Finding the Light in the Grain:
a Conversation with Flavia Bacarella

Jason Newport

The conversation with Flavia Bacarella took place over winter, 2010–11.

Flavia Bacarella, painter, collagist, and woodcut artist, is trying to solve a puzzle before her next show. Her work will be part of a two-person exhibit at Prince Street Gallery in Chelsea in April and May; Bacarella is leaning toward showing only woodcuts this time, but that's not the puzzle. Her quandary is how to finish the very last corner of her latest woodcut. A tiny area of wood, roughly the size of a postage stamp, has been stumping her for days. While December snow lies thick on the ground around her farm in upstate New York and wintering birds flash back and forth from the icy trees to feeders hung in the yard outside her windows, that final piece of the woodcut weighs on her mind, pressing for a solution to successfully complete the intricate image of a leafy garlic plant. Her intuition hasn't puzzled it out yet. But she knows the answer lies waiting in the wood.

Woodcut is an art form Bacarella has pursued since 2005, the carving of a reversed image into a block of wood so it can be inked and pressed onto paper, producing a print. The art developed independently in Europe and Asia and has rich traditions on both continents. Bacarella came to it serendipitously when her husband's magazine column offered her a chance to illustrate an article on tomatoes, and she decided, on a whim, to eschew her usual drawings for something she'd never attempted before: a woodcut image. It was a

Garlic #1

success—as well as an artistic breakthrough for her—undoubtedly because she came to that whim well prepared by her training and experience as a professional artist.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, a third-generation Italian American, Bacarella grew up immersed in her father's fervent enthusiasm for "all things Brooklyn." Her own enthusiasm for life and art began, appropriately, on the stage of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, where she danced from ages three to seven. It's not difficult, when one looks at her artwork today, to imagine the sprightly spirit of a little girl still dancing mischievously behind the vibrancy of her paintings and the sly cutouts of her collages.

Her other childhood passion was for Crayola crayons, and that love of colorful drawing eventually blossomed into the study of painting for her MFA degree from Brooklyn College, by way of two years' work at the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting, and Sculpture and before that, an undergraduate career in English. In 1986, the New York Foundation for the Arts awarded Bacarella a fellowship in painting, which got her artistic career off to a good start, and City University of New York (CUNY) has since awarded her multiple Research Foundation Grants for painting and printmaking, most recently in 2007. Her works have been exhibited continually for the past twenty-five years, and are held in the Bryn Mawr College Fine Art Collection and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, among other public and private collections. Her collage O *You Beautiful Doll* was the cover for *Chautauqua Issue 7: The Music and Words Issue*. Bacarella also served as a guest artist teacher at the Chautauqua Institution in 1999 and 2000.

Garlic #2

Since 1995, Bacarella has taught art full-time at Herbert H. Lehman College (CUNY), where she is

currently chair of the Art Department. In 2006, just one year after doing her very first woodcut, forty-two of them were commissioned to illustrate her husband Keith Stewart's book on organic farming, *It's a Long Road to a Tomato: Tales of an Organic Farmer Who Quit the Big City for the (Not So) Simple Life.* The book has recently been reissued in an expanded second edition including fourteen new woodcuts.

During the December break between her semesters at Lehman College, while Bacarella was mulling how to finish off that intransigent little patch of woodcut and get on with preparing more blocks for her spring show, she and I had a conversation about food, farming, wildlife, nature, aesthetics, teaching, her philosophy of art, and her sense of herself as an artist, especially in relation to working with wood.

JASON NEWPORT: **Let's talk about place, Flavia. You come from Brooklyn. Is there anything in particular that you feel most connects you artistically to the place you were born?**

FLAVIA BACARELLA: I've always felt connected to Brooklyn and all of its lore: the Brooklyn Bridge, the Botanic Garden, the Brooklyn Museum, Coney Island—even the Brooklyn Dodgers. Much of my identification with Brooklyn did come to me through my father when I was a young child, but I feel shaped by Brooklyn in so many ways. Somehow if you were born in Brooklyn as I was, it's an identity that you never quite lose. It seems nicely rounded out by my choosing Brooklyn College for my MFA degree years later.

