

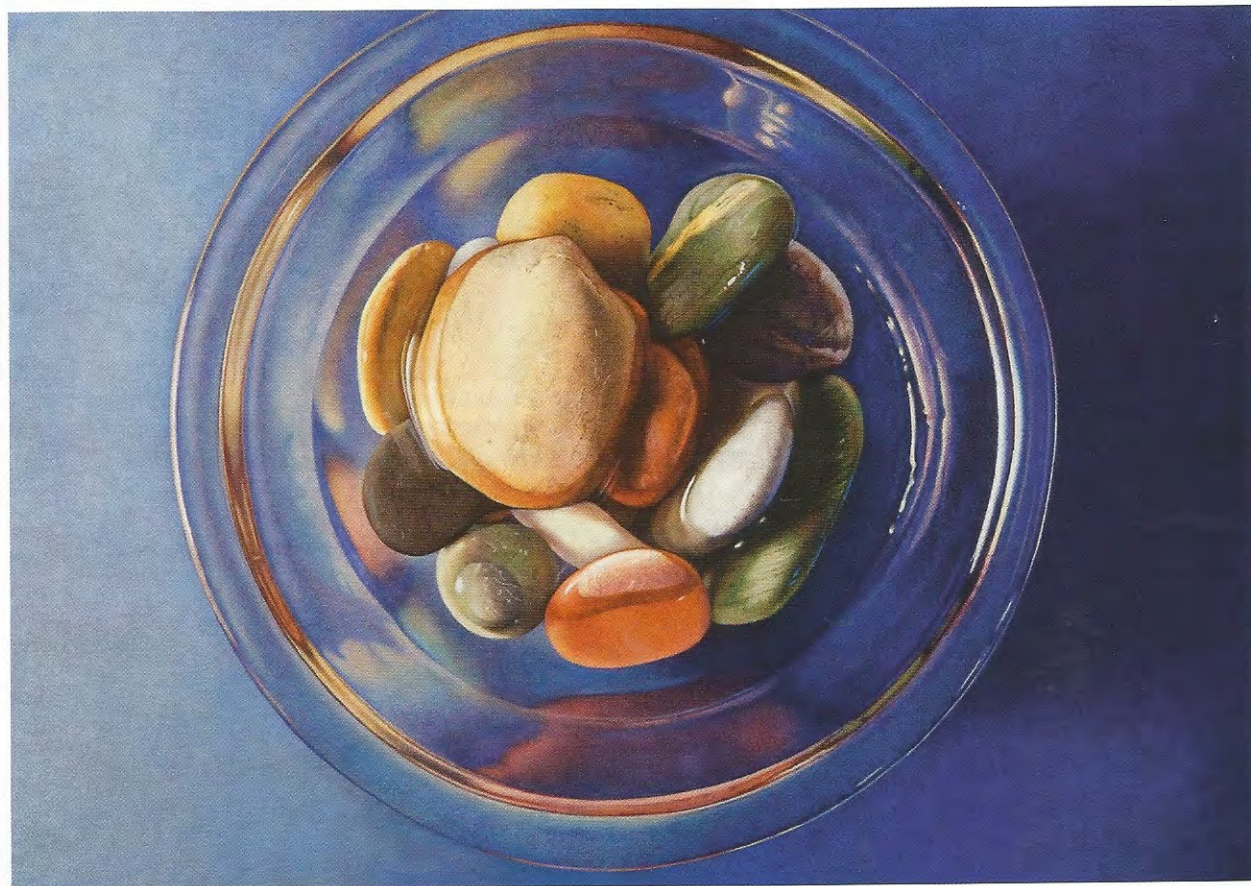
studio
palette
composition
canvas

artist profile

inspiration
gallery
imagination

Drawing Inspiration from Nature

BETSY LAWSON **writer**



wellesley artist Deborah L. Friedman has garnered international acclaim for her recent series of colored pencil drawings exploring beach stones and the interplay of light, water, and composition. One enthusiastic colleague went so far as to suggest she had found her voice and could produce works within that niche for years to come.

Friedman agrees that she's fascinated with the subject matter right now—she finds it both meditative and technically challenging—but can't imagine she would stop evolving as an artist. "If you'd told me six years ago that I'd be doing a series of stone drawings, I wouldn't have believed it. I was into birds," she says.

