About the Artist

Andrea Sulzer is based in Brunswick, Maine. She studied Fine Arts at Smith College, received a BA in French from NYU, and Master's degrees from Columbia University (Education), and the University of Maine (Forest Biology). After working as an instructor of English as a second language, a lab instructor in plant physiology, a field ecologist, and a scientific illustrator, she received her MFA degree from Glasgow School of Art in 2004. She is currently an instructor in studio art and drawing.

Sulzer has received individual artist's fellowships from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation (2007), the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation (2006), and the Maine Arts Commission (2005). She has been a resident at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture and the Ucross Foundation.

Her work has been exhibited internationally in the U.K, Germany, Japan and China. She has also shown at the Drawing Center, Coleman Burke Gallery, and Nancy Margolis Gallery (all in NYC); the DeCordova Museum and Merrimack College (Massachusetts), and in Maine at the Bates College Museum of Art, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Ogunquit Museum of American Art, Center for Maine Contemporary Art, and ICON Contemporary Art where she is currently represented.

Her work can be found in the collections of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, the Bates College Museum of Art and numerous private collections.

Exhibition Checklist

Area Gallery:

fold and buckle #1
oil on gampi paper, thread
2012, 23"x22"x2"

fold and buckle #2 and #3
oil on gampi paper, thread
2012 16"x13"x2", 13"x10"x2"
dunce #2, pastel and oil on paper, 2010, 39"x28"
green bluff, colored pencil on paper, 2012, 79" x 80"
(slide right, cropped)
sugar hill, unique woodblock print, 2011, 38"x30"
(front cover)

Floating hill series, (#2-6)
unique woodblock prints
2012, 38"x25"

Glickman Library:

jostle and hide
variable parts of tracing paper
gampi paper, oil-based ink
graphite, map pins, staples, and thread
2012 (inside left, detail)

what's left
variable parts of tracing paper, gampi paper,
oil-based ink, watercolor, graphite,
wood, map pins, staples, and thread
2012

Visiting Artist Program

Each year, six visiting artists and scholars greatly enhance the USM Art Department by engaging in student art critiques, demonstrations, art exhibitions and lectures. The Artist-in-Residence stays for a more in-depth engagement where he/she maintains open studio hours, creates an artwork, and greatly contributes to the fabric of the USM community.

Area Gallery, Woodbury Campus Center
Portland Campus
Hours: Mon-Fri 7am-10pm.

All events are free and open to the public.
For holiday hours, parking and directions info call 207-780-5008. www.usm.maine.edu/gallery

New Work by Andrea Sulzer

September 4 - October 16, 2012

University of Southern Maine Art Galleries

Photo credits: Luc Demers
Material Assumptions
by Diana Tuite

An assortment of unwrapped hard candies left in blazing sunlight atop a sheet of blotting paper will inevitably melt. More than that, their psychedelic sugars will leech into and wick through to the back of the rag paper. What results is an uncannily direct still-life image embedded in the moistened, thinned, and now translucent paper fibers. Held up to the light, this variation on a transfer drawing resembles a piece of stained glass; it is something of a Pop Art sudarium (Latin for a “sweat-cloth” like Veronica’s veil), if you will. For Andrea Sulzer, who had been working on a series of drawings based on these candies, this inadvertent fusion of pigment and paper spoke to the frustration that she had been experiencing in trying to push through—physically and conceptually—the surface tension of the picture plane.

A wildly creative draftsman and printmaker who relinquished a career in the plant sciences for one in art, Sulzer has recently started to produce hybrid three-dimensional forms that advance some of her most pressing questions about the nature and limits of graphic activity. Indeed, much of her new work has focused on varying her process and materials to pressure the relationship between color and support and, by extension, the physical world in which the work participates. Sulzer is in pursuit of subtle strategies for challenging the ways that drawing and printmaking have traditionally existed as surface activities lacking a three-dimensional life, and, in the process, she forges new interrelationships across media.

