Letter from the Executive Director

There has always been a welcoming spirit at the League. Those with an affinity for art know that they are with like-minded people who share their goals and desires to master their mediums. In such a supportive environment, many of our students choose to remain and study years after first enrolling. In this regard, we are as much a community as we are a school. This is the nature of the League: there are as many reasons to attend the League as there are attending students.

The Board and administration recognize the League’s primary mission of providing a program and setting that supports the individual pursuit of art. The outgrowth of our 140-year history is nothing short of staggering; more prominent artists studied at the League than in any other institution. The same holds true for our illustrious faculty. League members who credit the League with providing them the most rewarding time of their lives continue to support us through gifts and bequests. We continue to be a sanctuary for artistic discourse and discovery where students learn that there are no limits to what they can achieve through dedication and the practice of making art.

We honor those who have shown such dedication. In this issue of Lines, we profile individuals such as instructor Bruce Dorfman, celebrating fifty years of teaching at the League, and artist Eleanor Adam, who came to the League after the death of her son Alex to learn art and rediscover her place in the world. Eleanor went on to found the Alex Adam Gallery, a not-for-profit art center. At the upcoming League gala, we will honor League alumnus Ai Weiwei and celebrate his enormous contribution to contemporary art. We will also honor Greg Wyatt for his art and dedication to supporting art education on a worldwide basis.

Ultimately, we honor the rich fabric of the Art Students League where we welcome all those with an interest in art. Ours is a demographic as vast as the world itself and this is what makes the League the most uniquely positioned institution of its kind anywhere.

Ira Goldberg
Executive Director
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Cover image: Janet Cook, Winky, oil, 40 x 40 in.
Our fascination with faces begins when we first recognize mom. If you’re studying at the League, that fascination increases with time. I confess to wanting to draw like Leonardo da Vinci when I took my first anatomy class here about seven years ago. Now, I’m just thrilled to properly render a grape. But the human face holds its pull on my imagination. So, when I was invited to view the Portrait Project exhibition, I saw it as an answer to my curiosity—why the portrait when so many artists have moved on to abstract painting or new media?

Howard Gladstone’s idea for the Portrait Project came about because he needed models and studio space, neither of which he could afford. He felt the need to step outside the League to see whether he could reach the next level of professional development. This issue of Lines from the League celebrates the creativity, community and professionalism of the artists participating in the Portrait Project. These emerging and professional artists share their stories of finding their way through almost unbearable heartbreak, and the fears of uncertainty and insecurity, with help from the pure joy of art making.

We’re also celebrating Bruce Dorfman’s fifty years of teaching at the League. We asked several of his former students to share recollections of their studio experience: what helped shape them as artists, what did they learn? Jillian Russo, the League’s curator, writes about Arnold Blanch. Bruce studied with Blanch in 1951–52 at Woodstock, home at that time to the Abstract Expressionists Philip Guston, Adolph Gottlieb, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Isamu Noguchi, and David Smith. Bruce taught in the same studio as Blanch, with Arnold teaching in the mornings and Bruce in the afternoons, from 1964 until Blanch’s death in 1968.

The Profiles section introduces Michael Colonna, who left America to be a professional soccer player in Italy. Shirley Piniat remembers her husband of 62 years, a bond which began at the League. These are just two of the many stories representing the diversity and depth of the League.

If you would like to share your stories and images with our readers, please e-mail me at denise@artstudentsleague.org.
I was about three years old when my grandpa came back to Odessa from the Gulag. He was about as old then as I am now. I was his first grandson and, after the horrors of Stalin’s concentration camps, I was a great gift in his life. A powerful guy, he had big, strong hands. His face expressed both immense strength and tremendous sorrow. I studied his face every day, and, at about age ten, I got the feeling that I had to draw my “Seida” Gervits.

The second face that asked to be painted was my mom’s. As a very young child, I didn’t see her face; to me, she was like air or the light of a star, given freely and taken for granted. Very soon, though, I started to look at her more like an artist than a son. Suddenly, I discovered her beautiful eyes, dark like Spanish olives; her Madonna-like, harmonious face; her black hair pulled back in a braid.

Very early in my life, I enjoyed the visible world. My passion for looking at the world was likely prompted and supported by a handful of oil paintings hung over my crib. There was a copy of Ivan Kramskoi’s *Enigma, Unknown Lady* and a couple of landscapes in which the mastery of oil technique blew me away.

Once, I stepped outside for a walk and was stopped by something fascinating: a man wearing an old uniform was seated on a small chair and painting on a small easel. I found the smell of those paints sublimely beautiful. I froze and stood behind him until he finished his painting. Ever since, I’ve had the penchant for looking everywhere in town for artists painting in the street.

From these many experiences grew my artistic passion, especially my love for portraiture.
Leonid Gervits, Untitled

Sharon Moreau, Untitled

Fran Middendorf,
*Orley Shiv*

Janet Cook, *After Tiepolo*

Donna Skebo,
*Self-portrait*

Eleanor Adam,
*Homage to Bill*
Clarissa Payne Uvegi, *Self-portrait*

Orly Shiv, *Georgia*

Leonid Gervits, *Barry Rosenthal*

Valerie Gillett, *Howard Gladstone*

Amy Digi, *Howard Gladstone*

Howard Gladstone, *Betty*
I had always wanted to paint portraits. But, as a busy free-lance illustrator (known as Winky Adam) and the mother of three boys in New York City, I didn’t want to risk taking the time to start a new career in painting, famously difficult and non-remunerative. Perhaps I felt I wasn’t worth it.

In December of 2004, my son, Alex, then 20, was diagnosed with a rare pediatric cancer called Ewing’s Sarcoma. Dropping everything to care for him, I shepherded him through two years of long and increasingly cruel treatments. The summer before he died, my strapping, six-foot, funny son was hallucinating, skeletal and in intolerable pain. I sat in his hospital room thinking that I myself would die from grief. In that moment, I had a powerful insight: I needed art.

In September 2006, I joined a class at the Art Students League and began to make portraits of Alex that became a collaboration between us. He talked to me and I transcribed his words into painted portraits. We carried on a wonderful, profound dialogue that let us express visually what was happening to him and how he felt about it.

When he died in January 2007 at the age of 23, I started to make enormous pastel paintings of his brothers, my husband and Alex’s friends, which served as both illustrations of what had happened to us—of what we looked like now—and affirmations that we had nevertheless survived his death.

Eventually, it dawned on me that I did not know how to paint from life and I wanted to learn. Thus began my studies with Sharon Sprung and Mary Beth McKenzie. Painting from life was transformative. The moment I stood in front of the model, my grief, my memories, my anxiety disappeared. In order to create a true portrait of the person before me, I needed to live in that moment, focused neither on the past nor the future. I remember thinking that, if Alex were anywhere in the universe, he was there with me as I painted.

By my count, I am now 6,500 hours into the 10,000 that Malcolm Gladwell tells us is necessary to become proficient in our chosen endeavor. I am very lucky indeed to study at the League with Sharon Sprung, Harvey Dinnerstein, Mary Beth McKenzie and Costa Vavagiakis. As a better painter now, I am still a long way from being where I want to be: my goal is to paint people who live on the canvas, who practically breathe on their own, so lifelike that the viewer will say: “Why, hello, you!”

I still feel Alex with me as I paint.

The Alex Adam Gallery hosted the recent Portrait Project—Artists and Posers exhibition. The not-for-profit Alex Adam Gallery was founded in honor of Alex, a talented writer and actor. Alex cherished a vision of living and working in a Harlem brownstone with a group of equally talented friends. After his death, we bought a brownstone at 78 West 120th Street, (www.arts78.com) which has become a living art community in the spirit he envisioned.

