



The Spirit of Samuel Rosenberg's Legacy



Leonard Kessler (seated), age 10, Leonard Lieb on the right, age 17. Irene Kaufmann Settlement art class, January 1931.

Mr. Rosenberg didn't change my orientation; he gave me one. He taught us that our path is before us. If our purpose is to follow that path, certain ideas and concepts should become apparent to us. His classes gave us the rudiments to be prepared.¹

—Dale Stein, Carnegie Institute of Technology graduate, 1947

A *Painter's Legacy: The Students of Samuel Rosenberg* is an exhibition that explores works by 54 artists who once studied with Samuel Rosenberg at the Young Men and Women's Hebrew Association (YM&WHA), known as the "Y," or at the Carnegie Institute of Technology (Carnegie Mellon University), referred to as Carnegie Tech. The selected pieces underscore the profound impact he had on his legions of adherents. While not a Rosenberg exhibition per se—the focus of *A Painter's Legacy* being on the artistic achievements of his students rather than his own—Rosenberg's accomplishments as an instructor and mentor underlie this endeavor's development, which compels knowing more about him, his teaching career and what made him unequivocally revered.

It seems in the arts, more so than other professions, an assumption persists that artists are "born that way." Like the adult Athena springing from her father Zeus's head wielding armor ready to tackle the world, artists emerge into being fully equipped with the necessary mechanical skills and conceptual principles to be successful. In truth, with few exceptions, budding artists require rigorous curriculum and an environment that develops the knowledge, skills and savvy required to work in society as an artist. Often, as a result of their charisma, experience and knowledge, impressionable students gain affinities for their professors. Less often, a teacher's theoretical models, instructional methods and particular way of being, or *savoir-faire*, affect their pupils' lives. More rarely still, do four generations of artists

point backwards 60 years to identify a single teacher as *the* major force and influence in their careers. The opening sentiment by Dale Stein about Samuel Rosenberg's impact on him while enrolled at Carnegie Tech in the 1940s lends insight to the sheer weight of the teacher/student paradigm and to the resounding potential inherent in that unique relationship that Rosenberg was so adept at tapping into, not only with Stein, but with his other protégés as well.

It all started when Sydney Teller, director of the Hill District's Irene Kaufmann Settlement (IKS), introduced Rosenberg to teaching. Teller hired him in 1917 to direct the Neighborhood Art School, IKS's art program. Rosenberg served as the program director through 1929. Originally founded

in 1896 as the Columbian Council School, the IKS was a community center by nature, providing numerous social services and cultural programs to both immigrants and Hill District residents. The well-rounded art classes at the IKS developed by Rosenberg soon germinated the talents of young people who would, in the future, achieve their own artistic acclaim. Among his earliest charges there were Leonard Lieb, Leonard Kessler and Milton Weiss, all of whom are included in *A Painter's Legacy*. Kessler and Lieb are pictured as young artists in fellow IKS teacher Armando Del Cimmuto's IKS art class (*page 2*). Although all three became professional artists, Weiss and Kessler went on to attend college and continue under Rosenberg's guidance (Weiss at the Y Workshop and Kessler at Carnegie Tech). On the other hand, the IKS art classes were the only formal training Lieb completed, a testament to the program's caliber that offered a variety of painting, sculpture, drawing and design classes, affirming the breadth of the Jewish community's involvement in responding to the varied needs of its citizens.

Rosenberg began teaching drawing classes in 1924 at the night school for the Department of Painting and Design at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. By 1926, his responsibilities at Carnegie Tech expanded when he was promoted to a part-time instructor in the College of Fine Arts. He acquired yet another appointment in 1926 when he began teaching drawing and painting classes at the Y, where he was also the department's director. In addition to a two-year stint at the Pennsylvania College for Women (now Chatham University), he taught Saturday morning classes at the Carnegie Institute (Carnegie Museum of Art). By the time he retired in 1964, he had been an educator for 47 years, 40 of those years spent at the Carnegie Tech, and 39 years teaching at the Y.

