

FRITZ BULTMAN REMEMBERED

BY RON SHUEBROOK

My most vivid memory of Fritz Bultman and his work dates from a summer day in the mid-'70s when I traveled from our home in Nova Scotia to Provincetown to install an exhibition of my work at the Fine Arts Work Center. Perhaps because I was to be in town only briefly, Fritz was kind enough to invite me to his studio for the first time. Prior to this visit, I had seen only the outside of the studio which I understood had been designed by the great sculptor, Tony Smith. During my fellowship year at the Fine Arts Work Center in 1969-70, my partner, Fran, and I had enjoyed the Bultman's hospitality in their home on Miller Hill Road, but the studio had remained a mystery. I had been stimulated by the innovative functionalism of the house, its integra-

tion with the natural site, as well as by the works of art and exotic furniture that could be found in every room. I still recall a collage by Joseph Cornell and a drawing by Fielding Dawson in the kitchen, and an animal horn chair and a recent major canvas by Fritz in the living room. Visits to the Bultman home had offered us glimpses of the rich lives and diverse interests of its owners who, unlike some others in their situation, had obviously decided not to settle for a received model of calculated interior decoration or architectural fashion. This extraordinary domestic ambience contrasted greatly with the circumstances in which I was raised.

These recollections, and my continuing gratitude to Fritz for his encouragement and counsel about my work during our Provincetown

residency as well as in subsequent correspondence, heightened my sense of occasion. I was excited about the possibility of seeing his new work in the studio context and learning directly about his concerns and working processes. When I first met Fritz in 1969, I knew little about his career and had never seen his works firsthand. During our period in Provincetown, I did see several elegant figure drawings and a rope-like abstraction on paper in a group exhibition at the Work Center. In the intervening years, I sought out information about his life and art from secondary sources and had become increasingly aware of his accomplishments in a diverse number of media. Moreover, while in graduate school at Kent State University in 1971, I had fortuitously encountered his superb bronze

sculpture "Vase of the Winds II," 1961-62, in a traveling group exhibition, "Artists Abroad," at the Canton Art Center in Canton, Ohio. At the time, I was deeply affected by the mythic and cultural resonance of its image and formal invention. It seemed to present a serious challenge to the then-dominant and limited critical assumption that truly ambitious contemporary art should primarily be oriented to the solution of formal problems that had been historically determined. I was also pleased to note that this convincing sculpture was in the collection of the Whitney Museum.

My growing awareness of his career and these all-too-few engagements with his actual works suggested to me that Fritz really was an artist whose public reputation had not risen to the high level of his achievements. I felt compelled to know much more about his life and to see much more of his art. In addition, these initial personal discoveries about Fritz (and about other underrated artists in the U.S. and elsewhere) contributed to my skepticism about the legitimacy of the accounts of contemporary and historical art that were being advanced by the majority of authoritative texts of the time, and by many of the professors with whom I had studied. Unfortunately, due to my lack of confidence in my own level of knowledge, it took me a half-decade from the time that I first met Fritz until I had the courage to talk directly to him about his work.

When this opportunity finally came in the mid-'70s, I felt more than a little excitement and a considerable degree of anxiety. As I entered the light-filled studio, I was immediately struck by how this dynamic, interior space seemed to be a meeting place between the natural and the built environment. Consequently, it was not surprising to be later reminded by Fritz that Tony Smith had studied with Frank Lloyd Wright, the master of environmentally integrated architecture. With its self-evident, utilitarian construction and its angled bank of floor-to-ceiling windows, this deceptive building offered not only physical and psychological shelter but also an intimate view of the surrounding foliage and landscape. It seemed a perfect context for making art that was not only based on a need for individual invention but also on the persuasions of cultural and geographical circumstance.

I recall that Fritz was standing in front of several of his remarkable collages that, I believe, were tacked to the wall and in progress. There were several plaster and wire mesh sculptures related to "Vase" on the floor to the left. Though I cannot recall his greeting, our conversation moved easily from the collages and sculptures to the state of the art world. We talked initially about the additive and subtractive processes that he used in the building of the surface of the collages. By gluing small bits of previously painted papers together, he was able to keep the color

clear in each discrete, though interlocking, shape. He could also refine the edges of each shape by cutting away any extraneous area or by covering it with the colored plane of the adjacent form. This process enabled him to respond to the perceptual and physical experience of the piece as its expressive order unfolded, and to avoid the restrictions of the given rectangle of the commercially prepared papers. With such a strategy, Bultman was able to improvise extremely beautiful compositions which possessed a kind of pictorial inevitability that was determined by the interaction of expressive structure with an efficient method of fabrication. For pragmatic reasons, he wondered about the implications of possibly adhering the collages to canvas. I was profoundly impressed by the rigor and urgency of his inquiry and felt deeply privileged to be sharing ideas with this intensely committed and mature artist. It was quite evident to me that for Fritz each decision in his work could not be simply reduced to a matter of aesthetics.