Today Brooklyn is *the* hub for New York's young artists. A great deal of the action in art is taking place in this borough. Brooklyn has experienced a total renaissance, with its restaurants, bars, artist studios, even the new paper, the *Brooklyn Rail*. The *Brooklyn Rail*'s reviews and interviews in the arts give a strong indication of the art world today.

At Lehman College, you teach painting, drawing, and most recently woodcut to a lot of young artists. Besides financially, of course, how does teaching nurture your own life in art?

In teaching, you encounter many students with different ideas about everything. There's the potential for discovery and for creating new ways of seeing or interpreting. Student work is a rich area to mine, in that sense. And teaching is stimulating and thought-provoking. I'm frequently surprised by the work of my students and sometimes inspired to look at things in a different light.

Do you find students to be much interested in nature and the natural world? Is that something they're used to in the Bronx?
The Lehman campus is a beautiful oasis in the borough. It's a thirty-seven-acre campus, an interesting mix of architecture and nature. There are squirrels, both brown ones and black ones, which are more rare. There are even a few cats. There're trees, there's grass, and there is now an organic garden right outside my painting studio. I think much of this is appreciated by the students, most of whom live in apartment buildings. But we also have many students from Westchester, who are, generally speaking, more suburban than urban. Having said that, I can't say to what degree the student body in general is involved with the natural environment in which they are studying.

It's also the case that most of our students have little time. They work, some full time, at the same time as they take classes. Some have families. So, like many of us in the modern world, they probably don't

Monitor Lizard, Molting

take the time to appreciate or indulge their interest in nature as much as they might in a less harried world.

More specifically in the arts, however, I find that students are eager to utilize the campus in their work in a number of ways: installation art, photography, drawing, and painting. In our graduate program we've had a number of landscape painters. We offer a landscape painting course each summer, which the students have been very excited about. In addition to the campus as a landscape site, they also travel throughout the Bronx, to Woodlawn Cemetery, to Orchard Beach, to the Botanic Garden, and to the Bronx Zoo, among other places.

You were also a guest artist teacher at the Chautauqua Institution. What was the experience on the grounds at Chautauqua like for you in 1999 and 2000? And how are your interests and concerns as an artist different ten years later?

Ten years later…I hardly realized it was so long ago. I still feel a strong connection—I know other artists who have taught there over the last decade. Having one of my collages on the cover of last year's *Chautauqua* journal put me back in touch with the community directly. While teaching at Chautauqua, I found it a stimulating environment, culturally, intellectually, and creatively. Chautauqua provides a setting for a community of artists, all concentrated in one place. All of the studio faculty were working on their own art as well as teaching. The opportunity for feedback from fellow artists was a great feature of the program. After all, we worked together, we ate meals together, and we shared housing together.

At the time I was at Chautauqua, I'd done neither woodcuts nor collage, though while there I did do some printmaking in my free time: monotypes and etchings. I also painted landscape, mostly off campus, in the nearby towns.

In the years since, I've expanded my range of artistic activities, as you mentioned, to include woodcuts and collage. The new media I've been working in have renewed my enthusiasm. My concerns are similar to ten years ago, but broader, with more options.

Does that suggest anything about what you might expect to find yourself doing ten years from now?
What will I be doing ten years down the road? Probably less teaching, with more project-oriented goals in addition to painting. In the area of woodcut, the farm provides an almost limitless source of subject matter. Animals, birds, insects, plants, a panorama of the life that coexists on an organic farm. The cycles of birth and decay as evident in the seasons, the ever-changing look of the terrain, all of this—well, I've just barely scratched the surface.

We'll come back to that, don't worry. I would like to know a little more about the way you pursue your goals as an artist. The soul of Chautauqua is said to lie in the American passion for self-improvement, especially the drive for artistic, aesthetic enrichment. What sustains your drive for artistic enrichment?
Of course looking at great art helps to sustain me as an artist. If I look at great woodcuts, especially those of the German Expressionists, or Edvard Munch, it's inspiring. The same is true for collage and painting. This morning I was perusing an article on Schwitters and his collages and felt moved to work on collage again. Museum shows have a strong influence on me. One of my favorite painters is Bonnard. I feel that after seeing three exhibits of his, one in Washington, DC, some years ago, two more recently in New York, I painted more in a short period than ever before. I wanted to achieve color in the way he did. I never could, but I was driven, and I think it showed in my work.

