Stamford Advocate 5/21/70

Louis Schanker, Early Life Rebel, Enjoys Days In Rustic Home Studio

By MARIE UPDEGRAFF

If a fortune teller gazed into her crytal ball to see what was going to happen to Louis Schanker, neither she nor Louis Schanker would have believed it.

The Stamford artist, who married wealthy, twice-widowed "torch singer" Libby Holman in 1960, rebelled at age 14 against just about everything — family, school, religion.

If he had had his way at the time, he might have been killed or disabled in World War I. Or, today, he might be a retired circus roustabout.

Instead, at his present age of 66, Mr. Schanker is not only a leading designer, carver and printer of woodcuts, but also a respected painter and sculptor. Bard College, where he taught art for 15 years, has named him professor emeritus.

Found in Top Collections.

His work can be found in the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum, the New York City Public Library, the Chicago Art Institute — to name a few hallowed halls that include him — and in many top private collections. This fall a Rockefeller grant to the Brooklyn Museum will enable the museum to publish a book of his woodcuts in color and black and white.

A highly intelligent, considerate man with a fringe of white hair and a full white mustache, Mr. Schanker radiates good will and physical stamina. The other morning, as he sat in the library of "Tree Tops," his wife's 100-acre estate on Merriebrook La., it amused him to recall how, as a youth, he tried to derail his life —and had a lot of fun doing it.

Tried to Enlist at 14.

"I was born in a cold-water flat in the Bronx," he began, "and, when I was 14 I ran away from home to go to war. I changed the date on my birth certificate to prove I was 18. But, the Army decided it didn't look kosher and told me to go home.

"I rebelled against religion. My parents were orthodox Jews who had a small store in the Bronx which sold tailor's trimmings. Also, I rebelled against school. My first month at the old Townsend Harris High was my last. To me, academic subjects meant nothing but frustration."

So young Schanker quit school and went to work for E. P. Dutton & Co. as a messenger. One day he saw a set of oil paints in a store window, and, with money jingling in his pocket, bought the set as a birthday present for his older brother. Louis was the fourth of seven children, three boys and four girls.

Brother Didn't Paint.

But, his brother took no interest whatever in the paint set. Finally, Louis picked it up and began coloring the spaces of the picture that came with it. (He insists the spaces weren't numbered in those days.)

Then, he went on to painting on blank paper. His new interest in art propelled him back to school, to study drawing at Copper Union at night.

The lure of adventure continued to haunt him, however. So, when he was a strapping 19-year-old with black hair and the endurance of an elephant, he dropped the art courses to run away with two friends and join a circus in Macon, Ga.

The hick-town Sparks Circus, which played one-night stands in towns of 5,000 or less, hired him to take care of its ring horses. In the circus pecking order the wire walkers, animal trainers, and other performers were the elite. Fellows like "Blackie" Schanker who did the menial jobs were considered "scum."

Gambled Away Money.

"I was paid five dollars a week plus 'found,' which meant room and board," he said. "I never saw a penny of my five dollars because I always lost it in circus crap games. But as long as they fed me, I didn't care."

Nevertheless, he cared enough to try to organize the "scum" to demand more money. Management found out and abruptly fired him in a little town in Michigan.

After a summer on a harvesting crew in the Midwest wheat fields, young Schanker returned to New York to seriously study art at the Art Student's League and the Educational Alliance, a settlement house. He earned money manning a soda fountain from 6 p.m. to 1 a.m. When he wasn't painting, he posed for art classes.

Studied in France.

"I made enough money on tips at the soda fountain to finance a year in France and Italy in 1931, during the depression," he said. "I studied at the Grande Chaumiere and had a studio outside Paris. I was still doing realistic painting."

But, as time passed, his work became increasingly abstract. Until today he rarely creates anything that could be considered realistic.

The artist who completed only one month of high school went on to teach at Bard College, becoming an associate professor. At roughly the same time, he spent 18 years teaching at the New School for Social Research.

Mr. Schanker's marriage to the famous Miss Holman, widow of tobacco heir Zachary Smith Reynolds and widow also of actor Ralph Holmes, was another unexpected event in his unpredictable life. They met in 1958 at the New School. Miss Holman had just finished starring in Lorca's tragedy, "Yerma," her first appearance after a long absence from the stage.

"You Must Meet Libby."

"One of my former girl students at the school was in a Zen Buddhism class with Libby," Mr. Schanker explained. "This student kept telling me I must meet her friend Libby, and one day she brought Libby into my classroom.

"We had about a minute. I said, 'I'm glad to meet you,' and Libby said, 'I'm glad to meet you,' and that was that. She had to go to her Zen class, and my next art class started coming in.

"I didn't see Libby again until the same student had an exhibit at one of the New York galleries, I said, 'Hello,' and she said, 'Hello,' and we both attended a party after the show. It wasn't until we started going together that I had any idea who Libby Holman was."

Originally, the dynamic Elizabeth Holman came to New York City from Cincinnati to study law at Columbia, but was sidetracked into the theater. In 1926, she made a hit overnight singing "Moanin' Low" in "Garrick Gaieties," and from then on was famous as the "torch singer." Her plans for a legal career went down the drain.

Wed In Jamaica.

