

Bringing woodcuts into the 21st century

Gilbert Bouchard



PREVIEWS

Karen Kunc's Select Images

Showing at: SNAP Gallery,
10137 104th St.

Until: July 3. Kunc will be giving an illustrated talk about her work Saturday from 1 to 3 p.m. at the gallery

Michele Drouin's Painting from 1988-2003

Showing at: Agnes Bugera Gallery,
12310 Jasper Ave.
Until: June 11

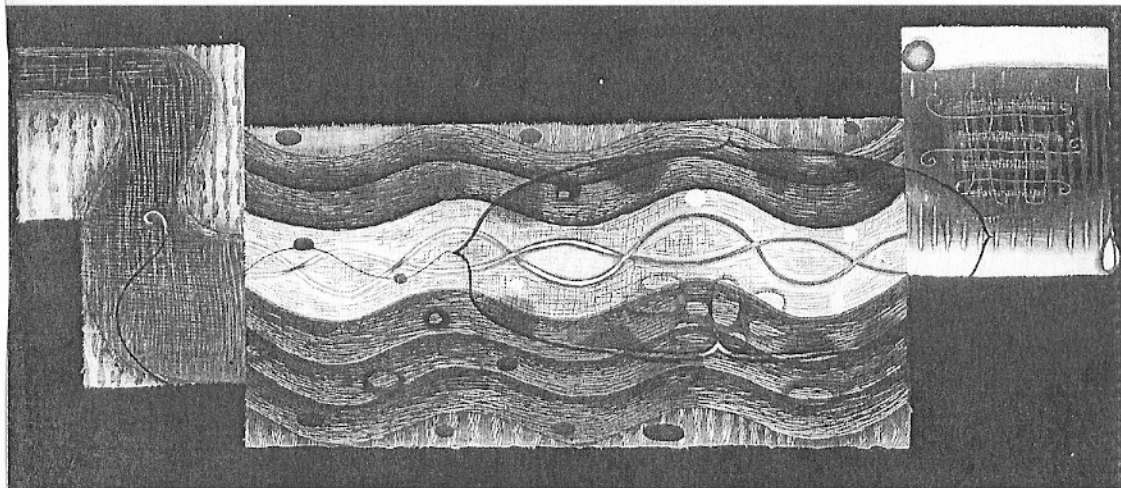
Karen Kunc's brightly coloured, prairie-inspired prints are redefining the woodcut tradition.

"There's a woodcut tradition that everybody knows and understands: the German expressionist school which is famous for its gutsy, raw and mainly black-and-white images," says Kunc, an instructor at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

Select Images, a five-year retrospective of this renowned American printmaker, can be found at the SNAP Gallery.

"That tradition is in my work, but because of the layers and layers of colours I use and the lush colour sense I have, I'm subverting and augmenting the tradition."

Kunc defines herself as "a colourist by nature" and opted to work with colour in her printmaking even though black-and-white work is far more common in the woodcut medium.



SUPPLIED

Above, one of Karen Kunc's vibrant woodcuts; at left, Michele Drouin's *Soleil dans la grisaille*

"I don't even make proofs in black-and-white, I immediately start my works in colour. For me, colour is a non-verbal thing. I know it's working when I see it and how it reacts with my eye."

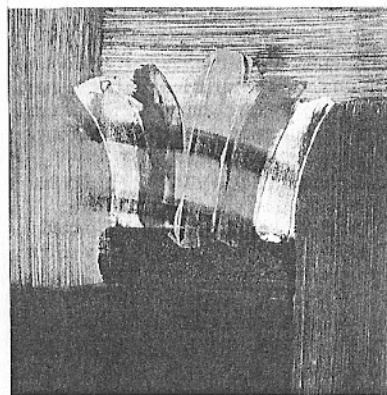
The relief printmaking technique wasn't where she started as an artist.

"I first started working with woodcuts because I was asked to teach it. I was familiar with the other three major printmaking techniques (etching in metal, chemical-based lithography and stencil-based processes like silkscreening) but had not done any woodcuts since high school. Up to then, I'd been making mainly etchings and silkscreens, both processes which have informed my woodcuts."

Kunc instantly fell in love with woodcuts, especially their directness and hands-on nature.

"There's less removal and less distance in woodcuts. You make a mark and then directly print with no intermediary processing."

While her work is more abstract than not, Kunc says she's influenced by the Nebraska landscape — both prairies and rolling hills.



Michele Drouin deploys colour in lush fashion

Like Kunc, Montreal-based Michele Drouin is also an internationally acclaimed colourist associated with lush deployment of colour.

"In a way my work is like that of Guido Molinari (another acclaimed Montreal-based painter known for rigorous colour abstraction) in that I begin with light and colour and I'm painting without shadow," says the painter and published poet.

A retrospective of her work from the last 16 years is at the Agnes Bugera Gallery. Drouin boasts more than 40 major solo shows in various world art capitals including Montreal, Toronto, New York, Paris and London.

Calling her process "one-shot" painting, Drouin says her work is more risky and intuitive than other more "studied geometric or abstract work" produced by her peers.

"There is a power in that sense of openness and space with these isolated elements juxtaposed dramatically against that space, like a telephone pole against the sky, or a fence standing out against the snow. ...

"Even though our prairie might not be considered wildly colourful, it's all about being steeped in the environment and then finding artistic accents and exaggerations."