

RUTH WEISBERG

Reflections Through Time

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Exhibition Dates:
June 13 - August 29, 2015

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RUTH WEISBERG

Reflections Through Time

Ruth Weisberg is one of Los Angeles's most celebrated artists. **"Ruth Weisberg: Reflections Through Time"** expands upon the recent Weisberg exhibition at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, presented on the occasion of Weisberg receiving the prestigious 2015 Printmaker Emeritus Award from the Southern Graphics Council, the largest international body of printmakers based in North America. (The SGC's previous awardee, in 2014, was Wayne Thiebaud.)

Weisberg brings past-time into contemporary context through veils of washes and tones. **"Reflections Through Time"** reveals Weisberg's decades-long interest in re-imagining the works of past masters such as Velazquez, Watteau, Blake, Titian, Veronese, Corot, Cagnacci and others. Shown here, for example is her monumental drawing, "*Island*" (2007), and related monotypes inspired by 17th century Italian painter Guido Cagnacci, which were shown in a Ruth Weisberg exhibition at the Norton Simon Museum of Art in 2008-9.

Ruth Weisberg is the first living painter to have been afforded a solo exhibition at the Norton Simon Museum, when she was invited to exhibit a body of work based upon a work of her choosing from the Museum's collection. She also holds a similar distinction as the first living artist to receive a solo exhibition at the Huntington Library, when Weisberg created a series of works inspired by William Blake's engraving, "*The Circle of the Lustful*" (1826-27), in that museum's collection.

In this current exhibition, art history takes on extraordinary, if not supernatural form in the painting titled "*Return*" (2014) and its related drawings, as Weisberg observed that the primary figure in a masterpiece painting in the Tel Aviv Museum, the self-portrait by Maurycy Gottlieb, entitled "*Jews Praying in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur*" (1878) is a virtual twin of Weisberg's son, Alfred (better known as the celebrated contemporary musician, Daedelus).

This exhibition includes Weisberg's iconic work, "*Waterbourne*" (1973). Here the artist joins both symbolic and literal reflections of light, and in this case, a personal passage of impending motherhood and the emergence of woman. Other works in the exhibition, including her most recent work, an original lithograph entitled "*Harbor*", engage reflections on personal history and of the convergence of art history and cultural experience.

Memory is a dominant point of origin/departure in Weisberg's works as her themes also meld art forms, as in her *"La Comedia e Finita"* (1977), depicting Watteau's *Pierrot*

pulling back the curtain on the climactic scene of Marcel Carné's epic 1943/45 film, "*Les Infants du Paradis (Children of Paradise)*". Other recurring themes include diaspora and homecoming, phantom lovers and rites of passage. Her depictions of grouped children, as in "*Together Again*" (1975), are as evocative of memories of her own childhood in Chicago as they are to projections of those possibly lost in the Holocaust.

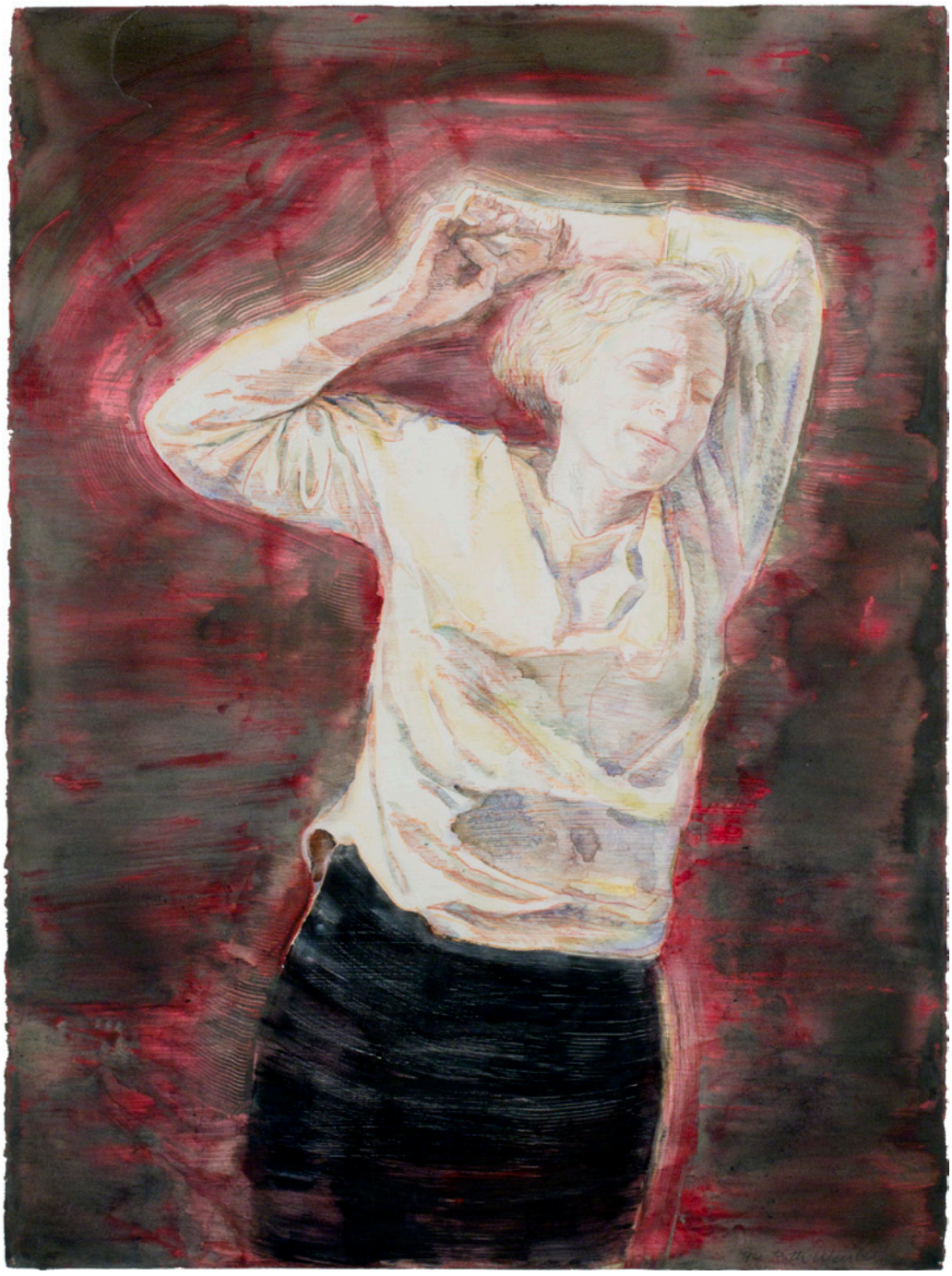
Ruth Weisberg is currently a professor at the University of Southern California where, until 2010, she was one of the longest tenured Deans of the Roski School of Art and Design. Weisberg's works are included in the permanent collections of over 60 museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., Whitney Museum of American Art, Portland Art Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Getty Research Institute, Norton Simon Museum of Art, Art Institute of Chicago, Detroit Institute of Arts, Biblioteque Nationale in Paris, and Rome Institute Nationale per la Grafica, among many others.