Our conversation turned to his sculpture when I told him how much I admired his "Vase" that I'd seen in Ohio. He described how he was able to develop a vocabulary of organic forms with plaster and steel mesh that he could organize in various configurations. If desired, he could later transform the composition into a variation on a theme by cutting or altering the plaster components of the existing sculpture, and by recombining them into a new arrangement. The immediacy of the sculptural construction seemed to have obvious affinities with the directness of the method that he employed with his collages. His fluid, improvisational approach to modeled, yet constructed abstract sculpture was a revelation to me. Contrary to my earlier thinking, I became convinced by this evidence that welded steel was not the only material and process that could resist gravity, and explore the possibilities of the three-dimensional gestural image in literal space.

I'm not certain how long our discussion continued, but, quite unexpectedly at one point, Fritz broke off his remarks, and turned abruptly to me and passionately declared, "I *really* love to work." This simple assertion of his great pleasure in the life of the studio was like an epiphany for me as a young artist still not fully aware of the depth of my own commitment to this practice. His obvious dedication to disciplined studio practice has remained a crucial example for me over the years. His resolve to produce serious and ambitious art despite relative critical neglect has helped to convince me that the most valuable personal aspect of one's life as an artist lies in the actual making of the work itself.

In recent years, however, I have happily observed the apparently growing interest in revising Fritz Bultman's place in the informed accounts of American abstract painting and sculp-

ture since the '40s. Unfortunately, consistent with popular assumptions about the usual pattern of artistic recognition, this crucial reassessment of his achievements has gathered momentum only since his death in 1985. Despite regular solo exhibitions during his lifetime at such influential New York galleries as Kootz, Stable, Martha Jackson, and Tibor de Nagy, his reputation remained modest. Since 1987, there have been several large memorial exhibitions in public museums, and a series of more compressed exhibitions in commercial galleries in New Orleans and New York. In particular, those mounted by Gallery Schlesinger seem to have contributed most substantially to the renewed interest in his work. The current comprehensive exhibition, "Fritz Bultman: A Retrospective," organized by the New Orleans Museum of Art, is circulating among several museums in the south and will be shown at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum in the fall. A substantial catalog accompanies the exhibition and contains an informative biographical essay by April Kingsley, her tellingly edited interview with Fritz by Irving Sandler, and a selection of the artist's notebook writings.

When I look at the reproductions of Fritz's work in the catalogue for this retrospective, I am reminded of the sheer visual intelligence and daring that has been evident throughout his long career. From the dense forcefulness of the imagery and pictorial structure of his 1949 canvas "The Hunter," to the spatial inventions and col-

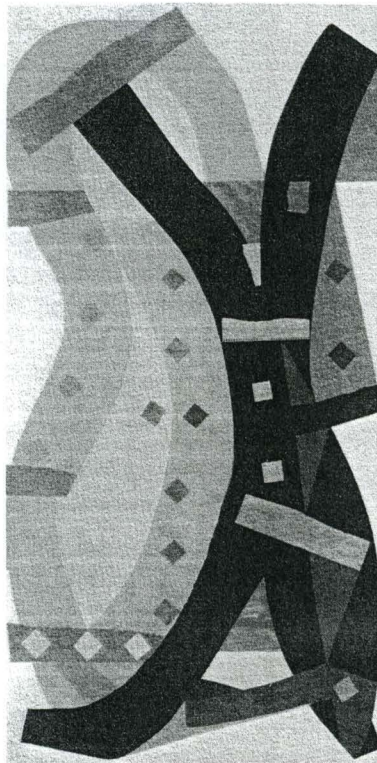


FRITZ BULTMAN, "Vase of the Winds II," 1961-62
bronze, 60 x 36 x 27"
Collection of Whitney Museum

oristic nuances of his collages from the mid-70s until his death, his art has always announced a creative identity that is both original and exacting in its distillation of the visual legacy of 20th-century abstraction. "The Hunter" was painted with a raw emotional intensity within a composition that is formally rigorous and insistently referential. The history of its making is disclosed in the brush gestures and transparent passages that comprise the interlocking shapes. It is an urgently layered painting that cannot be reduced to a crude verbal analysis but gives over its ambiguous meanings only to the attentive gaze of an open viewer. The late collages seem to demand similar perceptual conditions. As noted earlier, I observed that these collages have achieved an expressive integration of process, material, and pictorial structure. Though he certainly was mindful of Matisse's exemplary collages, Bultman's efforts in this medium seem to embody more fully an experience that is both tactile and visual. In my judgement and in that of many others, Bultman has made some of the most beautiful and accomplished collages produced in the Post-War era. They deserve serious comparison with the work of others such as those of Robert Motherwell, which are infinitely better known and accepted as among the supreme achievements in the medium.

When I turn to a photograph of his "Vase of Winds II," I am further convinced of a pressing need for reassessment of his achievement as a sculptor. The graphic illustration jogs the memory of my experience in front of the actual work. With its evocative, still-life arrangement of undulating leaf-like planes, a modeled vessel form, and a supporting rising platform, this deeply satisfying sculpture seems charged with a sense of ritual and metaphor. I note how the projected sense of fragile stability of the imagery has been intensified by the orchestration of light and shade, as well as by the repetition of nearly related elements. The flattened foot of the vase-like volume almost mirrors the horizontal plane of the lower platform, and establishes an internal relationship that refers to the external fact of the parallel floor on which the viewer stands. The shadowed, narrow zone directly above the platform causes the vase element to appear to hover and, therefore, to defy the material facts. The recognition links our literal and perceptual experiences to the aesthetic expression of the sculpture—which uncannily acknowledges and resists the physical forces of the world. When this particular work returns to the Whitney Museum following the retrospective, it should be shown regularly beside the other important examples of abstract expressionist sculpture.