Two years after they met, Mr. Schanker, whose first marriage had ended in divorce some time before, and Miss Holman, were married in Jamaica.

On a knoll at "Tree Tops" stands the artist's modern studio building, where he often spends 12 hours at a stretch. It has a fireplace and a generous expanse of windows and skylights which let in candid north light. The studio holds samples of his sculture, woodcuts and paintings and, of course, the tools with which he works.

Circles and spheres particularly fascinate him. "They are the perfect shape," he explained. "You drop some liquid on the floor and it forms a circle, never a square or a rectangle."

Creates "Feelies."

This fascination takes form in wood scultpure that Mr. Schanker calls his "feelies." Standing about in his studio are a number of pieces, some taller than a man, inside of which he has chiseled and polished one or more moveable spheres. They remain entrapped, exactly as he formed them in the body of the work, like an unborn child in the womb. The spheres can be rotated, but they can't be removed without breaking the piece.

Mr. Schanker invited a group of teenagers from a blind school to one of his New York shows, specifically so they could feel his scultpure. He says the blind youngsters were ecstatic over the experience.

Currently, he was prepared an exhibit of bright acrylic abstract paintings on sheets of plastic that he chiseled out ever so slightly to create a textured effect. They will be shown in a New York gallery. Occasionally, he has exhibited one or two of his pieces at the Stamford Museum.

"I don't think any artist can explain his work or why he does what he does," Mr. Schanker commented. "It's a matter of feeling, mainly, and a sense of color, space and movement. Preconceived ideas don't necessarily turn out that way. You allow accidents to happen, because accidents make art exciting."

The rebel who tried to go to war in 1917 has become a rebel against the war in Vietnam.

"Libby and I and some others have organized a group called 'Peace Now' to end America's participation in the Vietnam war immediately," Mr. Schanker said. "Libby is chairman of the movement. We have just sent telegrams to all 100 senators and to President Nixon, urging them to get out of the war right now."

PARRISH EAST END STORIES

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"THE SUMMER PLACE": 31 HAMPTONS ARTISTS
JULY 12 - AUGUST 12 1970

RELATED PEOPLE

Conrad Marca-Relli
Charlotte Park
Elizabeth Parker
David Porter
Ludwig Sander
Louis Schanker

At the time, he was painting somber underground visions of the city, especially the subways, while his friend Gottlieb tended to paint close-valued, faintly distorted visions of interiors, such as 'The Family,' reproduced in *Art News* of December 19, 1936. These two resisted the pull to American-scene illustration but nonetheless sought in their works some tragic communication. Around 1935 they frequented the studios of some dozen others and finally formed a loose group called 'The Ten' which, as one member (Joseph Solman) repeated, 'challenged the supremacy of the silo.' They had their first show in 1936 at the Montrose Gallery. Listings in the catalogue were Ben-Zion, Ilya Bolotowsky, A. Gottlieb, Louis Harris, Jack Krefeld, Marcus Rothkowitz (Rothko), Lou Schanker, Solman, and Nahum Tschacbasov. In other shows in the subsequent four years the group varied, including at times John Graham, Ralph Rosenborg, and Lee Gatch. Their objectives were more or less announced in 1938 when, as 'The Whitney Dissenters,' they refused to show in the Annual, and wrote a broadside in which they spoke of The Ten as 'homogeneous in their consistent opposition to conservatism, in their capacity to see objects as though for the first time. . . . It is a protest against the reputed equivalence of American painting and literal painting.'

The increasing interest in expressionist variants was remarked by Jacob Kainen in the February 1937 issue of *Art Front*. He noted a 'stirring,' a reappearance of expressionists who: 1, attempt to reduce the interpretation of nature or life in general to the rawest emotional elements; 2, have a complete and utter dependence on pigment; 3, show an intensity of vision. The best organized group of young expressionists, functioning in New York was The Ten, he reported, praising Gottlieb and Rothko (Rothkowitz) for their 'usual sober plasticity, keeping everything simply emotional,' and also mentioning Louis Harris, Lee Gatch, Ben-Zion, and Joseph Solman. Significantly, he linked expressionism with the mounting fear of war, warning that 'we are closer to chaos than we think.' It is probably safe to speculate that the artists he writes about were keenly aware of the political dangers in the late thirties, and that their expressionism was a response to the rising hysteria as the war drew close.

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SATURDAY, AUGUST 19, 1972

The New Y

Hired
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Photographs for The New York Times by JOE ADAMS

Warren Brandt, right, at work at the political painting session on Thursday in an East Hampton, L. I., studio. Seated at the right rear is Harold Rosenberg, art critic.

