

## *Between Here and Then*

### **HERE**

In the signature photo of this exhibition, *Capoieria* by Kristen Capp, a man hovers impossibly over his shadow in the sand. What has been created by a combination of shutter speed and photographer's intent is an imaginary place, one that was never *here*. It can not be revisited, even if a team of acrobats should somersault in front of our eyes. *Then*, as 'captured' in this photograph, is a fictional world where gravity is suspended, a fiction we are prepared to accept and be delighted by.

Yet, much of the Montclair State University photography collection – specifically, images made using light, film, paper, chemicals – is not of the fictive variety. Leafing through stacks of photographs, I kept tabs on what caught my eye and why. Before the end of an hour, each photograph seemed to declare its relation to the others not just by the persons/places/things shown, but also by the varying functions each photograph served. I made four groupings: snapshots, functioning as visual diary entries; sketches – photos implicated in the process of creating something else; documentary photographs of objects and rituals; and lastly, images that enhanced the depicted, images whose existence as a picture is an end in and of itself, like that of the hovering figure. These categories cover much of what we generally expect from the photograph, minus the smartphone's addition of image-as-conversation.

Defining and presenting each group according to its function became my organizing principle. Through a brief discussion of the purpose for which a photo was made I could guide you, the viewer, through the works, posit the photographer's intent, give you a bit of history of an archived moment. But while immersing myself in the collection as a whole, what came to intrigue me was the very position of viewing: gazing into an artifice of place, trying to imagine being there to see a spinning figure hovering over a spot in the sand. Looking at Warhol's snaps of cocktail parties or Gall's landscapes, I strain to imagine the original room and its noise, or conjure the heat and smell of a field. We hope to learn or enjoy something from the scene displayed in a photograph. Usually that enjoyment combines efforts of recognition, cultural memory (I recognize young John Travolta in a Warhol snapshot - my thoughts ricochet around Hollywood and the actor's career as a result), and of course the aesthetic enjoyment of the photograph itself. But what buried levels of experience contribute to our knowledge of and engagement with the picture?

I decided in this installation to attempt to expand the viewing experience, which often consists of gliding from artwork to artwork, inspecting briefly, then proceeding to the next work. And so, each group of photographs is accompanied by a three dimensional object(s) relating in some way to things seen in the pictures. I hoped to lure you to the space between object (cocktail glass) and photo (black and white image of a person holding a cocktail glass), to set up a triangulation of *here* and now, the original scene and photographer's impulse *then*.

I call this a phenomenological mode of viewing, one that embraces Maurice Merleau-Ponty's assertion that embodied perception, the body's "experience that takes place before reflection and theorizing,"<sup>1</sup> is how we know. Our understanding of the picture before us is built not only upon light on the retina and our intellectual response to the information we 'read' in it, but of the whole of our body's perceptions in space – standing next to the studio chair, recalling the sound of clinking glasses.

By placing an object in proximity to the framed works, I hope to bring you back a step, into an awareness of the physical space you stand in. Are you conscious of sharing space with a pedestal and spread of natural material, while moving through that space in front of the photographs? Look to the Queens Anne's Lace - consider the plants in the photo, recall some weedy patch you have recently walked by. Do the object and photograph in tandem expand your sense of the moment/space? The moment when the photographer stood, moved by a 360' experience, before shooting to then flatten and preserve?

## THEN

### SNAPSHOTS

For over a hundred years, since the marketing of Kodak's Brownie camera, Americans have preserved moments in their lives with a click of the shutter. It comes, then, as no surprise that the great champion of consumer culture, Andy Warhol, owned several regular film cameras with which he, too, recorded mundane moments in his life, mostly pictures of friends and lots of parties. They serve as diary entries of a sort, and augment his collection of ephemera. Starting in 1974, Warhol would pack all kinds of items (magazines, photographs, correspondence, etc.) into boxes that, when full, he sealed and dated. Black and white photos such as these were among the archived mementos.

When peering into these *snapshots*, we should also consider the position of the photographer in the room – the person who is never in the picture, who keeps a distance, who “captures” moments and “shoots” the pictures. Thinking of Warhol's well known costume - the man beneath the wig and sunglasses, I wonder whether using his camera to chronicle social events allowed him to enjoy the party at a slight but safe remove.<sup>ii</sup>

### SKETCHES

*Sketches* is made up of two set of photos - Andy Warhol's Polaroids and Donald Lokuta's shots of George Segal and models at work in his studio.

