

Western New York Collects: Arnold Mesches

September 9, 2012-January 27, 2013



CASTELLANI
ART MUSEUM
OF NIAGARA UNIVERSITY



Anomie 1492; Negative Spaces, 1990, acrylic on canvas, 80% x 95% x 2 inches. Collection of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY. George Cary Fund, 1991.

Western New York Collects

This exhibition is the first in a series that will highlight the work of a diverse range of visual artists with Western New York connections who have gained significant national and international recognition. Selected from Western New York collections, both public and private, this ongoing series also honors the role of local collectors in creating an enduring artistic legacy for our region. Finally, we hope this new series will reveal the varied, but always vital, relationships between artists and collectors.

Many thanks to Gerald Mead for his assistance with this inaugural exhibition and his insightful interview with Arnold Mesches.

Kate Koperski Director

Michael Beam Curator of Collections and Exhibitions



Anomie 1934: *Halos*, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 80x96 inches. Collection of the University at Buffalo Art Galleries. Gift of Eleanor A. Castellani in honor of her husband Armand J. Castellani, 2004.

How did your association with Armand Castellani begin and how did your relationship with him and the Castellani Art Museum progress throughout your career?

Sandra Olsen, the former director of the Castellani Art Museum, whose friendship I've also cherished over the years, came to my 1985 exhibition at Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, introduced herself and immediately called Armand saying: "you must come over to see this work." He did. A handshake and a long "eye to eye" sealed a lasting friendship. He took a careful, hard look at the show and then we sat and looked at slides and 8"x10" color photographs of my work. I was immediately stunned by the extent of his self-taught knowledge about art history (past and present) and the wisdom of his insights. It was the beginning of a closeness that lasted until his passing and flowed over to Eleanor and the *famiglia*, my *famiglia*. There were numerous studio visits, friendly haggling over purchase prices that would bring Sandra to laughing tears; two street kids bargaining about bucks and works, delighting in the fun of it all. There were coffee cloches talking about art and life and girls and aches and pains and the love of it all. It was warmth and joy I shall never forget and shall hold dear for the rest of my days.



The Ringbearer and the Flower Girl/The Bride and the Bridesmaid, 1988, acrylic on canvas, 80x132 inches. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Savino Nanula, Grand Island, NY.

What are some of the reoccurring cultural/historical themes that you address in your work and why have those subjects been so compelling to you?

Someone once said that “the world is my pedestal,” when asked about inspiration sources and the creative process. Noted art historian Peter Selz, in a recent essay on my life’s work for the catalog accompanying my retrospective exhibition in Miami (opening on Valentine’s Day, 2013 and commemorating my upcoming 90th birthday) put it this way: “More than many of his contemporaries, Mesches is acutely aware of the importance of the continuity of art’s history. With his discerning sense of the present, Mesches is able to connect his work to the past and, perhaps, point to the future.” I am interested in the importance of using history and culture to emotionally and intellectually invite my viewers to participate, by asking “why” regarding the choices of my imagery and my disparate juxtapositions. By exploring the past and connecting it to the present, I feel that I can best question the future and involve my audience. The forms, the surfaces and the variations of techniques, hopefully only enrich my delving into the complexities I see in the world.



Art in Public Places 1, 1983, acrylic on canvas, 80x98 inches. Marie and Thomas O'Donnell Collection.

You have been described as a “figurative expressionist.” How has that stylistic approach been an effective means for you to express yourself through your work?

Content is within the form; form makes content. Emotion is within the color, the texture, the use of line, independent of subject or image—it makes a gestalt, a wedding between form and content. I have chosen to make imagery, others have not; I feel it allows me to make (quoting Peter Selz again), “an art that is engaged, both politically and morally.”

Since this exhibition focuses on your artwork that now resides in collections, what role do you think public and private collections play in how your life’s work is experienced and interpreted over time?