Besides the gallery, the building houses six artists with studios and the Alex Adam Foundation, which supports emerging artists.
Originally from England, I came to work in New York City as an IT consultant. When my future husband was transferred to L.A., I stayed to finish my contract at a large international bank, then moved west, enrolled in art classes and rediscovered my love of art. The following year, we moved to Miami, just in time for Hurricane Andrew, and, despite some flooding and minor damage to our home, I continued studying, this time, at the University of Miami. After a year and half, we moved to foggy San Francisco where I took yet more classes. I felt like the perpetual student. Slowly my skills improved, but it was not until 2002, when I studied with Sharon Sprung and Mary Beth McKenzie five days a week, that I saw improvements in my work. Who knew you had to work so hard!

About four years ago, I decided to leave class and paint on my own. Finding my own voice and having to be my own critic was and continues to be very difficult. However, I have had some great teachers and good advice from them: believe in your own vision and be true to yourself. Having such great female role models as Sharon and Mary Beth has been very inspiring. They are my guiding lights.

These days, I teach at the Pastel Society of America and conduct workshops in France. I continue to enter competitions and show my work as much as possible. Represented by the Dacia Gallery in the East Village, I am also a member of numerous art clubs including the Salmagundi where I currently serve on the art committee and jury of awards. Over the years, I have won numerous prizes including gold and silver medals at the Allied Artists of America and Best in Show at the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club.

Feeling like you are part of something bigger than yourself is how I got involved with the Portrait Project. I was also inspired and charmed by some sketchbooks I saw in England of artists drawing artists. I felt like I was witnessing something unique and wanted to be part of this collaboration between fellow artists.

The 40 x 40 inch painting I submitted to the show is of my friend Eleanor, and was done in about four-and-a-half hours. Working spontaneously and much looser than usual, I started with a rough sketch on a white canvas, blocked in shadows in raw umber and let that dry. Then, I worked with big brushes and lots of paint and color. Once that was dry, I finished the details in the hair and eye area. It was great fun to do and I intend to do more like it.

Janet Cook, *Sisters*, 2012, oil on panel, 48 x 34 inches
As it was for many others, September 11, 2001 was a defining moment for me. Back then, as an account executive in global trade at IBM, I had been scheduled to be at One World Trade Tower; but, as fate would have it, my plans were changed. It was a “carpe diem” experience for me. I had always wanted to study art, to learn to paint, so, when IBM offered an early retirement program the following year, I seized the opportunity and headed straight to the Art Students League.

I grew up in Houston, Texas—at that time an “art starved” area. Today, it’s very different, but back then it was all about the rodeo. My dream was to live, work and study art in New York. Upon arrival, I had enough money to last one month; looking back, I consider myself very lucky to have quickly landed a job with IBM. “Big Blue” is a great company but not for the faint-hearted. Immediately consumed by my career, I threw myself into it wholeheartedly and thrived on the pressure of each project, on the people I met, on the trust and confidence of my customers, on the bonds formed with them and my colleagues. Art remained a simmering passion, one that I never had time to pursue.

Today, after a decade of studying at the Art Students League, I find myself immersed in paint, studying color, light and composition under master painters, energized by my fellow students. This experience is immeasurably enriching my life. I am fascinated by the complexities of painting the figure and occasionally drawn to the spontaneity and intuition inherent in abstraction. For me, painting people from life is about connecting to a person, discovering what makes him or her unique, and putting my interpretation of those characteristics on the canvas.

I love painting the figure with all its challenges, but, every now and then, I just want to let loose with the paint. When I paint in abstraction, it’s about my emotions or ideas at any given time impulsively expressed on the canvas. Both forms of art play an important role in my artistic development, one influencing the other.

Currently, I’m on my new journey with new friends, projects, discoveries and achievements. It is exhilarating to be completing the circle of that young woman whose dream was to come to New York to study art and learn to paint. ©

From left, by Donna Skebo: Yuka, 2013, 16 x 15 in.; Painting Clarissa Painting Me, 2002, 60 x 36 in.
Clarissa Payne Uvegi

Painting as Meditation

When I paint, it’s meditation. A part of my brain opens up and fills with light and I get the sensation that I can accomplish my objectives. Growing up, I was always drawing; whenever friends came over, we would sit and draw together. My mother occasionally took me to MoMA or the Metropolitan Museum, and I remember looking closely at the brushstrokes and feeling a connection with the artist. As a teenager, I finally got an easel, paints and canvas, but I didn’t know where to begin.

I experienced my first drawing classes with Gustav Rehberger and Peter Cox at the Art Students League during the summers, while an art major at Douglass College. With no access to a personal studio, I used my college dorm hall to paint my first self-portrait in oil. Luckily my dorm mates liked the smell of turpentine! I remember feeling lost at Douglass because conceptual art was “happening,” whereas I wanted to portray what I saw. I began to feel like an imposter. “Real artists” painted from their heads, I thought, and that wasn’t what I did. (Much later, I realized that I painted from my heart). I initially intended to study art therapy because of my interest in psychology; I had a desire to comprehend the human form as the pathway to understanding the human being.

After graduating from Douglass in three years, I went to Parsons School of Design where, in an act of practicality, I studied communication design. Parsons facilitated my journey as an artist in many ways, including training my eye for composition. One summer, my parents gave me the ultimate gift of a Parsons in Paris program. This was a pivotal experience for me—painting outdoors on the banks of the Seine and in the Luxembourg Gardens, Jardin des Tuileries and Père Lachaise, the famous cemetery where Jim Morrison and Oscar Wilde are buried.

I was still searching. While drawing in the evening at the League, I worked in the family fur business in retail, design, sales, and buying, and soon became a partner.

During this time, I got married and had two children. Being a mother fulfilled me in such a way that I was content to do that completely, full-time and overtime. However, when my youngest turned six, I was ready to make a change.

I returned to the League and back to my art. After a reintroduction to painting in a summer class with Richard Pionk, I studied with like-minded Mary Beth McKenzie for over ten years. She helped me tap into my own way of seeing. I finally found my place and rediscovered my love of painting the figure in oils. Oil has allowed me to mold and maneuver the paint on the canvas in a way that inherently works with my style of painting. It allows my paintings to be texturally palpable. Additionally, working with Dan Gheno has been immeasurably enriching. He has continued to encourage me to pursue my individual vision as an artist in an incredibly propelling way.

As a result of Mary Beth’s encouragement to paint self-portraits, I entered one in the 2009 Outwin Boochever Portrait competition. Out of 5,000 submissions, I became one of 49 finalists to hang for almost a year at the National Portrait Gallery. This recognition was a profound experience.
that contributed to accepting and embracing my identity as an artist.

One day, while standing in front of my painting at the National Gallery, I met a young couple expecting their first child. The husband commissioned me to paint a portrait of his pregnant wife. Because they lived in D.C., and I am located in New York, I had to secure a comfortable studio for the family-to-be and plan, create and follow through on completing this commission before the birth. As luck would have it, my subject gave birth six weeks early. Uncharacteristically, I finished the painting using photographs. The couple later returned to New York with their three month old baby boy for the presentation of the painting. Happily, they were pleased with the results.

I have a passion for studying the model in order to evoke more than what is seen on the surface. Something magical happens—especially when there is a spark from within the figure. While painting, I am trying to discover how far I can go, as if solving a deep puzzle within myself. It’s not that I aim for realism, but rather, simplicity. I like the basic form to be realistic, but, as long as I can capture the spirit of the person, elements of the painting can be loose.

This relates to what I want to convey through the figure. I want to elicit the being of the person I am painting. That is why I need to examine, scrutinize, investigate. I undertake an almost painstaking process of studying the model, as if unraveling a mystery. Focusing on the face and especially the eyes as the core of my painting, I aim to tell a story with line, color and form—to lead to the essence of the person before me and to understand and connect with others continues.

From a poem about me by my dear friend, Sidney Rosenblum: “… I paint because it helps me breathe, it enables me to kiss my sorrow, to hold my joy. It is my language, all the verbs, the nouns, the silences and the spaces in between, color and time and space, a place to rejoice.”