Among her numerous citations, Weisberg was awarded the 2009 Women's Caucus Lifetime Achievement Award. She was the first artist exhibited at The Women's Building (Judy Chicago was simultaneously presented with a solo exhibition to inaugurate that venue), received the 1999 College Art Association's Distinguished Teaching of Art Award, a Senior Research Fulbright combined with a visiting artist residency at the American Academy in Rome, a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar, and a Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa, from Hebrew Union College. Weisberg has written more than 60 articles, reviews and catalogue essays. She held the distinction of being President of the College Art Association.

Since her arrival in Los Angeles in 1969, Ruth Weisberg has been a formidable influence and mentor to decades of artists in this city and beyond. Her first major survey exhibition in Los Angeles was in 1979 at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery. Ruth Weisberg has had over 80 solo and nearly 200 group exhibitions.

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Color Plates



Where Was I?, 1994
Mixed Media Drawing
30 1/8 x 22 1/4 inches
JRFA #4167
Price List



First Child, 1973
Original Color Lithograph on Handmade Paper
25 x 21 1/2 inches oval
Edition: 40
JRFA #4835
Price List



Waterbourne, 1973
Original Color Lithograph
30 1/4 x 42 1/4 inches
Edition: 30 plus 10 proofs
JRFA #11070
Price List



Passage, 1985
Original Color Lithograph
36 1/8 x 29 inches
Edition: 30
JRFA #10567
Price List



Messenger, 1986
Original Color Lithograph with Drawing
21 1/2 x 29 1/2 inches
Edition: 15
JRFA #9143
Price List



Together Again, 1975
Original Two-Color Lithograph
15 x 22 inches
Edition: 150
JRFA #6926
Price List



Neverland, 1976
Original Lithograph
22 x 32 inches
Edition: 40
JRFA #9142
Price List



La Comedia é Finita, 1977
Original Lithograph
29 1/4 x 37 1/2 inches
Edition: 30
JRFA #2579
Price List



L'Ancienne, 1978
Ink Drawing on Lithographic Wash
28 3/4 x 40 1/2 inches
JRFA #0935
Price List



Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684 - 1721)
Pierrot, c. 1718-19
Formerly known as Gilles
Oil on Canvas
Musée du Louvre, Paris, France



Gilles et L'Ancienne, 1978
Original Lithograph
29 5/8 x 41 3/4 inches
Edition: 30
JRFA #0936
Price List



On The Journey, 1987
Mixed Media Drawing
30 x 40 inches
JRFA #4170
Price List



Source, 1988
Original Color Etching
15 3/4 x 23 3/4 inches
22 x 30 inches (Sheet)
Edition: 45 plus 20 proofs
JRFA #1374
Price List



William Blake (1757 - 1827)
The Circle of the Lustful (The Whirlwind of Lovers), c. 1826-27
From Illustrations to Dante's "Divine Comedy"
Engraving
The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA

Ruth Weisberg holds the distinction of being the first living artist to be afforded a solo exhibition at the Huntington Library in 1999, when she created a series of works inspired by William Blake's engraving in that museum's collection. Works illustrated on pages 23 through 25 were included in that exhibition.

In 2008, the Norton Simon Museum would similarly honor Weisberg to be the first contemporary artist given a solo exhibition, inviting her to create a body of work based upon a work of her choosing from that museum's collection.



