

More than mother and daughter

Horowitzes have much in common

By Mary Abell

Brenda and Diana Horowitz, having more in common being mother and daughter, are both landscape painters who work directly from nature and both use the atmosphere, light and landscape in and around Provincetown as inspiration for their work.

Though Brenda Horowitz, the mother, studied art at Cooper Union and City College in New York, it wasn't until she came to Provincetown in 1954 to study with Hans Hofmann that her work came alive.

"I learned from Hofmann how to destroy," she said. "An artist can get very precious about things. Hofmann taught you how to work and re-work until you got it right. If one corner didn't work with the rest, you had to adjust it," said Horowitz.

Brenda Horowitz drew from the figure for over 15 years, then began concentrating on landscape a few years ago.

"Hofmann never influenced me to work in an abstract way. I was always a figure painter," said Horowitz who admits that her use of color is based on abstract ideas of color balance and is not a naturalistic approach.

"In 1978 I began to paint landscape. I had always done small landscapes in the summer and I treated the figure as figurescapes, forms in relationship to space. So it was natural to move into landscape."

Horowitz uses color to describe her emotional responses to natural phenomenon. She admires the work of Milton Avery.

"I've always been a colorist. Interested in the subject matter of landscape and how to use colors in unique combinations to give a feeling of nature rather than the actual green grass, blue skies, etc.

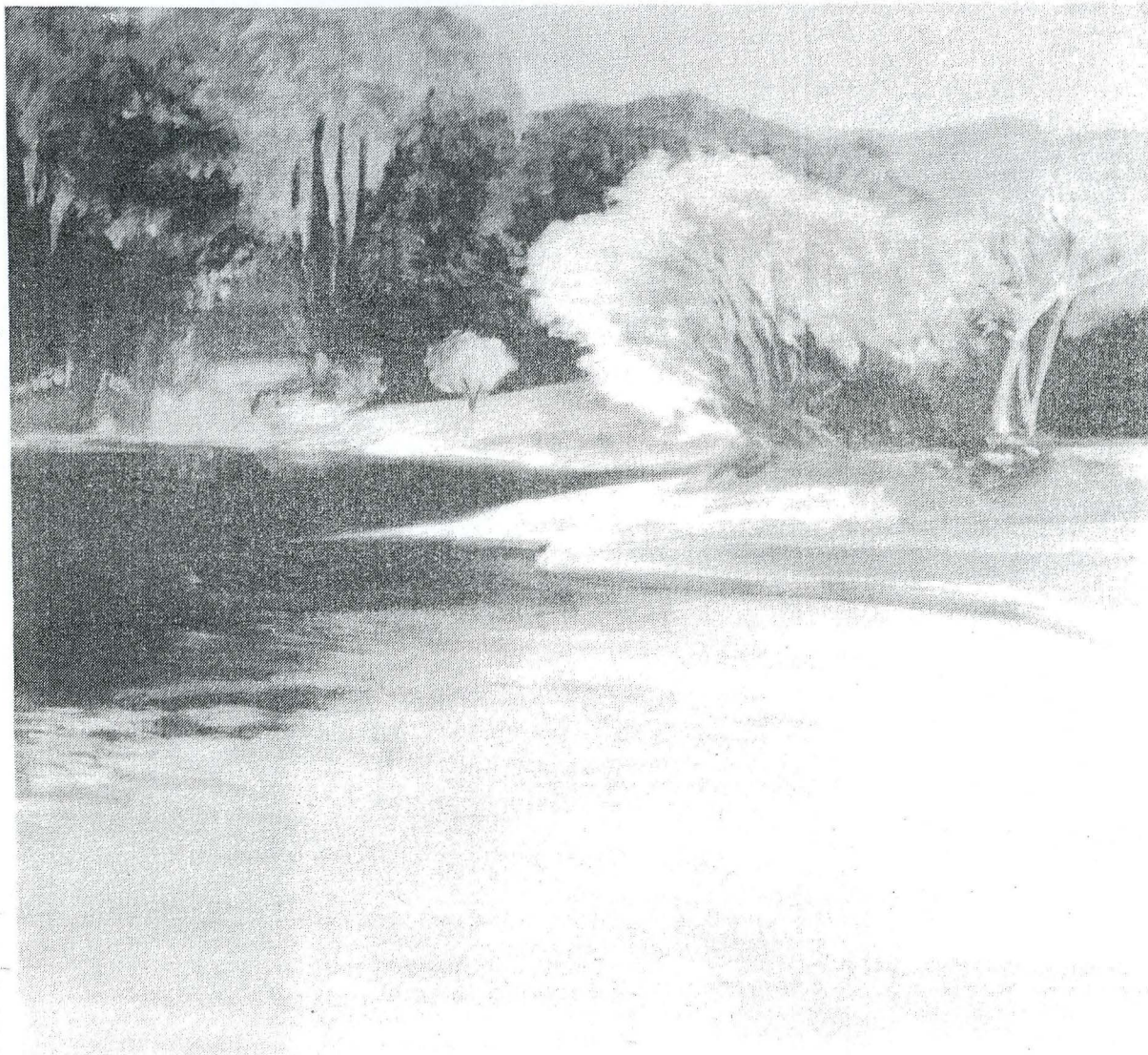
She also admires the "aliveness of Monet's brush and his color and that is what I try for."