Howard Gladstone
Creating a Collective of Artists

I started studying philosophy and psychology at Clark University. After two years at Clark University, I transferred to the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), where I had the opportunity to work with the dynamic Polish documentary filmmaker Marian Marzynski. Filmmaking threw me into theater, movement and writing. My last year at RISD, I was a repertory actor with Brown University’s Summer Theatre. After leaving RISD, I shot a film with a former classmate about surviving the troubles in Northern Ireland. *Belfast Reel* was shown at the Museum of Modern Art, and a second documentary film with my friend Kathleen Dowdye, about the San Gennaro Festival in New York City’s Little Italy, aired on public television.

My mentor, Marian, asked me to shoot a ten-part public television series about small businesses around the country that he would direct. When I completed that project, I stopped in Chicago and finished my master’s degree, and then worked as the assistant director of the Center for New Television, where I coordinated the National Endowment for the Arts Regional Fellowship. I also independently co-produced a film about the election victory of Harold Washington (Chicago’s first black mayor), taught at Columbia College, and co-founded and directed the Chicago Area Film and Video Network, a coalition and advocacy group of independent filmmakers and film organizations.

Tiring of advocacy work, writing grant proposals and trying to get the next gig, I decided to take control of my time working in the arts by devoting myself to painting. One of my friends offered me her apartment to use as a studio while she was at work, as long as I walked her dog when I came by. I was also awarded a painting residency at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. I wanted to formally learn more about painting and sculpture, so I returned to New York City to study at the New York Studio School and, later, the International School of Art in Umbria, the National Academy and the Art Students League.

I won an unusual award for excellence in both painting and sculpture from the New York Studio School and first place in painting at the National Academy. At the Art Students League, I won the Nessa Cohen...
Grant for sculpture and a Merit scholarship in the same year. Later, with my League instructors’ recommendations, I received a Newington-Cropsey fellowship for sculpting, and a residency for painting at Vytlacil. While I was at Vytlacil, I received an offer for an ongoing studio residency with an arts organization called Chashama at the Brooklyn Army Terminal, a huge outdated military supply terminal now owned by the City of New York.

Some of my ideas for paintings are propelled by myth. After a bad injury on a trip kept me from returning home, I empathized with Ulysses in Homer’s *Odyssey*. One panel I painted depicts Ulysses’ wife Penelope and their son Telemechos as the latter explains that he will sail off to search for his father. Another panel alludes to the absence of Ulysses by showing an unused room with a rocking horse (Ulysses invented the Trojan Horse), an empty chair (a throne), and his famous bow which Penelope’s suitors were unable to string in a contest to win her hand.

I started the Portrait Project because I wanted models in my new studio and could not afford to pay for the long hours required. Painting at the Art Students League is a wonderful experience, but not every student turns out to be an artist; I felt that I needed the control, independence and focus to find out if I could take my painting further.

The idea for the Portrait Project was to create a vehicle so that artists could pose for one another and show the results together in one place. It was also a way to learn how other artists deal with the practical issues of painting people, and to create a forum for the kind of art discussions that seem to be vanishing in the ever busier world of New York City.

It is very challenging and thrilling to work from life. I have learned that there is not always time to do an ambitious painting and, when I paint my friends, I need to deal practically with the time I can get. Sometimes it is better to have a less ambitious plan and do a simple paint sketch. My own experiences and those of my teachers, friends, and artist-heroes eventually come together to make an expression and reflection of the place where I uniquely find myself and others, in our moment of time.
One of the first memories of my father is the image of him sitting in his dusty studio with his racks of pull-out paintings redolent of old paper, wood, turpentine and linseed oil. My mother had been left to bring up her children, while Dad, a full-time worker in a bank, extended his days in New York City by taking night classes at the Art Students League. He attended sporadically from 1947 onward and studied with Robert Brackman, the Soyers, Edwin Dickinson, Robert Beverly Hale and even Edward Hopper from time to time.

On the weekends that Dad did make an appearance at home, I was always happy to sit for portraits which he loved making. Sitting for portraits forged a bond between us, even though, as a child, I was very impatient with the idea. One weekend, Dad returned with news that he had won a portrait to be made by the then popular portrait painter William Draper. It followed that it was torture for me to sit for him but I was regaled with gifts. I loved watching Draper set out his paints: tiny dabs on a worn wooden palette. It seemed a miracle he could make a whole painting with such a small amount of paint.

Years later, the act of portrait painting proved to be a great help to me. When I was a student at the Rhode Island School of Design, I had a boyfriend in Washington, D.C. To pay for my frequent trips up and down the East Coast, I drew pastel portraits on the National Mall outside the National Gallery. It was a carny, cut-throat business; the other vendors had a pecking order for where to set up easels, tables and such. One particularly vicious caricature artist liked to block my customers and heckle me while I was working. The experience of drawing up to 20 portraits a day was invaluable. I drew a variety of faces: twins, people of all ages and from every part of the world.

My Washington experience served me well when, a few years later, I found myself in New York City as part of a newly formed Masters program at the School of Visual Arts called “Visual Journalism.” Students were sent into the streets of the city to draw people just as cub reporters would have written about them. We drew window washers, circus performers, actors and the homeless. I empathized with our subjects, and, in a profound way, New York City is still the city I feel most bound to.

I must credit my teachers at the International School of Painting, Drawing and Sculpture in Umbria, Italy, where I relocated in 1997, as my best teachers of portraiture. Nick Carone, Lennart Anderson and Bruce Gagnier formalized spiritual insight, structure and historical context into a clear, sagacious teaching method.

I am now carrying on learning by teaching for the Rome Art Program in Italy. This summer course takes place on the streets and in the museums of the city. By teaching drawing, I am trying to communicate an empathy with Rome, its sculpture and history and its many visitors.

When Howard Gladstone proposed the Portrait Project, I felt grateful. Here is an opportunity to renew collegial contact with New York by the beautiful act of painting an insight as well as a likeness.
Orly Shiv
Moving Toward Art

Sitting with a group of artist friends talking about life—about what brought us to the art world and made us artists—prompted me to ponder the truth about who I am and how I led my life and made my choices.

Most of my friends talked about being drawn to the arts and drawing or painting from a very early age. In contrast, I was a fencer in my youth, holding a sword instead of a brush. My only art-related memory was of admiring my friends’ parents who were artists.

My attention was drawn to the arts only in my early twenties, when I left Israel for my first trip to Europe and encountered the art world in the museums of London and Paris. I remember facing John Constable’s landscapes and being drawn into the work, losing track of time and location, and meeting *Venus de Milo* and *Winged Victory of Samothrace* face-to-face in the Louvre.

These discoveries happened at a time when I had to choose my course in life. I wanted to become an architect, but lacking the requisite math skills I turned to fine art. Hesitating to commit to art, I doubted my talent and abilities and did not think I could make this my calling. Professionally, I learned and taught weaving and then moved on to landscape design.

Twenty years ago, my husband’s job required us to move from Israel to the United States. The relocation forced me to decide what I wanted to do with my life. Our two children were in school most of the day, so I decided to return to painting and, later, to sculpting as a hobby.

I was fortunate to come across the Art Students League, where I found the ideal environment; it became my second home. The instructors’ encouragement and the company of my fellow students, who became my friends, provided an anchor in a new country.

Looking back, I realize that I have been interested in aesthetics and the relationship between the two- and three-dimensional all my life. Today, after years of hard work and dedication, I can sometimes think of myself as an artist.

I look forward to my next chapter. ♡
There is no nutshell version of my life; it’s more like trail mix. It all began a bunch of decades ago in Yonkers, New York and has grown from a few peanuts to a large bag of nuts and sweet and tart fruit. Included in the mix have been adventures spanning this country; a wondrous solo backpacking trip in Europe; time as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Philippines; stints as a public school teacher in New York City and Portland, Oregon; the opportunity to be a Seeds of the League instructor; a BFA from Pratt Institute; an MFA from Lehman College, with credits transferred from University of Alaska Fairbanks; and employment with Lincoln Center, the New York Transit Museum, and the Art Students League.

