



Lee's Letter

About Giving

It has been wisely said that a gift requires at least two people—a giver and a recipient. When it comes to birthdays, holidays, or other such occasions, this is generally true, but we often fail to consider some of the most priceless gifts that have been passed on to us.

Possibly because of the privations they endured during the Depression, my parents instilled in my brother, my sister, and myself the importance of giving and of sharing. My father would occasionally paint special pictures as gifts to friends or relatives. He and his close friend, Wayman Adams, often did canvases for each other; and among his friends and fellow artists at the Salmagundi Club, he freely shared thoughts and advice to assist them in improving their skills and techniques. Years after he had stopped teaching voice, my father was more than willing to coach musical friends and acquaintances (one singer who benefited from his instruction was Frank Sinatra, an admirer who owned more than thirty of his paintings). My parents believed that if you were especially blessed, whether with resources, talents, or unique abilities, there was a moral imperative to share your gifts with others.

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Save the date:

**Major Exhibit
of the Artwork of
Johann Berthelsen
in Manitowoc, Wisconsin,
to run
November 16, 2014, to
January 18, 2015**



Dates have been formalized for the first major exhibit of the work of Johann Berthelsen in more than two decades. Titled "Johann Berthelsen: An American Artist," the exhibit will take place at the Rahr-West Art Museum in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, and will

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Johann Berthelsen
The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC

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www.berthelsenart.com • 414-962-7865
Edited by Frank Burke
To reach Frank Burke or to be
added to the mailing list, email him at
frank@berthelsenart.com

In the course of a lifetime in the Arts, Johann Berthelsen became acquainted with many extraordinary individuals. In this feature, we will introduce them to you.



Milton Schepps

A trader in treasures – Milton Schepps

Sometime in the mid-1930s, as Johann Berthelsen was seeking art galleries to represent his work, he happened on a small shop located on Madison Avenue near 54th Street. The sign said “Traders in Treasures,” and there were paintings displayed in the front window. When Johann entered the building, he was opening the door not just to a business relationship but to a life-long friendship with the proprietor, Milton Schepps. Mr. Schepps’ admiration for Berthelsen paintings and his friendship with the artist as an individual materially affected the trajectory of Johann Berthelsen’s fortunes and reputation, as his friend made introductions to many of his clients, who were well-known figures especially in the entertainment world.

Lee Berthelsen has vivid memories of his visits to Traders in Treasures as a child and as a young man. “The shop was small, but it was not unlike Aladdin’s cave—with display cases holding lovely pieces of silver, gold, porcelains, jewelry, East Indian wood carvings, ivories, and other collectibles from all over the world. One particularly memorable piece was a desk carved from a single piece of wood. Everything was precious and of the first quality.”

In addition to Mr. Schepps, the staff consisted of “the two Frankies.” The first Frankie was an accomplished clarinet player who spent his evenings playing with some of the better bands around New York, and who was always ready to discuss clarinet technique with the artist’s teenage son, Lee. The second Frankie was striving to make a name for himself as an artist.

The unique merchandise, as well as the upscale atmosphere, helped establish the store’s popularity especially with show business luminaries. Once Traders in Treasures began to exhibit and sell Berthelsen paintings, customers frequently would ask Mr. Schepps to meet the artist in order to commission special works. Lee Berthelsen recalls, “Milton Schepps never hesitated to make those introductions and, in this way, Dad met many influential people. Some people wanted paintings of their city or country homes; others sought a special scene that was important in their lives. Dad never hesitated to oblige.”

In the late 1940s and early ’50s, Frank Sinatra was a regular Schepps customer who rarely failed to drop by when he



A Berthelsen still life from the Schepps collection

was in town. He normally stayed in a suite at the Hampshire House, which had a magnificent view of Central Park. Having purchased several Berthelsens from him, Sinatra asked Milton Schepps to meet the artist so he could commission some works. Mr. Schepps made the introduction.

When Johann arrived at Sinatra’s suite to paint the expansive view of the park, they began the first of many conversations. An amateur artist



Milton Schepps at the wedding of his lovely daughter, Merri

himself, Frank Sinatra was a keen admirer of Johann Berthelsen, ultimately collecting more than 30 of his paintings.