In addition to the various exhibitions and attendant catalogues that have signaled Fritz Bultman's reemergence as an historically significant artist, important writers have recently in-



FRITZ BULTMAN, "Mardi-Gras," 1978
collage of painted papers, 96 x 48"

cluded him in their accounts of his historic period. For example, in her 1992 book, *The Turning Point*, April Kingsley makes an emphatic yet critical analysis of the New York art world of 1950, which places Fritz meaningfully among his peers. Other informative articles by B.H. Friedman and Budd Hopkins combine with Bultman's own published commentary to elucidate his previously unacknowledged importance. My modest hope and realistic expectation is that the finest of his available works will be acquired by important public institutions and exhibited on a regular basis. Such crucial placements of his most significant works in public collections would ensure a greater likelihood that he will find his rightful place, honored among the finest practitioners of abstraction in America. ■

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—Ron Shuebrook

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FRITZ BULTMAN, 1982, PHOTO RENATE PONSOLD

*Myron's subtle presence was mirrored in his art, and though he epitomized refinement, he also could be—among friends—raucous, casual, and ebullient. Fritz was the stout one, reminding me, thinking of it now, of a miniature version of William Styron (perhaps it is their Southernness) and the Pablo Neruda character in that Italian movie *Il Postino*. Myron could be as austere as the Greek playwright Aeschylus while Fritz had the more humanitarian urges of Sophocles.*

Fritz Bultman and Myron Stout: A Provincetown Memoir



MYRON STOUT, 1983, PHOTO RENATE PONSOLD

BY MICHAEL STEPHENS

A work by Robert Frank caught my attention at the Whitney Museum. Though it was a photographic collage from the 1980s, the actual photographs predated the piece by several decades. It was of the artists on Tenth Street, one of them my old friend from Provincetown, the painter Myron Stout. The Myron I had known was an elegant, older man, but one who was a great mentor to younger artists. Both of these Myron Stouts—the young one in the photograph and the older one I knew—were quite hip, though. In the Frank photograph, Myron wore an overcoat and a fedora and a cigarette dangled from his mouth. When I met Myron in the late 60s, he had long ago left the chaotic art world of New York for the slower, easier one of Provincetown. On the Cape, he was an elder statesman, everyone's favorite uncle, the person you most wanted to come to your house for dinner or drinks. He might still show up in a fedora and overcoat but the cigarette did not hang so defiantly from his mouth, and all his edges had been smoothed and polished; he was the definition of what one meant by "mellow."

Myron was discriminating yet anything but a snob. What he had were his routines and his own close set of friends whose houses he frequented like clockwork. I'd see him at either his own house on Brewster Street or, more often than not, at the Bultman's house around the corner on Miller Hill Road. In fact, for me to remember Myron, I also think of Fritz and Jeanne Bultman. Fritz and Myron were two very different people, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. They also had much in common, not just a love of practicing art; both men were rigorous intellectuals. Then, too, Myron and Fritz were Southerners, genteel, urbane, exquisitely mannered, and seemingly with infinite grace in the social world.

"Since Fritz and Myron are gone," Jeanne Bultman told me, "there is no one to carry on

those conversations that they used to have about Greek art, mythology, and the classical world."

Though they had differences about art, friends, books, food, ideas, and life itself, their friendship was long and enduring, and it was steadfast through the more than two decades I knew them. Like that Robert Frank photograph of him, Myron was cool, perhaps the coolest, most understated person I've ever known. On the other hand, Fritz was a volcanic personality, a constant-eruption of feelings and opinions, though these moods were shared with his calmer, even courtly self. Let me say from the outset that Myron and Fritz were two of the nicest people I ever knew. Though their manners in public were quite different—Myron was thin, even wraith-like at times; Fritz was short and squat, a combination Buddha-belly and epicure's physique—and their manners of making art seemed almost diametrically opposed, theirs was, as I said, a lasting friendship that seemed to be built on mutual respect.

"Take some strawberries," Fritz called out as I left their house, and Jeanne would lead me off to the patch where they grew in her garden.

Fritz was short and round while his wife, Jeanne, a former dancer, was tall and slim. This created a marvelous visual image when they walked together. In many respects they were the perfect Provincetown couple, odd and perfectly right.

"Eat more asparagus," scolded Fritz when I stayed in their guest house. "They'll only go to seed if you don't eat them."

Then, of course, there was Myron, offering a last glass of wine or a shot of whiskey or one of his Gauloise cigarettes, the culprits of the emphysema and cancer that eventually killed him.

Myron's subtle presence was mirrored in his art, and though he epitomized refinement, he also could be—among friends—raucous, casual, and ebullient. Fritz was the stout one, reminding me, thinking of it now, of a miniature ver-

sion of William Styron (perhaps it is their Southernness) and the Pablo Neruda character in that Italian movie *Il Postino*. Myron could be as austere as the Greek playwright Aeschylus while Fritz had the more humanitarian urges of Sophocles. His mind was sharp and quick, but Fritz's demeanor could be slow, even ponderous in its gait, even as his art and life reflected a personality full of twists and angles, one that was electric and malleable.