Drawing, painting and printmaking happened during or documented these adventures. Those artworks led to numerous exhibitions, membership in the United States Coast Guard Art Program, and participation in the Arts in Embassies Program and the Portrait Project.

So maybe I am a nut in the bag of trail mix and my artwork is a compilation of my adventures traveling, wandering the streets of New York City, hanging out at Yonkers Ink, learning from people I taught, sitting on the dock of the bay, chilling in an airport hangar, smelling roses in parks, sampling good eats from the grocery aisle, and doing whatever else crosses my path.

All of this is an incredible, amazing journey that continues in familiar locations and some yet to be discovered places. Throughout all of it, I just gotta be a little nutty to make it all happen.

Amy Digi, *Untermeyer*, oil on canvas, 30 x 20 inches
When I was growing up, my family collected art. Artists visited us and sometimes we went to their homes and studios. I admired their work and liked the way they talked about art. Artists were nothing like the people in my daily life; they were more like athletes I looked up to but could never hope to meet.

I tried enameling and collage in high school and had a great teacher, Kalman Kubinyi, a WPA artist, one of many art teachers who were positive, encouraging forces in my early life. When Kubinyi showed his work, his creativity and skill impressed me. I loved his encouragement and spirit.

In college, I tried sculpting in clay, printmaking and silk screening but found the camera was the best way to express my ideas. Working with my hands and making my ideas into something inspired me. I experienced incredible moments of discovery while shooting: I seemed to step outside myself and had a higher consciousness of doing something important.

My college photography teacher, Steve Iseman, was a fantastic guy. The camera became a reason to explore. I learned that I loved old things, and curiosity carried me into long-term projects. Studying at the Dayton Art Institute at night gave me a sense of community. Other photographers were working on their projects and we enjoyed an exchange of ideas.

In junior year of college, I studied in Vienna and took Frau Gunz’s art history course at the Kunsthistorisches Museum. The collections and her insights into the work were influential on my learning to see in a critical manner.

I knew I was going to New York after graduation. For me, it was the only place to be. I was so relieved to be done with years of school. Even though I appreciated my art teachers, school had been a long-drawn-out process with no opportunity to choose my own projects. Only in college did I see a path for myself.

After school, I spent years working in commercial photography and assisting and learning from mentors. I later learned more advanced skills on my own, always with the goal of bettering my method of communication with an audience and standing out through my work. Now I have built a following and have the visibility and audience that I always wanted. Photography has allowed me to expand my life both personally and professionally.

Portraits were my first love. I like capturing life. Portraits can be very tricky because there is no formula and each session demands a fresh start. Capturing a portrait in photography is difficult because it means managing many complex events while trying to stay in the moment.
“Paint! Paint! Get that paint on the canvas!” cried my cigar-smoking art teacher during my first experience with oil paint. I was 16. It was a life-altering moment, discovering I had a strong and personal relationship with color and a way to make my tiny mark on the world.

In the late 1960s I was interested in painting portraits, but at the School of Visual Arts, I was swept up in the madness of happenings and the new trends of conceptual, minimal and process art. (And “being cool.”)

My most valuable lessons and inspirations came 30 years later from instructors and classmates at the National Academy and School of Fine Arts where I began learning the craft (and much more) from Sam Adoquei, Michelle LiCalsi, Nicki Orbach and Dan Gheno.

I have received awards in the School’s annual juried shows and have exhibited at Lincoln Center, Newark’s City Without Walls, and The Vieques Conservation & Historical Trust (solo show) in Puerto Rico.

I continue the struggle for a better understanding of myself, of life, and of how to express it all beautifully.
I think I’ve always been an artist. When I was a child, the bigger the box of crayons my parents bought for me before school in the fall, the more positive I was that it was going to be a great year! I loved those crayons and those colors.

My relatives loaned me an anatomy book. My parents made me give it back. Too many nudes. Back to the nudes: a once-a-week drawing session on the outskirts of Denver when my daughter was a baby and another one in a little room at the train depot in Steamboat Springs. As he pulled up, the engineer would spot that model, seemingly, with great surprise.

In 1988, I moved to New York. We were the night people, hungry to learn to paint. We lugged our giant canvases—and sometimes wet oil paintings—through the turnstiles up to the League and back home again. This was definitely not Boulder, Colorado.

I taught in the public schools by day, dining in the League cafeteria or in the painting studio before class, sometimes with a can of tuna. Mine was a five-night-a-week commitment. It was much more than a class. It was a way of life. There was friendship, competition, humor, plenty of frustration, and, on occasion, satisfaction, even exhilaration. But, most of all, we did learn to paint. For me, the League was life-changing.

Recently, I found myself on a very crowded train with a wet oil painting, always a recipe for disaster. I had to chuckle. This is still so much fun, a great life.
Arnold Blanch (1896-1968) is one of many American modernists whose substantial contribution to the mid-century art world is not well known today. A consideration of Blanch’s career reveals the depth of his involvement in the American art scene as a painter, muralist and teacher. As a participant in artistic communities in Woodstock, San Francisco, Paris, and Key West, his friends and colleagues included George Bellows, Diego Rivera, Hans Hofmann, Niles Spencer, Emil Ganso, Jules Pascin, Stuart Davis, and Isamu Noguchi. During the Great Depression, Blanch was a painter and muralist for the WPA Federal Art Project and was awarded three post office mural commissions in Columbus, Wisconsin; Norwalk, Connecticut; and Fredonia, New York. He was also a committed teacher, holding positions at the Art Students League, 1935-1939 and 1947-1968, at California School of the Fine Arts, 1930-31, and at the Colorado Springs Fine Art Center, 1939-1942. Although Blanch is primarily remembered as an American Scene painter, in the 1950s, he experimented with a new style, creating abstract, fanciful, surrealist landscapes.

Born in the small town of Mantorville, Minnesota in 1896, Blanch was not primed for a career in art. His father was a wealthy banker and business owner who lost his fortune when Blanch was five years old, forcing the family to relocate to St. Paul. Arnold absorbed artistic influences from his mother and his aunt. His mother painted china, which instilled in him “an importance given to that which was hand-painted over that which was not,” while his aunt created oil painting reproductions to decorate her home. Blanch remembered spending “many rainy afternoons in reverie with these pictures, and in their commonplace scenes,” and his “fancy took great journeys.” Everyday scenes, including portraits of farmers and workers, cityscapes of rural and industrial towns, and images of derelict farmsteads damaged by the Depression, would become the primary subjects of his own painting.

Blanch rebelled against a formal education, leaving school in 1913, when he was about sixteen. He began working at the Minneapolis Public Library, which at the time housed the Minneapolis School of Fine Art on its top floor. After observing a class, he enrolled with the intention of becoming a commercial artist. One of his teachers, the German American painter Robert Koehler, introduced Blanch to modern art by defending the controversial post-impressionist, cubist and realist painters who were exhibiting in the Armory Show. This left Blanch with “a memory of some of those paintings—Gauguin, Cézanne, and also Henri and several others.”

In 1916, Blanch received a scholarship to attend the Art Students League and moved to New York. He studied first with Luis F. Mora and later with Robert Henri, Kenneth Hayes Miller, Boardman Robinson and John Sloan. His fellow students included Alexander Brook, Isabel Bishop, Katherine Schmidt, Reginald Marsh, Adolph Dehn, Peggy Bacon, Yasuo Kuniyoshi and John Flannigan, all of whom established successful careers. In particular, Henri’s lectures, in which the ashcan painter discussed Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass, made an impression on Blanch. Blanch explained, “Whitman gave dignity to people and he added to my understanding of democracy. He gave significance that made it more than a word. I mention this because Whitman has not only been an imetus to living but also has had an effect on some of the content of my painting.” While Blanch’s paintings are not idealistic, they depict humble subjects with dignity and often portray them working in harmony with their environment.