Ariel, 1997
Mixed Media Drawing
30 x 18 1/4 inches
JRFA #6105
Price List





Lovers, 1999
Watercolor and Pencil on Paper
29 x 44 3/4 inches
JRFA #6088
Price List



Guido Cagnacci (1601 - 1663)
Martha Rebuking Mary For Her Vanity, After 1660
Oil on Canvas
Norton Simon Museum of Art, Pasadena, CA

Ruth Weisberg holds the distinction of being the first contemporary painter to be afforded a solo exhibition at the Norton Simon Museum in 2008. Weisberg was invited to create a body of work based upon a work of her choosing from the museum's collection. Her paintings, monumental drawing and two monotypes illustrated on pages 27 through 31 were included in that exhibition inspired by Guido Cagnacci's masterpiece in the Norton Simon Museum collection.

Weisberg was afforded a similar distinction in 1999, when she was the first contemporary painter/draftsman given a solo exhibition at the Huntington Library Museum. In that exhibition, Weisberg created a body of work inspired by a William Blake engraving in the museum's collection.



The Blessing, 2008
Oil and Mixed Media Painting on Canvas
80 x 96 inches
JRFA #9734
Price List



Island, 2007
Mixed Media Drawing on Paper
51 1/2 x 90 inches
JRFA #9740
Price List





Reflection, 2007
Monotype
19 3/8 x 19 1/4 inches
24 1/2 x 22 3/4 inches (Sheet)
JRFA #9746
Price List



Expectation, 2007
Monotype
15 3/4 x 23 1/2 inches
19 3/4 x 26 5/8 inches (Sheet)
JRFA #9747
Price List



Virtue, 2008
Oil and Mixed Media Painting on Canvas
91 1/2 x 91 inches
JRFA #9735
Price List



Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796 - 1875)
Interrupted Reading, c. 1870
Oil on Canvas Mounted on Board
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL



Point of Departure, 2009
Mixed Media Drawing on Paper
30 x 22 5/8 inches
JRFA #9829
Price List



Interrupted Reading I, 2010
Trois Crayons Drawing on Paper
16 x 12 inches
JRFA #10073
Price List



Interrupted Reading II, 2010
Trois Crayons Drawing on Paper
16 x 12 inches
JRFA #10074
Price List



Rapt, 2010
Monotype
19 3/4 x 17 3/4 inches
29 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches (Sheet)
JRFA #10078
Price List



Tintoretto (1518 - 1594)
Tarquin and Lucretia, c. 1578-80
Oil on Canvas
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL



Ravish, 2010
Monotype
25 x 17 3/4 inches
29 x 22 1/2 inches (Sheet)
JRFA #10079
Price List



Titian (1485/90 - 1576)
The Rape of Europa, c. 1560-62
Oil on Canvas
The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA



Europa, 2010
Monotype
17 1/2 x 24 3/4 inches
24 x 29 inches (Sheet)
JRFA #10075
Price List



Paolo Veronese (1528 - 1588)
The Choice Between Virtue and Vice, c. 1565
Oil on Canvas
The Frick Collection, New York, NY



Questioning Veronese, 2011
Oil, Pastel and Colored Pencil on Gessoed Paper
37 x 25 1/2 inches
JRFA #10178
Price List



Parting of The Red Sea (*The Haggadah Series*), 2001
Mixed Media Drawing on Paper, Diptych
30 x 44 1/4 inches overall
JRFA #6946
Price List

