

ART NEW ENGLAND

September / October 2011

Shelf Life

Editor's blog: Oct 2, 2011

By Debbie Hagan

Anne Krinsky's installation, Shelf Life, is up now in the Owen Smith Shuman Gallery at the Groton Public Library, 99 Main Street in Groton, Massachusetts, through November 5, 2011.

Let's face it, Kindles and iPads cannot replace the printed book--no matter how hard electronic manufacturers tell us otherwise. Artist, writer, and book lover Anne Krinsky reminded me of this at the opening of her show *Shelf Life*, inspired by printed books, some from the Groton Public Library, where this small, inspirational show takes place.

"In this age of digital media, the installation celebrates the physicality of the book and highlights the historic and artistic value of printed materials," writes Krinsky in a statement about this show.

Printed books not only hold within their evocative covers rich mysteries, but offer the weight and physicality that often provide substance. I've yet to see an electronic device that can accurately capture the richness of a book's embossing, gilding, and illustrating, let alone the resonant smell of the paper, leather, and dust that in an instant takes many of us back to a time in which we've curled up with a book, sailing the seas of our imaginations.

A wall displaying white shelves holding 12 x 9 inch mixed media panels, approximately the size of books, form the heart of this show. Sumptuously layered, some with transfers, these panels are painted and sanded so eloquently that viewers instinctively move up close, as they would with books, to examine their complexities. In a way, it prompts a sort of reading.

Krinsky explains, older panels include botanical images she made, while living in London, responding to rare illustrated manuscripts in the Natural History Museum. In her newer panels, she drew inspiration from the Groton Library's collection, such as those related to the elm trees that used to arch over the town's streets before succumbing to Dutch elm disease.

Krinsky grew up around books; her parents owned a book store. She read every fairy tale that she could find in the shop and in her public library. These multicultural myths and fantasies inform her work, most obviously in *Medusa*.

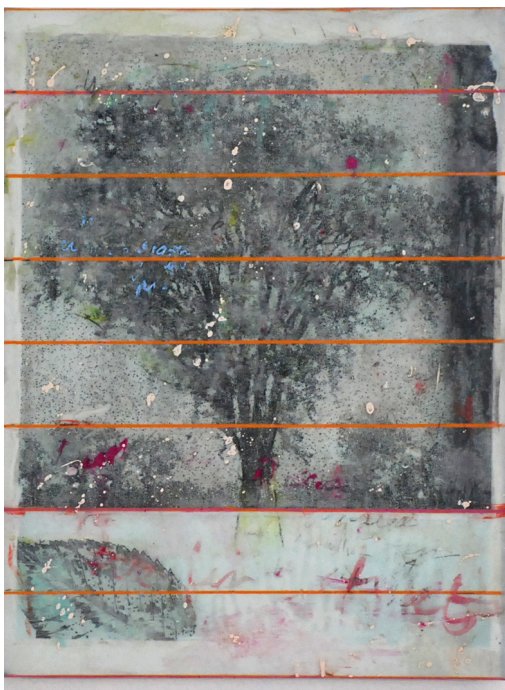
The question Krinsky poses to viewers is, "In the digital age, is the physical fact of a book or artwork still something to value?" For me, it's a knee-jerk yes, as I suspect it is for others my age and for those seeing this show. *Shelf life* gives us moment to pause and consider the tangible beauty of print.



Shelf Life Calligraphy



Shelf Life Chamomile



Shelf Life Elm 1



Shelf Life Medusa