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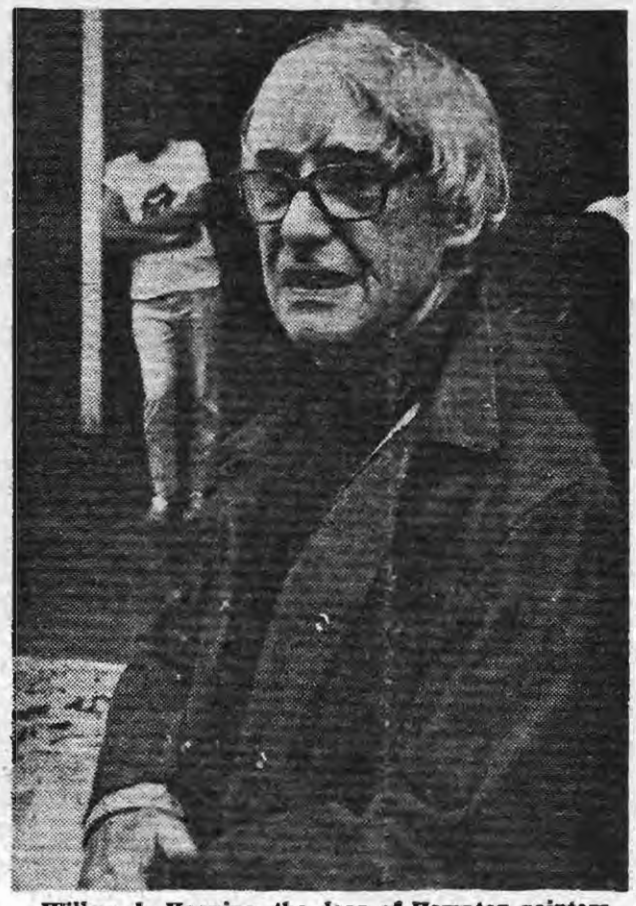
46 L.I. Artists Brush Up for Politics

By JOHN CANADAY
Special to The New York Times

EAST HAMPTON, L. I., Aug. 18—It looked a little like a reunion of graduates of the Cedar bar, the New York pub where artists and critics generated abstract expressionism during the nineteen-fifties. It looked even more like a paint-out for the adult and golden age Fun with Art classes of any community art center. In spite of a couple of McGovern buttons and one McGovern sweatshirt it didn't look at all like a political rally, which it was.

Forty-six artists who live or summer in the Hamptons had signed up for a project that they hope will bring about $25,000 (hopes vary upward and downward) to the McGovern fund when their combined efforts on two giant canvasses are auctioned in September. Yesterday afternoon about 25 or 30 of them met here in the backyard of the studio of the late Wilfrid Zogbaum and lit into (which involved getting onto) the canvasses, one 12 by 15 feet, the other 9 by 12 feet, which were laid out on the ground. Artists who couldn't attend sent work to be pasted on.



Willem de Kooning, the dean of Hampton painters

A Reserved Spot

The session was scheduled to begin at 4 P.M. and contrary to expectations it really did. The artists not only arrived on time but also staked their claims to choice spots like homesteaders in a land rush. By 4:30 the canvases were literally crawling with painters, and latecomers were jockeying for places.

"Can't you get another sheet or something?" one of them asked Herman Cherry, a Cedar bar alumnus who, with David Myers, a writer, is the project's impresario. "No, I can't," Mr. Cherry answered. "Just paint smaller."

"I gave them a limitation of size but naturally they disregarded it," he went on, and added a refrain that had been recurrent during the afternoon: "De Kooning will be here any minute now." An area about 2½ feet square on the southwest corner of the smaller canvas had been reserved for Willem de Kooning as the dean (i.e., the highest-priced) of Hampton painters.

Mr. Cherry explained that the canvases, which are unmounted, will be used as curtains or backdrops for an evening of skits by artists and writers of the area to be performed Sept. 1 in nearby Amagansett as their traditional end-of-summer frolic and get-together. (It sometimes takes the form of a baseball game, but lately a lot of joints are getting a bit stiff.)

"We've already got one line for the skits—like in the old Groucho Marx song, 'Whatever It Is I'm Against It'" [the Harry Ruby-Bert Kalmar song from "A Night at the Opera"]. "'Whatever It Is, Amagansett.'"

The artists' individual areas, spotted across and up and down the canvases, are meant to resemble the advertisements on asbestos curtains in oldtime vaudeville and burlesque houses, except that most of them will be abstractions. One nonabstract painter, Warren Brandt, known as a strong colorist, was at work on a large reclining nude that began as a solid white area with the figure sketched in in gray and punctuated by four red dots for the navel, nipples and mouth, defining four points of a kite-shaped quadrangle.

"Once that's settled, I'm O.K.," Mr. Brandt said.

Few Secrets Revealed

"Now we know how he does it," another painter commented, but not many studio secrets were given away. Robbed of their easels, the artists were more interested in comparing the advantages of the crawl, the crouch, the squat or, for the more agile, the standing full bend, as positions for working on a horizontal surface. A guest of honor, Harold Rosenberg, the art critic, dean emeritus of the Cedar and inventor of the term "action painting," was seeing plenty of it.

Garb for the occasion was informal but not eccentric, with the exception of Larry Rivers's. Mr. Rivers was modeling a floppy beret improvised from a pair of women's panties, pale blue silk with a dainty floral pattern. The Rivers Beret, which falls across one ear but reveals it through a leg opening, is not expected to catch on.

Mr. Rivers, although a painter, was present as the camera half of one of four mike-and-camera teams whose documentaries will immortalize such comments as Manoucher Yektai's "What this really is, is a jam session." Jimmy Ernst's "We've got nothing to worry about because neither of the candidates paints on the side," and somebody's "Don't slip up on me with the mike like that. That's a Republican trick."

