

art people

Nancy Haver | artist, printmaker, illustrator

When it comes to capturing a landscape or still life, Nancy Haver doesn't like to limit herself to one medium.

Reworking the same scene as a painting, a woodcut print and an engraving — or perhaps a graphite pencil sketch as well — can reveal different tones and nuances of a subject, Haver says.

Then again, her versatility could also be a product of a certain restlessness in the Amherst artist. “I tend to get carried away,” she says with a laugh.

Haver is at once a printmaker, a painter and an illustrator, with an educational background that includes not just art but a degree as a naturalist. Though art is something “I’ve been making ... in one form or the other since I could hold a crayon,” as she wrote in a short biographical sketch for a recent exhibition, her first professional artistic opportunities came as an undergraduate, when she did scientific illustrations for various publishers.

That in turn led her to study as a naturalist, which she followed up by earning a master’s degree in printmaking at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. All of those experiences have coalesced over the years: Haver especially likes depicting

outdoor scenes, both of flora and fauna, as well as landscapes of varying scales.

Printmaking has particular appeal because of its intricacy and variety; she’s drawn to what she calls the “intense



contrasts and pattern” that are typical of woodcut and wood engraving. She traces her interest in printmaking to her childhood, when she watched and then helped her father develop black-and-white photographs. What is common to both

processes, she says, “is the element of surprise — you don’t know exactly what you have until you produce that final image, and I really like that.”

A show in November at Forbes Library



in Northampton featured a full panoply of her work: acrylic and watercolor landscape and still life paintings, primarily of Valley scenes and produce; woodcut prints and engravings; copper-plate etchings; and detailed pencil drawings of human hands

and partial torsos.

The contrasts between similar subjects in different mediums were striking. An acrylic painting of a series of ledges on Mount Tom was awash in greenery and bathed in sunlight, while in a woodcut of the same scene, the dark lines of rock evinced a brooding image of ruined battlements.

She likes to work at different scales as well, using bigger canvases for paintings and making smaller, postcard-sized woodcut prints, given the time and detail that’s needed to carve a piece of wood to produce a good print. She notes that varying the size of her work is another way to capture different aspects of a subject.

Haver, who’s also a part-time worker (and co-owner) of Collective Copies in Amherst and Northampton, says she’s done a lot of illustrating work over the years for newspapers, book publishers and other clients. But more recently she’s begun

turning down some of those offers and concentrating on her own art, with an eye to doing more landscapes in particular.

“I think it’s a time in my life to be less practical.”

— Steve Pfarrer