

Love me – love my art: The art of the couple

Welcome to ARTknows! In this edition we are going to explore the art of couples. There have been famous couples in all walks of life throughout history; political couples such as Cleopatra and Julius Caesar (or was it Mark Anthony, or both?) or singing couples such as Tina and Ike Turner. How about visual fine art couples? Many of you know that my husband is also an artist. Gary Weisman. He is a sculptor working in bronze. And many of you know that we have a bronze foundry in our home. I met Gary at art school. It has been helpful to our art to be married to each other. We have been fortunate, experiencing equal amounts of success and disappointments. It is interesting that whenever we submit to a particular art exhibition, we either both get accepted or both rejected – and I don't think it has anything to do with the fact that we are a couple. This acceptance/rejection may speak to how similar – despite how different – our work is.

We also mutually understand that the most important thing in our lives is the capacity to create art. Time, money and energy is always directed towards creating art.

I know other couples in which one is an artist and the other is not. It is very difficult for the non-artist to understand the importance of other's maximizing time in the studio. These non-artists often make demands forcing the artist to give up weekend studio time. Gary and I have never demanded priority over studio time. Gary works 7 days a week in the studio. I also work 7 days a week in the studio, but when our son was young, I did take the time to attend to him; going on school trips, watching soccer and so on. Before Jack was enrolled in school, Gary worked in the studio during the day from 9-5. In the early days, I initially started to work in my studio at 5 pm but found this too late to begin - being tired after spending the day caring for Jack. I eventually hired a high school student to watch Jack from 2-5pm every day in our home. This enabled me to start my work at 2, but I was there on the premises if an issue arose. Jen the babysitter was much better engaging Jack in games being almost a child herself. The only problem in this solution was that we never had dinner together. I knew if I took time off for dinner, I'd get lazy and not return to my studio. We eventually never learned how to have dinner together. In high school, Jack preferred to make his own dinner. I felt bad about this, recently ruminating about it with a friend. This friend - who is not an artist, has three kids, and had family dinner every night at the prescribed time - responded with a weariness, "Oh, family dinners are overrated." So - whatever....



This is Gary's clay sculpture of the abolitionist John W. Jones. It stands 7 feet tall. Jones (1818-1879) Jones was a former enslaved Black man who escaped the plantation he lived and hiked to Elmira, NY. There he became one of the most successful Underground Railroad conductors and one of the richest Black men in the state of NY. Ironically, in Elmira he was also responsible for burying the Confederate soldiers. Despite being the soldiers fighting against Black freedom, Jones felt it was his responsibility to give his upmost respect in the burial of these Confederate soldiers. In fact, when Jones had to bury the son of his former plantation owner, Jones wrote to the father asking how he could bury the son respecting the wishes of the family.

As we move through the history of various art couples, the definition of couple will be expanded and we will look at couples who are not the traditional duo. I also invited James and Kate Kearns Mundie to share their experience as an art couple - raising children and creating their work. You'll remember James from the last ARTknows and his wonderful drawings and woodcuts.

Artemisia Gentileschi and Pierantonio di Vincenzo Stiatess

Very few artist couples are mentioned in history books. This is probably dependent upon the fact that women were often not recognized as artists. One of the earliest couples I could find in art history is the marriage of Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653 Italian) to the fellow artist Pierantonio. Artemisia was born in Rome into an artistic family. Her father Orazio was a very successful court painter to King Charles 1. Like most women in art history – before the rest of the society recognized them – women artists were taught by their artist father. However, very little is written about Pierantonio other than his birth and he appears to be a minor artist.



