

Loose Lips - Story Titles

Mommy Married Marvin
Willie was Weary of Wasps
Frieda Flunked Fred's First Date
Polly's Precious Python
Cameron Crowed
Glorious Gloria Goes Glam
Lucky Lionel Licked Little Lulu
Tony Never Tired of His Tiny Toy
Victor's Virus Vanished in Spring
Nelson Never Napped
Wedge
Bipolar Bunnies
Stanley's Stork Club

“Loose Lips”

Drawings by Melissa Stern

What I love best about a short story is its ending. I like the anticipation and excitement of the beginning of a well-written tale, the feeling of being absorbed in its middle, but most of all the resolution and satisfaction of the ending. To me, looking at a drawing provides this same kind of journey, although the time frame is speeded up: The flash of interest when one first glances, the experience of being “drawn” into the image, and finally the lasting feeling of having peered into someone’s mind or soul when one walks away.

The biggest difference between a short story and a drawing, of course, is that a drawing provides so much more room for interpretation. The viewing experience is driven to a large degree by what we the viewers bring to the drawing. What we take away from it depends upon whom we are when we arrive. Every time one looks at a drawing- or any work of art- one completes a story; this is what **Loose Lips** is about. **Loose Lips** is fundamentally about choosing

the ending for a story. It is an exercise in both making choices and taking the time to consider the choices one makes.

Loose Lips is a collection of visual and written stories. The installation presents each visual story on the wall rather than in book format. Each story begins the same way, with a single image and line of text. Each series concludes with three drawings that illustrate possible variations of its ending. The intention of this installation is to give viewers the chance to choose the ending they imagine or desire for each story. The ending images are variously drawn, collaged, burnt, sewn, and painted. Using collage elements from old Life magazines as well as encaustic, oil paint, acetate and pastel, I have conveyed a myriad of visual and verbal solutions, each with vastly different emotional tone and implications. The drawings are amusing and occasionally dark. The stories themselves are fun, provocative, odd, quirky, highly accessible, and above all, open-ended.

What interest me most are the endings that people choose, what they tell me about people and how they think about the world. As life and experience change us, so do the choices we make. And the story of our lives is made up of the choices that we have made. The people who see the exhibition will ultimately make the story of **Loose Lips**. After the show closes, I will make one final book. This will include the beginning of each story and the ending (drawing) that has best captured what the viewers feel is the essence of each story.

Loose Lips is artwork that involves the viewer as active participant, collaborator, co-conspirator; in a word, as artist.

MORE ON LOOSE LIPS, WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Loose Lips operates on several levels of meaning:

The phrase "loose lips" is a potent one in our culture. One thinks of the children's game of "telephone" or "whisper down the lane." I think as well of the misunderstandings, both humorous and pernicious that gossip can cause, of businessmen or housewives drinking endless cups of coffee while chatting about one another on the phone. The title is also a clear reference to "Loose Lips Sink Ships" from World War Two propaganda posters, a phrase both farcical and quite serious.

The most "audible" level on which Loose Lips acts is its alliteration. The title has the same alliterative rhythm as each line of the book. This is a passing reference to the lilt of children's stories, but of course these stories are not solely for children.

Finally, the title refers to the audience's own role in the work. While visually and thematically related, the stories and images are meant to be both open-ended and open to interpretation. Their precise meaning is "loose," determined in the mind and articulated by the "lips" of the viewer.

The stories themselves are about contemporary lives, quirky but universal. They are written and designed to hang loosely but comfortably together like a collection of short stories, each in a different setting but all about the same extended family of characters:

"Mommy Married Marvin" is the first story in the exhibition. What follows is what happens after that fateful marriage, the adventures, misadventures, vanities, vulnerabilities and idiosyncrasies of Willie, Frieda, Polly, Cameron, their friends and relatives, culminating in "Stanley's Stork Club," after which presumably the cycle begins anew.

"Loose Lips" is a Rorschach test, a game of telephone imagined and spoken by its audience.