Working from nature, Horowitz does detailed sketches in charcoal, then returns to her studio to translate and simplify those sketches into feeling using acrylic paint on canvas.

"I try to see the objective stance in nature, then return to my studio and translate it into feeling. There is an endless supply of subject matter out there. Hofmann also taught me how to see properly. You can be careless in your observations but there is a truth out there, she said."

In her studio Horowitz "changes every area several times until all seem to work together like a puzzle, if one doesn't fit, I have to keep turning it around until it does," said Horowitz.

Using sponges the elder Horowitz applies acrylic paint in thinly built up layers. She usually wets the surface first,



"Long Pond" by Brenda Horowitz

Photo by Jacob Burckhardt

and mixes her paint to the desired hue before applying them. She blends the pigments together with sponges attempting to create an atmosphere of satiny light.

"It is more of an inner light, an inner vision," said Horowitz.

"I record my feelings about a scene, I play with it. The artist is free to eliminate or change things. Structure is important. What an artist imposes on his work is that artist's personality. Hopefully, that is what makes my landscape

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The Horowitzes as artists

(Continued from Page 7)

different and gives it a stance which is my own."

"Once you put a line on a paper you are making an emotional statement," said Horowitz, who is interested in graphology, the study of handwriting for the purpose of character analysis.

Horowitz hates to part with her preliminary sketches because she said her sketches are her "best record of the source of the work. It's like selling your diary to someone."

Diana, the younger Horowitz, began to draw when she was two years old. Her first painting was of Blueberry Hill in Provincetown, where her family has summered for 17 years. A family joke has it that Diana had it in her blood to be an artist because she mistakenly drank turpentine when a child.

"My mother got me started on it and I got hooked," said Diana. "There was really nothing else that I wanted to do, never really a question. I feel fortunate that I had a head start because my mother was an artist. I learned early. I grew up seeing her drawing and painting and I learned from it."

Diana works in a variety of media including oil, watercolor and charcoal. She graduated from the High School of Music and Art in New York, which her mother also attended. Then she enrolled at Hunter College and completed a BFA at School of the Arts, SUNY, at Purchase where she studied printmaking with Murray Zimilias.

She learned etching, lithography and monotypes and says that learning to work with strong contrasts helped her with her charcoal drawings.

"School develops the discipline which an artist needs," she said. "In school I spent 14 hours a day working and evolved into being an artist."