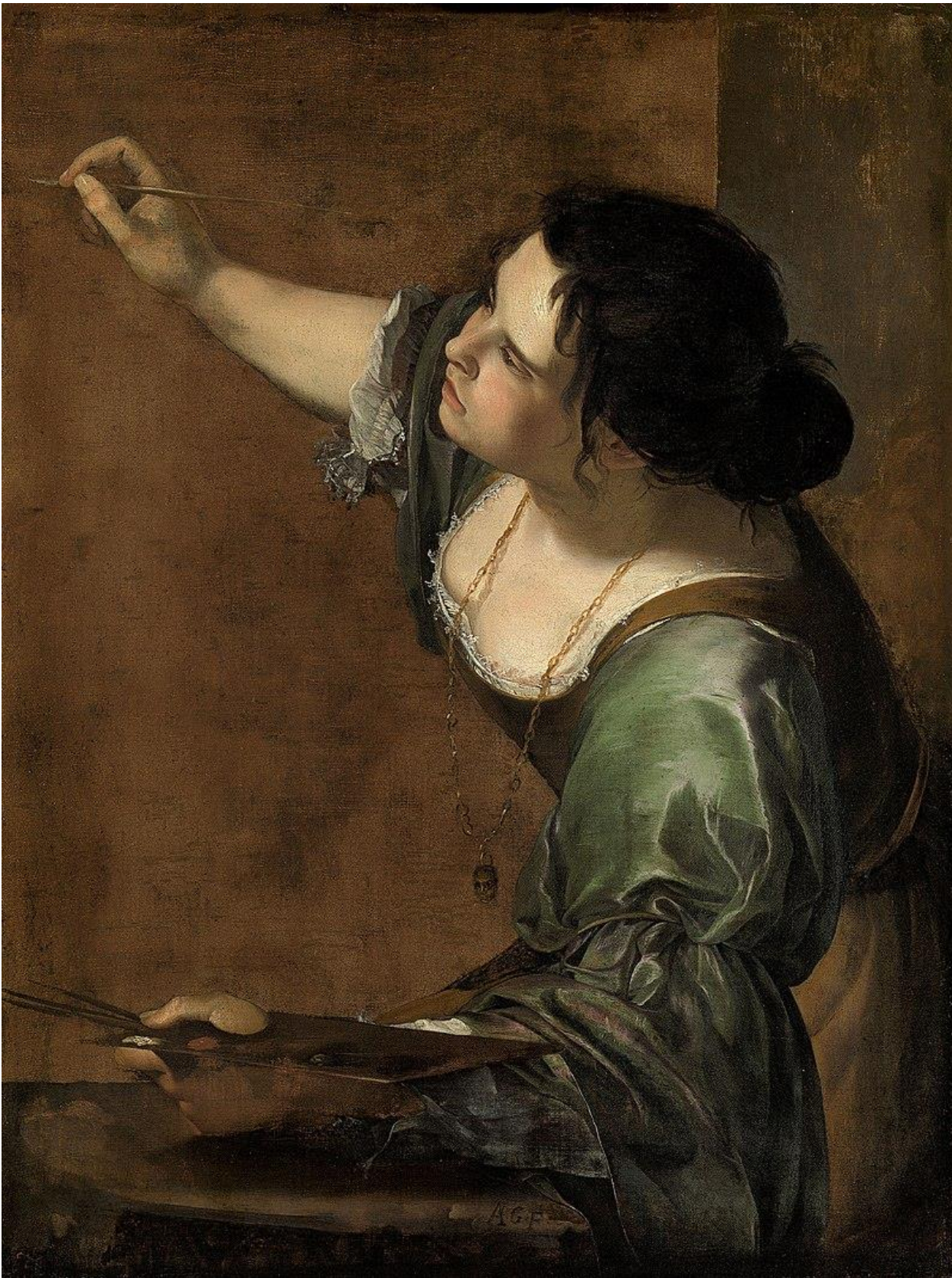
Artemisia moved to Florence, Italy and married the painter Pierantonio di Vincenzo Stiatessi. The couple had five children and she established herself as a well-known artist. It is unusual that it is the woman – Artemisia - who became famous and survived the test of time.

Unfortunately, much of Artemisia's career was overshadowed by the trial of her father's studio assistant, Agostino Tassi, whom Artemisia accused of rape. Tassi was convicted but later released.



Artemisia's father, Orazio Gentileschi, 1563-1639, Italian.

He was a favorite painter in Rome, following in the style of Caravaggio. After the trial of his daughter's rape, Orazio was ostracized to the outskirts of the Roman society.



