

Susan G. Riegler

Works on Paper

Artist's Statement

My aim is to observe, capture and transform patterns and details found in nature. The edges of things, different sorts of light and shadow, the effects of weather, and magnifying small parts of the larger all interest me. I strive to capture the essence of an object or event and my emotional reaction to it. From the time of my earliest memories, I would sit around staring at things, visualizing how to depict and carry them on to surprise someone. My artwork is informed by the notion of “sammlung” or the collection of patterns in nature and in human community. I have a keen interest in patterns be they used for wallpaper, fabric, or other decoration. The translation of three-dimensional color and light to two dimensions provides me with an ongoing challenge.

Since I am also a counselor, it is important to me to gather inspiration and to create images that can soothe or inspire. I aim to generate touchstones that may allow viewers to pause and remember their own place in the natural world and the solace that it may provide. The prayer card or post card that was historically a totem to recall and honor a physical pilgrimage may be transformed today into a catalyst to begin or continue an emotional journey. Then and now, the trip may be arduous, and a talisman is fitting. I also enjoy calling upon fables, quotations, and nostalgia as sources for a particular image.

Why Make Prints?

Printmaking is my chosen medium because it is a technique rich with history; a slow and tactile process with no guaranteed results, ripe with surprises. The element of risk in the process of etching is especially appealing to me. You never know what you will get, but you can make what you create into something else!

Copper or other metal plates cold to the touch, the smells and colors of different types of ink, and the energy needed to run the press by hand or push the baren all motivate me. I like the intellectual work of translating an image, as well as the physical effort involved. The challenge of working small, using delicate line, and hand coloring is especially satisfying. To me, printmaking is one big messy wonderful puzzle meant to be enjoyed and shared.

My Background

My artistic formation began first under the tutelage of my mother and my hero, Margaret Anne Daly who was an artist and illustrator of over 40 children's books (Sue Riegler) and who designed for Houbigant, Inc. in New York City. She taught me how to look closely, making details larger than life. We spent many hours examining cylinder seals at The Metropolitan Museum, transporting us to another time and inspiring me to always imagine. She passed on to me the notion that we are all artists and that making art connects us, physically and spiritually.

Inspired by a childhood that allowed exposure to cultures including Asian, Cuban, Irish, and German, I enjoy hunting for cross cultural similarities and digging into the past to inform my present work. Thanks to the long lineage of women in my family (from the immigrant sewers and feathermakers to the grandmothers, aunts, and mother who spent time and patience with me), I was taught from an early age to use fabric to handmake garments and to repair things via darning and sewing. Necessity born of poverty and oppression produced a certain sort of resilient beauty and legacy that continues to inspire me. And, the kinesthetic act of stitching is soothing.

As a young adult, I studied life drawing, design, fine art, and art history both here in the US at Wellesley and MIT, as well as overseas. Training in intaglio etching and other forms of printmaking includes study with master printers Robert Townsend, Tomas Vu Daniel, Louise Hamlin, and Lynne Allen at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts. I also hold a certificate in environmental design from Parsons School of Design.



Prints Connect Us!



My prints have been exhibited at Harvard University, as well as local venues, and award-winning works appear in private collections in the U.S. and overseas. I have delivered printmaking workshops in Massachusetts for children and adults.

Printmaking has provided me with a source of connection to artists across cultural borders. An arts fellowship to Germany with time at the Gutenberg Press, studio visits in Quebec, Venice, and Havana as well as residencies here and abroad have allowed me to share work and ideas with others who find meaning in this medium which has so much to offer and should not be lost in our ever more ephemeral culture.





Inspirations

- Patterns, fabric, threads, cobwebs
- Nostalgic and forgotten things
- Transparency and shadow
- The subtle beauty of decay
- Baden Baden, Barcelona, Venice, Kyoto, Havana...
- Quotes that Inspire...Ryokan, Virgil, Heraclitus, Rumi...



