

A Conversation between Bruce Weber and Sherry Camhy

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Camhy: It's great to have the opportunity to speak with you – so many metalpoint artists are indebted to the catalog for the exhibition *The Fine Line: Drawing with Silver in America*, which you wrote while you were curator at the Norton Gallery of Art in 1985.

Weber: I'm curious - how did you first become interested in silverpoint?

Camhy: Harvey Dinnerstein introduced me to the medium. I was a monitor for his painting class at The Art Students League. He invited me to his home and studio in Brooklyn and some of his Silverpoint work was there. It was so beautiful. I fell in love with the medium. I had to try it myself. Now, I want to introduce artists and art lovers to the medium not only as an artist but also by giving workshops and acting as a curator for "*The Silverpoint Exhibition*" at The National Arts Club, December 4, 2013 to December 23, 2013.

When I first became aware of silverpoint, it was frustrating not to be able to find very much information about it anywhere. Then, I heard about your catalog for the Norton Gallery & School of Art exhibition *The Fine Line: Drawing With Silver In America* and your essay in it. I searched desperately to find a copy and finally found one in a rare bookstore. Do not ask me how much I paid for it. It was very expensive, especially for me at the time. But I never regretted its purchase. It opened a whole new world for me.

What made it possible for you to make *The Fine Line* Exhibition come about?

Weber: The show took place in 1985. It took a few years to happen probably starting in '82 or '83.

I went to the Graduate School of the City University of New York for my PhD and received it in 1985, the same year the Norton Exhibition happened. I have done work in many areas of American Art- from the early 19th century until now. I recently curated *See It Loud: Seven Post-War American Painters* at the National Academy Museum, where I am Senior Curator, 19th and Early 20th Century Art.

I have done a lot of different things but I have always been interested in drawing. When I was at the Norton, I was the only curator. Now they have a number of curators or they did up until recently. So I was doing everything, whether it was contemporary or 19th century art. I did not do much work in 19th century area at first at the Norton, but I did do a big exhibition in that field in 1987 on post-Civil War landscape painting in America (with William H. Gerdts), titled *In Nature's Ways: American Landscape Painting of the Late 19th Century*.

Camhy: What gave you the inspiration to do an exhibition on Metalpoint?

Weber: There were a few inspirations. Leo Joseph Dee, was alive then and a contemporary silverpoint artist. I knew him. Leo Dee's wife Elaine was formerly married to William H. Gerdts, who was my teacher both in college and graduate school. At that time, Leo Dee was showing work at the Coe Kerr Gallery so I knew his work and Thomas Wilmer Dewing's and Joseph Stella's as well.

I remember having lunch in West Palm Beach with a New York dealer, Vance Jordan, who has since passed away. I informed him I was thinking of doing a silverpoint drawing show and he said, "You should do it." So I went to the director of the Norton, Richard Madigan, and suggested the idea to him.

Camhy: What were the next steps in the process?

Weber: First I had to find out whether there were enough artists who worked in the medium and where their work could be found. We sent a letter to about 125 museums across the country and asked whether or not they had any silverpoint work, from America, Europe, Asia, or anywhere, in their collection. We had to start way in advance because it took time to get the responses. The process was critical to discovering who might have been or was currently working in the medium. At first the idea for the exhibition was kept open in terms of American and European drawings (from historical to contemporary) or only American drawings of the past and the present because we did not know what was out there. In those days, we asked if someone at the responding museum would take a Polaroid for us of the drawings they informed us about, and that is how we got a visual clue as to the nature of what was in museum collections at the time. At the time, I had two fabulous assistants, Esther Grapes and Nancy Barrow, and one of the great museum registrar's, Pamela Parry, who is still with the Norton. It was great that Richard Madigan was so supportive of our effort.

Camhy: Methods of curating an exhibition must have been so cumbersome without digital and internet communication.

Weber: It was before digital photography and the drawings were slight and hard to see in terms of reproductions. Otherwise, we would have been charged for photographs of works we might not have wanted to borrow for the exhibition, and that would have made doing the show forbidding from a budgetary point of view.