Warhol's Polaroids: William Ganis, in his essay *Anxious Objects: Andy Warhol's Photographs* points out that Warhol used the Polaroids as sketches in the making of his silkscreen portraits. “This process...involved taking dozens of instant Polaroids...One or more were then selected by Warhol for transformation into a silkscreen to make the painted portrait.” And “...especially as taken under harsh studio lighting with a white background (and sometimes white makeup on the sitter), were the first step in the translation of the subject's image to high-contrast silkscreen half tones.”<sup>iii</sup>

The poses in these Polaroids recall graduation portraits and public relations head shots. Warhol made use of other conventions of photographic portraiture such as mug shots (his failed project at the NY State building, 1964 New York World's Fair) and photo booths (i.e. *Ethel Scull 36 Times*, 1963).<sup>iv</sup> Fig.1 Moving beyond a Modernist demand for paintings of original form, Warhol adopted the industrial photo silkscreen process of the comic book as well as the celebrity poses which construct the ubiquitous imagery of consumerism that floods our days. Nevertheless, each portrait morphosed into something uniquely Warholian.



Donald Lokuta’s photographs take us into the creative process by another route. Segal’s studio assistant of many years, Lokuta, when not actually helping Segal with the wet plaster that was his primary material, took photographs of the process. These photos make us witnesses to some of the stages on the way to the Segal’s preternatural figures (such as those in *Street Crossing* at MSU’s entrance). Says Lokuta: “I want these photographs to take the viewer back to the creative moments – the conception of the works. The images show the art in the environment in which it was created—at the moment it was created.”<sup>v</sup>

## DOCUMENTS

The photographs contained in this section are almost all second and third generation images - re-photographed from articles and books on African art and dance. They were collected as educational material for the exhibition *African and Oceanic Art from the Wingert Collection* held at the Montclair College Art Galleries from Jan. 13 - Feb. 8, 1989 (much of which is on display in the Kasser Theatre’s lobby).

“Senegalese Family Group” 1906 (French photographer Edmond Fortier) Fig.2 and “Royal Mask of the Cameroon” 1907 (Franz Thorbecke, Assistant at the Seminar for Geography, Heidelberg University, c.1907)<sup>vi</sup> Fig.3 are copies of original photographs made by these European photographers/anthropologists in colonial Africa. Elizabeth Edwards describes the use of photography in this period as “part of the collective endeavour in the production of anthropological data.”<sup>vii</sup> Such images were seen as “raw data” to be collected by the scientific community. Other images displayed here picture the masks and sculptures, now part of the Wingert collection, as they were originally used in ritual performances.



Fig. 2, Senegalese Family Group

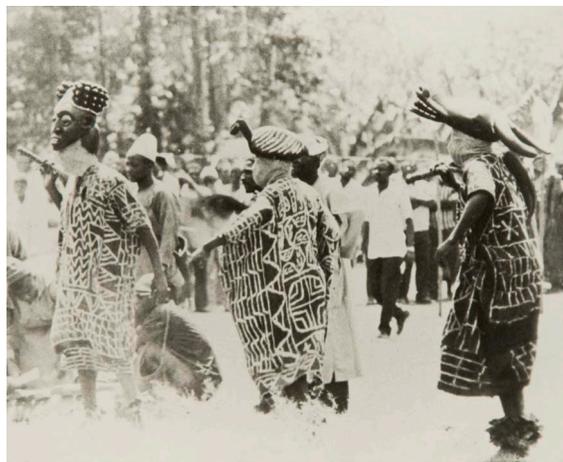


Fig. 3 Royal Masks of the Cameroon

## PICTURES

Maybe, standing between object and image, we catch a lingering “scent” of the situation compelling the photographer to press the button. Perhaps standing between preserved Queen Anne’s Lace and enhanced landscape picture we recall our attempt to “capture” the astonishing loveliness of nature. Be reminded of your own sad shot of a basketball moon, and how it fails to convey the wonder of standing beneath the real orange orb. The illusion doesn’t hold. Instead we feel compelled to enhance our mechanical reproduction, imbue it with exaggeration befitting the magic of the real.

In *Capoeiria* (Kristen Capp) a man seems suspended in mid-air, his figure a blur as it spins in space. The casual viewer knows from personal experience that a blurred image results from motion of the camera or the subject. Photographers use this phenomenon (slow the shutter speed and the moving object will appear as a blur) deliberately to connote speed. Other photographs in this *Pictures* section are also images crafted to infuse the original scene with a charismatic pull. The photographer kneads light through focus and framing, developing and printing.