Before colored pencil drawings of birds, it was graphite drawings (black and white) and further back still, lithography, the process of printing from a flat surface treated so as to repel

Lapis Light

artist profile “a strong love of the natural world”

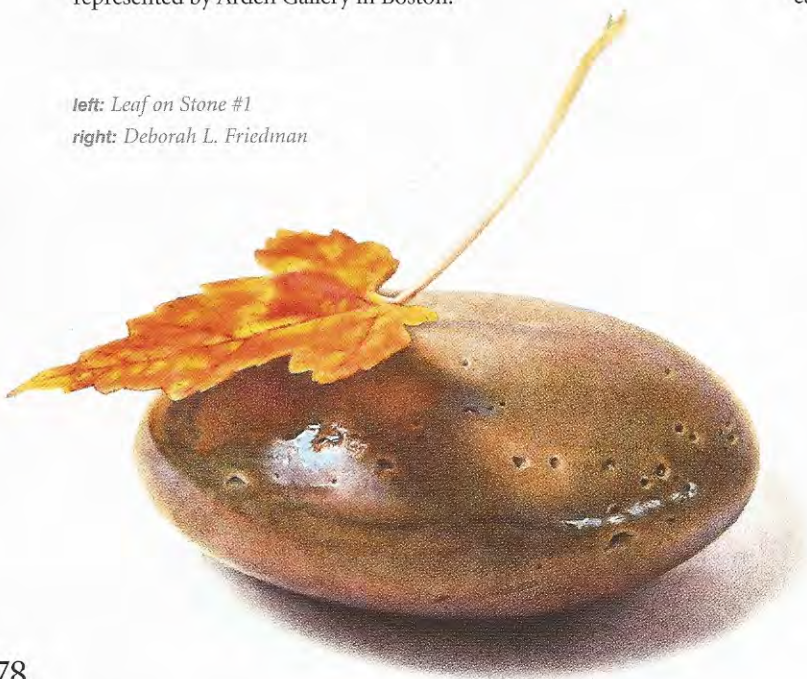
the ink except where it is required for printing. Friedman can trace her journey as an artist all the way back to when she was a four-year-old in Southern California and drawing with crayons was a favorite activity.

“I never drew stick figures,” Friedman says of her earliest memories of creating art. Rather, her ample figures of men and women were always dancing, or dusting, she laughs, but were always in some kind of motion. Her parents encouraged her interest and enrolled her in a variety of art classes at the Los Angeles County Museum and then later at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln when the family relocated to Massachusetts.

Friedman credits her mother in particular with instilling in her a strong love of the natural world. She spent summers enjoying the abundant wildlife on her grandparents’ wheat farm in Texas that included close-up looks at bats, armadillos, horned lizards, and rattlesnakes.

She chose to study art at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, but was not drawn to its painting classes. At that time, painting was taught in a loose and experimental way and Friedman understood herself as a “more exacting” artist. Lithography and etching suited her temperament. She was inspired by the work of her instructor Fred Wessel, a printmaker who has gone on to international acclaim and is represented by Arden Gallery in Boston.

left: *Leaf on Stone #1*
right: Deborah L. Friedman

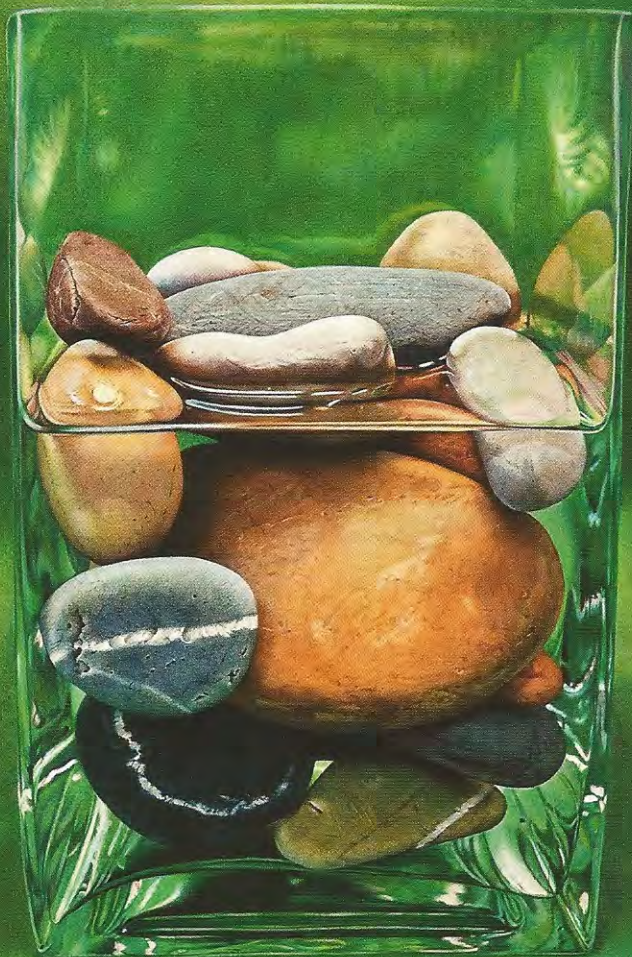


Blue Jay

Friedman’s Bachelor of Fine Arts thesis project was a series of lithographic portraits and pencil drawings inspired by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites. Work from that series was entered in a juried show and not only won the Berkshire Art Association Award, but was purchased by the Berkshire Art Museum in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

The medium of lithography, however, was too expensive to support on her post-college wages from an art workshop, so Friedman began experimenting more with graphite pencils. Her portfolio grew and she earned grants from the Ford Foundation and was offered residencies





Counterpoint in Green

at artist colonies. The most prominent among them was to the storied MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire.

