

## Paul Resika in P-Town: A Master Continues to Evolve

By Laura Shabott | July/August 2015

On an unseasonably cold day in June, I am preparing to meet with Paul Resika, a remarkable man and a brilliant artist, to discuss his current exhibitions at both the Provincetown Art Association and Museum and the Berta Walker Gallery. A painter who has created “thousands of pictures” (as he calls them), he was given his first show in 1948 at the age of 19 with George Dix Gallery on Madison Avenue in New York. Resika was already a serious artist, having studied at age 12 with Sol Wilson and at 17 with Hans Hofmann. A prodigy will often burn out his candle at a young age, but that is not the case at all with Resika; he has a body of work spanning almost eight decades.

Our scheduled appointment is at the Berta Walker Gallery in Provincetown, where he is represented by his longtime friend. Arriving early at the vibrant Bradford Street space, I am greeted by new managing director Grace Hopkins. She and Walker have just installed an extraordinary show, “Hans Hofmann (1880-1966) and Blanche Lazzell (1878-1956).” In one of the rooms, an exquisite group of pen and ink drawings by the master teacher are shown alongside woodcuts and gouaches by his former student, modernist Lazzell. This is the perfect place to engage in a conversation about art with Resika, who studied with Hoffmann here in Provincetown during the summer of 1947.



*Motor Shop, 1948*

When Resika arrives at the gallery with his lovely wife Blair, a noted photographer, we walk about the exhibit. The former student points out a gesture drawing made by Hofmann in 1935. “It looks just like him. It really does! I have never seen a self-portrait of his before.” He then tells me a wonderful story. “My mother came to see me, her boy in Provincetown. I was just a kid then and she was having dinner with an old friend of hers. It turns out to be Joe Kaplan, a very noted Provincetown artist.”

At first, Resika was considered a second-generation abstract-expressionist, with works such as the precocious “Motor Shop,” his homage to “Guernica.” He had seen the Picasso show at the Museum of Modern Art and went frequently to study the monumental work. “There were only 30 galleries of modern art in New York [at that time] and they were all around 57<sup>th</sup> Street,” Resika recounted. “We would wander through the Museum of Modern Art and then go to the modern galleries like Peggy Guggenheim’s The Art of this Century. Nobody was in these places,” said Resika, “It was the ver beginning.”

It is not a problem for this artist to emulate others, to learn from the greats before him. In 1950, he left for Europe to study classical painters in Venice and Rome. In the show catalog “Paul Resika: Paintings, 1947-2014,” John Yau, renowned poet, art critic and writer, says, “At a time when many of his generation were struggling with, or reacting against, the legacy of Abstract Expressionism, Resika decided he had to either ‘learn to paint or hobble myself with tradition.’ Mastering modernism was not enough for Resika. He moved to Paris and took life-drawing classes at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. After eight months, he moved to Italy, eventually settling in Venice, where he became enthralled by the city’s three 16<sup>th</sup> century masters: Titian, Jacopo Tintoretto and Paolo Veronese.”

Fearless

Back in the states, Resika would go on to create landscapes, interiors and figurative works that became his vehicles for color, form and volume to the present day. Flowers, boats, lighthouses, nudes, woods, the moon and a beach were abstracted into forms that are familiar but not representational in the traditional sense. Resika created these series of different motifs with great self-assurance and a fearlessness to explore paint on canvas.

We can see his visual progression from the representational “Woman Crossing a Bridge (Vaucluse),” completed in 1968, to “The Striped Cat,” painted in 2003. Both are images of a woman, but the classic sense of perspective is done from the later piece; the figure is anchored dimensionally in the composition with a luminescent vibrant yellow.

About the show at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, director Chris McCarthy said, “Watching this process unfold has been an exquisite experience—what people expect to see or what they think they know of Resika’s work is not what this exhibition represents. The curators, Don Beal and Rob DuToit, have made very careful selections that steer you through an intense journey, transporting you back to the Renaissance and leading you into the contemporary. Resika’s unique style reinvents itself throughout each decade, taking what he learned studying with Hofmann to a different realm of geometry, color and space.”

Berta Walker represented Resika for five years in New York City at Graham Modern Gallery, and then since 1997 at her own gallery after Long Point Gallery closed. “What resonates for me with Paul’s work is his extraordinary use of color; the light emanates from his art in a way that is almost indescribable,” Walker said. “Even in a night painting, he brings a glow that speaks to the soul of his viewers.” This is clearly evident in “Moon and Geometry,” one of the landscapes selected for this exhibit.

Reluctant to talk about himself, we move the conversation to the challenges of today’s emerging artists. When asked what he would do if he was just starting out, Resika said, “If you want to sell a painting, buy a painting.” He will talk about his own extensive collection with art historian and writer Jennifer Samet, Ph.D in a panel called “The Artist as Collector with Jennifer Samet and Paul Resika,” a public event on August 25<sup>th</sup> at PAAM.

Resika has been both a participant and a witness to some of the most noted teachers and art movements in the twentieth century. The two concurrent shows are humbling, moving and filled with joy. Do what it takes to get to Provincetown to see these exhibitions.

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