

Burnell's shadowy creatures come into light

By Jennifer Hagar

From the window of artist Polly Burnell's studio above the Post Office, there's a view of a fenced garden behind a house that is otherwise hidden from view. Looking out everyday at what others never see seems to be a apt description of Burnell and of her work.

The artist, barefoot and tanned from working in her own garden, talks about her work and her life. Illustrations from old children's books hang on her studio walls and scattered around are books of interest to naturalists. It is soon apparent that in her work and her life, Burnell delights in what is not commonly in view — the life of insects on the periphery of our attention and the “unloved” creatures of the night. She says if she had not become an artist she would have been a scientist, probably an entomologist. As a child she once spent half a day following an ant's progress up a hill. Bringing her fascination with the

unseen and unnoticed into her work has led to the use of bats and moths to dominate the personal iconography of her new ceramic work opening Friday at the Schoolhouse Gallery, 494 Commercial St., and continuing through July 14.

Burnell had primarily been doing oil painting, but her friend Tom McCanna suggested that the color and nature of her images would do well on ceramic. She responded because she has always been drawn to periods in the arts where functional objects were made beautiful, such as Russian Revolutionary Ceramics and the work that came out of the Bloomsbury group, and elements that were part of her painting moved to the new medium. Some of her plates incorporate silhouettes, an old tradition Burnell has been attracted to.

“I love how much you can say ... a gesture, a posture is so telling of character perhaps more than the details of feature,” she says, “It is possible to recognize someone you know on the street from a distance just by their shape.”

On one of her plates there are sil-

houettes of two girls in old-fashioned dresses with sashes tied in bows, a cage and a bat being released into a mottled gray and pink sky. The plate is festive, with scallops of purple, red and orange around a green rim, yet the sky is ominous. The sisters, and the elephant toy pulled by the littler one, cast shadows. (As the majolica glaze process Burnell uses makes a rather flat image, she likes to add shadows and play with complex relationships between figures to create depth.) A scraggly tree is outlined on the horizon. Just as the background of the plate suggests sunset, dawn, or an approaching storm, there is also an ambiguity in the younger girl's reach towards the older one. She could be grasping for support or trying to prevent her older sibling from snatching the released bat back from the sky.

Perhaps it is not surprising that nocturnal creatures appear in her work because Burnell says she does her best work at night and experiences light as a kind of psychic “noise.”

“I have access to my uncon-



Polly Burnell in her studio.

Photo Sue Harrison

scious at that time, it's like waking dreaming to me, and I like being part of that elite group that stays up all night,” she says.

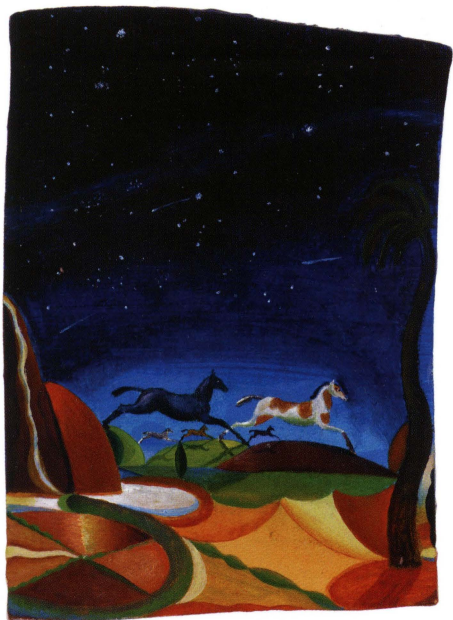
In 1993 Burnell was awarded a

fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center, and that was a pivotal influence in her personal and artistic life. She describes it as a time

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POLLY BURNELL IRENE LIPTON



PROVINCETOWN ART ASSOCIATION AND MUSEUM



POLLY BURNELL, *WHAT ARE WE LOSING?*, 2005, OIL ON PANEL, 10 X 6 INCHES

Polly Burnell Irene Lipton

CURATED BY DONALD BEAL

March 2 – April 15, 2007

OPENING RECEPTION MARCH 2, 6–8 PM

Sincerity and feeling mark the work of Polly Burnell and Irene Lipton. They are artists of very different personalities. Perhaps Cezanne's mysterious word *temperament* is better, for temperament, not style, novelty or subject matter count in art.