The Star Appears

The Star Appears

At about 5 o'clock the star of the day, unexpectedly bearing a vivid resemblance to Janet Flanner, stepped out of the bushes near his corner of the canvas, and the mikes clustered around him.

"How did you get here, Mr. de Kooning?" asked one mike-bearer, a question that sounded reasonable enough to a reporter who had made it from New York by way of a train, a bus, and $18 worth of taxis.

"I walked over," said Mr. de Kooning.

Wasting no time, he assumed a medium crouch and began to work from two pages of pencil sketches he had prepared in advance. Within 10 minutes his designated area was filled with a pattern of black on white, and, yielding to the goad of the territorial imperative, he crossed the line into an area where Louis Schanker had been working all afternoon on a very neat black on white pattern of his own.

"Hey!" said Mr. Schanker. "You got some paint on mine!"

Mr. de Kooning smiled and put on a finishing touch or two and faded back into the bushes.

"What should I do?" Mr. Schanker asked of a wide audience.

"Paint it out," answered Ralph Carpentier, the landscape painter, presumably meaning paint out the de Kooning part.

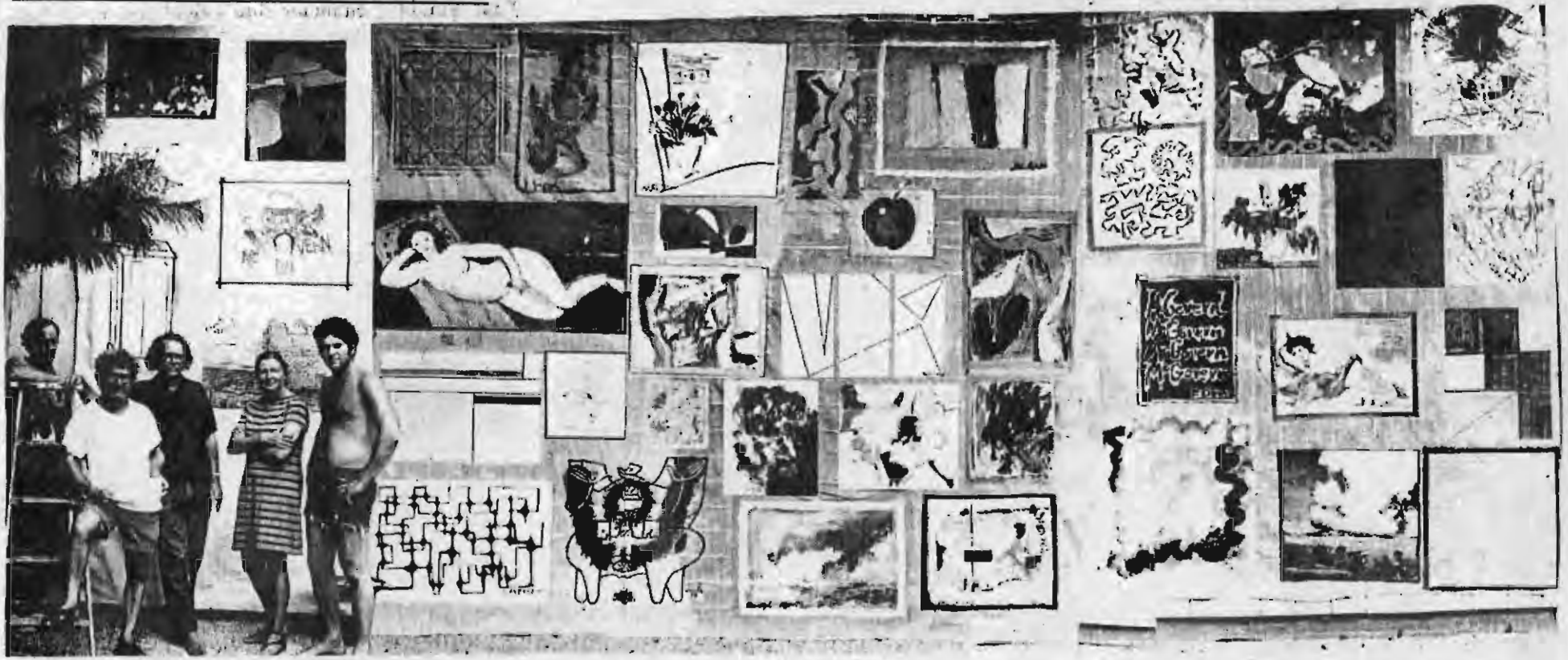
"Mine's better than his is anyhow," said Mr. Schanker. "And I've still got my border to put in."

A Little Squiggle

The border was put in, two inches wide, bright orange and extending slightly into de Kooning country. A small taillike squiggle from Mr. de Kooning's brush was left within the Schanker area, or at least was still there at 5:30 when this reporter last observed it.

"We all love each other," Jimmy Ernst commented. "It's the World of East Hampton."