*Mimi Weinberg*

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<sup>i</sup> (Thomas, 2006, p. 47)

<sup>ii</sup> (Smith, 2015)

<sup>iii</sup> (William V. Ganis, 2009, pp. 11-21)

<sup>iv</sup> (Antonio, 1973) In this film, Ethel Scull recounts having Warhol take photo booth pictures of her in as the basis for her portrait by him, *Ethel Scull 36 Times*

<sup>v</sup> (Donna Gustafson, 2015, p. 114)

<sup>vi</sup> (Joseph, Dance Masks of the Tikar, 1974)

<sup>vii</sup> (Edwards, 1992, p. 4)

Figure 1 **Ethel Scull 36 Times** Andy Warhol, 1963.

Figure 2: **Senegalese Family Group**, c. 1906-7, Edmond Fortier, Dakar.

Figure 3: **Royal Masks of the Cameroon**, c. 1907, Franz Thorbecke, Heidelberg University.

## Barnet/Segal: *It Runs in the Family*

by Mimi Weinberg

### INHERITANCE

*Barnet/ Segal: It Runs in the Family* could have easily come into being as an exhibition of colorists, two painters complementing one another in their handling of various media and choices of subject matter. Peter Barnet's paintings present family dramas in brightly colored but sharply distorted spaces. Rena Segal's works display ordinary themes as landscape and still life constructed with extraordinary compilations of line and color. There is much to enjoy from the pairing of these artists' work, but of course the choice was not coincidental; this show's painters are the offspring of important American artists: Will Barnet and George Segal. What intrigued me originally, and piques our curiosity here, is the social dimension. How does the child of a famous artist choose to continue in the field?

Bellini, Hals, Calder or for that matter Booth, Barrymore, Fonda, and Coppola: we are acquainted with the surnames of artists and their children (the Younger, the Elder) and whole dynasties of actors. As a matter of course, we assume that aspects of ability (eye-hand coordination, visual acuity) are likely genetic. On the other hand, family environment and nurture (growing up behind the scenes, being raised by professionals practicing their discipline) certainly is its own preparatory school. Too, there are expectations from one's larger community to contend with. In an aside, we suspect, in fact it doesn't hurt to have a cousin in the business.

Throughout history familial relationships have figured into the work-a-day lives of artists. The great Classical sculptor Polykleitos the Elder likely taught his son Polykleitos the Younger. The Younger also sculpted athletic figures, but went on to accomplish great works as an architect rather than remain and instruct his father's apprentices.<sup>1</sup> Passing on an artistic skill set to one's heirs was common. The confluence of artisanal skill and family business leads us as far back as Hellenistic Greece. Virginia C. Goodlett has documented the history of families at the core of sculpture workshops, in particular in Rhodes. In her article "Rhodian Sculpture Workshops" Goodlett states:

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<sup>1</sup> Plato. *Protagoras*. Translated by B. Jowett. M.A. Vol. I. II vols. New York, New York: Random House, 1937: 83.

“Two generations of a family commonly worked together at one time, which suggests that family training was extremely important on Rhodes. Sons tended to remain in their fathers’ workshops; in no instance can a Rhodian sculptor whose father was also a sculptor be shown to have established a separate workshop...even in those instances where a number of foreigners worked within a workshop, the identity of the family as the core of the workshop remains clear.”<sup>2</sup>

The kinds of artworks such a son learned to produce depended, of course, on demand; and demand is shaped by the cultural norms and visual conventions of a period. The Rhodian apprentice would already be aware of the types of subjects purchased by the shop’s clientele – funerary monuments, portraiture, athletic figures. He would then be taught the techniques – carving, casting, etc. - practiced by his workshop. I found it interesting to discover that though the apprentice might learn a craft from the master, in the world of ancient Greece there was no concept of trade secret. Rather, it was an honor to have one’s creative contribution added to the sum total of humanity’s effort, perpetuated through the dissemination of the invention.

Polykleitos the Elder would not think of claiming residuals for his *Kanon*.<sup>3</sup> Ideas we may have about individual intellectual property and personal expression did not yet exist.

We as patrons and viewers relish the tale told, can’t help but seek the sparks of talent in family members. We burden the bearers of a family name with our fantasy that, having a leg up by virtue of their inheritance, offspring are obligated to carry on the legend. The Bellinis of 15<sup>th</sup> century Venice satisfy this desire. Giovanni and Gentile Bellini inherited the workshop of their father, Jacopo when he died in 1470. Jacopo was known for his experimentation with perspective and interest in antique architecture. Gentile and Giovanni effected a shift from the traditional technique of tempera on panel to the new (Flemish) medium oil painting and the use of canvas – a medium so much more malleable and responsive to the touch than egg tempera that it allowed for the depictions of nature heretofore unknown. In spite of this display of invention, the Bellinis’s forms remained familiar; they did not face the demand for individual vision or aesthetic distance from the parent we anticipate from our contemporary painters.