Trying something new also can be fulfilling. Most of my early artwork was drawing and painting of a more traditional type. For a change of pace, I took a collage workshop and found myself putting images together that had no obvious relation to one another. I found that engaging creatively and intellectually.

Sometimes I look outside of art itself. I don't feel that I make art about art. I make art about nature. So for that inspiration, the place to look is nature.

Self-improvement can come in many forms. Reading, cinema, lectures, even the occasional radio or TV interview show can be enriching and lift the spirit. I can think of many examples: the *Brain Series* on Charlie Rose, interviews with artists on their work (Chuck Close).

Your paintings and woodcuts tend to be figurative, your collages abstract. For you, how do those forms relate to each other? What sides of your aesthetic do they express?
As I indicated when I spoke of the collage workshop I took, I found myself putting images together that had no obvious relation to one another. Some images were simple color notes, and some were juxtapositions of words and images. In the process my background in literature and anthropology began to play a larger role in the artwork. The

Potato Diggers

difference was that in the past, I worked from perception or, in other words, from life. Collage, for me, is a process completely free from the limitations of working as a perceptual artist.

That's an interesting progression, moving from perception toward intuition. Then you began doing woodcuts in 2005, is that right? What prompted that particular change of approach? And how do you relate to the rich history and ongoing traditions of woodcuts? You've become very proficient in just five years.

My first woodcut, or even first two woodcuts, were done with an X-Acto knife on scrap pieces of wood, very thin wood, maybe an eighth of an inch thick. I had at the time been illustrating essays for a column my husband

Heirloom Tomatoes

was writing for a Hudson Valley magazine called *The Valley Table*. Have you seen it? It's very nice. Since I'd done mostly drawings, one day I thought it would be a good idea to provide different genres wherever possible, and so I did a woodcut of some tomatoes for one article.

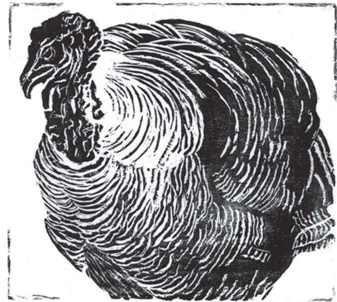
Later, my husband was offered a book contract, and he mentioned my work to the publisher, thinking that they might be interested in some illustrations. To make a long story short, they asked to see a portfolio of work and I provided it, and included one woodcut in it. They liked the woodcut and strongly suggested I go in that direction. I was horrified thinking I'd only done one, hardly knew the medium, and I almost bowed out. But I wanted the opportunity to collaborate on the book, and so I gave it a try. Basically I just taught myself, and I found that I was up to the challenge.

I did the entire book, *It's a Long Road to a Tomato*, forty-two woodcuts, in one summer. I understood soon after I made a few woodcuts that this medium works beautifully with type and understood exactly the reasons for the publisher's preference for woodcut. I began to see the benefits that woodcuts provide—a uniform set of images.

Once I began, I did as much research as possible. I looked at the woodcuts of Dürer, at those of the great German Expressionists. Among the German Expressionists, I admired the works of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, and Emil Nolde. I looked at woodcuts by Dufy—his woodcuts for Apollinaire's *Bestiary* are extraordinary. I looked at prints by living artists such as Will Barnet and Antonio Frasconi. And I set to work. Later, I was introduced to the work of Naoko Matsubara and found it immensely inspiring. I love the forceful directness of the images of the Germans, the power of the political work by Frasconi, and the lyricism of the works by Dufy and Matsubara.

You've said before that the woodcut, even more than drawing, allows you to pursue "a distillation of observation and some more intimate connecting truth about my subject." How so?

One has to keep the image simple, reducing the subject to its elemental structure. The work of carving out the image is time-consuming, and it is imperative to not cut too much away. For me, the "connecting truth" is akin to a first impression, and that must find expression in the woodblock. It can be a movement or a fleeting gesture in an animal, for example, or a tilt of the head, in a portrait. More than a likeness, it should get to the essence of the subject. In a sense it is the organizing principle behind the particular subject that has to hold my attention all the while that I carve the block.



