

SOUTHERN GOTHIC IN THE NORTHWEST

Graphic novelist a recent Eugene transplant

The work of illustrator and graphic novelist Elizabeth Blue might best be described as “Southern Gothic.” Her approach incorporates themes of romance, crime, fairy tales and family relationships to fashion compelling visual narratives.

The first volume of *The Micanopy Murders*, Blue’s beautiful graphic novel, is available for purchase online. Blue dreams of one day releasing the entire work in a single binding. However, her painstaking work ensures that for now, at least, the book will appear incrementally in individual albums, with the release of Book Two still up to a year away.

The graphic novel’s story takes place in Micanopy, Fla., a real-life community a couple hours north of her native Tampa, a place Blue describes as “just one of those little towns that got left behind.” Blue says her story, set in 1961, is about “the stale, sad feeling you can have in the South.”

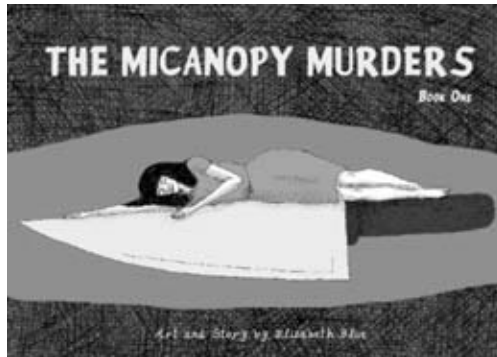
Blue’s Micanopy faces two threats, the staggering heat of a major drought and something more insidious: a rash of unexplained murders. The story enjoys a leisurely, Hitchcockian pace, with nearly wordless scenes punctuated by characters engaging in unexpected exposition — not to mention violence — lovingly rendered in India ink and gouache.

That sense of give and take, push and pull is mirrored in the book’s formal structure as well, with some pages accommodating up to nine comic book panels, and others operating as one single, detailed panel.

Though she enjoyed growing up in Tampa, Blue says that both she and her twin sister Dido, now a milliner based in Austria, knew from a young age that Florida was not for them.

“We were very gloomy teenagers,” Blue says, stranded in a part of the country known for sunshine.

The girls’ father, an advertising art director, took a business trip to Scotland and suggested it might match the macabre sensibilities infused in Blue’s influences, media like Tim Burton films, *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, *The X-Files* and the graphic novels of Dan Clowes and Charles Burns — tales of misanthropic loners and misunderstood



geniuses, characters that often sport odd quirks and special abilities.

Blue considered more traditional choices for launching a career as an artist, she says, but in the end decided, “If I’m going to find myself in New York, I might as well find myself in Scotland.”

It turned out Blue’s father was right; she loved it. “There’s something liberating and exhilarating about the depressing gloom there,” she says.

Blue earned both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in the U.K., along the way winning a graphic literature prize for Book One of *The Micanopy Murders*, an award that included a modest publishing deal.

Despite her affection for the U.K., Blue says that the setting of her story “had to be the South because of the way there’s a storminess inside,” when it comes to both the weather and to human emotions, a sublime cocktail for crime comics.

“I had kind of glamorized it in my mind,” Blue says of the South. “It was difficult to imagine the heat and the stink of it when I’m in a beautiful Cornish house.”

Blue’s creative environment here in Oregon also aids in her process. She lives and works in a tree-shrouded south Eugene home removed from the road, sharing her space with two cats, two chickens and one guy.

Blue and her husband, Doug, moved to Eugene in September of 2011, after Doug accepted a job here with a sustainability nonprofit.

Blue says, “It’s taken me some time in Eugene to find my feet and be a productive artist.” It’s easy to cut her some slack, though, considering she holds down a day job and teaches art classes at the UO’s EMU Craft Center, all while making time for the creation of her magnum opus.

Blue says she finds Oregon’s overcast weather reminiscent of her beloved Scotland, handy considering it’s the sort of atmosphere she finds artistically invigorating.

“I’m very environmentally based in my decisions,” she explains. ■

Elizabeth Blue’s online shop is located at etsy.com/shop/elizabethblue. New fans are invited to use the coupon code EWREADERS for free shipping on domestic orders.

OUTDOORS BY JOHN WILLIAMS

WINTER AT SILVER FALLS

Waterfalls and icicles abound

Silver Falls State Park is Oregon’s largest state park, with more than 9,000 acres to explore. The early American history of the area included private ownership of South Falls. The owner pushed old cars into the canyon and charged 10 cents to see the falls. Thankfully that insane use of such a fantastic area has ended. Early logging removed much of the massive trees that once surrounded the incredible falls in the area. American activity around Silver Falls in the early years of settlement was based primarily on exploitation. This period of exploitation ended during the 1930s as America shifted towards conservation. Through these efforts much of the deforestation around South Falls Historic District is no longer apparent to the majority of visitors. Silver Falls State Park is a place I often take for granted.

Silver Falls is the crown jewel of Oregon State Parks, and because of this I always assume anyone living in Oregon has been there. I now know this is not the case because my girlfriend, who has lived in the Willamette Valley her entire life, had never been. It’s truly an incredible place that everyone in Oregon should visit. The centerpiece of Silver Falls State Park is the Trail of Ten Falls. If one is looking to enjoy this area without many people, winter is the best time to visit. It is also a great time because the flow of water is more impressive and the falls are shrouded in ice. Walking behind many of the cascades is my favorite part of the Trail of Ten Falls, although during the winter this can be a somewhat



dangerous task. There are massive icicles that you must travel under, which tend to fall as the temperature increases. Behind the falls, the ice melts much later than elsewhere, providing an incredible, albeit slippery path.

Though there are many entry points to the Trail of Ten Falls I prefer to start and end at the South Falls Historic District. From the visitor center, the trail rapidly descends to an epic vista of South Falls, which it quickly travels behind. One will likely run into the largest crowds around South Falls, but as you travel along the trail towards

Lower South Falls the crowd will dissipate. Approximately one mile later you will come to Lower North Falls. The trail passes rapidly by three other falls and several miles later you will come to North Falls. When we made our way under North Falls, my favorite, I couldn’t help but linger in the chilly afternoon air and admire the power of falling water before finishing the remainder of the trail high above in an impressive Douglas-fir dominated forest. Silver Falls State Park is a must see for any Oregonian or anyone passing through Oregon. ■

DIRECTIONS FROM EUGENE: Follow I-5 north for 60 miles, turn right onto Hwy. 22 East, follow for 4.9 miles, take exit 7 towards Hwy. 214, follow for 12 miles, turn left into the South Falls parking lot.

HIKE DATA: 8.7-mile loop, with 1,300 feet of elevation gain.