Summer 2023 galleryand.studio Vol. 4, No.3

Gallery&Studio

arts journal

Ai, Guidlines and Rules in a New World

There is a lot going on without much fanfare that may affect artists and the art world in general. The continued juggernautic (sic) development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being reported on by the media, but there is not a lot being done in the United States, regarding guidelines and rules. Japan created guidelines in 2019, China followed in 2021 and Canada is in its 3rd reading of a bill in parliament. Even Brazil has a draft bill in their Senate. The European Union (EU) is still working on their EU AI Act, which just recently added a last-minute amendment to require AI companies to disclose the data sets that their AIs are trained on. This will obviously lead to lawsuits by artists, writers, coders amongst many others if the law is passed.

An opportunity to clarify "transformative fair-use" in copyright law was sidestepped recently by the US Supreme Court in the case of Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts v. Goldsmith, where the decision was based mainly on licensing issues.

It was revealed that Warhol did on occasion pay for licenses to use photographs that he utilized, but there were also several cases of copyright infringement brought against Warhol in his lifetime that were all settled out of court.

There were some harsh words between the Justices in the majority decision and dissent by Justice Kagan. The latter seemed to suggest that the majority had totally ignored the value of transformative use which could impact creativity in the future. As an artist what do you think? Do you have any experience with copyright issues? We would love to hear from you at info@galleryand.studio or at www.galleryand.studio

—The Editors

Front Cover "Betty Crocker Madonna" by May DeViney

Gallery&Studio
arts journal

PUBLISHED BY G&S Arts Journal Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
1632 First Avenue, Suite 122, New York, NY 10028 email: info@galleryand.studio
EDITOR AND PUBLISHER Jeannie McCormack FOUNDER Ed McCormack
FOUNDING MEMBER Margot Palmer-Poroner OPERATIONS Marina Hadley EDITOR Luce Skrabanek
SPECIAL ADVISORS Dorothy Beckett Michelina Celli POETRY EDITOR Christine Graf
DESIGN AND PRODUCTION Karen Mullen DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY CONSULTANT Sébastien Aurillon
BOARD OF DIRECTORS Sébastien Aurillon, Linda Dujack, Christine Graf, Marina Hadley,
Jeannie McCormack, Carolyn Mitchell, Norman A. Ross
Gallery&Studio Arts Journal is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and is distributed free of charge in the New York City area.
To subscribe, please visit: galleryand.studio/subscribe

Table of Contentsw

30

12

23

8

4

24

14

6

A Magical Place: The Imaginary Realms of Wangechi Mutu

by Bobbie Leigh

"Yo Mama," 2003. Ink, mica flakes, acrylic, pressure-sensitive film, cut-and-pasted printed paper, and painted paper on paper, diptych, overall 59 1/8" x 85". The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection Gift, 2005. Courtesy the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles. Photo: Robert Edemeyer

Probably no other exhibition in recent years is as fascinating and mysterious as "Wangechi Mutu: Intertwined" at the New Museum in New York City. This is the only museum that is dedicated to introducing new art and new ideas by artists who have not yet received significant exposure or recognition. Mutu's major solo exhibition brings together more than 100 of her works—painting, collage, drawing, sculpture and film. The entire museum is devoted to the Kenyan-born artist's huge range of work from the 1990's to the present.

Starting with the seventh floor Sky Room, a luminous penthouse space with glass walls, surrounded by a terrace, you enter Mutu's art-inflected world and never leave it as you wander through the entire museum from floor to floor. Mutu has created a woman's world in which she explores decades-long legacies of colonialism, globalization, while evoking African folklore and cultural traditions.

In the Sky Room, *Shavasana 1* (2019), a cast-bronze sculpture of a woman's body sprawled beneath a textured palm blanket dominates the room. It is the perfect place to begin an exploration of Mutu's work. Shavasana is a death position in yoga and the sculpture was inspired by a Black woman's murder in California. We don't see the woman, just her outstretched arms, but as in so much of Mutu's work, even in death, a sense of life emerges. The dying woman has kicked off one of her high-heeled, lipstick red stilettos. As co-curator Margot Norton writes in her interview with Mutu in the show's catalog: "There is so much power in your Shavasana works. Though it is anti-monumental to have a figure lying down on the earth, it can be

"I'm interested in powerful images that strike chords embedded deep in the reservoirs of our unconscious."

extraordinary powerful."

Another equally powerful bronze sculpture is *Crocodylus* (2020), which refashions a picture of the supermodel Naomi Campbell riding a crocodile. It evokes the tradition of African folklore which often refers to hybrid beings. For Westerners, unfamiliar with the folk tales of Africa, so many of Mutu's works remind us of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where gender is fluid, nymphs and humans are transfigured and two bodies melt into a single one "seamless as water." In an article in the *NY Times* Mutu is quoted as saying: "My point really is to try to use visual art, historical language, and images and objects to flesh out a more African-centric history that predated colonization."

Mutu's *Yo Mama* is a diptych (2003), collage-based work that confronts the stereotype of Black feminine weakness. It is a tribute to Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti, the mother of the famous Afrobeat musician Fela Kuti, and a pioneering feminist who is thought to have been the first woman in Nigeria to drive a car and who fought for women's health issues. Mutu depicts her as a Biblical Eve, slinging a headless serpent across her shoulder while (yes, another high-heel) stiletto boot mutilates the snake. This diptych is an outstanding example of layered references (a snake caused the downfall of Eve). The artist has said: "I'm interested in powerful images that strike chords embedded deep in the reservoirs of our unconscious."

Mutu usually is the star of her own videos. In one shown on a broad screen, she portrays a woman balancing a heavy basket on her head as she struggles up a hill. Locusts and birds harass her but she continues, growing smaller as her burden metamorphosizes into a slithery blob as it goes over the edge of a cliff.

Mutu, who is represented in most of the major museums worldwide, is best known for her collages. There are many examples in this exhibition, all surrealist with mismatched faces and distorted images.

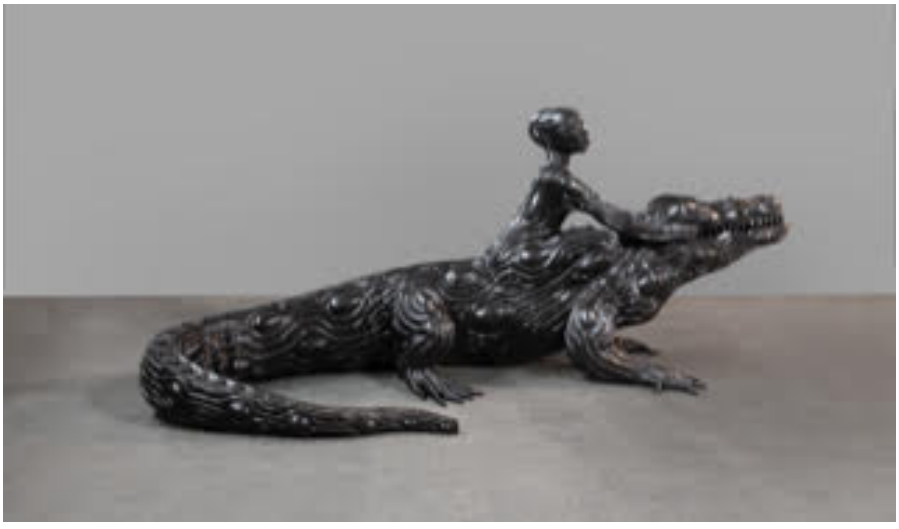
Born in Kenya in 1972, Mutu was encouraged by her parents to draw as much as possible. She went to boarding school in Wales, attended the Parsons School of Design, Cooper Union and received a master of fine arts degree from Yale in 2000. Today, she lives mostly in Nairobi but also has a studio in Brooklyn.

"Dancer," 2004. Ink, acrylic, spray paint, and collage on mylar 36" x 24". Collection of Ellen Stern, in loving memory of Jerome Stern. Courtesy of the artist.

NY Times writer Roberta Smith writes that this exhibition reveals Mutu to be "one of the best artists of her generation, using her innate versatility to demonstrate diversity as essential to life, real or imagined."

Wangechi Mutu's vast, inventive work is almost impossible to characterize. There is a grandeur and majesty in all that she does, whether glittery, glamorous, or earthy clay and wood. Mutu knows no boundaries with her imagination and investigations of violence against women and the environment. *G&S*

www.newmuseum.org



"Crocodylus," 2020. Bronze, 167" x 87" x 73". Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery

Sisters in Artistry: Anna Whelan Betts and Ethel Franklin Betts

by Mary Holahan

In William Dean Howells' 1890 novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, an entrepreneur invites another businessman to join him in founding a magazine. Asked if he plans to include illustrations, the prospective publisher answers "My dear boy!... Do I look like the sort of lunatic who would start a thing in the twilight of the nineteenth century without illustrations?" His response alludes to the popularity of illustrated publications, the outcome of new technology, especially in color printing, expanded rail and postal distribution, and widening literacy. Editors competed for artists who could create enticing images on deadline. Avid readers flocked to bookstores, libraries, and newsstands, and drove magazine subscriptions into the millions.

Anna and Ethel Betts were born in the 1870s to Philadelphia medical doctor Thomas Betts and his wife Alice Whelan. We know little about their youth until Anna and then Ethel enrolled in the art school of the city's prestigious Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA). The instruction was rigorous and conservative. Although the sisters may not have yet defined their career aims, the teaching fostered a naturalistic realism that would serve them well in illustration. Anna also studied in Paris with painter Gustave-Claude-Étienne Courtois, known for interior scenes of elegant women in fashionable dress and jewelry.

By the mid-1890s, the divergence between fine art and illustration was pronounced. One critic complained that "the reading public has suddenly become picture-mad." PAFA (The Pennyslvania Academy of the Fine Arts) insisted that illustration was not fine art and rejected an offer

Anna Whelan Betts (detail), 1899, Howard Pyle Manuscript Collection, Helen Farr Sloan Library and Archives, Delaware Art Museum

from nationally known illustrator Howard Pyle to teach the subject. But the newly-founded, more innovative Drexel Institute for Art, Science, and Industry (now Drexel University) welcomed Pyle. Anna and Ethel joined his classes there. At $12 per term (about $430 today), it's likely that Dr. and Mrs. Betts provided their daughters' tuition. By 1900, Pyle established his own tuition-free school in Wilmington, Delaware, inviting only the most promising students, including the Betts sisters. Well-grounded by their PAFA studies, they absorbed Pyle's techniques for capturing the gist of a text not just in natural actions, convincing expressions, and accurate costumes but with emotive power, too.

Ethel's mastery of bright colors, bold patterns, lively characters, and attention to nature made her a favorite of children's authors. In 1909, she illustrated *Fairy Tales from Grimm* for publishers Barse and Hopkins, who advertised

Ethel Franklin Betts (detail), 1902, Howard Pyle Manuscript Collection, Helen Farr Sloan Library and Archives, Delaware Art Museum

"handsome editions of popular classics." In this variant of Cinderella, one of many, a rich girl reduced to servitude by her abusive stepmother and stepsisters entreats the spirit of her dead mother for a dress to wear to the ball where the prince will select a wife. The magical gift is a gown and slippers of "gold and silver... splendid and glittering."

