



## Christine Aaron Mixed Medium, Porchester, NY, USA

NOVEMBER 26, 2018 | IN MIXED MEDIA ARTISTS, PRINTMAKERS, VISUAL ARTISTS | BY DEBORAH BLAKELEY

Christine Aaron, Porchester, NY, USA

Making her mark in paper and wood with amazing effects\*

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**You call yourself a mixed media artist, have you always worked in mixed media and if so how or why did this come about.**

Art is a second career for me. I got my Master's in Social Work and practiced for over ten years. When my youngest was a year old I took a watercolor class. Within a year I was using poured inks and mixed media. At that time I realized that art stimulated me on every level, physically, emotionally, intellectually and visually and I made the active decision to work towards becoming a full time professional fine artist and engaged fully in that process.



Storm, Monotype Print, 23x18"

Shortly after, I became involved with printmaking and that segued into experimenting with printing on more unusual substrates, such as mirror, copper and steel, and then aging those substrates as part of the evolution of the finished piece. I found I was becoming more physical with my materials and more interested in exploring what materials themselves could bring to the table in terms of content. I have moved into doing installation and some sculptural pieces, some with audio components, as well as continuing my practice with printmaking and painting.

**You are very interested in the Gee Bend Quilters. Can you tell us briefly about them, their work, and how they have influenced your art?**

I tend to be intrigued by outsider art, by art where the hand of the artist is evident, that is material based, visceral and emotionally evocative. I spoke about some of these artists in a "Fantasy Curation" I was asked to do for Vasari21 (<https://vasari21.com/fantasy-curating-memory-and-materiality/>). The Gee Bend quilts, created by women of little means, from scraps and for serviceable purposes, have always spoken to me. The impulse and innate creativity to make something beautiful, distinctive, and in one's own voice shines through each quilt. They are graphically powerful, the colors and shapes visually play off one another...one can almost hear a contrapuntal jazz improvisation humming beneath the surface. They speak to resilience and the desire for beauty and order while becoming more than the sum of their parts.

**Discuss how the two links Paper Connection and the International Encaustic Conference have come together in your work.**

I started attending the International Encaustic Conference more than 10 years ago when I started incorporating encaustic (pigmented beeswax and damar resin) into my work. This annual conference, created by Joanne Mattera and now run by Cherie Mittenthal and Truro Center for the Arts, is a vital and information-packed several days, with a focus not only on materials and technique, but also on artist professional development. It is rich with networking opportunities, the formation of incredible friendships, and artistic collaborations that develop and deepen over time. As a printmaker first, I have an affinity for and interest in paper. There is a vendor room at the conference (heaven!) and one year Lauren Pearlman of Paper Connection International was invited. I met Lauren and was thrilled with the variety and range of papers offered and impressed with her deep knowledge of the properties of each paper. I had been using a tissue thin gampi for some of my work, but could only find sheets up to 22" x 15." It was Lauren who told me she had this paper in 10" long, 36" wide rolls that ended up being the perfect solution for an installation I had envisioned.



Pulling Gampi Print

We ended up striking up a friendship and since then she and all that paper Connection offers have been instrumental in helping me find the paper that best suits my creative needs.

