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FEATURED ARTISTS



"The Dead, The Un-Dead
and The Un-Born"

Local artists, Bob and Margie Moskowitz are fixtures in the Ventura County cultural scene. Bob chairs the Ventura College Art Department, and the couple has organized numerous group art excursions to Europe. Their story demonstrates the relationship between location and perception.

After 25 years of relatively limited artistic production, Margie began to paint again during the first group trip she and Bob took to Europe. In Florence, they visited different places, oil pastels and paper in tow, for onsite sketching. Boboli Gardens, situated high above the Tuscan countryside, spread out a vista for Margie that stirred her imagination. Along with the students, she began to draw.

Bob remembers, "Margie stayed looking over a high stone wall and worked for several hours. When it was time to go, she started to pack up, and a little gust of wind lifted her drawing, the first one she'd done in a long time and, poof - took it over the wall. As it sailed down, I said, 'Don't worry, we'll go down and find where it lands.' Well, we had to hike down 3-miles over bridges, through people's back yards, and when we reached the end of where we could go there was the drawing up in a tree. I had to stand on my tip toes and reach with the tips of my fingers to get it back for her. And, there was something about that process of having to go find that drawing that made it precious."

When Bob took a year-long sabbatical, their daughters were grown and pursuing their own lives. He and Margie had worked hard to build a life, having met in the arts graduate program at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. Margie had taught painting, drawing and art history for 11 years all over St. Louis and Illinois, having enjoyed successful gallery representation for her abstract mixed-media sculptural work. She'd worked for a magazine. She'd stayed at home to raise her children. Bob has been teaching art for 25 years in addition to building a very reputable portrait commissions portfolio.

They'd saved, invested conservatively, and decided to seize a moment to circle back around on the dreams and passions that brought them together in art school back in 1977. In a brazen expression of optimism and celebration of their coming future they decided to enact a trans-continental "geographic" and bought a farm in Maine. They embarked upon the great American road trip to get there.

Bob remembers, "We met the first day of graduate school. I saw her across the room and immediately went over to introduce myself...I can still describe everything she was wearing...It all worked out, and here we are all these years later."



SHARING *the* SILENCE

Featured Artists Bob & Margie Moskowitz

Survival & Denial / Northern Latitudes Exhibits

By Amy Jones

Gallery Photos by Dina Pielact





Before they left for Maine, the gallery director at Ventura College had approached them to concurrently show their work in separate galleries with a shared opening and reception. Bob Moskowitz' solo exhibition of new paintings was entitled "Survival & Denial." Margie Moskowitz' solo exhibition was entitled "Northern Latitudes." Their opening was well attended, and crowds went back and forth between the galleries to look at Bob and Margie's paintings and compare them. The warm evening air was filled with chatter about the back stories of this work, startled and funny responses, troubled and inspired impressions.

Margie's invitation featured a painting of storm clouds gathering over a lonely highway on the way to Maine. She paints from photographs taken from select vantage points. The road painting photograph was taken through the windshield of their car, which places the viewer inside the vehicle moving towards the clouds rolling up on the horizon. The two one-way lanes divided by a grass median, create an inherent dilemma of comings and goings.

Bob's invitation featured a painting of a naked woman laughing hysterically next to a nonplussed looking man against a backdrop of an Alaskan iceberg. Other than the fact that the work is both painting with roots in the oldest traditions of portraiture/landscape, it couldn't be any more different – at first glance. But the two roads, juxtaposed against the two people begin to weave a constellation of thoughts about the work, about artists, about the confounding complexities of couple-dom and its connections to culture.

Inspired by the 18th Sura of the Koran, renowned psychologist Carl Jung describes his cave archetype as a womblike space in which one might meet with their shadow-self to confront and transform it. The cave represents a journey to self, an exploration of the sources of creativity and transcendent thought. Jung's imaginative blueprint of enlarging the field of consciousness remains an inspiration for many artists.

With meticulous brush work, a plant-like sensitivity to light and with both her shadow-self and her life partner working on his own canvas in an adjoining studio, Margie transposes the cave, this spatial model of the human emotional interior, into landscape. She moves the psychological journey from a dark isolated space into the open world of light and color and growing things. She subtly explores understanding of self and the journey to self by the limits and boundaries encountered along the way, which she depicts as barriers and demarcations placed on the landscape by roads, paths and fences.

Her views are expressions of what might be called "I am moments." The farmhouse in Maine is an epicenter of such moments. There is Margie and Bob in their barn studio, wind rustling Maple leaves and tall meadow grasses as they paint in shared silence, having arrived at last on the elusive topography of creative process.

