

Digital life after death

Online initiative keeps artwork posthumously in public eye

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Banner Correspondent

Always looking for innovative ways to expand the activities of her organization and bring more visitors into its galleries — that's Christine McCarthy, executive director of the Provincetown Art Association & Museum.

Now McCarthy has taken the process of bringing art to people one step further by entering into an online partnership in a new initiative with the purpose of preserving and promoting the work of artists who died without full recognition of their talents.

Deriving its name from the Tibetan word "phowa," which refers to a transfer of consciousness at death to a new life, "Poba: Where the Artists Live," is a program initiated by the James Kirk Bernard Foundation to honor the life and work of Bernard, a young writer and visual artist who passed away at 22. This multi-faceted venture was designed, developed and is now run by the New York-based organization Songmasters. Its managing partner, Jennifer Cohen, has long-standing ties with the Outer Cape and a commitment to showcasing and supporting the artists and traditions of this area.

Recently McCarthy and Cohen met to discuss details of furthering the project beyond an Art Association posting of the works of husband and wife William Fried (1902-1984) and Lillian Orlowsky (1914-2007). Both the Art Association's Museum School and its most prestigious annual painting grant are named after this couple. Now they are also memorialized online and in a way that keeps their work in the public eye (poba.org/artists).

"They have an amazing reach with this website," McCarthy says. "Cape Codders may know who our celebrated artists are, but beyond this area most of those talents are terribly under-recognized."

The next artists McCarthy plans to post on Poba are LaForce Bailey (1893-1962), a master water-colorist and self-described "progressive modernist" who summered in Provincetown and taught art at the University of Illinois, and Nancy Webb (1926-2012), a noted sculptor and influential teacher who lived in Wellfleet and was honored for her artistic achievements by the Art Association in 2011.

Poba's connection to Cape area artists extends beyond the Art Association. Berta Walker, owner and director of the Berta Walker Gallery is a founding member of the program's board of advisors. Cohen credits Walker for helping

Poba move from idea to launch stage. "She keeps us attuned to the needs of visual artists. We are also pleased to be able to include some Berta Walker Gallery artists among the growing family of Poba artists, including Norman Mailer as an illustrator and Nancy Whorf, among others."

"I find the women creating Poba to be incredibly original thinkers and around-the-clock workers, willing to ask for support and ideas from professionals in every aspect of the arts," Walker says. "This new website offers endless possibilities." Walker says her gallery had been contacted for suggestions of artists whose estates they represent. "The exciting aspect of Poba is they reveal work that would have gone otherwise into oblivion in all aspects of the arts: literature, dance, visual arts," she says. "I am intrigued by the possibilities of expansion into additional areas of need, most importantly, creating a resource for guidance and protection of artists' estates. Ideally Poba would not only be presenting under known talent from estates, but also, ultimately, Poba can offer referrals to storage facilities as well as guidelines for safe protection of art, sculpture or manuscripts."

"Even though PAAM is about tangible arts and Poba is entirely digital," Cohen says, "their missions are aligned. They have very different ways of accomplishing the same thing: keeping creative legacies alive."

In addition to the Fried-Orlowsky posting, the Poba website is also featuring the work of many other Cape artists, including Nancy Whorf (1930-2009), Phyllis Sklar (1924-2010), Toni Schiff (1931-2013), Norma Holt (1918-2013), David Shainberg (1932-'93)



"Thar She Blows," by Nancy Whorf, 1994. PHOTO COURTESY PAAM



Christine McCarthy, PAAM executive director, and Jennifer Cohen, managing partner and founder of Songmasters, which provides technical and administrative support for the online initiative POBA: Where the Artists Live. PHOTO DEBORAH MINSKY

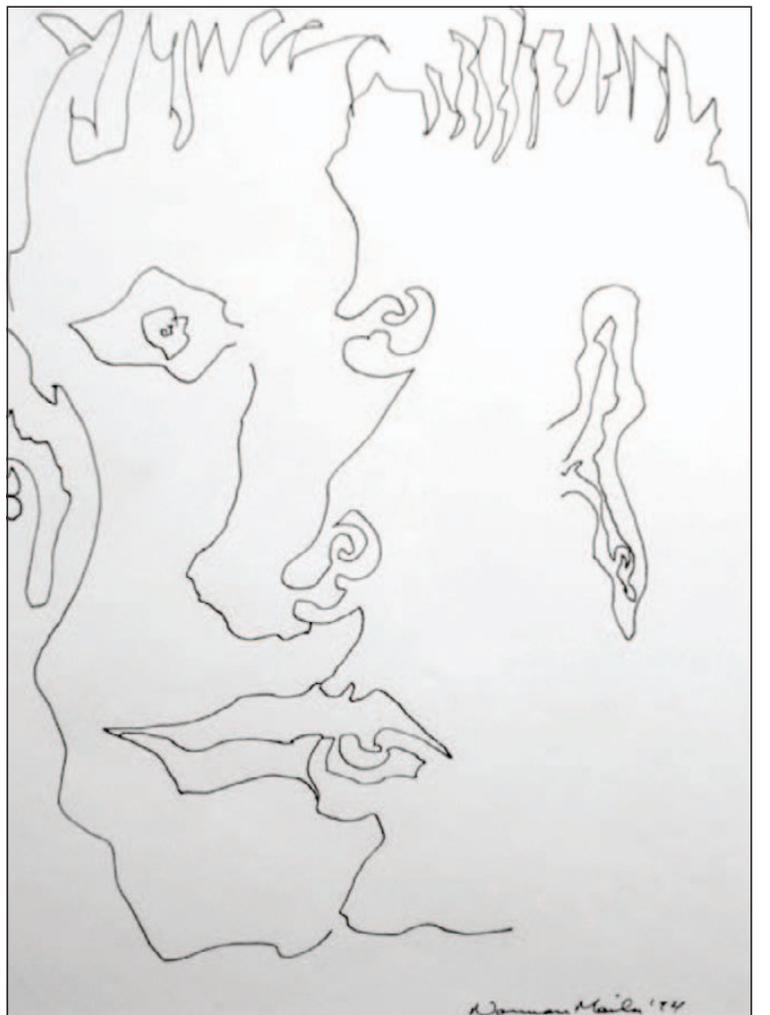
and Blake Van Hoof Packard (1994-2010).

Cohen says Poba will be adding Art Association artists to its online listings regularly. "As a result," she says. "Poba can be considered a 'virtual cultural arts center.' It was born to create online displays of the artworks of really talented artists in a range of art forms and to provide the assistance and resources that collectors and families of artists as well as the galleries and institutions need to archive, restore, appraise, complete and promote these works. We do this through direct assistance and through its network of experts and partners."

Walker says that Poba's potential contribution to the Provincetown art scene cannot be underestimated because it addresses the challenge of collecting and centralizing information about the many great younger, talented artists who up to this point have been "floating in non-discovery."



"Uncle Sam's Canaries," by Phyllis Sklar, 1997. PHOTO COURTESY PAAM



"Ink on Paper," by Norman Mailer, 1974. PHOTO COURTESY PAAM