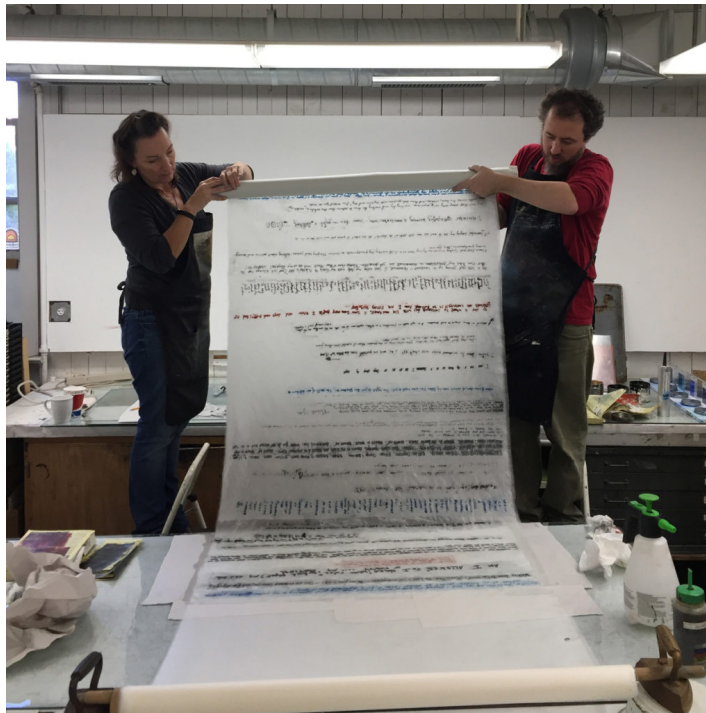


Christopher Shore and Christine Aaron pulling a print together

### Expand on your large format works?

In order to create the large gampi panels I need help and more space than my current studio allows. I work with Christopher Shore, master printer at the Center For Contemporary Printmaking in Norwalk CT, USA. He and I experimented with ink viscosities and methods to translate my vision into reality. Using a method referred to as paper lithography, we hand ink up a 9' x 3" toner copy of one of my images with oil-based printing ink modified to the right consistency. We then roll out the gampi and hand transfer the image onto the gampi using hand (mostly thumb!) pressure. Gently peeling back the print on gampi is always a bit dicey and nerve wracking as the gampi is relatively strong and resilient when dry, but fragile and prone to tearing when wet. But the results! Exactly what I had hoped. We used several shades of translucent grey ink, so that when lit from behind the image disappears, then reappears as the light shifts or is in front of the panel. They create a subtle whispered rustle when hung and moving and respond to the slightest air current that makes them seem alive. When viewers walk through the installation, the panels flow towards them and then shift away.

Explain about your involvement in community projects. Use 'The Memory Project' to expand on this.



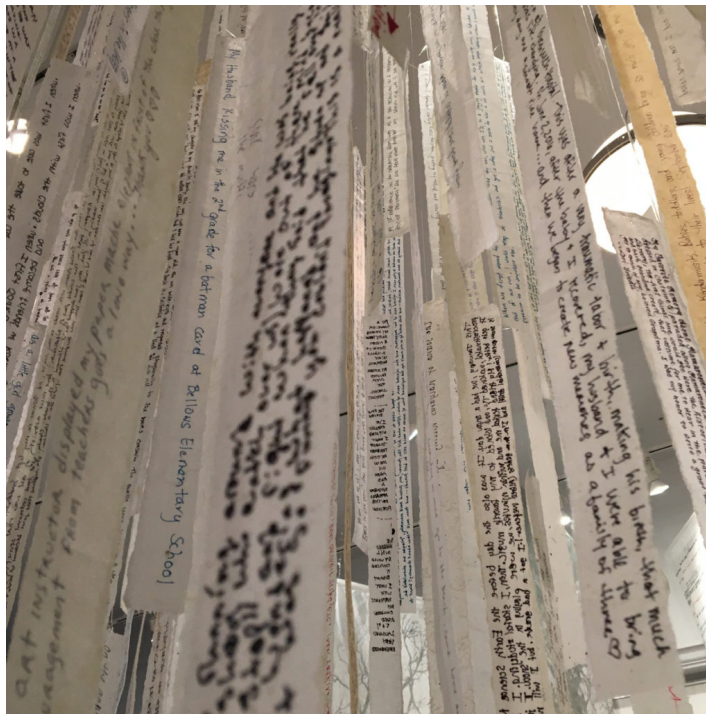
Holding a Print copy for The Memory Project

I received an individual artist grant through ArtsWestchester, a local art organization (funded through the New York Foundation for the Arts). One component was to offer a community event, such as a lecture or open studio. Having worked with themes of memory, loss, and the way in which humans are marked by their personal experiences, I decided I wanted the entire focus of the grant project to be a community participatory one.



