

Selma Bortner

Date of Birth:
06/18/1926

Place of Birth:
Cleveland, Ohio



The Journey, c.
1990

hand-colored
linoleum print on
paper
H. 24 x W. 35.5
inches
Group I

“For me, being an artist was always a question of survival. I could not survive in this world if I could not do something creative. It’s a commitment that I made when I was a child. I knew from the first time I could think about it that I wanted to be an artist.”

—Selma Bortner

Printmaker Selma Bortner is familiar with all printing techniques, although she prefers to work with surface techniques such as fine cut, wood cut, and collography. She often combines these techniques, using nontraditional materials in order to express the message of her work as clearly as possible. Her works often seem to be the visual embodiment of dreams. Bortner places the message of a piece at the forefront, using her work as “a pipeline to feelings which cannot be expressed in any other way.” For example, her artwork is a forum in which she discusses breast cancer and women’s issues.

Bortner’s most recent work deals with new beginnings, mortality, and women’s perceptions of themselves as contrasted to the world’s perception of them. Though these artworks include a strong narrative element, the images can be jarring and unexpected. The works include a series on domestic violence—the Woman’s Place Series—and the Car Bomb Series that commemorates the Mideast crisis. The Aida Series deals with Bortner’s battle with breast cancer.

Bortner earned Bachelor of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees in art education from the Tyler School of Art in 1948. She and her husband, Judge Oscar Bortner, moved to Levittown in 1952. Bortner has taught locally and spent twenty-three years in the art department at Bucks County Community College, where her classes included printmaking and design. Despite time commitments to teaching and raising a family, Bortner continued working on her own projects, always seeing herself as a working artist. She has won numerous awards for her work, including the Pennell Memorial Medal in 1970 and 1971 and first prize from the American Color Print Society in 1995. Her work is featured in the collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the San Francisco Museum of Fine Arts, and the James A. Michener Art Museum, among many others.