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<sup>2</sup> Goodlett, Virginia C. "Rhodian Sculpture Workshops." *American Journal of Archaeology* (Archaeological Institute of America) 95, no. 4 (October 1991): 669-681.

<sup>3</sup> Long, Pamela O. "Invention, Authorship, 'Intellectual Property,' and the Origin of Patents: Notes toward a Conceptual History." *Technology and Culture* (The Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of the Society for the History of Technology) 32, no. 4 (October 1991): 846-884.

Yet, it is during this period of the 15<sup>th</sup> and especially 16<sup>th</sup> centuries that the innovation and inventions of the individual become valued: “*the notion of imitation as a descriptive concept gave way to the 16<sup>th</sup> century concept of ‘fantasia,’ an inspired form of creativity sparked by the painter.*”<sup>4</sup> Here we locate a hairline crack in our fantasy of a family workshop, a business based on inherited abilities, a learned set of skills and business acuity that might be passed down father to daughter as from Orazio to Artemisia Gentileschi. A reputation for inventiveness and originality of the individual’s work now begin to factor into the equation of artistic success. We should not, however, jump to the conclusion that by originality we mean the cataclysmic vision seen in *Demoiselles D’Avignon* (Picasso’s father taught painting). Inventiveness and originality may be displayed by the grandiloquent compositions of Peter Paul Rubens, but these qualities were located in his design. Great swathes of each painting were accomplished from the Master’s sketches by his highly trained staff of assistants.<sup>5</sup> The object of our contemporary desire, the single work painted by the single hand springing from singular forms invented by one artist, had yet to come into being.

We commonly point to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the advent of Modernist art. The paradigmatic analysis of the natural world now practiced in the hard sciences, the Industrial Revolution’s concept of progress, the establishment of the Louvre as a public museum -- all such factors combine to push painters like Manet and Cezanne toward the analytic investigation of their medium. A subterranean current, too, had been strengthening, underlined by Descartes’s pronouncement “I think therefore I am,” of a focus on the inner life of the individual rather than his role in the community. The expectation we have of the mad, inspired artist alone comes to us from the notions of genius that mark German Romanticism, set forth by the most important of Enlightenment aestheticians, Immanuel Kant. In 1790 Kant writes, the artist “...awakens to a feeling of his own originality and whom it stirs so to exercise his art in freedom from constraint of rules, that thereby a new rule is gained for art; and thus his talent shows itself to be exemplary.”<sup>6</sup> This imperative, to be original, to break the rules, presents us with a dilemma –

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 883.

<sup>5</sup> Miegroet, Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van. "Art, Value, and Market Practices in the Netherlands in the Seventeenth Century." *The Art Bulletin*, September 1994: 455.

<sup>6</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*. 1976. Edited by Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns. Translated by J. H. Bernard. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1976. 321.

we must reconcile genetics, technique and family nurture with the mysterious origin of inspiration.

## FATHERS

Today's art world is a very different place for an heir to artistic ability to work in. Contemporary attitudes are philosophically miles from the appreciation of technical innovation found in previous centuries of European art. With a societal focus on the individual, her ideas and expression of self have come to the fore: choosing to become an artist has not the promise of the "family business" awaiting its next generation of proprietors but something altogether more challenging. Rather than seek to fill a niche market, as Frans Hal's son Frans did in the 1600's- painting rustic scenes like his father- the son is expected to innovate in form and idea; which means, to choose to make art assumes one has, or will find, one's own singular point of view.

The oeuvres of both Will Barnet (b.1911) and George Segal (1924-2000) clearly display the characteristics Kant described as essential to the artist: independent spirit and rule-breaking originality. Throughout his career, Will Barnet has been known to go his own way. As the art world celebrated, in the 1950's, the loosely flung excesses of Abstract Expressionism, Will and his colleagues of the Indian Space Painters remained focused on the structural integrity of an image, inspired by the way native American artisans cultivated flat space. Long after and ever mindful of the Old Masters, he has cycled through abstraction and representation without regard to prevailing "in" imagery. As recently as June 2010, Roberta Smith commented upon the innovative works made for his exhibition at Alexandre Gallery, calling the paintings "...fresh in every way."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, Roberta. "Art in Review: Will Barnet: 'Recent Abstract Paintings'." *The New York Times*, June 25, 2010.



