



## Lee's Letter

## Entering a New Dimension

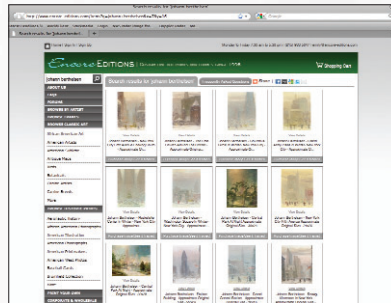
I'm very pleased to tell you that it has been an extremely rewarding – and exciting – time here at The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy. In fact, when I consider the scope and range of our activities, it seems to me that my father's artistic legacy is entering another dimension. The initial phase involved the creation of his artworks and their sale through galleries and commissions to collectors and institutions. The second phase occurred as an increasing number of collectors came to appreciate his work and purchased paintings as they became available for auction or sale.

This new dimension of which I speak encompasses many people whom we have reached via media undreamed of in my father's lifetime.

Thanks to our website and the prevalence of the internet, we have reached tens of thousands of individuals throughout the world. We have heard about the

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## Johann Berthelsen Conservancy and Encore Editions announce limited edition prints of Johann Berthelsen artwork



In a joint announcement, Encore Editions of New Hope, Pennsylvania, a leading source of fine art prints, and The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, confirmed that Encore Editions has been authorized to offer a limited edition series of prints of artworks by Johann Berthelsen. The prints will be based on hitherto unpublished paintings, many of which are from the personal collection of the artist's son, Lee Berthelsen. The initial offering will include 16 of Berthelsen's famous snow scenes and will be available in quantities of 25 each of original size and double original size. The prints will be numbered and will feature the signature

of Lee Berthelsen. They will also be available as note cards.

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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.*

## Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong



Louis Armstrong photo courtesy of the Louis Armstrong House Museum

One of Johann Berthelsen's most interesting – and personal – works involved a collaboration between three people: the artist, his son Lee, and the great jazz trumpeter, Louis Armstrong.

By 1954, Armstrong had already established a reputation as an iconic figure of the American musical scene. Born in New Orleans in 1901, his early life was marked by poverty and delinquency. Though he had learned to play cornet as early as age 11, it was not until he was sent to a reform school that he had the good fortune to encounter Professor Peter Davis who provided the intensive musical training that

would lay the foundation for his unique style. An avid and enthusiastic musician, the young Louis played every chance he could and, in the process, met many individuals who would prove influential in establishing jazz as a musical genre.

By the early 1920s, Chicago was the jazz capital, and its king was Joe "King" Oliver. Oliver brought the young Armstrong to Chicago to

play in his band and helped him establish a reputation with the public as well as with other popular musicians. Armstrong eventually migrated to New York where he had already

become popular as a result of his recordings. He played at such venues as Connie's Inn and the Cotton Club in Harlem and began to include more singing in his performances.

During the Depression, he traveled widely, seeking opportunities in movies and working with leading big band leaders including Guy Lombardo. After extensive travels, including a European tour, he settled in New York in 1943.

The post-War period saw a decline in the popularity of big bands but, thanks to his firm musical foundation and extensive experience, Armstrong

was able to easily transition to playing with smaller groups or to appearing alone. His popularity continued to build and, in February of 1949, he appeared on the cover of *TIME* magazine.

In 1954, he was seeking a very special 10th wedding anniversary gift for his wife, Lucille, and decided to commission a painting. In all probability, he was referred to Johann Berthelsen by Milton Schepps. Known as New York's "jeweler to the stars," Schepps was a close personal friend who frequently displayed – and sold – Berthelsen paintings bearing the label, "Traders in Treasures." Schepps had previously introduced Johann to Frank Sinatra who subsequently commissioned over 30 paintings.

Lee Berthelsen was present in the apartment at 249 E. 57th Street the day Louis Armstrong stopped by to discuss the painting. Lee recalls, "Very early in the conversation, Mr. Armstrong said, 'I hear that you used to be a voice teacher.' That began an extensive discussion about classical music in general and opera in particular. Mr. Armstrong's knowledge was incredibly broad, and it was obvious that he was an extremely serious opera fan.

"Finally, the conversation came back around to the painting. Mr. Armstrong, who was soon to open at the Paramount Theatre, asked if my father could do a painting of Times Square incorporating the Paramount. My father said that he could.