For her single full-color illustration, Ethel chose Cinderella's hurried departure from the ball, when she loses a gold slipper, afraid that the smitten prince will discover her lowly position. In her haste, the shimmering brocade fringed skirt spreads out across the steps and her veil catches the wind. Her fan and green-and-white fabric bag escape their lavender cord. Ethel would have known many Cinderella images of recent decades by artists

Ethel Franklin Betts (1877–1959). "She ran away so quickly that he could not overtake her," c. 1909, for "Cinderella," in Fairy Tales from Grimm (New York: Barse and Hopkins, 1909). Edited with an introduction by Hamilton W. Mabie. Oil on canvas. 25" x 18½." Delaware Art Museum, Gayle and Alene Endowment Fund, 1989

who presented Cinderella in multi-tiered, ribbons-and-lace finery, with ornate hair styles, set amid royal trappings. Ethel's portrayal is modest in comparison. Symmetrical plants and architecture offer minimal distraction. Cinderella's natural silhouette, free-flowing hair, and simple jewelry may have had its own fashion appeal for American girls and the mothers who read to them. Her dark eyes are the picture's emotional focus, as she glances around fearfully, on the lookout for the determined prince. Vicarious experience of her dangerous adventure may have beguiled young imaginations more than opulent surroundings.

Anna's imagery for books and magazines often featured historic costumes. *Lady of the 1870s* is a study for an unpublished illustration for "The Whims of Fashion" in the April 1917 issue of *The Century Magazine*. Fashion journalist Roger Boutet de Monvel's humorous essay recounts "strange..and surprising" past styles of dress. Anna's nine final published illustrations encompass several centuries. She—like Boutet de Monvel—probably looked through prints, photographic albums, and the fashion pages of old magazines to create this image.

The mid-19th-century invention of synthetic dyes popularized vibrant colors. The young woman's teal shawl (covering a hint of low, "princess" bustle), deep green parasol, and yellow-and-red hat enliven the black, white, and gray of her costume. Glowing red tones draw attention to her face. Stripes and buttons emphasize the vertical line of her "cuirass" bodice, the tight-fitting jacket ending in a point below the waist that was advertised as "the natural form" in the mid-1870s. Skirts narrowed during the decade but often kept their fringes and ruffles. The compact straw hat with its black ribbons, tilted fashionably forward, recalls one commentator's remark that "bonnets can find but very little place upon the head." Throughout the image, Anna's handling of paint is fluid and graceful. The shawl's colors range from deep blues and greens to almost white; its dark and light edges are continuous, calligraphic brushstrokes. Anna captures a stylish young woman's spirit in the fingers twirling around her parasol, mid-step as her alert blue eyes dart to the side.

Ethel limited her commercial art after her marriage in 1909, though she produced several *House and Garden* covers and continued to exhibit her work. She and Anna both won bronze medals at the art exhibition of the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition in San Francisco.

Anna worked steadily into the mid-1920s, when failing eyesight ended her career. She taught art at a boys' school in Pennsylvania until her retirement in the 1940s, when she re-joined Ethel in Philadelphia. Anna died in February 1959, followed by Ethel six months later. They are buried side by side in their native city. *G&S*

Anna Whelan Betts (1873-1959). "Lady of the 1870s," study for "The Whims of Fashion," by Roger Boutet de Monvel, in The Century Magazine, April 1917. Oil on board. 23¼" x 15¼." Delaware Art Museum, Gift of Phyllis and Norman Aerenson, 2021

It's a brilliant, whacked-out watercolor Sunday in July and the conga drums that are the pulsebeat of Central Park are coming in loud and clear over the swaying treetops, chanting, "Western Civilization is crumbling, Western Civilization is crumbling..."

Two Chinese Buddhist monks are crossing the bicycle path in their stately grey robes just as a muscular black man in a red tank top and leather shorts comes peddling by on a nine-foot-high unicycle.

The spectacle freaks the two monks out. They stop right there in the middle of the bicycle path, gesticulating with bemused excitement. Hardly anyone besides the two Chinese monks pays much attention to the man on the unicycle, though his skill equals that of a circus performer. New Yorkers have come to regard the most surreal spectacles as commonplace on a Sunday in Central Park. Indeed, it often seems that every eccentric exhibitionist in the city is out vying in a marathon pastoral freakarama...

Almost as soon as the unicyclist is out of sight, another man passes, leading a caravan comprised of several toy wagons, a German Shepherd, two Siamese cats, and a baby on a tricycle, all pulled by a single rope. Keeping the caravan together is a formidable task, but somehow to do so seems very important to this man. Every couple of steps he must stop to adjust something. The dog is barking, the cats meowing, the baby starts bawling. The caravan master, a middle-aged man in a powder blue golf shirt and Air Force sunglasses, is not distracted by the occasional passers-by who stop to watch his strange procession. He apparently has a mission and a destination; most of the strollers in the park pay little attention as he goes on his way...

Then, along comes a pale young man in Bermuda shorts on roller skates, his spindly knock-kneed legs wobbling as he goes. This young man is wearing the most incredible headgear: a pagoda-shaped umbrella suspended like a shot-off pith-helmet several inches above his head on the end of one of those pole-beanies that used to have a propeller on top completed by oversized rose-colored glasses. This curious young man looks like a giant insect in a low budget Japanese horror film or perhaps the first primitive airplane ever attempted by some mad inventor. But there is something almost heroic about the getup and the deadpan manner in which the pale young man inhabits it that makes him look as though he is about to set out on some great adventure. It would seem only fitting for a military band to be playing as this comic heroic figure passes; there should be a reviewing stand instead of a hotdog stand over there, and confetti rather than frisbees whirling in the air... Somehow no one seems to notice.

On some of these surreal Sundays in the Park, New York seems a city of compulsive fixations as its citizens take their weekend respite from reality—so elaborate seems the care lavished on every costume and act. Take, for example, the former prize fighter known around the East Village as Big Brown, who often shows up in the park all done up as an African King... Not the kind of African king you might see in *Newsweek* wearing a three-piece suit from J. Press, steel rimmed spectacles and spats—but the real downhome-style African monarch you might see in some painting by the French primitive painter Rousseau—the kind who brandishes a spear with much pomp and circumstance, and wears a leopard skin loincloth and regal ceremonial robes... Even in a blasé seen-it-all city like New York, Big Brown is someone it is almost impossible to ignore. He cuts a royal figure prowling the park in his proud finery or standing before a large outdoor birdcage in the zoo brandishing his ceremonial tree branch about his head and chanting an African song of his own invention as the exotic rainbow birds shriek and freak in a fine feathered frenzy as though he is playing their very own tune.

Despite the crazy blatancy of the 1970's bright summer Sundays such as this, there are some sun-flecked slow motion parts of the park that put you right in the middle of a French Impressionist painting: squint your eyes and the Sunday strollers in sports clothes become the formal pointillist promenaders of Seurat strolling under parasols, in cravats, morning coats, bustles and bonnets through some Parisian park of the past... There are parts where people are picnicking and watching sailboats on the shimmering waters of the pond; out of the way James Fenimore Cooper paths where city kids in the microcosmic blade-of-glass world of the imagination are exploring the great outdoors and shady paths where lovers stroll while

others live passionate *Splendor in The Grass* scenes; little necking-dramas are enacted under Eden-trees; old people sitting on Simon & Garfunkel benches, transistors blaring fragments of beer advertising, barking fiery Irish setters flashing in the sunlight, the slow slap, slap, slap of oars on the lake, the creak of rowboats, someone calling a child and the tinkle of a Good Humor bell blending with the bastard *Malagueña* of a Spanish guitar strummed softly somewhere distant and pulsebeat congas, bongos counterpointing the clunking cacophony of a cooking Trinidadian steel band; the roar of a caged lion yawning into the languor of the day... a balloon escapes high above the treetops...

There is a path around 77th street or thereabouts on the east side of the Park that will take you past the boathouse, the refreshment stand and past the public lavatories and back into the jarring rhythms of the present. For if you follow it all the way it empties into a heavily populated public plaza teeming with energies peculiar to this age—although some equivalent must certainly have existed in Babylon or Ancient Rome. The spacious concrete plaza is bordered on one side by an outdoor café where some sip Sangria and watch the parade. On the other side is the lake, and between them is a large fountain in the bastardized architectural style that one often sees depicted in the Dufy-blue murals that grace the walls of some of the classier pizza parlors around town: two large bowls, piled like take-out pizzas one atop the other, with constantly recycled water dribbling down, topped by a pigeon splotched angel of green brass.

Absent here is the slow-motion spaciousness that exists in more pastoral parts of the park. Swarming with stoned-out humanity, Bethesda Fountain is one of those cross-roads like Times Square or 8th Street in the Village on a Saturday night, where all factions of freakdom meet. It seems to have grown out of the first tribal gatherings of the hippies in the mid-Sixties; the be-ins, the smoke-ins, the freak-ins, the fuck-ins; they would pour into the plaza around Bethesda Fountain after conducting their tribal rites in the nearby Sheep Meadow... There was this exhilarating sense of barbaric spectacle about the whole scene. Costumes had replaced clothing on every psychedelicized body whose metabolism boasted that affinity for fantasy which was the hip new knowledge of the day. People would dress up like Diana the Huntress or Mick Jagger and head for the Park to be part of the tribe that was becoming a weekly event. Whether drugs had truly expanded the mass consciousness or merely opened up darker avenues of the soul was not something to consider in a pre-Manson era. They would pour into the park every Sunday from all the surrounding boroughs of Manhattan, seeking friendship, a sense of community, sex, drugs, or some miraculous combination of them all...

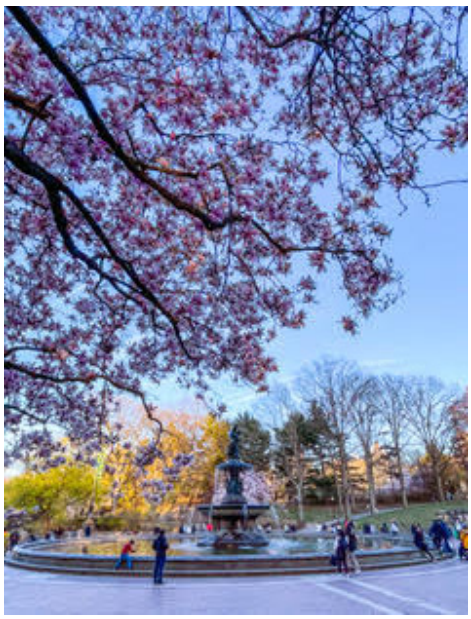
By the Seventies, the Flower Children had all but vanished and now Prole-Chic casualties of Woodstock's failed revolution remained around the fountain.

Sometimes there were sudden impromptu water wars around the fountain. Some people get carried with such sport and climb into one of the big pizza-bowls and start splashing around in the water. The uptight killjoy cops are roundly booed and hissed when they move in to order the drenched revelers out; but it rarely comes down to a confrontation, because even the cops, according to some of the kids, seem in a slightly more tolerant humor on a sunny Sunday in the park... Who really wants to bother arresting some stoned-out nut in rolled up jeans who merely feels like doing a bellywhomp into the shallow waters of Bethesda fountain?—or more awkward yet, some sixteen-year-old nymphet who has stripped down to bikini panties and a training bra and is dancing like a Botticelli Venus in one of the municipal fountain bowls?