Wild Turkey

You've also said that the resistance of wood "imposes limitations that encourage an essential simplicity."

The resistance of the wood … enables me to subdue my intellect and sustain a somewhat meditative state of creativity. It is satisfying to both my temperament and my sensibility. To borrow from Antonio Frasconi's

Woodchuck

book of woodcuts, *Against the Grain* (aptly named), I find it challenging to work "against the grain," and sometimes "with the grain." The finished woodblock, the final print, the control I feel… all in all, this medium suits me. I am always excited by the emerging image as I carve the wood, and I simply enjoy the finished product as I print the woodcut by hand with a dowel. If I use tools such as the dremel, which creates a kind of jagged cut in the wood, the result is a flickering light that comes from the grain of the wood.

That's definitely worth seeking. Tell us more about your physical process for making woodcuts. Show us the experience of carving a piece, from inception to completion.

Well, first thing, I can give you a list of the necessary tools:

- bench hook, that's an essential tool for safety
- India ink (optional)
- rubbing wax, because to see the imprint helps determine progress
- newsprint, to record various stages of the block while cutting
- cutting tools, usually a large and small V-gouge, a large and small U-gouge, a knife, and a straight chisel
- wood, I prefer poplar or ¾" birch plywood
- printing ink, either water-based or oil-based
- roller, used to roll the ink onto the block
- printing paper, Japanese mulberry paper if printing by hand, heavier paper if printing with a press
- dowel, for printing by hand
- drying rack

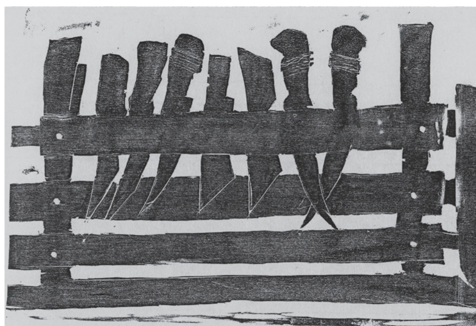
Once you have an idea in mind, then the process goes as follows:

First comes selecting the wood. It's important to determine how the subject fits the shape of the block. It's important to maximize the shape of the block, since it's the picture plane. I use poplar and ¾" birch plywood, though for some subjects I choose a wood with more grain.

Second comes drawing on the block. It's important to remember that the image will be reversed when printed, and this must be taken into account at the beginning of the process. I generally draw right on the block as opposed to transferring a drawing onto a block. Composing the image onto the block is very important, and when I get something that's working, it's very satisfying.

Next comes inking the block. I mostly just do my prints in two colors, black and white. But it's important to know what areas of the block will be black versus white. Inking the areas that will remain black (the raised relief parts) allows one to carve away the un-inked areas.

So then comes clearing and carving the block. Using the U-gouges and straight chisel, of varying sizes, you clear the large areas outside the image. With a variety of knives and gouges, I carve out the defining details of the image.



Knife Rack on Truck

Every now and again, I rub the block with the rubbing wax onto newsprint to see how the image is developing. And I can check with a mirror to see it in reverse.

Next comes finishing the edges. The edges are important on each block, as they will define the edges of the image when it's complete. It's important that a strong sense of the picture plane is present when the block is printed.

The next steps are for actually printing the block. You measure the block and cut the paper to size, leaving enough space on all four sides to be able to float the image when framing.

Then comes mixing the ink and inking the block. I lay out the ink with a spatula and, using the roller, roll the ink till it's ready—until it has a snapping sound. Using the roller (for my blocks I use a 10" roller), I roll the ink onto the block till it's covered, moving both horizontally and vertically.

Next is registering the paper and printing the block. I lay the paper on the inked block and, using the dowel, apply even pressure all over. If I'm using Japanese mulberry paper, it's often possible to see the image developing through the paper. Doing black-and-white printing, it's also possible to get a gray tone by varying the pressure on the dowel.

Finally I lift the paper and peek to see if the ink is dark enough and even all over. If so, then I lift the paper off the block very carefully and place it to dry on the drying rack. The woodcut is complete!

Do you have a favorite part of the process?
Once you have an idea in mind and execute it in terms of drawing on the block, then when you're working, carving the wood, it's fun. It's very meditative. It's focusing, and yet your mind has room to roam. I have found that even when you make a mistake, you can find your way out of it, you can just turn things around. But you have to be economical and can't carve too much.