“Several weeks later when the painting was finished, I was fortunate enough to be present when Mr. Armstrong returned. He was immensely pleased and told my father that he had depicted Times Square exactly as he most loved to see it – with the lights reflected in the pavement after a rain. He pointed to the many figures in the painting, smiled and said, ‘Look at all these people. I bet they’re all coming to see me at the Paramount.’ He repeated his love for the painting but had just one more request: he asked if his name could be lettered onto the marquee as it would be for his upcoming engagement.

“My father shook his head and said, ‘Mr. Armstrong, I don’t know that I could do that. I’m an artist, not a photographer.’”


Lee continued, “As I was, at that time, a very brash 18-year-old, I said, ‘I’ll do it.’ Mr. Armstrong agreed, and I lettered the words, ‘LOUIS ARMSTRONG AND HIS TRUMPET’ to the marquee. Quite pleased, Mr. Armstrong suggested that perhaps the signature should read: ‘Johann Berthelsen



and the son of the artist.’ We didn’t think it would be wise to go that far.”


Louis Armstrong’s subsequent career was characterized by a steady increase in his popularity. Through the medium of television, he regularly reached millions of his fans. He appeared in multiple feature films and recorded extensively. His recording of “Hello, Dolly!” continues to delight audiences.

Louis Armstrong died on July 6, 1971. His honorary pallbearers included political leaders and legends of the music and entertainment world.

On April 28, 2005, the Berthelsen painting of Times Square which he had commissioned was sold by Shannon’s Fine Art Auctioneers of Milford, Connecticut. At that time, it achieved the record price for any Berthelsen painting. It remains today a work as unique as the artist who created it and the musician who commissioned it. 

In our work at the Conservancy, we have rediscovered a number of superb works by Johann Berthelsen – some of which we did not know of. Likewise, we have become aware of other paintings by Johann and his contemporaries that we would like to locate and photograph for our catalogue.

Perhaps, some of our friends know the location of one or more of these works:

- **Rockefeller Center at Christmas.** A view of the skating rink at Rockefeller Center showing the seasonal Christmas tree and the gold relief sculpture of Prometheus. Johann painted this several times in a large format, always including a young skater in costume who had just fallen on the ice.
- **La Boheme Act 3.** Opera lovers know the third act of *La Boheme* as one of the most famous “snow scenes” in opera. Johann Berthelsen captured it from the viewpoint of a box at the Old Metropolitan Opera House. The four principal characters – Rodolfo, Mimi, Marcello, and Musetta – are depicted outside the inn at the gates of Paris during their rapturous quartet.
- **The Paris Opera.** Though he never visited Paris personally, Johann Berthelsen used photographic images in constructing one of two known paintings of Paris. The other is Notre Dame Cathedral. 

# Hidden treasures revealed:

## *the Berthelsen pastels*



The words that launched a career were spoken when a worried and destitute Johann Berthelsen, having lost his voice students because of the Great Depression, was commiserating with a fellow artist about what direction his professional life was to take. His friend's statement, "If you can do in oils what you do in pastels, you'll be a great success," inspired and encouraged him. For the next 40 years, Johann Berthelsen would concentrate almost exclusively on oil paintings.

The pastels to which his friend referred, exquisite works of art in their own right, have remained largely unknown to the general public, including even some of the most avid Berthelsen collectors.

The primary reason for this derives from the fact that, once he had established his reputation in oils,

his work in pastels became less frequent. For the most part, the pastels have resided in the collections of family members, and few have ever been offered for sale.

In themselves remarkable works, the pastels reveal the elements that would later come to characterize the Berthelsen paintings. Many of them are New York scenes, including Central Park in all seasons. Nocturnes especially glow with an Impressionistic mastery of light and shadow. The detail is so complex that, from a distance, certain of the works could be mistaken for oils. Fortunately, Berthelsen always utilized the finest materials, including Montgolfier paper and imported chinks. As a result, they have remained in an excellent state of preservation.

The rediscovery of many previously unknown works in this medium has prompted extensive discussions at the Conservancy as to the best way of bringing them to the public.