Artemisia - above

Judith Leyster and Jan Miense Molenaer (Baroque period in Haarlem, Judith, 1609-1663; Jan, 1610-1668)
In an earlier ARTknows edition on food and art, I referred to the artist Judith Leyster and briefly mentioned her artist husband, Jan Miense Molenaer. You may recall Judith's beautiful still life paintings.

Below is one of Judith masterpieces. Like Artemisia, Judith's art has survived the test of history while there is little known of her husband.

And like many women both now and then, Judith gave up painting after she married Jan. At one time she had a studio with apprentices. Art historians now suspect that many of the works that had previously been attributed to her husband Jan, were actually Judith's. This is definitely a redundant theme – that of the artist wife giving up her work to support her husband. That is why I always tell my husband, “You can help me in my studio in being my assistant. But history is against me. I cannot help you in your studio without falling into the trap of giving up my own work.” For most situations I stick to this commitment, although sometimes I give him a hand. When my husband suggests we work on a project together, I reply – “Oh, you mean where I get to hold your nails for you?” No way..... Judith self-portrait below



Mary Beale and her son Charles Beale (British 1632-1697; British, British 1660-1714)

Mary Beale was one of the most important portrait painters in 17th century England. Her husband Charles, unusual for the time, ran and assisted in her London studio. Their son, Charles Beale the younger was also a portrait painter in both miniature and full-scale portraits. When his eyesight began to deteriorate in 1688, he gave up painting and helped his mother in her studio. Her relationship to her husband was truly modern for that time. They believed in equality between men and women.



This is one of Mary Beale's portraits of her husband Charles. It is noted for its informality - an uncommon presentation in British portraiture at the time.

Mary did several portraits of her husband.



To the left are two pieces by Charles; a painted portrait and a drawing. You can see how he was influenced by his mother's style.

Both he and his older brother were instructed to copy the paintings of the earlier masters.

Copying paintings of earlier painters is a good way to understand how to paint.

I wonder why these women artists were able to maintain their success through time. It may be that since there were so few women artists because of the societal blocks against women being successful that those who could break through these restrictions were extraordinary in their abilities. It is also likely that they had family support to break through the barriers that society set against women.

Gabriele Munter and Wassily Kandinsky (German, 1877-1962; Russian 1866-1944)

Gabriele and Wassily are another art couple. Gabriele met Wassily while studying at the Phalanx Art School in Munich. Kandinsky was the school's director. Their love evolved while traveling, although he was married. In 1903, the pair became engaged and Kandinsky moved in Munter's house. Finally, Kandinsky divorced his wife in 1911, but instead of marrying Gabriele, he married someone else. Oh well.



Kandinsky is considered a pioneer in abstract art; focusing his art on geometric shapes and color relationships.