Tractor Spraying Copper

I have never in woodcutting repaired a block. Some people will do a lot of that. If I don't get it right, I just abandon it.

What do you enjoy the most in it?
The solidity of the wood has something to do with my pleasure in it. The challenge of working with wood is carving form out of the the solid block. And there are surprises. Like in the recent edition

of the book, one added print is of my husband on a tractor spraying copper on the tomatoes, to keep the blight off. I wasn't quite sure it would work as an image, but in the end it feels like the tractor is moving. I can't say how it happened that way, but I really enjoy that.

I think . . . for me, I think, what I enjoy most is when I see something in the block itself that suggests what it's going to be. I can give you a good example. For a while I was buying these long pieces of poplar to use. One day, I had this piece, I think it was 9" x 39", I had it standing on the floor in my studio. I picked it up and was about to cut it down to a smaller size, but then I stopped. There was something about it. I just liked the feeling of the block in my hand. So I said to myself, "I'm not going to cut this." I was doing birds at that time, and I looked at this long block, thirty-nine inches tall, and I thought about it. Well, I only knew one bird that big, and that was the great blue heron. "Aha," I said, "I'm going to do that." And so I did, and that became my *Great Blue Heron*.

Great Blue Heron

Because that block presented itself as being perfect for the biggest bird you'd seen.

Yes, and since I had additional planks of poplar that were the same width, I cut one to match the height of the great blue heron block. I decided to carve a second heron, a green heron. When it was done, they looked great together. I just immediately saw them as a pair, and then showed them as a pair, and sold them as a pair. All because there was something in that first block that suggested it. One image came out of the other.

Green Heron

What else guides your choices as an artist? Do you have a particular artistic philosophy?
What is my philosophy? I'm not a trendsetter. My work is not groundbreaking. But it is focused—on nature essentially. The work gives expression to my connection to other aspects of life, as in animals and places. I think that all of my work represents how I see my subject. Sometimes I think of my work as a bit like portraiture: a little vignette of a place or an animal, or in some cases, a situation. I'm always interested in the psychology of eyes, human and animal both.

We are all so harried in modern life, running from this to that. Making art is about stopping to look and to record some truth or vision. Making art can just be allowing others to see what you have seen. If an artist can do that, that's an accomplishment.

Let's talk a little bit about some important subject matters in your art. You and your husband, Keith Stewart, live on an organic farm that sends one hundred varieties of fresh vegetables and herbs seasonally to Union Square Greenmarket in Manhattan. In Keith's book, *It's a Long Road to a Tomato: Tales of an Organic Farmer Who Quit the Big City for the (Not So) Simple Life*, many of your woodcut illustrations feature produce like *Garlic* and *Sweet Dumpling Squash*. How does food itself relate to your life in art?
Food has always been important to me. I'm from Italian grandparents on both sides. My grandfather who lived with my family when I was a young girl taught me to cook from age eleven until fourteen, when

he passed away. Step-by-step I learned how to prepare and cook food. Italians are particular about how food looks as well as how it tastes. To me, I bring that same mentality to art…to me it is quality that counts. My grandfather always had a garden, so the vegetables were often fresh, as they are on our farm. They were beautiful to look at. When I was a young girl, one of my grandfather's tomatoes won first prize in New York State for its size and its beauty.

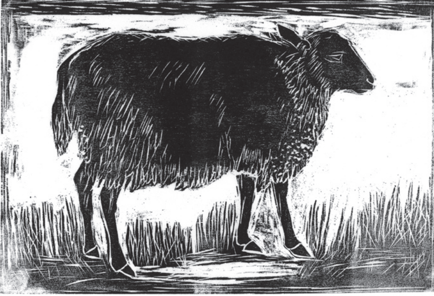
Union Square Market

I love that your grandfather raised prize-winning tomatoes, and a tomato happened to be what you did for your very first woodcut. That's a great symmetry.

Yes, that little one with the three or four tomatoes. It's very narrow. Like 2"x6". It was done for that article on tomatoes and then it became the motif throughout the book.

