

Syracuse University

From the Selected Works of Samuel D. Gruber, Ph.D.

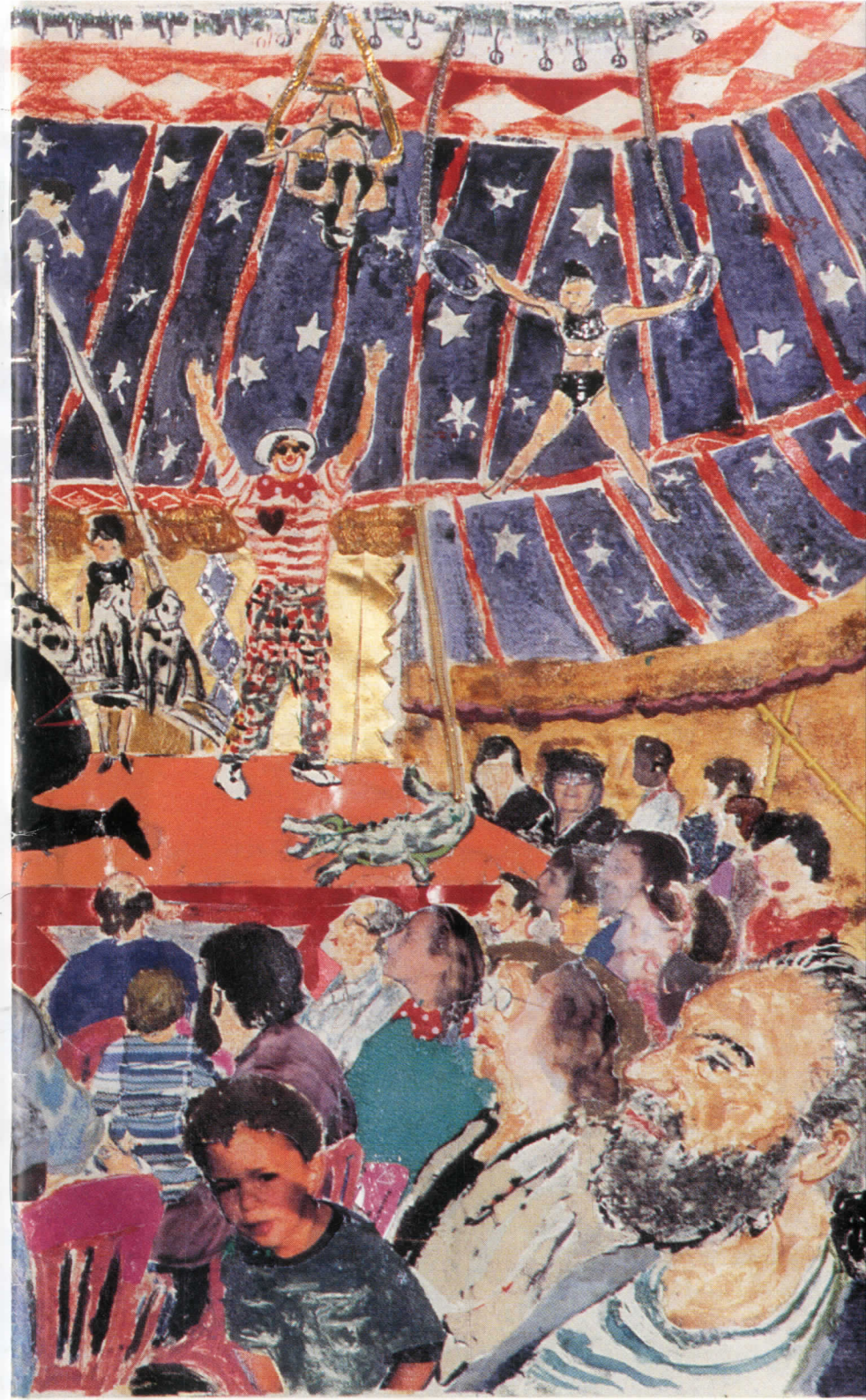
January, 1996

Shirley Moskowitz at Seventy-Five

Samuel D. Gruber, Dr., *Syracuse University*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/samuel_gruber/62/