Rosenberg is rightfully acclaimed as one of the region's most notable 20th century artists. He was a prolific painter who created a voluminous corpus of work. Throughout his career, his paintings were exhibited widely and sought after by collectors. He was involved with distinctive

organizations including the Associated Artists of Pittsburgh (AAP) and Group A, an organization begun in 1944 as the Abstract Group, by Rosenberg, fellow Carnegie Tech professor Russell Twiggs and Rosenberg student Milton Weiss (the group's first president) to support the ideas behind the emerging genre of abstract art. The trajectory of his work matured to reflect the major art movements of his era including portraiture, social realism and abstraction. Rosenberg's philosophy about art-making enabled him to pursue many styles for which he is well known. His early scenes portraying Pittsburgh's assorted landscapes depict the city during significant cultural and economic phases, which have become important teaching tools for art and history educators. Nearly 40 years after his death, he remains a respected and beloved figure throughout the region.

Now, as then, Rosenberg disciples, historians and critics speculate that entrée into the canon of great American artists awaited him had he gone to New York City in the 1940s and '50s, during which time it was



Art class with Samuel Rosenberg at the Irene Kaufmann Settlement, December 1924.



Samuel Rosenberg with students in class at the Young Men and Women's Hebrew Association, mid 1930s.

the epicenter of avant-garde art and ideas. The artistic energy there was not only shaping the practice and philosophy of art making in the United States, but propelling, for the first time, a distinctive American style of art onto an international scene. Many of Rosenberg's associates surmised New York would have been a perfect creative climate for him.

Despite the esteem in which Rosenberg was held by his contemporaries as an artist, he regarded his role as a teacher with the same gravitas as his career as a painter. While being an adroit artist was of critical importance to Rosenberg, anyone who knew him, however, understood that teaching and art making was, to him, a harmonious union. It is quite likely he could have transferred these skills to educational settings in New York—or any city for that matter—but it was Pittsburgh's particular character, history, topography, as well as its vibrant Jewish community, that fomented his creative growth and sustained his interest. From early on, he was a strong advocate of using available surroundings to build subject matter. Pittsburgh's industrial scenes and distinct attributes of the City's neighborhoods like the Hill District were

not only perfect subjects for him to paint, but also to urge his students to explore. This is particularly evident in the early works of Abe Weiner and Milton Weiss whose Hill District paintings depict themes of daily life, as well as Constantine Kermes,



Y (Young Men and Women's Hebrew Association) Workshop student Ann Peterson near the Rosenberg's home in Somerset County, PA, August 1949.

whose relocation to Lancaster, PA, in the early 1950s spurred him to explore the working lives of the Shakers and Mennonites. Besides which, Rosenberg was raising a family, and between Carnegie

Tech, the IKS and the Young Men & Women's Hebrew Association, he had ample teaching opportunities in the city that was his home.

Why he never tried his luck in New York was brought up numerous times by scores of individuals throughout the development of *A Painter's Legacy*, affirming an air of mystique that still lingers in people's imaginations as well as a hint of wistfulness that he had not gained a more pre-eminent position in the canon of American art history. A minor shift in perspective bears out that another city's loss was truly Pittsburgh's gain. Contradicting the common proverb that a prophet is not recognized in his own land, Rosenberg's relationship to his generations of students cemented an enduring legacy as an exemplar of intellectual generosity, as a champion of his students' aspirations, and as a pedagogical archetype.

Although his own work may not be heralded with worldwide renown, as a teacher, his impact was imprinted on generations of artists, many of whom went on to become internationally celebrated including Andy Warhol, Philip Pearlstein and Philip

Morsberger, for example. He is regarded by many to share the company of some of the most venerated pedagogues including 19th century's iconoclastic Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art instructor Thomas Eakins, early 20th century history visionary art teacher Robert Henri, and the influential Abstract Expressionist proponent Hans Hofmann. No doubt Rosenberg would be immensely gratified to know his continued status among these distinguished ranks, particularly Henri, whom Rosenberg greatly admired, regardless that their work differed and that they held dramatically opposing views of Henri Matisse. Rosenberg singled him out as brilliant master while Henri repudiated his Impressionistic techniques and brash palette.²

