

IRONED AND STARCHED. THEY HAD NICE CLOTHES. THEY HAD AN APARTMENT.

—JASON BYRON GAVANN

There are many more stories of what went on that summer. Some versions are the same; a lot of them are conflicting and contradicting, but basically they all add up to a lot of ambition and drive. A life lived between a text of excess and the real turns of a hard life is a tough one to straddle. All I know for sure is what I saw. The boys worked hard, studied hard, and tried to live as hard as they could. Like every other summer in Provincetown, things got slow and scary for out-of-towners after Labor Day hit. I saw Mark and Jonathan when they came back from P-town at a party at 11th Hour Gallery, the loft I lived in with some friends. Mark followed me into my room and shut the door behind himself, turning off the lights and cackling. Immediately the stereo emitted a brutal abortive screech. In his attempt to scare me, Mark had stepped on the turntable and destroyed it. He was so repentant. Mark, the punk, begging my forgiveness. Mark, sweet boy with a bad leg, offering me money to fix things—could this be real? This is the way I remember him best, yet in his next breath he was hurting my feelings, full of snotty disdain for those of us rotting in Boston while he was moving on. A few weeks later, we had an opening at the loft of paintings by Stephen and my boyfriend at the time, Tony Millionaire. The Clam Twins performed, mostly behind a curtain, breaking dishes on the floor. They came out, sang a few songs in real drag, lighting matches to hair spray. They were total brats.

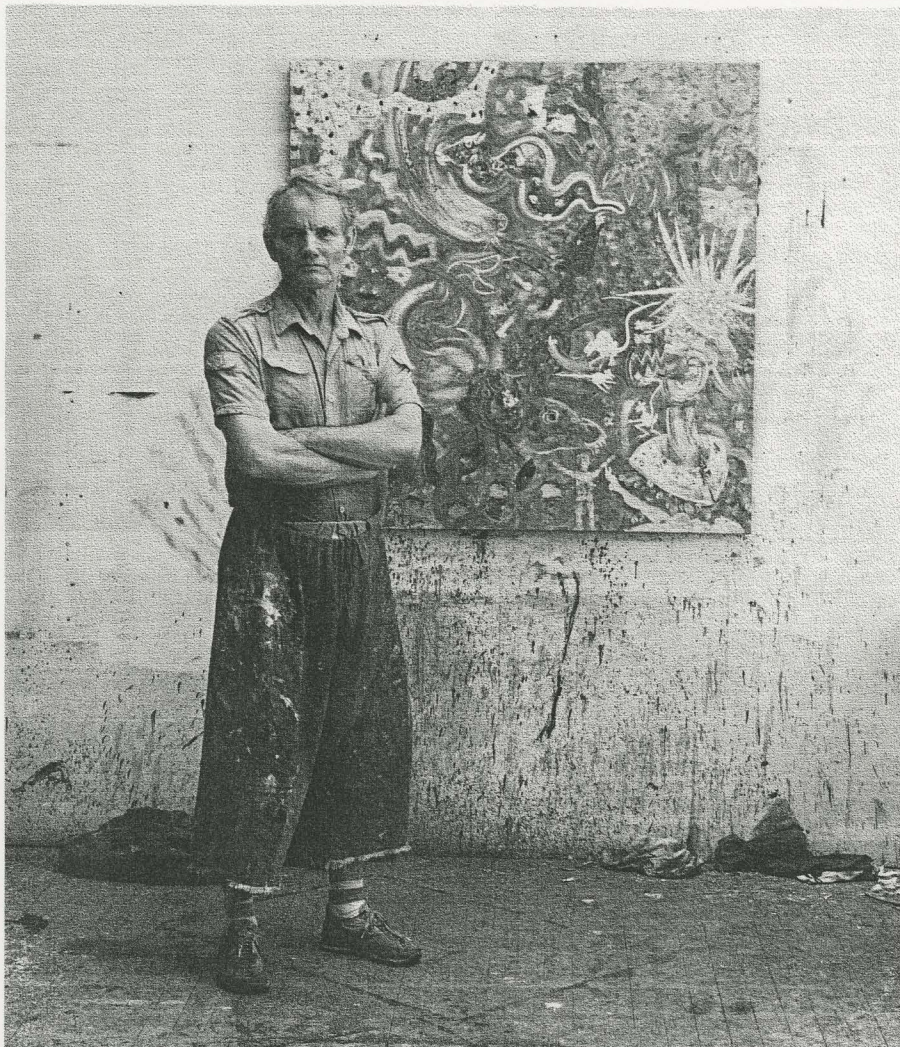
It actually took another couple of years for Mark and Jonathan to move to New York, and by then they weren't even together anymore. Mark was still photographing, Jonathan finding himself. Stephen moved to New York pretty much right away and kept painting and performing, trying some very alternative rock-and-roll and go-go dancing in drag at the Pyramid Club in the East Village, eventually becoming Tabboo!, supervixen drag diva. Jonathan changed his name to Jack in 1987 or sometime around there. He got a studio on 42nd Street and got serious about his work. Mark died of AIDS at the young age of 30 in July of 1989, his work just starting to get serious attention. I was in Provincetown. I met some friends at the Edwige for breakfast. We were somber, recounting fond memories until someone giggled, "He was really evil." And we all giggled too, "Yeah, he was really bad." ■

Kathe Izzo, the founder of the Shadow Writing Project in Provincetown, is a poet and performer.

