

## Art Gebhardt: In the Mind's Eye

August 31 – November 6, 2016



A stroll through the Cedarburg Art Museum galleries featuring paintings by Art Gebhardt provides a fresh take on the modern masters of painting. Art Gebhardt is a self-professed eclectic artist—one who experiments with a variety of subject matter and themes in his oil paintings. He loves art history and finds inspiration in works of post-impressionist and cubist painters, among others.

Born in 1928 and raised in a Milwaukee family running a leather business, Art found his artistic calling and graduated from the University of Wisconsin – Madison in 1950 with a degree in art. At that time, the recent college graduate postponed his involvement with painting by taking an important role in the family tanning business. Art helped the business thrive until his eventual retirement, as he provided for his wife Patty and seven children during those many years working the family business.



Earlier in Gebhardt's formative years, UW art professor Robert Grilley was an important influence, probably for his evocative, figurative painting style. As painting found more prominence in Gebhardt's life in about 1994, he attributes Wisconsin artists Joseph Frieber, Fred Berman, and Leon Travanti as formative mentors that were influential. Because many of Art Gebhardt's paintings are created from his intuitive resources, the exhibition takes on the title "In the Mind's Eye" to reflect the content that is derived from the artist's inner being.



A number of modern masters provide sources for stylistic applications of Gebhardt's subjects. Interior scenes are often the focus of Art's paintings. Influences of French painter Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) can be noted in several of Gebhardt's interior scenes with playful use of color, tabletop arrangements, and views from inside looking to outside. When Art Gebhardt depicts his earlier Fox Point home interior with bold red walls or with eye-popping, decorative lamps or other elements that bear only vague resemblance to real life, he may be taking his cue from Fauvist masters such as Henri Matisse (1869-1954) whose red, decorative interiors were a trademark.

Several of Gebhardt's paintings relate to biographical details in his own life. A portrait of Patty, his wife of 63 years, was made six months before she died in 2014. Another painting of the artist as a child with his parents was inspired by a historic photograph and imbued with new life in a 2015 painting.

Gebhardt's dream-like painting of himself as groom with his bride is portrayed in a scene with the floating nuptial couple high above the church where they were married with their subsequent family of children also pictured. This is much like Russian-born French artist Marc Chagall's dream-like paintings where lovers or animals float above a mostly blue, fanciful world.



Circus, carnival, and race track scenes provide additional recurring themes for this Milwaukee-born artist. While Picasso had harlequins as subjects at intermittent times during his career, so

too does Gebhardt find the clown or harlequin as a suitable subject for painterly experimentation. In a recent painting, a harlequin is seated at a dining table with a family, pointing to another masked character or to the outdoors. There is shock value to this work that the artist enjoys. The artist invites each viewer to make his or her own interpretation of each of the paintings, so Gebhardt hesitates to give specific titles to his works. The artist admits that his clowns are executed as psychological studies, more than subjects relating to the circus. One abstract version of a clown, shown below as dissected and fragmented, may be an ode to Cubist painters Braque or Picasso.



For the pure circus theme,

Gebhardt's paintings of horses and performers in a ring or trapeze artists may have found their precedent in paintings by French artists Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901), Edgar Degas (1834-1917), and Georges Seurat (1859-1891), though Gebhardt's compositions and treatments are uniquely his own.

Interestingly enough, all of Gebhardt's paintings are lovingly owned by family members who cherish the paintings as priceless expressions of Art Gebhardt's inner self.

*-Mary Chemotti, August 2016*

