

For Immediate Release

Wired Gallery Presents

THE GOLDEN AGE OF NEW PALTZ

An Exhibition in Three Parts

Part Two: 1963 – 1967

Curated by Jack Murphy

April 7 - May 6, 2018

Opening Reception: Saturday, April 7, 2018

5:00 – 7:00 pm



Ben Bishop - Vietnam War Series
#1



Burge, Ken - Untitled



Giardullo, Denise - Chagall Doll



Iversen, Eric - Mohonk



Samuels, Ed - Self portrait



Stratton, Tom - Untitled

High Falls, NY, February 22, 2018—On Saturday, April 7, 2018, Wired Gallery opens part 2 of **The Golden Age of New Paltz**, an exhibition in three parts celebrating the New Paltz artists of the 1960's, with a reception from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. The show runs until Sunday, May 6, 2018.

This second installment of the exhibition will survey artists who either came to New Paltz, or lived and worked in the area from roughly 1963 to 1967. (Many of the artists in the combined shows were active throughout the 1960's and beyond. The use of the three time periods for each show is more a way to break down the number of artist involved, into manageable groups.)

Among the work on display will be examples by State University College at New Paltz professors Ben Bishop, Maurice Brown, Ken Burge, John Frank, Alex Minewski, Benjamin Wigfall and others.

Work by students from that era will include Gary Allen, John Anderson, Allen Bryan, Harvey Cohen, Reno DeRosa, Jimmy Edwards, Denise Giardullo, Dick Hogle, Eric Iversen, Anthony Panzera, Theo Papas, Phil Paratore, Bruce Pileggi, Roger Polansky, Rosalie Rossi, Eddie Samuels, Susan Slotnick, Jon Ellis Stevens, Tom Stratton, Al Summ, Rosalind Zarr and others*.

* This is an incomplete list at press time.

CURATORIAL STATEMENT:

This exhibition picks up where last summer's Part 1 left off. The artists represented include some who I wanted in Part 1, but missed, and people who were new to New Paltz in the mid-1960's. As you go through the gallery you will most likely be as surprised and impressed as I was by the overall technical quality, clarity of vision, and execution of ideas in all of this work. The work speaks for itself, obviously the students learned well from the faculty, whose skill is evident. But behind the visuals, it's the relationships of the students and faculty, which I think played a major role in how the New Paltz art scene of the 1960's developed. A brief history of the College will add a little perspective.

The Growth of the College

The college at New Paltz was growing. It had been a State Normal School, preparing its graduates to enter the teaching profession in New York State public schools. By 1938, the school was officially known as the State Teachers College at New Paltz, and the first graduates of the new four-year program were graduated in 1942 with bachelor's degrees. In 1948, the State University of New York system was created with New Paltz one of the founding schools. The education department was expanded to offer art education as a specialized discipline in 1952. The college became one of the first two schools in the SUNY system to grant the Bachelor of Arts degree, in 1960, leading to another name change the next year, to the State University of New York College of Liberal Arts and Science at New Paltz. The expansion of programs and new courses, allowed a greater choice for electives, and the new BA degrees opened up possibilities other than teaching to New Paltz graduates.

Another big change occurred when the five, then new, dormitories opened at the start of the 1960's. The student population more than doubled. In the art department, this resulted in more art and art education majors, as well as a sizeable increase in full-time art professors. I was told that in one year alone (either 1962 or 1963), over one dozen new art faculty members were hired. Looking through, and comparing, the 1961 and 1964 Paltsonian Yearbooks, I found that there were 10 members of the Art Department faculty pictured in 1961. By 1964, that number had grown to 25. Similar trends were seen in the growth of the number of students. The 1961 senior class numbered about 185 students, and by 1964 that number had grown to almost 400. The Yearbooks listed the majors of seniors, and 1961 had 27 Art Education majors, while that grew to 49 in 1964. So, by this time, the arts and artists on campus seemed to be enjoying a healthy period of growth, which would continue through the rest of the decade, leading up to the approval of the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree program, and then the Master of Fine Arts degree, in the first few years of the 1970's.

The New Paltz Art Scene in the 1960's

Most of the New Paltz Art Scene centered around the college, although there were a number of artists in the area who had no actual connections to the college, but were drawn of the academic and artistic opportunities and events on campus. This area of the Hudson River Valley had a long tradition of artistic expression, most notably with the nineteenth-century Hudson River School of Painting. Many artists from New York City maintained summer retreats and studios in the hills west of the Hudson, and by the early 1900's, the burgeoning art colony of Woodstock, NY, was becoming a major attraction for artists and bohemians, alike. With the coming of the New York State Thruway, New Paltz was a short drive to all the artistic attractions, galleries and museums of New York City. But New Paltz was in the process of inventing itself as its own "art scene."

