*



Revenge  
2022 | Inkjet Print

The Arts at CIIS



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**Gallery hours**  
10am to 6pm weekdays  
Weekends by appointment

**Show dates**  
April 15 - June 24, 2022  
Opening: Friday, April 15