

# BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

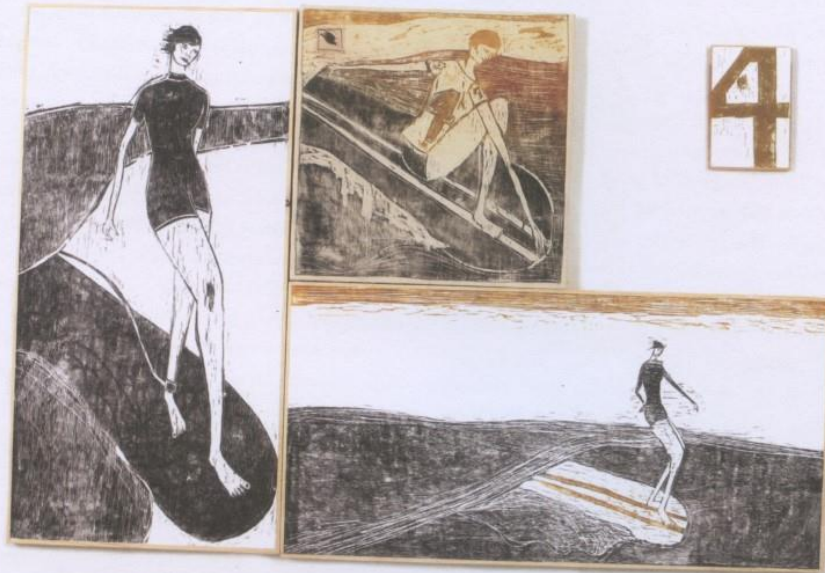
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709 Walnut Street 1st Floor Philadelphia PA 19106 tel 215 413 8893 fax 215 413 2283  
email [bmayer@bridgettemayergallery.com](mailto:bmayer@bridgettemayergallery.com) [www.bridgettemayergallery.com](http://www.bridgettemayergallery.com)

# BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY



TEAM RIDERS #4 | WOODCUT | 2007

## DEEP CARVE

JULIE GOLDSTEIN'S ART CELEBRATES WOMEN AND WATER,  
BUT IT'S THE INTRICATE STORIES BENEATH THAT GIVE IT POWER

BY STEVE CASIMIRO

The women of Julie Goldstein's art are more elongated than she is, but they share an unmistakable sisterly physiology—broad shoulders, narrow waist, muscular thighs, their most telling curves rendered in the short sweep of a tomboy bob or the graceful bend of a wrist. And though they move through the world on surfboards and boats and dirt bikes, the immediate impression is less athletic than whimsical: the flapper. It's that short hair, yes, but also the knowing smile of a woman in full. One envisions a swishy beaded dress stashed in the

closet and Charleston dance moves at the ready. And men? They love men and will abide their foibles, but they certainly don't need 'em.

Goldstein's women are strong and independent—and real. They have stories, true ones, even if they aren't revealed openly in her art, where messages are transmitted via jigsaw cuts and knife gouges made in woodcut panels then printed onto bright sheets of paper. In the riotous sketchbooks that precede every new series, she writes about these women,

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SWIMMING UP | WOODCUT, ACRYLIC, GRAPHITE | 2010



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adding nicknames and quirks and habits, character traits that appear in the finished work only as some universal truth recognized in joy or grace or contentment. She reduces not to abstraction but to a point where you begin to sense the spray of salt water, sun on a freckled nose, the soft heel pressure of a backside turn.

Goldstein, 41, was born in a small town near the New Jersey coast and spent summers in Harvey Cedars, on Long Beach Island, an 18-mile ribbon of grass and dune, where she surfed and swam and lifeguarded. An all-round athlete, she was recruited by the University of Connecticut track team, which held her attention for three years until she gave herself completely to art studies, getting her bachelor's from UCONN and then a master's in printmaking and art education from Columbia.

She met her husband, photographer and creative director Mark Tesi, on Long Beach Island when they were teens, and they reconnected a decade later, eventually settling in to teach art, make art, and enjoy the close-knit ocean community. They opened a gallery and surf shop called

fervor dimmed, and she considered returning to teaching full-time. But then another friend offered them lodging in the back of his Laguna Beach art space, the Surf Gallery, and that's where they moved, to a tiny storage room with a back door opening onto ocean blue and western sky. There, kept company by the inspiring paintings of Alex Weinstein, David Lloyd, and others, her hunger to make art grew keen again. This time, though, something was different.

"When I was in New Jersey, I thought about what people buy," Goldstein said, "and I was more interested in how I would make a career doing this. After the fire, I thought, 'I don't care about making a career doing this. I only care about making art because that's who I am.' And I let go of any idea that I would actually sell anything. I let go completely."