Once the responses came in from the museums, we had a starting point – a list of names of American and European artists we could investigate beyond what was in museum collections. Each artist was searched out independently of what works they had in American museums. Susan Schwalb's input was critical. She somehow found out about the project and we connected.

Camhy: Susan Schwalb has been very helpful to me as well. What was her role in your research?

Weber: For the proceeding five years she had been involved and focused on what was happening in metalpoint in the contemporary art world. She started pointing me in that direction but I also made a lot of discoveries on my own. It was before Google. Recently, I have started organizing a retrospective of Wolf Kahn's work and I never used Google as much as I am doing at the start of working on a show. You did not have anything like that as a starting place in '85.

Camhy: Is it still a secret or can I ask you about the artists who are going to be in the joint exhibition you are working on about metalpoint with the National Gallery and The British Museum planned for early 2015?

Weber: It is still up in the air or it may have been decided by now, but there will be around ten drawings selected from 1900 to now. They are mostly American and a smaller selection of European metalpoint drawings. I will be able to reproduce up to eight other works in my essay. My essay is 5,000 words.

Camhy: A while ago, I wrote two articles on silverpoint "Silverpoint; Old Medium, New Artists," *FineArtConnoisseur Magazine*, August 2007 issue and "Sparkling Magic Wand," *Linea Magazine*, Summer 2007 issue. I recently completed writing two more, the essay for "The Silverpoint Exhibition" I am curating at the National Arts Club and one for the December/January 2014 issue of *Drawing Magazine*.

Rereading your original essay for the Norton exhibition, it is still one of the best on the subject.

Weber: I remember it being one of the smoothest essays I have ever written.

Camhy: Was that because you had done so much research before you did the actual writing?

Weber: It is very painful for me to write.

Camhy: I am so surprised to hear you say that. Writing is difficult for me also but I enjoy the discipline. It is like doing silverpoint, writing requires taking the time to think carefully and clearly.

Weber: The first draft of the essay was close to the finished product possibly because I had the structure and the outline clearly worked out and structure is important to me when I write.

That same year, I did a show on Stuart Davis' New York pictures. I really had to struggle with the essay. I had to rewrite the whole essay after I had thought I had written the final version. It was a real battle. In that case, it was a lot about iconography that nobody had figured out as of then and aside from Lewis Kachur, nobody has explored much about it since that time. It was about figuring out the meaning of things – there were clues around like the name of the *New York Journal* cartoonist T. E. Powers hidden in the Norton

painting *New York Mural* beside a footnote symbol. It was a whole other kind of exhibition and a whole other kind of approach to investigation.

With silverpoint certain issues have to be dealt with; the mystery of the medium; the ideal of the Renaissance; how the Renaissance continues to affect aesthetic approaches, etcetera. There are certain things artists do when they work in the medium that they seem to continually move toward. The Norton essay is still relevant because the same issues continue to be significant.

Camhy: Are there new thoughts that you are going to be adding to the new essay?

Weber: Yes. I have a little room and I have written the additions. The only part I have not written as of yet is about the silverpoints of Jasper Johns. I am going to write that tomorrow. I feel that what I had written had value and to totally rewrite my essay made little sense. The National Gallery agreed so I have adapted the essay and added text. There are a lot of things have happened since '85, and I've reached out to today and written some new sections on past and current artists and inserted some other things as well.

Camhy: My focus has been on the work done by artists who are discovering the medium as well as the ones who are continuing to delve deeper into its possibilities. My own concerns have been about the new materials available to use that enhance the medium's possibilities and the creative freedom that has resulted from their use.

Weber: Using it in conjunction with other mediums?

Camhy: Yes, and using different kinds of grounds on larger surfaces,

Weber: I do not think in those terms. My feeling continues to be that it's necessary to be a strong draftsman. If you do not draw extremely well, do not bother using it. Secondly, the medium has its "limitations" but it is critically important that the artist look on these "limitations" as strengths – as allies – and embrace them.

Camhy: For example?

