

Springs Invitational Art Stories: A Love Story – Jerry Schwabe, Barbara Sansone & Lenox

August 7, 2017 | by Dakota Arkin Cafourek

A muscular beauty with a neat mane and extended tail lifts his front hoof and lowers his head and neck as if to bow. Barbara Sansone's horse Lenox is eternalized, his gentleness and strength captured at once, in a classic bronze sculpture by her husband, artist Jerry Schwabe.

Jerry Schwabe is thrilled and honored to show Lenox, titled after its namesake, in the 50th annual Springs Invitational Art Exhibition at Ashawagh Hall. To him, it is a special event that brings great recognition to the community. While his sculpture is two decades old, it feels as if he only made it yesterday.

"I don't think of it as time," Schwabe said in a recent interview at his East Hampton studio, acknowledging the years-long processes in sculpting and the resilience of the horse's memory.



"Lenox" by Jerry Schwabe. Bronze. Courtesy of the artist.

For the long-time married couple, their love story begins in 1983 at Claremont Riding Academy, the since-closed equestrian center on W. 89th and Amsterdam Avenue in New York City. Sansone was already an accomplished rider when Schwabe took up the sport. Every Thursday, they shared the ring, and soon after, a drink, Schwabe recalled.

Sansone's bay, Lenox, had been bred to be a racehorse but proved himself a difficult mount. For Sansone, for whom the thoroughbred was a birthday present from her mother, Marie Sansone, he was tender and good-natured. They formed the extraordinary bond that can only exist between horse and rider; Lenox would rest his head on Sansone's lap when she'd visit his stall and he turned out to be one of Schwabe's most patient models, said Schwabe.



Barbara Sansone and Lenox. Courtesy Jerry Schwabe.

After the couple married, he recalled the long hours he and his wife would share at East End Stables in East Hampton, N.Y., describing an idyllic scene of caring for their horses and riding bareback in the paddocks. There, they trained with none other than Harry de Leyer, who

famously spotted “the eighty-dollar champion,” taking his horse Snowman from the slaughterhouse truck to national championships at Madison Square Garden.

At the time Jerry Schwabe set out to sculpt Lenox, he was relatively new to the medium. It was only his second or third undertaking in sculpture when he approached capturing his wife’s four-legged companion, but he had already been drawn to bodies of movement. Schwabe’s very first sculpture had been inspired by a photograph of a Martha Graham dancer featured in The New York Times.

To sculpt the horse, Schwabe would bring his tools and materials to the barn. While grooming the very patient horse while standing in the cross ties, he memorized the horse’s body with each stroke, finally memorializing him in sculpted form. Now an accomplished artist in a variety of mediums, including watercolor, oil painting and photography, he said, “I like sculpture because I like to touch it; its solidity, smoothness, movement of form; it’s all there when you touch a piece.”



"Lenox" by Jerry Schwabe. Bronze. Courtesy of the artist.

Working in three-dimensional art came naturally to him, right from the start, said Schwabe. His mother, also an artist, would ask him to critique her work as long as he could remember. A painter who dabbled in sculpting, she would show her piece to her son who concluded it was

beautiful but did not resemble its model. His mother declared in defense, "Let me see you do better." And so, he decided to do so.

An admirer of greats such as Michelangelo and Bernini, Schwabe had long been intrigued by sculpture even before his mother's challenge. He said he was amazed at the way sculptors could create softness and realism out of stone. He even had purchased a block of alabaster to have at it with a chisel and hammer. However, it was in classic bronze sculpture that Schwabe ultimately found his medium.

He began to take art courses at the National Academy School of Fine Arts, New School University, and the School of Visual Arts, among others. He signed up for horse anatomy courses where he learned their build down to the skeleton.

His process begins with plastalina, a modeling clay which never hardens so its shape remains malleable for however long it takes for the final form to take shape for the artist. As a next step, he would bring his clay forms to Dominic Ranieri, renowned for his casting repairs for Wall Street fixture, Charging Bull by Arturo Di Modica, to move Schwabe's pieces through the multi-step and multi-week process of transforming it into a wax form and to add fine details. Finally, the form would go to a foundry where it would be made into a ceramic eggshell and filled with liquid bronze.

Schwabe didn't pick up a paintbrush until years later. His paintings were born out of appreciation for landscape and he is inspired the immense beauty of the East End. Schwabe paints art he would want to see on his own walls, which happen to be covered in large scale scenes of the innumerable inlets and marshes found in the East End corners of Long Island.

"I like making art that I like to look at," he said.



"The Park" by Jerry Schwabe. Watercolor on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

A perpetual student, Schwabe takes a weekly art class with fellow local artist, Janet Jennings. He likes the idea that everyone might be working from similar inspiration but every interpretation will be completely different. He enjoys the challenge of doing things he wouldn't normally do. Of working in many mediums and styles, he's been told, "You have to focus on one thing." Schwabe refutes this and pursues what he finds the most intriguing at any given time.



"Irish Spring" by Jerry Schwabe. Watercolor on paper. Courtesy of the artist.



"Fresh Pond" by Jerry Schwabe. Acrylic on Canvas, 48 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Teri Kennedy, the curator for the Springs Invitational, explained that she loved Lenox since she first saw the sculpture years ago. "When I accepted the invitation to curate, there were a small number of works I knew I wanted in the show—work that I carry in my own 'mental gallery'. Lenox was one of these pieces."



"Lenox" by Jerry Schwabe. Bronze. Courtesy of the artist.

As for the horse who inspired the sculpture, Lenox went on to live a long life and enjoyed retirement on the East End.

“Horses are magnificent creatures,” said Schwabe, adding that they’re smart and sensitive. For Sansone, the bronze sculpture of Lenox is her husband’s best work, she said. They both agree: the sculpture is truly a work of love.

Jerry Schwabe is an award-winning artist based in East Hampton, N.Y. His art has been exhibited nationally and his work is in private collections in the United States and Europe. In The Hamptons, his work has been exhibited at Guild Hall, the former Siena Spirituality Center in Water Mill, Quogue Library Gallery, Surface Library Gallery, Ashawagh Hall and others.

More of his art can be viewed at his website by visiting www.jerryschwabe.com. For a recent story on his art, visit “Quiet Beauty Portrayed by Jerry Schwabe in Landscape & Figuration” by Pat Rogers.

The 2017 Springs Invitational Art Exhibition presents art by around 114 artists with work selected by Invitational curator Teri Kennedy. The show will be on view from August 4 to 20, 2017 at Ashawagh Hall in East Hampton, N.Y. Presented by the Springs Improvement Society (SIS), the exhibition is a benefit for SIS which maintains and manages Ashawagh all.

The “Springs Invitational Art Stories Series” was arranged by Teri Kennedy to reveal the stories behind some of the art on view, presented from the point of view of the exhibiting artist or artists. To read the series introduction for the Springs Invitational Art Stories, [click here](#).

BASIC FACTS: The Springs Invitational will be held August 4 to 20, 2017 at Ashawagh Hall. The Curator’s Tour of the Invitational takes place on Sunday, August 13 from 11 a.m. to noon. Ashawagh Hall is located at 780 Springs Fireplace Rd, East Hampton, NY 11937. www.ashawagh-hall.org.

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