Intaglio Etching

Etching (derived from the Latin *radere*, to scratch, to scrape) is a method of making prints from a metal plate, usually copper or zinc, which has been bitten with acid. The plate is first coated with an acid-resistant substance (etching ground or varnish) through which the design is drawn with a sharp tool. The acid eats the plate through the exposed lines; the more time the plate is left in the acid, the coarser the lines. When the plate is inked and its surface rubbed clean, and it is covered with paper and passed under a cylindrical press, the ink captured in the lines is transferred to the paper. Among intaglio techniques that I use are drypoint, aquatint, white ground and soft-ground etching.

While walking with my dog in mid-winter, I noticed some budding trees in the nearby bog. This print resulted, printed on rice paper. Versions were then sewn with thread.



More Intaglio



*Intaglio etching with white ground,
depicting the view through a seashell.*



*Intaglio etching with aquatint,
depicting Havana, Cuba.*

Flying Feathers

In this print, I used aquatint to create more depth in the print. After inking the plate, a very thin film of peach ink was rolled onto the plate and printed to mimic *Chine-collé*, a method used to add further color to a print.



Carborundum

- Carborundum is really the reverse of etching, wherein diverse materials (carbon powder, iron filings; think sandpaper!) are used in a glue medium such as acrylic gel to build a convex texture on the plate. It is then inked and put through the press. When used with other etching techniques this procedure produces varied and interesting effects of line, texture and relief. I like to add lace, thread and stencils to the plate as in this print, which is a homage to my grandmother's sewing.



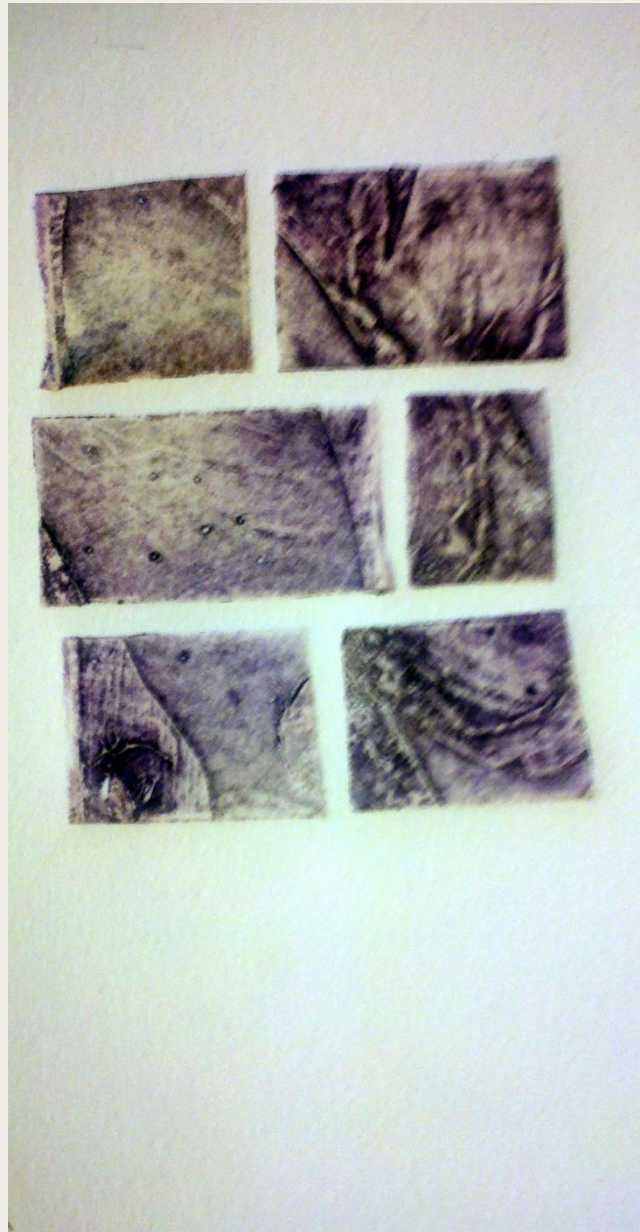
Seashells

My Dad was almost blind the year that I worked on this print series. I wanted to create something that is both colorful and tactile so that one could feel and see the pattern. My Dad loved the ocean, served in the Navy and used to walk the beach with me combing for shells. Don't you love to pick them up? Smooth and cool on the inside and rugged on the outside, the shell carries its marks of history for you to discover....