SHIRLEY MOSKOWITZ: A Half Century of Art

January 19—February 9, 1996

Without the encouragement of Lois Johnson and Peter Lister there would be no exhibit and no catalogue. I am eternally grateful to them both. I also want to thank my son, Sam Gruber, for writing what I hope is an objective essay, and my husband, Jacob Gruber, for being my patron as well as my husband for the past 50 years.

*On the cover: **Circus in Morre**, monotype/collage, 1993*

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Shirley Moskowitz at Seventy-Five

January 19 to February 9, 1996

Haviland Hall
The University of the Arts
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Moskowitz holding a fresh proof.

Shirley Moskowitz has been making art for sixty years. She still remembers her eighth grade teacher, Miss Rebecca Henry, teaching about “dominance and subordination, balance, rhythm and harmony”. When she was a teenager she knew she would be an artist—happily skipping school to deliver to Nelson Eddy a portrait she had done of him (not from life, uncommissioned). Now, at age seventy-five, she doesn’t need to skip school. With few distractions, she is busier than ever. This exhibit surveys the artist’s accomplishments over a half-century, focusing especially on her newest work. Moskowitz continues to develop her art in new and exciting ways, and without dismissing her earlier work, we can say that her best work is her newest work.

Warmth and intimacy pervade Moskowitz’s work. In the several modes in which she works, her favorite subjects have remained her family, and especially the landscape and buildings around her. As a young artist she depicted the bayous of her home town of Houston, and later the industrial and suburban landscapes around Philadelphia, where she moved in 1948. Beginning in 1959, when she travelled to Europe for the first time, the scope of her world widened, and her paintings increasingly drew on European landscape—some famous, such as Montmartre, and others obscure, like the Czechoslovakian towns of Kytlice and Kutna Hora. Since 1970, the major emphasis of her work has been the depiction of the landscape and rural Italian life where she now spends much of her year.

Moskowitz was born in Houston in 1920. She studied art in high school and at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts. At 17, she enrolled at Rice University, graduating in 1941, when she entered Oberlin College, receiving an M.A. in art in 1942. The instruction at Oberlin was conservative, and as Moskowitz relates, the “word *abstraction* was not known

at Oberlin in the academic year of 1941-42.” In 1943 she studied at the Morris Davidson School of Painting in New York.

While at Oberlin, Moskowitz met Jacob Gruber and they were married in 1946. In the years to come Gruber’s career, especially his anthropological and archaeological work, would allow Moskowitz to travel extensively, and the depictions of these travels are a major element in her art. This year marks the fiftieth year of their partnership.

In the summer of 1946 the newlyweds were in New York City, where Moskowitz painted a series in oils of neighborhood streets. These works already demonstrate much of her mature style—a full canvas, an active picture surface, and attention to details. Most important, a feeling of joy in the scene pervades these paintings, as in her most recent collages. By 1948 Moskowitz and Gruber had moved to Philadelphia, where Gruber began teaching at Temple University. Philadelphia has remained their home ever since. After a year, the couple moved to Plymouth Township, outside Norristown, where they lived until 1967 and where Moskowitz established herself in an active group of local artists and raised a family of three while continuing to make art.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the artist frequently painted her children and domestic scenes (*Ruth*, 1956). She regularly went on field trips, painting old barns (“I must have painted every old barn in Montgomery County—and there were a lot of them then”), but preferred industrial scenes of Conshohocken and Manayunk. In 1953, Moskowitz was invited to join the Philadelphia Watercolor Club on the basis of *Bridge at Conshohocken* (1953).

By the end of the decade two developments led Moskowitz into new directions. In 1959, she moved with her family to England for seven months. She also travelled to Brittany and Denmark. In all these places she was attracted by the effect of “stones on stones,” a theme



An early oil from days in Yorkville, New York City, has the liveliness and activity that will grow through European travel and ripen in later works. (Not in exhibition.)

