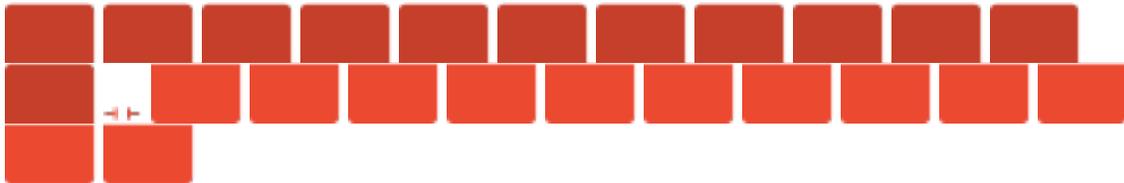


## A Day in the Life of an Artist



*By Wende Caporale\**

Not long ago, someone mentioned to me that they had prepared a “Bucket List” of experiences they desired to occur before they ostensibly “kick the bucket.” Many among us keep such lists with the hope that one-day they may be able to check off two or possibly three items. When I met recently with artist Sherry Camhy, she was waltzing from one item to the next on her Bucket List. Her work is represented in the permanent collections of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, Israel; New Orleans Museum of Art, in New Orleans, Louisiana; and the New York Public Library in New York City, among others. Her art education includes the Art Students League of New York, National Academy of Art and Design, and New York Academy as well as pivotal private workshops. Camhy also holds a master’s degree from Columbia University, and most astonishingly, completed a gross anatomy, dissection course at New York University Medical School. What could possibly be a better way to learn anatomy of the human form? As a result, Camhy is well known for her figurative work particularly in black-and-white but she also enjoys working in many color mediums, oil painting, pastel, watercolor, pure pigment and mixed media in landscapes and still life compositions. A little-known fact is that she has won several awards for sculpture.

Currently Camhy has been asked to curate a show at the National Arts Club in New York called *The Silverpoint Exhibition*, December 4 to 23, in which 40 artists from the United States and Canada will be represented. In this new role as curator, what she hopes to convey is the variety of work that artists are doing with a very old medium. The exhibition at the National Arts Club precedes the silverpoint exhibition scheduled for 2015 by the National Gallery in conjunction with the British Museum in London, which will focus on older work in the medium and only include 10 images done since 1900, curated by Bruce Weber. The National Arts Club exhibition will highlight contemporary artists’ work and different interpretations of the medium to communicate different points of view. Traditional approaches will complement the more unorthodox works that include mixed media, three-dimensional and large-scale artworks. Being part of a network of artists working with silverpoint who have tried to find a venue for an exhibit, Camhy was able to organize an exhibition of this scale in the medium in a New York City location. For the first time, Camhy is processing the power of the curator’s role in formulating an exhibition. Each of the artists will be represented by one work incorporating the wide

range of uses of the silverpoint medium. The work represented will either be linear or tonal, small or large, and includes architectural drawings and animation as well as traditional approaches with a variety of surfaces.

