



D I A N N E B E R N H A R D

TRANSFORMING
LIVES THROUGH

ART



“THE OBJECT ISN’T TO MAKE ART, IT’S TO BE IN THAT WONDERFUL STATE WHICH MAKES ART INEVITABLE.”

– Robert Henri –

For a natural born artist, the medium doesn’t matter. The intent does. And when it’s a work of art created by Dianne Bernhard, it’s a personal gift wholeheartedly bestowed.

Dianne views the world as a canvas, rearranging, retouching, reimagining, repurposing, revering until the object of her affection is stunningly recast through her eyes. She can fashion delicate angelic dolls from fine porcelain and transform cast off furniture into gilded, faux-finished heirlooms as precisely as she can brush breath into individually blushing petals on a bouquet of long-stemmed painted roses that make you instinctively want to stop and smell them, thoroughly taken with their arresting natural beauty. Her eye for art informs her life, whether it manifests in the gallery of ocean-hued seascapes that grace the foyer of her inviting beachfront home, in the hand-painted tiles that embrace her many fireplaces or inside the sanctuary studios she works in to create her acclaimed floral oils and the pastel poetry that resonates with her today.

An accomplished painter, teacher, arts advocate and dedicated patron, Dianne has spent a lifetime perfecting her passion. She honed her talented hand under the tutelage of American and European realists, both at home and abroad, learning how to give voice and spirit to her artistic expressions with the same quiet strength she infuses in her convictions.

Over her lifetime, her career has taken her from coast to coast and around the world, first as student then as teacher of the paint-along workshops she helped pioneer, and today as patron to living artists following their dreams. Sharing her love of painting fuels her passion for a life devoted to – and uniquely enriched by – the arts.

As a young painter, she was influenced by the epoch-making American artist Robert Henri who “gave his students, not a style (though some imitated him), but an attitude, an approach to art” that spoke volumes about the subjects they immortalized. His paintings, many of them expressive portraits of people, young and old, evoke a generosity of spirit and personality that defined his belief that the object wasn’t about making art, “it’s to be in that wonderful state which makes art inevitable.”

DIANNE, BY HER VERY NATURE, IS ALWAYS IN THAT WONDERFUL STATE.

We had the honor of sitting down with Dianne this spring at the Westport home she shares with her husband, Van, an exceptionally gifted artist as well, surrounded by Long Island Sound on three sides and an idyllic harbor, inside and out. Blues predominate here, drinking in the setting and accenting sink-in-sofas that beg you to stay. Flowers, everywhere, intoxicate with joys unbidden and fireplaces, even unlit, warm the welcomes on offer here. Our conversation began without words, awed appreciation at the Bernhard’s stunning works of living art replacing idle chatter. As we admired poetically hued renderings of land and sea, Dianne pointed out the pastels among the paintings we took for oils. We couldn’t readily tell them apart which surprised us, coming from the notion that pastels were created by chalk pencils that with

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WHEN DID DIANNE FIRST BECOME ENAMORED WITH PASTELS AS WE WERE NOW?

"I was judging a competition and saw a pastel painting that really captured my attention," she told us. She sought out the artist to compliment her on both the quality of the work and the techniques she used, taking the opportunity to ask her how and where she learned to create such beautiful work.

"The artist was evasive with her answer, leading me to believe that she developed this magical style on her own," said Dianne, at the time sorely disappointed because she was hoping to be able to study this impressive art form. A short while later, she was surprised to see another painting that exhibited the same impressive signature qualities, again seizing the opportunity to seek out the artist and inquire about her style.

"She didn't hesitate to tell me that she studied with a master pastel artist in Connecticut, and proudly gave me his contact information. His name was Herman Margulies and I quickly became one of his most devoted students and patrons."

A longtime resident of Washington Depot in Litchfield County, Connecticut, and native of Poland, Herman Margulies came to the United States in 1951 after surviving unimaginable horrors in several Nazi concentration camps during World War II. A precocious youth who spoke seven languages, Herman's talent as an artist was obvious when he was just seven years old, joyfully drawing the world around him until the Germans invaded Poland and the Hitler regime took over. He was only 17 at the time and would endure a lifetime of tragedies, including the loss of his family, in just six years. When the camp he was imprisoned in was liberated in 1945, he weighed just 86 pounds and required hospitalization to nurture him back to health. It was there that a nurse recognized him from their life before the war and brought him drawing supplies to aid in his recovery. Her kind gesture and his enduring love for both his beloved art and a girl he had met in a concentration camp, renewed his faith in the world, and he would go on to become one of America's greatest pastel artists.

"His life and career followed a circuitous path before I met him," Dianne recalled. In addition to working in several different industries, from coal mining and leatherworks to printing, he lived in Belgium and immigrated to the United States in 1951. After moving to Connecticut with his second

time faded into dust. They become ever more vibrant as Dianne explained the medium, her enthusiasm putting them into a genre of art long due their fame.