It was at MacDowell in 1984 that she met the composer David Hoffman. The couple married a year later. After the birth of their first son, they purchased a Victorian in Wellesley that had been in one family for a hundred years and needed many renovations. Six months after moving in, the unfinished attic space on the third floor was converted into a comfortable and spacious studio. Light now pours in from the large windows on all four sides, as well as the skylight above.

For years, Friedman said part of the appeal in working in graphite and colored pencils was that she could steal away to her studio for half hours at a time when her boys were small. She had been working with oils, but the exacting process of mixing colors and preparing to paint

artist profile “freedom to experiment”

seemed only barely underway when she'd hear the school bus and it was time for all the attentions that small children require.

Friedman was very active in the elementary school PTO and other volunteer activities throughout the community. When the new Sprague School opened in September 2002, Friedman was asked to be one of its PTO co-presidents. Friedman speaks highly of the continuing emphasis Wellesley Public Schools place on teaching and promoting arts in the classroom. She was honored to be asked to participate in a parent-led Art Appreciation program sponsored by the PTO that featured her portfolio of work and life as an artist.

Friedman has also been a long-time member of the Wellesley Society of Artists and has won numerous awards in its shows over the years. She earned first place for her piece “Counterpoint in Green” in the 2013 Spring Exhibition that was on display at the Wellesley Community Center.

The camaraderie and support of local artists has led to other opportunities for Friedman to share her art with the community. In May 2012, she was invited to participate in a series of artists' talks sponsored by the Friends of the Wellesley College Botanic Gardens. She spoke about her journey as an artist and the inspiration she draws from nature and in doing botanical art.

Her talk was well received and Friedman was asked to lead a one-day workshop. The first section filled up and a second was added. This workshop, in turn, led to a five-week course offered through the Wellesley College Botanic Gardens this past spring.

“I try to push [my students] out of their comfort zone,” Friedman says of her teaching style. She encourages her students, both those in group classes as well as the private lessons she offers out of her home studio, to be willing to end up with something that's “not actually good enough to hang on the wall.”

Rather, it's about the freedom to experiment and find new subject areas, Friedman says, as well as new media that keep their interest in art fresh and alive. While she sees herself as an artist first, the role of teaching and mentoring emerging artists is important to her. She named



left: Spirit Stones; right: The Secret Life of Leaves

artists Scott Prior and the late Frances Cohen Gillespie (wife of the artist Gregory Gillespie) as mentors important in her own career. “They have continued to influence my work in one way or another to this day.”

The Colored Pencil Society of America

The Colored Pencil Society of America (CPSA) is a nonprofit founded in 1990 that is dedicated exclusively to artists working with colored pencil. It has some 1,600 members worldwide and more than 25 district chapters in the United States. Friedman is currently vice president of the New England chapter. When the chapter visited the Davis Museum on the Wellesley College campus last year, Friedman invited members back to her house for a potluck and tour of her studio.

“Some artists hold their skills and expertise close to the vest,” Friedman says. But CPSA members tend to be very open about sharing techniques and new challenges they are exploring as artists, both in person and through the CPSA magazine and website. Friedman’s Spirit Stones won the CPSA-sponsored “Great Explorations Award for Exceptional Achievement,” an online exhibition that will be displayed through January 31, 2014 at www.cpsa.org/view-explore-this-9.

The publicity surrounding the award captured the attention of the British pencil company Derwent who liked her very first foray into drawing stones and commissioned a work. She was delighted, and a bit surprised, when her images later became the cover art on the tin box in which the artist pencils are sold.

Friedman will continue with her study of the beach stones—in fact has piles of them in her studio—but is also looking forward to using oils again. She imagines undertaking large canvases, a recent luxury in terms of the huge time commitment required. This fall, her younger son enters his senior year at Wellesley High School and not long thereafter, like his brother before him, will leave the nest.

Friedman said her own journey as an artist will continue to take shape. She imagines the future holds an ongoing relationship with a commercial gallery, one that both supports her vision as an artist and lightens the administrative load of scheduling shows and selling her work. “I look forward to being able to spend even more of my time creating artwork.” [WV](http://www.wv)

To view the artist’s work, visit www.dlfriedman.com.