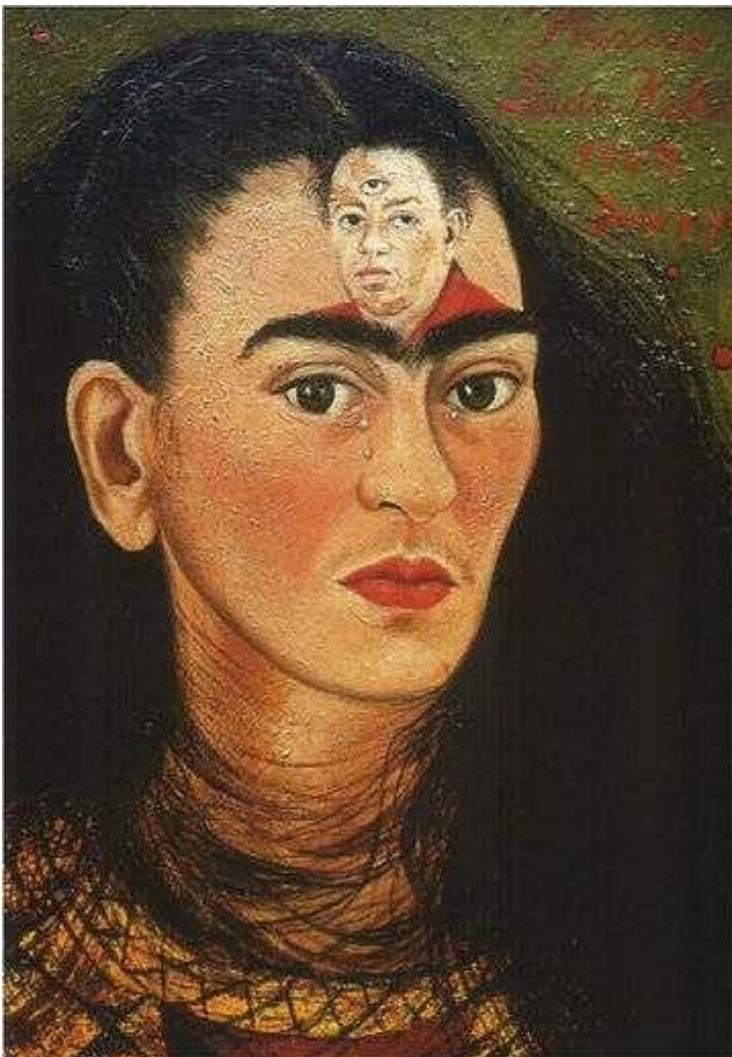
Munter suffered the difficulty of being in a relationship that was not sanctioned by society and at times she had to stop painting to accommodate the situation. At the same time, she was given much encouragement by Kandinsky to be an artist. He told her to paint "like a man" (which of course, would be a terrible thing to say today!) At the time however, it reflected the energy that society allowed men artist to fulfill their passion not extended to women. It meant – "make the commitment as if you were allowed to do that like a man."



Although Munch and Kandinsky styles are different (he paints geometric shapes unlike the figures and landscapes of Munch) their likeness can be seen in their attention to geometry, shapes, (and if you could see the images in color) – color.

Diego Rivera (Mexican, 1886-1957) and Frida Kahlo, (Mexican 1907-1954)

Most people know of Diego and Frida and of their tumultuous relationship. They met in art school when Frida was a student of Diego. They married in 1929, divorced in 1939, and then remarried a year later. Their colorful paintings influenced each other. While Diego was known for his large public murals, Diego wrote that his wife's more personal approach to painting was superior to his work. If you have a chance, read the biography of Frida Kahlo by Hayden Herrera - some of you may have seen the movie based upon this biography.



Frida Kahlo's self-portrait with inset of her husband Diego.

ASSIGNMENT: Create a self-portrait and include someone who is significant to you – a child, partner, mother, father.

Max Ernst (German, 1891-1976) Dorothea Tanning (American, 1910-2012)

These two pioneers of Surrealism first met in 1942 at a New York gallery. It is reputed that they fell in love over a chess game.

(The school of surrealism sought to channel the unconscious as a means to unlock the power of the imagination. It distained rationalism and was influenced by psychoanalysis. The surrealist believed that the rational mind suppressed the imagination. Part of tapping into the unconscious was through myths and primitivism.)

Tanning wanted to depict “unknown but knowable states” – to suggest there was more to life than meets the eye. Her work combines the familiar with the unfamiliar.

ASSIGNMENT – create a composition based upon themes of surrealism, myth, primitivism or combining the familiar with the unfamiliar. What myths do you feel particularly connected to?



On the previous page is a work entitled “Endgame.” This piece was exhibited at the Tate Museum at a Dorothea Tanning retrospective in 2019. One reviewer writes about this particular piece, “Endgame is readable as a commentary on the preliminary marital mayhem (of the marriage between Dorothea and Max.) The white shoe/Queen stamps on the black Bishop (representing the institution of marriage) making waves all about. She (the Queen) zips around the board and emerges from the darkness to perform the coup to grace....Above right sits a set of four rooks. These could simply be seen as the pieces the Queen took off the board or could symbolize another hidden meaning. If we think of “castles in the air” these rooks could be seen as a nod to unrealistic plans or hope.”

Max Ernst was interested in psychology and the mentally ill having studied philosophy and psychiatry before committing himself to art. Ernst felt that the mentally ill could make connections to unfiltered creativity, Ernst experimented with hallucinogens and hypnotism attempting to transfer his dream state directly to the canvas.