Who would want to have to deal with this crazy glitter queen who calls himself Fantasia, who has climbed almost to the very top of the fountain and is now sitting astride the angel's wings addressing the crowd. He's wearing sparkles of glitter in his kinky Orphan Annie mop of hair and swaying back and forth with daredevil ease up there, purposely pretending to lose his balance to tease the crowd of laughing kids making the gesture of loco in the plaza below. Everyone is digging Fantasia because in a world full of crazies he is a super crazy who really has his insanity together. Fantasia is swaying up there making this great put-on speech about how his poor old mama got busted on a dope dealing charge and he needs to raise the bread to bail her out. Bombarded with coins from below he catches them all and the crowd cheers wildly.

"How much more am I bid if I climb all the way to the top and sit on the angel's face?" he shouts down.

Every once in a while, those custodians of Western Civilization, the police, must interrupt their talk of retirement pensions and impending lay-offs and walk down into the plaza to make sure that the fountain is still there. The natives seem to be getting more restless every time they appear, but they always go away again, leaving anarchy to joyously prevail. And the drums, the pulsebeat drums, go on chanting their message through the brilliant trees. *G&S*



Bethesda fountain, Central Park, 2023
Photograph by Smiljana Peros

Arthur French III — "Third's World"

by Roger Parris

Arthur French III's first play, "Teens Today," written when he was a teenager over thirty years ago, won the Annual Young Playwright's Festival Award at the American Community Theater, founded by the legendary Maxville Glanville. It was an auspicious beginning for a career as a playwright. His plays have also been produced at the Samuel French One Act Play Festival and the Strawberry One Act Play Festival.

A co-founder of the Martha J. Thomas Playwriting Workshop and founder and facilitator of the Fusion Gumbo Writer's Workshop, Arthur is also committed to teaching and mentoring playwrights. His influence has been phenomenal. I first worked with Arthur in "Third's World," a One-Act Play Festival showcasing his plays. The festival was produced by his father who also directed the play "Workday," that I performed in. I found Arthur to be such a generous and open playwright. Watching how he worked with the different casts and personalities was a lesson in collaboration and teamwork. The following quotes are a testament to the impact he has had on other writers and actors:

Lisa McCree, actress and playwright: "I have found him to be extremely talented and a prolific writer who does not hesitate to take a risk in a creative way. His stories are rich and engaging. Being part of Fusion Gumbo has been an honor being in the company of professional writers who truly take their work to heart, all in the space Arthur created."

Fernando Mañon, playwright and poet: "Arthur French III has been an enthusiastic and prolific writer who has always given me the impetus to write plays about subjects that may be seen as too odd or controversial for the stage. The courage he exudes to bare his hurt, feelings and thoughts have provided me with the opportunity to do the same and put them on the page. His flair for writing has allowed me to push forward even when I have felt that I no longer wanted to write. He has been a gift."

Staxx Cordero, actress and playwright: "Arthur French III is phenomenal, an inspiration for actors and writers. Forever entertained by his work."

Jim Willis, actor and playwright: "Arthur is the most prolific playwright I know and I told him he has had the greatest influence on me as a writer."

These are edited excerpts from our conversation in a Harlem restaurant.

Roger: You were introduced to theater when you were a child. What is your earliest memory?
Arthur: Went to see "Rosalie Pritchard" and "Perry's Mission," two one-acts. I was 3 or 4. It was at the Negro Ensemble Company. I have a vivid memory of my Dad on stage slumped over a table with his nose in a shot glass, lights flickering and a shooting. Wondered why Dad was slumped over (laughs).

Roger: Did you attend specialized schools that focused on the arts?
Arthur: Queens School of the Theatrical Arts. It was a private school. Attended 4th to 8th grade. My parents kept me off the streets. Drugs were around and Mom and Dad made sure we had activities. Antonia, my sister, also went there.

Roger: Exactly how old were you when you wrote your first play?
Arthur: 16. "Teens Today." Got an award from the Annual Playwright's Festival. It was about peer pressure and issues that teens deal with today.

Arthur French lll. Photographer: Antonia March

Roger: Your Dad, Arthur French, was an acclaimed actor and director. What was it like growing up in the French household?
Arthur: Whole lot of fun. When he was rehearsing we knew to leave him alone. At first it bothered us. As I got older and got involved in theater I understood. Dad would ask us questions about shows he was in.

Roger: You are such a prolific playwright. Talk about your writing process.
Arthur: I write in spurts. Read a newspaper, see something on the train, hear music. Usually I don't put a time to complete it. Recently, I tried that and finished a full length about a homeless man meeting a woman who's a poet and he hides that he's homeless and then I get inspired by another idea and I get away from dealing with a timeframe.

Roger: You were a co founder of the Martha J. Thomas Playwriting Workshop and founder of the Fusion

"If you have a good group of people and a safe space, no egos, work can get better. "

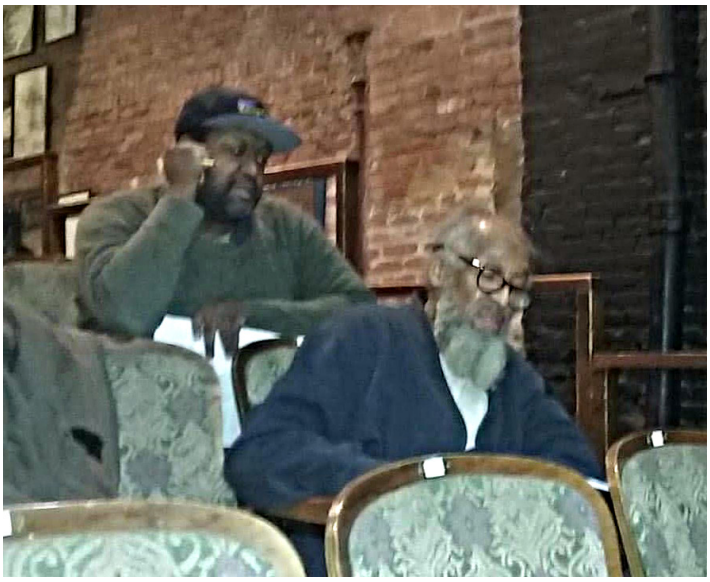
Gumbo Writer's Workshop. What attracts you to the workshop process?
Arthur: If you have a good group of people and a safe space, no egos, work can get better. So I like that concept. Learned from Leslie Lee, Steve Carter and Henry Miller in their playwriting workshops.

Roger: Your sister, Antonia, writes for television. Do you have an interest in collaborating with her?
Arthur: We always talk about it. Would love to do it. As for what decade I don't know (laughs).

Roger: What has been your most difficult challenge working in theater?
Arthur: The politics and agendas. I feel it's about money. Theater is free form. Why do we see certain playwrights always get their work done. The net should be much wider. Shouldn't be just one playwright or one group.

Roger: (After reading the four playwright's comments) Any response?
Arthur: Wow! (pause)..... I mean I'm blown away....taken aback. (pause)..... Few years ago I didn't think about my work like that. I appreciate that. When you're writing it's just you. I'm humbled by it....Surprised and moved. Nice to hear.

Arthur French III kneeling in front of the cast of "Harlem Nocturnal Emissions." Photographer: Justin Michael Woods.



Arthur French III behind his father. Photographer: Sirlouis Jones

Roger: What would you like your legacy to be?
Arthur: Don't worry about legacy. That's up to people to say when you're not here. My father used to say, "My children are my legacy." *G&S*

IG: mrawf3rd

Brant Lake, July 1990

I will think of the time this summer
and remember it in a picture:

how we danced on the shores
and sang from the hills

while the sun shed our skins like a whisper:
and for a while we walked the earth
on cloven hooves––
Half-wild, dark and free.

Robin Goldfin

The Kingdom of Hay-on-Wye

by Madison Arsenault

Hay-on-Wye *Photo by Phil Thomas*

At the northernmost tip of a stunning national park along the Welsh and English border exists a town like no other. At first glance, Hay may appear like any quintessentially idyllic town in the United Kingdom—surrounded by the lush Welsh countryside and dotted as it is with charming storefronts, the motte where a Norman-period castle once stood, and a still-standing castle—but this town has a not-so-secret attraction that lures visitors in by the thousands.

With over two dozen bookstores, Hay is a world famous center for secondhand and antiquarian books. This historic town has created an international reputation for itself, attracting readers and book lovers from around the world as the first ever "Book Town."

One man alone is responsible for Hay's status as a literary beacon. Raised in Hay after his family inherited an uncle's nearby estate, Richard Booth went on to study at the University of Oxford. Hating big business and what it did to small businesses and rural towns, he watched fellow students leave their small towns behind in favor of big cities. Noting just how detrimental this was to rural economies, Booth combined his love of books with his desire to resist big-business-based economies and returned to Hay to open a secondhand bookstore in an old fire station. He tapped into his inherited wealth and, during the '60s and '70s, amassed huge numbers of books from universities, colleges, libraries, and private collections across the US and UK that eventually filled the shelves of five other secondhand bookstores he would go on to open in Hay.

Focused on revitalizing rural Hay, Booth wasn't in it simply for the love of books. He saw the lifeless shopping centers of America as a warning of corporate capitalism, a threat of what could overtake his small town and others around the UK if their economies were left to decay. That grim future inspired his grand vision for what Hay could be, what he could create there. His half dozen bookstores in town inspired others to open their own and singlehandedly revived what was a dying rural economy. By the '70s, enough secondhand bookstores had opened in Hay to earn it the moniker "The Town of Books." The number of bookstores continued to grow, attracting international attention and inspiring small towns around the world to become "Book Towns" to set themselves apart as destinations.

Booth was an eccentric man. His scheme of buying used books to sell in bookshops across his town in order to foster an independent economy, was viewed as out there, but not at odds with his personality. He used this eccentricity to his advantage, drawing attention to his town and bookstores with his flare for theatrics.

On April Fool's Day 1977, Booth strolled through the streets of Hay wearing a faux ermine robe and a homemade crown, declaring Hay-on-Wye an

independent kingdom and himself king. The scheme, though a publicity stunt meant to attract tourists, was certainly rooted in Booth's well-known dislike of big government. Real rallies were held and Booth made efforts to set up a cabinet of ministers and had a new national anthem written. As elaborate as it may have become, it was only a stunt. A fellow Hay bookshop owner, Anne Brichto, said, "Of course it was a joke in some sense, but the Welsh government of the time had to put out a statement to say Hay was not actually an independent kingdom, which Richard loved because they had taken it seriously enough."

Booth is still referred to as the King of Hay and even opened a bookstore of that name that he owned until he died. Upon his death in 2019, signs popped up in bookshop windows, along with displays of black books for mourning, that read "The King is Dead, Long Live the Kingdom." Though his kinghood might not have been real, Booth's incredible impact on Hay and Welsh tourism earned him an MBE (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) in 2004.