Blanch’s studies at the League were briefly interrupted by his service in World War I in 1918. After his return, he continued taking classes until around 1922, when he moved to Woodstock, New York. He studied first with Luis F. Mora and later with Robert Henri, Kenneth Hayes Miller, Boardman Robinson and John Sloan. His fellow students included Alexander Brook, Isabel Bishop, Katherine Schmidt, Reginald Marsh, Adolph Dehn, Peggy Bacon, Yasuo Kuniyoshi and John Flannigan, all of whom established successful careers. In particular, Henri’s lectures, in which the ashcan painter discussed Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass, made an impression on Blanch. Blanch explained, “Whitman gave dignity to people and he added to my understanding of democracy. He gave significance that made it more than a word. I mention this because Whitman has not only been an imetus to living but also has had an effect on some of the content of my painting.” While Blanch’s paintings are not idealistic, they depict humble subjects with dignity and often portray them working in harmony with their environment.

Blanch’s studies at the League were briefly interrupted by his service in World War I in 1918. After his return, he continued taking classes until around 1922, when he moved to Woodstock, New York. Among the many artists in the Woodstock community was George Bellows. Bellows was renowned for his dramatic images of boxers in the ring, and was undertaking new color experiments in his painting. Blanch recalled Bellows introducing him to Hardesty Maratta’s color theory, which paired each color with a musical note. Bellows would “decide on a color theme and would pull out this drawer and he would only use the colors within this drawer. It was very complex and I didn’t quite understand it.”
Although Blanch did not embrace Maratta’s color theories, the subjects of some of his paintings in the late twenties and early thirties suggest a connection to ashcan artists such as Bellows and Henri. He was painting “trees, mountains, girls, still-lifes, hunters, things like that.” Around this time, he accompanied Reginald Marsh on a trip to Scranton, Pennsylvania. While Marsh focused on painting the Pennsylvania coal miners, Blanch was interested in the industrial landscape. At the center of his painting Scranton is a large two-building factory rendered in cubic blocks and rectangles. The grimy foreground is barren except for mounds of coal and a small group of toy-sized workers who have completed their shift and are quietly leaving the facility. The only human presence in the scene, the workers, are departing, depopulating this industrial wasteland, leaving only smokestacks spitting fumes across the hillside town in the distance. In contrast to painters such as Marsh and Philip Evergood, who conveyed social messages through the cultural and political interactions of their protagonists, Blanch found the landscape alone expressive and symbolic.

Blanch had his first solo exhibitions at Dudensing Gallery in New York in 1926 and 1929. Following the success of his first solo show, with the financial support of Juliana Force, an assistant to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, he went to live in Paris for a few months in 1927. In Europe he was surrounded by a community of expatriate artists from New York City and Woodstock, including Stuart Davis, Niles Spencer and Emil Ganso. He also developed new friendships with Isamu Noguchi and Jules Pascin, whom he saw frequently. He returned to Woodstock with the sense that he had created some of his best work during that winter.

Blanch received his next opportunity to travel in 1931, a teaching position at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. He had never been out West and was eager to see the Sierra mountain ranges and the desert. He received a warm reception. Blanch was assigned a large class of students and the school hosted a formal dinner to honor him alongside Hans Hofmann, who had just emigrated to American and was teaching at the University of California. At the California School of Fine Arts, Blanch also met Diego Rivera, who was working on the mural The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City. Blanch had a studio right next door to Rivera’s and became friends with him and Frida Kahlo. Since Rivera did not speak much English, Blanch became Rivera’s social security. He recalled, “I was always making dates for him. He was a fabulous, fabulous person, a fabulous liar, and with a fabulous imagination.” One of Blanch’s portraits from this period, Seated Girl, 1931, shows Rivera’s influence in the rendering of the figure, which is simultaneously solid, weighty, curvaceous, and soft. Blanch’s subject is dressed nicely, but plainly, in a sheer blouse and simple skirt, quite a contrast to Rivera’s laborers. Although she wears a working woman’s clothes and has toned forearms and strong hands, the young woman appears in a moment of motionless contemplation. The sparse architectural elements in the scene emphasize the painting’s psychological focus. A stairway in the background leads to an open doorway that is placed precisely at the girl’s head level, offering the viewer entrance into her mysterious thoughts.

In 1933, Blanch left San Francisco to travel in Europe for a year with the support of a Guggenheim fellowship. He did not stay abroad long, however, because the economic situation was deteriorating and many American expatriates had decided to come home. He returned to New York, where he began teaching at the Art Students League, and enrolled in the WPA Federal Art Project. Blanch, for the most part, spoke highly of the government-sponsored art programs. He noted that they “had a positive effect on the artist and his relationship with the public…Somehow we gained a respect for ourselves, we were considered as people, we were considered as a profession…” His mural for the Fredonia post office, The Harvest, portrayed popular themes of cultivation, fertility and abundance, employed in Depression-era murals as an uplifting public message. In contrast to many artists who struggled during the thirties, Blanch sustained his career through government commissions, grants and multiple teaching appointments.

In the late thirties and early forties, Blanch taught at the Colorado Springs Fine Art Center and spent his winters as a guest instructor in Key West, Florida. In Colorado Springs, he enjoyed teaching alongside printmaker Adolph Dehn and was impressed with the community-oriented approach of the school, which housed teachers and students in the same building. Key West also offered a vibrant artistic community. Tennessee Williams described the Florida art scene during these years in his essay “Homage to Key West.” It was “a mecca for artists,” where Williams met “the poet Elizabeth Bishop and artist Grant Wood…and Arnold Blanch and his wife.” Williams was referring to Blanch’s second wife, Doris Lee, a successful Regionalist painter, whom Blanch married in 1939.

In 1947, The Art Students League reopened its summer school in Woodstock and Blanch joined the faculty. During the war, the artistic community had dwindled and he was eager to help attract a new generation of artists. In 1963 he remarked that the school “has been of great interest to me, the development of it, the bringing of young people to Woodstock since that time.” One of those young artists was Bruce Dorfman, who studied with Blanch in 1951-52 and taught alongside him from 1964 until Blanch’s death in 1968. They shared the same studio, with Arnold teaching in the mornings and Bruce in the afternoons. Woodstock’s status as an influential art center was further reinforced by the presence of the Abstract Expressionists, including Philip Guston, Adolph Gottlieb, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Isamu Noguchi, and David Smith, who regularly attended the annual Woodstock Art Conferences held in the late forties and early fifties.

Blanch responded to the influences of Abstract Expressionism and surrealism in his works of the 1950s. His fantastical 1955 landscape, Another Spring, which is part of the Art Students League’s collection, captures the feeling of exuberance brought on by the first blossoms of the season. Here, Blanch transforms trees into biomorphic shapes floating across mint and turquoise color fields. Admirably, rather than remaining tied to his familiar and successful realist style, in his late paintings, Blanch pushed new boundaries. In accordance with his first experiences with art, his lyrical abstractions continued to propel the imagination on great journeys.

Sources:
Oral history interview with Arnold Blanch, Nov. 1964, collection of Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
Bruce Dorfman, *Flyte 1*, 2013, combined media, 14 x 9 inches
Bruce Dorfman Artist and Influence
Celebrating 50 Years of Teaching at the Art Students League

Interview, 1985

Renée Lerner: When did you begin to teach abstract art?

Bruce Dorfman: As long as I've been teaching art. I don't make that distinction. I simply cannot involve myself with misrepresentations with respect to art. Art is abstraction and, to the extent that it acknowledges that, it is more realistic. To the extent that it fails to acknowledge that and attempts to represent some concrete way, to that extent, it is unrealistic and misrepresents. I don't like to structure anything around the teaching of some kind of art.

Beauty seems to be an important ingredient in your paintings. Could you talk about that a bit—its meaning for you?