Max Ernst had an obsession with birds relating to an incident he experienced as a teenager. In 1906 the artist's parrot died the same night his sister was born. This coincidence forever developed confusion between birds and humans, entrusting this confusion into his mind. He developed an imagery bird called Loplop.

Jasper John and Robert Rauschenberg (American, 1930 - ; American 1925-2008)

Rauschenberg and Jasper lived and worked in adjacent studios in New York during their relationship from 1953 to 1961. Being in a same sex relationship when it was illegal in the United States meant they had to navigate a homophobic society that prohibited the public expression of their sexuality. At the time Abstract Expressionism was a major movement in art and their work were against the grain of this movement. They both worked in symbolism of objects. Jasper Johns has had a long relationship working with the image of the American flag. As Jasper writes, “One night I dreamed I painted a large American flag and the next morning I got up and went out and bought the materials to begin it.” The American flag is both

an abstraction of an idea and a symbol but what does the flag become when it is painted? Is it an image of the object or the object itself? Jasper began working on the series of American flag in 1954.



Jasper Johns

Rauschenberg is known for his Combines (1954-1964) which is a group of artworks incorporating everyday objects as art materials and which blurred the distinctions between painting and sculpture. He is a precursor for the Pop art movement. The Combines incorporate objects into the paintings.



Christo and Jean

Claude (1935-2020; 1935-2009). Christo and Jean Claude first met in art school in Bulgaria where Christo was born. (Oh boy, I guess all art couples meet in art school. I met Gary in watercolor class at the Penna Academy of Fine Art.) Claude was born in Morocco. They were known for the experimental outdoor sculptures that pushed the limits of how people saw the world. Many of their projects were about wrapping existing structures - like wrapping islands in pink material or wrapping a bridge in Paris in tan burlap. They installed 1200 umbrellas in Japan and another such umbrellas in California. I saw their project called “The Gates” in which they installed 7503 orange panel fabrics suspended from poles. It was really quite dramatic and beautiful. All of their pieces are temporary and in doing so the couple challenged the notion that sculpture must be sustained through time.



I have invited Kate and James to share their experience:

[The Art of Marriage, How Fine Artist Couples Inspire each other](#)

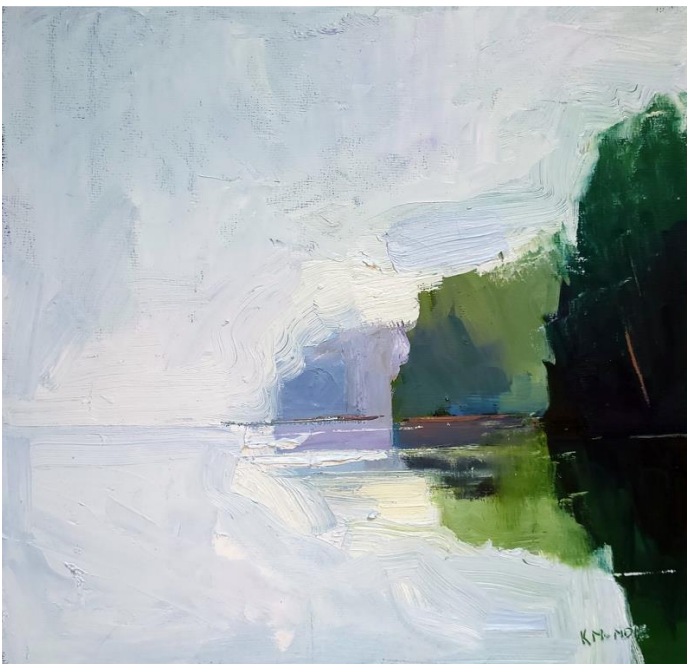
By Kate Kern Mundie and James Mundie

How long have you been partners? And where did you meet – in art school? Was being an artist a factor in how you met?

We met at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and began dating 28 years ago. We were both printmaking majors and were in some of the same classes. We continued our BFA's at the University of Pennsylvania. To save money, we often took the same courses so we could share textbooks.