The Memory Project, card catalogue

I invited any person who had a relationship to the community to share a significant memory of their choosing. I involved local businesses, community libraries, a nursing home, a music academy, etc. in spreading the word and providing workshops. Participants were asked to hand write their memory on provided asian papers, or audio record a memory in their own voices. I used these to create several installations: hundreds of individual memories written on narrow paper strips, hand coated in wax and suspended on invisible thread from the ceiling; a vintage library catalog holding hundreds of handwritten memories so visitors could read and share them with one another. As the project grew I recognized the importance of the audience being able to read and/or hear all the contributed memories; so, unlike an earlier project where parts of the memories were obscured and layered, here, all memories could be read or listened to in full.



Installation, close up from The Memory Project

The audio recorded memories were interspersed with sounds from the local community, and played throughout the gallery, and could also be listened to on individual compact disc players while visitors wandered through hanging gampi panels and looked through and read the memories in the other installations.



The Memory Project, Installation

I found people had a great need to share a piece of themselves with others and that the majority felt most comfortable in having specific authorship remain anonymous. It was an honor and a privilege to have these memories entrusted to me. They ranged from poignant to mundane to powerful to humorous. All the installations were created with an eye to being able to add to them and grow and I would love to travel this project to other communities. All the memories can be read and listened to through the website: <https://www.thememoryproject.space>. A catalog of the process and exhibit can be found here [http://www.magcloud.com/webviewer/1448242?\\_r=569225&s=w](http://www.magcloud.com/webviewer/1448242?_r=569225&s=w)

**Please give us your own thoughts on the importance of art in healing.**

That's an interesting question. I think art can have the ability to connect people with one another as well as take them more deeply within themselves. People approach art from personal perspectives and see and experience different things as a result. Art can evoke a memory, a stirring of something within, empathy and a recognition. In places of stress and illness such as hospitals, I think art can soothe and offer emotional and intellectual escape.

**What lead you to burn your work.**

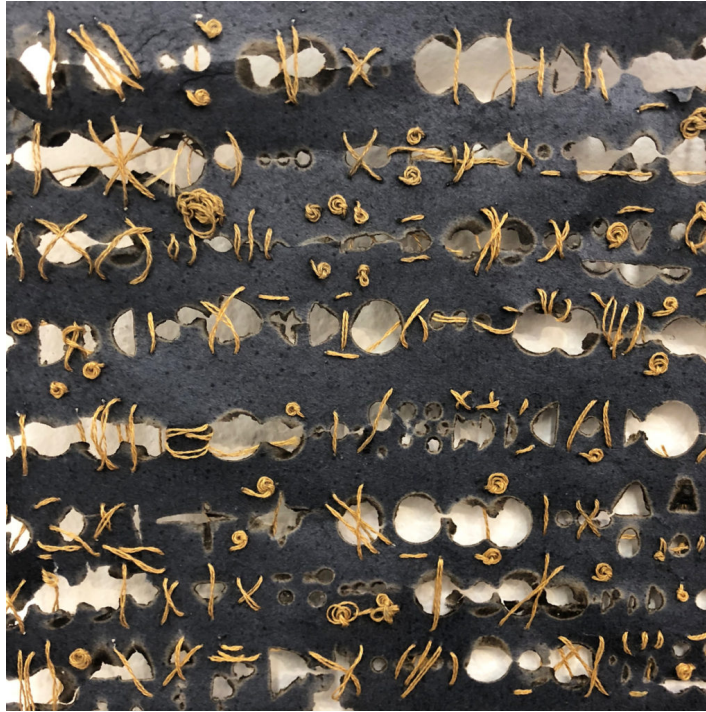


I was in this wonderful installation workshop with Judy Pfaff a couple years ago. Judy was an incredible facilitator and encouraged risk, trial and error and thinking outside of the box.



Secret II, Burnt, drawing with stitching on oak gall ink dyed paper, 10 x 8"

I started experimenting with drilling, staining, carving and burning wood panels. I was immediately struck by the mark making, and residue with which these methods infused the surface. That started a deeper investigation with fire.



Secret II – detail

Burning, used throughout history to destroy, purify, obliterate and sanctify, evokes absence and presence, shadow and light. I started working with burnt drawings on paper, and the marks reference language, code, a mysterious unknown language, an attempt at communication, or resemble artifacts from another time and place.

