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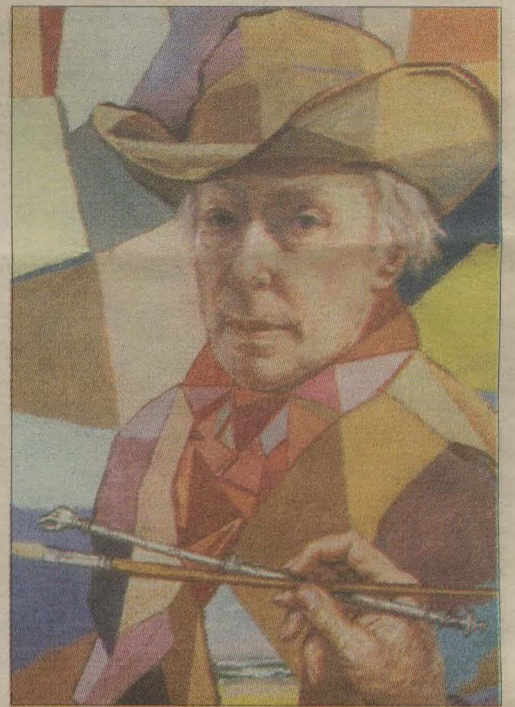
"Self Portrait," 1931, oil by Hananiah Harari.

## The hybrid art of Hananiah Harari

Painting & works on paper exhibited at PAAM

By Christine Frisco

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"Pied Portrait of Me," 1993, oil by Hananiah Harari.

Labeled as "the split personality of the art world" by a Newsweek art critic, Hananiah Harari moved freely between realist and abstract art. Truly hybrid, Harari's work includes many painstakingly accurate renditions of still lifes and portraits, as well as abstract, cubist and surreal pieces reminiscent of Picasso, Matisse, Klee, Kandinsky and Miro.

A selection of 28 paintings and works on paper created between 1961 and '63 will go on display at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum 460 Commercial St. beginning with an opening from 8 to 10 p.m. Friday and running through Oct. 24.

The show, comprised of pieces selected by family member Rich Bauer, features many whimsical, colorful caricatures of people. There is even "Adam and Eve," with a saucy, voluptuous-to-a-fault Eve holding the apple away from Adam

who looks hypnotized as he steps forward in a Frankenstein-like manner to reach for the apple. The snake dangles between them. "Still Life with Dog" brings Susan Baker's nutty, humorous illustrations to mind. Several are scenes of Provincetown, a favorite vacation destination, including beach scenes and "Old Dock," a busy, abstract rendition of a pier. Many of the oil paintings are large scale—ranging from 65" by 79" to 40" by 48."

PAAM executive director Christine McCarthy says the show will introduce Harari to a new audience and offer some surprises to those who are already fans.

"The majority of this work has never been seen by Provincetown," she says. "PAAM is excited to be able to showcase this body of work for the first time."

Harari was a self-described exuberant spirit who created abstract art based on nature that allowed in elements that are chaotic and sen-

sual, rather than what he called "a disassociation of form from the natural world ... representing an apex of uncontaminated purity," such as demonstrated in the work of Mondrian. Harari believed this non-objective approach missed out on the "enriching concept of random upset (disorder, derangement, derailment) — a phenomenon abounding in all of life." He went on to say, "Abstract art does not end in a private chapel." (These quotes are excerpted from a letter to the art editor of The New York Times in 1937 in protest to the non-objective shows at the newly established Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.)

His early influences were many, particularly Matisse and Picasso. In the '30s, Harari wrote: "There was no eluding Picasso's magnetic net — it permeated the atmosphere. With wonders all about, I felt [myself] a whirling dervish, happily trapping each in

turn, very normal for a young painter."

Harari's art spanned seven decades from the 1930s to the '90s. Early on he dabbled in frescoes, murals and printmaking; later in collage, often surreal in the vein of Max Ernst. Harari also enjoyed creating self portraits set in his studio, depicting the paintings on his walls with great detail. "Mine," painted in 1983, shows Harari with open arms presenting his studio collection ranging from Renaissance-like portraits to cubist and other abstract pieces.

He enjoyed painting a realistic trompe l'oeil still life of odd items, and then an abstract rendition of the same. "Still Life with Frog," from 1939, is a good example of this: items include a frog figurine borrowed from his grandfather, an African mask, a photograph of two African sculptures, a favorite corn cob pipe and an envelope with his name on it. While his for-

mal mastery of realism is evident, one senses he got more pleasure out of the freer, more exuberant abstract paintings.

Harari's second one-man show in 1941 was described by critics as "semi-representational, wildly imaginative paintings with curious titles."

Harari was born in 1912 in Rochester, N.Y. His parents were of Lithuanian descent. He studied at the College of Fine Arts at Syracuse University in the early '30s. In 1932 the young artist went to Paris to soak up the rich art scene and later returned to the U.S., in '35, marrying the sister of a close friend. He was active in the first artists' trade union in the mid-'30s. He and his wife had son, Michael, in '46 and his wife died in '77. Two years later he remarried to a painter, Shirley Lewis. Harari

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"On Vacation," oil by Hananiah Harari.



"A Color Garden," oil by Hananiah Harari.



*"Scooter Couple," oil by Hananiah Harari.*

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died in 2000 at the age of 87.

His long career included a six-year stint at the WPA Federal Art Project in the Mural Department; many commercial art commissions including cartoons and advertisements; two decades ('50s and '60s) of hundreds of meticulously accurate portraits of the movers and shakers of the time, including the Kennedys, Rockefeller, duPonts and the Mellons; and 14 exhibitions ranging from 1939 to '77. His work is in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the San Francisco Museum of Art, among several others.

In 1950, during the McCarthy era, he was blacklisted from commercial artwork as a result of his

political cartoons ("On Safari with Harari") published in the leftist magazine *New Masses*. At about this time, he began receiving commissions from Portraits, Inc. in New York and this launched his lucrative period of portrait painting, during which he found himself "very diverted from my true calling."

Harari was also a teacher beginning in 1938, when he taught at the progressive American Artists School. His mission statement includes: "I favor nurturing an art which reflects the richness and variety of life — as well as of art itself. So I deplore restrictions narrowing one's choices of subject and means. ... With color ... I want to honor the rainbow that is life. With painting space I aim to seize the heights and depths in life. In apprehending the eloquence of shape, I can express the beat of life." □