LOST FRIENDS

Robert Beauchamp: An Homage

BY LAWRENCE SHAINBERG



ROBERT BEAUCHAMP, 1988, PHOTO BY PETER BELLAMY

Bob Beauchamp died, of prostate cancer, in March 1995. He was 70 years old and he'd been my friend for more than 30 years. We met briefly in Greece, when I was 25 and he 37, and then, a few months after I returned to New York, I ran into him at Dillon's Bar, which was the scene of the moment in the art world. I didn't know anything about the art world. My liberal arts education had filled my head with ideas about art but I knew nothing of its reality. Dillon's was populated by artists coming down from work after good or bad days at the studio, lots of egos in various stages of expansion or decomposition. Mostly, for me, Dillon's was Bob Beauchamp, though there was almost never any ego on display with him. Paint on his jeans and under his fingernails, construction boots, trying to break up fistfights, crying into his beer that his work had gone stale, that he'd lost his courage and imagination, he embodied art as vocation that had but distant relation to museums or the academy. "What do I do as a painter?" he

said once, "I get up every day, go to my studio and try to do something better than I did the day before." Once I knew that I could count on finding him at the bar, I took to stopping in at the beginning or the end of an evening, and without quite realizing it, left behind a kind of loneliness I'd come to take as part of the dues one paid for living in New York. By the time Dillon's closed a few years later and the scene had moved uptown to Max's Kansas City, he and I had formed the habit of meeting almost every night at the bar. We also played touch football together on Sunday afternoons, watched boxing and basketball and football on television, went fishing for bluefish on charters out of Montauk, ran together, studied karate together. I don't recall us having serious conversations. Mostly, we conversed looking straight ahead—at the water when we fished, at the TV set, at the mirror behind the bar. Until the last few years, when he

Robert Beauchamp

was sick, I can't remember him calling me on the phone or suggesting a meeting or discovering, say, a ballgame we'd want to see together. With the exception of the bar, most of what we did together was my idea. Since he never read the newspaper, he knew so little of what was going on that he might have been living in Kansas. Not that in Kansas his life would have been much different. Unless interrupted by an invitation from one of his friends, he worked 12 or 13 hours, seven days a week, and for relaxation went to the bar. Though now and then he went to museums or galleries, he seemed immune to urban distraction, keeping his social life to a minimum, treating the telephone like an infectious disease. Christmas, New Year's Day, his birthday or his wife's, he put on his overalls, his backpack, and his boots, and headed off to one of the studios from or to which, when the lease ran out or the rent climbed out of reach, he and I and other friends moved his ever expanding opus over the years. In 1975, we needed two trips with the big Ryder truck we rented; in 1980, three; in 1984, even though he'd removed at least a hundred paintings from their stretchers and rolled them up like carpets, five. Now and then I got fed up with his compulsiveness, the rigidity of his schedule—a dozen no's for every yes when it came to invitations—but the more I struggled with discipline and distraction, not to mention the loneliness and in-

stability of the profession I had taken as my own, the more I realized that it was precisely what exasperated me about Bob that made him such an inspiration. For instruction, I could always turn to writers who'd done it better than I could ever hope to do, but none of them could offer me the example of his work-habit—persistence, endurance, a passion for the process that was sublimely, almost fanatically, indifferent to success or failure. Imagine what it meant to someone who'd studied Arts and Humanities to meet an artist who liked to call himself a Small Businessman.

He was raised in a tenement, the sixth of seven kids in a slum family from Denver. His father left home when Bob was three and his mother supported the family working in a bakery. He was a football star in high school until he started painting and lost interest in the sport, but during all the time I knew him, the picture of him as a "triple-threat" halfback that had appeared in the *Denver Post* was always pinned to his studio wall—right next to the orangutans and tigers, the ballet dancers, the de Koonings and Pollocks and Bacons that were such crucial sources for his work. Until he got sick, five years before his death, Bob continued to look almost preternaturally like the halfback in that photograph, lean and muscular and light on his feet, raw as any kid who'd never left the heartland, angular jaw set firm and confrontationally, one green eye squinting ever-so-slightly. He was a killer with women and, as I used to see when they approached him, with many gay men who came to the bar. After high school, he studied with Boardman Robinson at the Colorado Springs Fine

Arts Center before enlisting in the Navy, and three years later, after his discharge, he returned to study with him again. During a stint at Cranbrook, he first encountered, through a travelling show of work by Hans Hofmann students, the art of the man who would become one of his lifetime teachers. "Hofmann," he said, "helped me see that, through purely plastic means, pictorial elements could transform themselves into a spiritual experience." In 1950, at 26, Bob went home to Denver for a brief visit, bought himself a used Whizzer motorbike and headed for Provincetown to study with Hofmann. It took him seven days to make the trip, in part because his bike kept breaking down, but also because, in a tale he'd tell me 20 years later at Dillon's, he stopped in Indiana to locate his father. "I had a general delivery address but my father wasn't listed in the local telephone directory and no one I asked had ever heard of him. I was about to give up when a waitress in a diner suggested I ask the local postmaster, who came in every evening for dinner. She was right. 'John Beauchamp?' says the postmaster. 'Sure I know him. Raises coon dogs on the river bottom.' He gets in his car and I follow him on my bike and, on the edge of the Wabash River, we come to a tar paper shack surrounded by various pieces of junk, an old pickup truck, and the tumult of barking dogs. When my father comes out, the postmaster says, 'Hey, John, I got your son here.' 'Your son?' says my father, offering me his hand. 'Glad to meet you!' 'No, John,' says the postmaster. 'Not my son—he's yours!'"

Did I say we had no serious conversations? Perhaps I meant intellectual.

Disconcerted though he was, John Beauchamp finally got himself together and invited Bob inside for a beer. They sat on a couple of folding chairs at a spool table and searched about for things to talk about, but when they were done with bringing John up to date on the family, there was nothing left but silence. Climbing into the pickup truck, they went back to the diner for dinner, then returned home and slept together in the only bed John had. Next morning, they went back to the diner for breakfast, then Bob took off for Provincetown. John Beauchamp died a couple of years later and his son, needless to say, never saw him again.

Given this background, it was no surprise, I suppose, that he seemed a man who'd never known either the upside or downside of family life or comfortable domesticity. I always thought of him as unattached, a sort of vagabond, not so much a burner of bridges as one who'd had no bridges to burn, and he liked to maintain a similar image of himself. Even when he had settled into a happy marriage, he assigned ownership of all property to his wife, Nadine. They lived in *her* house, drove about in *her* car, and the dog he walked and loved so much belonged to *her*. I wasn't altogether amazed when Nadine told me that, on the telephone once, he introduced himself to his own mother. "Hi, Mom, this is Bob Beauchamp, your son." But years later, when he began making those haunted wheelchair portraits of his brother Gene, who'd contracted polio at the age of 30, I realized how much I'd oversimplified and romanticized him. Not for nothing was he an Expressionist, his work a torture of contradiction and yearning, such a

palpable, violent struggle against politeness and inhibition that one can feel the paint exploding off the surface, battling against the constraints of the figures even as it creates them. In 1985, a few hours after she called to tell him his mother had died—the mother he phoned maybe three times a year and had seen no more than five times since leaving Denver 35 years before—Nadine went over to his studio and found him drunk and hurling his body against the wall. She finally convinced him to come home with her but he did not regain control, if you can call unconsciousness control, until he passed out.