Fritz and Myron might not be joined in any art history texts because their art forms were so different. But in my own mind I forever associate them because I usually saw one of them when I was visiting the other. Jeanne often served as the catalytic agent, inviting all of us to her table for a sumptuous meal.

I met these two artists when I was in my early 20s. A cocky young writer who had already sold a book to a major publisher, it was hard for me to respect anyone in the older generations, especially those who might offer literary opinions. For me, though, Myron and Fritz were unique; they were visual intelligences who were two of the best-read and genuinely erudite people I had yet met and though young, I had made the acquaintance of many writers. I used to think that, between them, there was not a single book not read. And their tastes were broad and eclectic; Fritz might mention the French historian Braudel while Myron, in the midst of a disquisition about Greek art, might allude to Louis L'Amour, the prolific cowboy pulp fiction writer whom Myron adored, even going so far as to catalogue and cross-reference the characters in 60 or so novels, or to put it in Myron's own voice, "the Sacketts and what-not."

Fritz regularly loaned me copies from his personal library, including a translation of Baudelaire by Delmore Schwartz and a fascinating book called *The Life of the Fly*, the observations of a French scientist, the Abbé Fabre, too poor, it seemed, to do anything but observe the life of the insects around him. Then, too, Fritz read his contemporaries and neighbors, writers such as Norman Mailer or B.H. Friedman, poets such as Stanley Kunitz, and Wellfleet rascals like Edmund Wilson. I first heard of John McPhee, for instance, while Fritz animatedly walked, at the end of the work day, on Harry Kemp Way, telling me about McPhee's latest literary nonfiction work in the *New Yorker*.

I often wondered how Fritz had time to practice his art with all the reading he did; he readily admitted that he was a slow reader, but a steady one, and he seemed to absorb texts exceedingly well.

"We all read a lot," Jeanne Bultman said, "but Fritz and Myron retained so much more than any of us. They could sit around talking so clearly about what it was they read."

I met Fritz and Myron in the late '60s when I moved to Provincetown from New York. I had sold a novel to Grove Press, and with the money, came to the Cape for the winter in order to hide out. Literally, I had to hide out because I had a warrant for my arrest in New York after I had punched someone in the nose after he stole my

former girlfriend, and neither of them appreciated my behavior. In fact, the ex-girlfriend had broken a bottle of wine over my head after I knocked out her new beau. The novelist Rudolph Wurlitzer, who had then just published his novel *Nog*, suggested that I go to the Cape. Though he was a friend of Fritz and Myron, initially he didn't tell me to look up Fritz but rather his son Anthony, who was my age and lived on the Cape with his wife Lynn. His wife frequently modeled for Fritz, and in fact, the day I stopped by Fritz's studio, he was inside drawing Lynn and another statuesque P-town beauty by the name of Tacke. Instantly I went back to my room on Commercial Street and wrote a poem about this remarkable event; Fritz wound up using it in a catalogue for a show later on, and we immediately became lifelong friends.

Of course, it did not hurt the friendship that we both were lapsed Catholics. I've always thought that the speech rhythms of New Orleans and Brooklyn—the latter where I originated—were highly compatible. Not to mention that Fritz was a terrific draftsman with his nude drawings, a wonderful collagist, and a highly skilled sculptor, besides having a lacerating wit, a sense of high camp—oh the way he could lash into someone beginning with the word, "Honey," and then lambast away—and an abiding dedication to irony.

The Fine Arts Work Center was a new operation, and Fritz invited me one chilly fall evening to a get-together for the fellows and staff at a local restaurant, and that is where I met Myron. As with Fritz, I took an instant liking to Myron, and the feeling seemed mutual, and we were friends from that moment until he died nearly 20 years later. He and the writer Rudy Wurlitzer were friends, so very often, being a junior member to this community, my introduction to everyone was that I was a friend of Rudy's. The year before he and I had been fellows at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire. A few years later, we would share the same editor at E.P. Dutton, the New York publisher. Eventually, living in Provincetown, I became Michael, their friend, though several years later, I remember a friend of Rudy's staying at Myron's apartment on Brewster Street and burning a hole with her cigarette in his mattress, and finding—I can't remember exactly why now—that the whole event smacked of the extraordinary because, one, someone was staying at Myron's, and, two, she had burnt his mattress.

Fritz was a collector of animal horns, and they decorated the furniture and walls of all his houses. But with Myron, I think of magnifying glasses, particularly as he got older, as his meticulous, tiny, graphite drawings needed magnification to be seen and worked on with his vision slowly fading away. In fact, one of the last times I saw Myron, he was using a large black-handled magnifying glass which I told him I admired.

"Take it," he said.

"I can't take it," I answered.

"Please," he said, handing it to me, "please take it as a gift."

Later, I thought the gift both odd and apt, so Myron, if you will. For both Myron and Fritz had Borgesian streaks in their personalities, being curators of the obscure, the recondite, but also admirers of simple, elegant objects. Like horns. Like a magnifying glass.

