When New York photographer, papermaker, and artist Dene Ross met treasured Tallahassee doyenne Clifton Lewis in 1990, they instantly fell in love, as both did with so many people. An art lover, people-person and patron of artists of all kinds, Lewis promoted Dene’s latest works, which were created at a studio in south Georgia. The “pulp paintings” would be displayed for visitors at Clifton’s home, Spring House, the only private residence in Florida designed by the great American architect Frank Lloyd Wright and built under his direction.

“If you go
What: Spring House Institute welcomes Dene Ross: Pulp Paintings
Where: Spring House, 3117 Okeechobee Road
When: 6-9 p.m. Thursday
Tickets: $10 student, $25 individual, $40 couple, children under 12 free. For more details go to www.preservespringhouse.org and select ‘SHI & Dene Ross Event.’ Payment can be made in advance online or with cash or check at the door.
“Making a pulp painting is labor-intensive. Applying pulp directly on the papermaking mould (either 22"X18" or 37"X47"), I build each piece from its underside to its face, so the work is saturated with pigment. Water is drained and vacuumed from the completed piece, which is dried with fans and weights to make an even, flat finished work of art.”

The exuberant landscapes embody an aesthetic and philosophy shared by Clifton Lewis, Dene Ross and Frank Lloyd Wright: a deep respect for the complex beauty of the earth, expressed in a talent for inviting the natural world into our daily lives.

In the mid-1970s Dene was a printmaker and photographer who had studied with photography pioneer Barbara Morgan. Paper was the base of her work, so when Harvard librarians discovered that the highly acid wood pulp paper used in books since 1900 was decomposing, she determined to make paper that would last.

Her research revealed that the first handmade paper, used for keeping court records, was made in China in 105 A.D., from mulberry bark, hemp, jute and clothing rags. Papermaking soon traveled around the world. In the 1500s, animal skin paper such as parchment and vellum was too difficult and expensive to use in the newly-invented printing press. Rag paper became widespread.

The invention of the Hollander beater in 1680 greatly reduced the time it took to make cloth into pulp, but paper did not become readily available to the masses until the end of the 19th century when the Fourdrinier machine began making it from wood. Unfortunately, without a buffer, wood paper self-destructs.

Using paper as the medium for creating images is a relatively new art form. Dene began to experiment and spent a summer with Navajo blanket weavers learning natural dyeing techniques. Her first paper works were a mixture of cotton and linen pulp and used Chinese techniques of embedding flowers and leaves, along with naturally dyed yarns and threads for line and design.

Dene has shared her knowledge and expertise at school and community papermaking workshops and demonstrations in the US northeast, Athens, and Rome. She also taught a graduate-level course for art educators and art therapists in the use of papermaking as an educational and therapeutic tool. These are the sorts of workshops Clifton Lewis had in mind when she founded SHI.

Art

Continued » 1E

“Study for Jeans 12 - The Point”

Artist Dene Ross and Clifton Lewis around 2010.