In Provincetown Bob painted abstractly, but when he moved to New York, he began to feel that abstract painting "left too much out." He was poor and living on the Bowery, stunned by the pain and waste that surrounded him. It seemed to him he'd have to wear blinders over his eyes to keep the figure out of his work. On the other hand, he was anything but a realist. Hofmann's "push-pull" was gospel for him, and de Kooning so much his standard that when he went to his studio he often felt that he was going into the ring with him. Figure or not, he always began by throwing paint at the canvas, then blotting and rubbing and scraping, often laying the canvas on the floor and spreading the paint with a broom. Now, however, as he gave in to his lifelong passion for rendering, gave free reign to his dreams and his nightmares, his bestiary began to emerge. In 1969, he made an inventory of his own work for *Art Now*:

"A nude girl jumping rope, horses, blue-bot-tomed baboons, fish and fish hooks, octopi, preg-

nant woman, water, bricks, flower, feet, erections in the rain, hair, bees in flight, teeth, teardrops, scorpions, fruit, flies, belly buttons, cheese, lightbulbs, crowing roosters, and fighting cocks and barking dogs, a view of the Alps, a maple seed, check marks and X marks, a wet handkerchief, skin tone, meat, snakes, fangs, and snake bites, floating feathers, dancing girls and running diving tumbling men."

Reviewers began to link him with Bosch, Ensor and Munch. The struggle was to let the figure emerge from the paint, not from memory, work on instinct, not thought, keep one's options open, surprise oneself at any cost. "A painter," he said, "is in a constant state of desire; we could be called desire." Once he told me that he tried his best, when walking to the studio in the morning, to work himself into a rage.

Soon after his work became figurative again, he'd formed the habit of pinning large sheets of paper on the wall and using them as sketch pads. Whenever the mood or the need arose, he'd move to the sheet and let his hand go, without regard for polish or composition. The sheets were not meant for exhibition, of course, but after awhile he noticed that visitors to the studio were stopping in amazement before them. In the works' apparent disregard for form was realized a deeper form which seemed to pictorialize the creative process itself. He started mounting the sheets on hollow doors and including them in his shows, and they often sold better than anything else on the

Robert Beauchamp

walls. Like everyone else, I loved these drawings, but it was not until I'd turned in the final draft of my first novel that I realized how much they'd helped me break through a need for order and continuity which had come dangerously close to stifling me. I don't know that I'd have finished the book at all had I not seen these drawings develop on the walls.

For awhile Bob was selling everything he could paint, but then his gallery closed, and he had to scuffle. He'd always made a living from his work, but he had no careerist instincts, no talent for selling himself. A succession of galleries followed, also teaching gigs, a full year once at the University of Georgia, but the work itself was never interrupted. In fact, it grew more internal, enigmatic, and mystical. Ordinary objects found their way into the bestiary—matches, safety pins, apples—and then the pastiche began to contract. For years, it seemed, he painted nothing but Gene. No work, he said, had meant as much to him, and none had fallen so painfully short of the feeling he yearned to capture. Eventually, he turned to other subjects—Dragon Ladies, clowns, animal and bird heads—but his work was almost entirely devoted to singular portrait now. Using color, as he said, to “turn form,” he was edging toward the cartoonish, the heads distorted, expressionistic, thickly impastoed, with crushed noses, hair splayed as if from electri-

cal shock, deranged asymmetrical eyes composed of circular brushstrokes in which the pupil might be a single fleck of white leaping off the canvas like an insect. I have to say too that among the heads, I began to see him make more and more attempts at portraying my own. Maybe this was the first time that either of us, still gazing straight ahead rather than into each other's eyes, had ever acknowledged how important our friendship had become. In homage to my passions, he was also doing Buster Keaton and Samuel Beckett. For awhile he even succumbed to the lunatic project of painting the three of us side by side.

The cancer arrived in 1990, withdrew for a couple of years, and returned with a vengeance. Talking almost every day, we stopped looking straight ahead. Bob was afraid of death but not afraid to speak of his fear or cry in front of me or embrace me or hold my hand or curse me when I urged him toward equanimity. “Don't give me that shit, Larry. I want more.” Like a dumb beast waking up, I began to realize that this man I'd always taken to be so insulated in his work had brought to our friendship the same single-minded intensity, the same loyalty and devotion and honesty, he'd taken to his studio. I remembered how he'd always listened, not just with attention, but enthusiasm, and how often he'd astonished me by quoting something I'd said to him years before. I remembered how quick he'd always been to read the books I recommended, how absurdly uncritical he was when he read mine. I remembered the time when my wife and I were splitting up and, on the verge of tears, as if his pain and mine were identi-

cal, he showed up drunk at my house at two in the morning to castigate her unjustly. And I remembered how angry he got when I disappointed him, how often he referred to the time he saw me, 25 years before at Dillon's, polite with a woman he knew I disliked. I remembered how, when he'd shown me his work, he listened to my opinions even though he'd always concurred when others of our friends laughed about my visual illiteracy. Most of all, I remembered how excited I had always felt, on leaving his studio, to get back to work myself.

Six weeks before Bob died, Nadine and I and a couple of other friends wheeled him around the de Kooning retrospective at the Met. Happy as I'd ever seen him, he remembered almost every painting, one because he'd seen it in progress through the window of de Kooning's studio on 10th Street some 40 years before. Again and again, he stretched out his hand toward the paintings that moved him and traced the line in mid-air. What was it he loved about de Kooning? “The character of the line. The courage. You can't fake that.” Next day, when I went to his studio, I found him pale and short of breath, fighting pain, exhaustion, rage, and sadness, a mere shadow of himself as he moved around in his wheelchair, pulling paintings out of the racks. Lacking the strength for oils, he was doing large watercolors, a number of which proved to be as strong as anything he'd ever done. Cancer had destroyed his body and depleted his energy, but on the character and courage of his line, it had no effect whatever.

