

MYRON BARNSTONE (1933–2016)

ALIVING LEGACY

It's an old story, and a new one. The art of Myron Barnstone (1933–2016) represents a distinctive moment in 20th-century cultural history, while his teaching practice is still informing and guiding younger artists well into the 21st century.

Today the “Barnstone Method” is unfamiliar to most collectors, but among working realist artists it remains highly regarded. This educational approach offers a solid foundation in the basics of classical art, encouraging pupils to consult historical masters ranging from Leonardo and Michelangelo to Picasso (who was rigorously trained in figure drawing by his father). Key features of the program include the precise application of geometric principles, epitomized by the Golden Section, in order to foster movement, depth, and feeling, and also the color theories contained in the Fletcher system of palette control. Assuming students practice regularly, Barnstone’s curriculum equips them to pursue with confidence any artistic direction they wish — from commercial illustration to abstraction.

A UNIQUE LIFE JOURNEY

Born in Portland, Maine, Myron Barnstone studied at the Portland School of Fine and Applied Art from 1947 through 1950, then spent two years at Boston’s New England School of Art.

He served in the U.S. Air Force from 1953 through 1957, knowing that the generous terms of the GI Bill would enable him to enroll, upon completion of his military service, at Oxford University’s Ruskin School of



Art. During his three years there, Barnstone did not particularly relish the teaching, but he found a mentor in the gifted realist instructor Geoffrey Hamilton Rhoades.

Like many artists of his generation, Barnstone pursued abstraction, using strong expressionistic colors that remind us of such “School of London” peers as his friend R.B. Kitaj and Francis Bacon. Even in this period, however, Barnstone never lost his fascination with drawing the figure, nor with the details of human anatomy. While living in Spain and then France, he conducted a successful exhibiting and commercial career in Europe, where his paintings highlighting the very real prospect of nuclear war were well received. In 1967, he mounted a Paris exhibition of Holocaust scenes — partly inspired by the loss of several members of his own family. These pictures show twisted bodies writhing in pain, people trapped in boxes, and tortured faces. They are still not easy to behold, reminding us that such horrors had occurred only two decades before they were made.

Barnstone lived in London from 1969 through 1972, then moved to southwestern England. He grew increasingly frustrated that schools throughout the Western world were failing to provide students with fundamental skills. “Nothing in art,” he declared, “is any more arbitrary than that which you would find in metric poetry or metric music, or any other

MYRON BARNSTONE (1933–2016), *Figure Walking—Evolution*, 1971, acrylic and oil on board, 21 1/2 x 11 in., private collection



MYRON BARNSTONE (1933–2016), *Mother and Child 2*, 1966, oil on board, 41 1/2 x 29 2/1 in., private collection

MYRON BARNSTONE (1933–2016), *Self-Portrait—Environment*, 1971, oil on canvas, 20 x 25 1/2 in., private collection

intellectual form. Everything has a structure. Everything has a beginning, a middle, an end. It has purpose, and it falls in a tradition.”

As a single parent seeking to spend more time with his daughter (Catherine, known as “Cat”), Barnstone set up shop in 1977 at “Barnstone Studios” in Coplay, Pennsylvania. He chose this location because it is just an hour’s drive northwest of Philadelphia and two hours west of New York City — major cities where he could keep an eye on the American art scene.

During his extraordinary 35-year tenure at Coplay, Barnstone did not want his art to influence that of his students. He burned all but 500 of his paintings, drawings, and photographs, which were then locked away. Moreover, he stopped creating and exhibiting his own art, aware that it was generally dark in mood and might scare off students and other onlookers.

