The garden outside the Leiber Collection is a work of art on its own.

"My most geometric drawings come from the garden," says Gerson Leiber, a 92-year-old modernist artist living and working in Springs. Walking along a winding brick path through his five acres of verdant space, Leiber mentions a series of abstract paintings based on hedges. "Strict lines help define the canvas, but I found them too limiting," he says smiling mischievously. "I want to be free!"

That freedom pervades Leiber’s barn-style studio in East Hampton, where he still paints today. Its double-height windows overlook English boxwood parterres pruned in diagonal and oval lines. Since completing his hedge series in the late ’90s, Leiber has continued to observe nature’s energy and expansiveness and maintains the moxie necessary to preserve it. Leiber’s most recent exhibition, “Rites of Spring: A Modernist View of Nature” at the Carter Burden Gallery in New York, which ran until mid-May, was a synthesis of more than 50 years of work along with an evocation of the beauty and honesty one can derive from nature.

Springs was already known as the cradle of the Abstract Expressionist movement when Leiber and his wife, Judith, the famed handbag designer, moved there in 1956, the same year that Jackson Pollock died in a drunk-driving accident near his house on Fireplace Road. Leiber says he slowly developed a love for gardening while continuing to grow the couple’s successful accessories company. To one side of their long driveway, which is lined with climbing roses on a green wooden fence, a small gate opens onto a rectangular lawn with five columnar hornbeams in the center. The design came to Leiber as a way of “not fighting” the flatness of the lot, which he purchased years after buying the original farm. A double row of 15-year-old pink rhododendrons flanks the lawn on one side, breaking the geometry of the landscape and adding a touch of color in spring.

Beneath the rhododendrons is a clearing for teak benches and a cement column built for a bronze urn in the style of those made by the great bronzed-maker Claude Ballin for the gardens of Versailles. On the urn’s handles, the faces of a young man and a young woman look outward, while their old..."
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Although some of Leiber’s paintings evoke his garden, his abstract paintings are “inspired by abstract thoughts, not actual landscapes,” he says. On the other side of the boxwood garden is the quarter-acre potager, with two espaliered pear trees at one end and raspberries running along the side. Asparagus lettuce, chard, and corn peek out of the loamy soil, which has come a long way since the old days, when this was an abandoned farm with furniture and a car half-buried in the ground.

Leiber mentions that his dwarf-leaf boxwood is more fragile and prone to decline than the large-leaf varieties. Three columnar junipers stand in the center of the pruned boxwood, creating a scene of emerald and grayish greens.

East Hampton artist Michele D’Ermo is just one of a trio of talents displaying landscapes and seascapes that have been reimagined through paint, rag paper, and mixed media as part of the “Zenscapes” exhibit at The Design Studio in Bridgehampton through July 7. The local talent blends together land, water, and skies through her use of rich colors and ambient light, creating paintings that contain “the unfiltered, unfamiliar, and unknown.”

Also part of the show are Los Angeles Flow artist Kimber Berry and San Jose paper constructionist Michael Buscemi, whose latest work was inspired by Georgia’s Caucasus Mountains, Black Sea, and wild winds. His recently completed piece Your Path is part of his white paper collage series. Berry’s work, Plastic Gardens, explores the modern relationship between humans and nature through digitally manipulated photographs of paint, natural and plastic plants, and flowers embedded into paint. “I create a dialogue of the human condition and raise important questions about how we live with nature,” she says.

Elisa Contemporary Art mounts “Zenscapes,” an exhibition of landscape abstracts from three coastal artists.

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