Looking around the studio, I saw paint racks filled to bursting on every wall except the one on

and Miz Hofmann were important for my mother, Dora, as well, since she had also studied with Hofmann in the '30s before moving into a career as an art director. Eventually though, my parents found that the rigors of art socializing and art politics outweighed the loyalties and the light. In the mid-'60s we stopped coming.

And in the '60s my father's art career came unstuck. From the Egan Gallery where the New York School took shape, he went to Poindexter, then Howard Wise. Then, for about a decade, from the mid-'60s to the mid-'70s, he was without a gallery in New York. At the memorial gathering for my father at the New York Studio School this January, Mercedes Matter said that Willem de Kooning had asked her more than once how it could be that an artist of such gifts as George—as good as the best, she reported de Kooning saying—didn't have the success he deserved. Mercedes wondered whether it had to do with something of the spirit of the underdog in George. I think she had a point. Everyone who knew my father has commented upon his awesome dedication and integrity. These were enacted often as a spirit of resistance. He never expected life to be easy, and so he wasn't surprised when it was not. He turned down interviews, most notably with the young Irving Sandler, and he didn't go to photo shoots, notably of "the Irascibles," one of whom he was meant to be. He paid a price for this resistance, but artistically they may have served him well.

which he painted. I knew too that he had quantities of paintings stored in the WestBeth basement, in his house in Wellfleet, in a warehouse in New Bedford, probably in a few places I didn't know about. In fact, he didn't give a damn about what he had in storage. He lost interest in a painting as soon as it was done. Given the looming certainty of his death, the thought of such abundance was not an easy one to bear. All this energy he'd mobilized and focused, all the "desire"—what was it but a hopeless attempt to deny the futility of existence?

"Why are you crying?" I said.

"I don't want to die," he said.

"Who does?" I said.

"I don't know who does. I know I don't. It's too soon."

"Wouldn't it always be too soon? If I were 100, I think, I'd call it too soon."

"Don't give me that shit," he said with sudden ferocity. "I want more!"

Nothing I could find to answer that, so we settled into a long silence. Eventually, he stopped crying and we made a few jokes, even managed a couple of laughs. Leaving his studio a little while later, I noticed that, as always, I could not wait to get back to my own. Never had the impulse felt more absurd, but there it was. Even on the verge of death, he made me want to work. I had always been able to count on that, and even in his absence, I am counting on it now. ■

Lawrence Shainberg is the author of four books, most recently, *Ambivalent Zen* (Pantheon, 1996).

When pop art came in and was followed by minimalism and conceptualism, he just kept working, resolute and unfashionable. There are many poetic figural abstractions from the '70s. He was always alive and learning. In his mid-'60s he learned lithography and produced hundreds of beautiful (and almost perversely non-linear) lithographs, some at the Tamarind Institute in New Mexico. When he and my mother returned to Provincetown in 1990 for him to do a master class in graphics at the Fine Arts Work Center, he immensely enjoyed sharing these skills.

Like Hofmann, George McNeil was a great teacher, inspiring and demanding. In the late '80s, the College Art Association presented him with their award for being the best art teacher in the United States. For over 40 years at Pratt Institute and (from the '60s) at the New York Studio School, he taught art history from an artist's perspective, and taught painting. He had literally thousands of students. I keep meeting them, and each one felt an impact. The contained world of teaching gave him a place to express passionate views, and to offer empathy to his students, but allowed him a private place to return to. Again there is the question of the consequences of certain values. That very dedication meant that, like Hofmann, he could be set somewhat to the side, as "mainly a teacher." While the sheer time spent teaching must have been a drain (I remember his fiercely rigid teaching-and-work time tables), it gave him the discipline in art that carried him through into an old age of tremendous creativity.

My childhood memories of Provincetown are of a place of perfect freedom and happiness. Growing up bohemian in ethnic Brooklyn, I was a bookish misfit, a "four-eyes." In Provincetown I was at home. Amongst the summer children, was there anyone whose parents were not artists or psychoanalysts? Perhaps elites with sunburns don't look quite so elite. In retrospect we children accepted as normal a supercharged atmosphere of creativity, competitiveness and exaggerated heterosexual sex intrigue, with consequences still working themselves out for our own generation. Some of these artists' and analysts' children I still know. Christopher Busa edits this magazine. Julian Weissman became my father's dealer during the '80s and early '90s. My brother Jim and I called our father and mother George and Dora from an early age. The locution I am using in this article is the way we spoke. We called them by their names rather than by their roles as some recognition of their lives beyond parenthood. For me at least, regarding my father, I think there was also a darker recognition that while one might be loved, it would not do to demand too much attention. My parent's lives, and their marriage, were less dramatic than those of Philip and Musa Guston, but when I read the memoir of her father by Musa Guston (whom I had known as Inge as a child), I instantly recognized the Oedipal configuration she described so movingly. The public fame of the New York School reinforced the child's instinctive sense that one was being required not to

ask too much from a parent whose high dedication lay elsewhere.

In the '80s, some recognition came for my father, carried along by the neo-expressionist tide. He had the time, and he still had the anger (though never, ever, bitterness over the success of someone who deserved it). He had the confidence that he could do anything with paint, and he began to say so. As I see it, now that nothing was going to happen anymore, he could let rip, and he did, with increasingly erotic, comic, exuberant works. Birds, animals, fetishes, graffiti, and tiny cartoonish figures populate the immensely complex canvases. In the '80s he produced the *Disco* series of wild dancers, then topographical abstractions of the city, with George's graffiti tag signed into the picture, then vivid images of sporting conflicts. He was at the Gruenbaum Gallery for most of the decade, then moved (rather too rapidly, I think) to Knoedler, Hirsch & Adler, and thence to A.C.A. which now represents his estate. In his last years, arising from the pain of my mother's death in 1990 and his own illness, there came a series of psychological paintings, some erotic, some existential, some his version of portraiture. He seemed unstoppable, and he painted up to a few months before his death in January 1995.