Weber: Jean Zeleski saw Susan Schwalb's early pre-metalpoint drawings and suggested that she try metalpoint. Clearly, there was something in Susan's work that made Jean think it was right for Susan. What led Jean to think that? Susan's interests? Her style? How well she could draw? Or the thought that Susan might become interested in the medium because of the nature of the medium itself.

Those were questions I asked myself about the artists works I was considering when I was doing the Norton show. I was looking for artists who were masters of drawing and celebrated or embraced the so-called "limitations" of the medium.

Camhy: Being a silverpoint artist and curating a silverpoint exhibition is a totally different experience. This is my first time in the role of curator. Looking at many other artist's work and many images done by the same artist when only one could be chosen, I realized the most important thing to me was what the artist could bring to the medium and how it was attuned to the artist's statement. I was not interested at all in an empty display of technique but I was looking for an honest work, a direct response to something of importance to its creator.

Weber: When I was working on the Norton show, the surprise was that some artists were using metalpoint in more abstract ways and there has been a continuation of that trend. Then, as now, there was a dominance of artists who focused on the figure and still life.

Do you just work with the figure or have you done still life?

Camhy: My work is divided between landscape without figures and figures without any indication of time, place or external narrative. I do not feel the need to create images with complex narrative, reference to mythology, art history, or social symbols as many figurative artists are doing currently. The people in my work embody their own internal history and speak for themselves directly without the need for external embellishment.

I have also done studies of "things" which might be called "still life" and worked in oil, pastel, watercolor, graphite and pure pigment. I do not think there is a medium I have not tried. My choice of medium is always determined, first and foremost, by the concept of the work. I have many things I want to say.

Sometimes I draw with a brush and others times I paint with a pencil or a silver stylus. Sometimes, I find painting with oil too easy but drawing silverpoint is always a perfectly pure experience. What better way to create an image of "Innocence?"

Oil paint originated in another era. We still use it but not necessarily in the same way. Silverpoint originated in a different time. We are living in another and using it in our own way in ours.

Weber: At the time of the Norton show, I was trying to figure out why people were employing silverpoint. Catching up with the writing about the subject now, it seems like people are either quoting me or they are trying to figure out how to say the same thing, and basically saying that in our time with all our anxieties this is a medium in which there is a quiet. There is a beauty to it, an elegance that some artists (and audiences) yearn for. When I had to make a selection for the show, I was trying to see who was really being faithful to the medium in trying to bring out its very nature as opposed to using other media that might produce darker and more varied tones or introduce a broad spectrum of color as well as demonstrating an understanding the whole nature of its tarnishing and tonal transformation.

The basic exhibition was historical. I was trying to build on the history as opposed to doing a contemporary exhibition. My understanding was based on how artists were using

silverpoint traditionally, particularly in the 20th century, and how artists who were using it at the time were extending or transforming earlier practices. To understand and to make the selection based on an historical and contemporary understanding.

Camhy: What do you feel is the role of curator?

Weber: There are all sorts of ways of doing exhibitions. I have done ones that highlight something that is worth considering in a deeper context. It might be an artist or a side of an artist that has not been dealt with. For example; Stuart Davis' city pictures; Marsden Hartley's still life; landscape painting - after the Hudson River School. With the silverpoint show, I thought it was important to look at it from a to z in American art and to see what was going on and then define it within certain categories.

I have done all sorts of shows. The exhibition I have up now at the National Academy Museum focuses on seven representational painters, most of whom emerged in the 40's and the 50's, Leland Bell, Paul Georges, Paul Resika, Neil Welliver, Albert Kresch, and Peter Heinemann, and, the slightly younger Stanley Lewis, who embraced or continue to embrace the possibilities of a dialectical synthesis between abstraction and representation. Many of these artists were influential teachers and had an influence on, and are still influencing, what is going on in American painting.

Sometimes, when I have done shows of major names like Marsden Hartley or William Merritt Chase, it is a different experience. The role of a curator is in part to try to figure out things that are significant that deserve to be better or more widely recognized. Maybe of all of the shows I have done, *The Fine Line* Exhibition has been the most influential. I did not know until recently that artists were reading the catalog and getting inspired to try working in silverpoint.