**Figure 1 Will Barnett with Rena Segal and Peter Barnett, October 9, 2011, photo by Mimi Weinberg**



**Figure 2 Rena and George Segal, photo courtesy Rena Segal**

George Segal made work daring, like DeKooning's *Women* paintings, to risk reference to tradition, yet all the while thumbing a nose at both tradition and contemporary expectations of what was acceptably avant garde. In the film *George Segal – American Still Life*, the sculptor describes his ground-breaking works, begun as direct casts, worked and positioned among ordinary objects to form the empathetic installations we know:

“For me to decide to make a cast of a human being broke all the rules of fine art...Rodin was accused of casting from life...I was convinced I could get away with it.”<sup>8</sup>

What, then, is passed on from father to daughter, father to son, these days? When the act of painting becomes a declaration of self, how much harder is it to choose, with intimate knowledge of the hardships, an artistic life? Both Peter Barnett and Rena Segal come bearing tales of gentle guidance from their fathers, encouraged but not pushed, sharing the pleasures of their parents' art world social circles. Both remember being told “just be yourself.” It is the right kind of advice for an art world obsessed with exactly that.

## PETER BARNET

As Peter Barnett recalls, his dad was constantly drawing his three sons, at play and posed. In the early 1940's the second bedroom of their NYC apartment was Will's studio. Peter's mother, Mary Sinclair, also painted -- the life of artists constituted the world. Will often took the boys to

<sup>8</sup> *George Segal, American Still Life*. DVD. Directed by Amber Edwards. Produced by Amber Edwards. Kultur, 2008.

the MET, shepherding them through the galleries to stand in front of, perhaps, a portrait by Raphael, pointing out how the red hat and cuffs of the figure led your eye through the painting, singling out admirable passages of brushstroke or ingenious uses of space.<sup>9</sup> Frequently they would run into artist friends, colleagues and former students of Will's from the Art Students League and the New York art scene of the time; Seymour Lipton, for these boys, was both a sculptor and Dad's dentist.



**Figure 3 Will and Peter Barnet in Central Park, circa 1942; photo courtesy Peter Barnet**

Thanks to their father's position teaching painting at Birchwathen in Manhattan, Peter and his two younger brothers attended the private school. Having his father as art teacher gave Peter a grounding in drawing, painting and pictorial analysis; he also watched his father's interactions with students, absorbing Will's respectful teaching style. Though Peter ran through a number of career choices as an adolescent (baseball, dance, acting - even attending the Actors' Studio for a short time during the Brando/Dean days), it was to teaching art to which he finally turned.

The fact that Peter chose teaching over painting as his main profession belies the importance his own development as a painter had for him. As an adolescent, he spent summers with the family in Provincetown. There he attended Hans Hofmann's "summer school," integrating Hofmann's version of pictorial analysis with that already learned from his father. Perhaps because Peter had grown up with this manner of conceptualizing art, he was interested in, but not awed as others were, by Hofmann. Indeed, as one would anticipate from a teenager, he was more impressed with the legendary drinking and shenanigans of the Abstract Expressionist "set" that frequented Provincetown in those years. Mentioning artists he looked to as a young painter, Peter cites Klee,

<sup>9</sup> MET, *Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 1942.

Miro, Stuart Davis,<sup>10</sup> as well as two associated with the Indian Space painters, Steve Wheeler and Peter Busa (who had a particularly wild rep in those summer days). All shared his preference for “flat, bright color”<sup>11</sup> and the manipulation of spatial dynamics. Yet, perhaps it is in his affinity for the drama of illustrated fairy tales and the cartooned styles of Rosenquist and Wesselman, we find a son’s rebellion.



**Figure 4 PLEASE REPLACE WITH SHOTS by ANTHONY - Indian Space Painting, Peter Barnett, circa late 1950's**

**Figure 5 Will Barnett "Children At Play" circa 1944 o/c**

Preparing for this exhibition, I asked both artists to choose a work by their father that proffered a key to their artistic legacy. Peter’s choice, *Children at Play*, (Fig.5) is a painting by Will Barnett from 1944 showing us two of his sons: Peter, playing with a truck, and Richard, as a toddler in the background. As he recalls,

“In the 1940s and early 1950s my family lived in a small apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. In the living room, was a Persian-style rug occupying most of the room. And as small children this was a big enough space for all kinds of creative play. On this rug my brothers and I would often play with our toys and create our own inner worlds. My dad, who was often drawing and painting anyway, would get right down on the rug next to us in order to draw images from our child’s eye view.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Will Barnett. Interview with author, New York, N.Y., 9 October, 2011. Will Barnett admired and studied with Davis at the Art Students League when he first arrived in New York in the 1930’s.