An artist and teacher at the New York School of Art at the turn of the 20th century, Henri promoted a distinctly American viewpoint about art-making during a transitional era when arts curriculum still depended heavily upon the study of European antiquities. Simultaneously, vanguard ideas supported by Henri and his contemporaries about utilizing art to represent average people in ordinary settings, referred to as the Ash Can school,

were taking root and gaining momentum. Henri is regarded as possessing all of the essential elements that comprise a legendary teacher: he had a magnetic charm, he rebelled against antiquated systems of art production and criticism; he outwardly rejected archaic jury processes; he fiercely



A Rosenberg art class at Carnegie Tech (Carnegie Mellon University), early 1950s.

defended his students' aspirations by displaying their work and helping to get their work into juried exhibitions, and, at times, even gave his students financial assistance. As a result of his charm and dynamism, young artists including George

Bellows, Edward Hopper and Yasuo Kuniyoshi clamored to enroll in his classes and get into his summer class trips to Europe.

Although Rosenberg was more contemplative and reserved in temperament than Henri, former students from both Carnegie Tech and the Y Workshop echo similar sentiments about their loyalty to their mentor for similar reasons. On object labels throughout *A Painter's Legacy*, viewers will find numerous heartfelt statements made by former students attesting to the loyalty, influence and reverence those artists still feel today. In addition, in *Samuel Rosenberg: Portrait of a Painter*, author Barbara Jones confirms "his students still draw on and remember many of the things he told them. Much like Henri, Rosenberg encouraged his students to follow their own emotions, reflect upon their own personal experiences, and paint from their hearts. He would direct them to look at their own work, to create their own personal style, rather than imitate his or another artist's style."³

By the time Henri retired from teaching in 1928 at the Art Student's League of New

York, Rosenberg had been teaching for over a decade. Considering his regard for Henri, it is likely Rosenberg kept abreast of his activities, and possibly had a copy of a book Henri produced in 1923 at the urging of a student, *The Art Spirit*, comprised of commentary and observations he had become known for making while critiquing students' work.⁴ Rosenberg adopted a comparable teaching philosophy that suited him and that had a similar uplifting effect on his students, while enabling him to fit with the curriculum as well as the personalities and diverse methods of colleagues.

A narrative on Rosenberg's ardent support of his students would be incomplete without mentioning his role in saving Andy Warhol, ever the non-conformist, from suspension at the end of his first year at Carnegie Tech after getting failing grades. Fellow student Bennard Perlman recalled in *Samuel Rosenberg: Portrait of a Painter* and during an interview with this author, that upon finding Warhol in a state of despair, Rosenberg convinced him to repeat Drawing I, as required by the Art Department faculty, for a better grade.⁵ Although humiliated by the failing grade and faculty ultimatum, Warhol completed



Group A meeting, January 1959. Clockwise from center rear: Gloria Karn, Anne Golomb, Milton Weiss, Margaret Jensen, Marie Kelly, Leonard Lieb, Larissa Osby, and Gertrude Temeles Half.

the make-up class successfully over the summer and joined regular classes in the fall semester.

Recently returned World War II veterans like Leonard Kessler, Hubert FitzGerald and Philip Pearlstein, eager to resume civilian lives and complete their education, combined with individualistic Warhol and other bright students meant Carnegie Tech was surging with remarkable talent and

fecundity. It is no wonder the symbiosis between the students and instructors of this particular era, in which Rosenberg was a fundamental figure, crystallized into the halcyon era of Carnegie Tech.

Outside the classroom, Rosenberg, like Henri, was involved with his students, remaining available for discussions after class, attending lectures and exhibition openings with them, and inviting students



Abstract Group gathering to make decorative bottles for a holiday sale, November 1956. Rosenberg students include (clockwise) Anne Golomb (rear center), Gloria Karn, Gertrude Temeles Half, Leonard Lieb (front center), and Milton Weiss (standing, left).

to his home and studio. At least one student, Ann Peterson, a Y Workshop student during the 1950s, traveled during the summer to visit the Rosenbergs at their vacation home in Pennsylvania's Laurel Highlands region. Found in a collection of snapshots given to Pittsburgh's Senator John Heinz History Center by Rosenberg's daughter-in-law Arline Rosenberg, the image of Peterson's legs submerged in water with canvas in hand exemplifies the extent of mutual warmth and comfort between Rosenberg and his students (*page 7*). A related image depicts Peterson's husband Norton lounging by the river bank riffing on a guitar while Rosenberg looks on, illuminating a vibe of shared creative energy among close friends or extended family.