I shall never be able to fully thank the many collectors, both public and private, who have honored me by collecting my work over the last 67 art-making years. It is always an emotional, morale building—let alone financial—lift having people or institutions acquire a work (or works). But, the most important fact is that every purchase affords me more stress free work time in the studio. Of course, having works in public institutions, museums and the like, certainly allows more people to see the work. Therefore, for posterity’s sake, I always urge my collectors to will my work to museums and public institutions. But, both are vital in making the wheels go 'round. Thank you, one and all—thank you, thank you, thank you!

Interview with Arnold Mesches conducted in September, 2012 by Gerald Mead, an independent curator, collector and arts writer who teaches at Buffalo State College.

Arnold Mesches was born in 1923 in the Bronx, NY and raised in Buffalo, NY. He moved to Los Angeles in 1943 to accept a scholarship at the Art Center School. Mesches began his fine art career in 1945, moved to New York City in 1984, where he lived for eighteen years before relocating to Florida. He has had 134 solo exhibitions to date as well as countless group shows and is represented in major museums, public and private collections. Mesches will be honored with a retrospective exhibition titled *Arnold Mesches: A Life's Work* examining his artistic achievements from 1945 to the present day. Comprised of over 200 works, the exhibit will open in February of 2013 at the Freedom Tower and three satellite galleries on the campus of Miami-Dade College in Florida.

Mesches has held important faculty and teaching positions at institutions including the University of California, Los Angeles; Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA; Parsons School of Design, NY; New York University, NY; Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ and as Professor of Graduate Painting at the University of Florida at Gainesville where he and his wife, novelist Jill Ciment, reside. In 2009, the University of Florida awarded Mesches an Honorary Doctorate in Art degree.

Selected Museum Collections

- Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY
- Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY
- The Burchfield-Penney Art Center, Buffalo, NY
- Castellani Art Museum, Niagara University, NY
- Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC
- Israel Museum of Art, Jerusalem, Israel
- Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
- National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
- Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

Recent Solo Exhibitions

- 2010**
Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC
- The Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum at Florida International University, Miami, FL
- 2009**
Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, CA
- 2008**
Bannister Gallery of Art, Rhode Island College, Providence, RI
- 2007**
University of Central Florida Art Gallery, Orlando, FL
- 2006**
Ogden Museum of Southern Art, University of New Orleans, LA
- Dorsch Gallery, Miami, FL
- 2005**
Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

2004

Jacksonville Museum of Modern Art, Jacksonville, FL

2003

Glass Curtain Gallery, Columbia College, Chicago, IL

2002

Ezra and Cecline Zilhka Gallery, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT

PS1 Contemporary Art Center (Museum of Modern Art), Long Island City, NY

Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art & Design, Los Angeles, CA

University Art Museum, San Diego State University, CA

2001

Oregon Jewish Museum, Pacific Northwest College of Art, Portland, OR

Addington Gallery, Chicago, IL

Castellani Art Museum, Niagara University, NY

The Singer Gallery, Mizel Arts & Culture Center, Denver, CO

Selected Grants and Awards

- Altos De Chavon, Dominican Republic
- Art Critics of America
- Florida State Individual Grant
- Florsheim Fund
- Ford Foundation Faculty Grant
- National Endowment for the Arts
- New York Foundation for the Arts
- Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant
- John F. and Anna Lee Stacey Scholarship Fund
- Honorary Doctorate, University of Florida

Exhibition Checklist

Anna Mesches 1, 1974, acrylic on canvas, 66 x 60 inches. Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University Collection. Gift of Jill Ciment in honor of Anna Mesches, 1996.

Anomie 1492; Negative Spaces, 1990, acrylic on canvas, 80 3/4 x 95 3/4 x 2 inches. Collection of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY. George Cary Fund, 1991.

Anomie 1934: Halos, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 96 inches. Collection of the University at Buffalo Art Galleries. Gift of Eleanor A. Castellani in honor of her husband Armand J. Castellani, 2004.

Anomie 1942: Poonta, Bombay, 1990, acrylic on canvas, 91 1/2 x 116 inches. Dr. and Mrs. Armand J. Castellani Collection.