Choices involve exhibitions, extending the number of pastels currently on the website, and offering a selection of prints. To create further awareness in the art world and to raise money for the restoration of certain pieces, it is possible that some may be offered at auction.

For collectors and admirers the world over, the rediscovery of these hidden treasures offers a new and exciting opportunity to appreciate the artist's talent and virtuosity in multiple media. **B**



In announcing the collection, Emily Miller-Jee, President and owner of Encore Editions, stated, "We have, for many years, offered a number of prints of Johann Berthelsen paintings, and they have been extremely popular. His New York snow scenes are not only superb works of art but capture many of the city's landmarks as they appeared in the period 1920 through 1971. As such, they appeal to both art lovers and to those with an affection for, or attachment to, New York."

Lee Berthelsen, founder and Chairman of The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC, stated, "We are very pleased to announce this new association with Encore Editions. The quality of their prints is excellent, and I will personally be working with them to ensure that the coloration and appearance of each print reflects my father's intention and execution. In recent years, the prices of original Berthelsen artworks have risen dramatically, and we believe that the prints offered through Encore Editions represent an excellent means of enabling a wider public to appreciate and enjoy my father's work."

In a related development, it was announced that Encore Editions will also be offering Berthelsen related items formerly available only through the Conservancy's website. These include a numbered limited edition print of the Chicago Art Institute, a set of note cards featuring select Berthelsen New York snow scenes, and a DVD of the documentary, "Johann Berthelsen – A Life in the Arts." Produced in 2009, the documentary has been featured on public television and includes a representative sample of Johann Berthelsen's work in various media.

Lee Berthelsen commented, "During his lifetime, my father's work was collected by many notable individuals, including Dag Hammarskjöld, Louis Armstrong, Frank Sinatra, and Ethel Merman. It is extremely rewarding to see his art reach not only a wider audience but another generation of art lovers and New Yorkers."

For more information, visit Encore Editions at [www.encore-editions.com](http://www.encore-editions.com) or The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC, at [www.berthelsenart.com](http://www.berthelsenart.com).



extent of his popularity in Europe. I have been contacted by relatives in Denmark who are currently researching information about Johann's parents and grandparents. We have been able to correct erroneous biographical data, and we have authenticated an increasing number of paintings.

Our documentary, "Johann Berthelsen – A Life in the Arts," has been shown regularly on public TV in Wisconsin.

We have recently concluded an agreement with Encore Editions authorizing a special limited edition of select New York snow scenes (see our lead story). Some are from my private collection and have never before been reproduced. Encore Editions will also be handling the distribution of our DVD, note cards, and prints of the Chicago Art Institute. Thanks to their high-quality reproduction capability, copies of Johann Berthelsen's work will now be available at very reasonable prices to an ever-widening public.

Our newsletter and website will continue to provide interesting features on Johann Berthelsen and his world.

Of the many achievements and satisfactions that we can point to since the founding of the Conservancy, none is more important to me than the contacts and friendships that it has brought about. Many generous people have shared their knowledge, their collection, and their interest with us and have become dear and valued friends in the process.

As we move ahead, I look forward to meeting many more individuals whose lives have been touched by my father's work. Taking his art to a new dimension of creativity was his legacy. Sharing that art with an ever-increasing audience will be ours.

Yours sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Lee Berthelsen.

Lee Berthelsen  
Chairman

The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC

[lee@berthelsenart.com](mailto:lee@berthelsenart.com)

# New website video feature discusses *artist's technique*



How did Johann Berthelsen go about creating the artworks that rank him among the foremost American Impressionists of the 20th century? While there is no explanation for natural talent, part of the answer can be found in the artist's technique.

Now, in a video presentation that can be accessed through The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC, website ([www.berthelsenart.com](http://www.berthelsenart.com)), Lee Berthelsen explains his father's technique in various media.

Lee states, "From the time I was very young, I assisted my father. Seeing my own, and my brother's, interest in art,

he frequently made suggestions and explained how he achieved his unique effects. In discussing how we could best communicate this, we at the Conservancy decided on video because it gives us the opportunity to literally demonstrate how he started his oil paintings, and the way in which he used pastels."

The video, which will appear on the website in late January or early February, 2011, is expected to become part of an expanded media presentation to be used in conjunction with exhibits of Berthelsen artworks and for educational purposes.