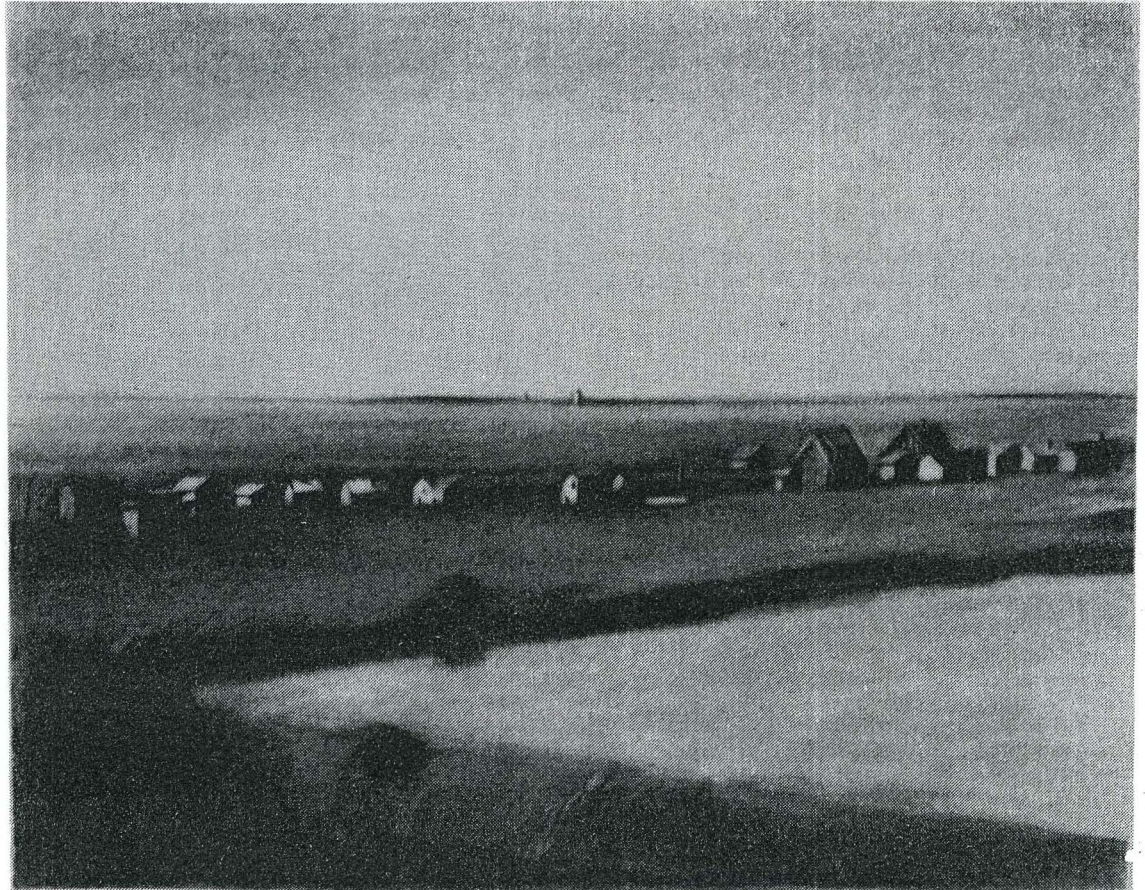
She takes her bicycle out with paints or charcoal and when she spots an interesting area for her visually, sets up her easel. She completes her work on site.

"I can bicycle around for hours before I might see something. I try to capture a moment in landscape. A moment of light and color. A time when I can feel the air, more than just what I'm looking at. It is more meaningful to paint outside. I want to capture the feeling more than merely recording the physical objects," said Diana.

Diana's recent charcoal landscapes are done using sponges and tissue to erase and blend to achieve the tones and atmosphere she is after.

Though Diana's work is reminiscent of Edward Hopper's, she disavows any influence.

"People say my work looks like Hopper, but I never looked at his work seriously," said Diana.



"Morning at High Head" by Diana Horowitz

She admires the work of Mirandi, Avery, and Marsden Hartley.

The trees and vegetation in Diana's work look slightly blurred, as if they are in motion, and strongly remind the viewer of her mother's similar manner of treating the same subjects. Yet her houses and other dwellings are strongly delineated and solid.

Much of her work has the still haunting quality which feels like nostalgia, or a dream. Her charcoal drawings are well composed with strong tonal contrasts, which resonate with a romantic appeal. Light is very important and clearly defines and characterizes her landscapes. She uses interesting or unusual perspectives to increase the sense of

mystery and drama.

When Diana was graduated from school three years ago she lived in Maine and Vermont where she found sympathetic landscape material.

She has recently been awarded a teaching assistantship in the Tyler School of Arts program in Rome for next fall.

Both of the Horowitzes say they work well together and are often comrades searching for inspiring subject matter. Each says the other is a good critic.

They will be featured in a show at the Swansborough Gallery in Wellfleet beginning Saturday. Brenda Horowitz will show her watercolors and acrylics and Diana her charcoal drawings.

CLASSICAL LANDSCAPES

Ay.
Artists
Horowitz, Diana

BY LOIS MARTIN

The strong geometry underlying Diana Horowitz's poetic plein air images gives them a sense of timelessness and serenity. "I sometimes feel like the lens of a camera open for a long exposure," she says.