<sup>11</sup> Johnston, Jill. “Peter Barnett.” *Art News*, March, 1964:14.

<sup>12</sup> Barnett, Peter. "some notes on *Children at Play*." Sept. 2011.

Peter absorbed examples of an artist's manipulation of space not only by watching Will sketching, but also from their home's art library:

“ In a more formal sense *Children at Play* employs flattened planes that allow for an illusion of ascending depth while always retaining an awareness of the physical reality of the flatness of the canvas. Beautiful examples of similar use of flattened space and a linear edge can be found in the work of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Japanese printmakers. I remember my Dad had a great big book of Utamaro.”<sup>13</sup>

Will Barnet's *Children at Play* serves as more than a frontispiece to the subject of artists' children. It offers us real evidence of the influence of an artist parent, a touchstone for the narratives of Peter Barnet's paintings. In the works we see in this current exhibition, the father's fairly realistic family scene, the cozy tones of the Barnet apartment living room, have morphed in Peter Barnet's paintings into colors now acid, now candy; the level floors and walls are radically skewed to become the space of dreams. Only the carpet remains as an anchor in the complex scenarios of psychological states - joy, foreboding, anxiety, togetherness - depicted in Peter's paintings.

A dark magic has taken hold of the characters in the series of works presented here. Some of the figures (family members?) have been bewitched, taking the form of dogs, wolves or perhaps trickster coyotes. *Trench Coat* (Fig. 9 #14), *Fedora at the Door* (Fig.10 #13) and (Fig.11 #16 ) *The Stranger* come in lollipop oranges, yellows and greens -- colors clear and appealing. Yet happy color seems a feint. A figure in a Fedora appears -- now by the window, then by the door, uncomfortably lacking facial features - a spirit hovering in the moment depicted. This spectre is not necessarily threatening; without a face he seems silent. Nevertheless, a human figure in a room with two animals suggests a kind of authority.

In *Trench Coat* two dogs lie on a blue rug; one is on its back, four legs aloft in a vulnerable position. He casts a worried eye toward the corner of the room at the hatted man, faceless, footless but present. The blue corners of window sash and acute angles of the green walls converge to press the room anxiously. This feeling is only partially allayed by the stable square of dark carpet. Glowing orange *Fedora at the Door* finds the lone animal confronted by the man. A small dish, like a food dish, sits a middle distance between them. He stands on a small oval carpet, legs crouched, thickly painted fur on his back echoing the normal behavior of canines -

raising their back fur when confronted and fearful. If the animal in *Fedora at the Door* is intimidated, the creature in *A Nip of Anxiety* (Fig. 12 #3) is not. Teeth bared, body tensely poised, this wolfish creature guards his carpet and bone from an animal walking near the window. Outside, trees are eerily lit and the yellow-green brushstrokes of the floor screech sharply up, a visual growl toward the passing figure.

Curiously, in *Blue Midnight* (Fig. 13 #6) the psychodynamics of the previous interiors have been put to rest. Dark blue serves to hush the scene; trees and the glimpse of a figure glow like phantoms from beyond. The yellow etching delineates now familiar angles of floor and window. Our bedeviled trickster lies asleep, sinking into the deep protective plush of his magic carpet. This picture, depending on where you place it in your sequencing of the previous paintings, can be understood as a single scene depicting a dream, or, it can suggest that all of the previous works are dreams, interactions with the hobgoblins of the psyche.

More joyous depictions of familial existence are to be found. There are pictures of mates dancing with abandon in rooms filled with music. In *Green Radio* (Fig. 14 #5) a couple dance, looking at one another in anticipation; the step of air separating them is filled with a pair of intensely vibrating colors- orange and turquoise embracing as rug and legs of a table. Scenes of parents cradling and admiring pups are painted in deep jewel tones on the mellow colored wood of wine boxes. These repeat primal images of infant and mother immortalized in Madonna & Child paintings, Polaroid snap shots and digitally forwarded phone images. In all, the adult figures look serene, the pup's gaze fixed upon parent. Looking at these works as a whole, we can go back to a father's painting of two boys playing on a rug and surmise the value of the family dynamic and the constant of art in the home. What we could not anticipate from that picture is the expanse of expression the son's canvases offer to us.