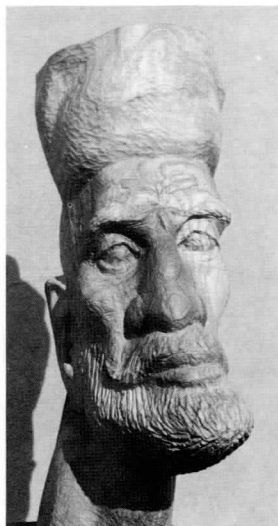
she continues to explore. This trip, followed by summers in Europe in 1962 and 1966, greatly expanded her repertoire of painting subjects, establishing themes of urban rooftops, chimney pots, ceramic tiles, and old cemeteries—which will continue to attract her. She also filled sketch books and made watercolors, all of which would provide material for larger oil paintings at home.

Back in Norristown, Moskowitz joined a group of artists which met every week, beginning around 1960, at the sculpture studio of Hans Huneke. These weekly meetings became an important fixture in Moskowitz's life, and over seven years she produced a series of increasingly ambitious wood carvings. Some of these, such as *Rabbi* (1962), and *Oleni* (1963), deal with Jewish themes, but most focus on figural groups reflecting the emotional and physical ties of family. In the 1960s Moskowitz produced other works on Jewish themes, including a number of woodcuts and lino-cuts, but as her world expanded with her travels there were fewer demonstrably Jewish works. She has returned to this theme in the 1990s, however, encouraged by the work in Eastern Europe of her daughter Ruth, a writer, and son Sam, an architectural historian. A striking series of watercolor and monoprints of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues resulted (*Tarnow [Poland] Cemetery IV* 1993).

A major step was taken in the early 1960s when Moskowitz began tearing up watercolors and putting them back together to make paper collages. Many of her first works, such as *Nautical Abstraction*

(c. 1961), utilized a multi-layered technique in which the primary picture surface was cut in places to allow images to appear behind, while an overlay of applied paper and other materials built out the picture surface. The primary images of these works were still executed in watercolor, with collage acting as a highlight, adding texture and depth.

With collage, Moskowitz also created highly detailed realistic landscapes, usually based on on-site sketches or watercolors from her



*This early sculpture, **Rabbi**, depicts a Jewish theme which emerges again thirty years later after a visit to Poland in the watercolor/monotype **Tarnow Cemetery IV**.*

travels. Images such as *Prague* (1967), remain among her finest work. Their combination of diverse materials for the collage is astonishing, and adds a rich surface. Another series of imaginative collages utilizes hundreds of cut pieces of paper to create a single image, and each piece of paper itself contained a smaller image—either photographic or drawn. These works, such as *The Land of Egypt* (1965), often used images from magazines and travel brochures. Moskowitz returned to this method in the mid-1970s, producing *Israel* (1975), *The Eternal City* (1975), and other works. It was also in Czechoslovakia in 1966 that

Moskowitz began to work extensively in pen and ink—first with India ink and sepia washes, and later with colored inks.

Moskowitz moved with her family to Center City Philadelphia in 1967 and since then has produced a body of work celebrating the city, but in 1970 a dramatic event happened in the family life. They moved to Rome for three years where Moskowitz, in addition to painting scenes of Rome in the tradition of *vedute* artists such as Piranesi and Rossini, discovered a theme that has informed much of her work ever since—small town and village life in Italy. This has resulted in a series of striking watercolors from the 1970s and early 1980s.



Via San Ambrogio, an etching done from Roman sketches, foretells the greater use of printmaking in future monotype/collages.