How important is it to you that the other is an artist? (For myself, I couldn't imagine being married to a person not an artist, because so much of the everyday concerns and language circles on art).

It can be difficult to be in a relationship with another artist - everything from financial concerns to competitiveness for resources or recognition. However, we are not competitive about our work. Our artistic styles, mediums, and methods are entirely distinct. Kate is a landscape painter, with a loose and impressionistic painting style, grounded in a rich palette of colors. In contrast, Jim is a printmaker and draftsman, recognized for his highly technical and extremely detailed monochromatic approach.



What has truly sustained our relationship is our strong connection through art. Like any other couple, we have faced the usual ups and downs, including arguments about finances and household chores. However, it is our deep friendship and shared passion for creative expression that have kept us together. We enjoy spending time together and engaging in meaningful conversations, which primarily revolve around our art and our creative pursuits.

To left is Kate's painting of Long Cove Fog, oil 10" x 10"

How did you set up your studios or work space?

We have a studio in our house, which happens to be the largest bedroom in our home. Given the nature of art materials, many of which are flammable or toxic, we exercise caution. We've made the conscious decision to forgo working with some of the more hazardous materials, particularly in light of Kate's cancer diagnosis (currently in remission) and because of our children in the house.

Over the years, especially when our children were little (they are now teenagers), our art-making time was often confined to brief moments here and there. The convenience of having a studio at home allowed Kate to steal precious moments for art in between chores and childcare responsibilities. Jim, on the other hand, would work in more extended sessions after the kids had gone to bed, taking advantage of the quiet house. As our children have grown older, Kate has become increasingly determined to establish a regular and dedicated studio schedule, treating it as if it were a job.

How does your art influence the other's art? How is it distinct?

Our artwork does not directly influence each other's work, but we do provide each other with critiques and valuable feedback. Kate says, "Jim's drawing skills surpass mine, and when I find myself stuck on a landscape painting, where something 'is not quite right,' I'll turn to Jim for input. He has an uncanny ability to quickly identify issues in the drawing or perspective that may be causing the painting to appear off-kilter."



In the case of Jim's prints, he often seeks Kate's critique when faced with a crucial decision regarding irreversible changes to his print block. He will explain his plan and ask for opinions on whether it is the right course of action.

To the left is Jim's print
Krampus, 7.5 x 7.5 inches, linocut

Sometimes, both of us venture out to work on landscape images. Jim tends to focus on the intricate details of trees, diligently capturing the texture of bark or the fine needles of pine branches. In contrast, Kate prefers to face open spaces such as fields or water, where she paints loose, unstructured color fields without delving into fine details.

We also know the sort of things that the other might use for inspiration, so we share source material as we come upon it that the other might enjoy. For example, knowing the sorts of scenes that Kate likes to paint, Jim will take reference photos of a landscape or a building and send them to her as ideas for future painting locations.

What is your process (work habits)

Kate has always been a planner and so she takes a very regimented approach to her studio practice. For about the last 10 years, Kate has worked a part-time day job with an engineering firm remotely from home which she

has structured to allow for blocks of dedicated studio time during the early morning and afternoon. Because her painting style is very direct and immediate, this allows her to produce new work with regularity. Typically, she prefers to work on one piece at a time, seeing it through to completion before starting something new. Unless she is painting on-site outdoors, she needs the studio with its easels, lights, solvents, and tables.

In contrast, Jim works a full-time administrative day job for a university, which (before covid) required him to be in the office five days a week. Jim's artwork is more labor-intensive than Kate's, emerging more slowly. He will typically have multiple drawings, woodcuts and linocuts in progress at any given time, moving from one to another as the inspiration strikes him or devoting more time to whichever project is nearest to completion. Being more of a night owl, Jim usually prefers to work after everyone else has gone to bed. Much of Jim's work is small and portable, so he often does not need to be in the studio itself and will instead sit on the couch in the living room or the kitchen table to draw or cut blocks while listening to music or having a movie or television program play in the background. **(Below is Kate's painting, *Night Market (Esposito's)*, 11 x 14 inches, oil on pan**



While our artistic work doesn't naturally lend itself to collaboration, we do help each other, like studio assistants, especially when it comes to preparing our work for exhibition. Sometimes, it's a matter of getting out of the way and allowing the other to take over the studio depending on who needs it more at that moment. For example, when Jim is printing an edition of woodcuts or framing drawings for a show, there generally isn't room in the studio for both of us. Additionally, Kate takes on the primary responsibility for managing the business aspects of our art endeavors, handling the administrative aspects for both of us.