## RENA SEGAL

As a child, Rena Segal drew with colored crayons, always on paper, never on the wall. She drew, and later painted, as a matter of course, being kept busy, quiet, in the studio with her father George as he worked. At age 8 Rena painted *Diamond in Window*. (Fig.6 #21RSL) She recalled her father stretching this small canvas of linen for her, and acknowledges with delight how lucky she was to be given a scrap of such fine quality material for her use. Of course there is a genetic

component in the makeup of an artist, Ms. Segal allows, but as is evident in her stories of childhood, nurture predominates.



**Figure 6 Rena Segal, Diamond in Window**



**Figure 7 Helen and Rena Segal, Allan Kaprow at performance piece, circa 1960; photo courtesy Rena Segal**

During Rena's childhood, George was teaching at various institutions to support the family: the Highland Park Community Center, Roosevelt Junior High School in New Brunswick, advising the students of the Rutgers University sketch club. The chicken coops across the road from the house became his studio. Artworks were regularly toted from studio to house, hung here and there, contemplated, discussed at all hours by family and friends. One of the closest among these friends was Alan Kaprow, professor of art history at Rutgers, inventor of Happenings, who in 1953 moved in down the road a piece. Happenings took place in various galleries in NYC as well as on the Segal farm. Rena remembers being taken to these events - instead of hiring a babysitter, her father would joke. She recalls one particular evening when she and her brother entertained themselves climbing ladders, finding words written at the top, and, indeed, writing on the walls too, as the adults sipped their cocktails and conversed.<sup>14</sup> After a time these events would end, the kids would be packed into the car for the ride home, conking out in the back seat. (Figure #7)

During the course of an art history class in high school, Rena decided to become an artist. (Fig. 15 #22RSL) Majoring in art at university gave her a chance to go out and find her own voice as a painter. She entered school already equipped with technique and a clear idea of studio discipline.

<sup>14</sup> Very likely the Smolin Gallery (photo pg. 33 Fig. 26 BLAM catalogue Barbara Haskell, Whitney catalogue (see Kraus book vol.2 Haskell, Barbara. *BLAM! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance 1958-1964*. New York, New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1984. 22. Fig. 26

During her first semester at Montclair, and later at Rutgers, there was a bit of awkwardness when teachers (who were personally acquainted with, and in some instances former students of her dad) and fellow students first met her. As they came to know her down-to-earth, focused approach, such tension dissolved. In just such a low-key way, her father would, when called upon, become an art handler, helping her pack up and move her works at the end of the year.

Throughout George's life, father and daughter maintained a close artistic relationship, discussing, shop-talking, helping each other install exhibitions. Rena posed for many of her father's sculptures; indeed today she maintains them as well as co-directs the George and Helen Segal Foundation. Asked 'how does it feel to come upon a cast of one's self in a museum or public square?' Segal explains she is delighted by the experience –it invariably reminds her of the casting process: the lively, laughing atmosphere in the studio.<sup>15</sup> In 1998 Rena and George Segal exhibited together at the Gallery of Bristol Meyers Squibb in Lawrenceville, NJ. It was then that George confirmed to Rena that as a painter she had “come into her own.” In fact William Zimmer, in his review of the exhibition, points out the risk of showing with “the father...George Segal, the world-famous sculptor with a secure place in the history books” and notes she “stands up to the challenge.”<sup>16</sup>

Two points of access offer themselves when looking at Segal's paintings presented here: the aforementioned intense coloring and the choice of ordinary subject matter. In matters of color the paintings affirm her love of Monet, Cezanne and Rothko. If we focus on the choice of subject matter we enter the world of the familiar and ordinary that was claimed by her father, who in his paintings and later sculptures employed expressionist color. While choosing the pastel drawn by her father for display in this exhibition, Rena commented:

