SYLVIA SCHUSTER: Ink on paper - drawing, print and collage to document the shifting lines, planes and gestures of the human head.

From the mid-1960’s, when I first met Sylvia Schuster at the University of Iowa print studio of Mauricio Lasansky to the East Village New York City art supply stores where Sylvia bought drawing ink in big bottles, and whose hands were always covered in that ink, you knew that Sylvia Schuster was at work full-time as an artist. I have met over the years a number of artists who are so completely immersed in their work that they have little time for anything else.

Drawing on sources as varied as German expressionist art and the searching imagery of American abstract expressionism, Schuster remains a figure painter with her inspiration coming from a model - male or female, live or from a plaster cast. She worked for a number of years at the New York Studio School with Mercedes Matter and a number of artists also working in a traditional and at times academic approach to still life, landscape and the figure.

But it is Schuster's work as a printmaker in intaglio processes that early on defined her art career. Titled Head and heavy with inked lines and outlines that seem to shift and move with working and re-working precision, they have a physical weight and sculptural substance - pushing the paper to its material limits.

We now look at two works on paper of the same size (a vertical format that Schuster had settled on in her later work) but separated by some 35 years. The first image is an ink drawing of the head of a model Sylvia used for some years in the 1970's - though I first saw it as the drawing of a black male, I was once told by Sylvia that it was an African American woman who modeled for her. The line quality brings to mind the richness of a Matisse outline drawing but also very likely the influence of James Lechay, an artist who taught for years in the art department at the University of Iowa where drawing from the model was a daily ritual for all faculty and students. He was an artist who valued the simplicity and spare and emotional value of the line drawing we see here. But there is a hint of collage too that fills the face like slapped-on bandages. Now look at a collage from around 2005 and see how that method of composition and construction dominates not only the head but the spaces around it. The torn papers with ink are often earlier drawings that Schuster re-cycles so to speak by tearing up work she is not happy with for some reason. Collage has an old history in art making and it lent itself to the Cubist paintings of Picasso and Braque among other artists.