Her first series in California, *Swim With Me*, was a radical break. Many of Goldstein's East Coast prints were dun colored, or monochrome, almost somber. Even when she made huge, lively prints of Costa Rican mamacitas on dirt bikes, the paint was black, the field on which they rode white. The West Coast pieces, by contrast, were pulsing

## "After the fire, I thought, 'I don't care about making a career doing this.' "

Pine, where they sold Goldstein's prints as well as the work of other artists whose styles reflect a deep connection to waves and water. Life was good.

But life can change in a blink. On the night before New Year's Eve, 2008, Pine burned down. No one was hurt in the blaze, but the gallery was destroyed and with it most of the art Goldstein had created, as well as all her woodblocks. Her sketchbooks, dating back to college, were safe at home, but it was devastating nonetheless.

It was also liberating, an unanticipated blank slate, and while the couple didn't know precisely what would come next, they quickly decided to move on. Friends offered a vacant cottage in Cardiff, in Southern California, as a place to regroup, and the couple drove west with their dog, a giant Newfie named Davey, arriving at the coast three weeks after the fire. They were met with warm Santa Ana winds, gold sparkling on the water, and the sense of profound change on the horizon.

Tesi found work right away, but California's promise was more elusive for Goldstein. Dazed by their loss, her artistic

with lushness of burnt orange kelp beds, glistening green avocados, and sea-hazed sunsets.

"The thing with California is that the colors are so vivid and so bright that I had no choice but to take what I was looking at and turn that into art," she said. "In Jersey, I did a lot of work about surfing. I love surfing. But out here I actually needed to be under the water, because my head was spinning with the stress of everything that had happened from that fire. So, I swam. And then I just started drawing myself swimming. Woman after woman swimming. Swimming swimming swimming."

Goldstein had saved some of the charred woodprints from the Pine fire, cut out the salvageable sections, and brought them to California. Now she found an application—she took these scraps, carved her swimmers on them, printed them to paper with lots of room for them to move, and then, because printing color over color would be messy or distracting, she stitched fabric to the prints, blossoming hues billowing in the wake of her water girls.

That these wedges of color were symbolic was inescapable.

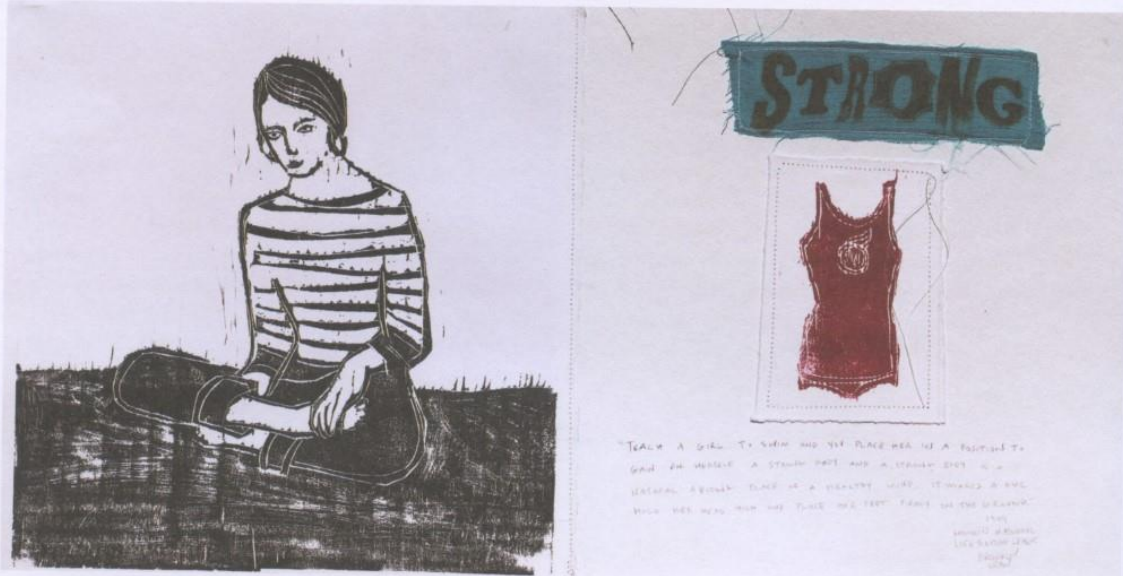
TOP: MARK TESI | STEVE CASIRO

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Goldstein at Swami's, California, and in her Encinitas studio.