Now George is gone, and of the recognized major artists of that expressionist generation, only a sadly diminished de Kooning and Esteban Vicente remain. The entire history of the recognition and misrecognition of the women and men of that generation needs to be re-written. Meanwhile, though, Esteban wrote the eulogy delivered for George at the New York Studio School (read by Harriet Vicente) and at the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Both old rebels had eventually become members. At the Academy, although he could have read it in his own perfect Castilian English, Esteban had Paul Resika recite it instead. Much of the homage was about the essential loneliness of my father as an artist "whose work embodies a full understanding of the nature of painting." What Esteban said was true for all artists, and more so for the generation that felt they had to make existential demands upon themselves. For some, this could be a manufactured demand, but for George it was real. As Esteban said, "any activity which has to do with creativity denotes a loneliness for the creator—a separation from the 'others'—aloneness is a creation of creativity." Through the teaching and example of George McNeil, Esteban went on to say, we "learn that art requires personal sacrifice on various levels." This is true for all of us, but it was most acutely true for my father. ■

Helen McNeil, a writer and critic based in England for the past 20 years, teaches at the University of East Anglia. She and her husband, the English artist Graham Ashton, divide their time between England and Truro. She has just finished a novel and is completing a study of gender and literary modernism.



ROBERT BEAUCHAMP, *THE MEN OF CIRCLE X*, OIL ON CANVAS, 1980, 41 X 59.5 INCHES

Robert Beauchamp The Smile of Rage

BY CHRISTOPHER BUSA

BORN JOHN ROBERT BEAUCHAMP, the artist never used his first name. Perhaps that was because he was named after his father, who deserted his family of seven children when his next-to-last, whom everyone called "Bob," was only three years old. This was in 1927 and soon the Depression would make the family troubles worse.

He grew up in Denver in a large apartment building he later described as a "tenement," after seeing slums in New York. His mother toiled long hours in a bakery; mainly older siblings raised him, yet his mother was the enduring rock of resilience and model for the tenacity that sustained him in hard times. Scary things happened around him. In one apartment, a woman killed her husband by putting ground glass in the sugar. In a basement apartment lived a teenager who wanted to join the circus. Beauchamp recalled that "one act was fantastic." The teenager lay on his back and swallowed the hose of a tire pump while someone else stood by his head and

pumped air into his stomach until it became "so large that it looked like it would burst." When a signal was made, the hose was pulled from the mouth and, with both hands, the boy pressed hard against his stomach. To everyone's delight and relief, air was expelled with a violent noise. Beauchamp predicted that "later, he probably had stomach trouble."

Not all his early life was urban. His grandfather had a farm 12 miles from Denver, picturesque with chickens and pigs roaming among rusty equipment. The barn was collapsing, but there was an apple orchard on the side of a mountain where the family enjoyed picnics. A cow called Dynamite kicked his grandfather, laying him up for weeks.

An older brother became an alcoholic and a younger one stricken with polio. Beauchamp, good at drawing, was recognized early and won a scholarship to Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, where he studied with its founder, Boardman Robinson. Robinson, an imposing figure with a

long white beard and thick eyebrows, had been to Russia with John Reed and his political experience generated searing illustrations, black and white and too broadly emphatic in their childlike directness to be called "cartoons." These were published in the radical *New Masses* and in New York newspapers. The emotion of the images, their "humble search for solid form," left a great impression on Beauchamp.

After three years in the Navy, serving as a gunner on merchant marine ships and daydreaming about finishing art school, Beauchamp set up shop in San Francisco filling orders for signs and other displays. Losing interest quickly he moved to Michigan to complete a B.F.A at Cranbrook Academy. Here he found asylum in a Never-Never-Land he had not known, sanctuary in a manicured estate transformed into an ivory-tower art colony. He hated this refuge at first, then began to love the experience of shelter and protection offered to a developing artist. He decided to become a sculptor, become skilled in ceramics, and make a living as a potter. That lasted until the year he graduated. In his last year, Cranbrook was a venue for a traveling show of students of Hans Hofmann, the great Bavarian teacher of so many American artists at mid-century. Hofmann left Germany just before Hitler, that failed artist, began to denounce any art better than his own.

Beauchamp, before he met Hofmann, saw Hofmann's influence on developing artists, something "big and bold." Beauchamp felt a surge of desire and bought a Whizzer motorbike, really a bicycle with a four-horsepower motor that made the contraption travel at almost 40 miles an hour. With low horsepower, his engine yet propelled him 125 miles on a gallon of gasoline. To start the engine he flipped a lever on the handlebars to hold the exhaust valve open, then started pedaling. Once the motor turned over, he released the lever and the thing would start running. Pedaling backwards activated the rear brake; the front brake lever was on the right handlebar. There was no real transmission. Two pulleys side by side, one larger than the other, comprised the heart of the drive system. A small pulley on the engine crankshaft drove a V-belt that turned the larger part of the intermediate pulley. A second belt drove a very large pulley fastened to the spokes of the real wheel. There was no "neutral." If Beauchamp got tired of squeezing before the traffic light turned green, he had to shut the engine off and put down the rear kickstand.

On his trip to Provincetown, Beauchamp decided to visit his father, whom he had never met. He'd heard stories that his father raised hounds in a small town along a tributary of the Mississippi River in Indiana. He arrived there on his motorbike, looking for his father. He found

the town, but could not find his father. Nobody knew whom Beauchamp was looking for. After going to the post office, and learning the address of the postal carrier, he went to his house and said, "I'm Bob Beauchamp. I'm look for John Beauchamp." The postman knew whom he meant and that John Beauchamp lived down by the river bottom. He said, "I'm eating my dinner and just wait a minute and I'll take you."

Dinner finished, the postman drove his car to John Beauchamp's house, the son following on his Whizzer. The roof of the shack was layered with tattered tarpaper that had been, in places, patched with new tarpaper. Broken down trucks guarded the property and dogs were barking in several cages or pens. The postman knocked on the door.

When it opened he said, "Well, John, I want you to meet your son, Robert."

The father said to Robert, thinking he was meeting the postman's son, "I'm pleased to meet you!"

Beauchamp's poor father was in shock.

"No, John," the postman says. "He's *your* son."

With this understanding, John took his son Bob to the general store, which had seating for a few diners, and they sat around a small table irradiated with the warmth of a coal stove, eating a little supper and getting to know each other.