Today, there are more than twenty bookstores in Hay, many specializing in specific genres and areas of interest. One of Booth's bookstores, called Richard Booth's Bookshop, was at one time the largest secondhand bookstore in the world and was sold in the early '00s. Booth's Books was renovated under the new owner and now houses a café and small cinema. The Children's Bookshop specializes in children's literature, while Murder and Mayhem specializes in horror, thriller, and detective stories. The Poetry Bookshop is the only second-hand bookstore dedicated to poetry in the UK. With so many incredible bookstores, it is impossible to focus on the charm and allure of just one, but a bookstore that is particularly intriguing is the Hay Castle Bookshop. With open-air bookshelves nestled into the walls outside Hay Castle, which Booth also owned for a time, this bookshop is open 24/7 and runs on the honor system.

Booth's Books *Photo by Giles Morgan*

Booth's Books Photo by Giles Morgan

Each year, Hay hosts a literary festival that attracts many thousands of visitors for over six hundred events that include book signings, speeches, and more. The Hay Festival, which began in the '80s, lasts ten days and was once called "the Woodstock of the mind" by Bill Clinton during a visit. Encouraging young readers, a children's literary festival called Hay Fever is held simultaneously, as well.

First within the Book Town Movement, Hay is estimated to have somewhere near 10 million books in its town of less than two thousand people. These bookstores have put this rural Welsh town on the map and revitalized its economy as their community welcomed in book lovers from around the world and inspired others to follow their lead. Charming, idyllic, and full of books, it's a remarkable town. For book lovers everywhere, Hay-on-Wye is simply irresistible. Long live the Kingdom! G&S

Paris: L'Hôtel Lutetia—A Veritable Museum

by Norman A. Ross

L'Hôtel Lutetia

For many years, the Lutetia, the *Grande Dame* of the Left Bank, was our favorite hotel in Paris. For such a magnificent hotel the prices were something of a splurge, but affordable. Each time we stayed there we were overwhelmed by its beauty and the artwork, and we felt as if we were in a museum. An iconic landmark on the Left Bank, in the district of the ancient Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the Lutetia is an Art Déco palace. Although there are other famous luxury hotels in Paris, the Lutetia, named for the Gallo-Roman town that was centered on what is now the Ile de Cité, is unique for its rich and fascinating history.

Located on Boulevard Raspail in the 6th arrondissement, the Lutetia is noted for its architecture and its history, including its role as a headquarters of the German *Abwehr* (counter-espionage unit) during World War II. (Other luxury hotels were also 'requisitioned' by the Nazis, including Le Meurice, Le George V and the Ritz.) Among its many other 20th-century guests were André Gide, Samuel Beckett, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce and family, Picasso, Matisse, Salvador Dali, Josephine Baker, William Carlos Williams, and Charles de Gaulle on his honeymoon (but we didn't see any of them).

Le Bon Marché

Somewhat a surprise, the story of the Lutetia began across the little park it faces, known today as the Square Boucicaut. Long before the Lutetia opened in 1910, a novelty shop called Au Bon Marché (At the Good Market) was founded there in 1838 to sell lace, ribbons, mattresses and other assorted goods. Aristide Boucicaut, who worked there, had married a young woman named Marguerite Guérin who had a small shop nearby. In 1852 he became a partner in (now) Le Bon Marché, and he and Marguerite eventually bought the store. Together they amassed one of the greatest fortunes in France.

Boucicaut made drastic changes in the store's operations, instituting fixed prices (instead of haggling) and guarantees that allowed exchanges and refunds, creating the first major department store in the world, upon which Macy's, the Galeries Lafayette, Harrods, Marshall Field's, Marks & Spencer and a myriad of other modern stores were modeled. He began to advertise and added a much wider variety of merchandise. In 1869 he built the first major building in the world designed to be a department store, and in 1872 he enlarged the store (with help from the engineering firm of Gustave Eiffel; thus there is a statue of "Gustave" in the lobby of the Lutetia).

Boucicaut was famous for his marketing innovations, including a reading room for husbands while their wives shopped; entertainment for children; and six million

catalogs mailed to customers (long before Sears Roebuck began mailing catalogs in 1887). By 1880 half the employees were women. He died in 1877, and Marguerite ten years later, shortly after their only son had died. All of France was in mourning. She left 150,000 francs to Louis Pasteur, which enabled him to create The Pasteur Institute, and she left the store to its employees!

At the turn of the century, the owners of Le Bon Marché began to consider building a hotel opposite the world-famous store so that important customers could stay nearby in comfort, just as they had encouraged the building of the Gare d'Orsay nearby for the convenience of their customers arriving by train. (It is now the home of the Musée d'Orsay and its Impressionist collection.) In 1910, the Lutetia opened in the Art Nouveau style with designs by architects Louis-Charles Boileau and Henri Tauzin, and the interior by Jules Leleu.

During WW I the Lutetia was taken over by the American Red Cross and it functioned as a hospital. Throughout the 1920s and early '30s the Lutetia was the meeting place for the artists and literati of Paris; Gertrude Stein and her circle met there regularly. From 1935-37, the Lutetia was the

headquarters for anti-Nazi German exiles who met in the hotel to build a popular front against National Socialism. Among them was the author Heinrich Mann, who headed the group, which was known as *Der Lutetia-Kreis* (The Lutetia Circle).

Musée d'Orsay, formerly Gare d'Orsay

World War II

From September 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, refugees fled to Paris from areas occupied by German forces. Because of its reputation, the Lutetia was filled with displaced artists and musicians. However, beginning June 2, 1940, when the Germans first bombed Paris, the city began to empty. On June 14th, Germans entered and occupied Paris and most of the French were evacuated. In 1944, when Paris was liberated, the hotel was taken over by French and American forces. From then until after the end of the war, it was used as a repatriation center for prisoners of war and returnees from the German concentration camps. (Of the 2.5 million people deported, mostly Jews, only 40,000 returned. Although Germany had demanded the deportation of all Jews 16 and older, the Vichy Government rounded up younger Jewish children as well and shipped them to Auschwitz.)

During the 20th century, ownership changed several times.

Clarté, by Max Le Verrier (1891-1973)

In the late 1980s, the designer Sonia Rykiel supervised a major redesign of the interior of the hotel intended to recreate the Art Déco style of earlier decades.

The last time my wife and I stayed at the Lutetia was in January 2009. At that time the hotel hosted (and boasted) the small Paris Restaurant, which had one Michelin star, as well as a wonderful brasserie specializing in seafood. *Le petit déjeuner*, with the most wonderful croissants, brioches and other assorted breakfast treats, was served in the breakfast room–or *en chambre*. In April 2014, the Lutetia was closed for major renovations that involved gutting virtually the entire building. In addition, a swimming pool was added (required by the Paris government for the hotel to call itself a "Palace"). The hotel did not reopen until 2018. Prices on the hotel's website for early May 2023 began at €1,480 (~$1,600) per night, and at €2,000-€3,000 at other times. Today, the hotel has five food venues. The brasserie remains, but the Paris and its star are gone. And for us, it's a great place to visit, but we can't afford to stay there. G&S

Note: For this article I have drawn on the book "Hôtel Lutetia Paris–100 Years," ©2009 by Éditions Lattès, in cooperation with the hotel (which included the photo of DeGaulle), which was given to us as we were departing in 2009. Other photos by Norman A. Ross

Charles de Gaulle

A typical Parisian building on Bd Raspail opposite the Lutetia

Gustave by César Baldaccini, 1989

May DeViney's Social Studies

by Mary Holahan

When May DeViney comments about herself that "I am basically a cartoonist" and "Deep investigation is not warranted," she is understating her originality. She does have a cartoonist's ironic forthrightness, but closer examination, if not essential, reveals unexpected layers of meaning. Her "hint of the past...to express the continuity (persistence) of...underlying ideas" is both stylistic and thematic. Perceptions of centuries ago find expression in recycled fragments of our own time. She brings us into recognizable worlds that are suddenly unfamiliar. Like the discipline of "social studies," with its universe of intertwined human activities, her works may leave us thoughtful, amused, unnerved, or ambivalent.

DeViney studied at the Art Institute of Chicago. She absorbed the impact of the Chicago Imagists, especially of her instructor Jim Nutt, a leading member of the Hairy Who collective, active from the late 1960s into the early 1980s. She veers away from the most exaggerated distortions, glaring color, and what one critic called the "madcap delirium" of those groups in favor of a more naturalistic style. Pop Art and Surrealism also have a presence in her work. DeViney's lifelong involvement with social justice movements takes shape in much of her imagery.

Butcher Madonna is from DeViney's "Working Saints" series, which "honors women's hard and underappreciated work in supporting a better society... (and) questions whether a 'perfect' woman, such as the Madonna, would be viewed today as perfect, or have her every life choice criticized as women's are today."

Here the Madonna invites us to look at her unconventional work in a butcher shop or a slaughterhouse. Clean hands testify to her efficiency with a bloody cleaver. A blood stain on her apron suggests the cult of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Mary, a theological sign of her selfless love of humanity and her suffering over the death of Jesus. Instead of the usual serene dove representing the Holy Spirit, an upside-down plucked chicken hovers overhead, a comically undignified reminder of its earthly fate. There are no signs of the animals who have been sacrificed for human consumption. This interplay of symbols common in the history of Christian art provokes open-ended speculation.

"Butcher Madonna," 19.25" x 11.25," acrylic on canvas over wood, antique frame

"Odalisque," 24" x 14" x 3," antique victorian chair back, toy packaging, antique and new fabrics, canvas, acrylic, braiding and plastic

Presentation of the haloed Madonna against a gold background wearing a traditional blue robe and veil is reminiscent of an icon. The balanced composition, solemn pose, and gesture of appeal make her both an object of reverence and a poster-like call to worldly action. Does the work she is doing bring her dignity or drudgery? Is she independent or a victim of exploitation? What is her role in the

wider world? DeViney's butcher challenges our society, including women, to probe the "perfect woman" model in all its complicated manifestations.

The word odalisque derives from Turkish. In 19th century France—when many Europeans traveled to the Near and Middle East—it came to mean a concubine in the women's quarters (harems) in Sultans' households. Men other than eunuchs were not permitted in harems, the residents of which included family members and enslaved women and girls. Some male European artists, including those who had never left the continent, developed a voyeuristic harem fantasy of mostly nude, young, submissive women on display and available to men. They painted them reclining amid luxuriant fabrics and opulence, wearing minimal jewelry and headpieces. The captives in these imaginary erotic settings—most famously those by Ingres, Renoir, and Matisse—were ordinarily given the White European features of the studio models.

In the flattened space of DeViney's collage, the red-haired odalisque looks like a teenager. Behind her, an immense flower creates a suffocating, hothouse atmosphere. An assemblage of decorative objects, supported by an ornate 19th century chairback, comprises the background. The odalisque's vulnerability and isolation are reinforced by her position as one among several ornaments. Wide-eyed, grinning men leer at her through a scrim-like "window." An image of the Virgin Mary hangs near the center, an affecting suggestion that the girl may be praying for liberation. Sex trafficking and slavery in all its forms come to mind as modern reflections of the defenseless odalisque.

"Go to the Head of the Class" was a children's board game produced from 1936 to 2013. Players answered questions with the objective of advancing up rows of desks; the first to reach the desk at the head of the class was the winner. The game involved both knowledge and chance, as some cards with random instructions moved players ahead or back. DeViney's 1955 edition has a sky-blue background, colorful books, and characters typical of the Dick-and-Jane textbooks depicting White suburban children. A nursery school teacher oversees a smiling boy and girl in a corner, and the classroom teacher presides at her desk. The scene is a stereotypical paragon of the safe and orderly school room.