Looking Closely

This is also a carborundum print. Whereas the last print was done on an acrylic plate, this print evolved from a cardboard and acrylic plate that I then cut into pieces. I enjoy arranging small plates into tiles before pulling the print, as I find the space in-between very important to the finished image. Negative space is a positive! In this case, I had studied tree bark in an effort to identify interesting textures. I printed with an indigo, sepia, and lavender palette to provide a bit of a twist.



Moving into Mono's...

Monotype:

One of a kind print made by painting with ink on a smooth metal, glass or stone plate. The plate is then passed through the printing press where the pressure of printing creates a texture not possible when painting directly on paper. The process permits only one copy; thus "monotype."
Modern monotypes take advantage of a wide variety of materials including cardboard.

Monoprint:

One of a series of prints in which each has some differences of color, design, texture, etc applied to an underlying common image.



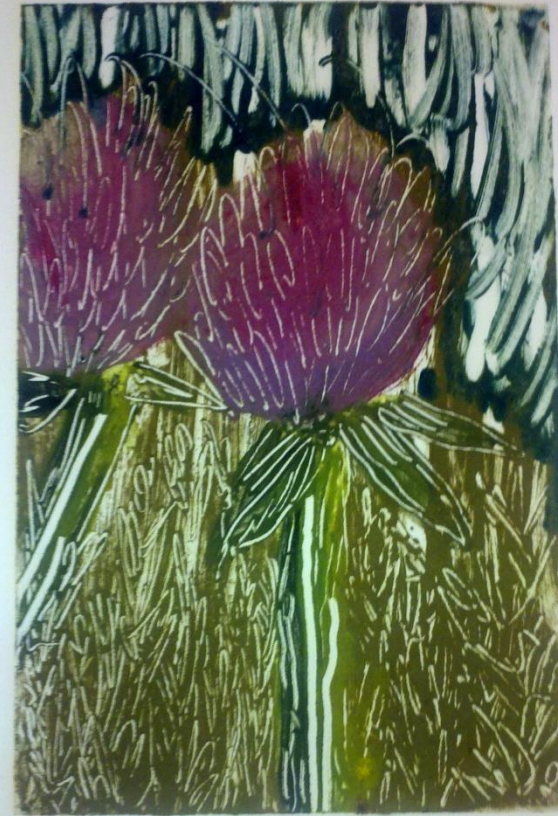
One morning, my brother saved a pelican with a broken wing. I like to transform such events into little vignettes.

Sursum Corda

I love quotes!

The Latin "sursum corda" means "lift up your hearts".

Ambling back to my studio from the beach, one hazy summer night in Provincetown, I noticed two thistle flowers reaching to the moon and made this print as a result, for two friends celebrating 40 years of marriage.