Camhy: Do you have any idea that when I talk with anybody who is the least bit knowledgeable about silverpoint, the first name that comes up is Bruce Weber?

Weber: It is so strange because I have done other kinds of shows that I am known for in different areas of American art but certainly. I've never contributed in a major way to a revival of interest in any other medium or any other thing.

Camhy: Well, it has been very big in this case. Jeannine Cook, Susan Schwalb, myself and several others worked quite hard together to convince the curator of the Telfair Museum in Savannah, GA, Holly Koons McCullough to curate *The Luster of Silver: Contemporary Metalpoint Drawings* that ran from June 7 to September 10, 2006.

Weber: Yes, I read the catalog and it was the most extensive of any of the recent exhibitions because it was able to include small bodies of work from the artists so people could see a range of their work in the medium. By the way, if you had not noticed, and as you can see by the checklist, the Norton show had many more works than what was illustrated.

In those days museums did not automatically illustrate everything in an exhibition, and you also certainly almost never automatically illustrated everything in color. Color was so expensive. Now catalogs tend to be all in color. David Wong, designed the Norton catalog, but we did not know if we could have a catalog until he experimented with printing a selection of the black and white photographs with what I believe was a 120 line screen. The catalog won various awards. David was a wonderful designer.

Camhy: What do you think of the way digital images of metalpoint look on the Internet?

Weber: It is hard to see anything unless you have a great computer and a great screen. There is a whole debate about whether museums should put high resolution images on their website because of the danger of people reproducing them for their own purposes. I am currently working on an exhibition dealing with Turner's influence on 19th century American Art and the Yale British Art Center has put up high - resolution images of their Turner's on their website. This is probably the way museums are headed, and a godsend to a curator developing an exhibition idea.

People feel that if they are going to show the work, why not show the best images. I do not know what the National Gallery is planning in terms of printing the catalog for the metalpoint exhibition to bring out the finest results in the way of reproductions but I am sure they will figure it out.

Camhy; Have you ever worked in silverpoint yourself?

Weber: Susan Schwalb gave me some paper and a stylus. I tried it just to get the feel of it - just a little bit.

Camhy: Even working with the medium a little contributes to another level of understanding that another curator might not have taken the time to reach.

I started my first silverpoint work without knowing much about its history. I started on a blank page. If I had known more about the official traditional assumptions of the medium's limits, it would have stopped me from doing what I did with it. For example, I started working on the largest surface I could find.

Weber: How large?

Camhy: It was 30" x 40." Then, it was rare to find paper that size suited for silverpoint. If I had known better, I would not have attempted to do one so large nor one based on subtle tonal gradations that had to be developed stroke by stroke, line by thin line, testing how far the sterling silver would allow me to go. The image eventually became more and more beautiful as it began to tarnish with age. It took on a life of its own. This work, *Silver Sky*, is now in the permanent collection of the Evansville Museum of Arts & Science where people can see the drawing and come to witness the process of it tarnishing. Although the work, at first glance, looks quite realistic, it is based partially on scientific research but predominantly on abstract considerations.

The paper surface was quite expensive and I was determined to work on every inch of its surface. I taped it to my studio wall and spent long hours working late into the night taking the image to another level and to the very edge of the paper.

I learned two crucial things. First, because the silver was hard and the paper relatively thin I could incorporate the texture of the wall into the texture of the image – in essence, I could do a “rubbing.”

Secondly, when some strokes accidentally went beyond the paper’s edges onto the wall itself I was shocked to see that the silver worked better on the wall than on the paper. The discovery caused me to experiment with preparing my own surfaces and working on even larger formats.

When I finally found a copy of your catalog, I carefully studied your essay and the information in its back pages where the surface each artist used for their work was meticulously described. Your catalog is such a source of vital information about metalpoint.

Weber: In hindsight, one might have in some way seen the potential impact that the exhibition and the catalog would have. Reading it today, I can see that an artist reading the essay might be inspired to try it.

I was advocating silverpoints’ strengths and it’s beauty but I was also isolating some of the aspects of it that are particularly good to try with it if you are an artist, like profile drawing.