**Expand on the value of the missing in the burning process.**

I think both the drilling and burning evolved to where I recognized that what was missing was as important and intriguing as the residue and mark making that remained on the substrate. The cast shadows become physical evidence of what was lost. When possible I like to incorporate light and shadow as part of the completed piece and the light as it changes, shifts those marks. Much as time, loss and experience affect and change our recollection and understanding of events.



What We Keep III, Burnt on hand dyed indigo paper, 10x8"

I think losses impact and live within us, shape and mark us. So the ghostly presence of the cast light and shadows helps to convey the shifting relationships between perception, memory and experience. The patched together nature of what remains of the material/paper, speaks to the way in which we continue to make connections, create an understanding of the story/sense of the memory left. I am also drawn to materials and processes that have an immediacy and unpredictability. I am a chronic over-thinker. Working with materials and processes that are inexact, that are variable in their results, forces me to react to what is actually happening in front of me and act as an antidote to the over-thinking. Frequently the "mistakes" (burning that gets out of control, drilling that fractures the wood) speak better to my concepts than my preconceived ideas. Dying, printing, drilling, and burning are all inexact and often I "lose" much of what I began with, which naturally starts the process of reclamation and repair. In effect the things lost become as much a part of the piece as what's retained, and that history haunts and inflects the work that remains.



Repair II, Burnt, drawing on hand dyed paper with stitch, 10x8"

**In "Remains" you have used hand dyed paper. Do you do the hand dying?**

I took some classes in making natural dyes and used these to dye papers. Much like my processes of drilling, burning, and rusting there are elements of chance and surprise in these hand processes. Some of my work is on paper that I have dyed myself with oak gall ink, cochineal, walnut ink or indigo dye. Some is on paper that I have purchased from other artists who hand make, dye and sell paper.

As I become increasingly involved with the materials I use, wanting them to carry some of the "content" of my work, it leads me to investigate them more deeply. I recently took an introductory class on papermaking and am scheduled to take other related ones (i.e. in casting paper, embedding in paper). I want to expand my experience with and understanding of

the nature of paper, whether I end up making my own paper, so that I can make more informed choices as to what I choose to use for future work.



Vestiges, Burnt, drawing on Abaca Paper with Stitch, 18x12"

**Comment on the statement made about you, "Trees, for Aaron, are a symbolic language."**

I've always responded to trees and particularly enjoy them in autumn when they are resplendent and in the winter when they are naked and calligraphic. They mark each year of their life in their rings, physical marks of their lived experience that remain hidden from view. After severe storms, where huge branches and whole trees fell, I would notice innards that had been rotted out or eaten away or damaged past the point where the limb or tree could survive. The day before, these

limbs and trees looked healthy and complete. Other times I would notice thriving trees that had healed, grown over or through obstacles, a resiliency. The bare winter trees also call up life cycles, the periods of dormancy, of waiting, of transformation and annual renewal. To me it is analogous to human experience.



Vestige IV

Beyond all that I find them beautiful in and of themselves. The "beautiful" in art has almost become a dirty word. It is not trusted. I do want to create beautiful art...but perhaps a beauty more complicated by being simultaneously bittersweet, unsettling, mysterious or evocative.

**Discuss your subtle use of color also your use of bold hues.**

I tend to use many blues and greys with a deep indigo-black as my favorite. Often color comes out of an instinctual response to what has been started. In the case of the lithographs I did on metals, the oxidation and patination of the metals as part of the composition, determine a beginning color palette, just as natural wood and dyed paper begin the color conversation. I tend to gravitate towards naturally occurring colors and want to reference the life cycle through color such as those of fungus, moss, blood, decay, rebirth. I think I use color to evoke an emotion, and a sense of mood and place.



Sulphur Branch II, Lithographic Monoprint on patinated copper, 24x 18"

**You don't always use paper as your base. Expand on some of the works you have made on other bases.**

I started printing on more unusual substrates, such as mirror, copper and steel, and then aging those substrates as part of the evolution of the finished piece. I found I was becoming more physical with my materials and more interested in exploring what materials themselves could bring to the table. As I investigated and manipulated actual wood, I found the form shifted. In one particular critique group with Patricia Miranda, she pointed out that I was still handling the wood "on the surface" as if it was a painting. That was an "aha" moment to begin thinking about how the work intervened in and

conversed with the surrounding space. Increasingly I am considering space and environment in my work to create a more immersive experience for the viewer.



