

Alumnae Grant Funds Book Project

Last year the Alumnae Association established a Faculty Recognition Award to be given on an annual basis. In establishing the Award, the members of the Alumnae Board sought to show their appreciation for Spence teachers, past and present. Faculty members submit proposals for the grant, which is intended to fund a project undertaken during the summer months. The Award carries a two thousand dollar stipend and seeks to encourage "the development of personal interests rather than institutional interests."

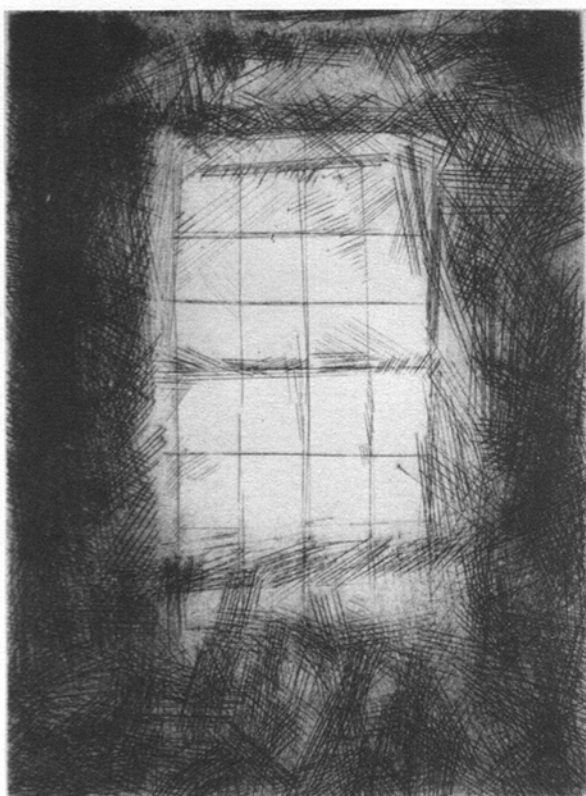
Susan Mareneck, who has taught in the Art Department at Spence since 1980, is the first recipient of the Faculty Recognition Award. Susan teaches art classes in the Lower and the Middle Schools, including the Middle School sculpture course which she will offer winter term this year. Susan was given the Award for her proposal to create a series of prints as companion pieces to a collection of poems by her friend, Verandah Porche, and to publish the collaborative project in book form.

"This project really began ten years ago," Susan explains, "when Verandah gave me the collection of poems and suggested that I make drawings to go with it. Last year I was going through my desk, and I found the sheaf of poems—and I thought that perhaps we could still do it." Ten years ago both women were living in New England. Verandah Porche, who is a published poet and teacher, still lives in Vermont. When they decided to undertake the book project this past summer, they asked Cathy Rogers, a friend who had also lived near them years ago, to design the book. Cathy is now a physician in Seattle.

During the summer, Susan produced a copper engraving each week, and Cathy flew from Seattle to discuss how the book would be put together. "I usually work on one huge painting for an entire year," Susan notes. "This project was wonderful because it allowed me to break out of my old habits and to create a new work each week."

Susan completed nine engravings in two months and then spent the fall making prints of the engravings for the book. Titled *Glancing Off*, it will be published in an edition of fifty handmade copies, each containing original prints of Susan's work. As each print takes half an hour to complete, this final stage of the process has been time consuming. Susan's teaching schedule in the fall was arranged to give her Thursdays and Fridays off so that she would have time for her artwork. Describing how she was able to complete ninety prints for the first ten copies of the book, Susan explains: "I go home on Wednesday and do all the laundry and make sure there's food in the refrigerator. Then I go to the country on Thursday by myself [she and her husband own a house in Leverett, Massachusetts] and stay through to Sunday, producing the prints." Susan has a sixteen-year-old daughter by a previous marriage and a three-year-old son by her present marriage. She says that her husband has been "delighted" to have their son at home, entirely dependent on him, while Susan is away on weekends.

The three artists have published *Glancing Off* under the name of See Through Books. This name describes how



Engraving for *Glancing Off* by Susan Mareneck.

the actual book is assembled: the hand-sewn binding, for instance, has been left visible so the reader can see how the book was made. For Susan, the name also describes the process by which she produces her engravings and paintings. She works in visual layers, building up marks in an engraving or brushstrokes in a painting, so that the viewer can "see through" all the layers of the work that have gone into the finished piece. "Working in layers has a lot to do with being a female artist, with being other things besides a painter—being a mother, a wife, and a teacher as well," Susan comments. Because she has many other responsibilities, she is only able to devote short periods of time to her artwork. Working in layers is a technique Susan feels she developed to accommodate her other responsibilities, and the result is perhaps a distinctly female vision. "When you work one day on top of another, you achieve a different effect from what you could achieve in any one moment—many moments, many days, are there in the final work."

The engravings Susan completed for *Glancing Off* are more representational than the abstract paintings she has created in recent years. Many of them draw on everyday images from her house in Massachusetts, and the symbol for See Through Books is a kitchen colander. Susan found the actual colander on which the engraving is based in a dump twenty years ago. She describes it as well-battered, like the friendship which has been a constant over the years in the lives of the three artists who produced *Glancing Off*. The three women see the book as a testament to this friendship and to their complex lives as women, artists, mothers, and professionals. They are grateful to Spence and to the Alumnae Association for initiating the project which brought them all together again.