

Elizabeth Langer brings paintings, drawings, collages to Chilmark library

By Brooks Robards - Aug 5, 2015



"Elizabeth," oil, 12" by 15". Art by Elizabeth Langer

The Chilmark library hosts West Tisbury summer resident Elizabeth Langer through August 14 with an exhibit of her generative work in multiple media. "I work with an image in many different formats," she says. "I get an image that feels right to me. Because of digital printing, I can make it into a print." From there, the original drawing or painting may become a paper lithograph, an intaglio or relief print from a solarplate or a photo etching (often from a drawing), offering entirely new insights through the transformation.

Ms. Langer explains how she employs these very sophisticated processes with a photograph she took of bare trees in her West Tisbury yard at sunset. "I was working with the medium of paper lithograph, which has only one color," she says. "But you can combine it with a monotype, so it goes through the press twice."

The artist created an entirely new work by painting on Plexiglas with etching inks and reversing the image. The print became a monotype, then the addition of the etching inks turned it into a multicolored work. "You can even see the brush marks," she says.

"I don't throw things away," she explains. "I reinvent. It's artistic recycling."



"Holding On: Auschwitz—
1,300,000," acrylic and chalk, 30" by
30". Art by Elizabeth Langer

“Sometimes I get some of my best results from accidents,” adds Ms. Langer, an admirer of Vineyard Haven artist Rose Abrahamson. “There’s no risk. You can play with it and get your best results.” An illustration within the library exhibit is a portrait of the artist’s son, called “Sam.” In the version on display, the work – which started out as a drawing – ends up as a photo etching. She explains that you can actually etch a photograph on a plate. Another one of the techniques Ms. Langer uses is on view in “William,” an intaglio solarplate. Here she exposed a printing plate through light, curing it with water instead of acid. The original was a drawing done in charcoal at Featherstone, where she is a longtime member of the Tom Maley drawing group. “When you work with charcoal on its side, you get these wonderful textures,” she says. “I took a brush and highlighted some of the lines.” Ms. Langer uses papers with texture, including types called “laid, handmade” and the Canson brand of Mi Teintes.

In addition to her portraits, the artist is exhibiting several collages. “I love doing collages,” she says. “Collages are happy. My figure work is very intense, and sometimes I need a break.” Collages loosen her up and let her focus on color and composition. With this medium, she worries less about getting it right. “But I find the older I get, the less I want to get it right,” she says, laughing. She wanted to include her collages in the library show because she thinks the variety makes for a more interesting exhibit.

“The way you curate an exhibit is very important,” Ms. Langer says. An observer will note that the artist has arranged her work in a sequence of yellow palettes. “I try to vary sizes and make groupings,” she says. She also wanted to show art she hadn’t shown last summer.

Ms. Langer came to art as a full-time occupation in 2008. As a lawyer she founded the Women’s Rights Law Reporter, and worked with Bill Kunstler and Leonard Weinglass on the Chicago Conspiracy trial, as a legislative assistant to Bella Abzug, and as a trial attorney with the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Division, in Washington, D.C. She was called to art after being inspired by artist and teacher William Christenberry, who was a juror in one of her trials, and decided to trade her law office for a studio. Ms. Langer studied with Mr. Christenberry at the Corcoran School of Art and at the New York Studio School and School of Visual Arts. After retiring from the law she moved to New York, where her husband, Richard H. Chused, teaches at New York Law School. Her work has been on display in New York at the National Arts Club, among many other venues.

In addition to the 19 works at the Chilmark library, a second Langer solo show, “Juxtapositions,” will appear at the Vineyard Playhouse starting August 22.

“Blue Tuesday,” Elizabeth Langer, Chilmark library, 522 South Road, Chilmark, through August 14.