Pastels, we're reminded, were the medium of choice for such famous artists like Edgar Degas, Edouard Manet, and Eugène Delacroix whose works grace the walls of some of the most renowned museums and collections in the world. Picture the ballerinas that dance off of Degas' canvases; his mastery of pastels raises the bar in this art genre. Manet's pastel portraits of men and women are remarkably luminous with light and shading and juxtaposed with colors. Critics praised Delacroix for his pastels, too, noting "The richest of these full-colored pastels on paper rival his much more frequent oil paintings with a potent originality of tone and hue that has remained vivid while some of his oils appear to have darkened."



ABOUT DIANNE BERNHARD

Former President of the National Arts Club and the Connecticut Classic Arts Association, former board member of the National Academy of Design and an award-winning painter, Dianne B. Bernhard is the founder of the non-profit Art Spirit Foundation and owner of the Bernhard Gallery, both located in Southport, Connecticut. Honorary Vice President of the Pastel Society of America, and member of The Salmagundi Club, and the National Museum of Women in the Arts, a devoted grandmother and mother, a prolific and gifted artist, Dianne and her husband Van share their time in residences in Westport, Connecticut, Gramercy Park in New York City and their private island in the Bahamas

Photo by Nathan Kraxberger



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wife, Laura, he was awarded some 22 patents for innovative, life-changing products, the most notable of which was the disposal syringe, during a 23-year tenure at the Sterling Drug Company, and painted only on weekends. It wasn't until 1985, when he quit his day job with a leap of faith and the supportive blessing of his wife, that he became a full-time artist and tutor to students wishing to learn the art of pastel. Dianne was among his earliest protégées.

The first time Dianne saw Herman's work, she felt an immediate connection to the artist, recognizing his talent and heart with one glance. While art by its very nature is uniquely personal, great art traditionally embodies five key elements: technique, concept, emotion, quality and honesty. "I knew that whoever painted these paintings was passionate about his art and the beauty of life," she said. "That his medium of choice was pastels made his work all the more enriching. He used color in a way I had never seen in pastels layering it with his memories and dreams of happier times," she added. "His technique elicits a wide range of feelings each time you see his work. That's the way you know great art, how it makes you feel. I could see Herman's whole emotional processes going on in each canvas. It gave me a great respect for painting and painter," she explained, adding that she owns some 400 of his works in her private collection.

She watched him work and painted alongside him for two decades, finding her voice as his grew stronger, and has been an enthusiastic collector and advocate of his paintings ever since. Today she has made it her "commitment to focus attention on the renaissance of pastel and to bring that attention to the public regarding the permanence and beauty of this medium. Every movement needs a voice; I think Herman is that voice."

SHE HAS BEEN SINGING AND PAINTING HIS PRAISES EVER SINCE.

Herman took his love for impressionism, added his ideas and life experiences, and reinterpreted them through his pastel

paintings, she explained. They go beyond aesthetics, touching heart and soul with an honesty and sensitivity that speak volumes about the inherent resilience and beauty of the world in which we live.

"Pastels encourage spontaneous expression," she said, giving the artist the freedom to work in the moment, without the waits required by painting in oil. For an artist like Herman Margulies, who had so much to say about life, love – and hope, pastels became his legacy, inspiring a renewed appreciation for an age-old movement that's worthy of modern-day notice.

Pastels have historically lingered under the radar, unjustly overshadowed by oils and watercolors. As Dianne discovered as she first set out to recognize the living artists who worked exclusively with pastels, no major art competitions had a category dedicated solely to this medium. Pastels were always thrown into the last and least significant category in the competition.

Recognizing the need for institutional change, she contacted leading art associations, clubs and show sponsors, asking why there were no categories devoted to pastels, at the same time urging them to reclassify these paintings into their own, highly deserved classification. Then she did what she asked of them and created the Dianne Bernhard Award for excellence in pastels, with monetary rewards equal to those found in traditionally recognized genres. Universally, art competitions have been considered as incubators for art scouts to discover emerging talent and launch important careers for professional artists.

She explained that there are many talented artists living today who work in pastels, shading, shaping and redefining their memories, models and landscapes with eloquent, boldly colored strokes that defy any preconceived notions about this genre. Dianne echoed our own thoughts as she told us that people are now admiring pastels through new eyes, commenting that they "never thought pastels could do that."

In addition to showcasing her prized collection of Herman Margulies' pastels in several prestigious US galleries, including her private Southport, Connecticut, gallery, itself a work of art boasting a blend of hand-selected European antique architectural artifacts, Dianne established The Art Spirit Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to recognizing outstanding pastel artists in juried exhibitions and to promoting the arts as a life-changing force for today's artists.

Thanks to the trailblazing genius of Master Pastelist Herman Margulies, Dianne Bernhard has become a dedicated patron in support of contemporary pastel artists wishing to make their mark in the art world, a role that has truly taken her gifts full circle. □

