



TALE-SPINS

WATER, ANIMALS, AND RUINS

James Boyd Brent

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15. Cannon River, Minnesota

By the ruined Archibald Mill, a thirteen striped squirrel comes across a scene in which a figure is lost in the beauty of his own reflection in the icy water of Cannon River. The other figure, Echo, who has been in love with him for a long time but can't seem to get his attention away from his own image of himself, is being soothed by a group of animals. The beaver is singing her a song about other kinds of loveliness. Meanwhile, two figures dance on the opposite bank on the site of an old dancehall.

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James Boyd Brent's new intaglio series is about ancillary narratives and half-stories. It illustrates moments that may or may not actually be stories, as such, but which allude to the way the mind concocts a world for itself, among worlds.

This idea echoes the work of wood-engraver Thomas Bewick, best known for the small vignettes that he made to adorn the end of chapters, and which denote a sense of a story without the story ever actually being spelled out. Abundant in his imagery are stories, but they do not necessarily correspond with the main text. In each, the viewer is drawn to look into a small, distinct, and illuminated world.

Tale-spins: water, animals, and ruins points at the multilayered nature of existence, and is an invitation to ponder how consciousness lies between one thing and another—water and land, animals and people, growth and decay.

ON EXHIBIT

March 11–May 12, 2013

Architecture & Landscape
Architecture Library
89 Church Street SE, Minneapolis
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OPENING RECEPTION

April 4, 2013 | 4:30–6:30 p.m.

Architecture & Landscape
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EXHIBIT COORDINATOR

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1. The Yarrow River (small)

Several people went for a swim in the river by the exposed roots of the alder trees. On the right, climbing over a small gate that doesn't open, it's possible to scramble up a steep and sodden bank on the right in order to reach the ruined bridge.



14. The River Liddal

This is a ruined 18th century walled garden by the River Liddal which at this point is the border between Scotland and England (in this image, we are looking at Scotland). There's a small stream on the left that runs into the river on the Scottish side. On this side of the stream a red squirrel shouts Stop! at the approaching grey squirrel (grey squirrels are non-native, and have been steadily moving up the country from southern England where they were introduced from America in the 1870s—they are taking over the red squirrels' habitat). Three oystercatchers fly in formation down the river. In the walled garden, a person, a couple, and a deer all breath in together.



13. The River White Esk

A hare sits on its hind legs and boxes the air, occasionally also thumping its barrel chest. The person in the center is trying a hare-like maneuver—to run at top speed and change direction in an instant. This is taking place in the moonlight under the watchful gaze of a barn owl in *The Loupin' Stanes*, a Neolithic stone circle by the River White Esk.



2. Mississippi, St Anthony Falls (small)

Standing on the bridge, elevated in space on a solid structure, above an incredible surge of water. These whirlpools form in spring in the strong current when the river swells from snow melt upstream. Birds fly effortlessly just above the surface.



3. Mississippi, St Anthony Falls

Three pigeons swoop across the river in the direction of their perches under the bridge above the roaring water. A falcon unexpectedly appears out of nowhere, and at the same time a group of joggers see it, but the figures looking over the side of the bridge are preoccupied with by the complicated and constantly changing swirls in the torrent below. They are trying to understand how the swirls and eddies create whirlpools that form and reform, moving forward while simultaneously swirling back on themselves. They see intertwining movements in the water that look like braids.



12. Canal and Boats

A person seems to become tangled in the boat's mooring rope, like Laocoön wrapped in snakes. Household pets roam the streets and some meet on the quay. The lone dog on the other side of the canal wonders if she can find her way over the impossible bridge to meet the others.



11. Bass Lake, Minnesota

A young beaver sets out from the creek in the evening on one of his first forays into the lake. Four walleye leap out of the water simultaneously. It's the evening so while one of the campers does the dishes and another stirs pancake mix, other animals are starting to get more active than they were during the hot day.



4. Sensing Time (Yarrow River)

One sheep in the foreground has learned that she is expected to assert herself in this place, by the ruins of the Old Deuchar Bridge on the Yarrow River. Three rabbits respond to her authority by going to see what is taking place on the right: a group of people has accumulated here. One is writing a new language, another has cleared his thoughts, and another's vision of the world is influenced by the cool water flowing around her ankles. Their perceptions are changing.



5. The Yarrow River

The river flowing by at this point has washed away the soil revealing the roots of the trees on this side of the bank. The water is a deeper here than in other parts of the river so it's a favorite spot for trout to swim facing the current and hover in one spot, despite the strength of the current, by seemingly effortlessly moving their fins. Everyone now and then one leaps out into the air. This one most probably escaped from the nearby trout farm a little downstream, but now he's free. The running water can be heard flowing over the rocks that have built up around the ruined bridge on the right, a few hundred yards upstream. Every now and then a person appears in this tranquil place and blends in.



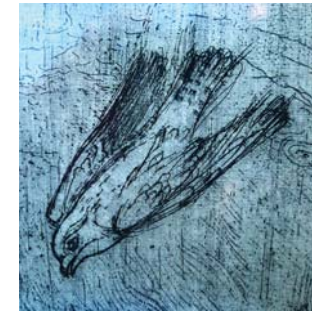
10. Minnesota River

Highway 77. Four worlds in one: our busy world hurtles by overhead, the tranquil arches contain an outdoor art gallery and frame a distant landscape, and animals come out on this side of the chain link fence. A hummingbird is racing along the path just above the ground, observed by a chickadee and a rabbit.



9. St Mary Magdalene, South Molton

The main door of the church was ajar and a bumblebee flew in and is now flying around. The spirits of natural things infuse the intricate dappled interior. Medieval images of the Green Man are the most prominent carved decoration. For a moment it looks as if a figure in one of the stained glass windows, the Good Samaritan, is standing by a column. It's a world of ornamentation and detail. The organist is playing hymn 264.



6. Mississippi, Minneapolis 1

We're looking down the Mississippi on the Franklin Avenue Bridge. A falcon is flying so fast in a dive that it seems to be standing still in the air. An eagle catches a fish, and the person throwing a stick into the river for her dog is aware of the rowers and the shouts of the rowing coach. On the bridge, the gracefulness and the physical strength of the runners combine in the three figures. A group of three pets who grew up together meet in the foreground. The person who is seeing this is you; your shadow is falling across the pavement on the left.



7. Rose Lake, Minnesota (BWCA)

Some campers are lighting a fire and preparing themselves for a few days' stay, away from their creature comforts, in the Boundary Waters, right next to the border of Canada and the US. They'll soon be visited by others coming in canoes, so some of them are waiting in the water. Others jump off rocks nearby. Some gather leaves, and a couple of hikers are challenged by their dogs (who by now think that this is their territory). The wild animals are all nearby on the edges of the campsite, but the chipmunk feels as if this is his particular place so he comes out and eats a nut right in the center, in full view.



8. Mississippi, Minneapolis 2

In this scene, people jump into the river (below the Lake Street Bridge) because there's a heat wave. The whole scene is framed by two beavers, one on the left and one on the right. They are each trying to create a dam across this part of the river. Their sense of time is different from ours and from some of the other creatures. A hawk floats overhead, but for the time being each creature is safe in its own world.