Her landscapes are not "in the wild." But the wild hovers at the periphery, emphasizing the dynamics of land ownership perhaps, as well as human efforts to impose order upon nature. Margie's work is also concerned with artists and their gardens ...A poppy at the edge of one painting, reminisces about liminal thoughts and feelings walking the dividing line of perception on the edge of ordered experience.

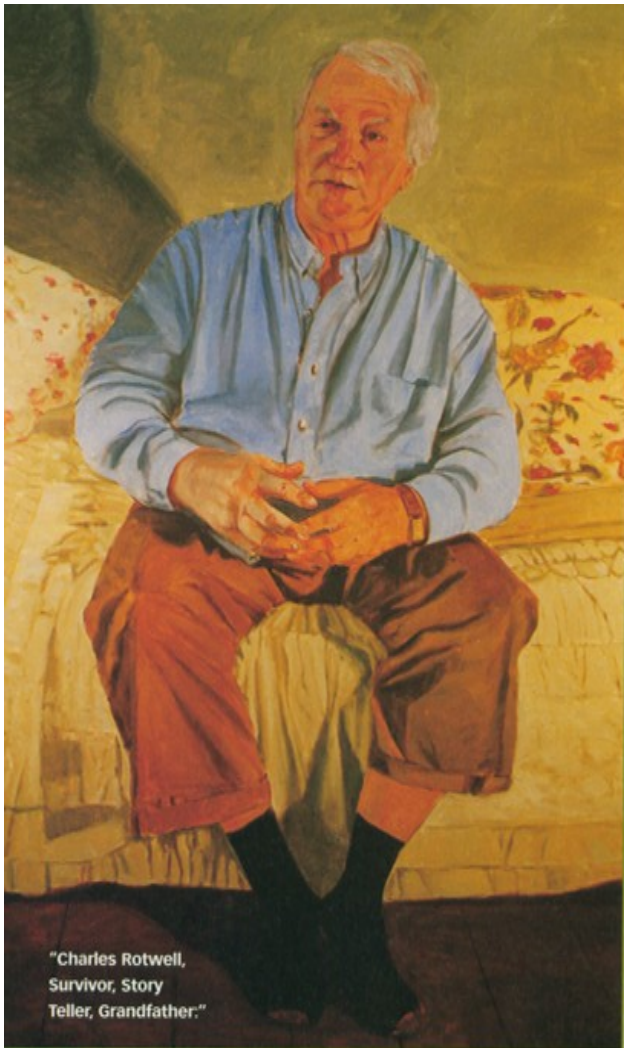
Some of this body of work, now ten years into its life cycle, depicts the great French Impressionist, Claude Monet's Giverny Garden.

The Moskowitz' 6-bedroom Maine farmhouse was built in 1810 and commands the 4-acre rural property that backs up to a land reserve forest. Wild turkeys march through their yard of ancient Maple, Willow and Apple trees.

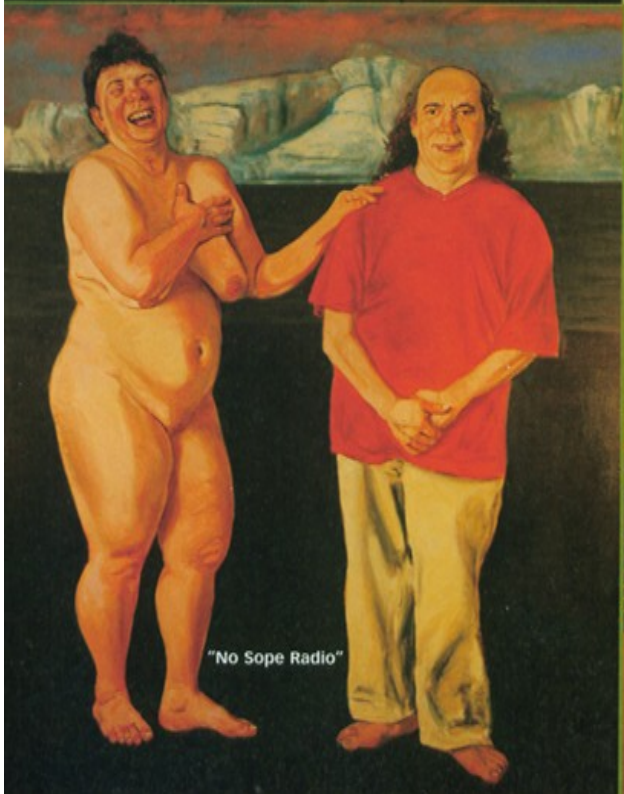
The handsome property includes a barn that Bob and Margie converted to be their painting studio. They grew a garden, and Margie made enough raspberry jam, orange marmalade and chow-chow to stock a country store. Bob stacked a proud woodpile and painted a portrait of the electrical contractors who helped with remodeling the barn.



