“I draw most of the subject matter from humankind, conveying their moods, feelings and anxieties to the viewer without prejudice or sentimentality, portraying people of all ranks and ages in their environment, depicting their activities at work and play.”

- Hella Bailin

Hella Bailin Visceral Impressions

Chosen from an archive of more than two thousand oil paintings, watercolors and drawings, this is the first comprehensive exhibition of Hella Bailin's artwork since her passing in 2006. Held at the Kean University Art Gallery from February 7, 2007 to March 9, 2007, it is indeed the first time her artwork is being shown without her personal input. One can imagine the transformation as these paintings now have to live on their own. The artist no longer can influence the way her work is perceived. It is the object or painting that causes us to respond. To Hella Bailin's credit, the work is now free to speak for itself and it is a privilege to begin the dialog with this exhibition.

As curator, I had a very unusual opportunity to reconsider Hella Bailin's personal collection of works created over a lifetime. Additionally, I had to consider the many pieces that were sold, given away or perhaps lost and even destroyed in an intensifying process as well. When choosing this show, I had to be fully engaged, perhaps connecting with works that may have been neglected by others. I will never know which pieces were the favorites, which pieces theough might not or which pieces were made in the harsh moments when the artist created out of overwhelming stress or tests that—choosing among them—may provide the most potent force in our lives. As the artist said of herself—"Influenced by my surroundings, I draw most of the subject matter from humankind, conveying their moods, feelings and anxieties to the viewer without prejudice or sentimentality, portraying people of all ranks and ages in their environment, depicting their activities at work and play."

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Bailin exhibited her work extensively in the region winning over 100 awards. She showed many times in New York City at the National Academy of Design, the National Arts Club, and the Lee Center. Bailin was a member of many organizations including the National Association of Women Artists, the Australian Artists, the American Mural Society, and the Royal Society of America. In addition, her work has been included in many exhibitions throughout New Jersey including the State Museum in Trenton, the Morris Museum, the Monmouth Museum and the Montclair Art Museum. Hella Bailin also applied her artistic skills to the illustration of children's books, and was known for teaching drawing and painting classes and leading workshops. For most of her life the Hella Bailin lived in the region—attending the region’s events, enjoying the region’s culture, and being part of the region. Her influence was felt in the day to day life as people smile and get at the many members of her name, which is a testament to the impact of her work. Today the Hella Bailin estate is a site of pride for the area, and the community it serves.

I want to thank the Bailin family for making this exhibition possible. Son Michael, and daughter, Bobbi, generously opened their personal space and made 39 works in the exhibition available to us for the show. Sarah Bailin, granddaughter, whose many months of organizing, cataloging, photographing and presenting the family collection represent an amazing effort. Many thanks to the President of Kean University, Dr. Dawood Farahi, the Provost, Dr. Vinton Thomson and the Dean of the School of Visual and Performing Arts, Dr. Carole Shaffer-Koros. We appreciate their support for the growing exhibition program and the opportunity to investigate her work and career of Hella Bailin.

Professor Neil Tetkowski
Director of University Galleries

Cover:
People, c. 1983, Watercolor 15” x 23”

Balconies
date unknown Watercolor 11” x 8”
Hella Bailin
Arc of an Artist

Hella Bailin's life (1915-2006) spanned major periods of American art history. Through the modernist movement in the 1920s, to the realism and social realism in the 1930s, Bailin's art absorbed the influence of these modern movements and captured unique imagery.

Born in Germany, Bailin studied at the Rheinische Kunstakademie in Dusseldorf, Germany before emigrating to the United States in 1937. Bailin trained under John Grabach at the Newark Museum School of Fine and Industrial Art as well as Bernard Gouster at the Morristown Art Center (1938-1940).

As a teacher of painting and drawing, Bailin became a mentor to generations of artists. Her teaching methods were passed on to the knowledge of thousands of students over her lifetime, and her influence still extends to the present day through her students and the teachers they have taught.

In speaking of her art, Bailin said, “I am considered an expressionist painter — I believe in the feeling moments of people and I try to express it in my paintings.”

Bailin trained at the Art Academy in Berlin (1933-36). Leaving Nazi Germany in 1937, she immigrated to the United States. In New Jersey, Bailin trained at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Students League in New York. After settling in New York City, her expressionist vision is enriched by her contact with the great masters of modernism. In 1940, Bailin moved to California and began a period of work in the traditional easel painting style of Paul Cézanne (1839-1906). High-keyed hues and swift brushstrokes characterize her art, which is rooted in the tradition of 19th-century French Impressionism. At a distance, as just one part of the composition, drawing from Cézanne's use of passage — objects in the light of day transform into an infinite array of shapes and colors, the building takes on an element of portraiture of the brushstroke belies the subject matter. Through the use of shape and color, the building takes on an element of portraiture.

Bailin's work forms a record of the transformation in the perception and use of color. Bailin's paintings of Greece — winding back alleys, arcades, and apartments. Complimentary, keyed-up colors, vivid shadows, and a glaring light infuse the paintings with the sensual recitation of visual poetry. Bailin gives us a new sense of the world of relentless motion and energy that is constantly in flux. The forms and figures are heightened by intense orange strokes, and to Bailin she translates those far-reaching experiences into art. Bailin achieves a consistent theme of light and atmosphere, adding an element of meditation on unbounded joy and liberation from a site-specific place to this neutral, unbounded space — much like the Dylan Thomas poem “The Road Not Taken” (1916).

Bailin sought out a variety of different subjects on her annual retreat to the Greek island of Monemvasia. She found subjects that are the hallmark of watercolor. By stepping away from the grid of the phone booths and the traditional landscape of the American cityscape, Bailin confronts the viewer with five subjects that are the hallmark of watercolor.

There is the sense of joy in the clarity of light that extends to the afflicted watercolorists — forcing a break from the grid and the formal landscape of the American cityscape. Bailin's work is an example of a form of painting that is rooted in the tradition of Impressionism, which is defined by the use of light and atmosphere, and the spontaneous, gestural quality of brushwork.

A similar impressionist style is found in several paintings of a watercolor series titled “Telephone Booths,” begun in 1983. One painting from that series is titled “Telephone Booths” (1997). In this picture the sculptures are perched on a bridge, adding the element of visual poetry. As a teacher of painting and drawing, Bailin was noted for her creative use of line and form. Her art is characterized by its ephemeral qualities frozen into a single moment in time. The influence of Grabach's style and color is present in Bailin's work forms a record of the transformation in the perception and use of color. Bailin's paintings of Greece — winding back alleys, arcades, and apartments. Complimentary, keyed-up colors, vivid shadows, and a glaring light infuse the paintings with the sensual recitation of visual poetry. Bailin gives us a new sense of the world of relentless motion and energy that is constantly in flux. The forms and figures are heightened by intense orange strokes, and to Bailin she translates those far-reaching experiences into art. Bailin achieves a consistent theme of light and atmosphere, adding an element of meditation on unbounded joy and liberation from a site-specific place to this neutral, unbounded space — much like the Dylan Thomas poem “The Road Not Taken” (1916).

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