

TRINITONIAN

Liz Ward unveils “Unchopping a Tree” illustrations

Heather Bush | March 28, 2014

On Thursday, March 20, Trinity professor and artist Liz Ward spoke about her collection featured in the Michael and Noemi Neidorff Art Gallery. Ward’s silverpoint drawings are included in the Trinity University Press book “Unchopping a Tree” by W.S. Merwin. When Ward was asked to illustrate for the book, she immediately agreed.

“What Trinity University Press didn’t know is that I had had a poem of Merwin’s hung up in my studio for decades like a talisman. He is an important poet for me, so I was just ecstatic with the thought of this” “and also intimidated and terrified with all the rest of it, Ward said.

The collection features pieces that span the years of 1995 through 2013. After agreeing to the task of creating art that responded to Merwin’s book, Ward decided to return to a piece of hers from 2005. This piece, created using silverpoint techniques, can be linked back to an even earlier piece of Ward’s from 1995. Composed of four large panels, the 1995 piece features the tree ring imagery that inspired her silverpoints.

“Liz’s work is silverpoint, so it’s kind of like drawing with a mechanical pencil, but instead of lead, you use a kind of wire made of silver,” said senior Natalie Cap.

The book’s text, along with these original pieces, served as a starting point for Ward’s 2013 collection.

“My challenge for the rest of the book was to make new work,” Ward said. “You don’t want to go backwards as artists. You always want to go forwards, and you’re always excited about the new thing that you’re working on.”

To create the drawings featured in “Unchopping a Tree,” Ward removed herself from her usual studio and set out to create her work in France.

“There was a wonderful paper mill in the area ““an ancient paper mill where they took old linen rags and actually beat them underwater,” Ward said.

Ward used paper from this mill to create multiple layers, giving her silverpoint drawings a unique texture. Each piece is intricately detailed, with repetitive, rhythmic lines that embody images of a tree on a cellular level.

Several of Ward’s students attended the exhibition’s opening to support their professor.

“Liz is one of my favorite professors, and her work is always environmentally themed, which is what I’m focused on,” said senior Cade Bradshaw.

Both Merwin’s book and Ward’s drawings engage with the environment, imagining the impossibility of putting back together a tree after it’s been chopped. Ward hopes that her drawings have remained true to the themes of the book, responding to the text rather than simply illustrating it.

Ward’s drawings will be featured in the gallery through Saturday, April 5.