"Pathway"



"Charles Rotwell,
Survivor, Story
Teller, Grandfather:"



"No Sope Radio"

NO SOAP RADIO – Bob Moskowitz' Painting on his Exhibit Invitation: Bob explains, "I like juxtapositions - to imply something's going on through an unusual pairing of people. John Dubb is a painter who had a stroke. He was originally from Budapest and is anti-socialist; he's a survivor. The woman, Janine, is from Ojai and models for my painting class; she's a survivor too. She takes care of her mother and works doing figure modeling and massage therapy.

The other layer of this painting was that many years ago in school there was a kind of non-joke people would tell: There are two polar bears sitting on an iceberg. One turns to the other and says, "No Soap Radio."

Everyone who knows the joke cracks up except the one person that doesn't understand. That person kind of laughs along for a little while, because they don't get it. Finally they ask what it means, and people then explain the joke by retelling it, until someone says, 'OK. There is no joke; you're not supposed to get it, and that's the joke.' So in this painting the joke has just been told. She's laughing hysterically, and he's got a confused smirk on his face."

The fact that they're in front of the iceberg is laden with potential meaning(s). Certainly, there is denial about the fact that the ice is melting and represents far reaching consequences. The painting is also a great example of how works of art gather meaning as they move through history. In light of recent events concerning Alaska and Sarah Palin fame, the painting has been endowed with a completely new set of possible readings...The joke is rooted in a history of sociological experimentation to demonstrate mob mentality and the proclivity of people, given pressure to conform, to go along with things that are not perhaps understood and may even be counter to their best interests.

The Survival and Denial series explores the crux of the human condition, spanning polar opposites of experience. This body of work includes portraits of Jewish holocaust survivors who escaped Europe to settle in Maine.

One of Bob's politically charged, caricature-based portraits confronts Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Louis Farrakhan, featuring some of their inflammatory quotes as text on the painting. Bob said, "I painted Ahmadinejad with an uncircumcised penis; it's a way of saying, 'You're unclean. You're NOT a true Muslim, because a true Muslim wouldn't say that the holocaust didn't happen or that there aren't homosexuals in Iran.' I went to the extreme stereotype and put him in a tutu. Farrakhan is in baggy pants instead of a tailored suit. My intent was to be totally disrespectful, to say, 'Let's have the conversation about why the Jews should get out of occupied Palestine, but don't try to go about that by saying the holocaust didn't happen.'"



"The Dead, the Un-dead and the Un-born" features head portraits of George W. Bush, Condoleezza Rice, and three soldiers who were killed in Iraq. A naked woman stands next to herself looking over her shoulder with a wary, paranoid expression. She is depicted with a big round pregnant belly next to her own un-pregnant self. The painting includes child-like drawings that seem to complete the head shots of the dead soldiers. The piece moves like a tornado across the territories of dictatorial betrayal, contradiction, hypocrisy and division over ideals in the U.S.

Bob said, "For me, kid's drawings are the mark of innocence. I think that many soldiers are basically kids who are taken advantage of by people who have no regard for their lives. Right wing conservatives, playing to their base, will protect the unborn (or say they will during an election), but as soon as the kid is born...it's such a contradiction that they're willing to send thousands of young people to die in a war started on false pretenses."