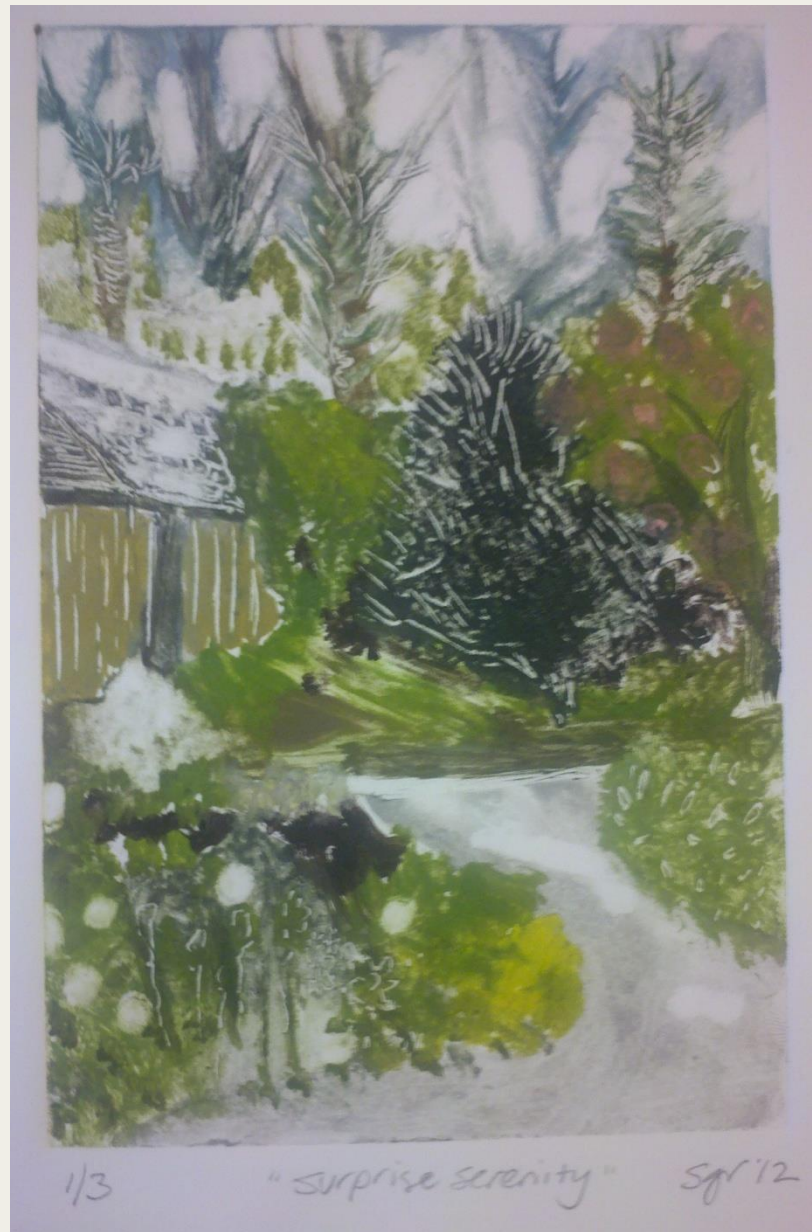


1/2 "Sursum Corda" Sgr 12

Nature and Serenity

This is another monoprint made after a casual stroll brought me to this wonderfully soothing pathway out in Washington State, at the Pacific Rim Bonsai garden.

If you cannot escape your current surroundings, art may transport you and then bring you back to where you are, refreshed. No need to escape at all.



Sewing

Both my grandmothers spent time meditating and mending, and the men in the family knotted and repaired things, which inspired me as a child. Now, I like to make prints and then sew into them.

Favorite colors include pink, white, and black.



Shashiko

Sashiko embroidery is a very old form of hand sewing using simple running stitches. The Japanese word Sashiko means "**little stabs**". Sashiko was born from the necessity of conserving and repairing garments at a time when cloth was not widely available to farmers and fishermen. Sashiko has been considered as functional embroidery or a form of decorative reinforcement stitching to repair points of wear or tears with patches, provide durability and warmth. Patterns were adopted from kimono prints, fabric weaves and nature such as, bamboo, ocean waves, flowers, etc. I fell in love with it – faded textures, patterns, indigo of the sea, where had these garments travelled? Imagine the hands that sewed into them, generation after generation.



Shashiko Inspirations

Using the history as inspiration, I started to play with the indigo colors, the stitching, the water....



More Shashiko

Here's another print made with thread and Asian plant materials. See that fish tail swimming away?

Projects include production of small cards for use with stressed clients to facilitate expression or allow moments of peace and breathing room.



Summertime

Here is an example of a monoprint (darker) and its “ghost”, which is the print pulled from the original plate that has less ink on it following the first printing.



The idea here was to replicate the feeling of flowing chintz fabric.