Camhy: That is a trend that is continuing. *The Silverpoint Exhibition* at the National Arts Club will contain four profile images; *Mercedes* by Harvey Dinnerstein, 1976, silverpoint on clay-coated surface, 20½” x 20½”; *Noe* by Lois Dinnerstein, 1975, silverpoint on paper, 4½” x 4½”; *Geraniums* by Fioretti, 2013, silver, gold, copper, 24” x 19” and *Josephine’s Tears*, by Richard Husson, 2013, silverpoint on tinted and hand textured Masonite, 12” x 16.”

Richard Husson’s work was created in a metalpoint workshop I gave at the Art Students League experimenting with some of the techniques mentioned in your essay in reference to Victor Koulbak’s method of combining media to create “an image that is highly elusive and tactile.”

Weber: After I learned recently that artists were reading my essay as a way to learn more about the medium, I’ve conjectured that the rise of interest stemmed in major part because I was a strong advocate for metalpoint and this grew out of a feeling that I had to be a strong advocate to defray the alternative view from those who felt (or currently feel) it is a limited and archaic medium, from an aesthetic and technical point of view. I needed to be a spokesman for silverpoint because very few people at the time felt

strongly about the medium. People were continually asking me, “Why are you doing this?”

The Norton applied for a special exhibition grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and they were turned down for funding. Early on the day of the exhibition’s member opening, the director of the museum, Richard Madigan was meeting at the museum with the second person in charge of the NEA, and he walked her through the show. The exhibition looked so beautiful when it was finally up. They both came over to me and she looked at me and said, “I have to apologize to you. We should have funded this show. When the committee members who decided on special exhibition funding looked at the photographs that you sent of works that would be in the exhibition, they thought that the drawings were so slight that the show was not worth funding.” She added, “The next project that you request funding for we are going to make sure to be more careful about in terms of NEA support.” It was the Stuart Davis exhibition. We received about \$50,000, I believe.

In the course of organizing *The Fine Line* Exhibition, I wrote Lincoln Kirstein and I informed him that I was doing a historical exhibition dealing with silverpoint drawings by American artists and he wrote me back. I had great admiration for him. He started the greatest ballet company we have had in this country. He was a terrific writer and did work important work on Elie Nadelman, as well as other artists, including some key artists who worked in the medium, including Tchelitchew and Cadmus. He sent me a reply that said something like this, “You might as well do an exhibition on plumbago.” I am sure I sent him a copy of the catalog when it came out but I don’t recall getting a further response.

I have often thought about his response because I have great respect for Kirstein and his thinking and to get an answer like that? I read the biography that came out about him around five or six years ago from cover to cover to try to figure out the person who said that and why he would have said that. Where was he coming from? Somebody says something that is so striking and you have great respect for him and then you have to ask yourself, “Well, do I think he was right or wrong?”

Right in the opening paragraph of the essay, I pointed out that silverpoint is not an archaic medium. Look at all the people who did all these different things with it, and look what contemporary artists are doing.

Camhy: Your last sentences in the essay make that crucial point.

“It (metalpoint) has been used in the ways that the Old Masters would never have considered or imagined. American artists have recognized its special qualities and capacities and in the hands of skilled draftsmen of skill and vision silverpoint is a medium of possibilities, awaiting investigation.”

The ending sentence sums up where everything is at in this point of time with this “un – archaic” medium.

Weber: Lincoln Kirstein was involved with a certain artisan circle. Cadmus was in the circle. Bernard Perlin was another. Jared French also but for the most part Pavel Tchelitchew was the inspiration for different artists in this circle choosing to employ the medium. George Tooker tried it too.

Camhy: Tchelitchew's work is just so remarkable but not much of it is shown today.

Weber: Tchelitchew has a particularly bad rap. He painted what was once an incredibly popular painting at the Museum of Modern Art, *Hide and Seek*, the Modern has not shown since they reopened after the Phillip Johnson building extension.

Camhy: What a shame. It is a wonderful painting that has been admired by so many people for his way of using of oil paint in such a fresh, direct, transparent technique and the haunting imagery he created with it. According to the information in your catalog he used Whatman's prepared paper as well as commercially prepared paper to do his poignant silverpoint portraits sometimes combining the silver with graphite.