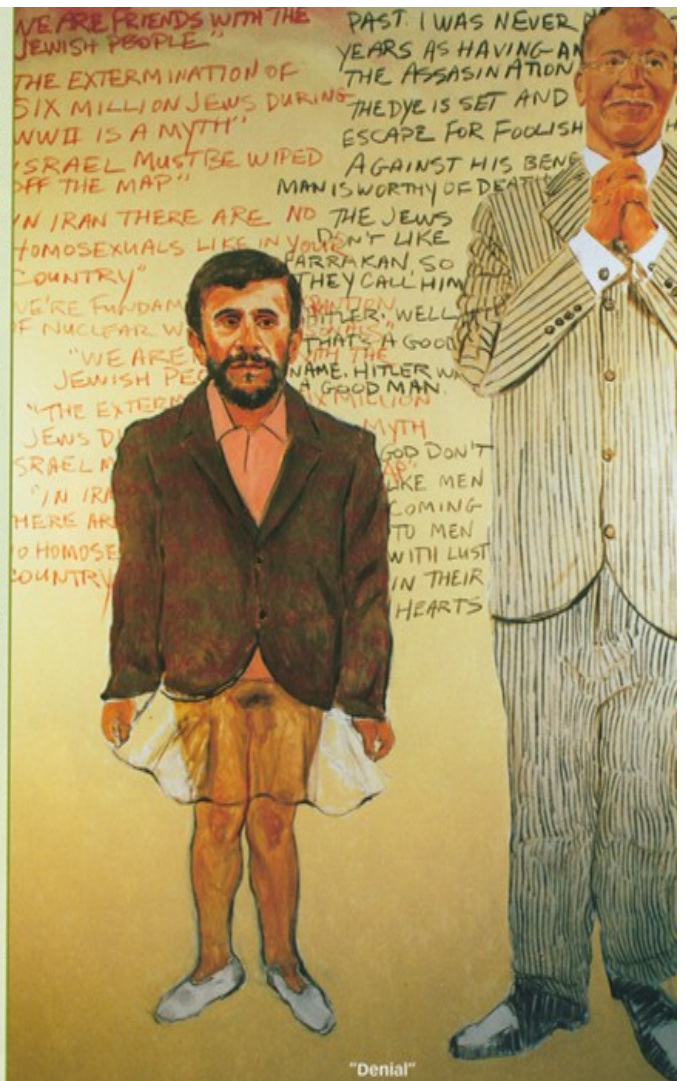
JULIUS CIEMBRONOWICZ, SURVIVOR, NEUROSURGEON, GRANDFATHER,
CHARLES ROTWELL, SURVIVOR, STORY TELLER, GRANDFATHER:

Bob said, "Julius Ciembronowicz was a guy who lost his family and went back to Germany after the war to hunt down S.S. officers...Charles Rotwell's family fled Austria. He watched the Nazi's come with planes to shoot people on the road trying to escape. He saw his mother and sister get killed. He and his brother made it to France where they were hidden by a monk. And so here he is. He got out, wound up in Maine, and became a mature man who got an MFA in writing."

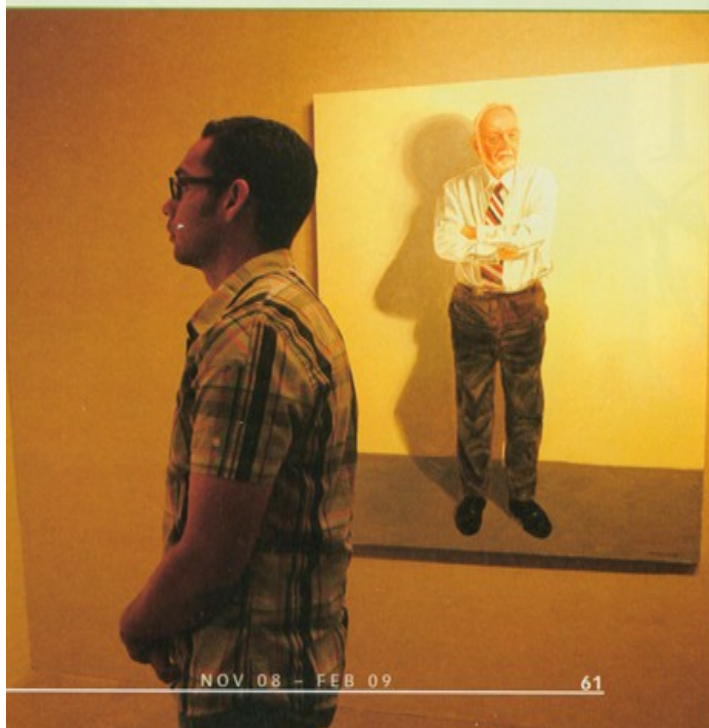
"I met them at the University of Maine Augusta campus on a holocaust remembrance day. I went and met survivors. When I asked if I could paint them, they all said yes, and I started with these guys...Part of what I wanted to say, was that in spite of all of this horrible stuff they went through, somehow they survived. They came to this country, created a meaningful life, and had progeny. Despite everything, their line is not broken. They are still here today to tell their stories."

"History repeats itself; we keep making the same stupid mistakes."

By juxtaposing holocaust survivors next to the piece with the dead soldiers sent to Iraq, Bob creates a strong indictment of the war and the mentality of war in general while looking well beyond that to expresses a steadfast optimism for the resilience of human beings, and hope for better destinations despite difficult life journeys.



"Denial"



"Remembering"