

Fractured Exhibit of Photography, Painting and Writing
Reception November 25, 2011 at the Butternut Gallery in Montrose PA.

I stood in the Butternut Gallery in Montrose shortly before the official opening time for the reception of the exhibit Fractured. The lovely soft paintings of nature by Rodrica Tilley and crisp spectacular aerial photos of gas activity by Michael Poster surrounded me, and I held the dark yellow covered essay also named Fractured, by Melissa Whalen Haertsch, and started to read. The opening lines said she had decided not to circumcise her son. How this related to a protest exhibit of the gas play was not clear and drew me in with both boots.

I braced myself for another attack on my culture, which is how I experience attacks on the practice of circumcision since it is a central part of Judaism. Whether it is sexual politics protesting patriarchy or philosophic objections based on free will or health claims of disputed efficacy or humanitarian claims of maiming the subject, they all masquerade in my mind as yet another cut at the Final Solution. OK, maybe that's hyperbole but you get the point. So I read on with my guard up.

What followed was an explanation of the author's fascination with Judaism which included searches through her lineage, way back, to see if she might have Jewish ancestors even though her family has been Catholic for ages. A thorough knowledge of the culture and religion bubble up. And then there are stories of abuse of landowners by the land men, the hazing of victims of the gas industry by their neighbors, and fear of water contamination. People are leaving the area to escape the problems from hydraulic fracturing. Michael Poster and his wife Rodrica Tilley are among them, having already moved to Vermont. How does this relate to the Jews? There is persecution, relocation, and adaptation, survival.

I was deeply moved by this essay. Without telling us what to think, a deeply personal story compares the transformation of pristine healthy land and water to something ruinous, to a kind of Holocaust. Even though it ends with a glimpse of survival, Jews having one foot in Israel and one foot in America in case something goes wrong in either place, the reader must think about the situation. Is it worth it? Is there something we can do?

I spoke with an organic grower at the exhibit who now lives in Montrose. I know him from when he lived in Williamsport. I bought fancy purple and yellow carrots from him at the market. He is now moving his young family to North Carolina to get away from poison water and the other gas problems. So sad to see beautiful land and water ruined. So sad to see quality people seep away. Must we move to have safe havens for body and soul? Some have decided already. The Exodus appears to be underway.

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