DeViney subverts this cheerful nostalgic atmosphere by adding "If they let you" to the game's title. On the board, she put three crayon-colored empty shell casings and two shiny spent bullets like scattered toys that would block a player's progress. But her baleful wordplay makes them ghastly evidence of the gun murders plaguing America's schools. Aiming in different directions and randomly placed, they elicit now-familiar dread of unpredictable death. Mere luck may decide whether helpless children and their teachers live or die on any given day. DeViney notes that she looks at the spent ammunition and wonders what it was used for.

"Go to the Head of the Class - If They Let You," 22.5" x 21.25" x 3," vintage 1950s children's game board, spent bullet casings, wire, acrylic, and scrap wood

Art has always confronted social issues. DeViney's artistic activism in causes ranging from women's rights to a more sustainable environment to resistance to gun violence places her in a long tradition of protest art. Her mastery of history, seasoned by a sense of humor, creates highly personal but apprehensible works of art. Rather than tell us her solutions, she opens our eyes and minds to our own insights. *G&S*

Viridian Artists
May 23- June 17, 2023
viridianartist.com

Competition Winners

Laura Renner wins the *Gallery&Studio* Summer, Visions of the Future competition, with her oil on wood painting "Waiting for a Connection."

"Waiting for a Connection" by Laura Renner

In the quiet solitude of the moment, a man looking out over a serene lake with a fishing pole stabilized under his foot, is waiting for a response. In time he might enjoy a catch and the fish may be on his dinner plate or perhaps it will be released to fight another day. In the meantime, he basks in this peaceful interlude between now and the vision of his future.

Throughout history, this ubiquitous image of a solitary fisher, now almost a cliché, has been seen in magazines, paintings, greeting cards and newspapers, promising imminent happiness in this very comforting and familiar story. This is a dream of a future in which the outcome is planned. It is an archetype image of the human need for happiness, persistence and comfort.

The runners-up have each presented images leading to ways to consider the meaning of the future.

Upward Quest by JP Fox tells a more intense story with his circular image. The foreground is dark, and above which could be sky, heaven or clouds are interlocked in colorful stripes. Is he telling us that the future is up for grabs, offering us options?

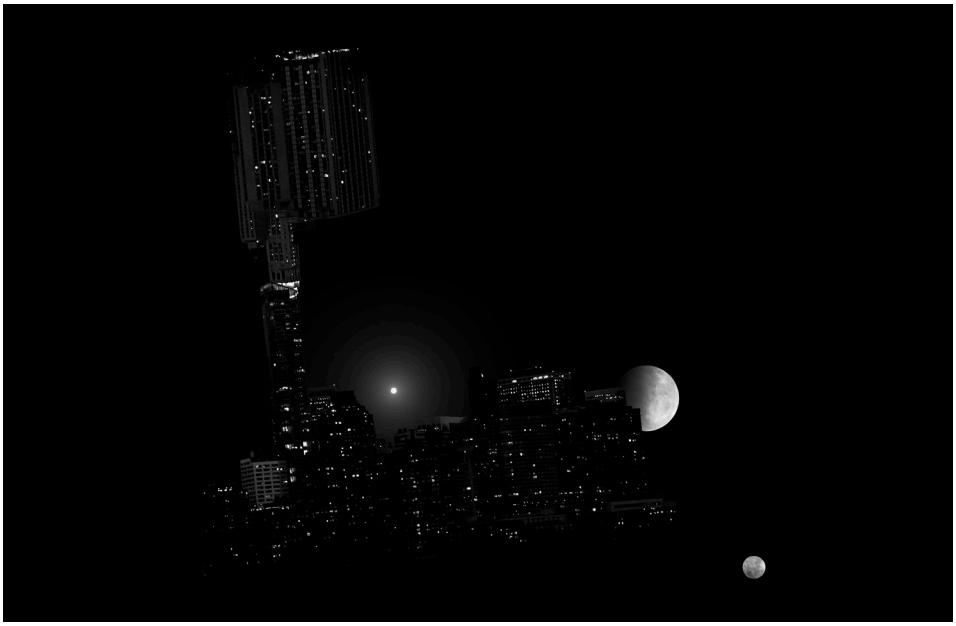
Marco Lando's *Alchemy* presents a dark universe of rearranged buildings. Nothing is what it seems. Is he presenting another dimension which is no longer grounded in the physical world as we know it?

Teruhisa Takahara's *Dawn* presents a layered futuristic vision. In the two top layers a stylized city stands under a dark starless sky; the buildings are mirrored below in orange and yellow. The bottom layer is equally puzzling. Black and white line drawings of figures within disconnected structures possibly indicate that life in the future will be unrecognizable.

Jenny Belin's *Headspace* is a bouquet of feline faces, all expanding out from a central cat face showing how the future springs forth from genetic replication through the generations.

August Light by Stephanie Lempres reflects an orderly terrain in her simplified sections of color. showing the lay of the land in Autumn. The light of august indicates the winter to come.

"Upward Quest" by J.P. Fox



"Alchemy" by Marco Lando

"Vision in the future, Dawn" by TeruhisaTahara

"Headspace" by Jenny Belin

"August Light" by Stephanie Lempres

Abstract and Luminous Visions

by Christine Graf

The Western Connecticut State University 2023 MFA Thesis Exhibition includes four artists, each in their own medium, showing an aspect of their inner dialogue in the process of creating art. These introspective works are on view at Blue Mountain Gallery from June 20 through July 8.

"Window," Aimee Jette, acrylic on canvas, 36"x 36"

Aimee Jette's art appears deceptively simple. After looking again and again at her straightforward presentation of everyday objects, one sees more than what initially meets the eye.

Jette's choice of what to paint involves geometry in an orderly and fresh composition. Her arrangement in the piece titled *Window* creates a sense of calm as she paints the beauty of an ordinary object. Her other two pieces of a communication device and a vintage Panasonic radio offer that same feeling. One is reminded of Motherwell's paintings using rectangular shapes as his inspiration, although he uses paint very differently. Jette wants us to see beyond the objects, beyond their utility. Just as the poet William Blake writes of the daily observations of life that he called, "luminous particulars," Jette asks that we notice what could be easily overlooked in abstraction. She compels us to look at the parts rather than the whole by zeroing in on the moment in an entrancement of light. In the painting the *Window,* Jette shows us two versions of a partial view of a bathtub, a window and daylight in which the image is broken up and transformed from the typical, into a serene composition. It engrosses the viewer since one is discerning the art as being ruptured from its original meaning and context. Jette's art and point of view offers new possibilities of seeing and the element of surprise.

"The Never-Ending Reach," Dan Baker, darkroom chemigram, 14" x 11"

The work of **Dan Baker** reminds one of haiku poetry. As if he is writing a three line poem with a subtle use of visual language. The artwork titled, "The Never Ending Reach" from his series, "Bubbles," is a darkroom chemigram. (A chemigram is an experimental piece of art where an image is made by painting with chemicals on light sensitive paper.) What is created from this process is randomness and a minimal and graceful image. At the base of the image it is solid black and then opens up to the light into cloud-like bubbles that resemble magical thunderheads. It is intangible and diaphanous, also somewhat foreboding. It proves that both beauty and fragility can exist together. Baker is a poet who allows for the joy of happenstance.

Lilah Heyman is a detail person. She paints the specifics

"Somewhere in Vermont," Lilah Heyman, oil on canvas, 48" x 48"

with the passion of an abstractionist. She documents from direct observation with a love of pattern, color and light. In the piece titled *Somewhere in Vermont*, one sees a jumble of fabric, tablecloth, towels, fruit, a pair of boots, a book and a potted plant. It is an amassing of the radiant specifics of everyday objects. The manner in which the fabric folds are painted exhibits a love of softness, of secrets, and textiles that create light and shadow. Heyman mixes it up in another piece called *In Bloom*, by painting what looks like the shadow of a floral bouquet against a striped wall. Again, she demonstrates the sensuality of material and provides an intimacy and tenderness to the common object.

Marcus Escribano's work is influenced by the Taino culture, which are the traditions and everyday life of the Caribbean. One is treated to rich, earthy colors and bold totemic canvases that tell a story with paint and abstraction. In his piece *Fallen* with oil on a wood panel, we see the shapes of human bodies falling into some deep crevice in what could be the earth. As the group of bodies gets closer to the base of the painting, their human shapes become blurred, and they begin to look like birds in flight. It is a palpable feeling of being off balance. Is it a descent into hell? Or a dizzying journey to another life, where one becomes liberated as a winged creature? No matter, since Escribano doesn't leave us alone in this topsy-turvy world. In another related piece, *Dancing With Ignorance*, no one is falling, just two figures are dancing on the surface of the deep strata of earthen-colored stripes. Is Escribano telling us there is more to explore in his culture? Perhaps we need to be aware of the layers of our lives in the same way the poet Stanley Kuntiz said, "Live in the layers not the litter." Escribano has more to share—the music, dance, storytelling, food and history of his culture. We look forward to seeing more of his art and vision. *G&S*

"Fallen," Marcus Escribano, oil on wood panel, 98" x 48"

bluemountaingallery.org

Bill Viola

by Stefania Carrozzini

Promoted by the Municipality of Milan-Culture, the BILL VIOLA exhibition is produced and organized by Palazzo Reale and Arthemisia, with the collaboration of Bill Viola Studio. A survey of works from Viola's entire artistic career, it offers the public fifteen masterpieces in the halls at Palazzo Reale. Thoughtfully curated by Kira Perov, the artist's wife and executive director of Bill Viola Studio. Forty years of work are displayed through a careful selection of pieces, defining a unique event giving us the opportunity to reflect upon life. We are priviledged to immerse ourselves in an alternative world entirely different from the one we left behind at the entrance.

Photograph by Stefania Carrozzini

Visiting Viola's exhibition is a wonderful experience and despite having seen his videos many times in museums and galleries (the first time I remember well at the James Cohan Gallery in New York, the impact is always remarkable. The monumentality of the work lies not only in its physical presence or in the skillful and complex use of digital technology, but rather in what the individual moving images evoke.

Viola's works cannot simply be mindlessly seen; you need to stop and contemplate (possibly without distracting yourself by scrolling on your cell phone). For a moment Viola asks us to suspend the swirling flow of thoughts to enter a meditative alpha state, another frequency that transports us to a perceptive field where time is for listening and waiting. Sensory perception feeds on our presence, and to truly understand his language, you need to be truly present, to immerse yourself in light, color and sound. Viola's entire work is a celebration of the gift of life, a permanent state of annunciation in which the states of mind and the passing stages of the human being are contemplated. Fragility, intimacy, death, passion, and love are fundamental factors in Viola's videos in which time passes extremely slowly as if the artist wanted to stop it and enter another dimension.

Water and fire elements are often present in his installations, which represent the transitional boundary between illusion and reality, sometimes fading into each other, inverting the law of gravity like water descending upwards or fire becoming water.

