

How one woman's grief helped others discover new and underappreciated art

By Patrick Fort • Oct 18, 2015



The bedroom of Jamie Bernard feels like a mountain lodge. It's pretty much in the same state that it was when he left it. In the basement of this huge, log cabin-style home are papers, notepads and stacks and stacks of books that belonged to the young man who once slept

here. On the wall, there's a Hunter S. Thompson-style gonzo poster and a self-portrait in the style of the "Sin City" graphic novel.

On the bed is an Aspen High School planner from the 2005-2006 school year. These are parts of the memories Sallie Bernard, an Aspen resident, has of her son who committed suicide half a decade ago.

She was left with his drawings and writings, along with the art he had been making when he was a student at Bard College in New York. One piece in particular is a doodle on a survey of his favorite professor.

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POBA was created out of a very personal and dark place, but out of that darkness people are finding light.

Jamie is running away while his professor confronts the ignorance and neurosis face to face, in the form of a giant monster. And this is on the bottom of a faculty quality survey. His teacher is getting rid of what's written as "ignorance and neurotic bulls**t."

Sallie wanted to create a place for Jamie's work to be seen. Somewhere that would allow everyone to appreciate what the rest of the world hadn't been able to experience yet. That place would be named [POBA - Where the Arts Live](#).

POBA is an online gallery that showcases the work of artists who, for the most part, you probably haven't heard of. Artists who hadn't hit their prime, or ones who passed away suddenly. The galleries have some work of artists you *do* know, but in mediums they aren't appreciated for. Norman Mailer, the writer, has some of his sketches and drawings in their archives.

POBA also catalogues the work of people who are still alive and well, and want to archive their art before their time comes.

Jennifer Cohen is one of the managing directors for POBA. Along with Sallie, she created a space for families and friends of the late artists to put the work that was left behind. The goals of the group are many. To have a place for everyday viewers to see new art, but also for those close with the creator to get a better understanding of the person they knew. Jennifer has seen firsthand how getting art into POBA has affected people's lives.

"The experience of putting this collection together herself really gave her an opportunity to rediscover her brother, and to really understand his work in a different way," says Cohen of a client that POBA helped.

Lots of the people who have submitted their loved one's art to POBA feel that way. It's created a space where people can share more than art — it's the stories too.

Earlier this year, a collection of letters written by Pvt. Hyman Schulman to his wife Sandy, were catalogued with the help of POBA. In each letter, he documented his trials in World War II until eventually his unit liberated the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. [The story was covered by the New York Times.](#)

It's these deep personal stories that Cohen says POBA is trying to find and share with the world.



Sallie Bernard helped to found POBA.
Credit Patrick Fort / Aspen Public Radio

The Loved Ones and Their Quest for Understanding

American Ballet Theatre alums Amanda McKerrow and John Gardner spoke for an entire minute - [in a two minute and forty-five second clip](#) - about how Clark Tippet, a ballet dancer, had influenced their lives in a video celebrating the company's 75th anniversary.

When one of Clark's surviving sisters, Janie Tippet, saw the video, she was taken aback by how much her brother affected other people.

"I had no idea how much the work he did with them impacted them," says Tippet, who practices psychology in Kansas.

It was moving for her to listen to that video online, and to hear how much they appreciated working with him.

“They were all three dancing still, and he created this ballet specifically for them,” she says. “They felt like he really understood who they were.”

The ballet is called [“Some Assembly Required,”](#) and was performed in 1989 by McKerrow and Gardner, the two people from the ABT video. As they leap and prance across the stage in a play and commentary on love and sex, they continuously sidestep each other. But they always return back to their lover’s side. Arm-in-arm.

I felt a little odd scrolling through the pages of POBA. It was uncomfortable to think about how the art I was seeing was so beautiful, yet I was unable to shake how almost all of these people died before their prime. Sallie’s son, Jamie, was in his early 20’s. Clark Tippet, the ballet dancer, was 37.

For me, it was different than going to a museum and seeing a Van Gogh. Through my art classes and history books, he had always been the famous painter who died long before I came into this world. But some of these people were of my generation. Some of these people had died in my lifetime, as I experienced their art.

POBA is trying to mix this history, the realness and constant shadow of death, and the art, together into something that people can use as a lens through which to view the work of its artists who may have physically passed on, but whose memory is still alive in people’s hearts.

Balancing Art and Your Relationships

Jennifer Cohen, from POBA, says the website will always be about the art, even if part of its mission is to allow a place for people to share the work of their loved ones.

“The intention was always to create an online arts hub that would be not only a place where people that love the arts could discover new art, but also (so that) estates and artists could come to find a central place where they could find reliable resources.”

Leslie Kogan is the wife of the late singer Andrew Gold, who’s known for his 1977 hit “Lonely Boy”.

When Andrew passed away in 2011, Leslie found out that taking care of the art that was left behind was a bigger deal than she expected it to be.

“It’s sort of like you’re married to two people,” says Kogan. “There was a separate entity. The art.”



Leslie found old tapes. DAT recordings. Computers full of demos and half-written songs. She learned more about who Andrew was by going through his work. Including this demo of a song, which was originally going to part of a collaboration with the creators of Alvin and the Chipmunks.

Sallie Bernard created POBA with the hopes that people would be able to see art that was created by people that didn't have the time to share their work. But she also got the added benefit of getting to know her son a little bit more.

"Yeah, but I'm still trying to figure it out," says Bernard when asked if she knows her son better than she did before. "There's still more to learn."

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