

Tracing Influence

From my first site visit to the Evergreen House and estate I was struck by the many patterns that animated both the architecture and art objects in the main house. The symbiotic relationship between structure and pattern was echoed in the stenciled theater space in Evergreen House that was designed by Leon Baskt in 1922. I found that his use of stenciled patterns became a visual structure that took on an architectonic significance. After some reflection, I decided to utilize actual stencils in my project as repeated modules that would continue the celebration of pattern that pervades the house. I was interested in the ability of a stencil to simultaneously become the outline of an image and the tool to repeat that image.

I chose to locate my project on the west facing side of the carriage house. I was drawn to this site because of an existing wooden trellis grid structure that had been cleared of most of its vines many years ago except for a centrally located portion of vine that had managed to grow around the wooden trellis like a tree in the city that has engulfed a chain link fence. I knew that this site would allow me to explore the place where sculpture meets drawing.

I was fascinated to learn that the inspiration for Leon Baskt's stencils was derived from domestic objects and imagery in a book about the peasantry art from his native Russia, entitled *Peasant Art in Russia*. When I began my research for this project, I was fortunate to locate this book in the library at The Ohio State University. My reading revealed that most of the peasantry art in the book had actually been produced by women from across the various regions of Russia. From ornately embroidered lace bed curtains and stenciled walls, to vividly glazed ceramic vessels and cut paper designs, these women created beauty at every turn in their domestic landscape.

When I read *Peasant Art in Russia*, I was most inspired by the many photographic portraits of women in their regional peasant costumes. They embodied their domestic aesthetic and became a worn collage of rich fabrics, intricate patterns, incredible jewelry and ornate headpieces. Compelled by the silhouette of their costumes, I decided to trace the image of one of these Russian peasant women from the region of Nijni-Novgorod as a simplified line drawing. I then overlaid this tracing onto a photographic image of my chosen carriage house site. I was excited to see the way the existing vine on the carriage house trellis seemed to become a kind of implied spinal column in the body of the drawn woman. This would become the central image of my project with the rest of my drawings generating inspiration directly from objects and imagery that were found in *Peasant Art in Russia*.

I see this work as recognition of the cultural maverick energy of Alice Garrett that saturates Evergreen House and a direct attempt to celebrate the unsung peasant artists that made possible Leon Baskt's theater design. I also wanted to continue the evolution of the imagery in Baskt's theater by working from the text that had inspired him nearly a century ago. In these ways, *Tracing Influence* is at once a celebration of what is and a reminder of who was at the core of what makes the Evergreen House such a vibrant and special place.

Process and Production

Tracing Influence occupies the west facing side of the carriage house on the Evergreen estate. It is comprised of 333 laser cut stencils. The stencils were cut from 14.25" square sheets of 104 lb. translucent synthetic Yupo paper. This synthetic paper is made from a recyclable polypropylene plastic that can withstand rain and wind. I began by tracing and interpreting various images from *Peasant Art in Russia* as simplified line drawings. I would then take these drawings and superimpose them onto a photograph of the carriage house until I found a general arrangement of images that seemed appropriate for the architecture of the building, its wooden trellis and four windows. I then collaborated with graphic designer, Jacqui Crocetta, who painstakingly interpreted these simple sketches into vector drawings that could be laser cut as stencils.

The images of a two-headed bird, tree, peasant house, peacock and other decorative patterns were juxtaposed with a portrait of a Russian peasant woman to become a site-reflective tiled image on the side of the carriage house. The 333 square stencils were installed on top of the existing wooden trellis. The translucent nature of the Yupo paper allows the architecture of the trellis to become an integrated part of the sculpture.

Alison Crocetta