That night they slept in the same bed because there was only a single bed in the shack. Large

sacks of Purina Dog Chow, for the hounds, surrounded the bed. They got into bed together, creating a "strange and creepy" memory that the son remembered to forget or forgot to remember, even if it was to emerge unconsciously in the uncanny associations of his future double portraits.

Before sleep, the father said, softly, almost inaudibly, that he went crazy when he left his wife and family. That was the first and last time the artist saw his father. The next morning they shook hands and Beauchamp mounted his scooter. Between breakdowns that extended the trip to seven days, he found himself whizzing to Provincetown.

He felt as if he were transported by the strength of a stallion, more horsepower than he had ever felt beneath him. Riding the road he felt free, and then he came over the last hill of tiny Truro and saw Provincetown harbor, the bay glittering and expanding into the endless ocean beyond. He learned words to say what he felt from Hofmann who, expressing his thought in a combination of German and English, believed that art was a way to reach the spiritual through the pictorial. He lived in a large barn that he shared with other Hofmann students. Yes, Beauchamp recalled, it *was* an intense summer: "Sun, sea, dunes, parties, girls."

He forgot to mention to himself how hard he worked in his studio, and how he continued work-

Berta Walker Gallery

Presenting the history of American art as seen through the eyes of Provincetown

2003 EXHIBITION SCHEDULE

5/23-6/20

INDOOR/OUTDOOR/OUT/IN

Paintings & sculpture by gallery artists & guests. Featuring **TOM O'CONNELL** "Ode to Provincetown." A mixed-media installation including fountains, meditation pools, floor and wall sculpture for the home and garden.

6/27-7/13

NANCY WHORF large-scale paintings PROVINCETOWN MASTERS

HANS HOFMANN paintings and watercolors
BLANCHE LAZZELL oils on board
OLIVER CHAFFEE early paintings
MARSDEN HARTLEY prints

7/17-8/03

SALVATORE DEL DEO florals VICO FABBRIS surreal floral landscapes

MARTHA DUNIGAN Memorial Exhibition in collaboration with Provincetown Art Association & Museum. Curator, Janice Redman

Nancy Whorf, "First Light, East End, 2002" (detail) O/P, 16 x 20"

8/8-8/24

VARUJAN BOGHOSIAN constructions GILBERT FRANKLIN sculpture PAUL RESIKA paintings

8/29-9/14

GALLERY ARTISTS Surprises and more!

9/19-10/5

COLLABORATIONS IV Continuing the tradition of creative collaborations among artists, writers, and musicians. Celebrating the Fall Arts Festival.

Special Events

"The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)"
July 3-20 • Th/Fr/Sa/Su • Payomet Tent, Rte. 6 & Noons Hts. Rd., North Truro, 508-487-5400, sponsored in part by Berta Walker Gallery "...impossible to resist" New York Times
"A fantasia of zany energy..." New York Daily News

208 Bradford St., Provincetown, MA 02657 • 508-487-6411 • Parking
HOURS: daily, 11-6 (closed Sundays at 4 to attend "Sundays at 5"
UU Church concert series, Provincetown)

ing for three more years with Hofmann, winters in New York, summers in Provincetown. In New York, he frequented the Cedar Tavern, showed off, made contacts, and attended the boisterous talk sessions at "The Club," where hundreds of artists knew each other and people he respected—Moth-erwell, Kline, de Kooning—got up and gave speeches. This was the artist's forum that became the model for Long Point Gallery in Provincetown, which Beauchamp joined late in life.

In 1954 Beauchamp had his first one-man show at the Tanager Gallery in New York, an artist's cooperative that also was a model for the later Long Point. Here artists decided to take their career into their own hands, and be their own dealers. But young artists are not good at doing those two things at once, and the gallery soon folded.


Beauchamp learned to paint abstractly from Hofmann, understanding that paint was the vehicle, like a motorcycle, that took you to the place you wanted to be, an elsewhere from where one was. But abstraction, for Beauchamp, was a false illusion, failing to bring reality into final resolution. He wanted something more ordinary that simply dragged his old self forward into the present.

Like Moses Soyer and Sideo Fromboluti, Beauchamp had a studio on Bond Street on the Lower East Side off the Bowery where lots of winos made their home. Fromboluti wondered how he could paint beautiful pictures when the streets were littered with so many sad humans. Beauchamp, too, found himself disgusted one summer day so hot that the bums were passed out, shirtless, sleeping on the sidewalk. Their skin, an obscene pink, roasted while their personal juices dripped in excited rivulets between crevices of muscle, bone, and fat. Having studied with Hofmann and absorbing the ethos of Abstract Expressionism, Beauchamp's initial painting was abstract. But suddenly he found the mode unsatisfactory, too "esoteric," and he wondered what such painting had to do with the reality around him. When Neo-Expressionism made a comeback in the '80s, Beauchamp reflected with wounding irony, "The flesh of the figure has returned many times. For some of us, it never went away."

"**FOUR MEN,**" an oil on canvas painted in 1957, depicts a quartet of white-faced males with matted hair, like black skullcaps, sitting squarely on short stools, their hands folded or paired as if to grip themselves or each other. Their eyes do not regard each other and the bunched figures sit tightly in mutual isolation. Other paintings of the period show lonely trees or white nudes on dark grounds, and their hunched shapes are solitary, even ghost-like. These vague forms with soft edges were consistent with other artists associated at the time with Beauchamp at the legendary Sun Gallery in Provincetown, such as Jan Muller, Lester Johnson, and Tony Vevers. These young artists adapted the way mentors like Rothko and Avery blurred image and ground by widening edges into extended transitions that became like an aura around the image.