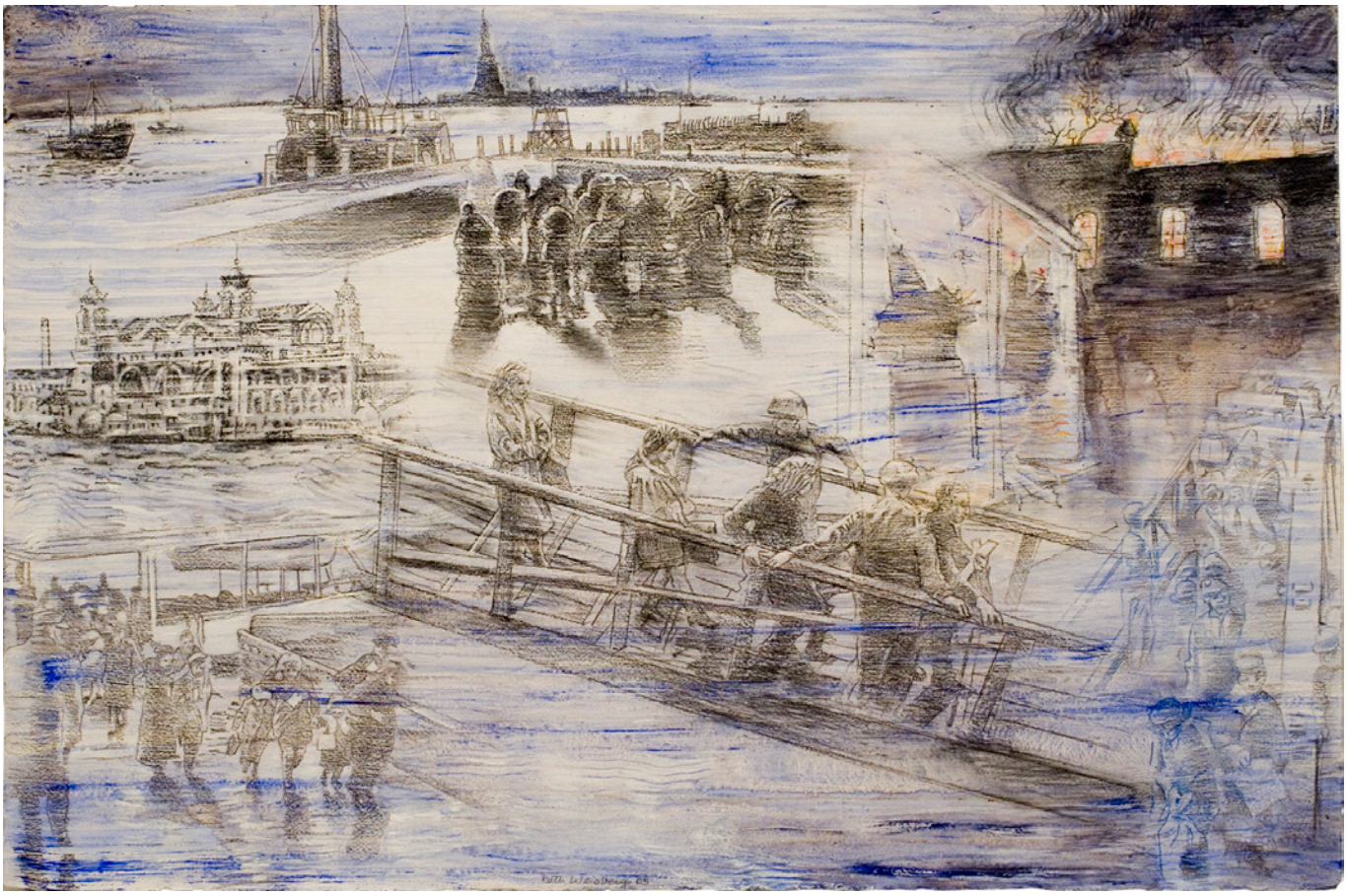




Blossoms (*The Haggadah Series*), 2001
Mixed Media Drawing on Paper
22 1/4 x 30 inches
JRFA #6943
Price List



And We Cried Out To The Lord
(*The Haggadah Series*), 2001
Mixed Media Drawing on Paper
22 1/4 x 30 inches
JRFA #6951
Price List



Study For New Beginnings (Left Panel), 2005
Mixed Media Drawing on Paper
20 x 30 inches
JRFA #9192
Price List

Depicted above and on the following page are works related to Weisberg's major 29-foot mural, *New Beginnings*, commissioned by United Jewish Appeal Federation of New York, installed at its New York City headquarters.

Destined, 2005
Mixed Media Drawing on Paper
22 1/2 x 30 inches
JRFA #9044
Price List





Maurycy Gottlieb (1856 - 1879)
Jews Praying in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur, 1878
Oil on Canvas
Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, Israel

Upon engaging this painting in the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Ruth Weisberg was astounded to discover that the primary figure in this masterpiece self-portrait by Gottlieb is a virtual twin of her son, Alfred (better known as the celebrated contemporary musician, Daedelus), who later posed for *Return* and its related drawings (pages 49 through 51).



Return, 2014
Mixed Media Painting on Unstretched Canvas
64 1/4 x 50 3/4 inches
JRFA #10883
Price List



Looking Back in Time, 2011
Oil and Pastel on Gessoed Paper
26 1/4 x 24 3/4 inches
JRFA #10176
Price List



Knowing, 2011
Oil and Pastel on Gessoed Paper
25 x 16 inches
JRFA #10175
Price List



The Dandy, 2011
Oil and Pastel on Gessoed Paper
21 1/2 x 17 1/2 inches
JRFA #10174
Price List



Sea Nymph, 2009
Monotype
20 x 27 5/8 inches
JRFA #11026
Price List



These two monotypes relate to the stained glass window, “Creation” (2012), by Ruth Weisberg commissioned for the Our Savior Church, University of Southern California Caruso Catholic Center. She is presently working on a second commissioned window.

Opposite:

Top:
Creation, 2014
Monotype
23 7/8 x 17 5/8 inches
27 7/8 x 23 1/4 inches (Sheet)
JRFA #11072
Price List

Bottom:
The Tree of Life, 2012
Monotype
23 7/8 x 23 5/8 inches
30 x 27 1/4 inches (Sheet)
JRFA #11071
Price List







Remembering, 2013-14
Monotype
14 5/8 x 30 3/8 inches
25 3/8 x 36 1/4 inches (Sheet)
JRFA #11073
Price List



Preparations, 1991
Conte Crayon and Graphite
25 3/4 x 19 3/8 inches
JRFA #9276
Price List



Harbor, 2015
Original Color Lithograph
18 1/2 x 26 inches
22 x 30 inches (Sheet)
Edition: 25 plus 9 proofs
JRFA #11037
Price List

Ruth Weisberg:
The Adventure of Living In Between

by John Seed



Ruth Weisberg at Judson Stained Glass Studios
Photo by Eric Minh Swenson

If you look over the biography of artist Ruth Weisberg you will note that she was born and raised in Chicago. After earning a BA and an MA in Michigan Ruth moved to Southern California in 1969 where she has lived since. Ruth has also spent time overseas, including three formative years in Italy between the ages of 17 and 21, as a student at the Academia di Belle Arti in Perugia.