The reference to Eastern philosophy and reincarnation is evident, so birth is not the beginning and death is not an end, as an old Chinese saying goes. Therefore, a visit to Viola's exhibition cannot leave us indifferent, it forces us to profoundly reflect on his video images. In their hyperrealism, they exude classicism and sacredness, interpret our fears and address the problem of the transient mystery of life and death. Bill Viola's art is a spiritual journey, that awakens the soul. *G&S*

Bill Viola:
Milano Palazzo Reale
Through June 25th, 2023

Spinning Tree Theatre

by Marina Hadley

In the heart of the United States there is a unique organization that offers teenagers of all abilities an opportunity to learn about the world of theater with seasoned professionals.

The Spinning Tree Theatre of Kansas City originally started as a professional actors' equity theater company in 2010, putting on musicals and plays. A chance decision in 2019 to stage Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Starlight Express* in conjunction with Variety, the Children's Charity of Kansas City, became a pivotal time for the organization as they worked with youths of differing abilities and disabilities. A decision was made following the success of this production to focus on the youth.

Andrew and Michael Grayman-Parkhurst founded the Spinning Tree Theatre after spending many years in the New York theater world. Today they run the organization employing professional musicians, stage designers and directors, lighting and music directors and many others, to help produce high-quality, professional shows, providing the youth members, who are mainly in the 13-18 year ago group, with an environment where they can learn all the different aspects that go into creating and staging theater entertainment.

One of their key programs is specifically for young playwrights, where they are each paired with a professional and coached through the creative process to write a play that is new and original. They work together for a few days with the mentor helping to shape the piece. Midweek a professional director comes in with a young director and young actors to help continue to develop the play. After several months of supported development, plays are chosen to be produced in April for the public.

"Medina and Eduardo" from "The Country of the Blind," produced in 2023. Photo credit Nicole McCroskey/Spinning Tree Theatre.

This year, three plays were selected and staged. The first play, titled *Rachel/Leah*, written by Riley Martin, mentored by Victor Wishna and directed by Julie Shaw, is a contemporary take on the Jewish story of the sisters from the Torah. The next play, titled *The ADHD Show*, written by Nicholas May, mentored by Frank Higgins and directed by Michael Grayman-Parkhurst is an insightful and humorous exploration of the life of a person with ADHD, with and without medication. The final play, titled *Murder on the Transcontinental Express*, written by MJ Bradshaw, mentored and directed by Cynthia Hardeman, is a comedy based on a My Little Pony episode with a murder thrown in! They were all well-reviewed and provided a diverse and thoroughly enjoyable evening of entertainment.

The organization works to achieve an authentically inclusive and safe environment for everyone. The aim is to create conditions that are beneficial to not only teach the rudiments of the theater world, but also allow the participants an opportunity to grow as individuals and as part of a community.

"RTC Group Uranium," from "Ride the Cyclone," produced in 2022. Photo credit Nicole McCroskey/ Spinning Tree Theatre.

Andrew stresses that it is important to acknowledge and discuss disabilities, race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, but the priority is to acknowledge and appreciate the individual, allowing them to create and collaborate with like-minded individuals.

As the world returns to live entertainment post pandemic, it is inspiring to know that Spinning Tree Theatre will be at the forefront, nurturing tomorrow's theater leaders. G&S

spinningtreetheatre.com

Inspirational Mr. Tucker

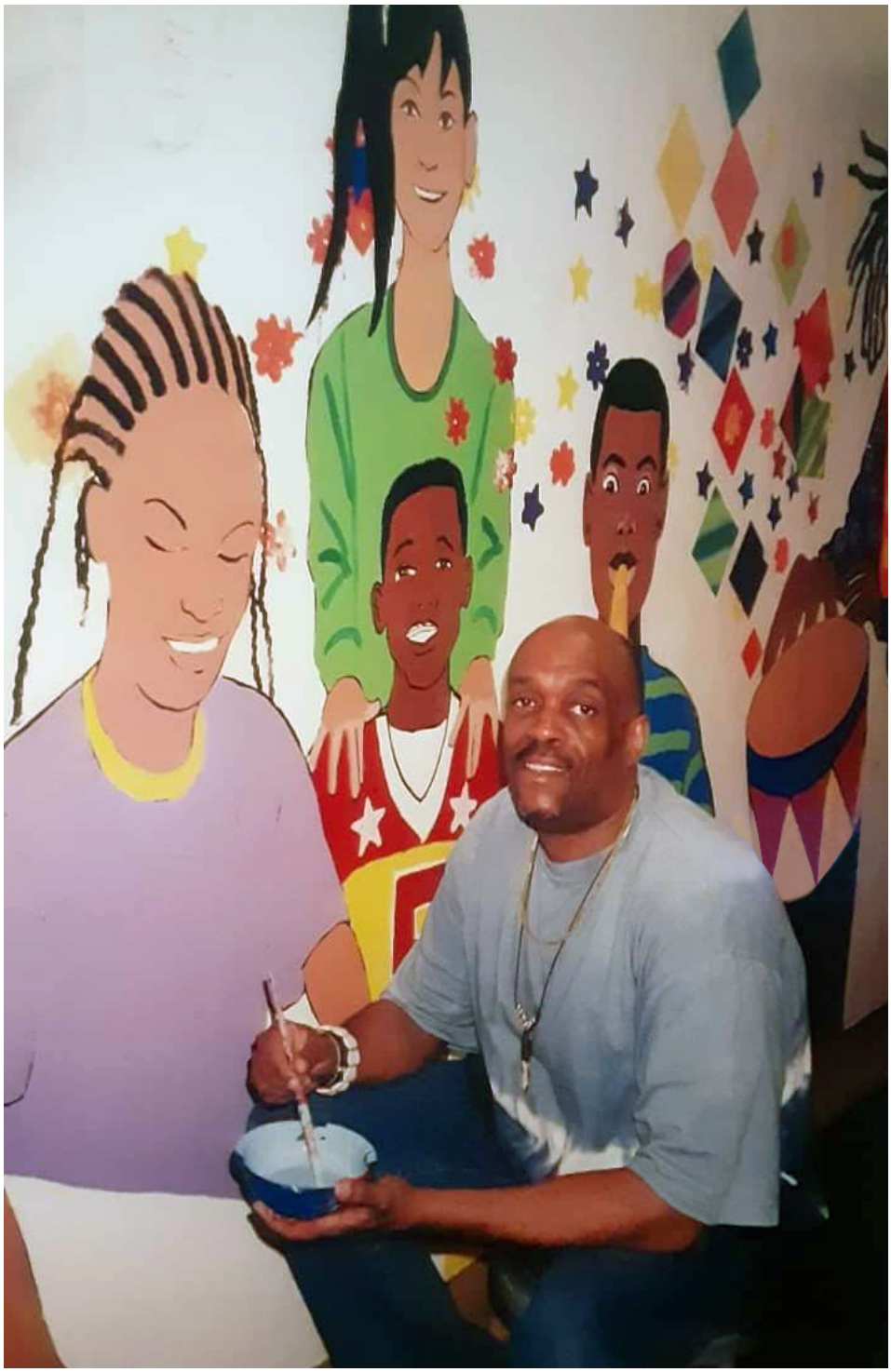
by Anne Rudder

With all the daily tales of corruption and skullduggery pervading today's virtual reality and greater physical world, it is sometimes difficult to encounter moments of truth and grace. Thoughts of goodness and beauty become obscured by unbidden intrusions of mental irritation so that dreamers must splash their heated faces with cool water to awaken from troubled sleep. This act of rescue figuratively manifests via the salvific responses of children and artists creating beauty to dispel miasma.

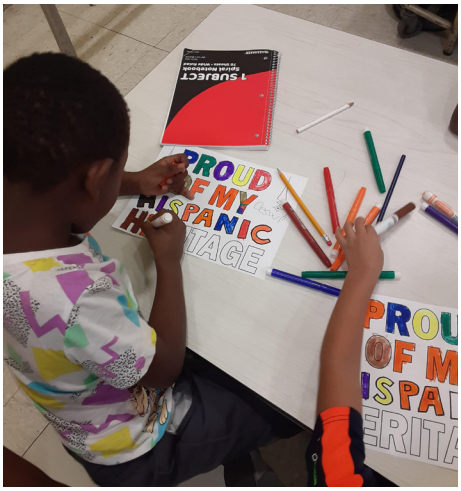
Artist and educator Elton Tucker continues to help children open to the world of creative expression through his mentoring as a teacher in afterschool arts programs in Harlem and the Bronx, nurturing his students to discover a sense of pride in their own abilities, encouraging them to respect themselves and their neighbors by making art.

The Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Community Center in Harlem, established to honor the eldest of the family's late sons, hired Elton as a part time arts instructor at the time of 9/11. In response to the horror, he saw this as an opportunity "a higher power" to help him assuage his own anguish, giving him a new sense of purpose to foster goodness after that time of overwhelming pain. He seized this tragedy as a chance to promote healing not only in others, but also in himself. Teaching children was his antidote to despair.

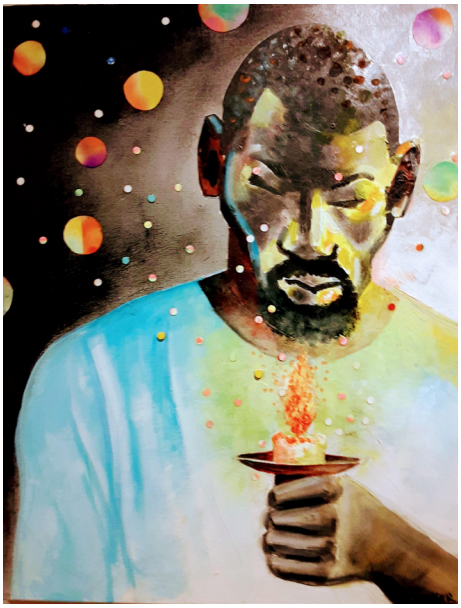
Now, and for the past ten years, he has worked with young people in grades K-5 at the Woodycrest Afterschool Program, inspiring hundreds of youngsters to realize artwork arising from their innate spontaneity, developing their artistic skills and honing their personal development through use of paint, collage and other media. He feels children's artwork must be seen and appreciated by the public and proudly displays his students' efforts at Woodycrest inside PS 126 where the program also offers dance, music, literature, computer



Elton Tucker painting a mural at the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Community Center in Harlem.



Child creating artwork at the Woodycrest after school Program



Painting by Elton Tucker

Painting by Elton Tucker

skills and homework tutoring. From his instruction, Elton provides a lasting positive influence on his young charges' lives and children frequently come back to visit him in the classroom after they have moved on.

Trained at The High School of Art and Design, FIT and The Art Students League, Elton originally wanted to become a designer and found he was attracted to fashion illustration, obtaining a full-time position in a buying office while freelancing sketches at lunchtime to supplement his day job.

In the 1990s, the onset of the use of the computer in illustration brought an additional intermediary layer to the act of creative expression, and Elton found himself yearning for the immediacy of the visceral tactile connection between artist and media that can only come from drawing and painting by hand. He says, "hands get messy but the heart is pure and shows up in the work." Unlike in a computer-generated piece, the human footprint of image from the hand's plastic manipulation of materials, expressed by both mind and body, tangibly faces the viewer as a forceful rejoinder to the homogenized sterility of pictorial mechanization in much of today's artwork.