Beauchamp never wanted to tell a story out-

POLi GALLERY



"Dune Dog" Watercolor N. Poli

Art by Nicoletta Poli & R.S. Knudsen

389 Commercial St Provincetown Ma 02657

508-487-5480 www.polipaintings.com

right. In the initial phase of his mature work, he produced large canvases with multiple subjects: a giant tooth, an apple as big as the moon, witches, horses, devils dancing on thin tightropes, magic circles, hoops, lassos, round eyeballs ringed with fear. In an early painting the mythological Icarus, flying near the sun and losing his form, becomes in another painting an image of melting butter. Popular culture confronts classical subjects, without confusing the comic and the serious, but rather blending levels of understanding with the ludicrous logic of compelling dreams. Various animals appear and disappear in different scales. The size of one image is unrelated to the size of an adjacent image; each element is unrelated to the other because they do not share a common perspective. The unifying element is often merely the tint of the ground itself, with the hue acting like a kind of gelatin, holding images together as if they were odd slices of fruit suspended in a single color. As Beauchamp put down a colored shape, things came into his consciousness. If a shape developed into a bird, it did not start out as a bird, although they are recurrent emotional connections to chickens and roosters. He loved the crazy motion of chickens and the absurd way they moved. Beauchamp developed a habit of making long lists of words—bananas, orange juice, safety pin, barking dog—words that shot out of nowhere with only felt, non-verbal meaning.

THROUGHOUT THE '50s and into the '60s Beauchamp lived with the sculptor, Jackie Ferrara, and they shuttled back and forth between New York and Provincetown in a yin-yang balancing of city and seaside familiar to many artists of the period. In 1959 Beauchamp won a Fulbright Fellowship and the couple went to Florence, staying 14 months with trips to visit Rome, Paris, Munich, and London. He was invited by the Museum of Modern Art to show in its seminal exhibition in 1962, "Recent Painting USA: The Figure." His career had begun to flourish after he'd joined Richard Bellamy's Green Gallery in New York; he also exhibited at many venues around the United States. During the '60s he was invited to show in all five biennials sponsored by the Whitney, a sure sign of being on the scene. He received excellent reviews that often described him as a "painter's painter," as if to apologize for being compared to some better-known artists. In 1966 he joined the Graham Gallery in New York, won a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and spent his first winter in Provincetown. He lived on Mayflower Heights in a house with beautiful views that belonged to Walter Gutman, a wealthy stockbroker, experimental filmmaker, and patron of new and rising artists. Only one room was heated, the bedroom. "Snow gathered in corners of parts of the house and I had to dress warm to paint," Beauchamp said in an interview for the Archives of American Art. "I did-

n't pay any rent. That was an eventful year, too, because I met my present wife, Nadine."

Beauchamp and Ferrara had broken up. In Provincetown he met Nadine Valenti, an artist who also had studied with Hofmann. She too had just separated with her partner, a scientist, "someone not in the art world," she said, last December, when I went to talk with her in the Wellfleet house she and Beauchamp shared until he died in 1995. "Our courtship," she said, "was fast and funny."

I asked her why the curvy female form that often appeared in Beauchamp's canvases sometimes took on the aspect of a seductive witch.

"For a young guy," she said, "the power that a woman has over his sexual being is scary."

Valenti also visited Provincetown in her early years, never actually meeting her future husband until his show at the Sun Gallery in 1956. She was only a teenager in art school in the '40s when she hitchhiked to Provincetown with a class chum, Elenie Larned, a particularly "wild trip because Elenie was so beautiful, unbelievably exquisite. Every truck driver that picked us up wanted marriage."

Like youthful hitchhikers, artists often seek out situations where their conflicts will be enacted as if in a theater. Relationships commence when one picks up or is picked up by a stranger, and the ride begins. One's unconscious life is activated, mobilized. In 1984 he painted a zany portrait, "Hitchhiker," with a giant thumb and two mouths looking in opposite directions.

Valenti laughed when I asked her what Beauchamp painted around the time of his marriage. "Lassos! Cowboys! Horses! I just thought of it—he did these when we were first married." The unconscious at work, Beauchamp here revealed his feeling of getting snared, captured around the neck.

"Horses were very important to his whole art," Valenti said. "In the beginning they were always wild and passionate. They would be running, jumping, rearing up, or galloping, terrified, with witches sitting on their backs. That was not him saying, 'Now I'm going to do a painting about a witch.' The horse is in his unconscious. He wouldn't talk to anyone, or me, about what they meant. I don't think he knew until he had done them a thousand times. His thing was the struggle of the paint on the canvas itself. However, I know that horses were very wild emotional things, and I know that when he was dyeing the horses' heads were all drooping.

"They were sitting on the ground. They were lying on the ground with their legs splayed. So I knew the horse was dying. He did drawings, at that point, because he didn't have the strength to paint. I have a little sketchbook, the last things he did. If you look at those and you look at the horses he did when he was young, you see this was his image of the male spirit. I don't know if he said, ever, even to himself, that the horse means this. He never did that."

After they were married Valenti took Beauchamp to the Cloisters in New York to look at a unicorn tapestry she was in love with. He saw it once, then proceeded to do a series of bizarre paintings and oils on paper with the unicorn in it. In one painting a slice of a waning moon echoes the same curved horn mounted on the animal's head. The animal is alone in the dark and snowflakes are falling, dusting the sky with points of light like distant stars. There is a large painting of a young girl, doll-like, her fingers delicately painted and drawn with long hair, almost a cartoon idea of the young, gorgeous teenager. Nearby would be a threatening animal that would be half-moose, half-Bob. The unicorn intermixed up with his whole lexicon. You see a unicorn, then all of a sudden it begins to look like a penis, then the horn is broken and the animal's body looks awkward and cumbersome, like a mule rather than an elegant horse. There is something threatening about Bob's work. Ivan Karp once told him, "You know what your problem is? You paint things people don't want to think about." Valenti found it true that people really get scared. "They don't know how to look at art. They look at it as stories: this man is threatening me!"

There is no such thing as a void in a painting by Beauchamp, though he believed voids existed in human experience. In his painting, he did not want empty spaces. He believed it was more difficult to paint an object in space than it was to paint the space itself. Emptiness was disquieting. If he sought to express the opposite of fullness, he did so, for example, by the way he pursed his mouth when his photograph was taken. This was like the way he drew the mouth in his portraits. Often the mouth was only a thick line or three red horizontals with cross-hatching scribbled vertically in another color. Is not this the sign and sound of silence? The mouth, tightly sewn, effaced with the vehemence of negation, means to say, *Call me the cowboy of the New York School! I do not say! You cannot say! We are unable to say!*

Beauchamp's standard of productivity was high and individual works were equally filled with lots of motion, a ride of motion. Even in his full-face frontal portraits the curves almost always indicate direction and speed—the *panache* of the gesture. His shapes blister with the speed in which they were drawn, leaving the trace of their quickness. The gesture takes place in a forced period of time, so timing and rhythm are recorded. Emotional decisions are revealed as the figure emerges through the act of finding. This quality he especially admired in de Kooning, where the taper of the edges gives off a tremendous sense of the living hand that made the actual stroke.