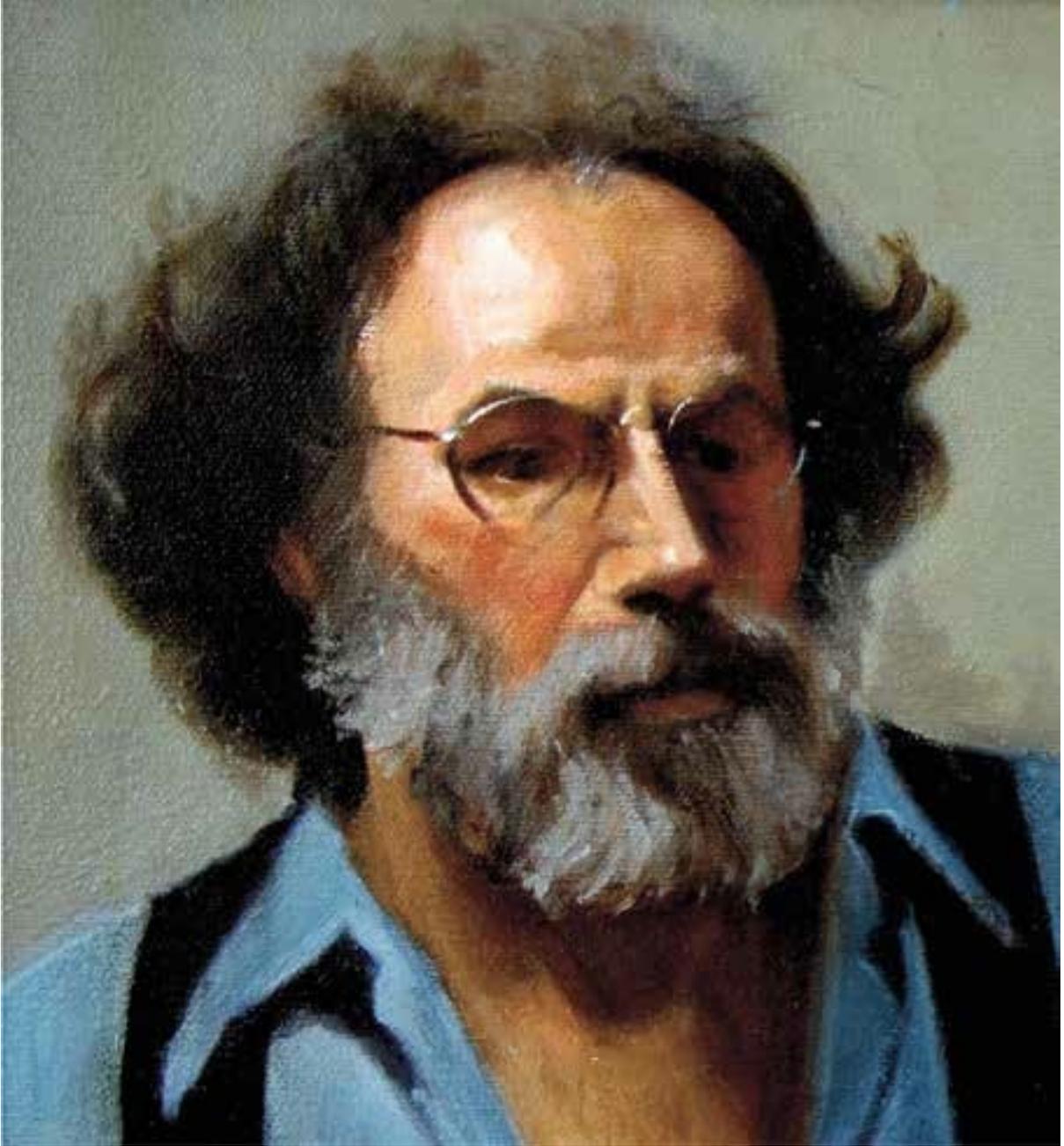
Camhy knew she wanted to be an artist from the time she was very young and recollects how she somehow acquired a copy of a book of male nudes by Paul Cadmus that she squirreled away under her pillow. Having been sent to her room for some transgression, she marveled at her good fortune to be able to copy the drawings from the book in the privacy of her room. Unfortunately she had no paper available on which to draw, but that did not dissuade the young artist who used the headboard of her bed as a surface. When her grandmother came to wake her the following morning, you can only begin to imagine her surprise!

Early in her career, Camhy juggled motherhood while maintaining the discipline it took to hone her skills. She would care for her two children during the day and focus on her artwork at night. She felt as if she were another person and felt inspired during the windows of time that yielded important work for her development. Working at night, the artist experimented with printmaking and discovered that the “freedom” she enjoyed in the evenings was very important. It was in the late 1990s that Camhy was included in an exhibition at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut, titled *Nude in Contemporary Art*. She was proud to be represented among artists such as Cadmus, Jenny Saville, and Lucian Freud.

A particularly fond recollection of the opening was seeing Cadmus standing in front of her work. Not divulging that she was the artist, she inquired of him what he thought. He was questioning why the artist worked so large and Camhy was thrilled to see that he returned to the work several times before leaving. When Cadmus had a solo show not long after the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum exhibit, Camhy attended and was delighted that the artist remembered previously meeting her. This occurred just a short time before his death. Recollecting this memorable moment,

Camhy says that as a little girl growing up in Brooklyn, New York, and later becoming a suburban housewife and mother, she never could have dreamed she would have such an opportunity. She recollects another time from her childhood when she was taking piano classes very close to the Art Students League of New York. Rarely practicing, the motivating force that propelled her to lessons was the opportunity to sneak inside the League to Robert Beverly Hale’s famous anatomy class. Camhy was escorted out so many times by then director Rosina Florio that Florio decided it would be best to enroll Camhy in an art class for children. Registering her good fortune, Camhy concludes that it is necessary to dream but you also need to do the work. Camhy’s reputation eventually led major New York galleries—Sherry French Gallery and Eleanor Ettinger Gallery—to contact her for representation. Her work has since been shown in several major museums side-by-side with renowned artists. Camhy’s younger self remains apparent as she notes her outstanding good fortune.





*Portrait, oil on canvas, 12 x 12" (30 x 30 cm)*



## A Day in the Life of an Artist

A great deal of the artist's time is devoted to teaching, an activity Camhy has discovered also can be advantageous for her own work. While she was at the Art Students League as a monitor in Harvey Dinnerstein's class, a vacancy occurred for an instructor for the anatomy class. Although Camhy had pursued the position for a long time, this opportunity also presented a crossroads in the artist's career; she was required to give up her "student" status to become an instructor. She finds that teaching is stimulating while "forcing (the artist) to be disciplined in a specific way." Camhy explains her method of teaching, which involves general discussions coupled with individual work with each artist at their easel. She never works on a student's original drawing but instead uses tracing paper over the work to make adjustments. In this way, the students can see what it takes to improve their drawings without having destroyed their original. She encourages them to walk around the model in order to achieve a sculptural feeling in their work. While Camhy is teaching so many classes, this approach is repeated many times during the course of the week; she thinks of this as "exercise" for her own skills.