Elton opines that many artists don't want to work on the computer to realize their finished pieces and prefer to rely on direct contact between human creator and page or canvas for artwork. There is an organic relationship for the artist and viewer that can be experienced only through brushstrokes and collaged elements. Exciting, when the work is based upon the uniqueness of the human spirit, contrasting with impersonal mechanized production.

One of Elton's goals in his teaching is to support positive representations of people, cultivating emotional and physical health in the African American community. This is very important to him as he helps young people sort out the confusion of adolescence so they may blossom as vital adults. At Woodycrest he instructs students to realize giant colorful murals, creative efforts under his tutelage enlivening walls and exciting young hearts.

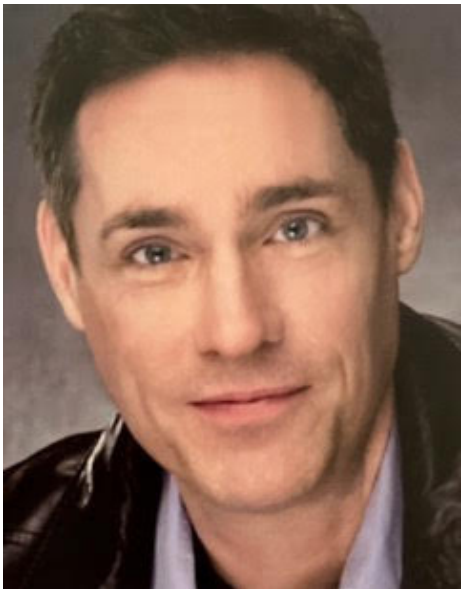
His own acrylic murals for the Ruth Williams Dance Company and St. Benedict's Catholic School in Harlem, have inspired students to generate their own art. Likewise, in the studio, as he draws and paints, stimulated by his listening to a surfeit of great music, his art evolves lyrically from many materials, among them, acrylic paint, sand, and tissue paper, so that compelled by his inner voice, his creative results become emotionally tangible, and the latent feelings of viewers are stirred when his art is publicly seen.

Elton Tucker's occupation as artist and teacher is truly the soul's vocation, the foundational rock for growth of beneficence in a world of increasing technological depersonalization. Through him, we can experience fine inspirational fruits from his own abundant life tree as he intimately gifts us irrefutable goodness and joy for today and the future. I am privileged to know Elton Tucker as a shining beacon to our spectral modern times. *G&S*

eltontucker.com

I Remember Doug McKeown

by Queer Stories 2.0, Gary Anderson, Gary Boelhower, Terence Diamond, Robin Goldfin, Oliver Hummel, Jude Kamilhor, Thomas Ledcke, and Jeannie McCormack



Doug McKeown

Doug McKeown was the facilitator of Queer Stories for Boys, editor of our book (2004, Thunder's Mouth Press), master storyteller, monster storyteller, actor, theater designer, filmmaker, teacher, videographer, and more. He was a true renaissance man. We will miss him.

"I Remember" exercises have become the backbone of Queer Stories workshops. Our stories are based in memory, and one person's memories often help jog another's. Memory begets memory, they are fruitful, and multiply. We honor those we love by keeping their memories alive. These are our memories of Doug, in no particular order. May his memory be for a blessing.

When I think of Doug McKeown, I think of a Queer Superhero! I didn't know Doug well, but every time I was in his company I felt as if I were in the company of someone who courageously showed up for life. He would share life stories and his brave story telling would often give way to vulnerable truths.

I only knew Doug very little through a few Queer Stories online. The last story time we shared was very near his death, but he was there, fully present, fully engaged, and full of stories—fully himself.

I remember Doug's infectious enthusiasm, a beacon that supported and guided me to do something I thought I'd never do in my wildest dreams. If not for Doug, I would have never had the opportunity, nor courage, to tell one of my queer stories in front of a live audience in a New York City theater. It is a gift I will always cherish.

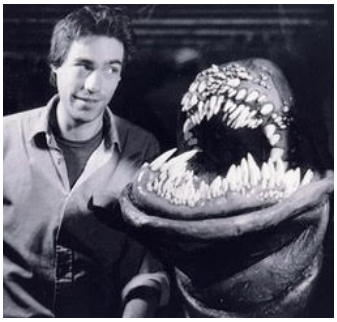
I remember the Doug McKeown Museum, which was housed, conveniently, at the residence of Doug McKeown. Every time Queer Stories 2.0 [post-Pandemic] got together, someone would bring up a random topic, and Doug would say, "Ah, I'll be right back." A minute or two later he would return with some incredible sculpture or painting that he had done years before related to that very topic. He presented them to us, not to brag, but rather to say, "Oh here's something I made. I hope you like it." I will always be inspired by his enthusiasm, talent, curiosity, and humility.

I never met Doug in person. I remember him as a face on a zoom screen who responded often to the fragmented stories I would tell from the prompt we were using during a Saturday Queer Stories session. He seemed to appreciate the humor in my tales. He would respond in kind with a story that he was reminded of, but he also encouraged me to complete the whole tale after several rounds.

When Doug began to share about his past in theatre and film, I was fascinated. I appreciated his work when he showed it —the short film with the cardboard piano was a hoot— and I marveled at the stories he told about his career in set design and filmmaking. As his childhood reminiscences unfolded over the many Saturdays we met, I realized that Doug was a one-of-a-kind weirdo growing up in a 50s-60s suburb similar to the one I grew up in. His "weirdness" was a sign of great sensitivity and creative talent. It gave me some perspective on my own experience of being a weirdo during my childhood.

Doug is one of the few people I've gotten to know over zoom. I would have liked to have met up

Photo by Doug from 1981, Jean Cocteau Repertory world premiere, from Left Craig Smith as August David Fuller as a Merchant Seaman.



with him and chat over coffee. I feel a certain loss of that opportunity, and of the brevity of the time I got to know Doug. It reminds me to stop taking it for granted that people who interest me will be around forever. It reminds me that I won't be around forever and that I better stop putting things off until tomorrow.

I remember Doug's obsession with Rufus Wainwright.

I remember meeting with Doug at the Cupcake Café on 9th Avenue in 1994. The previous weekend Doug attended my Queer Stories for Boys performance at Dixon Place and was interested in learning more about the group. What I remember about that early afternoon was that we talked so easily and with such enthusiasm until evening. This was easy to do with Doug. He made everyone feel like they had just answered the million-dollar question, hardly ever containing his excitement. He was eager to share his life story and equally supportive and generous to listen to mine. Doug is the teacher we all wish we had growing up. Someone who cherishes learning and exchanging ideas. Thank you Doug, your encouragement and generosity had a lasting impact on my life.

I cut the part about my ill-advised critique of Timothee Chalamet in Dune. Doug set me straight and I rewatched the film and now agree. Chalamet is a genius and probably the best American actor of the past century. Doug, I said it; now stop tormenting my dreams.

I spoke to Doug only a few times to make some type corrections on a story he wrote which appeared on our website. As we spoke, I learned that he was a perfectionist about his work. During the short time that I was acquainted with him, he gave us an artwork he had done from his theatre days for a fundraising project. This was such a kind and generous gesture since he was dealing with a serious illness. During our phone conversations, I was inspired by his unusual wisdom and inner strength.

I have learned more about his special qualities from the memories of others and through an email he sent which I feel to be an important message to all: "I just see no reason why we can't always aim for the best work."

I am grateful for the short time I knew him.

I remember it was sometime after my mother died in 1999. I was coming to the Queer Stories workshops and working on a long poem about my mother's death. She died from a metastatic breast cancer and had incredible pain. I called the poem *Ode to Sleep*, comparing death to sleep as many writers have done before. Doug listened closely and then asked the title again. I told him *Ode to Sleep*. He asked me "how are you spelling that?" I told him O-D-E. He said "No, spell it the other way." I loved him for that. And for many other things.

In the last few years of his life, Doug's science-fiction cult film found a new following, and he was contacted by many people about *The Deadly Spawn*. He became a kind of celebrity again, and he glowed in the attention. I was pleased that he was getting that attention. He was a man of the theatre. Attention must be paid.

I remember the fresh homemade blueberry muffins Doug would bake and bring to Queer Stories workshops when we met at the Community Center. So good. G&S

Environmental Theater, the Suburban Dream and Mike Vitti

by Woody Sempliner

My dirty secret, well one of them, is that I have lived most of my life in the suburbs. It seems I do this by choice. It's like smoking cigarettes: you know it's wrong but the wrongness of it, like a dysfunctional relationship, becomes part of you.

The lack of density in the outskirts is sinful. The resources required to support single family dwellings are woefully greater than for multiple homes stacked atop one another under a common roof in the more environmentally acceptable style of our righteous brothers and sisters who live in and love the city. And oh, the fuel wasted in one's car flitting about the suburban sprawl from the grocery store to the cleaners, the gas station (of course!) and then home again, only to dash back out to the hardware store for a bubble wrapped package containing six machine screws, because, well, you forgot, and there's that thing with the dishwasher.

I grew up in a sweet, leafy suburb on the shores of a lake just outside of a muscly Midwestern metropolis, hovering thereafter on the periphery of several great cities before moving to New York, where I tried—I really did—to live in Manhattan but just couldn't get a firm foothold and lapsed into a customary orbit within striking distance of the city's molten core. Unlike those who are permanently ensconced in the city and for whom it is a phantasmagoria of tastes and amusements, for the commuter the city is where one goes to compete, impress and strive. The train is how one steals away through dank, subterranean tunnels and bursts out into horizontal space beneath a broad sky. Against the muffled quiet of the walk home the roar of the city is still detectable, a residual buzz in the ears.

Mike Vitti

I thought the suburb to be an American invention until I got a glimpse of greater London. One wasted weekend there I and my bon vivant brother alighted upon the grounds of the Ham Polo Club, there to observe wealth on horseback. Recollection of the match is scant. (Drink may have been taken.) What lingers in memory are the houses near where we parked. Each was a little folly representing rural life in microcosm. There were rustic wooden fences, weathered and mossy green, guarding semi-wild-looking gardens that surrounded architectural variations on a storybook cottage theme. Gates opened onto flower-lined paths that did not go directly but meandered alluringly to side doors. One property even featured a stile, looking aged but unused, providing pedestrian access over a fence that safeguarded the containment of some imaginary barnyarderie.

The epiphany here was, yes, the earliest American suburbs were probably inspired by these English antecedents. But, more importantly, the suburb appears to have given birth to an architectural genre, a kind of residential theater. While the urban apartment building attempts to house as many people as possible, comfortably, efficiently, profitably, the suburb affords each homeowner an individualized version of country life in the style of whatever country's life suits the owner's fancy: English Tudor; French Provincial; Ranch; Colonial; Mid-Century Modern; Italian palazzo — the dream evoking nomenclature of residential real estate.

The criminal waste of the planet where I live is a gaggle of municipal jurisdictions that occupy the western half of a peninsula on the north shore of Long Island. The other half of the peninsula, or the top few hundreds of thousand of tons of it, was hauled away in barges from the late 1800s and into the second half of the last century. Those barges carried a high quality sand used to make concrete and to become the sidewalks, bridge abutments and skyscrapers of Manhattan. Of the peninsula's two halves this gouged out eastern one tells a more dramatic tale than the orderly streets and houses of the other.