Telling Stories

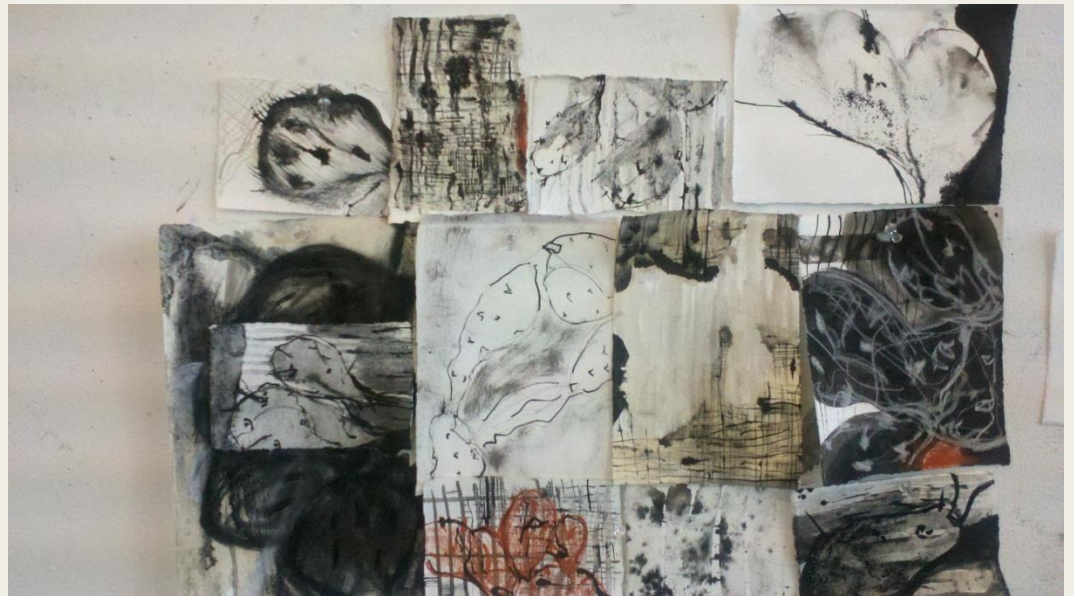
Riddles , questions, Zen koans are interesting to express visually.

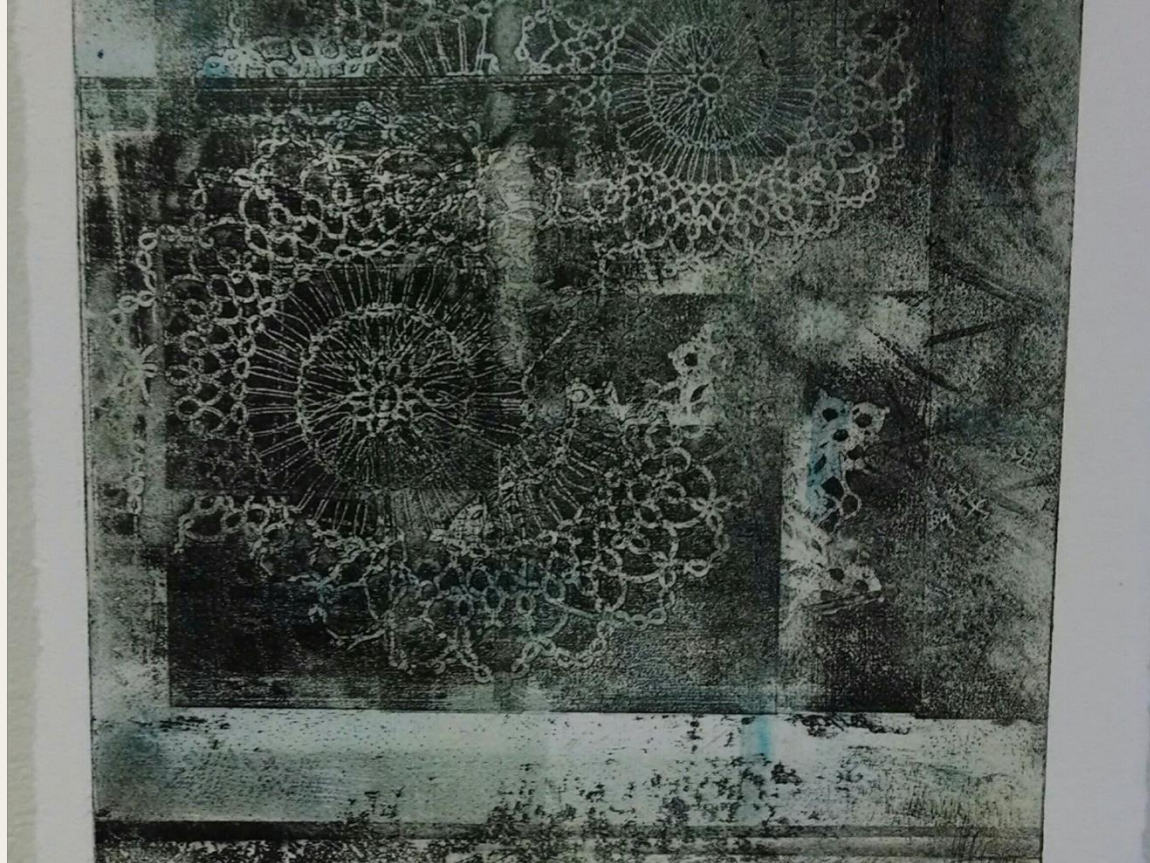
The man I knew as my grandfather, Rev. Chang, would visit and share his koans with me. Which Came First? is a monotype that plays with the conundrum of the chicken and the egg.