Diana Horowitz paints small landscapes, usually with man-made structures and vegetation in the middle ground against a light-filled distance and sky. Created in oil on canvases or birch panels (ranging from about 6" x 8" to 20" x 24"), they have beautiful surfaces with sure, economical strokes. The paint itself often has a lightly dry, ascetic, quiet quality. She likes to paint in the stillness of early morning or evening when, she says, "there's lots of color and no one is around." Her work explores deep space, expressing the relationship of air and distance through atmospheric perspective.

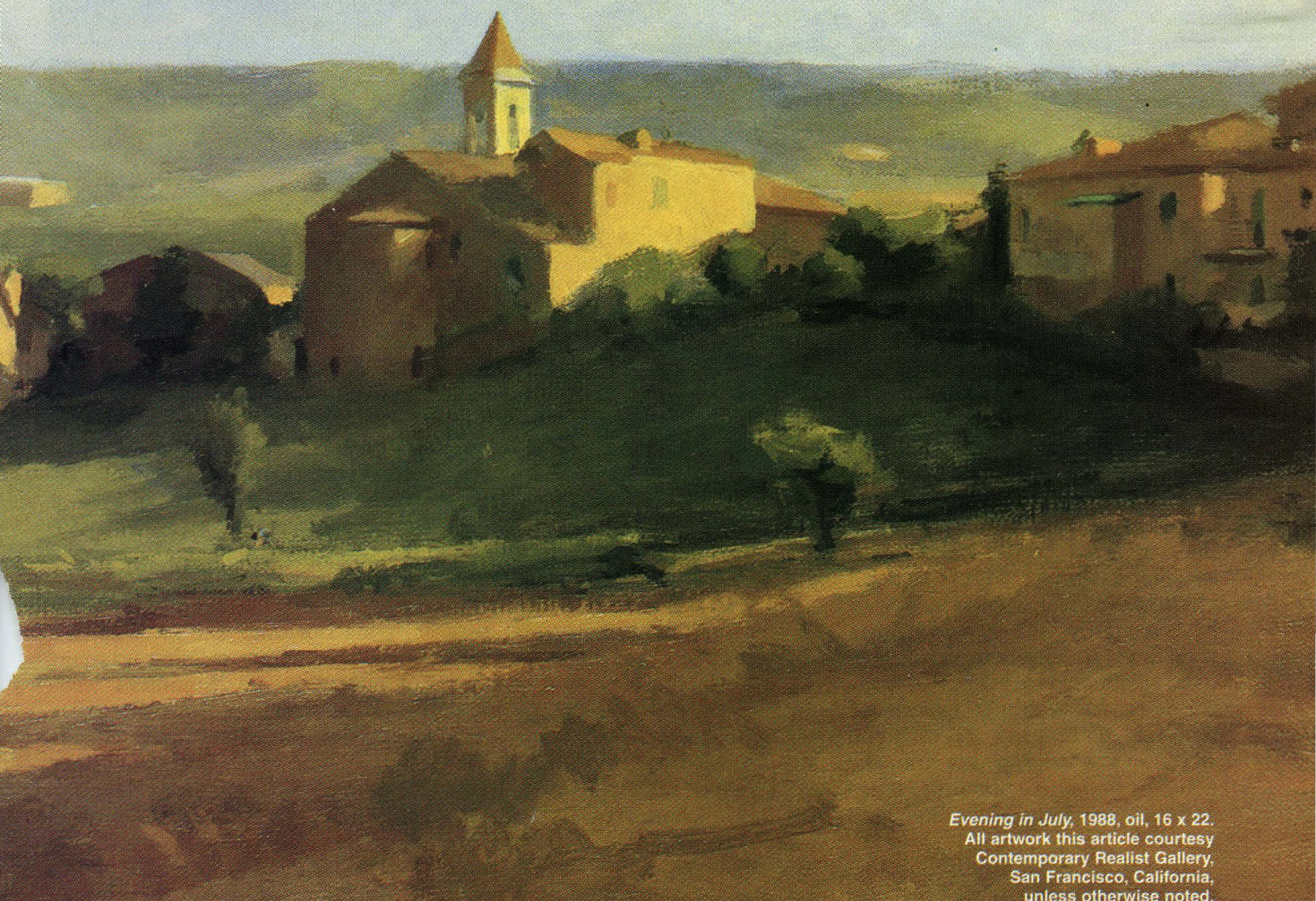
Painting, as some critics say, *sur le motif*—that is, in front of and in response to the object or view—Horowitz is fundamentally a plein air