When he heard about Johann’s early experiences as a singer and voice teacher, Sinatra confided that he was having a problem with his voice and throat and asked whether Johann could help. Johann analyzed the problem and suggested a remedy: “First, I would advise you not to speak at all for several weeks. Buy a little pad and a pen, and use that to ask and answer any questions. Also, you should hum simple melodies in a soft voice until you can feel the vibrations in your nose. Keep that up for a few weeks, and your voice will heal.”

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The Old Fifth Avenue Bank
New York, NY
Oil on canvas

incorporate more than 40 artworks, as well as personal items from the collection of Lee Berthelsen and other Berthelsen family members.

According to Greg Vadney, Executive Director of the Rahr-West Art Museum, "We are extremely pleased to be presenting this unique and highly personal exhibition. Johann Berthelsen always regarded Manitowoc, where he was raised, as his hometown. The house in which he and his mother lived for years is a block away from the Museum, and the town was home to many relatives, including his cousins, the Rahr family. The fact that the majority of the exhibit consists of items from the collection of his son, Lee Berthelsen, as well as works owned by other family members and such historic items as his palette and brushes, make this exhibit truly personal on many levels."

Lee Berthelsen states, "I know that my father would be extremely pleased to see this comprehensive exhibit of his work 'going home' to Manitowoc. Although we are currently exploring several other venues for the exhibit,

it's only fitting that our first stop should be here, where he first nurtured his great talent for art."

Included in the exhibit will be works in multiple media, including oil, pastel, watercolor, monotype, and charcoal. Johann Berthelsen's connection to the area will be evidenced through early paintings of the Wisconsin woods and surrounding landscape, as well as an early rendering of his mother's garden. A highlight of the show will be a collection of the artist's most popular New York snow scenes. A series of events scheduled to take place during the exhibition is currently in preparation.



The Grand Army Plaza
New York, NY
Oil on canvas

Eva Hickey, Assistant Curator of the Rahr-West Art Museum, comments, "It is our desire to showcase not just the artworks but the entire career of this extraordinary individual. His early career as an opera singer will be reflected in portraits by his good friend, Wayman Adams, as well as an accompanying musical program. Some especially touching works will include paintings and sketches of family members and even a particularly striking canvas of his children's toys."

The Rahr-West Art Museum is located at 610 N. Eighth Street, Manitowoc, Wisconsin 54220. The website is www.rahrwestartmuseum.org. The museum is open every day except Mondays and major holidays.



Paupers Drive
Manitowoc, WI
Oil on canvas



Gramercy Park
New York, NY
Oil on canvas



Johann Berthelsen painting a Nocturne

Please feel free to contact the Manitowoc Area Visitor and Convention Bureau at 800-627-4896 (or 920- 686-3070) with additional questions or information about lodging or visit their website at www.manitowoc.info/. Manitowoc is located approximately 45 minutes from the Austin-Straubel Airport at Green Bay, Wisconsin, or 90 minutes from General Mitchell International Airport in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



Central Park Looking West
New York, NY
Oil on canvas



Still Life
Oil



United Nations Building
New York, NY
Oil on canvas



Rockbound Stadium
Connecticut
Oil on canvas



Little Church Around the Corner
New York, NY
Oil on canvas



The Hellgate
New York, NY
Oil on canvas

On hearing the advice, Sinatra smiled and said, "That's exactly the same advice I got from John Charles Thomas."^{*}

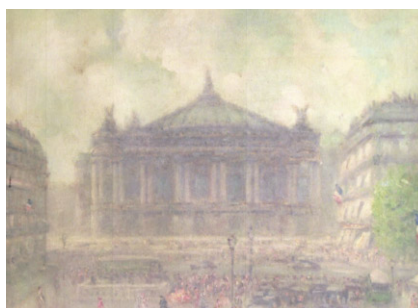
Sinatra would eventually commission, among other paintings, a gift portrait of Ava Gardner's dog, a painting of the Brooklyn Bridge (about which he had recorded a popular song), and a painting of the Place de l'Opera in Paris, which, for some reason, he never claimed and which remained in the personal collection of Milton Schepps.