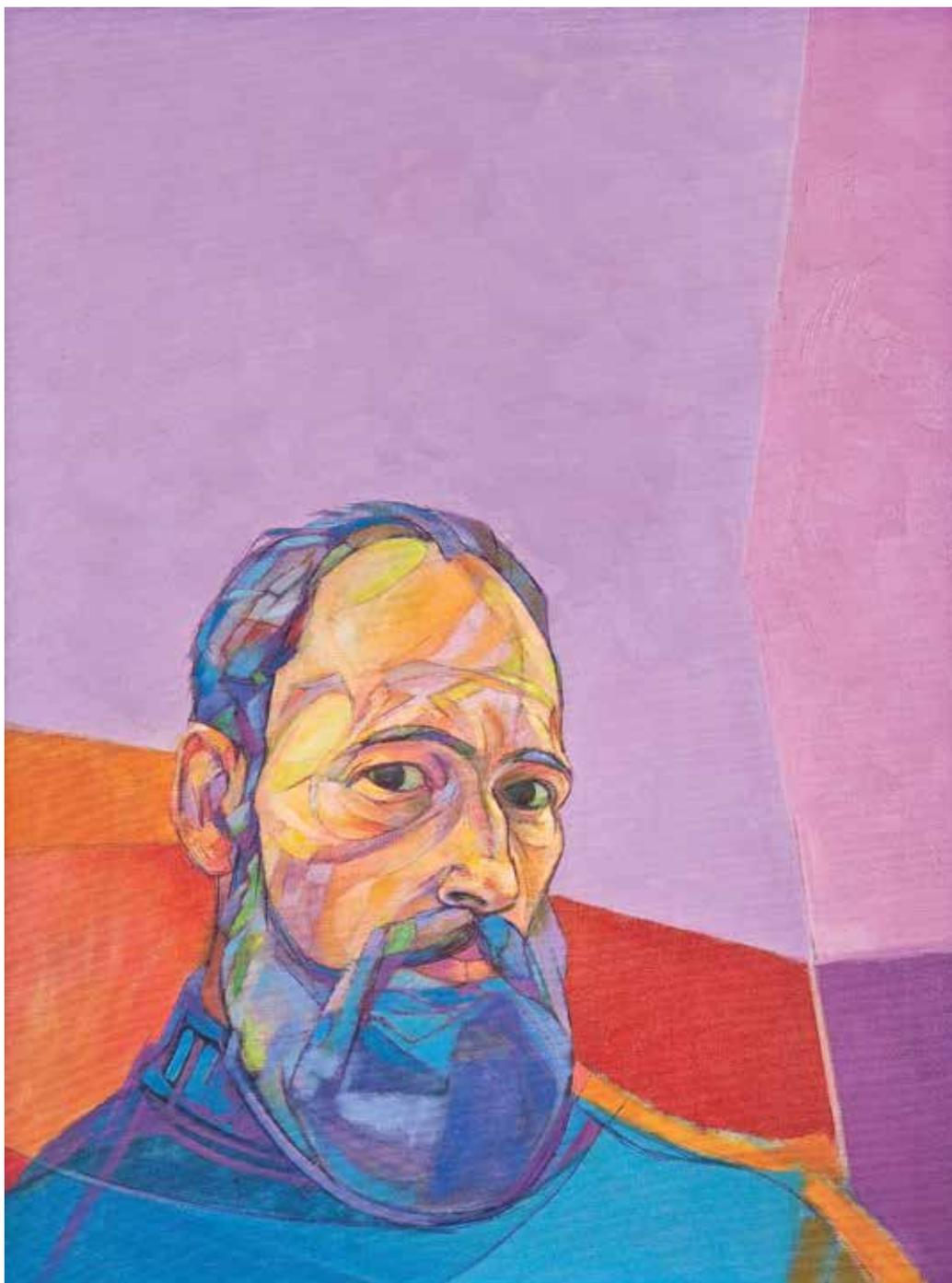
Painfully direct — though always for good reason — Barnstone taught thousands of students who have since become art instructors themselves, as well as professional artists, photographers, designers, animators, authors, and much more. He retired in 2014 and, because he was its only teacher, closed the school.

EXTENDING THE LEGACY

After her father’s death four years ago, Catherine Barnstone-Szafran (an accomplished photographer) revived Barnstone Studios by moving its facility to Thurmont, Maryland, two hours from Coplay and an hour’s drive northwest of Baltimore. Although teaching is offered on site, more broadly impactful now is the Barnstone Art Education Program, a downloadable video series of drawing and color theory classes available through barnstonestudios.com. Unusually for his generation, Myron Barnstone taught on camera, so his videos offer contemporary viewers the remarkable experience of watching a master teacher, as if he is still with us.

This immediacy is complemented by the Master Guides program, through which students can work with an instructor during live, one-on-one Skype sessions, and also attend live workshops taught with the Barnstone Method. All of the instructors involved studied directly with Barnstone himself or use his method in their own work.