She first became interested in tracing paper when she used it to mask out parts of her woodblocks and observed the way that it held the ink. This soon led to experimentation with drawings and monoprints (a combination of drawing, painting, and printmaking that results in a unique impression). As an art material, tracing paper is thin and insubstantial enough that it necessarily submits, but it can also be made to hold up structurally. Even saturated with color it remains responsive to the passage of light and the surfaces against which it is set. Pinning pieces of the tracing paper together to create shallow dome-like structures, Sulzer inducts her color with depth and complexity by overlapping the sheets. More like reliquies than volumetric pieces of sculpture, these ambiguous forms maintain much of their flatness, as though underscoring their identity as extensions of her drawing practice. Where color is not present at the seams, the doubling up of the paper creates subtly opaque shapes. The bulbous pins that she uses to conjoin the paper locate points of contact but that information recedes, made somehow immaterial within the unified and organic field that Sulzer establishes across these boundaries.

With these forms, Sulzer demonstrates her quest for a formal intelligence realized through dialogues between two- and three-dimensional exercises. On a walk outdoors this summer, she encountered a fallen snapdragon blossom. Attempting to make a line drawing of the flower, and deeming the results unsatisfactory, Sulzer tried again after having produced a model of it with tracing paper and pins. This diagnostic action furnished her with an embodied understanding of the flower’s construction, giving her the muscle memory and intuition with which she could, as a draftsman, now see through its form.

Throughout her work, Sulzer performs many such acts of reinterpretation. Recently, she used her tracing paper domes as the basis for a series of woodcuts printed on Japanese paper, also translucent but incredibly refined in its composition. To reconstitute these forms in flat terms required no small amount of sequential analysis; she had to reverse the composites, translating them into discrete printmaking steps. When Sulzer had layered sheets of paper to construct these domes, certain passages of color and graphic marks took on new qualities in combination with the paper and with each other, and those physical effects needed to be approximated. So she painstakingly printed colors one on top of another, and what results are flayed representations of the domes, much like map projections with their requisite distortions. Here the hard-edged plasticity of the ink and the transparency of Sulzer’s order of operations establish a formal unity between part and whole, suggesting a more foliate or floral ontology than was present in the tracing paper constructions.

Sulzer’s colored pencil drawings, a mainstay of her production, attest to her preoccupation with similar issues. Like many of her large works on paper, green bluff (2012) departs considerably, in its final realization, from its beginnings. Sulzer began this as a horizontal drawing that she then rotated, trimmed down, and extended onto a second vertical sheet. In many areas she first went in and drew with a white colored pencil. These initial white-on-white lines were kicked up to the surface only once she put other colors down on top of them, sometimes erasing and going in a second time.

Colored pencils marry color and graphic gesture, and they enable an artist to employ variable pressure to create a host of marks. While the waxy skin deposited by the colored pencils serves almost to exaggerate the externality of the pigment relative to the paper, this underdrawing technique contributes interiority to the color. Here, Sulzer does not force the color into the paper so much as she lifts the paper through the color, another means of integrating the two entities. Within this heap of marks (yet another version of a domed shape), she preserves white spaces around the bundles of hatched lines, setting them off from one another while simultaneously binding the volatile mass together.

Crowning this pile is one of the more recurring and disquieting elements of Sulzer’s iconography. The cone, as she depicts it, is capable of evoking the dunce cap; the coroza, a piece of the penitential gath worn during the Spanish Inquisition and frequently pictured in Francisco de Goya’s Caprichos; and the traffic cone. Perhaps the most explicitly referential form to crop up in her work, it is used sparingly. When it does appear, however, it seems to exemplify the urgency with which Sulzer questions the confinement of the artistic practice. To counter the material assumptions applied to the graphic arts, she extends her work conceptually and physically, fostering new continuities within her corpus and expanding into our social space.

Diana Tuite is an art historian specializing in modern and contemporary art. She has curated exhibitions at the Princeton University Art Museum and the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, where her recent shows have included Edward Hopper’s Maine, William Wegman: Hello Nature, and Lesley Vance.

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