There are certain qualities and characteristics that strike me very strongly and are very appealing to me. There are qualities or characteristics that establish themselves in relation to one another, and they are very important to me. And, ordinarily, in the course of a day one sees these things, or I see these things—perhaps. If I'm fortunate, I get glimpses of these things, and, generally, in the context of a great deal of clutter and other things. So, I suppose what I like to do with my work is to isolate those things which I need to see and combine them so that they are not in the context of things which I would prefer not to see. I paint out of preference rather than out of rejection.

And you want your paintings to be beautiful.

Oh! Oh! I want my paintings to be beautiful. I am a big, great, deep believer in beauty, as I understand it. I am very, very much concerned with my work being an affirmation of that. In terms of my own work, I have no interest in an art of rejection, or alienation, or denial, or rebellion, or anything of that sort. I have no interest in it at all. I have, at times, particularly during my teen years, attempted that kind of thing because it was de rigueur. I was consistently failing with that kind of thing—just always ridiculous. And, if I need to see ugliness, it's easy enough.

What have been the essential changes in your work over the past 20 years [1965–85]?

I think the work has become increasingly more direct. I think it continues to be more clear as to what it has to do with. Perhaps it holds peripheral issues, issues which may be important, but less important—to the side. I think that more and more it defines itself. It is less involved with existing general definitions of art as I'm aware of, both before and during the time that the work is being created. It is more concerned with defining itself.

Could you talk about the changes in practical terms with regard to the materials you are using? How are you more direct and clear?

I like the idea of confluences and conjuration and bringing together disparate, non-congruent elements. More and more expressions of that are finding their way into my work through different kinds of materials. One of the big problems with that is that always is maintaining directness, because you bring the potential for greater and greater indirectness into the work. It is very, very easy to succumb to the possibility of overload when you start combining all kinds of things into the work. Certainly, the possibility for extended displays of cleverness, tastefulness, big ideas and overstatement are always present. You can play all kinds of games with combinations of things and really lose track.

So what materials have you introduced?

Well, in addition to paint and canvas which always seem to be present, there are all kinds of found stuff: old parts of machines, engine gaskets and water-hose outlets, crushed institutional tomato cans and that kind of stuff. Just the kinds of things that I think one would not expect to see in paintings such as these. They are really things that have been horrendously outcast. They are rotten, stinking things. You know, the stuff you're almost afraid to bring into the studio because of possible contamination. I find these things and I use them.

How do these found materials relate to your concept of beauty?

I think that some of these discarded things are beautiful in their own right. Sometimes, when they can be brought into the scheme of things without forcing them, they lend themselves very well. By the way, I know there are some people who use discarded things; and for them, I've heard some people express it has something to do with some aspect of society; taking the residue of society and utilizing it that way as some sort of found thing, to rediscover the thing. I have no interest in any such statement at all. I find an old piece of garbage and I use it. I use it for its potential beauty. I am not interested in making a statement about society at all, absolutely not. I have no interest in that. I hope that is never attributed to the work. I have no interest in making comments on society.

How would you describe a successful work?

Of my work?

Yes.

Success to me. I think success takes place on several levels. To sum up, success to me is tied in very, very closely to gaining a clear expression in the most direct way that I possibly can. Initially, I find myself confronted by a certain kind of sensation which I can then contemplate for sustained lengths of time, and which I will not grow tired of. The work must possess a very high degree of clarity. It has to be clear in all of the aspects on which it can be seen. This means that every square inch of the painting is tended to. Nothing can be missed, if possible. If something has been missed then, to that extent, it is unsuccessful. Usually,
Tell me what your major accomplishments as a painter have been.

The maintenance of my independence. I think that is the most important thing to me.

How did you accomplish that?

Though there were some digressions, for the most part, I paid attention to the things that were most important to me. I have needed that, demanded that, and managed it finally. I think my work looks like my work. It’s mine! It’s not mistaken in some way: “Oh! That looks like ____ ; no, that is Bruce Dorfman, period.”

How would you describe your special teaching techniques?

I see my job as trying to get at and deal with those issues and feelings which are a particular concern to the particular person and nobody else. Then I try to find ways that the individual can best get those concerns expressed and become proficient—and conceptually so—that clarity can be gained. I don’t know what more any artist or so-called student can do. If I can be helpful with that, then I’m doing my job.

What do you do when you see a student’s canvas?

I try to see what it’s about, to see what its concerns are. Hopefully, to see more than one piece of work in order to gain that information. It’s sometimes clearer to read from what’s in front of me than from what the student is saying, because, generally, the student is self-denigrating. I watch what is going on in the painting to see what the student seems to be attempting to do. Then I harp on that. I find that, because of the horrors of art school, there isn’t much conditioning in that direction. Almost each time the student works, there has got to be a close examination of what the particular problems are—that are pertinent as far as that student and that student’s art is concerned with—and not an involvement with an external standard that existed before that particular student existed. I am not involved with external standards at all. 😊

© Bruce Dorfman, Renée Lerner 1985
I took painting classes with Bruce Dorfman at the Art Center of Northern New Jersey in New Milford from 1983–85. During that time, I also attended his collage class at the New School for Social Research in New York where I was introduced to a technique that ultimately led me to my present world of mixed media. In 1983 I was looking for a teacher whose artistic sensibilities were similar to mine. I was drawn, in particular, to Bruce’s beautiful color field paintings. When I entered his class at the Center, I found an instructor who was focused on finding out what I was looking to express and in helping me get there.

In addition to learning about clarity and attention to detail, I found a teacher who often had incredible insights into my work, which I found surprising and fascinating. With Bruce’s encouragement, I came to respect myself as a student and an artist, something of substantial value because I was truly questioning my abilities and whether or not to continue to strive to do art.

During this period, I was invited to join a private critique session where several artists brought completed or almost completed works for discussion. There I learned to view and respect other artists’ work. The critique included offering possible alternatives to help advance the work. Most importantly, I learned to accept criticism from my peers, and all of this under Bruce’s tutelage.

I continue to work at my art and mainly credit Bruce Dorfman for this. I owe him a great deal for his positive response to my work. His continued support has sustained both my confidence in and focus on doing art these many years. I am a most fortunate person to have had Bruce Dorfman as a teacher and to have him as a friend.

From top, by Renée Lerner: Silver on Yellow, mixed media on board, 2013, 18 x 18 in.; Red, 2013, mixed media on board, 32 x 32 in.
By the time I arrived at the Art Students League, Bruce Dorfman had been teaching here for a solid two decades, as long as I had been alive. Back then, the League was a vibrant place to stake out one’s artistic turf. Debates that began in the cafeteria over things like the restoration of the Sistine Chapel would occasionally devolve into blows in the bar around the corner.

My time in Bruce’s class was fairly fleeting, yet meaningful, and gleanings from our conversations persist. Our first meeting remains vivid. I was struggling with a painting to the point of desperation when he quietly appeared and pulled up a stool. I felt supremely invested in that piece on the easel, sensing that it had something, though I was intensely frustrated in my efforts to pull it all together. I moaned about it not working, lamented over the problems I couldn’t resolve; with each word my escalating distress becoming more palpable.

Bruce asked something like, “What about this piece is working for you?” Once I responded, his simple counsel was, “Take it from there. Start with what works, and try moving out from there.”

It had been ingrained in me that sacrificing my small or partial successes could best serve the whole. At first, I was loath to accept that a solution could be arrived at from his different approach, but Bruce’s gentle demeanor convinced me to try. His attitude conveyed things I had rarely, if ever, encountered up until then. It surprised me to detect respect for my artistic integrity, intent and individuality. With few words and zero coddling, patronizing or judging, he provided a kind of heartening reassurance I’d never known. This immediately dialed back the turmoil so I could proceed and, ultimately, succeed. I still consider that a defining moment and that painting, a pivotal piece.

That incident encapsulates my coming to understand that the art itself, as well as an artistic life, could be full of passion, intensity and excitement without the anguished drama. Building on the foundation of strengths, starting with what works and advancing from there, proved to be a way to engage in the immense challenges of art and of life with equanimity, clarity and hope. I remain grateful for the important lesson.

