

Passionate Women

Five Artists at Springfield Museum

Five artists are exhibiting "Works on Paper" at the Springfield Museum through June 19. The group formed by Kacey Joyce, Lynn Wiley, Connie Mueller, Amy Beller and Janice LaVerne is an offshoot of Benchmark Printmakers. Theirs is not only a story of individual passion for art but also one that speaks for the value of cooperation and mutual support among artists.

"Five of us decided we wanted to meet as a group of friends," Mueller explained. The smaller group is flexible; it allows them to respond quickly to each other's needs. "We know where each other's work comes from," Wiley said. "We remind ourselves that what matters is the process. We support each other personally, not just in our art." LaVerne noted they enjoy how different they are from one another.

The group has a hearty — and heartening — approach to art and life. "When we get together, we have a darn good time," Mueller said. As Wiley summed it up, "What holds us together is our passion for each other, our passion for art, and our passion for food and wine."

Joyce and Wiley were already long-time professional artists and instructors with established reputations. Others came to art later, after learning or practicing another profession. Their paths converged and quickly became intertwined, primarily through Joyce's and Wiley's LCC classes.

In this exhibit, Joyce's well-framed, small paintings feature a similar cast of daily objects (hat, pear, chair) and design patterns (frames within frames, margins) as her linocuts. Her tight compositions have been further simplified to striking effect. Within a black rectangle framed in gold leaf, one single object such as a red chair takes center stage, while one or two smaller ones (leaf, house) stand above or in the margin, laid-out like text.

In Joyce's previous works objects interacted spatially, but now they exist in stark aloneness and separation, acquiring the status of symbols whose presence refers to something else, something absent. In *David's Hat*, the yellow hat is allowed to stand in for its owner, celebrated photographer David Joyce, the artist's late husband. Kacey Joyce successfully conveys absence through such spare means and matter-of-factness, while eschewing sentimentality. She expresses both the poignancy of being-no-more and its near-incomprehensibility for those who remain.

In both her etchings and acrylic inks, Wiley plays with colors, shape alignment and spatial layering, most obviously in the way she handles and combines different plates for her small abstract etchings. She turns them around, superposes them in different way, and alters colors from one print to another. She formally explores color transparency and space in her acrylic-ink series, *Oregon Rain*. "Acrylic inks and etching inks have a similar look, that thin transparency that I really love," Wiley said.

Although the paintings have an abstract quality, they contain representational elements such as bridges and roads that serve as personal metaphors for Wiley, who uses painting to process and elucidate life events and emotions. "I don't know what the allego-

ry is yet," she said. "That's why I'm not done with this series. I'm very emotionally involved."

Mueller, who discovered her predilection for linocuts in Joyce's L.C.C. class, has been printing only four years. But her linocut reductions — printmakers call the method "suicide prints" — show her mastery of this complex, risky technique. The display of a calla-lily print's 11 color-printing stages and resulting linoleum block evidences the labor-intensive progression of colors and cuts. Mueller predetermines the number of her color prints per edition. A single edition of 12



Sangre de Christo Chapel, New Mexico.
Linocut by Connie Mueller

prints, each run through 12 color-printing stages, requires the linoleum block to be cleaned and re-inked 144 times!

Areas of solid color result from multiple layers of different colors to which Mueller adds a transparency medium, hence the complexity of that solid color when looked at closely. Much thought and decision-making goes into each stage, yet there is always an element of unpredictability and surprise, which Mueller says she loves.

Mueller's landscapes are inspired by places she knows. Visitors may recognize the Peoria Road area, bucolic and stately yet dynamic in "Moonlight," a little melancholy and muted but peaceful in "Early Spring," with its delicate play of light and shadow on bare tree branches. In "Mendocino Highway," a great sense of movement and rhythm results from the undulating branches, grass and road lines. In her black-and-white linocuts, Mueller exquisitely conveys the earthiness and plasticity of adobe architecture in New Mexico.

You wouldn't know it from her work, but Amy Beller, who started with a degree in design, once thought she could never draw. Joyce taught her that learning is about experimenting. "Until then, in all these years in school, I had not learned how to learn," she said. Check in particular Beller's small, bold, acrylic-glaze landscapes and her minimalist, ink line-drawing of a cat.

Janice LaVerne was a journalism photographer until 11 years ago, when she started painting and printmaking. I particularly enjoyed her *Lightbulb Man* series of small, witty, color-monoprints. *What is Important* combines two printing techniques, collagraph and etching.

Don't miss this tribute to art and friendship at the Springfield Museum. **EW**



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