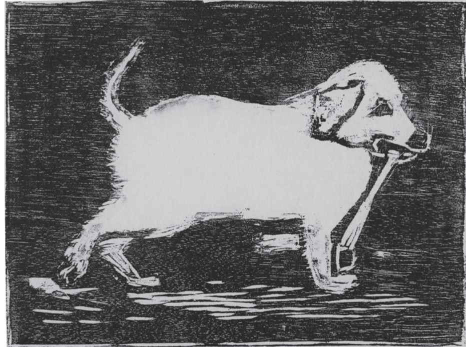
As far as art went, I had not generally drawn or painted vegetables very often, except in classes where still lifes were arranged by instructors. I was never a still-life painter per se. When the book project materialized, it was a natural fit, though. With over a hundred varieties of vegetables produced on the farm, some naturally were subjects for the essays in the book. And the farm brought other subjects into play as well: the tools, the tractors, the knives. These are all part of the landscape of the book. But it would be fair to say that depictions of some of the produce we grow have become more and more common in my art.

Your other woodcuts also feature everything from *Sheep* and *Woodchuck* to *Great Blue Heron* and *Monitor Lizard, Molting*. What


Sheep

do animals mean to you as a subject for art? I know you have a cat (Smokey) and a dog (Tiki). Any other animals on the farm? We actually have two dogs, Tiki and Kobe, as well as two cats, Smokey and Val. There were cows in the earlier years on the farm. Local dairy farmers would bring heifers or adult dry cows over to pasture. One year we had a family with a bull, a few cows, and quite a few heifers. Now, however, there are few dairy farms left in our area. They've all gone out of business. So we no longer have cows on the farm. But there are domestic and wild animals to see: chickens, turkeys, raccoons, opossum, tons of deer, the occasional fox, and even the black bear, reportedly, though I have not had the pleasure yet.

Oh, I hope you get to see a bear on your farm. That'll make a great connection for translating through your art.
I know! But what we think is that the dogs keep them away. People coming into our farm at night have seen them crossing the driveway. I haven't seen them yet.


Tiki with Deer Leg

What I appreciate most about the domestic animals on the farm is that they live very full and independent lives outdoors. This is true of the cats and dogs both. One of our dogs, Tiki, the maremma, is the protective type. She was bred as a dog to protect sheep up in the mountains in Italy and so will guard the other animals and us against known and unknown enemies. She seems to

view this as her role. The younger dog, Kobe, appears to work with the interns on the farm. He follows them, he follows the tractor, and he keeps busy from sunup to sundown. The little one, he'll travel. We have a radio fence on him set for thirty acres. He'll do the job, chasing deer away from the vegetable fields. He routinely checks the hedgerows each morning for woodchucks, rabbits, and other creatures. A farm is a really hospitable place for all kinds of wildlife. Our place is full of birds and their offspring: barn swallows, killdeer, Baltimore orioles, herons; the list goes on. An organic farm is an ideal place for birds of all species.

Downy Woodpecker

Do you wake up to birdsong in the warm months?

Even in the winter! Right now, you can see them flying around the feeders and trees outside. There goes the cardinal, and let's see… those are mourning doves, robins, couple of blue jays. Over there's the red-headed woodpecker.

Here's a good story. We have a wren house. It has just this little one-inch opening, you know. Well, one day when I happened to be watching, I saw the wren come out, and right after she flew off, I saw a little tree frog go inside. They were cohabiting! She's gone during the day, so he uses it then, and when she comes back at night, he leaves. I'd seen that little frog sunning himself on the roof of the wren house before, but I just… I had no idea. I'd never seen anything quite like that.

I think that kind of surprise is why I enjoy the woodcuts of the animals, the making of them as well as looking at the completed blocks and the prints themselves. If I can capture the energy and the nature

of the subject, if I make a connection to that, then the artwork is going well. Animals are great subjects. They don't model. They don't sit still. But observing them is fascinating and finding just the thing that defines the nature of the specific animal is exciting and challenging.