How do you feel about the new materials available for metalpoint work? I have found some that eliminate the worst roadblocks to working with metalpoint. Contemporary silverpoint artists have some new secrets and very different ones the old Masters kept about using metalpoint.

Weber: Are these being made particularly for metalpoint or for something else?

Camhy: Once, I happened to have a grey toned board in my studio that I had actually planned to do an oil painting on. The chance to do something unexpected came up so I reached for it and it was perfect for the image.

Weber: And it was large?

Camhy: It was large, 35" x 50". The resulting work was of a young boy, "*Innocence*," 35" x 50" and it will be in the National Arts Club Exhibition.

Now, I often go to the lumberyard to get a really large wood surface and prepare it with a ground, so I can work large and erase if as I want although I it is not my habit to do any erasing when I am working with silverpoint or working with graphite either for that matter.

Weber: You can really erase completely? And what happens to the ground?

Camhy: Nothing

Weber: Nothing?

Camhy: Nothing!

Weber: Of course, you know the ground affects the line and tarnishing and all that so it's more than just erasing that is the issue.

Camhy: So far, I have found that the grounds I have been experimenting with keep the silver looking like the subtle tones of sterling to begin with and allow it to tarnish beautifully as it ages. I do not like a ground that lets silver go too dark or darkens too quickly nor do I usually use Austrian silver because it is too dark right from the start because "What is the point of that?" You are no longer working with the special quality of the sterling.

On some pre-prepared clay coated papers, the silver goes on very light and the surface abrades too easily. The combination of ingredients that the old Masters used and the surfaces they put their secret formulas on so long ago continue to be used, but working on those limits the size of the work and makes erasing impossible.

Weber: Do you create your own grounds?

Camhy: Yes, I have prepared the old Master's grounds from scratch and used them. I have experimented with all kinds of things. Now, I prepare large wooden panels with countless layers of thin coats – coat – dry – sand -- coat – dry, sand - over and over again until there are enough layers so making changes is never a problem and it is possible to add color with mediums such as pure pigment, pastel, watercolor and even oil paint. I do not feel it is going against the tradition of the medium but instead enhancing the mediums potential.

Most silverpoint artists start with their idea carefully worked out because they are afraid that they will not be able to change something once a mark is made. Paula Gerard moved away from starting with a preconceived idea and then fighting to make it appear to letting the color and the silver inspire the image.

Paula Gerard,

"My "organic abstractions" are a radical departure from my figurative way of working. Instead of beginning with a concept which I seek to materialize, I start with only a movement of color in the ground. With the silverpoint, I start by 'feeling out' the shapes in the color areas, discovering possibilities of texture. Slowly the rhythms begin to coalesce and take shape and "grow," as if of their own power into images reminiscent of basic nature forces."

Paula Gerard. Norton Gallery & School of Art Exhibition, *The Fine Line: Drawing with Silver in America*,

Many potential metalpoint artists are intimidated by the thought of not being able to make changes as their images evolve, of not being able to erase. Once they realize it no longer

is the case, they are free to change their focus from what the medium could not do in the past to what the medium can do in the future.

With silverpoint work the first marks are so faint that they are probably going to disappear as the image develops. Even if they do not those first tentative lines give a sense of the hand of the artist and the mind of the artist. Those marks give a sense of life to the drawing.

Personally, as I mentioned before, I do not usually erase when I am working with silverpoint. I like the discipline - the limitation. It is challenging and inspires a different kind of line and tonal consideration and since I draw with confidence based on long years of working from careful observation it is not a problem for me. For other artists, it is reassuring to know they can reach for their faithful eraser.

Weber: That is interesting. There are papers that people can work on and still erase?

Camhy: Working on a properly prepared paper surface is possible but problematic because the ground on paper is fragile and easily abraded. It has to be worked on with great care.

Weber: How can you erase?