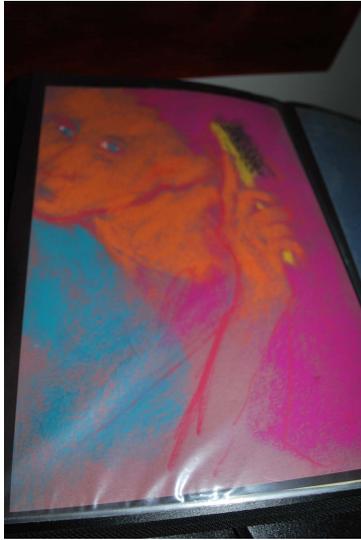
“ I chose *Woman Brushing her Hair* for the vibrant fields of color that I remembered in my father's early pastels. When I would walk up the stairs to the studio, I would see rows of the pastels underneath the slanted ceiling. The colors were intense. My father would set up a place for me to draw and I would use the large variety of colors in the pastel box. When I completed my creation, it was stapled on the wall among his pastels. Later on, my father moved the studio to a larger space, he continued to staple his drawings on the walls and had piles of pastel boxes on the work table.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Rena Segal. Interview with author, South Brunswick, NJ, August 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Zimmer, William. "Two Generations Taking the Same Journey, but on Different Paths." *New York Times*, April 5, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Rena Segal. Interview with author.



**Figure 8 Woman brushing hair, George Segal circa 1965**

While George's choices of color enhance an emotional charge already articulated by the figures in their environment, in Rena's work the importance is reversed: color takes its place front and center as the primary visual element. In a series of landscapes, the subject is not the bending vegetation, but the energy radiated by fields of color marked and marked again, in scrawl and splash, propelling lake and reedy banks into conflagrations of energy. Looking at *Farrington Lake #9* (Fig. 16 #5RSL) we can feel this building in the heated palette of blues and yellows and burning reds.

Rena Segal's paintings of ordinary objects, things that have, for the most part, been hanging around the house or studio, give us the opportunity to experience different sensations than do the landscapes. Looking at these still lifes, one might, in passing, recall Cezanne's use of mundane objects, using the familiar to help the viewer focus on a deliberate building of form from paint. His objects sit on the picture plane and threaten to slide into our laps. But whereas Cezanne's objects can be analytical statements on the conversion of 3D to 2D, Segal's bottles and fruit beckon us into a meditative realm. When interviewing Ms. Segal for this catalogue, I was perplexed at the lavishing of such attention on ordinary jars and bottles – and the kind of dare I felt in attempting to parse their meaning. It was then that the artist recalled an exercise from a drawing class at Montclair State with Eileen Muhammad - empty the contents of your purse and construct a still life. Her remark led me to consider how very personal the objects we need, insist on carrying with us all day, are, and yet how they are, too, mundane.

Segal describes her process of painting as *building up* from the surface. In the stacked images of fruit from 2010 we see strata of color and line, color and line upon a paper surface, then oil stick

on oil paint. Nonetheless, the overriding sensation is of *falling* into a deep, colored world, perhaps because of the perspectival space, the breathing room between each fruit's orb. (Fig.17) The softening of form Segal performs on the shapes of fruit makes them seem otherworldly. If one were to imagine these still lifes as landscapes, one could conjure a voyage. As Neil Tetkowski wrote about Rena's landscapes, "The artist's works take us on an internal journey, to a land of grand imagination. For some the response might suggest metaphysical frontiers."<sup>18</sup>

All this lush color is brought up short by the series of black and white pastels on paper from 1992. Their subjects, lone chairs, doors ajar, are mournful, even threatening. Queried about the extremely bleak atmosphere in these collages, Segal recalls a period of feeling down. As she paints "in the moment," that darkness came to the fore. The black and white series throws into focus her motivation: descriptions about states of being. Seen as a whole, Rena Segal's work communes with you in the present. Take a look at *Painting Table # 7*. (Fig. 18 #7rsl). The intensity of color buttered into the surfaces of canvas and paper leaves the rods, cones, and fingertips of one's perceptions tingling with stimulation. It's the kind of exhilaration you feel on a perfectly still dry day when the sky is so blue you feel you are swimming in the beginning of blueness.

A closing comment on the paintings seen in this exhibition: Peter Barnett's jazzy-hued works lead us to fairytale places. From afar, the acid colors call to us like music from the apartment next door. Once we enter, we viewers, through our surrogates the dogs, become witnesses to the to and fro of family relations, the unease as well as displays of joy and affection. The party in this story-land is intense, interpersonal. Rena Segal's work, on the other hand, grants us private space. Her paintings beckon us to luxuriate in immediate sensation and response elicited by her thickets of color and line. We then may reconsider, at our own pace, the underlying mystery of a bottle or a patch of reeds. Certainly benefiting from genetic inheritance, guidance in life and technique from their elders, these painters have clearly hewed to their own paths. How lucky we are to live in the age of imagination and individual vision, to sojourn in the realms these painters have cultivated.

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<sup>18</sup> Tetkowski, Neil. *Rena Segal: Landscape Paintings*. Union, NJ: Kean University Galleries, 2005.

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