Of course, the physical locations where an artist literally "lives" may have only slight connection to the life of their mind. In Ruth Weisberg's case it has to be said that she has lived--as an artist--in the margins between reality, history and art, constantly inter-weaving them in an effort to reconcile her own identity and experience with universal forces and concerns. To put it another way, Ruth has a feeling for culture as adventure. Making art is her personal way of obliterating the boundaries of time and place and of using imagination and empathy to suggest parallel realities that are zones of the "in between."

"My main pre-occupations have been time and memory," Ruth recently explained to me; "I'm very interested in the artist's ability to travel through time." While growing up in Chicago--her father was an architect and her politically active mother was "the president of everything"--Ruth was exposed to artistic culture by the Art Institute of Chicago, where she also took her first ten years of art classes. She grew up with the knowledge that her family was part of a diaspora. The sweetness of her early life was both deeply connected to her family's Jewish heritage and also tempered by her growing awareness of the previous generation's tragic losses.



By her fourth class at the Art Institute, Ruth had made up her mind to become an artist. It helped that her

parents approved of her choice, and also that she was able to study as a teenager with a brilliant drawing instructor: Emmanuel Jacobson. To this day drawing remains central to Ruth's work in all media including printmaking and painting and is an important aspect of her teaching at the USC Roski School of Art and Design.

Because of her attachment to drawing and earlier engagement with Italian Renaissance art, Ruth found herself "out of synch" during her art studies at the University of Michigan. "The choices were Abstract Expressionism or Pop," she recalls. "I was interested in surface and tactility but couldn't have been more remote from Pop." As a woman artist Ruth also became increasingly aware of her relative "invisibility" in the male-dominated art world. After graduate school she held a teaching job at Eastern Michigan University and also received a Ford Foundation grant to research and illustrate a Holocaust-themed book: *The Shtetl, a Journey and a Memorial*.

For Weisberg, who as a young woman saw and was emotionally devastated by her grandmother's "Memorial Book," filled with images of Polish Jews who had perished in the Holocaust, this project was a watershed. It established her "voice" as an artist, and confirmed her feeling that as an artist she could be a "witness to history" across time and memory. Like writer/critic Susan Sontag, who in 1945 saw photos of Nazi concentration camps in a book and later wrote that "When I looked at those photos something broke," Ruth's is a Post-Holocaust intellectual. Her art is driven by her sense of empathy towards a profound quest for life's redemptive meanings as the antidote for her glimpse of incomprehensible evil.

Looking across time is both an imaginative act for her and a moral imperative. As Ruth once wrote: "My work demonstrates intense interest in the cycle of life, the continuity of generations, and issues of survival and impermanence."

* * *

Weisberg's current exhibition--*Ruth Weisberg: Reflections Through Time*--offers the opportunity to view and consider a selection of her key works. Most are drawings and prints, along with a single mixed media painting on canvas. "I see painting and drawing as tremendously inter-related," Weisberg comments, "and printmaking has always been very important to me." The show has been hung to forefront pairings of works and relationships between themes, and works that might have been made decades apart are often seen in close proximity.



Waterbourne, 1973

The color lithograph *Waterborne*, created in 1973, is one very personal and revelatory image that suggests myriad themes and possibilities of meaning.

While pregnant with her first child, Weisberg floated nude in the pool of her great friends the art patrons

Elyse and Stanley Grinstein. In some respects, the lithograph she created from this event could be said to be a record of a performance that deals with emergence, motherhood and birth. In fact, Weisberg had been around performance and dance during her time in Ann Arbor Michigan, and after coming to LA had taken part in a performance workshop with the late Rachel Rosenthal.



La Commedia é Finita, 1978

Printed at Cirrus Editions, *Waterbourne* is a rich masterful print that demonstrates Weisberg's confident drawing and interest in texture. It presents a distinctly feminist consciousness, in which the artist presents herself as having a heightened awareness and sense of control over her own progress towards giving birth while also accepting the fluidity and risk of her situation.

In a black and white lithograph made four years later--*La Comedia é Finita*--themes of transition are again apparent, but in a much darker context. Weisberg has always taken an interest in cinematic and theatrical settings, and in this case both are at work. A figure of Pierrot, a Commedia Del'Arte character who also appears in the paintings of Watteau, draws back a curtain to reveal the climactic scene of Marcel Carne's *Les Enfants du Paradis (Children of Paradise)* which was made during the Nazi occupation of Paris. A close examination of the figure of Pierrot, a figure who often serves to suggest an honest witness or interloper, will tell you that "he" was modeled by a "she:" a friend and filmmaker named Laura Vazquez who often took care of Weisberg's children.



Guido Cagnacci
Martha Rebuking Mary for her Vanity, c. 1660



Island, 2007

Among the faces in the crowd are those of some of the nearly 1,800 extras hired for the film--including members of the Resistance--many of whom were youthful and starving. Weisberg, who responds intuitively to her source material, is clearly dealing with the collisions between art and life that occurred during the making of the film, and with the idea that art can create an imaginative space in which one can make sense of life's potent mixture of pain and joy. For Weisberg, who was an infant in the relative safety of the United States during the years

when this film was made, the print also explores the theme of where she was versus who she might have been.