Both men held contradictions: they were reclusive, scholarly, and creative; they were also deeply social beings. They loved food and drink, and indulged in these pleasures often. Both used drugs to various degrees and for various reasons. Fritz had to take opium for his stomach after he lost a good deal of his intestines in an operation; Myron, an old hipster underneath that first appearance of being one's favorite schoolmarm, took drugs recreationally and smoked pot at the end of his life because he wasn't able to drink.

At Myron's apartment, he had many vials of different grades and types of marijuana, with its effects noted, too. He liked speed to keep him going and to ward off depression, but was also known to ingest hallucinogens such as psilocybin. Sometimes I found his penchant for drugs an affectation, a way to identify with young people. But I have no doubt that Myron also liked to get high. Ultimately, both Fritz and Myron were fine wine drinkers. Dinner at the Bultmans was one of the rarest of treats for me, and I dined at their homes in Provincetown and New York countless times in a 20-year period. At Myron's, the parties were peopled with friends crowded into his tiny apartment, the drinks—Southern hospitality style—always flowing. You could never finish a drink at Myron's because it was always being replenished by him or someone helping him out for the evening.

"Stay for one last glass," Myron would say.

"Take some strawberries," Fritz called out...

I would reel home after a party at Myron's because I never could keep track of my drinking. The glass was always full; it was always too early to go home. "Stay for one last glass," Myron would say. But every time I sipped a little from that one drink, he filled it up again, so that I would lose track of just how much liquor I had consumed. At the Bultman's, I would drink continuously from a little glass, glass after glass, all night long, and more than once, unable to navigate down the winding, forested path from the top of their porch to Miller Hill Road or the cottage down below, I fell into the bushes, disappearing among the vines, laughing all the way, while Fritz and Jeanne's hearty laughs bounced off the porch above.

To understand Fritz I often thought one had to contemplate that house on the hill. Though it never failed to impress me with its elegance, really it was the simplest of designs, no more than raw building blocks with a few strategically placed windows. The house seemed enormous, but it was only two rooms. But what rooms they were! Each was long and narrow, and parti-

tioned; they were placed on the hill, if seen from a bird's eye, in a step pattern, the entrance to the house on the porch leading into where the two rooms were joined at their furthest points.

The front room was given over to socializing. It was where the kitchen was, a room laid out by Jeanne who once worked with Michael Field and was as good a cook as anyone I'd ever met, and it led into the dining room. Books were everywhere in pale wooden cases that had streaks of white paint over them. A door led out onto a deck with the best view in Provincetown. Though the dining room was small, even cramped, it created the illusion of being airy and immense, while also conveying intimacy when everyone sat around the table to dine.

Dining was not just eating. It meant talking about art, literature, and, of course, lots of gossip about people in the art world, show business, and Provincetown generally. A typical cast of dinner guests might include Myron, Ruth Latta, Bob Lawlor, Peter and Gloria Watts, and even one or two renegade outlaws, the local drug smuggler, let's say, and maybe a spiritual advisor. I never heard anyone talk about sports, but I swear that every other topic under the sun was covered in depth over all those years that I knew Fritz and Jeanne, and, of course, Myron.

Over the years, they had their feuds, and so Myron might not be present on a particular evening at the Bultman's. Though Fritz had art feuds which lasted a lifetime, he and Myron always ironed out their differences quickly.

I think that Myron probably understood Fritz a little better than Fritz understood him, though I think that Fritz probably appreciated Myron a bit more than Myron appreciated him. These, naturally, were quite discriminating differences between Southern gentlemen. When they disagreed, it was not over petty things but the subtle matters which comprised the world of art, their tastes in various painters and their work, ballets or movies, books, plays, or recitals. Eventually, all would be resolved. The old friends would be together at yet another meal prepared by the irrepressible Jeanne.

When I first met Myron and Fritz, I recall taking an autumn drive with them up Cape. Jeanne drove the Jeep that the Bultman's seemed to have for as long as I knew them. Fritz talked about the heather and the purple hue it gave off at this time of year. Myron spoke about the broom, and myself a city person, rather than ask what broom was, I waited until I got back to my room, and looked it up in the dictionary. Fritz loved nature the way a poet does, often in an ecstasy or despair about its enormity; Myron, on the other hand, was a trained botanist.

He often spoke about his years in Hawaii, teaching there. Those years often sounded like the happiest of his life. When he spoke about Hawaii, he did not sound like the great aesthete he was, but simply a man in love with a place. I thought that maybe his great love, whoever that person was, might have come from there. I think it was close to 11 years that Myron spent in the Pacific, and I wondered why he left Hawaii. Certainly, he loved the Cape, particularly Prov-

incetown, but I never heard him speak so ecstatically about New England the way he could revel in his memories of the mid-Pacific islands.

Sometimes Fritz might speak of New Orleans with the same kind of reverence that Myron bestowed on Hawaii, but that was not very often. Fritz's relationship with the South was very personal, to be sure, and usually a love-hate one. He seemed most at home, and most productive, too, on the Cape, but, of course, he worked well in New York, though I don't think he had anything like the serenity he found in Provincetown at the brownstone he owned on the East Side of Manhattan.