Lee Berthelsen continues, "Dad's paintings were collected by many prominent show business people, such as John Daly (news commentator), Broadway star Ethel Merman, singer Dinah Shore, CBS founder and president William Paley, radio personality Edward "Major" Bowes, columnist Walter Winchell, and others.



Washington Square Arch Nocturne

He was also commissioned to do paintings of the homes of prominent citizens, such as the Seth M. Milliken house at 990 Madison Avenue, the home of Attorney Charles Tomick in Great Neck, Long Island, and the house of ice dancing pioneer and



Paris Opera House, a Berthelsen rarity



The Beginning of Broadway in New York City

Olympic medalist Harold Hartshorne at Little Silver, New Jersey. How many of these individuals came to know Johann Berthelsen through Milton Schepps is impossible to say; but it is likely that the "Jeweler to the Stars," as he was informally known, was responsible for a number of important introductions.

Lee Berthelsen remembers, "Milton was a great friend of my father's up to the time of Dad's death. He always said that his two closest friends were Damon Runyon and Johann Berthelsen. Whenever I visited the store in his company, my father would always say to me with a wink: 'Say thank you to this man; he's helping to put you through college.'"

Perhaps the most sincere form of admiration that can be shown by an art dealer consists of acquiring an artist's work for his personal collection, and the Milton Schepps collection contains many of the public's favorite Berthelsen subjects, as well as several that held special meaning for Berthelsen and his wife. Even today, many collectors examining their Berthelsen paintings are apt to find a faded sticker on the back bearing the words, "Traders in Treasures." 

**John Charles Thomas (1891-1960) was a distinguished, and very popular, American baritone. His career included Broadway musicals, concerts, recordings, radio appearances, and starring roles at the Metropolitan Opera.*

Frank Sinatra courtesy of Frank Sinatra Enterprises



Frank Sinatra with one of his Berthelsen paintings

Over the many years in which I assembled a personal collection of my father's artwork, I was keenly aware of the responsibility that entailed. I realized early on that a good collection is more than an accumulation—it exceeds the sum of the parts and must convey a message. By acquiring artworks covering the vast span of my father's career, I have been able to assemble a body of work that vividly demonstrates not only his growth as an artist but his fascination with and involvement in multiple media. Added to this are other works by his contemporaries that add depth and context to his history.

As I had hoped it would, several years ago the time came for me to begin to share my father's legacy with a larger audience. With that in mind, I founded The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC. In addition to generating a greater awareness of my father's life and art through the website and, more especially, through the DVD "Johann

Berthelsen—A Life in the Arts" (which has been broadcast numerous times on public television), the Conservancy has created a resource for the authentication of Johann Berthelsen artworks. Our website www.berthelsenart.com and our newsletter, *The Canvas*, have enabled us to maintain contact with multiple galleries, collectors, and interested individuals and to share stories about the many individuals who influenced my father's life as a performer, a painter, and an individual. Our resources have also helped us to correct much of the erroneous information that had filtered into biographies on the Internet and elsewhere and have provided a means of discovering artworks which we never knew existed, including two European scenes. We are continually adding to a comprehensive list of Johann Berthelsen's work for our own use and for the convenience of future students and collectors.

Perhaps most important, through the Conservancy, I have met many people, some of whom have collected my father's paintings for years and others who are just discovering his extraordinary talent.

The exhibit scheduled for this fall at the Rahr-West Art Museum in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, will reach even more individuals. Likewise, we hope to attract the interest of some of the more than 15 museums in possession of Berthelsen artworks that might be interested in further exhibitions. I also plan to offer for sale a select number of my father's pastels, as that will be the most effective means of assisting the art world in discovering his skill in that medium.

The ability to enrich the lives of many individuals through exposure to my father's art has brought me much in the way of new friends and personal satisfaction. As my parents often said, "In giving to others, you always receive more in return."

Yours sincerely,

Lee Berthelsen

Chairman

The Johann Berthelsen

Conservancy, LLC

lee@berthelsenart.com

Visit

Johann Berthelsen
The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC

at

www.berthelsenart.com