Cat Barnstone believes the time has come for the public to see her father’s art again, and so her team is busy cataloging the works that survive and coordinating exhibitions of them nationwide. A group of his paintings was recently exhibited at the Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and in upstate New York this fall (September 4–October 24), Utica College’s Edith Langley Barrett Art Gallery will mount an exhibition curated by Prof. Mario Andrés Colón, a Barnstone Studios alumnus now passing the curriculum to his own students. Cat Barnstone understands that her father’s legacy is best served if at least some of his artworks go into private collections, one reason why visitors can buy directly from the exhibitions. (The proceeds are earmarked for the scholarship program in Thurmont.)



IMPRESSIONS AND MEMORIES

Fine Art Connoisseur recently asked a diverse array of alumni what they make of Myron Barnstone’s legacy. Their diverse responses are fascinating and remind us of the powerful impact that one person can have on many others.

Juliette Aristides

Meeting Myron changed the trajectory of my life. I was a teenager studying at a small college in Pennsylvania, where arts education was little more than how to glue elbow macaroni onto paper plates. Visiting Barnstone Studios showed me a world I had sensed existed, but had never seen. Drawing was taught as a language, and Myron was ferociously passionate about his subject. The lessons I learned from my year there have stayed with me. I now run an atelier in Seattle where each new student watches Myron Barnstone’s Beginning Drawing Course. Myron continues to influence the next generation through his videos, and he lives on as a voice of excellence in the minds of those lucky enough to know him.



MYRON BARNSTONE (1933–2016), *Procession*, 1967, pen and ink on paper, 13 x 19 3/4 in., private collection

Roger Brinker

When I became Myron's student at age 15, he helped shape my art philosophy and gave me tremendous skills. I was intrigued by his ability to capture the design systems in great art, then demonstrate how clearly they are visible in ancient, Renaissance, and modern styles. He became my mentor and influenced my decision to teach art full-time. Today I'm continuing that calling at the Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Several of the lessons I teach are based on the Barnstone Method. My fascination in our shared art heritage led me to investigate Myron's teachers, as well as their teachers. That search demonstrated a direct lineage to hundreds of artists including Degas, Raphael, Botticelli, and Leonardo. I was proud to serve as the youth class instructor at the Barnstone Studios for 18 years. Today, as a Master Guide, I continue to offer personalized instruction to Barnstone students.

Jay F. Goldstein

Each year the National Sculpture Society invites about 50 sculptures into its Annual Awards Exhibition. Only one abstract wood sculpture is invited each year. From 2008 to 2019, my abstract wood sculptures have been invited into six of the 12 exhibitions, and all have won awards. Myron Barnstone is the reason. He was a genius at training artists who rely on architecture and design, a strategy of creating art thousands of years old, but which fell out of favor about a hundred years ago. All of my sculptures are strongly influenced by Dynamic Symmetry, the practice of installing an architecture — a hidden design — into each work, as was carefully taught to me by Myron, my mentor and teacher.

Kelsy Lamdin

I first started studying with Myron when I was 14. I wasn't being stimulated enough in school, so the intellectual nature of his lessons was water to my

dehydrated brain. He offered me a scholarship when I was 16. I lived at the Barnstone Studios, working as a teacher's assistant, doing everything from cleaning toilets to tutoring students until I was 18. Myron taught me how to use integrated design systems to make shapes that represent emotions and ideas. I knew how valuable the information that Myron was giving me was, and that it would help me unlock my potential.

Eventually I pursued a series of apprenticeships with professional sculptors. What I learned at Myron's allowed me to pick up sculpting much faster than I otherwise would have. After years of trying (and a range of challenges), I can finally say I've succeeded in the goal I set for myself at Barnstone Studios: I'm a professionally successful artist. I wouldn't have been able to sculpt this way if I hadn't studied with Myron. Indeed, I wouldn't even have been on this path. I'm happy to say I know I've made Myron proud.

Christopher Parrott

When I first heard about Myron, I was studying at Pratt Institute [Brooklyn]. Pratt was not as challenging as I had been promised, so I was spending time at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Frick Collection trying to learn directly from masterworks.

I was excited by the prospect of Myron's help filling in the gaps of my education. Basically, I just wanted training on the level of what Michelangelo, Ingres, and Degas had. Upon meeting Myron, I was sold; his passion was electric, a stark contrast with the listlessness of many of my professors. I also loved how vast his knowledge of art history was. He approached the history of painting as a big messy continuum, not the tidy categories of "isms" I had learned. Lots of teachers can discuss the Sistine Ceiling, but how many can explain in granular detail how Michelangelo actually designed and executed the work?