What has been your favorite instance of observation?
Well, I'll tell you. We have these Baltimore orioles eating the mulberries outside our windows all the time. And they get a little drunk, you know, eating mulberries. So one morning, there were these two little babies, baby orioles, eating the mulberries, and I watched them chasing each other, flying around, and they both hit my studio window. I went outside to check on them, and they were both so tiny they didn't get killed, so I brought them inside and put them in a box. I gave them water, and they started to come around, but they were still stunned, you know, *confused*. So then I thought, since I had them there, I should do a drawing or something of them. Then I remembered a woodblock I had that would frame them just right, so I got it out and did a woodcut on the spot. Sometimes it's the subject that makes a thing work, sometimes there's something in the medium, the frame. Sometimes they happen together.

You've depicted your farm and its landscape often in your work. What differences does your eye take note of on the farm in winter? Aside from snow?
Well right now we do have six inches of snow, blown around in drifts. Everything is blue and white. The sky reflects into the snow. Otherwise, what you see is very brown. Trees are bare, branches jutting into the sky, creating patterns. One thing I'm always impressed with is that the sunsets in winter are

Landscape

very colorful, all those purples and pinks you see in the western sky. Maybe it looks brighter because everything else is so dull.

Winter is spare and stark. My artistic response is strongest to colors I see in the skies. I paint the least in winter when it's so cold. Although you see so much. Outside right now, you see the maremma, she has a lot of beautiful white fur. She rolls around in all that snow, she sits in the snow pile, and her fur actually looks tan against all that whiteness. It's been twenty degrees out these last few evenings. She sits out on the stoop, snow is coming down, and she's in ecstasy, at one with nature.

Sitting in my studio during these blizzards and snowstorms, I just have no desire to get out into nature. What a contrast to last summer when in July it was over ninety degrees and I was working outside painting landscapes. I much prefer heat to cold. In the studio in winter, I work mostly on prints and collage.

Keith and Kuri

You and your husband worked hard to secure a conservation easement for the land, granted in 2007. How did that effort affect your life, and what does preserving the natural environment mean for you?

I can't say that anything is different since we secured the conservation easement. We are still a working organic vegetable farm. But the easement has given us the peace of mind that the landscape which my husband and his seven or eight seasonal workers care for, and from which he has created a very successful business, will remain open land in perpetuity.

It is a beautiful landscape and I do paint it often. I never tire of it. It changes often on its own. There are spots I haven't yet discovered.

How I would hate to see it chopped up into a development of houses, or stores, or a parking lot. Preserving this farm means keeping alive the very things that give it life, the animals that roam in the fields and woods, the crops that are planted that feed the many customers in New York who help keep the business itself alive, but more importantly, it keeps alive the very history of the place. It maintains a sense of place. In sum, I guess you could say it is a living and breathing entity, and that alone gives it value.

Just yesterday I went to a memorial service for a neighbor, an older woman farmer, who had the foresight to place a conservation easement on her farm. We all understood that the life of the farm as open space, which was there long before she was, will continue beyond her life span because of her sound judgment. What a gift to those of us who live nearby.

Garlic #3

Indeed. Well, Flavia, how's the work for your next show coming along?

The show in late April is a continuation of the nature/farm theme that regularly appears in my work. In January I hope to have some uninterrupted work time. At the moment, I have a few prints in progress. There's the one that's nearly finished. It's a long narrow print, 5"x36", of a garlic plant with its bulb and its scape (false flower stalk). It's life-size, though one rarely sees garlic like this. It's how it looks when it gets dug out of the ground. Of all our produce, we're probably most famous for our organic garlic. I didn't realize when I decided on this subject just how much of the wood I'd have to carve away from the leaves—the plant has about eleven alternating long leaves, so even though the block is so narrow, the amount of carving that was necessary to create the image was quite deceptive.

How's that last little bit of it going?
I've been reluctant to dig into it. This piece has taken *so* many more hours than usual, has been *so* much work, mainly because of the leaves that cascade from the top down. I've given it so many hours already, but I have to get the last part right. It's ridiculous. It's so small, you could probably put your thumb over it. But it deserves the time required to get it right. It's our garlic, you know.

I hope it makes the show.
I'll get it today, I think. I prefer to show new work. I haven't yet shown a lot of the animals that are on the Web site. I might be ready for floral images. I like to do portraits, but I lack of models out here in the country. People aren't so eager to pose, as you might understand. The bird and vegetable series can probably go on forever. I've got lots of blocks waiting.

Killdeer