Camhy: I have done obsessive research, from boiling and pulverizing chicken bones, simmering rabbit's skin, compounding casein substances, to testing the claim that some brands of tooth paste will work because they contain the required mix of an abrasive, calcium and whitener. Just for your information, as you might have guessed, toothpaste does not pass my quality test but gesso with an acrylic base and some quality house paints do.

It was interesting that in the catalog for that Norton silverpoint exhibition you describe how three artists, Joseph Stella, Paula Gerard and John Wilde, created three very different, but equally good grounds.

Weber: Looking back at that piece of writing and how I thought then, again, I can see why the essay could potentially have had some kind of effect, but I did not intentionally try to seek to make that happen. I was trying to show the diverse and open possibilities.

Camhy: You started an evolution.

Weber: When I started doing research for *The Fine Line* it was so surprising to discover how many artists were quietly using the medium all over the United States and I was doubly surprised to find that the contemporary artists working with the medium were generally unaware of each other.

Camhy: In my very recent research for "*The Silverpoint Exhibition*" at The National Arts Club, I found that still to be the case. The Telfair Museum exhibition opening brought

together many silverpoint artists who did not know each other existed and they began to form a loose network some of whom have stayed in touch with each other more or less sharing ideas and working to promote exhibitions of the medium in various places. Many of the artists in this upcoming show are a result of that continued communication but many are newly discovered and many yet to be found.

Do you think there are going to be many works of art discovered and new artists found in the upcoming National Gallery/British Museum exhibition?

Weber: Up until recently I did not know Man Ray did silverpoints. He only did two. They are not in the show. I have only 5,000 words so I am planning to write a mention of Man Ray in the course of discussing Stella. Duchamp, Man Ray and Stella formed a bond around 1920. My guess is that because Man Ray knew Stella, and because Man Ray was already close at that time with Duchamp, he tried his hand at silverpoint. In regard to any artists that have emerged historically that I did not know about when I wrote the original essay about silverpoint in American art, Man Ray was probably the biggest name. Jasper Johns will probably be in the National Gallery/British Museum exhibition.

Camhy: What inspired Jasper Johns to do silverpoint?

Weber: I asked through his studio assistant to ask him and I just got an answer two days ago. It is kind of short. He said, Jasper Johns either did it because somebody gave him a stylus or somebody gave him a piece of silver and he just tried it. I went to see all three drawings. One is quite finished and that will be the one that is in the show, at least it is supposed to be. Johns understood the medium. He knew what you could get out of it in terms of technique and approach. It is amazing in a way because it is like an encyclopedia of all the things that one can do with the medium if one fully understands, but that's usually the case only when an artist has experimented at length with metalpoint, and spent time considerable time working with it.

Camhy: What particular characteristics did you find in John's work that lead you to believe he had such an understanding of the medium?

Weber: All the characteristics that I discussed in the catalog. I was not a student of Johns' drawings until now. In the early 80's, and extending for a few years, he had included a vase, actually a commemoration vase for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, that has around the bottom of it where it is curved, if you can imagine the negative space on the sides, actually consists of a profile of Prince Charles and Queen Elizabeth facing one another at the bottom within the shape of the curves, and other elements that would stand for the nose or the forehead or the chin.

That is so great because the profile is such an important aspect of what one can do with silverpoint drawing and he had to have known. He also must have delighted in the fact because he would continue to incorporate his favored motifs in this silverpoint drawing - this vase appears in a lot of his work of the time.

Johns is a master draftsman. He understands drawing so well and when he picked up the silverpoint stylus he was able to get so much out of it. In one of the other drawings he just sketched out bare bones compositional ideas like an artist does in a notebook of things that he or she might turn to at some point. He made a small group of images laying out compositional ideas in little rectangular boxes that would end up having elements that are in the other two drawings. The third one features watercolor and a partial image of a flag. Johns creates his paintings first and then he will use his paintings as the model or inspiration for one or more drawings. The drawings come after the paintings, and he explores the process and subject in incredibly inventive ways.