The participating artists, in addition to those mentioned, are Pearl Fine, Ilya Bolotowsky, Oli Sihvonen, Calvin Albert, John Opper, Jane Freiliker, John Grillo, Adolf Gottlieb, James Brooks, Charlotte Parks, Bigar, Bill Durham, Constantino Nivola, Harlan Jackson, Francile Lord, John Little, Kyle Morris, Robert Gwathmey, Alfonso Ossorio, Ibram Lassaw, John McMahon, Elaine de Kooning, Roy Lichtenstein, Lee Krasner, Arnold Hoffman, Peter Grippi, Ray Parker, Paul Georges, Saul Steinberg, Kimber Smith, Val Telberg, Jack Youngerman, Alec Brook, Gina Knee, Paul Brach, Vincent Longo, Mary Abbott and Vivi Rankin.



Standing in front of the forty foot Springs mural, from left to right are Liel Hope, Herman Cherry, Kimber Smith, Elaine Benson and Bill Goff. The artists who contributed to this thing are Pearl Fine, Ralph Carpentier, Ilya Bolotowski, Schivonen, John Opper, Calvin Albert, Jimmy Ernst, Jane Freilicher, Bill DeKooning, Jim Brooks, Charlotte Parks, Manouch Yektai, Bill Durham, Nivola, Harlan Jackson, John Little, Kyle Morris, Ibram Lassaw, Elaine DeKooning, Larry Rivers, Lee Krassner, Peter Grippi, Louie Schanker, Warren Brandt, Nicole Bigar, Francile Downs, Arnold Hoffmann, Ray Parker, Vincent Longo, Mary Abbott, Herman Cherry, Ron Lusker, Ray Prohaska, V.V. Rankin and Arline Wingete. $10 cash first prize to the first person who clips this photo out and indicates properly which artist did which painting.

The artists (from left to right beginning at the top): Ilya Bolotowsky, James Brooks, George Constant, Willem deKooning, Perle Fine, Adolph Gottlieb, Balcomb Greene, Robert Gwathmey, Lee Krasner, Ibram Lassaw, Julian Levi, John Little, Costantino Nivola, John Opper, Ray Prohaska, Abraham Rattner, Ludwig Sander, Louis Schanker, Esteban Vicente, Della Weinberger, Adja Yunkers.

21/60

Museum Section Guild Hall East Hampton, N.Y.

Twenty-One Over Sixty

July 21 - August 12, 1973

Elayne H. Varian, Guest Director
of the exhibition

Foreword

This exhibition presents the triumphant production of artists of the Hamptons, a few of many, but it will demonstrate our premise, that art and life may both be long and continuously stimulating. The work on view has the power, vitality and continuation of an ever-increasing force. Some is perhaps more lyrical, but all has a great sensitivity, and presents a positive statement. The show is an opportunity to re-evaluate the work of known artists, some of whom have been clarifying and reconfirming a personal image, while other artists have been experimenting in new media.

The title — which was a decision of the artists — "Twenty-One Over Sixty" (twenty-one artists over sixty years of age) is a humorous one, and is a counter-title to the several exhibitions of "Artists under Thirty," or Forty, etc. Our intention for this exhibition was to select two works of art by each artist, but due to prior commitment this was not always possible.

It was a great privilege for me to meet the artists and their wives and husbands, whom previously I had not known. I wish to thank all the artists for their cooperation, and also Enez Whipple, Director of the Guild Hall Museum, and two indispensable members of her staff, Rae Ferren and Sherry Foster. Appreciation is due Hans Namath for his generosity in lending perceptive photographs of the artists. Toni Borgzinner's profound interest in the Hampton artists has been of inestimable help and made the preparation of this exhibition a joyous experience.

Elayne H. Varian

Director, The Contempory Wing
Finch College Museum of Art

All measurements are in inches

ILYA BOLOTOWSKY	Red Trylon, 1972 acrylic on wood	84 x 9 x 9 x 9
	Vertical Ellipse, Yellow, Black and Red, 1972 acrylic on canvas	67½ x 47½
	Courtesy Grace Borgenicht Gallery	
JAMES BROOKS	Fangle, 1973 acrylic on canvas	76 x 76
	Gair, 1973 acrylic on canvas	64 x 64
	Courtesy Martha Jackson Gallery	
GEORGE CONSTANT	Parallelos, 1970 oil on canvas	50 x 60
	Manhattan, 1970 oil on canvas	52 x 60
	Lent by the Artist	
WILLEM DE KOONING	Clam Digger, 1971 bronze	height, 60"
	Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Bigar	
PERLE FINE	An Accordment No. II, 1973 acrylic on canvas	62 x 65
	An Accordment No. III, 1973 acrylic on canvas	66 x 68
	Lent by the Artist	
ADOLPH GOTTLIEB	Petaloid, 1971 painted corten steel	78 x 72 x 44
	Courtesy Marlborough Gallery	
BALCOMB GREENE	The Sea — Early Summer, 1973 oil on canvas	44 x 48
	Ocean Rocks, 1972 oil on canvas	60 x 54
	Courtesy Forum Gallery	
ROBERT GWATHMEY	Forgot, 1973 oil on canvas	30 x 25
	United, 1970 oil on canvas	62 x 40
	Courtesy Terry Dintenfass, Inc.	
LEE KRASNER	Rising Green, 1972 oil on cotton duck	82 x 69
	Pennons, 1972 oil on linen	54 x 54
	Courtesy Marlborough Gallery	
IBRAM LASSAW	Spaceloom, XXVI, 1973 bronze	height, 72"
	Lent by the Artist	
JULIAN LEVI	Hook Slide, 1972 oil on canvas	50 x 46
	Courtesy Frank K. M. Rehn, Inc.	
JOHN LITTLE	Monoblue, 1973 collage, acrylic color on rice paper mounted on muslin	72 x 62¼
	Lent by the Artist	
COSTANTINO NIVOLA	Wall piece, model for a wall in the lobby of the State House in Albany, N. Y., 1972, cement	52 x 38
	Sculptures, six models for a new intermediate high school, Bronx, N. Y., 1972, cement	
	Four sculptures	21 x 8
	one sculpture	36 x 8
	one sculpture	26 x 8
	Lent by the Artist	