The brownstone was on a once déclassé street one block south of Spanish Harlem, still the Upper East Side, still chi-chi, but also with elements of a border town. Lots of writers and artists lived there, including John Ashbery, a next door neighbor. The Bultmans told me how they bought the place for a pittance after the Second World War ended. These were the brewmasters' houses for the Knickerbocker brewery, and they said that the rooms stunk of beer for years after they bought the place. The same way Fritz added to his collages he built up his houses, slowly and artfully, one thought at a time, one brushstroke, one torn piece of paper, one fine object at a time placed in a room.

At dinner parties I met designers like Charles James, that flamboyant habitué of the Chelsea Hotel and writers such as Donald Windham and Eileen Simpson. Jeanne served festive holiday turkey or Mississippi hams with hot pepper-flecked cornbread. The evening might begin in a sitting room upstairs, where drinks were served. Over the mantel, there was a marvelous John Graham portrait, while a Joseph Cornell box was mounted in another corner. The floor appeared to be painted by Jackson Pollock, for the paint stood up off the linoleum, and it seemed inspired by Pollock's technique. Once, drunkenly, I asked Fritz if Pollock indeed had painted the floor. He looked at me with a perplexed expression. Poor Michael, he seemed to say without saying it. "Larry Rivers did it," he said.

The last time I saw Fritz was several months before he died. It was not on the Cape, but at the New York house. I had come over late in the afternoon for tea because he no longer had the strength for a full evening of drinking and eating. I suppose that his lifetime of ailments, especially his stomach problems, finally caught up with him. But the fact was he did not look bad at all; in fact, he seemed well if one's lucidity were any measure of well-being. Still, he told me, "I'm not long for this world, but I've made my peace." After all, death was not something Fritz, the son of an undertaker, seemed to fear. Though a lapsed Catholic, the belief system still operated, and, as Jeanne told me years later, he went back to the Church before he died. Perhaps he thought that he would die and go to Heaven because at heart he was an optimist.

After Fritz died in 1985, I lost touch with Jeanne for awhile. I had a burgeoning theater career, and at the time of his death I had a play

on tour which eventually wound up in London and Edinburgh. Back in New York, I had a child to raise and was working as a writer, editor, and teacher around the clock, it seemed. My own problem with alcohol and drugs was at a crisis level in the mid-'80s; I don't think I properly grieved when this good friend died. Besides, I had stopped going to Provincetown, not consciously; always I was saying that I was going to get up there, but months turned into years, and I did not return. Maybe because Fritz had been dying for as long as I had known him, his death seemed anti-climactic. I almost felt as if he had not left us, that at any moment he was going to reappear, telling about this wonderful new collage he did or a great piece of plaster and wires that he needed to have cast in Long Island City to turn into a free-floating bronze sculpture. I would hear his voice in my ear, talking about Balanchine dances, avant-garde operas, odd movies that ran forever in Provincetown. Fritz was argumentative with so many people that you would expect me to recount a great rift that may have occurred between us, but the fact was he was the same way the last time I saw him as he was the first time we met—witty, charming, devilish, often wicked, but underneath it all, compassionate, civil, and ultimately profound. He was one of the most cultured persons I have ever known.

My last visit with Myron on the Cape was during the summer, a few years before I bottomed out from my own addictions. His blindness had become worse. He relied on a handful of people to get around and to accomplish simple chores. Still, when my wife, daughter, and I finally left his apartment, he insisted upon walking us down his street to our car. Next to us, he was fine, but when he turned to go back home, one sensed how disorienting the lack of sight must have been, and how this once familiar street had become as treacherous and unknowable as a minefield. I watched him wander off with the most heart-breaking tentative lurch. My dear old friend Myron, that brilliant artist of black-and-white works that he refined over decades, had lost the privileged sense, that most urgent one of sight. He looked too frail and vulnerable in the sunlight; his skin was bleached a pale white. He had become our blind seer. When he coughed from the emphysema, his tiny frame spasmed.

After Fritz died, I wrote to Myron a few times, and either he responded or one of his friends wrote down his dictation. His letters, even when he still had his sight, were short, pithy texts, to the point and finished. But when Myron wrote me in Hawaii in 1986, his letter was long and flowing, full of lyrical reflections upon his own life on the islands more than 40 years earlier. I can't say I was shocked when I had heard he died. I was saddened, the way I grieved—or failed to grieve fully—when I heard about Fritz. Both of these artists were considerably older than I was, and yet through most of my adult life I thought of them as my good friends. As such, they were irreplaceable, and each of them one of kind, *sui generis*. When some people die, all

that remains are their bones or their ashes. With these two artists, I saw artifacts of their brief journeys on earth. Fritz left behind his body of art, drawings, paintings, collages, and sculpture; Myron left his mysterious black-and-white paintings, diminutive yet heroic, resonating exquisitely.

For Myron, painting in black and white was not the easy way, nor was it the more difficult. It was simply the way. Fritz's way—ritualized, myth-filled, formal—was like the religion he liked to deny he cared any longer about, though he still talked about it constantly. His work was threefold: sculpture, drawings, collages. His sculpture was mythic and heroic; his analytic drawings were sensual; his collages were gorgeous.

