

Such is the way that French-born and Philadelphia-based artist Agathe Bouton has managed to live both her life and her career as a painter, printmaker and textile designer.

From an early age, Bouton knew she wanted to pursue art. Raised in an artistic family, her father is a painter, muralist as well as a sculptor. Her mother was a textile designer who worked as a consultant for architectural and interior design firms.

“As a kid, I spent a lot of time in my father’s studio watching him work,” Agathe recalls, “as I grew up, I had the privilege to help him on his commissions when he had to do mosaic walls or frescoes.” Bouton adds: “I remember at 6 or 7 years old,” she notes, “I was taking some ceramic classes as an afterschool activity and I remember telling my parents that I wanted to be an artist,” she continues, “when I grew up, I would be a potter.”

Agathe went on to earn a BFA in Painting. She also earned an MFA in Textile Design from ESSAA Duperré in Paris, France.

During her time as an art student, Bouton explains that her father would set up a space in her family home (also his art studio) for Agathe to work on her art after school. As she states: “It was great because I had my teacher at school and my teacher at home.” During the early part of her artistic career, Agathe’s father would serve as her mentor – a fact, which, she says admiringly, “created a strong bond” between the two of them.

Post-graduation, at the age of 20, Bouton took a job working in the accessories department at the luxury fashion house Lanvin in Paris, designing textile patterns for scarves as well as a variety of other garments and products for the house brand.

“The windows of my desk would face Hermés,” Bouton reflects, “because at that time Hermés was located in the same area of Paris,” she says, “and when I was looking from my window, I could see the Hermés workers creating ‘the Kelly’ [Birkin] bags.”

Yet – despite living the ultimate ‘fashion dream’ – Agathe felt, as she describes, “[that] there was something missing.” She explains further: “I decided to pursue my creativity on the side [rather than] drawing and giving all my creativity to others and never keeping any for myself.”

After 10 years working in the textile industry, Bouton left her job to pursue a career in the art world. Working as a freelancer, she made the decision to return to her former art school to continue her previous artistic education.

“For me, at that time, printmaking was far too traditional,” she notes, “I did not find it very contemporary.” Yet, Bouton would soon develop an affinity and a passion for printmaking, finding a way to incorporate her love for both painting and color through her discovery of monotype, woodcut and carborundum printmaking methods.

Bouton cites traditional artists such as Antonio Tàpias, Nicolas de Staël, Pablo Picasso (one of her father’s favorites) and Rembrandt (for, as Agathe describes his “revolutionary” etchings) as a few of her artistic inspirations. She notes the architect Le Corbusier as another influence.

In latter works, such as in her series entitled *Paysages Urbains* as well as *Seconde Peau* [‘Second Skin’], Bouton’s bold use of line, color, form as well as textiles resonate with other modern and contemporary artists and textile designers from Josef Albers, Anni Albers to even Sheila Hicks.

After acquiring a low-rent artist studio in Paris, Bouton began to embrace her burgeoning creativity and artistic career: “I had my etching press in my amazing studio and I started to work,” she reflects, “I wanted to make bridges between the integration of printmaking plates and my own painting.”

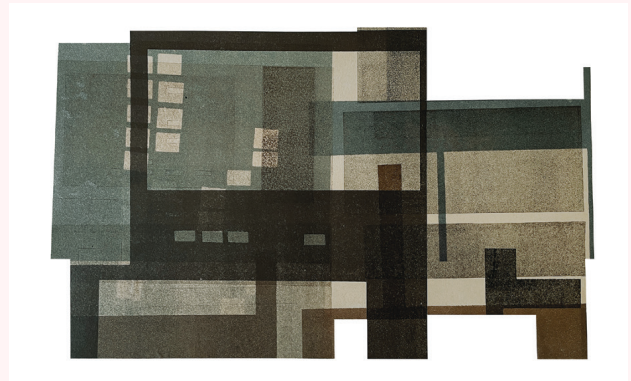
In one of her first series, entitled, *Héberge*, Bouton took inspiration from her experience living in Paris. For these particular works, she used the carborundum technique - a type of method which uses powder made from industrial diamond and glue to create a type of ‘bas relief’ printed on a plate or surface.

As she recalls, “I was living in the West part of Paris not far from the ‘Père Lachaise’ cemetery where there was still a lot of construction going on,” Bouton explains, “and when you demolish a block of buildings, you can see,” she describes, “on the remaining walls, some stains leftover.”

Bouton continues: “When I say ‘stain,’ I mean that you can see traces of the old buildings,” she notes, “so it creates a kind of pattern or map of where the old buildings used to be.” Thus, through a combination of carborundum and chine collé (paper collage), Bouton captures the physical appearance of the buildings’ eroding interiors hidden by the remnants of its demolished exteriors.

In the series *Paysages Urbains*, Bouton applies this same way of thinking to her monotype works - creating bold red and orange prints inspired by the contemporary industrial cityscapes which Bouton would observe whilst living in London in 2004.

In 2006, Bouton and her husband decided to relocate from London to Myanmar/Burma for her spouse’s job. Similar to the way that Agathe transitioned from a career in textile design to a career in art, she decided to make another professional ‘leap’ for the sake of travel.