JOHN OPPER	No. 12-71+72, 1971-72 acrylic on canvas	60 x 54
	No. 3-72+73, 1972-73 acrylic on canvas	52 x 66
	Courtesy Grace Borgenicht Gallery	
RAY PROHASKA	F.O.B. Mycenae, 1967 acrylic on canvas	72 x 50
	Touching Series II, 1969 acrylic on canvas	40 x 50
	Lent by the Artist	
ABRAHAM RATTNER	To Be or Not To Be, 1971-72 oil on board	26 x 39½
	Man to Man, 1972 oil on board	20 x 24
	Courtesy Kennedy Galleries, Inc.	
LUDWIG SANDER	L-5, 1971 oil on canvas	40 x 44
	Senica I, 1970 oil on canvas	66 x 60
	Courtesy Knoedler Contemporary Art, Lawrence Rubin, Director	
LOUIS SCHANKER	I, 1970 plexiglas, painted and engraved	24 x 36
	II, 1971 plexiglas, painted and engraved	36 x 36
	Courtesy New Bertha Schaefer Gallery	
ESTEBAN VICENTE	Untitled, 1973 oil on canvas	68 x 56
	Untitled, 1973 oil on canvas	62 x 60
	Courtesy Andre Emmerich Gallery	
DELLA WEINBERGER	Sand Fragments, 1973 oil on canvas	88 x 56
	Lent by the Artist	
ADJA YUNKERS	Y, 1973 acrylic on canvas	72½ x 62½
	Variation of Composition XI, 1972 oil on canvas	63½ x 48
	Lent by the Artist	

When several of the artists of our region discussed with us the idea of this exhibition last year, we were enthusiastic but realized it would be difficult for one of us closely associated with the community to make the choice of artists. We therefore asked Elayne Varian, a museum director highly respected in the profession, to serve as guest director and now wish to express our appreciation to her for selecting and assembling this outstanding exhibition. We wish also to thank the artists, galleries and collectors who lent work; Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Kolin and Mrs. Dorothy Beskind for their generous support in making the exhibition possible; and Miki Denhof for her generosity in designing the attractive catalogue.

Enez Whipple
Director
Guild Hall

PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDITS: Maurice Berezov, Dorothy Beskind, Andrew Bolotowsky, Ivan Chermayeff, Betty David, Francis Haar, Peter A. Juley, F. K. Lloyd, Hans Namuth, Steve Slonan, Malcolm Varon

Arnold Leo
East Hampton 1974

'50s Alive and Well

I thought of a framed drawing I had seen on the floor at de Kooning's studio over Labor Day weekend, of a frantic woman with legs tensely crossed and torso twisted, hunched into her smoking cigarette, her life burned away to raw energy, and I thanked God I had given up smoking last January. John McMahon said he believed the strokes of the drawing reflected Bill's trip to Japan two years ago.

The rhythm of the surf induced calm, at the center of which was oneness. "Camille," I said, "you and I are the same. The differences take care of themselves if we simply treat each other as equal human beings. What we desire is purity in our experience as humans. You are a lovely young lady."

"Thank you, Arnold."

Saturday Night

The backyard of Adrienne's house on Skimhampton Road is filled with five of her large polymorphous sculptures, each painted in a number of bright colors. Camille thought they [illegible] a children's

of President Kennedy's assassination to her house.

I got up from our cozy corner on the couch to fetch my companion and me a glass of wine and returned to find my seat next to the lady occupied by a man who, someone later said, was maybe named Barsh and who Camille happily said was the creator of the phrase "unhooked generation," the very phrase she had used to explain herself when this gentleman asked where she was from.

At last I grew tired of standing in the wings and rudely repossessed my seat next to the lady. I know Barsh will forgive me when I tell him that Camille later said he was a very sweet man and reprimanded me for being an impossible romantic.

A Swim

Louis Shanker and Eve Lowery invited my date and me for a swim in Louie's pool, we accepted, and I found out that it would be difficult to get an invitation to Ilya's opening Sept. 19 at the Guggenheim Museum. Dune House, Louie's home on Further Lane, was the perfect afterparty rendezvous. Eve greeted us joyously and disrobed for a swim. Louie and I joined her, but Camille demurred, silent creature, for she had not been in the water all summer. She watched us frolic nude and smiled when I leaped straight up out of the water by grabbing hold of a small tree that overhung the elegant little pool.

