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In the studio of Elizabeth Langer: Exploring new art forms



"Elizabeth."

By Brooks Robards

Elizabeth Langer has wasted no time since ending her 35-year career as a Washington, D.C., lawyer in 2008 and turning art from an avocation into a full-time commitment.

Long an accomplished draftsman, she is using her active sense of invention to plumb the possibilities of paper lithography, a state-of-the-art form of hybrid printmaking. It is just one of the many areas of art she explores.

Fitting in somewhere between monotypes and direct digital transfers, paper lithographs combine digital technology with traditional printmaking techniques to expand the boundaries of traditional approaches. Ms. Langer starts with one of her drawings or paintings and creates a digital photograph. Original photographs can be used just as easily. Once the new image is transferred to her computer, she uses Photoshop or iPhoto software to make any adjustments necessary for a black-and-white print. Reproducing the print on a large-format copier or laser equipment gives her the flexibility to change the size of the original print, making it bigger or smaller, or isolating only part of it.

The newly copied print becomes the artist's printmaking plate — made of paper. Through the magic of gum arabic, ink, and an etching

press, she creates new prints.

One example from her work that illustrates the process is "Mothers of Beslan," inspired by the 2004 school hostage crisis in that Russian town. The paper lithograph process gives the artist's original, powerful drawing multiple lives in the form of prints made more quickly than through conventional methods.

"The image obtained through this process has a luscious, textured, ancient feeling," she said. She may continue the creative process by brushing etching ink onto the print, or adding charcoal or pastel without changing the original drawing. Using another, even more innovative, technique with "West Tisbury Trees," Ms. Langer adds a Plexiglas plate to the process. That allows her to make a color print when she paints on the Plexiglas and runs it through the press twice.

Ms. Langer has drawn since she was a child and did artwork for the Chicago Conspiracy trial in 1969-1970 while she was working for the defense as a law student. She also delved into printmaking at one point in her law career, but meeting artist Bill Christenberry in 1992 became a formative experience for her as an artist. He happened to be serving on the jury for a trial Ms. Langer was litigating, and she decided to attend one of his classes at the Corcoran School of Art.

"I hadn't ever taken an art class outside of

"Mothers of Beslan" was inspired by the 2004 school hostage crisis in that Russian town.



"Sunrise."

school," she said. "He opened up the possibilities in a completely different way. He introduced the possibility of abstracting from a figure, of taking risks, of all kinds of magical ideas like drawing with an eraser." After she and her husband, law professor Richard Chused, decided to move to New York, Ms. Langer held a show in the Washington home

they were about to leave and sold 18 pieces of her work. "It's my record," she said. "It was very exciting and gave me enough money to rent a studio for a year. I finally decided then that I was going to be a real artist.

"I look for opportunities wherever I can find them," Ms. Langer said, and that could serve as her motto. Serendipities like meeting Mr. Christenberry in a courtroom have brought her other opportunities as well. She exhibited at the Flatiron offices of architect Bruce Fowle after meeting him on a cruise, and at New York Law School (Mr. Chused teaches there) after former Dean Richard A. Matasar saw her work.

In 2008, a trip with friends to a spa in Mexico led to a group of 10 collages, "The Ixtapan Series." With none of her ordinary art materials available at the spa, she improvised with scissors, a glue stick, the room service menu, and the magazine section of *The New York Times* to make the abstract work.

Although Ms. Langer has exhibited in the past at Shaw Cramer Gallery, she is happy not to have Island gallery representation for the time being. "I like that my prices are more affordable," she said. Galleries by definition need to take a chunk of profit. ■■■

Ms. Langer's work is on view at her home and studio in the Christiantown section of West Tisbury and at her website, elizabethlanger.com.