painter, working outdoors in all sorts of weather. Undeterred by the difficulties of lugging equipment to a site, she uses a bicycle to get around in the summer and in other seasons often uses a child's stroller to wheel her French easel and canvases. Although in bad weather she has at times resorted to painting from a window, this prospect is less pleasing to her. She says, "I agree with something Lois Dodd said once about how painting indoors was like painting 'inside a box.' I have to be outdoors. When I try to work inside for any period of time, my impulse falters, and I feel desperate to get outside." Her paintings are less about looking at a view than being in a space at a certain moment.

Over the years, she has lived and worked in a number of places—especially Italy, Chicago, and Brook-

lyn, New York. Shorter trips have taken her to Poland, Wyoming, Vermont, and California. Although she continues to paint wherever she is, she believes that her response to an environment takes time "to catch up," meaning that her paintings always seem to improve in the second year of her being in a new place, when its spirit really becomes apparent in the work.

Although her pictures depict a specific place, they're profoundly about the abstract geometry of the composition and the dynamics of various shapes, strokes, rhythms, lines, and colors inside it. Her forms are simplified, essential, and exact. The precision of her underlying abstract structures gives them a tautness and vigor and enlivens their classical serenity. It's impossible not to compare the purity, exactness,



Evening in July, 1988, oil, 16 x 22.
All artwork this article courtesy
Contemporary Realist Gallery,
San Francisco, California,
unless otherwise noted.

D. Horowitz '88



Battery Park City, 1994, oil, 12 x 18. Private collection.

and simplicity of her color tones to those of Corot's in his early landscape sketches of Italy, which art historian Kenneth Clark compared to "perfect pitch in singing."

Horowitz's paintings seem to operate like music, reminding viewers of a pure voice singing a clear melody such as "Shenandoah" or "Amazing Grace," or of a piano playing a Chopin étude. Sometimes when you listen to this type of music, emotion rises up from between the notes, washing over you with a marked physical sensation such as sorrow or joy. Even during the experience, you sometimes wonder how it's possible to be so affected by a series of musical notes. It's a strange experience that has nothing to do with the words of the song or any dramatic flourish; something about the tones and their spacing speaks directly to the soul.

The critic Clive Bell described this effect in the visual arts with his term

"significant form," which he claimed rested not in the appearances or actualities of paintings but in the formal elements of line, color, shape, and composition. Horowitz's pictures affect the viewer this way. Long after seeing one of them, a viewer might remember only planes of exquisite tone meeting in certain sections of the composition, unable to recall whether the planes represented the walls of an industrial warehouse or a Roman ruin.

She has none of the addiction to the picturesque that affects so many painters who have studied in Italy; she's always finding interesting images in her own surroundings. Her approach agrees with that of Constable, who, as Kenneth Clark put it, "in contrast with Gainsborough's statement that no landscape was worth painting outside Italy... said that his art could be found under

every hedge." Horowitz moves within and paints with equal sensitivity the entire range of human landscape, from urban and industrial to pastoral and classical.

She has studied extensively in Italy and the United States: at Temple University's Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia and Rome and at Brooklyn College, where she received her M.F.A. degree in 1987. If she was born with a painter's eye, she was also born with a paintbrush—rather than a silver spoon—in her mouth. The daughter of artist Brenda Horowitz, she grew up in a household where painting was part of everyday life. Summers were spent in Provincetown, Massachusetts, with the whole family outside and mother and daughter usually painting. The family began summering there when Brenda Horowitz started studying with that most influential of painting teachers, Hans Hofmann. Hofmann's theories of

“pure painting”—of the weight of colors, of the “push and pull” of shapes, of compositional dynamics—strongly affected the mother’s painting, and the influence of this teaching can be detected in the strength of her daughter’s work as well. Brenda Horowitz said in a 1983 interview, “I learned from Hofmann how to destroy. An artist can get very precious about things. Hofmann taught you how to work and rework until you got it right. If one corner didn’t work with the rest, you had to adjust it.”

Diana Horowitz’s natural abilities and lifelong training are complemented by an insistent self-discipline and rigorous self-criticism. She paints unflinchingly. On a three-week trip to Florence last summer, she finished seventeen paintings—thirteen studies and four developed works.