Although Weisberg's ability to work on an intimate scale in making drawings and prints is one of the strengths of her oeuvre, *Reflections Through Time* also features a monumental, mixed media drawing, Island, that is just over four feet tall and seven feet and one half feet wide. Made for Weisberg's 2008 exhibition at the Norton Simon Museum--*Ruth Weisberg: Guido Cagnacci and the Resonant Image*--it is one of a series of works created to respond intuitively to a painting in the Simon's collection: *Martha Rebuking Mary for her Vanity*. Emanating from her conviction that contemporary art is not separate from art of earlier periods, Weisberg conceived Island as a dialogue with a work of art that was very much receptive and alive to her imagination.



Paolo Veronese
The Choice Between Virtue and Vice, c.1565

"I think it's a great painting," Weisberg says of the Cagnacci. "It has a theatrical sense of ensemble and presentation." Weisberg's drawing isolates two characters from the original canvas--the reclining semi-nude figure of Mary Magdalen and her kneeling sister Martha--and recasts them with herself and her daughter-in-law Laura Darlington. It is a re-enactment, something that is present of many of Weisberg's recent works. In regards to the Cagnacci image, Weisberg explains: "At its core, the original painting is about the relationship between two women." Weisberg's re-enacted and re-focused variation softens the sense of "rebuke" and transmutes the relationship between the two women into something more affectionate: perhaps a blessing. In fact, another major work in this series is titled *The Blessing*.

Another of Weisberg's re-enacted works is based on a work by Veronese that Weisberg views as "a very great and troubling painting. Titled *The Choice Between Virtue and Vice*, which is described by the Frick Collection's website in this way:

At a crossroads, Hercules encountered Vice, who offered a path of ease and pleasure, and Virtue, who indicated a rugged ascent leading to true happiness -- a moral lesson underlined by the motto on the entablature at upper left: [HO]NOR ET VIRTUS/ [P]OST MORTE FLORET (Honor and Virtue Flourish after Death). The long talons of Vice have ripped the hero's stocking. A jagged knife leans against the breast of the sphinx supporting her throne.



Questioning Veronese, 2011

Weisberg's painting removes the figure of Evil, and replaces it with a self-portrait that glances toward the viewer. "It's significant when someone in a painting is looking at *YOU*," Weisberg observes. "When characters don't look down or away, it reveals that the artist knows that they are going to have a direct communication with the work's viewers." As to just what her glance means, Weisberg is hesitant to comment: "My glance has many interpretations, and I like people to come to their own conclusions."

"While so many artists want to make history by being contemporary through stylistic gyration," explains art dealer Jack Rutberg, "Ruth Weisberg makes history contemporary. Art history is her source of inspiration as it converges with her own history." Looking through Weisberg's show it is very clear that not only is she deeply interested in finding the life and meanings of culture over time, while seeking to involve others in her sense of connection.

"A combination of intellectual and emotional is what I want" says Weisberg. As her show demonstrates, she balances those two aspects with considerable confidence and grace.

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John Seed is a professor of art and art history at Mt. San Jacinto College in Southern California. Seed has written about art and artists for Arts of Asia, Art Ltd., Catamaran, Harvard Magazine, Hyperallergic, International Artist, The Huffington Post and Poets and Artists.

Originally published by The Huffington Post, July 23, 2015.

Reflections on "Reflections Through Time": Meta-narratives in the Art of Ruth Weisberg

by Annabel Osberg

"I'm painting memory--the art becomes a vessel for my meanings," the *Los Angeles Times* quoted Ruth Weisberg in 2007. "Once you go down this path of being an artist, it's very difficult to comprehend people who don't have a place to put their meanings in life." Perhaps she offers her own art as a surrogate receptacle. Weisberg's statement from her past illuminates her current exhibition, "Reflections Through Time," at Jack Rutberg Fine Arts in Los Angeles.

Throughout her career, Weisberg has been committed to reimagining old masters' artworks to reflect her own personal and social perspective while self-consciously insinuating that her viewers, in turn, may accept or reject her postulations. Artworks may begin as repositories for the artist's meanings; but the artworks' depositaries are also free to extract from them significance and attribute to them new ideas. Weisberg's re-interpreted pictures become screens onto which others may project.

As its title alludes, "Reflections Through Time" is a survey of Weisberg's work since 1972. Weisberg recently presented an exhibition at the University of Tennessee in conjunction with the Southern Graphics Council's bestowal upon her of their Printmaker Emeritus Award. Rutberg, who has represented Weisberg since 1983, organized this show at his gallery in order to expand on that exhibition.

During a gallery tour, Rutberg explained to me his curatorial intentions and how conceptual through lines crisscross the room from work to work and interlace a manifold exhibition that elucidates key aspects of Weisberg's long-term interests. The intersection of these rambling through lines parallels Weisberg's decades-long investigation of the convergence of art history, cultural and personal history, and memory.