Eliminating the hierarchal dynamics between student and teacher was a conscientious effort on the part of Rosenberg. It was not so much that he was informal—everyone referred to him as Mr. Rosenberg and he wore a suit and tie to conduct his studio classes—but that he did not view his students with paternalistic authority. Conversely, it is widely known that Hans Hofmann, the Abstract Expressionist artist who founded an art school in Provincetown, MA, which students flocked to, was capable of grabbing a student's work and ripping it in half at any time during a critique. Many other professors, too, including Carnegie Tech's Esther Topp Edmunds, routinely put marks on students' canvases to either improve upon them or to make a topical point.⁶ While Hofmann argued he shredded canvases to

force a toppling of perspective and to make shifts to orientation, it is nonetheless obvious that he did not acknowledge any real value in students' work. While many accepted this as part of the experience of studying with Hofmann, he alienated others.

That sort of action, seen as minimizing even when tolerated, was anathema to Rosenberg, who never touched another artist's canvas. In dialogue with former students in preparation for this project, many brought up that Rosenberg respected them as peers and genuinely valued the projects they were working on, no matter that they were students. In conversation after conversation, they conjured the image of Rosenberg standing quietly behind their shoulder, asking questions, challenging intentions and offering encouragement. In fact, many of the extant images of Rosenberg in class with his students depict these very scenes (*pages 5, 6, and 8 and the cover image*). This collection of seemingly inconsequential images gets to the core of the relationship. They actualize the potency of the experience of a teacher closely, yet quietly, scrutinizing the actions of the student, who is assuredly aware of his



Abstract Group board meeting, November 1955. Rosenberg students include Gertrude Temeles Half (right, 2nd from back), Milton Weiss (right, 2nd from front), Gloria Karn (left, 2nd from front), Marie Kelly (left, 3rd from front).

presence, and uncannily reveal Rosenberg's distinct alchemy. Standing behind their shoulders, he was ever guiding without being dismissive, available without being overbearing, and watchful without being authoritative. The photos also substantiate the amount of time he did spend standing behind them! Not only did he recognize their work, but as Stein evokes, his manner of teaching paired with the high expectations he had of them, nudged his students

to find solutions to problems and to use what they learned in class to extend beyond their comfort zones. The divergent paintings, prints and three-dimensional works assembled in *A Painter's Legacy* illustrate that Rosenberg's unassuming, yet strategic methods nurtured his students' ability to realize their own personal vision.

Rosenberg approached Carnegie Tech and Y Workshop classes with the same expectations of student performance and high level of curriculum standards regardless that the Y was not a degree-granting institution like Carnegie Tech, but rather an educational center designed to enrich adult learners. Notably, students could receive college credit for attending Rosenberg classes at the Y. Over the years, he taught a number of classes at the Y covering elementary and advanced illustration, and drawing and painting which were popular not only because his reputation drove high enrollment, but because it was the only program of its kind in those days, aiming to provide exceptional, while avocational, learning experiences. As the post-war era represented a golden age at Carnegie Tech, Rosenberg's longstanding Monday and Thursday Advanced Drawing and Painting workshop, referred to affectionately by students as the Artists' Workshop, reached a crescendo in the 1950s.