How do you divide daily chores like cleaning, shopping, cooking, and so on.

It is always the day-to-day grind stuff (gainful employment, laundry, feeding yourself, dentist appointments) that gets in the way of artmaking. The division of labor has been a significant point of contention for us over the nearly 30 years we have been together. We both grew up in households where the running of the house was heavily gendered—our mothers primarily handled domestic labor while our fathers went out to work.



James Mundie Robert *"The Man with Two Faces"* Melvin as Janus of Traveling Outdoor Amusement, 9.75 x 7.25 inches, ink drawing on paper,

Despite both of us working outside the house in non-art jobs, raising two kids, and having a strong desire to create art, we found ourselves caught in the trap of gendered expectations. We needed to find a balance between releasing our creative energy to produce beautiful and meaningful art and sharing attention to essential life tasks such as eating and having clean clothes. A couple of years ago, Kate (the planner) decided it was time to take a more strategic approach to her studio time. "I needed more dedicated hours for art beyond the sporadic half-

hour here and there. My goal was to secure a consistent 10 hours of studio time each week. Achieving this required clarity regarding which chores I would handle and when I would complete them. Until that point, I had taken on nearly all household chores, doing whatever was necessary to manage our tight budget and accommodate our kid-friendly schedule, which left me perpetually drained. One solution we found was to use the Fair Play card system, based on the book by Eve Rodsky, to clearly define who (including the kids) would take responsibility for specific chores and establish reasonable expectations. We put up a white board where we track the weekly schedule of events and dinner menu plans for the week. We also often use an online grocery delivery service, which saves a lot of time. As a result, Kate now enjoys approximately 15 hours a week of dedicated studio and art business time. Jim is not as regimented about his studio time but probably gets about 15 hours a week of art time, too.

How does being parents influence your art and how does your art influence your parenting? Artmaking requires a certain amount of selfishness to carve out time for oneself, but that has to give way to the pesky needs of the offspring. The biggest influence parenting has had on our art practice was mainly in time and energy constraints. In some ways, having children helped us focus and become more efficient with the time we had available to work. Kate was mainly a *plein air* painter before the kids, but afterwards shifted more to studio work. Now that they are older, however, there is the opportunity to venture out more. Parenting itself does not enter into the subject matter of our work, but as artist parents we have tried to provide our kids with as much opportunity and exposure as possible to artmaking and the art world in general. Since the time they were little, our boys have been invited into the studio to see what we are working on or make work of their own. Our childhood selves would have been jealous to have access to so many materials and advice right there in our own house. Our kids have used the studio to draw, sew, paint, silkscreen t-shirt designs, print linocuts, and build elaborate *papier-mâché* Halloween costumes. They have also tagged along to museums and countless gallery openings. This exposure has caused one son to express a desire to pursue a career in the arts for himself, while their other has concluded it would be more sensible to learn a trade as a plumber or electrician.



Jim and Kate. If you have comments or questions please send to

PE and we'll forward them on.

Notes from afar and afield:

This newsletter will be delayed in getting to you as you know from your earlier letter from Gary. Unfortunately, Gary fell and broke his wrist and had a concussion. He is fine except needing surgery on his wrist. I haven't seen him since falling but he sent me a picture of his wrist (I think it was in a cast) and his hand looks terrible - swollen and very blue. Send out positive thoughts for him....but of course, by the time you get this newsletter he will be whirling around on his skateboard.....Remember about 8 years ago when he broke his hip from

skateboarding? Although I am not one to talk having had two bike accidents that ended with first a broken arm and second with a broken collar bone. For those of you who like me are getting older each day...and who isn't getting older by the seconds?.....it is good to do daily balancing exercises; standing on one leg with eyes shut; then alternating to the other leg, with the goal of being able to stand on one leg unsighted for a minute. Phew!