The artist will be teaching a workshop called "Facial Expression" from October 28 to November 1 at Art Students League in addition to her regular weekly course "Painterly Drawing" on Tuesday evenings and all-day Saturdays. The course's focus is to help the underlying structure of both painting and drawing. Monday evenings she teaches a small select group of students at her studio in Chelsea. On Tuesdays Camhy spends the day teaching drawing classes for the film and animation students at New York University (NYU). Finally, she teaches at the School of Visual Arts on Thursday afternoons. Camhy's conviction is that the "core knowledge is what allows you to get anywhere you want with figuration; it gives the students the tools to do what they want in any medium." She remains very supportive of students getting their work "out there." Evidently Camhy gains much satisfaction from the success of her students citing some highlights of various students' accomplishments: representation in Forum Gallery and Bertrand Delacroix Gallery; admission to Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture; New York Academy of Art Graduate School; and a first prize winner of the National Scholastic Competition.

Since the artist spends so much of her time devoted to teaching, I question her approach and ask how she manages to find time to do her own work. Teaching makes it possible to do whatever she wants because she feels liberated that she does not rely on income from galleries. Also there are no preconceptions about the work she will produce and she does not feel "branded." Although the artist was once represented in New York City at various times by galleries, she no longer feels the need to have representation there. This metamorphosis came about 17 years ago when Camhy made the transition from student to instructor at the Art Students League. The trepidation she felt upon giving up her student status and ability to paint every day led her to seek her own studio space in New York City. Little did she realize that the space in the deserted neighborhood she chose was in Chelsea, which would later become one of the centers of the art world in New

York and beyond. Now a lively area with many galleries, Camhy participates in the Chelsea Walks twice a year and often opens her door to interact with potential clients. Another advantageous coincidence is the recent opening of the High Line entrance just down the street from her studio. It is a propitious time for the artist and Camhy enjoys this sense of freedom without a gallery.

In an attempt to explain how her work manifests, Camhy explains that when a series begins to materialize within her mind's eye, she will restructure her commitments once she begins a concept and will disappear into her studio, ignoring phone and other communication but totally absorbed in her work. She confesses that she frequently becomes so involved that by the time she leaves her studio late in the evening, she has only enough energy to stumble into a nearby McDonald's for a quick meal. Arriving home, she rolls into bed but does not sleep well because her mind is so preoccupied with her work. Rising early, she rushes back to the studio to continue the development of her idea. Although Camhy registers the toll this takes physically, she finds this cycle often repeats itself in spite of her concerns. One such series included some dolls the artist acquired with which she became fascinated. The dolls were damaged but Camhy arranged them intuitively in an unorthodox way. Having experimented with underpainting with raw umber and traditional Old Master colors, the artist decided instead to do what amounted to an underpainting using cadmium red and alizarin crimson. The result is an arresting image heightened by the artist's choice of palette. Recently when it was exhibited even people who knew her work well were surprised by the new turns it could take.

Camhy's work has been included in numerous museum and gallery exhibitions including the New Orleans Museum of Fine Art portrait exhibition, which included work from da Vinci and Rembrandt to David Hockney and Chuck Close. Gallery exhibitions include Sherry French, Eleanor Ettinger, and Frank Caro Galleries in New York where her work hung between social realists Raphael and Moses Soyer. An upcoming event at the Katonah Museum of Art in New York, a portrait exhibition titled *Face-to-Face*, will include Camhy's work along with that of her 3-year-old granddaughter, Juliette. Camhy is also the author of *The Art of the Pencil*, published by Watson-Guptyl, 1997. In addition *The Silverpoint Exhibition*, a hardcover and tablet book will be available December 4 through the artist's website.

While the artist's schedule is sufficiently complete, she manages to find time to serve on the board of the Hudson Valley Art Association and as an exhibition artist at the National Arts Club, and Pen and Brush in New York. We discussed the current art world and the different prevalent directions and concurred that art conveys a visceral reaction in the viewer is the communication to which we aspire. For her own work, Camhy intends to continue to attempt to find what she wants to say and keep reaching and experimenting. And of course she will continue to lengthen that Bucket List. To see more of Camhy's work, visit her website at [www.sherrycamhy.com](http://www.sherrycamhy.com).





*America, The Beautiful*, oil on canvas, 36 x 48" (91 x 122 cm)

28 [www.InternationalArtist.com](http://www.InternationalArtist.com)



*Light and Illusion – Metaphor*, graphite on black paper, 36 x 48" (91 x 122 cm)

*\* Wende Caporale is a highly successful artist whose portraits are always in high demand. Her biography and list of awards and accomplishments runs to many pages. As you'll read in this ongoing series, Wende's proactive approach to work and life make her the ideal columnist for the subject every artist has to face on a daily basis. [wendecaporale@aol.com](mailto:wendecaporale@aol.com), [www.wendecaporale.com](http://www.wendecaporale.com)*

*A Day in the Life of an Artist*