Drawing and Printing

How might we use drawing techniques to simulate the effects of etching and printmaking?





Keeping Lace Alive...

Using the gravure process to capture the texture of textiles! Over several years, I have visited, sketched, and reproduced Italian lace and brocade patterns (Venice residency; Bard University Exhibit St. Gallen). In person, lace is both strong (to have lasted from 1400 to the present) and delicate, produced often by incredibly young girls with tiny fingers working with limited lighting (reference). I often wonder what they were thinking while lacemaking, learning the craft from the prior generations much like I have. When a print is complete, I stitch into the paper following printing to add further depth.

Linoleum and Woodblock

My mother taught me how to carve lino and woodblock as a child, and I am lucky to have her press to continue the tradition of producing cards and fabric, often both printing and sewing a pattern.



Crossing Over



Patterns and Metalwork

I have sketched metal work patterns my whole life. I like to then print what I have sketched, or print the object itself!, or recently, create a clay and plaster facsimile of a fireplace screen so that I can print that.





Katezome (Japanese paste resist dye)

Sprigging (Irish embroidery)

This project is currently underway....

My intent is to...

- Demonstrate how stitching is used to repair, correct, preserve, and protect
- Create layers of transparency and translucence to allow light to filter through
- Allow mistakes and damage to form portals to joy
- Look closely to see the detail and imagine the maker working
- Consider patterns and repetition as soothing counter to the mundane
- Transmute threads of lace and fabric to paper and back to fabric
- Explore time and capture the past in present for the future to enjoy
- Form connections between widely separated cultures showing the beauty of connection
- Use created fabric pieces to print; design beauty to create another form of beauty.

Details about Wild Red Hen

Susan's press is called **Wild Red Hen** because she is energetic, a redhead, and loves the joyful children's story of the little hen who bakes cakes.

Susan's prints are a reflection of her travel experiences and the rural and seaside areas near her home and studio. Each print is hand inked, pulled, colored, signed and numbered by Susan. Her miniature etchings are particularly popular.

When she is not making prints, she is busy sewing and hand making "Relax" coasters for her Mending Works project that supports arts for at risk children. Or she is helping folks work better through her private practice work. Life is good.

Let's Connect!

To see samples of my work,
learn more about upcoming
exhibits, schedule a time to
learn how to make a print, or
to collaborate, please contact
me at:

wildredhen@gmail.com