While in Italy, Moskowitz also expanded her activity as a printmaker, producing etchings and aquatints. Back in Philadelphia, she studied printmaking at The Philadelphia College of Art (now The University of the Arts) from 1974 to 1976 and in 1977 purchased her own etching press. Many of her etchings, such as *In Back* (1980), depict Philadelphia scenes. She now regularly produces monoprints and incorporates these into larger multi-media works. Of equal importance are the photographs she takes herself which serve as basic documentation for her collages.

In 1983, Moskowitz and Gruber bought an old farmhouse in Umbria, a region of rolling hills and medieval hilltowns in Central Italy, and her focus shifted to this locale. The artist now spends half of each year in the village of Morruzze, and more watercolors and collages evoking the landscape and its people have celebrated this part of Italy. Through the mixed media of print, painting and collage, these works document—in much the way

a medieval book of hours did—the seasons and festivals that pervade Italian rural and small town life throughout the year. Into this setting, in a whimsical way, Moskowitz has increasingly superimposed her own life and history, incorporating images of friends and family at what otherwise would be remote and exotic events. Unlike an ethnographer who strives to distance herself from the subject of her study—as Moskowitz often did in her landscapes and cityscapes through the 1970s—she now fully immerses herself in her subject, blurring the line between familiar and exotic, past and present, family and strangers. In Moskowitz's recent work family is extended—both to unknown people, and to distant and historic settings. The process of personal integration involves no homogenization—quite the contrary, as Moskowitz scenes are active to a degree of discordance. Like the cacophony of a Brueghel village scene, everything is included and anything is acceptable.

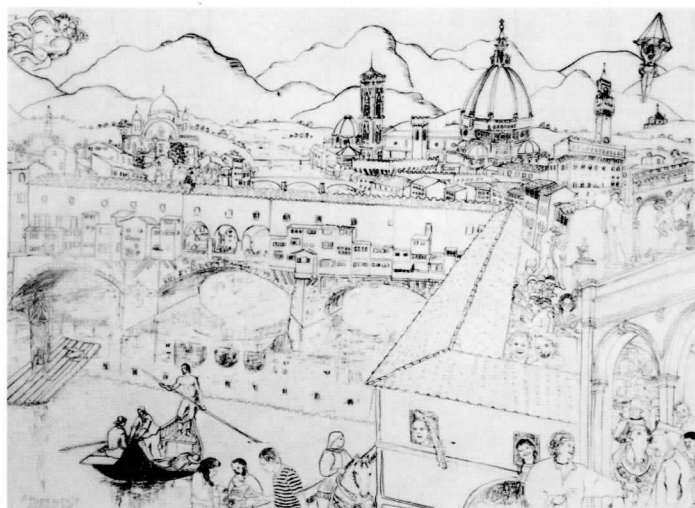
She described the process: "All of my subsequent collages, in contrast to those I did prior to 1978, are based on personal experience and are a controlled mixture of a variety of

texture and media, composed in such a way as to affect the viewer from a distance while at the same time inviting him to participate in the action—to experience through color, dynamic contrasts of light and dark, textures and techniques, a reality that may seem fantastic but is still real.”

On technique, she explained: “I tore up three monotypes which I had done of sheep and reassembled the pieces interspersed with cut photos I had taken of the shepherd, thus creating the collage *Pastorale Italiana* (1987). This was followed by *Processione* (1987), based on a procession of the Madonna which I had photographed in southern Italy. Carefully composed and printed as a monotype, it was then embellished with bits and pieces of photos, linoprints, and old chamois rag, sandpaper, a 500-lire note, and even a gold chain.”