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MISS ADELINE M. TRAPP AKA ADDY, BRONX CREW, 1901 | WOODCUT, RECYCLED FABRIC, GRAPHITE | 2014



WOMEN'S LIFE SAVING LEAGUE, BROOKLYN CREW, 1911 | WOODCUT | 2014

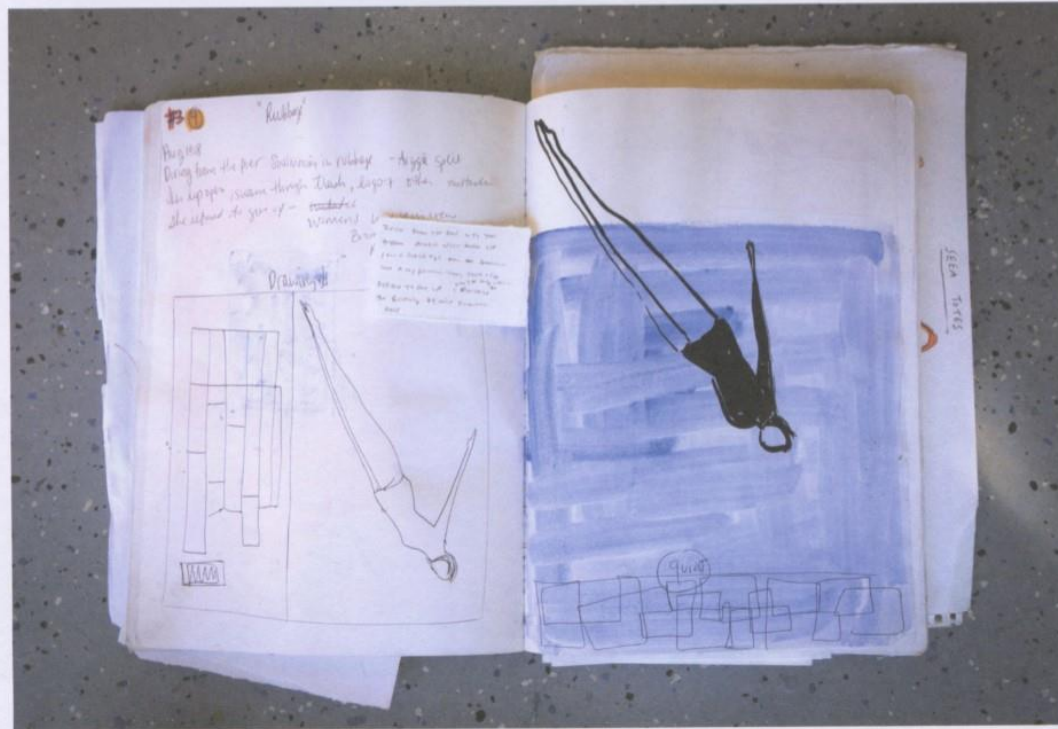
# BRIDGETTE **MAYER** GALLERY



"UNDER THE FULL MOON IN FEBRUARY" | WOODCUT | 2006

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Goldstein's sketchbook.



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"My mom said it reminds her of all the shit that women carry with them," Goldstein said. "All this stuff that they've got going on, it's like this massive multitasking. And then my sister would look at it and go, no, I think it's letting go of everything."

Today the cottage in Cardiff is a cherished memory, the Surf Gallery is closed, and Goldstein and Tesi live inland, in North San Diego County. Their son, two-year-old Frankie, towheaded and bustling, roams free between the house, the fenced yard, and a garage/workshop/studio laden with fabric, prints, and Goldstein's single-fin longboard. Davey now has a friend, a second huge Newfoundland who galumphs and slobbers. Set in a quiet neighborhood against a greenbelt park, the house softly embraces midcentury modern, from the subtly stylish street numbers outside to the clean lines of their living room couch. Walls are decorated with Goldstein pieces, as well as a thoughtful seascape by Alex Weinstein, a mixed-media by Thomas Campbell, and a rescued Pine Gallery sign.

The garage is scheduled for a makeover to more easily enable her large-scale work, but for the moment the studio

teaching other women how to swim and become lifeguards. They pioneered new ways of thinking, dressing, and living—some swam in long-distance races and many saved lives, including those of physically much larger men, and by the early 1900s there were more than 1,000 members.

"When I read about Women's Lifesaving League, I felt so connected, as if I knew these women from a past life. I couldn't get enough of their stories. I was a lifeguard in New Jersey for 13 years. I swam long-distance open-water races, as well as rowing. I was instantly connected...I had to retell these stories," she said.

Prior to Women's Lifesaving League, Goldstein's women were mostly solitary, and the camaraderie was only suggested (by the team jerseys, for example). Now it was overt.

"I think that as I prepared for birth and motherhood," she said, "I felt a shift that was less about me and more about me needing women in my life...my mom, sister, friends, and support from other mothers. I rarely ask for anything in life, but when I was preparing to be a mom, oh, man, did I ask for help and support from other mothers and women.

## Goldstein's women are strong and independent—and real.

resides in a corner, where a Jersey license plate keeps watch over scraps of wood and paper hinting at new ideas and past collaborations. (Goldstein recently launched a small clothing line and has designed wetsuits with Roxy, Seea, and others.) A stained woodblock from her most recent series, Women's Lifesaving League, tilts against a wall next to the garage door track: three women in a small rowboat, two rowing, the other standing at attention. Pinned above is their mirror image, in print.