From ages six to sixteen, Weisberg's first ten years of art training took place at the Art Institute of Chicago. The collection's formation of her artistic identity is not only evident in her techniques, but also in works that she chooses to reinterpret. Corot's 1870 painting

Interrupted Reading, a part of that collection, is one of many historic works represented in her exhibition.



Return, 2014

Several works, including *Return* (2014), are based on Maurycy Gottlieb's 1878 painting *Jews Praying in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur*. Seeing the painting at the Tel Aviv Museum while on a trip to Israel, Weisberg realized that the artist bore a remarkable resemblance to her son, whose image she later inserted in the place of Gottlieb's self-portrait within her reinterpretations of the painting.

In altering historic paintings and envisaging herself and family members as their protagonists, Weisberg personalizes art history while historicizing her own paintings. Many artists seek to engage in dialogues with their contemporaries or recent predecessors, often with the presumable intention of securing an appropriate place in a linear critical narrative driven by conceptions of progress. Conversely, Weisberg plucks artworks from long ago out of their external accretions of ideologic miasma, emphasizing the idea that anyone is free to approach art history from an individual perspective and experience art apart from narratives attributed by others over time.

Any given painting, drawing, or print is a potentially permanent crystallization of its artist's hand and vision; which, if it withstands time and maintains the interest of succeeding generations, is eventually subsumed by categorization into the usually chronologically linear canon of art history. Supplementary information explaining old artworks in texts and at museums is meant to facilitate understanding of the works' context in order to combat missed significance due to temporal gaps and loss of meaning over time; but it can also have the opposite effect. Excessively dwelling on an artwork's historical significance dulls a viewer's sensitivity towards the artwork's emotional and visceral effect; the artist's hand and thoughts are overlooked in favor of cerebral auxiliaries. (How many people in museums spend more time reading placards or listening to headphones on self-guided tours than they do actually looking at the art?) Weisberg exhumes paintings from their assigned categories on historical timelines, renewing some of the artist's original meanings and techniques while questioning others in assertion of her different, contemporary perspective.

Weisberg's individual approach to remembering these paintings thus takes precedence over the collective memory of art history. Even as her obsessive portrayal of old paintings subverts art historical chronology, her admiring emulation of her sources avows their enduring importance. Weisberg is self-conscious, but not ironically so. In this respect, her perspective seems postmodern, sans the usual concomitant irony. The old masters



Harbor, 2015



Waterbourne, 1973



Together Again, 1975

aren't exactly fashionable; but that seems to be part of Weisberg's point--they don't need to be; their greatness is timeless, though not above interrogation. Weisberg's work is suffused by melancholic nostalgia for past times, deceased people, and lost loves. Desires are thwarted; journeys curtailed. Several studies for a large New York mural portray scenes of immigration struggles of Jewish diaspora. Figures appear phantasmal, dissolving into backgrounds. Phantom lovers frequently materialize, as in *Harbor* (2015), where Weisberg is embraced by interlaced hands that seem to belong more to the seascape surrounding her than to an actual person.

Even Weisberg's more concrete figures are suspended in washy hazes that suggest dreamlike spatiotemporal ambiguities. Most literal is *Waterbourne* (1973), depicting a lone woman floating in a pool.

Solitude imbues nearly all her pictures. Most of her subjects are alone, appearing lost in thought. Even figures in groups or crowds seem detached, staring away from their companions, sometimes in the direction of the viewer, as in *Together Again* (1975), *Neverland* (1976), and *Source* (1988). The dismal loneliness in these works seems to indicate mortal alienation of the depicted children, frozen in time.

From an overarching standpoint, the sad detachment hallmarking Weisberg's work may imply her personal sense of isolation in longing for the past and yearning for communication with deceased artists.

"Artworks are crowded with solitudes. The lack of contact between artist and viewer must be part of the artwork's enduring and distinct appeal," David Humphrey observed in his book *Blind Handshake* (Periscope Press, 2009). "The paradox of detached connection might have fetish-like powers...Pictures engage us partly because we are able to occupy their spaces with our thoughts. Artist and viewer are, in a sense, having solitary conversations enabled by the forever off-frame other."

The mystical appeal of these solitary conversations, though, is half illusion. An artist can communicate through his work (whether or not it's interpreted in accordance with his intentions), but the viewer really doesn't communicate with the artist--the feeling that he does is a mere vanity. The communication is one-sided inasmuch as the viewer can only project, not transmit.



Questioning Veronese, 2011

This paradigm is more complicated for an artist who, like Weisberg, seeks to enter a "dialogue" with a deceased artist. The artists' dialogue is more of a dual monologue. Her desire to communicate with said artist will remain just as unreciprocated as that of any other viewer, though her ability to re-interpret the artist's works allows her to communicate towards her own viewers while partially inhabiting the guise of that artist. Thus, the optimistic senses of possibility and freedom implicit in Weisberg's individualistic interpretations of historical artworks are tempered by the wistfulness of detached connection: transmission is unrequited, never mutual. Fancying herself an intermediary is mostly a pretense; she casts herself as an actor, interpreting her source artist's role while contributing her own flair to a sequel.



