Reminders of Pollock and Monet

By Eric Drury
Special to the Eagle

PITTSFIELD — Every so often, one encounters artwork that eludes a quick identification of the process employed by the artist to create it. Such is a group of unique woodcuts entitled “First Cut Series” of Colombian-born artist Amparo Carvajal-Hufschmid on view at the Koussevitzky Art Gallery at Berkshire Community College through tomorrow.

A native of Bucaramanga, Colombia, Carvajal-Hufschmid has studied at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogota, the State University of New York at Purchase, and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She has exhibited widely in the northeastern United States and Colombia and is represented in several public and private collections including those of the Museo de Arte Moderno in Bucaramanga, Colombia, and Merrimack College in Massachusetts.

Carvajal-Hufschmid’s prints exhibit a richly layered complexity that is not typically associated with the technique of woodblock printing and achieve a surprising level of visual depth as a result.

Each print is a thicket of cross-hatched line and color built up layer by layer to create a roughly uniform ground or field of color. An array of blues, greens, maroons, yellows and purples are employed in the prints that almost, but not quite, mix optically, into fields of grassy greens and dry ochres and siennas.

Against this field, large shapes or lines a few shades darker are silhouetted at times resembling (very generally) cast shadows of fences, electric lines and window frames. Each unique print is printed on thin, almost non-existent paper and hangs freely without a mat in its frame.

At best, this combination evokes the memory of being in a backyard or park on a summer’s day and looking down at a rectangle of thick turf overlaid with raking shadows. In one or two cases, the combination falls short of the mark and reads as relatively formless and lifeless.

Carvajal-Hufschmid’s intuitive and direct process of printing layer after layer of colored lines is deceptively simple considering the delicate clarity and range of expression that she achieves with it. “These woodblock prints are painstakingly built from a single block printed repeatedly, switching directions and changing colors each time,” she says in a statement on the Website of an art gallery in Concord, N.H., that carries her work.

The act of printing for Carvajal-Hufschmid is the beginning of the process, not the final realization of the process that is more typical of the woodblock printing technique.

The visual texture of her prints is static-like and runs the gamut of feelings from chaotic and electric to soft and calm.

It’s hard not to be reminded of Jackson Pollock’s drips and splashes of paint or the ragged brush strokes of Monet’s larger water lily paintings and Rouen Cathedral series when looking closely at the “First Cut Series.”

One print stands out for its large size (54 by 27 inches) and the impressive way that complex visual depth is created with darker hues that allow lighter lines to advance, twisting and looping in the picture’s space. These lines, when viewed from afar, seem to be a yellowish beige. However, upon closer inspection, they are actually the negative space between hatches of darker blue, purples, blacks, and warm dark grey lines. The overall effect is like looking into a bale of straw with a tactile top layer covering a tangled mass inside.

The agricultural implication is not unintentional. Her statement for “First Cut Series” opens with the sentence: “A field with its infinite textures, color and light was my inspiration for this series.”

The Koussevitzky Art Gallery at BCC is open from 9 to 5.