Beginning with those works Moskowitz has turned out a steady stream of remarkable compositions—each a full world of its own. These works, which are so full of images and bustle with life, are the result of a long deliberative process—far more complex and time

consuming than Moskowitz herself suggests in her description. In most cases, each work is rooted in a real place which the artist knows, has visited, and has drawn. Her sketches are worked up to full scale drawings, then redrawn in ink on glass and printed as monoprints. The monoprint provides the scaffolding on which the collage is built. The placement of each item is planned, and often anticipated before the monoprint is made. Slowly, the surface of the monoprint



The complexity of Moskowitz's preparation is shown in this ink drawing on mylar for *Firenze* (monotype/collage, 1991).

is built up in collage, often amplified by a bit of watercolor work or pen and ink. The print is layered, adding surface depth to the perspective already incorporated into the original drawn scene. Worked into this assemblage—either as active participants or ephemeral onlookers—are images of neighbors, friends and relatives. For years Moskowitz has photographed her acquaintances—particularly those who visit in Italy. Slowly, year by year, these faces appear, sometimes in the unlikeliest spots, next to faces of Italian farmers and saints. Her annual

(Continued on page 10)

Selected Solo Exhibits

- 1994 — Morre, Italy
- 1993 — Morris Gallery, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts,
Philadelphia, PA (two-person show)
- 1092 — Villa Bellago, Baschi, Italy
- 1989 — Dolan/Maxwell Inc., Philadelphia, PA
- 1986 — Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, PA
- 1981 — University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
- 1977 — Nocara, Italy
- 1974 — William Penn Memorial Museum (State Museum of
Pennsylvania), Harrisburg, PA
- 1972 — United States Information Service, Rome, Italy
- 1968 — Woodmere Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
- 1962 — Cheltenham Township Art Center, PA
- 1946 — Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, OH





*In **Vendemia** and **Wedding Procession**, Nocara, rural Italian life is exuberantly celebrated as Moskowitz adds color upon color and texture on texture.*

exhibitions in Morre, the village near her Italian home, are popular events partly because the local population enjoys spotting themselves in her work. Indeed, the possibility of finding friendly faces in the unknown is calculated, because it encourages the viewer to peer closely at these dense works, and to spend time meandering through them.

If I have neglected to say until now that Shirley Moskowitz is my mother, it is not due to lack of pride in her work. It is because it is easy to write of her career and art standing alone.

Samuel Gruber
Syracuse, New York 1995



Assisi #2, 1995. The most recent monotype—a colorful evocation of rural Umbria.

List of Works

- 1) **On the Train**
o/c, 19" x 21", 1943
- 2) **Summer Landscape**
(Houston)
o/c, 16" x 20", 1945
- 3) **Apples**
o/c, 12" x 16", 1946
- 4) **Rooftops**
(New York)
o/c, 18" x 22", 1946
- 5) **Felix**
o/c, 16" x 20", 1947
- 6) **Flour Mills #1**
(Minneapolis)
wc, 19.875" x 14", 1947
- 7) **Still Life**
o/c, 16" x 20", 1948
- 8) **Dancers**
gouache,
12.75" x 13.75", 1949
(lent by Judith Meighan,
Syracuse, NY)
- 9) **Summer in Plymouth
Valley**
wc, 15" x 18", 1951
- 10) **Derricks**
gouache, 15" x 18", 1953
- 11) **Bridge at Conshohocken**
gouache, 13.75" x 17", 1953
- 12) **Tree and Road**
o/c, 20" x 24", 1954
- 13) **Feather Dance**
gouache, 16" x 20", 1955
- 14) **Ruth**
o/c 18" x 24", 1956
- 15) **Plymouth Meeting**
o/c, 16" x 42", 1958
- 16) **Self Portrait**
o/c, 20" x 16", 1960
- 17) **The Seine**
casein, 14" x 19.50", 1962
- 18) **Nautical Abstraction**
paper collage,
20.75" x 26.75", 1961
(lent by Harry Wasserman,
Los Angeles, CA)
- 19) **Wile Wine**
collage, 9" x 6.875", 1962
- 20) **The Land of Egypt**
collage, 22" x 30.50", 1965
- 21) **Kytlice #2**
(Czechoslovakia)
gouache
17" x 18.25", 1966
- 22) **Prague**
collage, 17.25" x 23.25", 1967
(lent by Jack and Virginia Cotter,
Philadelphia, PA)
- 23) **Casa Rosa (Rome)**
acy/c, 29.50" x 23.50", 1972
- 24) **Self Portrait**
intaglio, 11.50" x 11.75", 1974