It’s fitting to celebrate Bruce Dorfman’s fifty years at the League as a golden anniversary, for gold is a noble metal, an element of weight, value and luster. What could better describe what he has given and continues to give his students and this fine institution?
Connecting with someone who makes a real impact on the quality of your art career is rare. It’s even rarer to find a person with the exceptional generosity to share his intellectual concepts for the benefit of your art-making. Bruce Dorfman is a person who changed the direction of my art from the earliest stages of our acquaintance.

When I first walked into Bruce’s class in the late 1970s, I was struck by two impressions: the startling smell of paint and myriad easels tightly packed next to each other. Understanding the popularity of this instructor, I wondered if there would be room for me, but Bruce never failed to give each student a critique that spoke directly to his or her individuality and sensibility. He has the intellectual capacity to find a person’s vision and nourish it into reality.

For me, this meant that the drawn line, which I so cherished, would take a new course. Not too long into the semester, Bruce encouraged me to take the painted line off the two-dimensional picture plane and bring it into real space. I have been on a mission ever since, working in bent wood to express the “line in space” in ways that speak of discovery and creativity.

Bruce always says that discovery is a gift—recognize and use it. He also believes that we as artists are creating a new language which is not immediately understood: we must be true to a concept and pursue it in order for this language to be comprehended.

Bruce has a great passion for work and teaching. During his fifty-year tenure at the League, Bruce has touched the lives of hundreds of artists and, in doing so, has made the world a more beautiful place to live. I am honored to be one of his students and to call him my mentor.

From top, by Susan Manspeizer: Phoenix, 2013, bent wood, paint, 34 x 36 x 17 in.; 604 Conversations, bent wood, plexiglass, 42 x 29 x 18 in. Photographer: Sal Cordaro
After spending several decades as an art director and producer of television commercials, I decided to return to painting, something I could only do on weekends or vacation. The Art Students League was where I decided to study once again.

My association with the League actually began in 1940. I had recently graduated from high school and was awarded a one-semester scholarship to study in a class of my choosing. After a couple of missteps, I was fortunate to be accepted in a class taught by Reginald Marsh, whose work I knew from his weekly drawings in The New Yorker.

Fast forward to approximately 1975. The League gave me a pass to visit classes in session. I knew very little of the classes or the instructors. I shall never forget the impression I had upon visiting Bruce Dorfman’s class. The atmosphere was buzzing with activity. Dorfman was teaching that day. Without being too obvious and while trying to listen to some of his critique, I viewed some of the work being done and was struck by the diversity and originality of the artists.

I applied to study in Bruce Dorfman’s class and was accepted. I learned many things from Dorfman about my work and marveled at his ability not only to read a painting or describe another way to open up a painting, but also to cite possibilities and strengths and hone in on what was not fully resolved. Many topics were discussed, including the importance of finding one’s own path, being original and taking risks.

Dorfman was never at a loss for the exact term when expressing the mysterious process that helps create a work of art. He was also completely honest applauding a work that he considered successful or just the opposite when the work turned out a mess. As I think back, I believe I learned more from the latter.

After leaving Bruce Dorfman’s class, I worked in my studio and did some teaching. His voice resonates to this day.

Lawrence Berger

After bringing my children to camp one summer many years ago in the 1970s, I headed to Woodstock to take classes at the League. I was thrilled to find a young instructor there whose ideas coincided with my own ideology. Bruce was interested in materiality and experimentation and pushing boundaries in art. I enjoyed his enthusiasm and open mindedness. Many years later we showed at some of the same galleries together.

Fifty years? Unbelievable. Here’s to the next fifty and to your wonderful work, Bruce.

Images by Joan Giordano
Right: Who Owns the News, newspapers, corrugated paper, Japanese paper, paint, encaustic, 72 x 48 in.
Below: Printed Matter, international newspapers, mixed papers, corrugated cardboard, paint, graphite, wax, 40 x 30 in.
I studied with Bruce in Woodstock during the heady summer of 1969 and continued the following winter in a private workshop with a few other artists. I’m not good in class. I barely made it through high school and Bruce picked up on that and gave me a kind of freedom since I was what would be considered an outsider.

He took me to see the exhibition, *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940–1970*, at the Met. This was my first encounter with contemporary art and it changed my life forever. I think he was very excited as he knew it would blow my mind and send me on my way. One thing he said to me that has stuck to this day on multiple levels was, “You can never go home.”

We lost track of each other for a long time and then, about twenty years ago, ran into each other at the Rhinecliff train station heading for New York and have remained close friends ever since.
Frank O’Cain

The short time I spent in Bruce Dorfman’s class at the Art Students League back in the 1970s has influenced my entire career as a creator. By studying Dorfman’s work, I realized my need to understand color; how it can be used as a development of light, a tool to move volumes and a statement that becomes the content of the piece. Color was primary. The muted tones—the effect they had on me—brought me to places I am sure may not have been his intent. It did not matter, for the effect allowed me to understand that a surface without an object can be felt on levels that the eye can see, and the mind can perceive an endless entry into a world yet to be discovered. Dorfman always stressed the need to know one’s space, build a sound craft and understand one’s direction. He was always ready to enlighten you and help you to resolve your aim. He would often give us advice on how to conduct ourselves in the “art selling” world and how best to survive.

The lessons of how and why and the high principles students inherit from Dorfman as a creator are always alive within me.

Frank O’Cain, Past in Motion, 2007, oil and wax on canvas, 50 x 50 inches; From the series, Songs My Ancestors Sang
One year during his morning class, Bruce Dorfman gave a series of twice-monthly talks in Studio 16. Students from both Dorfman classes were welcome. At approximately 11 a.m., the class would step away from their work and gather their chairs around to listen.

The thing about the Dorfman morning talks was that one could never quite tell from the title what the talk was going to be about. Some of the more humorous and mysterious titles were: “Throw Out the Sofa,” “The Mentor as Psychopath,” “Art and Ice Cream” and “Peanut Butter.” Other potentially more discernable titles included: “Preconception and Conception,” “The Risk of Identity,” “The Virtues of Judgment” and “Performance Anxiety.”

Always engaging and ever enlightening during these talks, Bruce generously shared his experiences, philosophies and beliefs about Art, life, artists and art-making. Though the titles may not have made sense or did not seem connected at the time, he always found a way to bring them back to Art with a capital “A.” For example, “Throw Out the Sofa” was about making a commitment to being an artist no matter your circumstances or means. He would say that real artists would always find a way and that Art could be made on a folding table. “Art as Climactic Event” was about how Art, when it truly is that, is undeniable. There’s no such thing as bad art or good art—something is either Art or it’s not.

The concepts expressed in the Dorfman talks were not always easy to grasp, especially on a single listening. But there was no need for concern as these concepts were generously expressed and discussed with students individually during the regular class sessions.

Ideas from those talks resonate to the present day in my work with my own students. I often relate the distinction between having a concept and being attached to its outcome. Oftentimes one’s preconception doesn’t allow the actual “seeing” of work in its present state. From “The Risk of Identity” talk, I still contemplate how the choices and preferences one makes in the use of counterpoint risk it all as they assert one’s individuality and distinctiveness. Art, at least as it is understood in today’s world, isn’t possible without counterpoint.

Bruce Dorfman’s ability to clearly articulate both his life as an artist and the ideas that were so important to him, and his willingness to discuss them at length with his students, made Studio 16 a very rich and privileged place to be.
A Not-So-Impossible Dream
Michael Colonna

I was born in Puglia, Italy on the Adriatic Sea. When I was twelve years old, my parents took me to the United States where we settled in Brooklyn. At school, I loved art and athletics. In my senior year at James Madison High School, I was undecided about whether to choose art or sports. I chose sports in order to travel and support myself.