Unlike college-age Carnegie Tech students who would graduate and likely seek greener pastures by moving away to begin their careers, the artists in the Y Workshop were permanent Pittsburgh residents. Many of them were women raising families and juggling their aspirations with domestic obligations, and many who had already earned a college degree and were working artists. For artists like Jane Haskell, Gloria Karn, Nellie Lou Slagle, Elizabeth McClain and Eleanor Fax who had come to Pittsburgh from other areas, the Workshop proved to be a creative haven and a place to establish camaraderie among like-minded people. Poignantly, many of the bonds established during this time have remained as strong as ever. As a result of Rosenberg's guidance and his students' ambition, this group has had an enormous impact on the Pittsburgh art scene, exhibiting widely, having work acquired by major museums throughout the region, being involved with the AAP and other associations, and pressing the city's adoption of abstract art, which it had been slow to accept. Besides

Rosenberg and Weiss, many artists with the Y Workshop were involved with Group A, whose engagement with modernist ideals exposed and eventually swayed reluctant Pittsburgh audiences and critics to accept Abstract Expressionism, Op Art, kinetic sculpture and other avant-garde modes (*pages 9, 10, 11 and 12*). Although Gertrude Half was the only Y Workshop artist to be included in *Carnegie International* exhibitions—in 1952, 1958 and 1961—all the members of this group truly made substantial contributions to Pittsburgh's cultural scene, particularly throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

The 54 artists in the exhibit represent a fraction of Rosenberg's students, considering he was an educator for nearly half a century and was a pivotal influence for so many aspiring artists. However, in the compelling work throughout *A Painter's Legacy* Rosenberg's artistic and instructional influence is either tangibly evident or subtly implied.

Completed early in their careers the paintings by Weiner and Weiss connote the Ash Can School's unadorned realism to represent scenes of everyday life. While their work reflects the gritty realities of hardship, other artists like Lois Blaufeld, Harvey Breverman, Constantine Kermes, Mary Shaw Marohnic, Philip Morsberger, Philip Pearlstein, and Dale Stein have a preference for realism, yet do not infuse narratives of sociological disparity into their work. Although Seima Horvitz became an industrial designer, her paintings, completed early in her career, trended toward realism, with evidence of modernist influences via her use of distorted perspective and intense palette.

Individualized results of problems posed by Rosenberg regarding the use of paper to investigate color, light, shape, perspective and their interactions are evident in work by Blanche Galey Alexander, Florence Chernoff, and Anna Cohen. Jane Haskell's work on paper teases out these issues, but



Milton Weiss, Abstract Group member and group's first president, October 1953.

the exhibition also includes sculpture that considers the interaction of light and color.

In works by Rebecca Berman, Ruth Caldwell, Anne Golomb, Aaronel deRoy Gruber, Gertrude Half, Leonard Lieb, Cecilia Lieberman, Ruth Selwitz, and Nellie Lou Slagle, the embrace of non-referential imagery via Abstract Expressionism

is apparent. Paintings by Bernice Lehman Berman, Greta Holst Evans, Sara Feldman, Hubert FitzGerald, Elsie Kalstone, Elizabeth McClain, Ann Peterson, and Charlotte Rosenberg flirt with the gestural qualities of the expressionist genre while still utilizing the human figure and other elements drawn from life.

Roused by Rosenberg's own interpretation of the world events of his day, Sondra Battist Gair, Elizabeth Asche Douglas, Eleanor Fax, Walter Groer, and Gloria Peterson use subject matter to draw attention to society's injustices and address a spectrum of issues ranging from the Spanish inquisition to the hegemonic hierarchies within academic institutions.

The quality of light in his own work and in discussions of European and American masters was of great interest to Rosenberg. In particular, the works by Rochelle Blumenfeld and Ray DeFazio illustrate their own representation of the effects of luminosity. Although the content of her work is non-referential and could be grouped in the discussion about other abstract artists, Blumenfeld cites representing the spectrum of light as a guiding objective. The strong, saturated use of color Rosenberg lauded Matisse and André

Derain for emphasizing is reflected in work by Julianne Biehl, Katherine Kadish, Judy Spahr, Ann Tanksley and Gloria Karn.

Although Rosenberg taught drawing and painting, a number of artists who studied with him, including Helen Citron Boodman, Sylvia Feldstein, Diane Haber, George Nama, Sadie Shapiro, and Eva Weill became seriously engaged in printmaking, employing lithography etching, intaglio and monotypes.