Inquitude, Burnt plywood, gampi, encaustic, 24x18"

I went from using trees symbolically, to using actual wood, to a shift in other materials referencing the concepts I was exploring such as time passage, loss, memory, and the marks of human experience and connection. The processes I was using, from aging the materials, drilling, burning, and carving started to carry some of the content of my work, and also created new areas to explore. The drilling and burning and stitching evoked other things (trauma, wounds, healing, repair) and created cast shadows that spoke to absence and presence, memory and loss. Each exploration opened up other avenues to investigate.





What Remains II, Grainary, & Grainary II

#### **Materiality and Process**

In addition to the materials I choose, the processes I engage in are part of the overall concept of the work. For instance, with the stitched burnt drawings, the process represents (especially as a woman) that repetitive experience of doing, redoing, making, remaking, and propping up, repairing, connecting, the forging of strengths and networks despite fragility and inevitable decline; a determined resilience and piecing together of a meaningful life, through relationships and connections despite disappointments and loss. Loss shapes us more significantly than joy. I want to speak to the stubborn persistence of healing, repair and moving forward, forging ahead and finding beauty in the imperfect, the fragile, and the nature of being human.



Carving into wood

I work to have the materials and processes I use carry some of the content in order that the work embodies rather than illustrates. The burned, rusted and stitched cloth and paper, the drilled and burned tree slices...are whole and beautiful despite of or because of their fragility and fractured or pieced together nature. Additionally, I think the hand wrought and manipulated nature of these materials validates the imperfect, the intimate, the individual mark, in contrast to the pervasive and impersonal electronic media and mass-produced items dominating daily life. That my work is open to various interpretations beyond my intent thrills me. My first sculptural pieces were these three-inch deep, 15' wide wood slices with a rotted away center that I filled with shattered mirror.



Vestige V, detail

I was representing the fractured nature of memory and how each thing we learn or angle at which we look at or remember something, causes the memory to shift and change. Several people at the exhibit eagerly spoke with me about the work and their perceptions of it. One insisted that it spoke to man's destruction of the environment. Another saw it representative of cancer, the "alien" organism taking over the healthy, but that the cancer threat was "contained." Another just enjoyed the contrasting surfaces of the organic wood and the shimmering of the multifaceted mirror shards. It is exactly what I hope for, that each viewer relates to the work and finds meaning that resonates from his/her own experience.

**What are you currently working on?**

Currently I am creating more burnt drawings on dyed and stitched papers, experimenting with density and scale of the paper, mark making and burnt areas. I also have several much larger paper scrolls, roughly 48" x 5' long, that I will be working on in the next few months. Additionally I will be learning more about paper making, dying, and casting paper to incorporate into my ongoing work.

Recently I applied to a number of residencies with the goal of using one to explore a full installation responsive to a specific space, incorporating both the larger scaled paper and the drilled and burned wood pieces. It would give me the opportunity to experiment with how these bodies of work interact with and inform one another.



No Safety Nest, Found nest, shattered glass.

Lastly, I would like to start investigating other communities in which it would be possible to continue with and add to the memories in The Memory Project.

**Contact details:**

**Christine Aaron**

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Christine Aaron, Porchester, NY, USA

Interview by Deborah Blakeley, November 2018

ABSTRACT ARTIST AMERICAN ARTISTS ECO ARTIST INSTALLATION ARTIST ORGANIC PRINTMAKER US ARTIST



### Think a colleague or friend could benefit from this interview?

Knowledge is one of the biggest assets in any business. So why not forward this on to your friends and colleagues so they too can start taking advantage of the insightful information the artist has given?

### Other artists you may be interested in:



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☞ Textile Artists



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☞ Painters, Ceramic Artists



The Melbourne Map Illustrator / Cartography - Melbourne, Australia  
☞ Painters, Illustrators

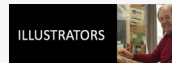


Helen Earl Ceramic Artist - Sydney, Australia  
☞ Ceramic Artists



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NANCY NEWMEN-RICE >



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