Though I associate the pleasant noise of the social world with these two men, finally I see a spiritual connection. Their work is now just like they themselves are, no longer of the earth but of the spirit world. Neither was a moralist or a polemicist, yet looking at their work results in a sense of peace and serenity, of order and good in the universe. Their works are beautiful in very different ways, but their characters were beautiful in similar ways. ■

Michael Stephens lives in New York and teaches in the writing program at Emerson College in Boston.



Fritz Bultman in his Provincetown studio, 1947.

PHOTOS COURTESY JEANNE BULTMAN

Fritz Bultman in Provincetown

Abstract expressionist's widow recalls life in the art colony

By Susan Rand Brown

BANNER CORRESPONDENT

There are 44 winding steps anchored by well-worn railroad ties leading from the west side of Miller Hill Road to the hilltop home Jeanne Bultman has occupied like a second skin for almost 60 years. That's when she and her husband, the artist Fritz Bultman, who died in 1985, bought a piece of land down the hill and across the road from what had been Charles Hawthorne's home and studio.

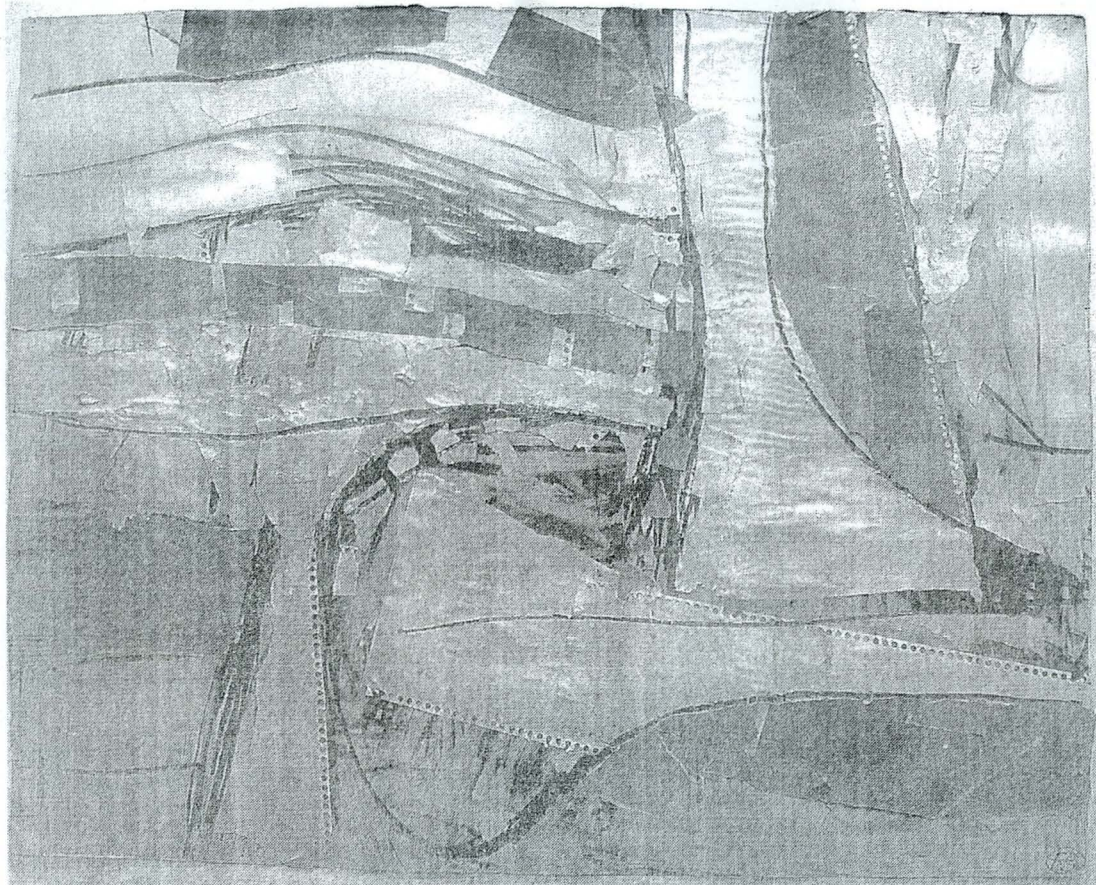
By the late 1930s Hans Hofmann was living, painting and teaching in the old Hawthorne house, attracting a small coterie of students eager for a fresh approach derived from cubism. The presence of the legendary teacher from Munich who knew Picasso and Matisse drew the introspective young Bultman, just as several years later it drew young Jeanne Lawson, who be-

come his lifelong companion.

A chunk of Jeanne Bultman's past returned this winter when 12 of Bultman's abstract, heavily textured paintings, done in Provincetown and New York in the late 1950s to the early 1960s and immediately purchased from the artist by Parisian gallery owner Rodolphe Stadler, were shipped back to her. Gallery owners Albert Merola and James Balla were there to disassemble the eight-foot custom crates when the paintings arrived.

In circulation after decades in storage, three of this group, never before seen in the U.S., will be exhibited at the Albert Merola Gallery, 424 Commercial St., Provincetown from July 16-29. (The opening reception for "Fritz Bultman: Rarely Seen Works from the 1950s and 1960s" is Friday, July 16, 8-10 p.m.) Bronze sculptures that had been in the artist's studio, early collages and drawings will also be shown. Towards the middle of his creative trajectory Bultman began working almost exclusively in collage, marked by joyful, undulating forms and intense colors. These earlier works, combin-

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"Tying the Knot" (1962), collage of painted papers and crayon.