In *Team Riders*, created in New Jersey, Goldstein explored a fictional surf team who wore numbered retro jerseys. In *Swim with Me*, she looked inward. In *Women's Lifesaving League*, which she discovered when reading *Fighting the Current*, a book about the birth of women's competitive swimming, she returned to the idea of women working together, but this time, rather than imaginary or idealized, the work was documentary.

Women's Lifesaving League tells the story of a group of New York women who in the early 1900s fought against prejudice and antipathy to form an organization devoted to

"So there could be a connection here, with the idea of teamwork. I care deeply about portraying women as strong and healthy. They remind me daily to stay connected to the sea, natural environments, surfing, family, and friendships, and most importantly to remember to be my true self and not lose my fun, rebellious, and competitive side, which sometimes gets lost in motherhood."

These challenges are ever present. Goldstein created, teaches, and directs an art program three days a week for 250 preschoolers, and she works on her own art the other two days—when she's not caring for Frankie. With all of these commitments to work and family (and the accompanying shifting identities), the subject of her next body of work, the *ama* divers of Japan, has an air of natural progression.

A part of Japanese culture at least since 750 AD, when they were mentioned in a book of poetry, the *ama* (literally, sea women) dove into the ocean to supply their families with food. They performed better than the men, possibly because their higher body fat percentage let them stay in cold water longer. Over the centuries, their quarry evolved—some now

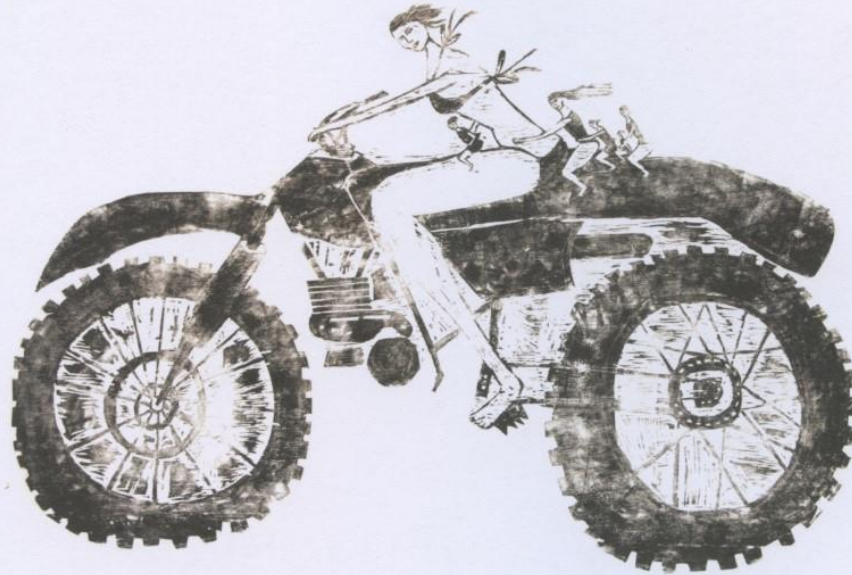
# BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY



MISS CLARA T. HURST AKA TBONES WITH BABIES | WOODCUT | 2014

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MOTHER AND CHILDREN ON DIRT BIKE | WOODCUT | 2007

**“I felt so connected, as if I knew these women from a past life.”**

dive for pearls, some for abalone or other shellfish—but the *ama* have always remained women, free diving while wearing just a pair of shorts, often wildly patterned, and a scarf to secure their hair, and carrying a knife or stick and some netting for their catch.

The group seemed ripe for Goldstein's interpretation, given her trajectory. They head out to sea together, but work and dive for themselves. They are independent and brave. And as a tribe, they are dwindling: In the 1950s, tens of thousands of women worked as *ama*, but today there are just 2,000. Many of them are in their 80s. Some are in their 90s.

“I don't know what I'm going to do with the *ama* yet,” she said. “I don't know where it's going to take me. Right now it's going to be about netting, ropes, knives, no tops. The bottoms. There's more sexuality going on. There's groups of

women. I don't know—this is all new for me. But I just can't wait, 'cause it's real, real stuff.”

Her *ama* sketchbook features metallic golds and other earthbound colors in the early pages but later evolves into sprays of aqua and orange. Photos of *ama* from the early 1900s are glued on the left and find their facsimiles in Goldstein's hand on the right. There are repetitions of patterns picked up from the shorts and line drawings of women with tethers trailing behind them. Symbolism is everywhere, and while the organic charm of the final woodcut still feels a ways off, while there are kids to teach and dogs to feed and waves to catch, there's little doubt of what's to come: a strong woman, in the water, by herself, but not alone. ■