Wherever she happens to be, long

walks and bicycle rides help her discover new painting locations. When a particular setting grabs her, she returns with her painting equipment. Lately, she has been placing her easel in the shade, although she believes this sometimes makes it difficult to achieve proper contrast. At other times, she sets up in the sun, although it then becomes tricky to find the proper relationships between warm and cool.

Sometimes she begins with a toned ground—of burnt sienna, burnt umber, or Venetian red. She always starts with an overall impression and moves from the general to the particular. Throughout the painting process, she tries to see the whole composition and to keep in mind her first impression. She proceeds directly into painting without prelimi-

nary drawings, and although her views generally contain architecture, she never uses a straightedge, preferring “to feel around the form for the edges,” she says. Because she likes a slightly dry, crisp look to the paint, she uses no medium, only turpentine.

She generally keeps a group of six or seven paintings going over a period of weeks, although she only works on two or three a day. Working on several paintings simultaneously helps keep her enthusiasm up and her eye fresh. “Besides,” she says wryly, “it makes it easier to be brave about making bold changes when you have more than one going at once.” She hangs the works in her studio, waiting to evaluate them indoors, away from the motif because, she says, “they look so puny and pathetic in front of the real thing.” She continues, “If they feel

London Terrace, 1992, oil, 12 x 16.





Left:
The artist captured on location in Rome.

Below:
The Lagnetto,
1990, oil, 10 x 26.

Opposite page:
Ponte Rotto,
1990, oil, 16 x 19 3/4.
Private collection.

weak, I try to go back in again—with vigor—sometimes even a month later.” She is severely critical of her own work, noting that for every six or seven paintings she starts, often four of them fail.

Horowitz has been inspired by the work of several contemporary painters, in particular Antonio Lopez-Garcia, Rackstraw Downes, and Lennart Anderson. However, perhaps the three most important artists to affect her

development are Corot, Cézanne, and Morandi. The influence of Corot’s early landscape sketches of Italy surfaces most clearly in the purity of Horowitz’s tones and her sense of atmosphere. Cézanne’s tactility, seriousness, and solidity can be read in the weight and presence of her forms. The influence of Morandi, although less obvious at first, is seen more in Horowitz’s intimate concern with time and the way the eye sees things: “I feel sometimes like the lens of a camera open for a long exposure,” she explains.

Her paintings attempt to both capture time and make it stand still, to be aware of time and yet deny it.

Horowitz’s preoccupation with time recalls a moment in a conversation between the journalist Bill Moyers and the mythology scholar Joseph Campbell. Moyers filmed a series of interviews with Campbell in a program called *The Power of Myth*. At one point, Campbell explains to Moyers how a central truth is revealed by virtually every religion. He draws an imaginary line from Moyers’s head to his feet and





describes it as the *axis mundi*—the “axis of the world”—which is the still point of the cosmos of time and space. This is the hub of a turning wheel, he goes on to say, and “the axis passes through you, *right now*. And through me as well.” He then draws the same imaginary line through himself, saying, “The present moment is eternal life.”

Horowitz is trying to put into paint what Campbell was trying to put into words. In their perfect evocation of a particular moment, her paintings capture something of the eternal and the infinite.

Horowitz is currently represented by the Contemporary Realist Gal-

lery in San Francisco, where she had a solo show in June, as well as by the Sazama Gallery in Chicago, where her work was exhibited last December. Her paintings have been featured in a number of museum exhibitions on contemporary landscape, including “Landscape Painting 1960-1990: The Italian Tradition in American Art” in 1990 at the Gibbes Museum of Art in Charleston, South Carolina, and the Bayly Museum of Art in Charlottesville, Virginia; “Contemporary Landscape” at Santa Rosa Junior College in Santa Rosa, California, in 1991; and a show of four figurative painters at the University of Northern Iowa Gallery of Art in Cedar Falls in 1992. Her paintings have also been included in numerous other museum and gallery

shows. She has received several grants and residencies, including those at the Millay Colony, Yaddo, and the Macdowell Colony.

She has taught painting and drawing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Tyler School of Art in Rome, and Brooklyn College. She was also a visiting critic at the Rhode Island School of Design in Rome and the Graduate School of Figurative Painting at the New York Academy of Art in New York City. In 1993, she received a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, which has allowed her to paint full-time this year. ■

Lois Martin is an artist and textile scholar based in Brooklyn, New York.