We haven't had an exhibition at the Big Red Barn since before the pandemic and I think it is time for another one! Hopefully, this year we can pull it off. We did have a very nice traveling exhibition of your work going to 5 libraries through the spring of 2023. This fall we sent that work to the Denver church where you had an exhibition in 2018. Here is a letter from Patra a member of the church with whom I coordinate the exhibitions:

The Art Committee at First Universalist Church of Denver exhibited 60 pieces of art from the Prisoner Express art collection during the month of September, 2023. The exhibit was very compelling and we thank Prisoner Express for loaning us the collection and for all the good they do by teaching art in the prison system.

The Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalist are as follows:

- 1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person.*
- 2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relation.*
- 3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.*
- 4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.*
- 5. The right of conscience and the use of democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.*
- 6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.*
- 7. Respect for the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part.*
- 8. Journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural beloved community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.*

Patra

Some of you have written asking if you can use the exhibitions in which we have shown your work for resumes. Yes, certainly! I will attempt to recall the exhibitions for the past 10 years. (If you have been with PE longer, let me know and I will comb my brain to remember exhibitions anything before 2011.

Select those exhibitions in which you participated:

2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 – Exhibition at the Big Red Barn, Cornell University Campus, Ithaca, NY 14853.

2014, “Art, alibi and an anonymous we”, Rosenfeld Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

2014, “Without the wall”, Philadelphia City Hall, Philadelphia, PA

2018, First Universalist Church of Denver, Denver Colorado.

2019, Traveling exhibition at Newfield Library, Newfield NY 14867; Ulysses Philomatic Library, Main Street, Trumansburg, NY 14886; Watkins Glen Library, Watkins Glen, NY 14891

2019, Gimme Coffee, Ithaca NY 14850; Gimme Coffee, Trumansburg, NY 14886

2020-2021; “Under a concrete sky” Erie Art Museum, Erie, PA,

2023, “Behind the wall” - Traveling exhibition in conjunction with Story House; Ithaca Library, Ithaca, NY; Auburn Library. Auburn, NY; Owego Library, Owego, NY; Lansing Library, Lansing NY; Seneca Falls Library, Seneca Falls, NY

For those of you who participated in the creation of the animation “The moth and light”; this animation was presented at:

2016 – Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, NY

2022 – Noyes Art Museum, Atlantic City, NJ

If I forgotten some, please let me know.....

Some comments about submitting art: Please put your name by which you are known in the system on the back of the art work. Letters are often separated from art work and there is no way for us to identify the artist if there is not a clear name on it. And while you may wish to go by “Rosey Rubylips”, if you are not listed in the prison as “ole Rosey”, it will be hard to keep track of authorship of the work. You are certainly welcomed to print both names on the back of the artwork. Operative word here is PRINT. There are many very original signatures but ones that I can’t decipher....so PRINT (with your lovely signature below if you wish).

We cannot sell art work for the artist. There are other organization who are dedicated to selling artwork. We don’t have the staff for the complexity of entering into a commercial relationship with so many participants. At times, we allow work to find homes when a donation is given to PE . (As you know this is a very nonprofit organization and most like myself are volunteers or workers who have various jobs.) That being said, we work hard to get your work exposed to the public and the Cornell community.

ART from the PE community:



Far left:
Rachel
Hilyard

Right:
Kristopher
(Kit) Storey



Daniel Troya's artistic response to the assignment from the last ARTknows on Medieval Art

If there are terms in the newsletter that I have not defined, do what James Hochchild did when he came across terms like expressionistic and others. He went to the prison library. While I know that art books are often stolen from prison libraries, most will still have a dictionary.

I had hoped to get a definition of "Krampus" from James Mundie, but haven't been able to as of the date of this newsletter. So if you have a definition of Krampus, or want to give it an imaginative try, let me know what you think it is.....better still create a drawing of what you think it is.

Happy New Year!

Treacy

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ARTKnows

Prisoner Express promotes rehabilitation by providing information, education, and opportunities for creative self-expression to incarcerated individuals throughout the United States.

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