We sat then, 'round the fire built by Louie. A solid, compact man in his 70s, with white hair flaming from his muscular shoulders and back, he runs every day and plays tennis with Herman Cherry, who happens to be in the hospital. I had been his guest one other time, when Libby Holman Shanker was hostess.

He showed Camille and me a book of his woodcuts, strong work like himself, with powerful vertical lines in the style of Picasso and Franz Mazereel. Original work, carved with a sure hand and a keen sense of shared social struggle.

Aftermath

Three days later Jack Rako and I went out in my motor boat and Jack's first cast, in the middle of the channel into the Creek, brought in a 17½-inch striper, eight o'clock in the morning. Camille had returned to the city, and at eight-thirty we spotted more than a hundred terns working over by Barnes Landing. We sped there and soon pulled in seven blues. That was Tuesday.

That evening we dined on striper at Jack's, while around the corner Joan and Lisa caught up with each other over supper at John McMahon's, before Lisa returned to the city. I joined them for coffee, which turned out to be tea, for the hour was getting late, and it was still uncertain if an invitation was available to Ilya's retrospective on Sept. 19, my son Erik's 16th birthday, which I should like to write about next week.

Louis Schanker Prints 1924-1971

Johnson, Miller, Jaeger, 1974, The Brooklyn Museum

FOREWORD

In 1963 The Brooklyn Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings, under the supervision of its curator, Una E. Johnson, began a series of definitive monographs on outstanding American artists who were making important contributions to the field of graphic arts. Through a generous grant from The Ford Foundation Program in Humanities and the Arts, this publishing venture has flourished for the past eleven years. Nine books have been issued from the presses of The Brooklyn Museum and several of the popular volumes are already out of print. The books have proved to be valuable reference tools for scholars researching contemporary American prints and drawings.

Although Miss Johnson retired from The Brooklyn Museum in 1969, her interest in the series has not lessened. It is therefore appropriate that her essay on Louis Schanker is published here.

Miss Johnson selected the first nine artists in the series and the publication of this book completes the original list. However, proceeds from the sale of the series have made it possible to continue the program. A new list of deserving artists is being considered at this time, and in the near future we hope to issue a tenth volume.

It should be noted here that this much-needed series stands as a published monument to Una E. Johnson, a pioneer scholar in the field of graphic arts.

Jo Miller
Curator of Prints and Drawings

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks are extended to Louis Schanker who made his prints available for research and generously gave his time to many interviews, to Tom Jagger for his catalogue research, and to Una E. Johnson for the introduction to this volume and for her constant cooperation. Grateful acknowledgments go to the following staff members of The Brooklyn Museum: Nancy Tousley for her assistance on the catalogue, Beatrice Brailsford for editing the manuscript, Dorothy Weiss for typing and proofreading, and to Daniel Weidmann for the layout and design of the monograph. Thanks also go to Jane Rockwell for special editorial assistance.

In *Static and Revolving* (1948), the artist made an intricate study of the circular movement and sudden curtailment of large forms in a two-dimensional space. His development and continued use of the circle image led to prints in which his use of color and of large, simplified forms in space created blunt, primitive rhythms. The circle, in many variations, became symbolic of Schanker's graphic work of the 1950s.

In the same decade, the artist made a number of important innovations in what he termed the plaster relief print. In executing these prints, he often used the woodblock to create a three-dimensional effect. The technical aspect of Schanker's work — one of the early ventures in the development of the sculptural image in twentieth-century graphic art — is described elsewhere in this monograph. Because of the varying blocks and somewhat complicated printing procedures, these experimental prints exist only in artist's proofs or in very limited editions. In these works he used his experimental printing techniques to soften the outlines of his bold, forthright images.

During the 1960s Schanker devoted most of his creative efforts to large-scale hardwood sculptures before returning to the woodcut and relief print. The prints of this period combine the woodcut with sheets of plastic cut in much the same manner as the woodblock. In 1971 Schanker issued about twenty prints, fifteen of which were printed from plastic plates. His most recent work with acrylic paints reveals his interest in their high color intensities and different viscosities.

Printmaking is a natural and appropriate vehicle for Schanker, for it combines his talents as a sculptor with his keen sense of color. The resistance of the block itself to the pressure of chisel, knife, and rasp exacts his most inventive and ingenious talents. His creative purpose is effectively implemented by the use of color as the integral function of his abstract designs. The works which make up Louis Schanker's graphic oeuvre lucidly document the strength and imaginitive approach which characterize American prints produced during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

Una E. Johnson
Curator Emeritus
Department of Prints and Drawings

INTRODUCTION

In the middle 1930s, the woodcut — oldest of all print media — was revived by a few artists who saw the great possibilities of developing it into a vigorous contemporary expression. Foremost among these artists was Louis Schanker.

Primarily a painter, Schanker also worked in low-relief hardwood sculpture. It was a logical step for him to combine his interest in color and sculpture with the woodcut medium. Thus he began a technical investigation of the clear, flat colors, precise registration, and oblique perspectives of Japanese color woodblock prints. Much as Arthur W. Dow had done thirty years earlier,* Schanker adapted and incorporated Japanese techniques into his burgeoning ideas. He worked freely with many colors in a progression of cut blocks, building his images as Dow had by using various colors printed from separate blocks. Color was used for its compositional value, rather than as a "fill-in" for a key block. Schanker further expanded the inherent possibilities of the woodblock by using sculptor's tools and carpenter's rasps to cut his blocks. In so doing, he considerably advanced the expressive range of the woodcut medium as a distinctly modern and vital idiom.