The art majors of this era forged strong and long lasting bonds and friendships with their fellow students and their faculty. To be an art major meant that you took two or three studio courses each semester. Studio courses ran for three hours, and unlike regular academic courses (that ran fifty minutes), art classes were not the rigid, sit in your seat and listen to lectures type of classes. Students walked around and looked at, and critiqued each other's work. Professors didn't spend every class lecturing; they walked around the room, spending some time with each student, offering instruction and encouragement. Even to freshmen, it was obvious that art students and faculty developed relationships that differed greatly from student/faculty relationships in regular academic. And this lengthy close contact continued for four years. Art students and faculty tended to interact socially as a group, as well. It was the beginning of a local art scene.

The art students hung together. They were "artsy," and many were also musicians, poets, writers and involved in the theater. They went on bus trips to the city to visit museums and galleries. They hosted poetry readings. The bands, formed by art students, were legendary. A night at Spinelli's, dancing to Jeremy and the Satyrs, or Moe, Adrian and the Sculptors, or any of the other local bands of the 60's, attracted students and faculty alike. Groups of students and faculty would catch the latest foreign movie, and then retreat to a bar or wine cellar to discuss the "meaning" of the film, and the work of the director. On campus, the art students would throw their annual gala, the Beaux Arts Ball, with costumes, music and magic for all. Art shows and guest artist lectures were open to campus. Many art students left the dorms as soon as they could, taking apartments in the village, bringing legendary status to quite a few rental properties over the years. Students would rent old barns and storage sheds as studios, and late night rap sessions on everything under the sun accompanied painting until dawn. And off campus living meant you didn't have eat in cafeteria in the College Union Building. Now you could dawdle over a coffee with your friends for hours at the Pink Spot or Ed's College Diner. And all the while, you would be surrounded by other art students, for four long years. Professors encouraged the students to "draw, draw, draw," and required that many new sketches be shown in each class. The students carried their sketch books everywhere, and often the only subjects available to them were other art students. Not only did this constant practice improve their drawing skills, it created real, and enduring, friendships. It also allowed for an exchange of ideas about art, and a sort of communal growth, through the close-knit "family" of New Paltz artists.

What is it then, over fifty years later, that makes the art scene of the 1960's and the New Paltz artists, unique and worth revisiting and reviewing? The impact of the local art and artists of that decade may not have had much effect on the greater art world, but a surprising number of these people did establish themselves in that rarified atmosphere. The real impact was how the fledgling art program at the college grew and enticed more and more new students through the 1960's into the art education program, leading to the proposal and eventual approval by the State of the SUNY New Paltz Bachelors of Fine Arts degree program in the early 1970's. The art scene flourished on campus and in the area during the 60's, and is an important part of the community today. Much of the success is due to this small group of students and professors, and the high standards they set for themselves and achieved.

The friendships that were cemented in those years have lasted until now. Come to the opening of this show, and you will be amazed at how many of these artists, who first met over fifty years ago, are still in constant contact with each other today. The time spent together as young people, searching for meaning in the world, and developing a personal viewpoint and a way to express it to others, along with the many shared experiences during that formative time, brought these people together, and their art was how they shared this life with each other.

And I haven't even mentioned the art on exhibition in this show. But you can go through the gallery and look at it and see for yourself. You will most likely be as impressed as I was by the technical quality, clarity of vision, and execution of ideas in all of this work. It was a pleasure bringing this work back to the public, and recognizing it as timeless art, by accomplished artists.

- Jack Murphy

(Information about the history of the State University of New York at New Paltz was found on the History of the Campus page, in the About New Paltz section of the website:

<http://www.newpaltz.edu/about/history.html>)

ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF THIS SHOW

Wired gallerist Sevan Melikyan says "The first time I heard of "the Golden Age of New Paltz" was in an article penned by Rich Corozine in the Almanac Weekly in 2012 about Bob Draffen, an artist from that

period who had recently passed away. The only golden ages I knew were the Dutch Golden Age and the Spanish Golden Age. I had no idea that New Paltz also had a "golden age." How intriguing and exciting! This deserved to be told in a show. It turns out that Marjorie Myers Simon -- who came to New Paltz in the early 1960's as an art education student and who was a friend to many of these artists -- had a plan to organize a show at the Dorsky Museum, SUNY New Paltz, to celebrate the fifty years since many of them were graduated. Unfortunately, Margie developed an aggressive cancer which limited her work on this project. Jack Murphy, who was an art student in the late 60's, offered to assist, and when she died in November, 2016, he decided to try to realize her vision. Without Jack, who took on the monumental task of curating the show, it may be that no one would have learned that New Paltz had once a Golden Age."

This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Marjorie Myers Simon, and to the many faculty and students who made the Arts Department at the State University College at New Paltz the vibrant, exciting educational and social experience remembered by all involved.

WIRED GALLERY

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