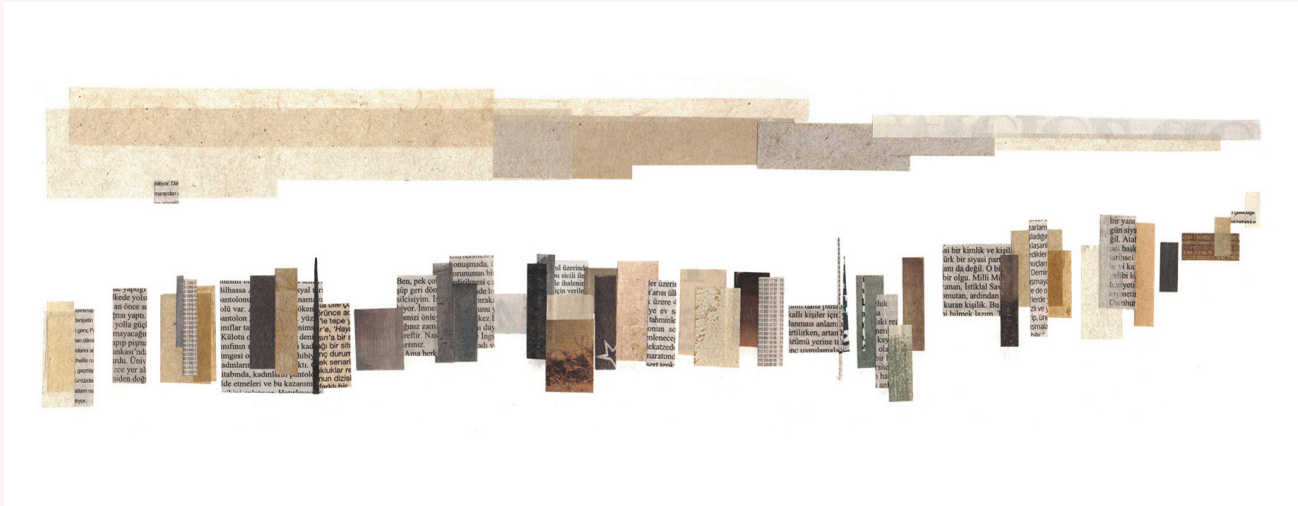
“I guess if I were to stay within the comfort of my own printmaking studio, I would have never explored different types of printmaking techniques,” Bouton says, “the experience definitely provided me with the strength to try to explore the possibility of working with any potential material that I could find.”

Leaving behind her printmaking studio and etching press, Agathe would learn to adapt and to develop her skills as both a painter and as a printmaker, focusing the subject of her work on whatever city or country she and her husband would reside in.

Whilst living in Myanmar/Burma, Bouton drew inspiration from textiles and garments. In a series entitled, *Burmese Days*, Bouton created large, circular woodcut prints on paper to emulate the shape and design of the specific types of skirts worn by the local women. In another series entitled *Indigo*, Bouton produced a set of indigo colored woodcut prints to echo the geometric shape and pattern of West African patchwork-style ‘Kuba’ textiles. Finally, through a series entitled *Istanbul*, Bouton made a set of dark and grey cityscapes using acrylic, mixed media and recycled paper to capture the city’s architecture and its intense skyline. At present, Agathe’s collectors are located all over the world: from Europe, the United Kingdom, Africa, Asia, Australia to the United States.







During this ongoing pandemic, Bouton did not let her inability to travel affect her overall work process. Confined to her current home and studio in Pennsylvania, Agathe drew inspiration from her own personal surroundings (and daily ‘COVID’ walks).

In the series *Soirée d’Été* [‘Summer Evening’], Bouton produced bold, simple blue monotype prints on rice paper. Through these specific works, Agathe explores the fragility of life, nature and the human form - capturing the hidden elements often taken for granted in our chaotic, daily lives.

“Some of my work requires me to be extremely focused,” Bouton explains, “and I found that strong concentration did not do well during the pandemic.” Agathe continues: “I didn’t want to feel too busy in my own mind,” she says, “for this series of works, it felt like a ‘fresh breeze’ coming into the studio.”

During this socially distanced period, Agathe made the conscious effort to seek out help from other artists - forming a group of six women under the name of ‘The Femme Collective’ as a way to stay connected creatively during this pandemic (providing support via useful discussions and artwork critiques). She also took part in two artist-led, collaborative initiatives during the pandemic called the ‘The Artist Support Pledge’ and ‘the

USPS Artist Project’ intended to help promote artist work on a local and a global scale.

As of this past year, Bouton is now represented by the Stanek Gallery in Philadelphia. She is also represented by the Martine Namy-Caulier in Paris, France. Her works have been included in several French institutions such as: the Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, L’Inventaire, Artothèque du Nord Pas de Calais, the Musée Français de la carte à jouer as well as two American public collections which include: the Print and Pictures Collection at the Free Library of Philadelphia and the Swarthmore College Library.

When it comes to taking the plunge into becoming a full time working artist and entrepreneur, Bouton offers this piece of advice to both emerging and mid-career artists: “Don’t be shy and challenge yourself,” Bouton says, “If you are a reserved person, find ways to push yourself,” she continues, “because you cannot predict what will happen in your life and career.” Thus, whether you are looking to jump-start your artistic career today, or are still striving to attain formal gallery representation, sometimes it helps to take ‘the road less and most traveled.’ When it comes to establishing a career - as both an artist and as an entrepreneur - risks are inevitable ... but also essential.



*The Protector, 2020
44x49" oil on canvas*