Studying with Myron was not for the faint of heart. If he identified students as having lots of potential, he could be relentless in pushing them

to the limits of their capability. This was exactly what I had signed up for. Myron's toughness was always tempered by a deep respect for what we were up to. He wasn't tough because of cruelty, but because he cared so much about the subjects he was teaching, and his critiques could be eviscerating!

My friendship with Myron continued long after I left Barnstone Studios. We never spoke about his work — it just wasn't something he brought up — but we saw movies together. Myron always had very specific ideas about what worked and what didn't — in any creative product. It could be as interesting hearing him talk about Tarantino as about Rubens.

After he died, I was surprised by how extensive his body of work was. Given all of the conversations we'd had over the years, I regret not having explored that topic with him. This is one reason I was happy to incorporate Myron's work in my first curatorial effort, the exhibition *Truth Lies Beyond* at New York City's Foley Gallery. Particularly gratifying was how strong the reactions were to Myron's painting. Although it was made decades ago, it struck many viewers as fresh and contemporary, and reinforced what I already believed: the times may be catching up to Myron Barnstone.



John Pacer

I started studying with Myron as a high school senior and then full-time for a year before heading to the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. I came back for several summers while earning my B.F.A. there, then got my M.F.A. at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

Before studying with Myron, I thought, like most people, that drawing was simply copying what you saw and "making things look like things." Myron showed me there is a lot more going on under the surface; for example, that various elements are unified through flowing movements and linear relationships that make everything hold together and imbue vitality, and that artists emphasize, exaggerate, or distort the elements they deem most important.

Myron taught us that art is an intellectual process, essentially a form of problem-solving. This is at odds with current teaching, which on one extreme is about "expressing oneself," and on the other about copying what you see to make things look "real." He also showed us how the early modernists, while they may have been rejecting the establishment, did not completely "throw the baby out with the bathwater," as he liked to say. Picasso, Braque, and Schiele were still thinking intelligently about their work and organizing it with the same deliberate decision-making as the artists who preceded them.

Because of Myron, I see and think about art and the visual world much differently than I did before.



Claudia Rilling

I was a high school student when I was introduced to Barnstone Studios. Upon my first meeting with this charismatic and passionate teacher, I knew he was someone who would provide me with the skills I needed. I learned invaluable drawing and compositional techniques and received a very sophisticated art-historical education. One of the things I admired most about Myron was his refusal to cave in to societal norms, watered-down opinions, and overly sensitive critiques. He was gruff, direct, and fascinating.

(UPPERLEFT) Catherine "Cat" Barnstone Szafran sits among her father's artworks; photo: Rebecca LaChance ■ (ABOVE) The sculptor Kelsy Lamdin at work ■ (LEFT) Student interns take a break from cataloguing Myron Barnstone's artworks by watching one of Barnstone Studios' downloadable videos. This one is devoted to "The Sphere in Value." Photo: Rebecca LaChance

JULIETTE ARISTIDES (b. 1971), *Mirror*, 2018, oil
on panel, 36 x 24 in., Gallery 1261, Denver





Craig Stevens

As a teenager I was fortunate to meet Myron. I was introduced to figure drawing and the Golden Section, and I was hooked. I was too young to comprehend everything being taught, but I could never look at things the same way again. My financial situation made it necessary to take a few classes here and a few there. Then life got in the way. I longed to go back and study in earnest. At Barnstone Studios, there was a feeling verging on the magical, and I wanted to be part of it. Several years later I was able to go back for more classes. Myron's drawing/design process informed everything I do today as a commercial billboard artist and muralist. A lot of the successes I have had in life are due to the ability to think creatively with a process because of my experience with Myron.

Dan Thompson

For me, Myron Barnstone epitomized "the ideal teacher." I never heard a more gifted communicator — Myron could make you fight a war for art. He was ferocious, bombastic, and unforgettable. Years after studying with him, Myron contacted me about including some of my imagery on his website, as a distinguished former student. That honor impacted me like a shot of adrenaline. ●

Information: barnstonestudios.com

PETER TRIPPI is editor-in-chief of Fine Art Connoisseur.

DAN THOMPSON (b. 1972), *Back*, 2019, graphite on paper, 16 x 23 in., source?