

## New Visual Arts Chair Sees Ongoing Opportunities for

# Art at Sacred Heart



New Fine Arts Chair Susan Mareneck

It's a "mixed-media world" and Susan Mareneck believes that her role as Sacred Heart's new visual arts chair is to nurture students' fluency with visual language, which is an increasingly essential tool for expression and understanding. "Given the vast amount of information available, students have to know how to develop relevant questions," she says. "That ability comes from making connections between things, and art provides an opportunity to exercise those conceptual and intuitive muscles."

Ms. Mareneck describes art as a metaphor for process, because the experience of creating it is as important as the result. "Art is an important way of knowing. It combines the rational and the intuitive in a concrete way," she says. "Students at all developmental levels learn that their best work is usually experimental."

When she is not teaching, Ms. Mareneck pursues her own work, which she describes as "conceptual".

She is interested in the subject of "place," including landscape and architecture as subjects, using a mix of media, maps and other historic documents, and actual artifacts in her work. She investigates historic, even archaic, art practices to produce contemporary images. One project she is currently working on involves "transferware" (18th c. Staffordshire china, is an example), a process of creating imagery on ceramic ware through an intaglio printing process.

Ms. Mareneck is teaching both Middle and Upper School students. As an artist and a teacher, Ms. Mareneck believes that her own work inspires her in school. "In my experience, artists are good teachers because they are excited about what is going on in their own work and it spills over into the classroom. Like their students, they are always learning and the kids pick up on that enthusiasm."

### "Art is a language that all children can use."

She feels strongly about encouraging young students to develop their own style. "Art is a language that all children can use. So many of them decide that if they are not 'the best' at art, they won't do it at all. But, no one would ever say, 'You won't be a great poet, so you can stop writing.' Especially in Middle School, it is more a question of keeping them visually fluent so that they have the skills and confidence to develop a personal way of using visual language. Our goal is for our students to use visual language as a tool of communication and a means of personal expression throughout their lives."

Ms. Mareneck comes to us from Spence, where she was a visual arts teacher for 20 years. "I have been impressed with the opportunities provided for

faculty and students to come together regularly at Sacred Heart. Moments taken out of the bustle of everyday to sit together and reflect, and to take a deep breath, put things in perspective."

She looks forward to carrying out Headmistress Mary Blake's curricular vision and sees it as an opportunity to inform herself about Sacred Heart's visual arts program. "The process will give us a chance to see what we are doing well and to figure out how best to empower our students in the future. My role will be to listen and learn from members in my department."

Looking ahead to the annual Sacred Heart Festival of the Arts in the spring, Ms. Mareneck and the other art teachers are hoping to develop exhibition spaces around the school for use throughout the year, "so we have more opportunities to show the wonderful works by all the students." ✨



"Looking Back", window frame with golden leaf and nine etched glass panes by Susan Mareneck