

# ANNETTE MITCHELL

It begins with a place of great visual power — the summit of Mount Washington, the lower basin or the Flume in Franconia Notch. She absorbs the scene with intensity, soaking in not the “picture” of the place but its essence, its movement, the way that it speaks to her. Later, in her attic studio back in Plymouth, she takes a wide brush dipped in deep black Sumi ink and makes a gesture across a sheet of clean, white paper.

“I give an interpretive movement — almost like a dancer — of what I felt or thought when I was in that space,” said New Hampshire artist Annette Mitchell. “Days later, I decide what I can add, in terms of the foam block print, that will enhance it.” Remember the foam block print.

The result of this deeply intuitive process is a series of striking works on paper that Mitchell has been creating for the last couple of years. Part monoprint, part painting, these pieces combine evocative gestures with monumental forms, conveying the feeling of water and rocks without falling into realism — Mitchell conjures nature, but doesn’t copy it.

The series was introduced in her 2012 exhibition at the Galletly Gallery at New Hampton School. “They were embraced like nothing before,” said Mitchell, noting that the pieces in this series are being collected at a rate that astonishes her. Knowing the work resonates with viewers is essential to Mitchell’s process; she is inspired by the response. Her upcoming solo show, “20 Days in May,” at the Sawyer Fine Arts Center at Colby-Sawyer College in New London, N.H. in May, will feature new works in the series.

When Mitchell grew up in Atmore, Alabama, “Art was like a dirty word!” But she persevered, leaving to study art at the University of Denver, and later returning to complete her graduate degrees at the University of Alabama, thanks to both an Alabama Scholarship and a rural assistantship. Today, Mitchell is Professor of Art and coordinator of the drawing program at Plymouth State University, and it was there that she invented a completely new way to make prints.

One semester, Mitchell was teaching a class for non-art majors, trying to cover every possible art-making medium with almost no budget for materials. Looking for a way to teach printing simply, inexpensively and without the press, she thought of those polystyrene foam trays that meat is packaged in. She dropped by the local supermarket and obtained a stack of clean trays. Mitchell began trying things out, incising lines in the foam with a pen, applying printing ink to the surface of the foam plate, then pressing the plate by hand against the paper. She tried multiple plates and overprinting different colors. The result is an adaptable process, full of possibilities, with a rich, velvety texture unlike anything else.

Mitchell has taught the technique in her classes, at conferences and workshops, and now as a graduate course every July. While she has no idea how many people have learned foam block printing from her, or how many more have used her book and DVD to teach themselves ([www.foamiswheretheartis.com](http://www.foamiswheretheartis.com)), her students are spreading the technique and using it in a myriad of ways.

In addition to prints, Mitchell uses the process with drawing and painting as in this series, or to enrich fabric for quilting, or on mat board for her three-dimensional relief constructions. She is always experimenting and trying new things, sometimes figurative, sometimes abstract, but her style, her humor, her passion for color, her unique way of translating the world into art is evident in everything she touches.

“Annette Mitchell: 20 Days in May” can be seen May 17-30 at the Sawyer Fine Arts Center at Colby-Sawyer College, 541 Main St., New London, NH.

Marcia Santore



Lower Basin, (Franconia Notch, NH), Sumi ink and foam block print on paper, 25" x 32".