After school, I played professional soccer in Bologna for two years. The team traveled every three days and, wherever we went, I admired art. When Bologna traded me to a club in Venice, I had to start all over again and made new friends in a beautiful city. I lived in the Belvedere Hotel at the end of the Grand Canal. The following year, I played for a team called Aquila located on the Gran Sasso mountain where I found myself surrounded by 99 churches, 99 fountains, and 99 piazzas. After my soccer experiences, I decided to come back to the United States and started working in a few restaurants that made me feel as if I had never left Italy.

When my son Alex was born, I decided to open my own business, Picasso Café on Bleecker Street. In the beginning when business was slow, my family and I decided to put in a wood burning oven. My father built the oven and I became the pizza chef while my sister served as my assistant, waitress and manager; my mother got up early in the morning to bake focaccia bread.

In 1995 the Picasso estate filed a lawsuit against me in federal court based on my usage of the artist’s name and his artwork for the décor of the restaurant. I was on the front page of many publications—The Wall Street Journal, Le Figaro, Art News, The New Yorker, and was featured on CNN and 1010 Wins, among other broadcast outlets. Of course, I got a lot of publicity but I also had to pay my lawyer. We were in court for two years.

The food and the ambiance of our restaurant attracted a lot of famous and not-so-famous artists: Yoko Ono, Julian Schnabel, David LaChapelle and Richard Gere spoke to Claude Picasso who tried to put in a good word for me. When we came to an agreement, the Picasso estate gave me a license for using the name and I had to pay royalties, the amount of which the family did not want me to reveal.

Working seven days a week, I found art to be my impossible dream. Tobey Maguire, the actor, told me that when he became famous, he would open a restaurant with me in Los Angeles. In 2003, after my lease was up, I went to Maguire’s house in Los Angeles. Leonardo DiCaprio, who was going to be our business partner, was at a table playing cards with his friends. While I was sitting in the living room, Tobey handed me an art book and started talking about art. After that conversation, I was more convinced than ever that I didn’t have to cook for a living but could study art.

One Sunday morning, I was drawing in Starbucks on 57th Street. After I finished, I walked along the street thinking about art school possibilities. All of a sudden, I saw the beautiful entrance of the Art Students League and I wondered if I could study there. I walked inside the office to ask some questions at the window and signed up in a minute for Bob Cenedella’s class. My dream was coming true.

Today I live in Tottenville, Staten Island, on the southern tip of New York State, five minutes from New Jersey. I don’t mind if
This is a tale of star-crossed lovers saved by the Art Students League. I was twenty-four, an art-crazed girl from Brooklyn, and he was twenty-three, an art-crazed boy from the Bronx. Neither of us had much experience with art other than occasional museum visits, and we never would have met except for the magical place called the Art Students League. Our courtship was short and sweet. He was a monitor for Jean Liberté’s class and I was a new student. To me it was amazing—a whole building devoted to art; something I yearned for, to study art. For economic reasons, I always had to work and never had the time to devote to developing whatever abilities I had. John had worked in the art section of a large advertising firm and then as a conductor for New York’s MTA. I was a school secretary and substitute teacher. Nevertheless, we both continued making art on our own all our lives…and I’m still active. It was really a wonderful time. I learned and grew, and John and I fell deeply in love. We were happily married for over 62 years until his death in April 2013. I owe it all to the League—bravo and thanks.

Celebrating Our Past, Present and Future at the

The Art Students League of New York

SAVE THE DATE

October 9, 2014
Metropolitan Club, New York City

2014 Calendar: League Dates to Remember

April 20
League closed for Easter

Through May 16
The Weekly Student Concours

May 18–24
Annual Scholarship & Grant Competition

May 25
Last day of Regular Session Classes

May 26
Memorial Day (League closed)

May 26–June 1
Intersession: No Classes and Gallery is Closed; Limited Office Hours

June 2–15
Red Dot Exhibition

June 20–July 6
Merit Scholarship Exhibition

June 2–August 16
2014 Summer Session

July 4
Independence Day (League Closed)

July 10–24
Final Project Exhibition

July 31–August 16
Technical Instructor Exhibition

August 17–September 1
Intersession: No Classes and Gallery is Closed; Limited Office Hours

September 1
Labor Day (League Closed)

September 2
2014–15 Regular Session begins
Welcome—New Members in 2013

Elena Adasheva
Marie Agi
Beth Alberty
Charlie Almonte
Richard Baker
Laura Barmack
Tim Barthelmess
Tonya Bates
Natalie Becker
Andrew Bell
Bridget Benson
Emily Berleth
Linda Berti
Bonnie Bishop
Laura Bleau
Donna Bolcomb
Patricia Bouley
Paul Boyle
Mati Bracha
Cynthia Brome
Sarah Brook
Robert Buckley
Melissa Bybee
Angela Capati-Caruso
José Cardona
Devin Carrick
Aiko Cascio
Alejandra Castaneda
Kathleen Catanese
Mary Grace Concannon
Michele Cooperberg
Cecilia Cozar Castaneda
Sid Davis
Lola De Miguel
Katherine Dolgy Ludwig
Anna Dolmatovich
Anne Domenech
Simon Doucet
Antoine Dozois
Pieter Drubetskoy

Stephen Durkee
Oldyna Dynowska
Florence Eidman
Beatriz Elorza Herra
Angela Errico
Michale Estrada
Joyce Faucette Farmer
Selma Fink
Jennifer Foley
Susan Friend
Amy Frogley
Nico Fuster
Anna Fyodorova
Eleny Ginn
Richard Glance
Lawrence Glickman
Richard Goldman
Sandra Gorman
Deborah Griffin
Elisabeth Hagen
Taitu Hailu
Michael Han
Lynn Handler
Parisa Harati
Elizabeth Harper
Hripsime Harutyunyan
John Hechtlinger
Jill Hochberg
Markus Holtby
Molly Honigfeld
Jenny Hwang
Grazia Imperio
Aída Izadpanah
Sogol Jafarzadeh
Scott Jefferson
Edith Jeffrey
Victoria Jimenez
Stephen Jones
Noah Jordan
June Julian

Sun Ja Jung
Tatiana Kamorina
Su Kyung Kim
Kristine Angela Kintanar
Cheryl Klein
Pamela Koehler
Sandra Koponen
Andrea Kornbluth
Maria Kovacs
Moon Hee Lee
Taehyub Lee
Barbara Lekus
Susan Levine
Aut Kwon Lew
Phyllis Lipton
Aurelia Liwag
Mina MacFarlane
James Mann
Stephanie Markel
Gabriel Medina
Vidhi Mehrotra
Frederick Mendelsohn
Raji Menon
Karen Miller
Bruce Minson
Antonio Mirabal
Sonja Mooradian
Monica Morandi
Lori Moskovits
Donna Moskowitz
Kara Murdock
Christine Nels
Iraqas Numam
Nadine Renazile
Reynaldo Reyes
Philip Rivera
Jacques Rosas
Susan Rosen
Diane Rothschild
Dorothy Ruckdeschel
Zinilda Sarete-Shanahan
Poonam Sawhney
Talia Schenkel
Hillard Schneider
Bernadette Schweihoff
Donald Grady Seary
Sarah Sears
Mary Ann Sekely
Carol Lee Shahid
Elizabeth Sheehan
Michelle Smith
Lola Stanton
Eric Strasberg
Christine Su
Maria Sultan
Fortuna Szpiro
Shakena Thornton
Michael Timmons
Genevieve Tissot Fuellmann
Rumena Turkedjiev
Anthony Viola
Lois Wertheimer
Anne Windhorst Simmons
Martha Wood
Seriti Yamini
Alejandra Yancey
Kara Yeargans
Lisa Yeisley
Maria Zavorokhina
Susan Zwirn

Stay in E-Touch

If you’ve enjoyed Lines, you’ll want to keep up with League members and events online by visiting our website, www.theartstudentsleague.org.
We’ve added a new Members page with key dates and an In Memoriam section.

From the League’s website you can:
• Join our E-mail list
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