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ing materials and techniques from drawing, painting and sculpture, show Bultman's progression as he was making the medium his own.

On the second day of summer, a smiling Jeanne Bultman greets the Banner from her wooden deck, then quickly leads the way to a small, rectangular room with windows on three sides, filled with books and art, looking very much like one of those meditation rooms hand-

made by artists in the 1960s.

Bultman describes the room — originally a garden house open to the elements — as a "small shack" when they bought it with \$1,000 wedding gift from her mother. With the addition of an adjoining kitchen, this is the room where they lived and raised two sons, Anthony and Johann. A small mattress for the young parents fills a sleeping loft accessible by steep stairs. Next came the studio with its northeast light, designed by the minimalist sculptor Tony Smith,

student of Frank Lloyd Wright; eventually they added a larger bedroom-living room space.

Jeanne Bultman was a long-limbed, blonde showgirl and model with an intense interest in the arts when Bultman met her in 1942. She remains strikingly elegant even in the very casual putty-colored jeans and jersey shirts she favors. Asked if she now stays the winter in Provincetown, she explains she can't: too many young scholars come to

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"Horizon" (1956-'58), oil on canvas.



PHOTO ALAN FONTAINE

Jeanne Bultman in Provincetown, 1942.

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see her in Manhattan, wanting to hear about the life and times of Fritz Bultman. And she is more than pleased to accommodate.

The studio at the bottom of her hilly property was built under pressure, she recalls, in part to give Hans Hofmann a place to teach during the summer of 1945, after he had to leave his Miller Hill Road rental; by 1946 Hofmann had moved to the

large place on Nickerson Street in the West End of town owned by Colton Waugh.

Their friend Tony Smith wanted to give Bultman a studio as a wedding present, and he and Bultman, both perfectionists, did elaborate conceptual work, but “neither one could put a nail in a board and actually pound it,” his wife laughs. They took apart an old Truro barn “board by board,” found a trained carpenter, and then Miz Hofmann “got up on a scaffold

— it had a very high ceiling — and painted the whole thing white inside. She was wonderful!”

Fritz Bultman’s friendship with Hans Hofmann’s wife Miz began in Munich right before the war. The 16-year-old artist had come from his family home in New Orleans to study. She was renting rooms to art students; he stayed with her from 1935 to 1937. Miz, who did not speak any English, toured her houseful of art students to Rome and Paris.

A chunk of Jeanne Bultman’s past returned this winter when 12 of her late husband’s paintings, done in Provincetown and New York in the late 1950s to the early 1960s, were shipped back to her. Three of these, never before seen in the U.S., will be exhibited at the Albert Merola Gallery from July 16-29.

Hans Hofmann had closed his Munich art school several years before, and was teaching in California. “He and Mrs. Hofmann became very good friends. He needed a mother to take care of him — she did it. She didn’t have any children, so it worked out fine,” Bultman says.

All this time Miz Hofmann was in denial about Hitler’s intentions toward avant garde artists. Finally in 1938, with the help of Fritz Bultman’s father’s political connections, she got on that proverbial “last boat,” removing paintings from frames and “rolling things up in a great big roll, good things, Braque, Bonnard, Picasso, and Hofmann’s early things too, of course” to save their collection.

By the time Mrs. Hofmann arrived in New York, Hans Hof-

mann had moved his school from Berkeley to Manhattan and Provincetown, and Bultman was studying with him. He and Hofmann student Mercedes Matter picked up Miz, brought her to Miller Hill Road, and before long Fritz Bultman was living with both Hofmanns, resuming a family-like relationship.

Jeanne Bultman arrived on the scene a few years later. A good friend of hers, a Russian portrait artist who had studied with Hofmann in New York, had an idea: “Let’s drive up to Provincetown. I want to introduce you to a friend of mine, Fritz Bultman, and to the Hofmanns, who have an art school there.” Out of such understatement is Provincetown art history born.

“We all had a wonderful summer. We’d go to the beach every afternoon. The Hofmanns had a funny old car with a rumble seat, and I had a car too. Often we went to the beach on the bus, because of gas rationing. The Hofmanns took us to the lakes and ponds in Wellfleet. And we very often cooked together. It was just easy and very pleasant. There were very few people in town,” Bultman recalls.

“There were blackouts at night here in Provincetown, because there were submarines in the harbor. Everything was blacked out. We’d go down to the A-House, go through a series of curtains, and stay there danc-

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Jeanne Bultman memorial

There will be a memorial service for Jeanne Bultman from 4 to 6 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 8, in the Stanley Kunitz Common Room at the Fine Arts Work Center, 24 Pearl St., Provincetown.

Jeanne Bultman, along with her husband, Fritz Bultman, was instrumental in the founding of

the Fine Arts Work Center. She was also an advocate for the creation of the Cape Cod National Seashore, a driving force behind the creation of Tougaloo College's modern art collection, and one of the last pivotal participants in the American abstract expressionist art scene of the 1950s and 1960s.

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