

**Sandy Bleifer**

## **ABOUT MY WORK**

My work evolved from an ongoing inquiry into the nature of my materials, especially the silkscreen process and the paper, itself. After all these years, I still take delight in discovering their expressive subtleties. What I learn from my media I use as a frame of reference for the real world. To my amazement, I find parallels between my working processes and the structure of the natural and man-made world. This has required an experimental approach to silkscreen printing. I never wanted to print true "editions" of identical multiples. Instead, I sequenced the color order, or cropped each print for a different image, or "painted" individualized blends through the screen, or reconstructed the printed page into unique compositions in order to express my observation that much of nature can be understood as rich variation on basic themes.

Paper itself has provoked an on-going inquiry into its qualities and potentials: Its outer fragility and its inner strength, its apparent simplicity and its structural complexity, its capacity for both hardness and softness intrigue me. Instead of using a piece of paper simply as the surface to receive an image, I have developed a vocabulary of manipulation techniques such as tearing, folding, layering, peeling, crushing, etc., which transforms the paper, itself, into a drawing and sculpting medium.

My creative process is to collect images of the landscape and to take note of the workings of nature while looking for a printing or paper manipulation technique to express their connection through the medium of paper and process. At the same time I try to be open to the materials and techniques I use in order to discover the aspects they possess which can be used as metaphors for reality. That is, to discover what paper and the methods I utilize have in common with our understanding of the world and the human condition. In this way my work has been a constantly refined and redefined map through life.

Several themes have prevailed over my work since the early 70's:

The landscape and the forces of erosion which have shaped it, the parallels between the nature of paper and the nature of wood, trees, leaves, rocks and walls.

Using a basic unit of imagery in the production of a silkscreen analogous to the way composers manipulate thematic material in their compositions.

The special qualities of paper that relate to human skin and, by extension, to the human condition itself.

My role as an artist has also evolved with these themes: As I organized thematic exhibitions, I expanded the exhibitions into public forums, educational programs, expressions in dance and poetry, and in creating opportunities for young people and seniors to become involved in the artistic process.

Enabled by technical proficiency and an experimental use of materials, I am motivated to question conventional approaches to subject matter, asking instead:

- What does paper as a material have in common with tree bark, leaves, rocks, walls, water and other natural and man-made objects?
- How can you use a method of art making that lends itself to identical multiples (silkscreen) to create variation within the process and beyond the process? And how can these variations reflect/express

variation within the different genre in nature itself?

- How can the static medium of the visual arts represent the passage of time and other time-based arts such as music?
- How does the nature of paper, its strength and resiliency, reflect the nature of the human condition; our vulnerability, our outer fragility and our inner strength our ability to endure despite abuse?
- Can art really change the world by changing perception and awareness?

It is this last question that made me redirect my focus in 1996 upon returning from Japan and the Hiroshima/Nagasaki Memorial Project. I felt that there was a potential for change that could be engineered by the artist above and beyond the work that they produced.

Inspired by Christo's installations and his practice of community outreach, I decided I would, directly, engage in the re-envisioning and recreation of my hometown, Los Angeles, at a time that downtown was beginning to be reinvented. I looked to historic buildings and neighborhoods as my "found materials" and tried to reinvigorate them with new uses and new contexts. This necessitated my putting together buyers, developers and tenants with underutilized properties and acquiring the real estate licenses and expertise to accomplish these transactions. I can't say I enjoy the "medium" of finance and legal methodology as much as I did working with my hands and intuition in art making...but that is the nature of the task at hand. Real estate is more socially interactive and, though one always faces the possibility of rejection, it is easier to take than when artwork that comes from ones very soul is being rejected.

I still explore artistic issues through my 15-year study of Ikebana (Japanese art of flower arranging) in a search to understand a different way of seeing the world. It has also taught me a new formal vocabulary and the ability to accept the transitory aspect of art making.

Sandy Bleifer, 2009