25) **Via San Ambrozio**
intaglio, 15.625" x 11.875", 1974

26) **Israel**
collage, 29" x 39", 1975

27) **Via Antonio Nibby 3**
wc, 14" x 19", 1975



*A lively pair dances in **Brighton** (1991).*

28) **The Eternal City**
collage, 24" x 18", 197

29) **U.S.A.**
intaglio, 17.75" x 13.50", 1977

30) **The South Tip of Nocara**
wc, 19" x 14", 1977
*(lent by Tevis Goldhaft,
Haverford, PA)*

31) **La Capella**
wc, 19" x 14", 1977

32) **Campagna**
wc, 19" x 14", 1977

33) **View from the Castle**
ink, 14" x 19", 1977

34) **Via Storta, Nocara**
ink, 19" x 14", 1977

35) **Second & Race**
wc, 14" x 18", 1978

36) **13th & Locust**
wc, 14" x 19.50", 1979

37) **Gray's Ferry Avenue**
wc, 18.50" x 24", 1979
*(courtesy Owen Patrick Gallery,
Manayunk, PA)*

38) **In Back**
intaglio, 17.50" x 12.75", 1980

39) **On Delancey Place**
wc, 28" x 20", 1981
*(lent by Jack and Virginia Cotter,
Philadelphia, PA)*

40) **Nocarese Landscape**
wc, 16" x 21.50", 1983

41) **View from Ruth's
Window, Vienna**
wc, 15" x 10.50", 1983

42) **On Central Terrace, N.Z.**
wc, 26" x 18", 1984

43) **Olive Grove, Morruzze**
wc, 8" x 11", 1984

44) **Three Sheep**
(#12 of Morruzze series),
monotype,
10" x 13.50", 1984

45) **Old Wagon #3**
monotype, 12.50" x 19.50", 1985

46) **Thistles**
gouache, 22.25" x 18", 1985

47) **Venice**
monotype,
17.75" x 11.75", 1986

48) **Pastorale Italiano**
monotype/collage,
15" x 24", 1987

49) **Umbrian Hills #4**
wc, 22.50 x 30", 1987
(courtesy Owen Patrick Gallery
Manayunk, PA)

50) **Narni**
monotype/collage,
20" x 16", 1987

51) **Mercato di Todi**
monotype/collage,
22" x 16", 1987

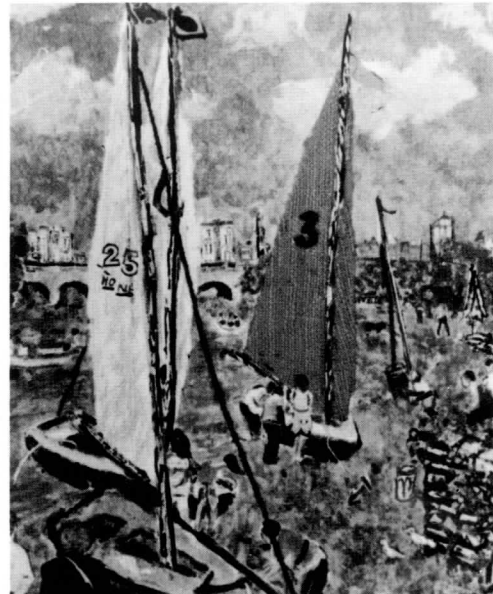
52) **Wedding Procession, Nocera**
monotype/collage,
31.50" x 22", 1988
(lent by Jacob Gruber,
Philadelphia, PA)

53) **Old Jewish Cemetery,
Prague**
intaglio, 9.75" x 17.50", 1988
(lent by Helen Starobin,
Philadelphia, PA)

54) **Searching for Cicoria**
monotype/collage,
15.50" x 21.75", 1989
(courtesy Owen Patrick Gallery,
Manayunk, PA)

55) **Vendemia**
monotype/collage,
23" x 35", 1989
(courtesy Owen Patrick Gallery,
Manayunk, PA)

56) **Venice, California**
monotype/collage,
12.625" x 19.375", 1989



In Thames II Moskowicz uses cloth for her sails.