The quick silver fantasy and delicacy of Polly Burnell's work; the powerful, rhythmic movement of Irene Lipton's painting, continue the great Modern tradition of Provincetown Art.

Paul Resika, January 2007

I am very happy to bring the work of Polly Burnell and Irene Lipton together in this exhibit. It's an opportunity to view a body of work by two artists who have been a very important part of the Outer Cape arts community for many years, and whose work has found its full stride. I've admired Polly and Irene's work since first seeing it years ago. Their paintings do what I think good painting always does, that is to convey some vital feeling that transcends the material and literal stuff that paintings are made of, and speak of things that can't be expressed in any other way. Irene's paintings contain a strange and exuberant life, and Polly's are like peering into a mysterious, intimate dream. Both find a visual poetry that is born from a deeply sensitive and intuitive nature and expressed through an equally deep understanding of painting.

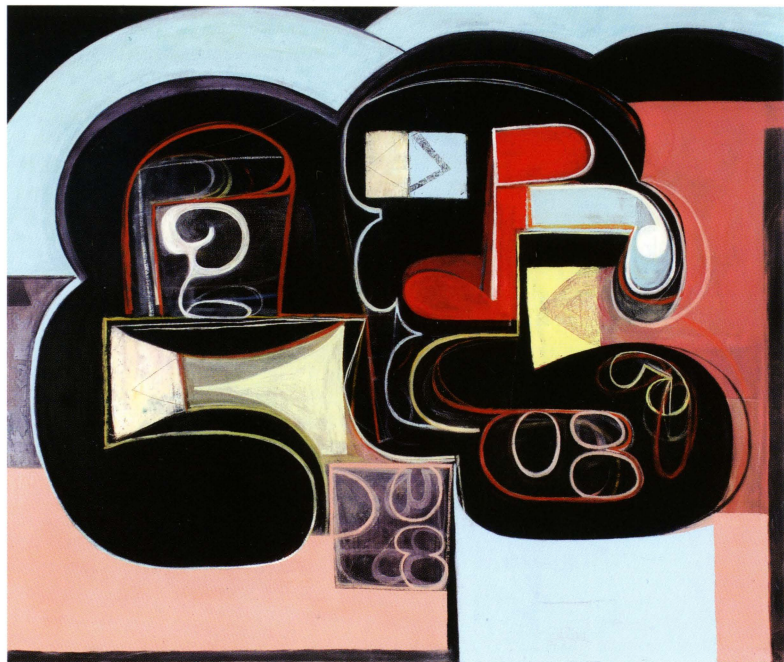
Donald Beal



IRENE LIPTON, *UNTITLED (LP502)*, 2007, OIL ON CANVAS, 54 X 65 INCHES

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TOP: IRENE LIPTON, *UNTITLED (LP501)*, 2007, OIL ON CANVAS, 54 X 65 INCHES

BOTTOM: IRENE LIPTON, *UNTITLED (B501)*, 2007, OIL AND GRAPHITE ON PANEL, 16 X 20 INCHES



ABOVE: POLLY BURNELL, *HORSE COUNTRY*, 2002, OIL ON PANEL, 9.375 X 7.5 INCHES

FRONT COVER (TOP): POLLY BURNELL, *THE HERD*, 2002, OIL ON PANEL, 10.5 X 7.75 INCHES

FRONT COVER (BOTTOM): IRENE LIPTON, *UNTITLED (LP301)*, 2005, OIL ON CANVAS, 60 X 72 INCHES

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