Works by Jerry Caplan, Lois Kaufman and Marie Kelly depict the leap into working with sculpture. While Caplan and Kelly were well known for their three-dimensional work, Kaufman's large abstract paintings are more readily identifiable than her intimate, yet tactile sculptures. In addition to printmaking and sculpture, the delightful children's book illustrations of Leonard Kessler, whose work defies easy

categorization, demonstrate the wide dimensions of Rosenberg's influence.

The early self-portrait by Maggie Milono differs from her later work utilizing brushed aluminum for which she is most known. Her only art training was with Rosenberg during Y classes she took for a brief period in the late 1950s. The self-portrait was completed during this time and conveys the artist catching head-on the viewer's gaze, separated from the viewer by a broken window through which she looks, appearing to survey all that lies in front of her.

Fittingly, this work seems to symbolize a quiet, yet profound, moment about becoming an artist, an artistic awakening of sorts. The life of an artist is one fraught with myriad concerns and expectations, including being an inspired thinker, making art that is accessible and relevant, contributing

to society's intellectual vitality, attaining the ability to support oneself via his or her artwork, and being favorably received among critics, curators, collectors and peers. Maybe Milono is deliberating over these issues or is perhaps dreamily anticipating the acceleration of her career considering her newly acquired skills. Regardless, this reading of her self-portrait is a visual reminder of Dale Stein's incisive metaphor positioning the artist on a path that is made more accessible as a result of Rosenberg's guidance.

—Melissa Hiller , January 2011

Biographical Details

Samuel Rosenberg was born in Philadelphia in 1896. His father, Solomon, was a tailor originally from Vienna, and his mother, Anna, who was Solomon's second wife, was from Minsk. His family moved to Pittsburgh in 1907. As a young man he took art lessons with Jacques Coblens, and graduated from Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1926. In 1922 Rosenberg married Libbie Levin (1898-1987), and in 1925 they had Murray, their first and only child. Rosenberg died in 1972, eight years after he retired. Sadly, Murray died in 1996, in the midst of art historian Barbara Jones' research on *Samuel Rosenberg: Portrait of a Painter*; the definitive publication about Rosenberg's life and work. Murray is survived by his wife, Arline, their children Joel and Sue, as well as grandchildren.

Notes

- ¹ Stein, Dale. Telephone interview. 11 June 2010.
- ² Perlman, Bennard. *Robert Henri: His Life and Art*. New York: Dover Publications, 1991. 87, 105.
- ³ Jones, Barbara. *Samuel Rosenberg: Portrait of a Painter*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003. 100.
- ⁴ Perlman, Bennard. *Robert Henri: His Life and Art*. New York: Dover Publications, 1991. 132.
- ⁵ Jones, Barbara. *Samuel Rosenberg: Portrait of a Painter*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003.108.

Perlman, Bennard. Telephone interview. 18 November 2010.
- ⁶ Stein interview. 11 June 2010.

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A Painters Legacy: The Students of Samuel Rosenberg February 7-April 30, 2011

Related Events

All events are free and open to the public

Opening Reception

Sunday, March 13 • 1-3 pm
Reception sponsored by Miriam and Jim Leib

Closing Reception

Saturday, April 30 • 6 PM

A fully illustrated exhibition catalog with an essay by art historian Dr. Vicky Clark with an introduction by exhibition curator Melissa Hiller will be available for purchase at the closing reception.

Curator Talk

Sunday, March 27 • 1 PM
Exhibit curator Melissa Hiller leads a tour of *A Painter's Legacy*.

Film Screening

*Samuel Rosenberg:
Pittsburgh's Painter Laureate*

Director: Kenneth Love
USA, 2008, 47 minutes

Thursday, February 10 • 7 PM
Sunday, April 17 • 3 PM

Kenneth Love's documentary follows Samuel Rosenberg from his early Hill District landscapes to his last abstract paintings. Interviews with scholars and former students illuminate his career, teaching style and artistic evolution.

More Information

Guided tours are available by appointment.

For more information about the exhibit, contact Melissa Hiller, AJM Director, at (412) 521-8011, ext. 105, or mhiller@jccpgh.org.

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Cover image: Art class with Samuel Rosenberg at the Irene Kaufmann Settlement. Undated.



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