Passage, 1985

Weisberg's early-life attraction to theater and dance choreographs her art. Figures pose stiffly before backgrounds so flat they appear as scrims, most notably in *Questioning Veronese* (2011) and *Passage* (1985). Gilles, the stock character of the sad clown in French theater, appears in *Gilles et L'Ancienne* (1978) and *La Commedia é Finita* (1977). The latter shows a figure that could be interpreted as a version of Gilles in Watteau's 1719 painting, opening the curtain on a scrim depicting the final scene of Marcel Carné 's 1945 film *Children of Paradise*.



Gilles et L'Ancienne, 1978

Children of Paradise intersects Weisberg's work multi-thematically as well as pictorially. In keeping with her interest in the Holocaust and recent Jewish history, it was filmed during the German occupation in France. Like Weisberg's pictures, the film is self-consciously theatrical: it opens with a curtain, pauses for "intermission," and contains scenes of several

plays within. As in her pictures, the movie treats of thwarted desire and unrequited love.

In his essay titled "Marcel Carné, *Les Enfants du Paradis*, 1945," Norman N. Holland discusses the film's cliché of a "romantic quadrilateral" in which "A loves B who loves C who loves D." The linearity of this paradigm mirrors the aforementioned chain of artistic un-reciprocation: deceased artist speaks to living artist who speaks to viewers who can only project. Holland concludes his essay with the thought that Carné's film is imbued with "an aesthetic of 'incompletion and disconnectedness'": an overarching aesthetic that also applies to Weisberg's work.

Likewise, her pictures share affinities with the tonality of black and white film. Whatever the medium, her figures are typically backgrounded by monochrome or muted colors.



La Commedia é Finita, 1978

Underscoring her commitment to drawing and printmaking, nearly all of the works shown are on paper. Even in her paintings, her focus on printmaking is evident in the way she deploys line and wash, similar to her lithographs. *Return*, the exhibition's one large painting, is on unstretched canvas. According to Rutberg, her predilection for the texture of handmade paper in her prints and drawings inspired her trademark use of unstretched canvas as a painting surface.

Unstretched canvas affords the painter a more free-flowing sensibility than the traditional stretched rectangular solid. Unstretched, canvas has more give; it may be more easily moved around, and even folded and draped in order to create flowing washes and textures. A stretcher turns a painting into an object, whereas an unstretched canvas retains its identity as a piece of cloth. As it is used in garments, blankets, and other items designed to envelop the body, cloth seems more humanizing than a rectangular solid.

The finished unstretched painting becomes one with the wall and therefore seems more a part of its total environment, as opposed to the way stretched paintings assert themselves as separate objects that protrude and cast shadows upon walls. Weisberg's large unstretched paintings are theatrical, like stage sets that situate the viewer in the artificial environment they posit. Her paintings themselves become like the scrims depicted in her earlier work.

The dramatic clichés and treatment of thespians' workaday lives in *Children of Paradise* echo Shakespeare's trite yet timeless phrase beginning: "The world's a stage," a concept suggested by Weisberg's theatricality. The gallery is a quiet participatory theater.

Rutberg curates exhibitions as if his gallery were a museum. He frequently produces catalogues for his exhibitions. His gallery is carpeted; wall labels bear supplementary information about artworks. Weisberg's current show features didactic placards picturing her source paintings and accompanying text--a touch that affects an academic, museum-like atmosphere appropriate to Weisberg's interests. In light of their sympathetic outlooks, it's easy to see why Weisberg and Rutberg have worked together for so long.



Creation, 2014



The Tree of Life, 2012

Rutberg began his career as a collector and dealer of prints. Printmaking is such an important part of Weisberg's practice that she hardly painted from 1979-1989. In conversation, Rutberg waxes philosophical about prints' fundamental nature as multiple originals, and poetic on their conveyed sense of touch despite production in quantity. In 1986, Weisberg wrote an essay titled "The Syntax of the Print," still popular assigned reading at colleges today.

Rutberg recalls seeing Weisberg at meetings of LACMA's Graphic Arts Council (a support council for prints) in the late 1970's. It wasn't until Rutberg opened his gallery in 1979 that the two really spoke. His first exhibition showcased the work of Hans Burkhardt and Arshile Gorky. Weisberg was so taken with the show that she wrote a cover article about it for *Artweek Magazine*, launching a dialogue between her and Rutberg that eventually led to their partnership. Having seen her work at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, among other places, Rutberg knew Weisberg primarily as an artist, and was impressed to learn she was also a prolific critic and teacher.

"Nothing stopped her," Rutberg declared. "This woman compartmentalizes her time in a way that is so extraordinary."



Creation, 2012
Stained Glass Window

In a recent video, Weisberg praised Rutberg's design for this exhibition, stating that seeing it for the first time helped her see her work in a new light.

Much has been written about Weisberg's perspective as a Jewish feminist; and the exhibition includes several drawings for a Passover Haggadah she illustrated--a rare honor for a woman to be given such a commission. Across the room are two monotypes, *Creation* (2014) and *The Tree of Life* (2012), done in relation to a stained glass window she recently designed for a Catholic church at USC. She's currently working on a second window. These two commissions exemplify the inclusive appeal of Weisberg's work, betokening its influence that transcends the personal and religious affiliations to which she adheres. Tapping into a fountainhead of enduring meaning while remaining true to one's time and identity seems to be the goal of most artists, and the accomplishment of most artists who are considered great.

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Originally published by The Huffington Post, July 17, 2015.





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