It is ironic because Johns created three silverpoint drawings in the fall of 1984 and I was working on the Norton exhibition at the time. It is kind of ironic that he was doing it at this time, and of course, I did not know about it. Nobody knew. The first time that people generally learned that Johns worked at all in silverpoint was in the 1990 retrospective exhibition of his drawings at the National Gallery. The drawing I mentioned featuring silverpoint and watercolor was reproduced in the catalog and there was a sentence or two written about it.

Camhy: As part of the exhibition of the National Arts Club of silverpoints I asked all of the artists to comment on why they chose to use the medium and how they used it. Many said in one way or another that it taught them to carefully concentrate and patiently observe their own act of drawing. To many, building their image became a form of meditation.

Weber: I think that is one of the reasons a number of contemporary artists have turned to silverpoint. It is also a good means of instilling a sense of discipline, and that is one of the goals usually behind its being introduced to students during the early stage of their time in art school. Even if it is not meant as something to use for the rest of your life, but just a medium to explore in art school, it is a way to learn discipline and to develop a clear idea or conception before working it out on paper, which is not ideal for such an “unforgiving” medium and the whole question of erasure.

Camhy: Are there any contemporary American artists whose work are going to be in the National Gallery/The British Museum exhibition or reproduced in your essay?

Weber: At this juncture I think there will probably be a reproduction appearing in my essay of the work of Carol Prusa, but there may be others.

Carol Prusa is one of a number of artists around today who are taking metalpoint to another level in regard to abstraction, and how metalpoint is incorporated into an artist’s work. She is making a sculptural statement. Her work is fascinating. Her investigations were spawned by her interest in Leonardo’s silverpoint drawings, and that is how she was stimulated to work in the medium when she was teaching one summer in Florence. Since the National Gallery/British Museum exhibition starts with drawings from the Italian and Northern Renaissance, and the fact that Prusa was originally inspired by Leonardo’s

work, it makes perfect sense to reproduce an example of her art. She is also an excellent draughtsman.

Camhy: Carol Prusa's work is first and foremost breathtakingly beautiful. It is a perfect combination of craft and content. Her work is going to be in The National Arts Club exhibition as well.

Weber: The idea of breaking the boundaries of people's expectations of this so called archaic medium, was as mentioned at the core of the nature of the show that I organized – to show that everything is possible. You cannot pigeonhole the medium. That is what I saw back then and that is what I continue to see now.

Camhy: The primary purpose of my curating "*The Silverpoint Exhibition*" was to demonstrate that the medium should not be and is not being pigeonholed at all. My goal was to show the range of possibilities in concept and craft.

There are "proper" and "impolite" statements. The work in the exhibition will range from traditional subjects to abstract ones. It includes an example of abstraction based on an architectural view of a boat house, "East Hampton (mapping) no. 4" by James Melone, to a "Character Concept" for an animation by Aidan Terry, a Renaissance inspired portrait, "Abigail in Black Hat" by Koo Shadler to an angst filled one, "Unique," by Sheldon Schultz. The images in the exhibition are filled with wide range of aesthetic concepts. To me, the most important criteria for inclusion in the exhibition were not an empty display of technical skill but rather craft at the service of the expression of a concept of significant importance to the artist.

Weber: Susan Schwalb has tried a lot of things. One of her strata drawings will probably be in the National Gallery Exhibition. She was not doing these at the time of the Norton show. We had a few works by her in the show and they showed various directions because she was trying a number of different things in the 1970s and early 1980s all the time. Certainly, if one were to do a retrospective of Susan Schwalb's work, it would be quite eye opening.

Camhy: How do you feel about the upcoming National Gallery/British Museum joint exhibition about metalpoint? And the curators turning to you?

Weber: It was amazing after all these years that somebody feels like they should do something and they found me. It is such an enormous honor to be considered and to be involved with the exhibition at this level.

Camhy: Did you have a good attendance for the Norton show? The people at the Telfair Museum were surprised by the number of people who came from all over for their "Luster of Metal: Contemporary Metalpoint Drawing" exhibition from June 7 to September 10, 2006.

Weber: *The Fine Line* was scheduled in a good slot; April, because of the seasonal nature of West Palm Beach, and the number of people living in the area at that time of year who come from different places because of its great weather. A lot of people visited the exhibition.