Art in Public Places 1, 1983, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 98 inches. Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University Collection. Gift of Marie and Thomas O'Donnell.

Barking Dog, 1987, ink on paper, 22 x 19 inches. Collection of Donald J. Siuta and Dr. John Cichon, Buffalo, NY.

Color Sketch for Portrait of Armand and Eleanor Castellani, 1998, acrylic on card, 7 x 12 1/4 inches. Collection of Carla Castellani, Amherst, NY.

Echoes #23, 1999, acrylic on paper, 10 3/4 x 9 1/2 inches. Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University Collection. Gift of Jill Ciment, 2001.

Echoes 27, n.d., acrylic on paper, 3 1/2 x 5 1/2 inches. Collection of Sandra and Nils Olsen, Lewiston, NY.

The Elements, 1985, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 24 inches. Collection of the Burchfield Penney Art Center, Buffalo, NY. Gideon Boericke Memorial Fund, 1986.

Jet Star 2000, 1994, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 74 inches. Collection of the Burchfield Penney Art Center, Buffalo, NY. Purchased with funds from the Estate of Virginia Cuthbert Elliott, 2001.

Joan, 1976, oil on canvas, 39 x 54 inches. Collection of Jim and Ronnie Kushner, Amherst, NY.

Nude, n.d., pastel on paper, 10 x 7 1/2 inches. Collection of Audre Bunis.

#P18, 1994, Polaroid photographs, 3 3/8 x 5 3/8 inches. Collection of the Burchfield Penney Art Center, Buffalo, NY. Gift of Jill Ciment in honor of Anthony Bannon, 1996.

#P-43, 1994, Polaroid photograph, 1 1/4 x 2 1/4 inches. Collection of Sandra and Nils Olsen, Lewiston, NY.

Portrait of Armand and Eleanor Castellani, 1998, acrylic on canvas, 26 3/4 x 46 3/4 inches. Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University Collection. Castellani Purchase Fund and commission to the Artist funded by the Castellani Children, 1998.

The Ringbearer and the Flower Girl/The Bride and the Bridesmaid, 1988, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 132 inches. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Savino Nanula, Grand Island, NY.

Self-Portrait, 1977, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 inches. Collection of Lillian Kushner, Amherst, NY.

Study for Anomie 23/1934: Halos, 1993, pencil, pen and ink collage, 15 1/2 x 17 1/2 inches. Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University Collection. Gift of Jill Ciment, 1997.

Study for Anomie #21/1968: Camouflage, 1992, collage, 15 x 16 3/4 inches. Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University Collection. Gift of the Castellani Family, 2000.

Study for Anomie, 1991: Nostalgia, 1995, mixed media collage, 8 1/2 x 6 1/2 inches. Collection of Dr. Anthony Bannon and Elizabeth Stewart.

Study for Art in Public Places 1, 1983, acrylic on board, 12 3/4 x 14 1/2 inches. Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University Collection. Gift of Jill Ciment, 1998.

Untitled, 1963, ink on paper, 7 1/2 x 11 inches. Collection of Gerald Mead, Buffalo, NY.

Untitled #31, 1989, mixed media collage, 18 x 18 3/4 inches. Collection of the Burchfield Penney Art Center, Buffalo, NY. Gift of Jill Ciment, 1993.

Woman with Hat, 1964, charcoal on paper, 17 1/2 x 22 1/2 inches. Collection of Lillian Kushner, Amherst, NY.



This exhibition and related programming are made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.



**CASTELLANI
ART MUSEUM**
OF NIAGARA UNIVERSITY
castellaniartmuseum.org

Museum and Shop

Niagara University, NY 14109-1938
716.286.8200 fax: 716.286.8289
Tuesday to Saturday 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.
Docent tours available upon request. Call 716.286.8200 for additional information.

Castellani Art Museum at the Falls

Conference Center Niagara Falls
101 Old Falls Street Niagara Falls, NY 14303
716.286.8200 fax: 716.286.8289
Monday to Friday, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.