The sand mines, as they are now called, eliminated the cliffs and rolling bluffs known then as "sand banks." Overlooking a picturesque arm of Long Island Sound and having once served as sets for silent motion pictures, the sand banks may be said to have been killed by mining but spared the slow death of suburbanization. As the sand ran out the remaining pits attracted urban managers desperate to dispose of garbage, giant mounds of it. Long time residents say that, on warm summer nights in the late 1970s and early '80s, they could hear the low rumble of methane

exploding in the depths of those garbage mountains which today are grassy, vented domes overlooking soccer fields, a golf complex, an over-fifty "golf side" gated community replete with end-of-life options, a Greek Orthodox church, a firefighter training facility and a vast, ominously vented field that covers up something best forgotten and serves as an aerodrome for model planes. Wrapped around this aerodrome and separating it from an 18-hole golf course are a couple hundred acres of wild wood that stand as testament to the redemptive power of nature.

A dwindling Long Island demographic can remember first hand the bare mounds of clay and rock on which these woods took hold. Mike Vitti, a native, was one of these, having grown up in Nassau County farm country during that fleeting sliver of time just before most of the island ceased to be rural. As a kid he hunted in fields that are now residential blocks, rode bikes on country roads and — and this is perhaps not unique in all the world but so very Long Island — he surfed. As an adult the wave and bike riding did not fade as childhood pastimes often do; they matured and actually merged somewhat with the advent of a thing called mountain biking. One can see how the daring and physical engagement of mountain biking could approximate that of surfing. But on Long Island, waves are easier to find than the dramatic topography that mountain bikers need.

This is what got Vitti started exploring what was left of the sand mines in the late 1990s. What he found there were mine leavings piled into steep inclines that, in places, rose up a hundred feet above low lying ponds and seasonal wetlands where the sand operation had clawed its way to the water table. For twenty years Vitti, by this time a landscape designer, begged, lobbied and cajoled a succession of local politicians for permission to make trails there. Those twenty years of waiting in the wilderness proved useful. Vitti used them to learn the space intimately and travel to see how wilderness biking and hiking trails had been made elsewhere. Meanwhile, having given up its sand, the land had been allowed to rest. What ensued was a botanical, zoological riot. The once barren waste became a forest of fiercely competing trees, vines, flowering shrubs and every imaginable weed. Egrets and Ospreys, Great Blue Herons, ducks and geese found the low lying lakes and swamps that were now rimmed with tall aquatic reeds. A coyote, rarely seen, began to roam the woods along with foxes and a small herd of deer. Birds of prey circled overhead while ticks flourished in the undergrowth beneath a luxuriant canopy of poison ivy. Here was a wonderfully wild display of natural power reclaiming a gutted piece of Earth, in the face of which words like 'invasive' and 'non-native' seemed silly.

Needless to say, someone had finally said 'yes,' and Vitti was allowed, without any remuneration whatsoever, to sculpt what are now known as the Hempstead Harbor Woods Mountain Biking and Hiking Trails. Without these elegantly simple dirt paths the land described here, this intense natural microcosm, and possibly how much I need it, would be unknown to me. As of this writing, the woods are lushly verdant and smell of honeysuckle. Dogwood, wild rose, Astor and plants I cannot name are blooming. Vitti's trails, varied and tortuous by design, wend their way between giant Ice Age boulders

and the rusted industrial remains of the last century. (Occasionally I spot the grill of what I strongly believe was once a DeSoto.) Not one hillock here, not one gulley is by nature made, yet, in the spirit of those storybook cottages near the Ham Polo Club, disbelief can be suspended in this environmental theater, and the mind can feast on the illusion, the reality and arguably the future of nature in an otherwise anthropocentric, paved, chemically treated world. *G&S*

Contact for Mike Vitti:
sick4surf@yahoo.com
CLIMB - Concerned Long Island Mountain Bikers:
www.climbonline.org

Randolph Rogers & the Blind Girl

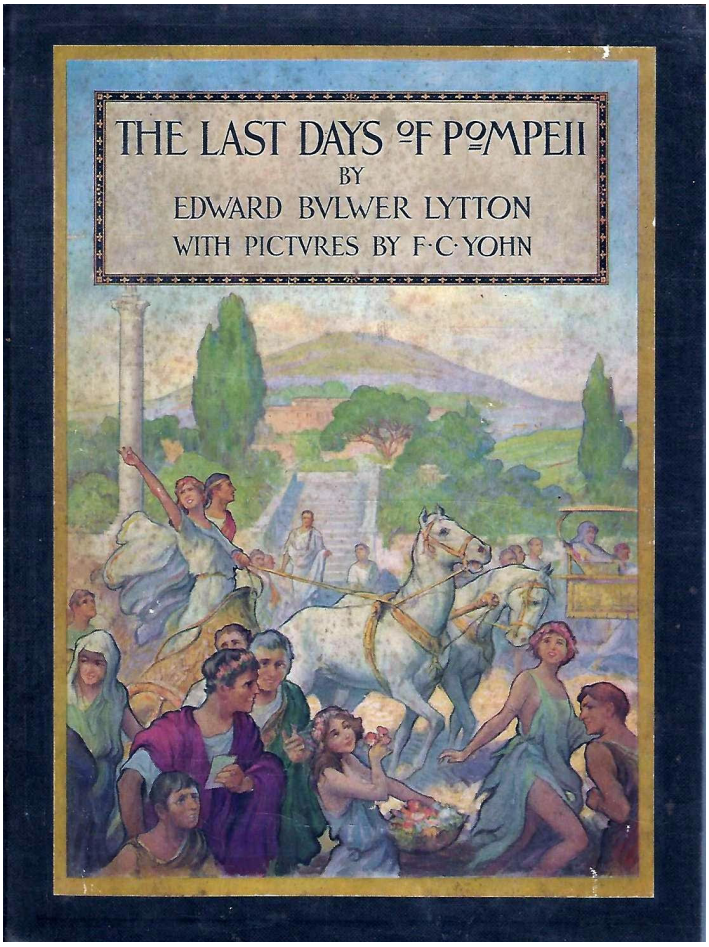
by Dr. Bill Thierfelder

Our story starts with a painting, continues with a novel, and ends up as one of the most popular pieces of sculpture in the entire 19th century.

Between 1830 and 1833, Karl Bryullov, a Russian artist who spent significant periods in Italy, produced a monumental canvas —measuring 15 by 21 feet in size—titled *The Last Day of Pompeii*, which depicts the horror caused by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. From its first presentation, the work was seen as an important link between Neoclassicism— the predominant style in Russian painting at the time— and Romanticism— as it was being increasingly practiced in France and elsewhere on the Continent. The epic depiction of the mayhem and destruction was received to nearly universal acclaim and made Bryullov the first Russian painter to have an international reputation. Further, in Bryullov's homeland, the painting was seen as proof that Russian art was as good as any art practiced in the rest of Europe.

Yet that is only the start of our tale. Within a year of the painting's first showing, the popular British novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton (most famously known for the phrase "It was a dark and stormy night") was inspired to create one of his better (and most remembered) works: *The Last Days of Pompeii*. Published in 1834, the novel uses its characters to contrast the decadence of 1st-century Rome with both older cultures and coming trends. The extremely melodramatic plot focuses on the Athenian nobleman Glaucus who arrives in the bustling town of nearly twenty thousand souls and quickly falls in love with a beautiful woman named Ione. As the tangled story unfolds, Nydia (a blind slave girl whom Glaucus has rescued) falls in love with the handsome protagonist. Unfortunately, Glaucus remains unaware of Nydia's feelings. After extraordinary adventures— which include poisonings, gladiatorial fights, and witchcraft— Nydia leads Glaucus and his lover through the eruption of Vesuvius to safety on a ship in the Bay of Naples. She can do this because she is used to going about in utter darkness while sighted people are made helpless in the cloud of volcanic dust. The morning after the catastrophe, she commits suicide by quietly slipping into the sea, death being preferable to the agony of her unrequited love for Glaucus.

"The Last Day Of Pompeii," Karl Bryullov, oil on canvas, Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia, 651 x 465.5 cm.



Front cover of author's copy of 1928 edition of "The Last Days of Pompeii."

But that's still not the end of our saga. We move forward about twenty years and meet the ex-pat American sculptor Randolph Rogers. Born in 1825 in upstate New York, young Rogers developed an interest in wood engraving, and in or around 1847 moved to work in New York City. Unfortunately, he had little luck finding employment as an engraver, so he ended up working as a clerk in a dry-goods store. Fortunately, his employers discovered his native talent as a sculptor and provided funds for him to travel to Italy. He began his studies in Florence in 1848 and was able to open his own studio in Rome in 1851, the city where he resided until his death in 1892.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

At first, he devoted himself to creating statues of children and portrait busts of tourists. His efforts proved immediately successful —and lucrative. There was a slight hitch, however. Rogers was not happy working with marble, so all of his marble statues were copied in his studio by Italian artisans under his supervision from an original produced by him in another material, including plaster and clay. (Artists like Rodin slightly later in the century would do much the same, making fortunes from copies of originals, while Andy Warhol's *Factory* was in some ways a 20th century incarnation of the concept.)

Karl Bryullov

Rogers' first large-scale work, *Ruth Gleaning (1853)*, based on a figure in the Old Testament, proved extremely popular, and up to 20 marble replicas were produced by his studio. But then —after reading Bulwer-Lytton's novel— Rogers decided to create his next large-scale work: *Nydia, the Blind Flower Girl of Pompeii*. Sculpted between 1853 and 1854, his sensitive depiction of Nydia proved even more popular than his sculpture of Ruth, and over the next three decades his studio produced at least 77 marble replicas in two sizes— a three foot version and a 4 and a half foot rendering. These stunning copies have since found their way into museums and private collections around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum in New York (where it stands guard at the entrance to the American Wing), the Portland Art Museum (where I first learned its multi-layered story), the National Gallery in Washington, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, to name just a few prestigious locations.

The label copy for the Metropolitan Museum's version suggests that the statue is a superb example of "body language"—and indeed, that may be the best way to understand the success of the work. The very title tells the viewer that we are most likely in the midst of Pompeii's final hours. Nydia's closed eyes and her staff tell us that she's blind. And though she leans her body forward urgently and her clothes are being blown by the volcanic wind, the real drama —and the success of this statue— is found

"Nydia, The Blind Flower Girl of Pompeii," 1853–54, carved 1859, marble, 54" x 25.25" x 37." Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of James Douglas. Photo: Bill Thierfelder

in the simple gesture made by her hand. Body language. She raises her left hand to her right ear and listens for the clues that will allow her to bravely lead Ione and Glaucus out of harm's way towards a boat in the Bay. She may be blind, but oh, she can hear better than most, and it's that skill that allows her to be the hero when others fail. Ultimately this sculpture shows us the triumph of will, bravery, and adroitness over adversity; her selfless actions only prove how emotionally blind others have been. That Nydia in the novel later takes charge of her life by ending it (as Cleopatra and Queen Boudica had) is not to take away from her courageousness.

Rogers would go on to have other successes —including the creation of the 17-foot-high bronze doors depicting the exploits of Columbus that still grace the front of the United States Capitol building— but it's the statue of a blind girl —inspired by a novel and a painting— that remains Rogers' calling card today in dozens of collections around our country and beyond. G&S