

Surrounded by inspiration

Relationships, environment inspire Berman's art



Laura Berman

By Jerry LaMartina
Contributing Writer

Laura Berman traces her identity as an artist back to her native Barcelona.

She lived there the first year of her life, and she is a dual citizen of Spain and the United States. Barcelona made lasting impressions on her.

"My mom walked me through the city every day," Berman said. "It really seeped into my personal aesthet-

ic — the patterns, the bold colors, the sense of design, the Spanish architecture and the love of color — and into what I'm attracted to and like to make."

Berman is a printmaker and a watercolor painter. Some of her paintings are gouache, a painting method using opaque watercolors. Examples of her artwork are at lauraberman-projects.com.

Some of her artwork will be part of a group exhibit called "Pele Prints at The Epsten," at The Epsten Gallery at Village Shalom from Feb. 4 through April 8. She had a solo exhibit at Weinberger Fine Art in September and October.

Berman also has been a professor at the Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI) since 2002. She teaches printmaking and book arts, and she is acting chair of KCAI's Printmaking Department this semester while the department's chair is on sabbatical. Earlier, she was program head and chair of printmaking at KCAI for four years, and was acting chair of its Graphic Design Department for a year.

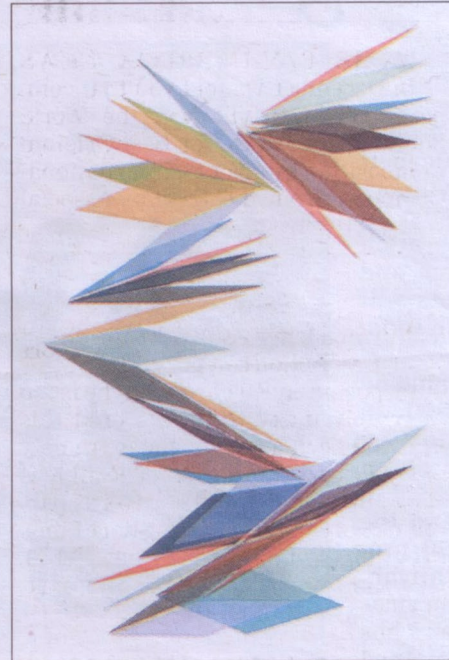
"I am good at administrative work, but it does distract me from my teaching and it takes time away from my studio work, so I try to avoid it if I can," she said.

'Pele Prints at The Epsten'

What: "Pele Prints at The Epsten," a group exhibit in collaboration with Pele Prints, a St. Louis-based print studio headed by master printer and publisher Amanda Verbeck, its founder. Featured artists include Brandon Anschutz, Laura Berman, Benjamin Guffee, Sarah Hinckley, Xochi Solis, Jessie Van der Laan and Ken Wood. The exhibit is curated by Heather Lustfeldt.

When: Feb. 4 through April 8. A public reception will be held from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Feb. 4, and Berman and Verbeck will give a talk at 1:30 p.m. A Crescendo Conservatory dance performance with costumes and choreography inspired by the exhibit will be at 1 p.m. March 25.

Where: The Epsten Gallery at Village Shalom, 5500 W. 123rd St. (123rd and Nall Avenue), Overland Park, Kansas, 66209. **More information:** Call 913-266-8414 or visit epstengallery.org.



Laura Berman, 'Umbra: RV9,' 2017, relief.

Her teaching influences her studio practice because her students "really keep me on my toes."

"They're so creative and ambitious," she said. "I really love to make bridges between what I do as an artist and teacher."

Berman moved with her mother from Barcelona to the United States when she was a year old and lived in 10 different states throughout her childhood and early adulthood. She has lived in 25 different residences. She moved to Kansas City in 2002 to teach at KCAI.

"I had never lived in the Midwest before, but working at KCAI has been wonderful, and I met my husband here, and now we have a family here and cannot imagine life anywhere else," she said.

Berman is Jewish. She and her family live in Prairie Village, after having lived in Brookside for many years. They don't belong to a local congregation, but they celebrate holidays at home and enjoy making their own traditions.

"We have Jewish and Christian family members, so, for instance, we celebrate both Hanukkah and Christmas."

She has been making art her whole life but probably first defined herself as an artist when she was thinking about what to study in college, she said. Art and math were "two great loves" in high school, and she decided that pursuing art rather than math would be more practical.

Her art is inspired by relationships with places and people, and these extend to the natural environment and her personal collections of things she keeps near her.

She describes her artistic process and how she approaches color, form and space in her prints as hinging on improvisation.

"I'm not a traditionalist with printmaking," she said. "I use traditional materials, but it's almost like a dance in my studio, a kind of play at the press. That's really fun for me and exciting and enjoyable."

Berman received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University and a Master of Fine Arts from Tulane University. In 2014, she and her husband opened Prairieside Cottage and Outpost (prairiesidecottage.com), which she describes as a family-friendly artist retreat, in the Kansas Flint Hills.

"The Flint Hills region is very influential on my work," she said. "There's nothing there, and at the same time everything at once is connected. How do earth and sky relate? What does a horizon indicate?"

What art indicates for society — for humanity — is deeply rooted in people.

"I think that art is kind of like the soul of humanity," she said. "We have a biological urge to make the world special. Art is a language with its own way of being read. It touches on beauty, community, being invested and involved in your life and community, on sharing, on the evolution of humanity."

"Everybody learns with a different combination of skills," she said. "I think art is able to speak to people on so many different levels. And it's about conversation in analyzing the art, what we value."