The artist's first recorded woodcut, *Trio* (1935), was printed from seven carefully cut blocks, one block for each color. This was followed in 1936 by a small composition, *Man at Piano*. In 1937 he issued a complicated and disturbingly appropriate woodcut entitled *Dictator's Dream*. *Polo*, the first of a half-dozen prints made from linoleum blocks, appeared the same year. Printed from eight large blocks, *Polo* effectively combines translucent colors and movements of fine, staccato lines and swirling forms. In both his paintings and prints, Schanker's interest in color, in movement, and in musical themes conveys the rhythmic actions of performing musicians and athletes in abstract form.

*Dow printed in watercolors from woodblocks cut with a knife, using the side of the wood, rather than the end, as his printing surface. Color was applied freely with a brush and the paper laid on the block and rubbed. Dow was fascinated with the color variations and luminous tones resulting from this method of printing in watercolor on Japan paper. Registration of the various color blocks was accomplished through the use of a key block (from the *International Studio* 59 [July – October 1916], pp. xv–xvi).

During the 1930s Schanker and many other American artists were working on mural projects under the auspices of the Federal Works Progress Administration. Because of his special interest in modern graphics, Schanker was made a supervisor in the graphic arts section of the WPA in New York City. Although he painted prolifically, he found time to produce some twenty woodcuts and linoleum cuts between 1938 and 1939.

Throughout his career, Schanker was never content to merely repeat his early achievements. The artist continued to experiment with the woodcut medium and initiated many variations in the techniques of relief printing. He was also an influential teacher. In 1943 and for several years thereafter, Schanker taught at the New School for Social Research in New York City. For one season he and his first group of students shared a small studio at the New School with Stanley William Hayter's Atelier 17.

In late 1943 the first extensive exhibition of Schanker's woodcuts was held at The Brooklyn Museum and Schanker began a series of very large woodcuts in color. In the first of these woodcuts, the ambitious *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza*, the artist overprinted five colors on a solid black block. Bold, angular forms are held within a web of semitransparent and opaque colors overprinted on undampened Japan paper. This technique gives an intense richness and luminosity to the print's uncompromisingly abstract forms. *Birds in Flight*, a print of similar size, followed. It's bold, semiabstract forms and flat, harmonious colors were printed from 14- x 30-inch planks.

A different cadence and approach to abstract imagery is apparent in *Abstract Landscape* (1945). Composed of small, abstract figures and occasionally delineated symbols of birds, leaves, and tendrils, this composition is built within a grid of dark lines. It is a modern version, in muted colors, of Egyptian hieroglyphs. The following year, Schanker turned to the completely abstract images that were to dominate his ensuing oeuvre.

Louis Schanker's skill and understanding of color, harmony, and dissonance led to many exceptional prints. The woodcut *Carnival* (1948) is a tour de force in a wide range of color made possible by skillful overprinting and controlled movement of images in two-dimensional space. During this productive period, his work in color printing was a strong influence on his paintings and those of other artists. But Schanker did not consider his prints as solely experimental or technical exercises. He saw in them a different, but equally valid, means of expressing the same ideas that preoccupied him in his painting.

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Brooklyn, New York. The Brooklyn Museum. *14 Painter-Printmakers,* 1955. Text by John Gordon and Una E. Johnson.

ONE-MAN SHOWS

1933	Contemporary Art Gallery, New York City.
1934	New School for Social Research, New York City.
1938	New School for Social Research, New York City.
1939	Artists' Gallery, Mercury Galleries, New York City.
1942	Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.
1943	The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York.
1944	Willard Gallery, Kleeman Galleries, Mortimer Brandt Galleries, New York City.
1945–50	Willard Gallery, New York City.
1952–57	Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York City.
1959	Stuttman Gallery, New York City.
1960	Willard-Lucien Gallery, New York City.
1962	Dewey Gallery, New York City.
1964	Granite Galleries, New York City.
1966	Dorsky Gallery, New York City.

CHRONOLOGY

1903	Born in New York City.
1920–24	Studied at Cooper Union, New York City.
1925	Studied at Art Students League, New York City.
1931–33	Painted and studied in France and Spain.
1934–39	Painted a series of panels for Neponsit Bay Hospital, Long Island. Executed several murals, notably at the 1939 World's Fair in the Science and Health Building and in the lobby of radio station WNYC, New York City.
1935	Made first woodcut, *Trio*.
1936	Began color woodblock printing.
1940–41	Made a number of woodcuts for the New York City WPA Arts Project. Later became supervisor of graphics, WPA Arts Project.
1943–45	Taught courses in woodcut at the New School for Social Research, New York City.
1946–60	Taught courses in woodcut and painting at the New School for Social Research.
1949–64	Taught at Bard College, where he is now Professor Emeritus.
1974	Lives and works in New York City and Connecticut.