57) **Pompeii**
collage, 22.375" x 30", 1990
(courtesy Owen Patrick Gallery,
Manayunk, PA)

58) **Harvest Breakfast**
monotype/collage,
23" x 17.25", 1990
(courtesy Owen Patrick Gallery,
Manayunk, PA)

59) **Pastorale Italiano #2**
monotype/collage,
23.50" x 17.50", 1990
(courtesy Owen Patrick Gallery,
Manayunk, PA)

60) **Spello: l'Infiorata**
monotype/collage,
33" x 22", 1990
(courtesy Owen Patrick Gallery,
Manayunk, PA)

61) **Firenze**
monotype/collage,
19" x 25.75", 1991
(courtesy Dolan/Maxwell, Inc.,
Philadelphia, PA)

62) **Campo, Siena**
collage, 17.25" x 24", 1991

63) **Brighton**
monotype/collage,
26" x 21", 1991
(courtesy Dolan/Maxwell, Inc.,
Philadelphia, PA)

64) **Playground, Santa Monica**
monotype/collage,
21" x 16.25", 1992
(courtesy Owen Patrick Gallery,
Manayunk, PA)

65) **Ballycastle (Ireland)**
mixed media,
24.50" x 36", 1993
(courtesy Dolan/Maxwell Inc.,
Philadelphia, PA)

66) **Tarnow (Poland) Cemetery IV**
wc/monotype,
15.875" x 11.875, 1993

67) **Circus in Morre II**
mixed media,
11.875" x 17.75", 1993
(courtesy Dolan/Maxwell Inc.,
Philadelphia, PA)

68) **Sagra della Castagna
(Chestnut Festival)**
monotype/collage,
30.625" x 22", 1994
(courtesy Dolan/Maxwell Inc.,
Philadelphia, PA)



Chariots in the sky complete the frenzy of saintly activity in this most recent monotype/collage, Assisi #2.

69) **Rittenhouse Square I**
monotype,
11.875" x 17.625", 1994

70) **Rittenhouse Square II**
monotype/collage,
11.875" x 17.625", 1994
(courtesy Dolan/Maxwell Inc.,
Philadelphia, PA)

71) **Cheswick Green**
monotype/collage,
22.25" x 17.125", 1995

72) **On the Thames II**
monotype/ collage,
8.625" x 12.625", 1995

73) **Quinces**
mixed media,
11.75" x 17.625", 1995

74) **Old Barn**
wc, 17.25" x 25", 1995

75) **Assisi #2**
monotype/collage,
17.50" x 24.75", 1995

Olenu
walnut, 1963
21" x 8" x 12"

Together Again
oak, 1965
h. 22"
*(lent by Jacob Gruber,
Philadelphia, PA)*

Cluster
ash, 1966
18" x 12" x 10"

Five
redwood, 1970
31" x 9" x 10"

Jacob
bronze, 1973
14.50" x 8" x 8"

Sculpture

Head
honey locust, 1961
h.18", w.12"

Rabbi
cherry, 1962
20" x 12" x 6"
*(lent by Floretta Mostovoy,
Philadelphia, PA)*

Hannah and Samuel
olive, 1987
35" x 16" x 9"

Unless otherwise stated,
works are for sale.

Public Collections

Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA; Robert I. Kahn Museum, Houston, TX; Allen Art Museum, Oberlin, OH; William Penn Memorial Museum, Harrisburg, PA; The Free Library of Philadelphia, PA; Museo di Roma, Rome, Italy; Fidelity Bank, Philadelphia, PA; National Museum of American Jewish History, Philadelphia, PA; Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, PA; ARCO Corporation, Philadelphia, PA; Bell Atlantic; Merck & Co.

photo by Helene Ryesky





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