Beauchamp's noses look crushed with a strange dignity, like a victorious prizefighter, after a difficult bout, who thinks, "One more victory like that and I am done for!" The ear often appears as an exaggerated double curve. (Beauchamp was as good looking as James Dean and had a marvelous smile, but he had big ears and, according to his wife, he was very conscious of them.) Hair in many portraits is rendered like

TRURO CENTER FOR THE ARTS CASTLE HILL

Summer Workshops Lectures Special Events

Painting | Drawing | Printmaking | Book Arts | Design
Sculpture | Photography | Mosaics | Metal | Film | Video
Acting | Performance | Glass | Writing | Jazz | Ceramics | Jewelry
| Kids & Teen Workshops | Felt Making | Art of Giant Puppets |

10 Meetinghouse Road & 1 Depot Road, P.O. Box 756, Truro, Massachusetts 02666



Keep your eyes on Castle Hill, as we expand to year-round programming!

Check our new website: www.castlehill.org or call (508) 349-7511

the smear across the face in the portraits of Francis Bacon. He achieved this effect by brushing the paint, wet on wet, with an industrial broom, one of his favorite tools. His procedure, a type of automatism derived from Surrealism via Pollock, was to begin with the canvas on the floor, applying paint with abandon and rage, calling it his "Rorschach method." He kept flat knives and wide trowels at the ready for splattering and smoothing and used turpentine-saturated newspaper for blotting. At a certain point he put the canvas on his working wall and began to find the image in the mess, digging them out of available forms and finding new forms. He remembered how Hofmann stressed the need to fill the canvas with potent space, alive with activity.

"And the eyes," Valenti said, "were always like *this*"—and here she gestured with thumb and index finger to draw thick circles around both her eyes—round-shaped, as if startled or amazed, like *What am I doing here? How did this happen?* Even in photographs of the artist, his eyes address the camera with confrontation. His characteristic way of self-presentation is to allow his eyes to bug out a little, just enough to draw your immediate attention. Artists, I remarked to Valenti, become tough because they need to express fragile feelings.

"He was a very sweet man," Valenti said, "but he always drew a line in the sand. He knew he could not step on it and he would not let the world trespass. You could not get between him and his paintbrush. You could not get between him and his going upstairs to paint. It didn't matter if the king and queen of England arrived, he was going upstairs to paint, and *I*," she laughed, "was left to take care of these people, and that drove me nuts. His eyes, you are right, were always a little bit in shock, but he himself wasn't as high as that look. True, he liked to drink in the early days, but he could be very gentle, very sweet. I really respected him because he was a great person. I was happy for him to be Bob Beauchamp."

BEAUCHAMP DIED OF CANCER in 1995, as did his brother Gene, years earlier. The many portraits Beauchamp made of his brother, a homely man, strong and powerful, who became afflicted with polio when he was 35, meant more to the artist than any other work he did. His brother came to visit the artist during the summer of '78 when he was living in East Hampton, often jogging happily on the roads that Pollock drove and crashed the car that killed him. His brother Gene was in a wheelchair, having lost the use of both legs. Beauchamp painted the wheelchair with skinny wheels that appear in fierce rotation, much like his youthful motorbike may have felt while he rode across the Midwestern highways, racing to Provincetown. Beauchamp now became closer to his brother. After each had served in the Navy, they saved and bought their mother a small house, but the family had not been close, but estranged with great distance between each member. Valenti's family was Italian and even if they didn't like each other, there was always a feeling of closeness. "Bob would call up his mother," Valenti told me.

"He'd say, 'Hello, Mom, *this is Bob Beauchamp, your son.*' He would call once a year and greet her that way. Not 'Hi, Mom,' the way he spoke to my parents."

Gene had polio, but later became sick with cancer, which traveled up his spine. Just before he died the cancer spread to his brain. On medication he called his brother often, saying things like, "Bob, I'm going to leave you a legacy."

"Yeah," said Beauchamp, "what are you going to leave me?"

"Alligators," his brother said. After that Beauchamp began to put red alligators in his portraits of his brother. "Reality is at least as important a source of inspiration for Beauchamp as imagination," April Kingsley wrote in 1984. "The excruciatingly painful portraits of his dying brother Gene were painted out of real anguish and love." When his brother died, Beauchamp traveled to Florida to observe alligators in the Okefenokee Swamp.

Beauchamp had few true friends. His closest was Larry Shainberg who used to call and ask Nadine, "Why doesn't Bob call me?" The two men fished together, staring quietly at the sea, and Beauchamp told Shainberg, "A painter is in a constant state of desire. We could be called *Desire*." Beauchamp often fished alone, getting up at four in the morning and surf casting until the sun came up. Then he came back and went right up to the studio to paint during the day and often returned to draw at night. He was very aware of his body and relaxed by using the dumbbells he kept in the studio. Beauchamp told Shainberg that he often tried to work himself into a rage when he painted and I am reminded of a poem by Alan Dugan, "On Being Unhappily in Love with Reason." Dugan suggests that rage is a fear of reasoning and he asks that rage "be cold and smile: you can." I am fascinated by that phrase, *the smile of rage*, because it adopts a voice that exists at some future point in time when a bitter and ironic wisdom is achieved.

"**YOU SAW THE ACME SHOW,**" Valenti said, referring to Beauchamp's posthumous exhibition in Boston last winter at Acme Fine Art. The painting on the cover of the catalogue, "The Men of the Circle X," painted in 1980, is filled with circles surrounding an X, like an image of finality. "To paint a head means more to me than to paint a circle," Beauchamp once said. These were the brands that the young Beauchamp saw burned into the tough hides of cattle on Western ranches, the distant memory returning full circle. Beauchamp predicted his demise and connected to his cowboy origins, where the brand on the horse identified the ranch where it belonged.

Christopher Busa is the editor of Provincetown Arts.

