



II Maestro!

WORKS BY MORTON LEVIN A CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION



June 9, 2023 through December 13, 2023 Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art

Cover Image: *Double Portrait*, 2005. Oil on canvas, 28 3/4 x 40 1/4 inches

Inside Front Cover Image: The Professions: The Philosopher, 1968. Etching (detail) **Opposite:** Musician with Violin (from Musicians triptych), 1982. Oil, 48 x 35 ¾ inches

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Published by The Square, Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art

ISBN: 979-8-218-21646-7

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Curated by Nicole Maria Evans, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art in collaboration with Alanna Zrimsek, adored wife of Morton Levin

Catalogue Design by Eric Heidle

Artwork Photography and Permissions by Alana Zrimsek

Film, A Keen Observer (2023) by Apo W. Bazidi, Film Director and Social Justice Documentary Filmmaker, Founder & CEO of Burn A Light Productions; with Alanna Zrimsek, Executive Producer

Printed By PrintingCenterUSA 117 9th St N, Great Falls, Montana 59401

This publication is made possible by the Montana Arts Council, a state agency funded by the State of Montana, National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the human endeavor, and National Endowment for the Arts. Special support from an anonymous donor. Added funding is provided by museum members and the citizens of Cascade County, and generous support from Davidson Family Foundation, Horizon Credit Union, and D.A. Davidson.

Not all works featured in this exhibition are included in this catalogue. For a complete list contact the museum's Curatorial Department. For a catalogue raisonne of Morton Levin's work please see Morton Levin: Graphic Arts [1939-2012]; Morton Levin: Drawings [1939-2014]; and A Fantasy of Beasts Revealed in Great Art: What is Illusory is Made Real. All by Morton Levin. All published by Egret Books, San Francisco. For more information about Morton Levin's work please email at azrimsek@att.net or visit www.AskART.com



FOREWORD

Sarah Justice, Executive Director of Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art

Over two years ago a vibrant, interesting, and beautiful woman with art feelers and great energy walked into my office and conjoined art studio within the museum. I sat at my computer working while listening to a voice filling the space in my studio. After looking around she walked into my office, smiled, and sat down in a red chair across from my desk. A lively conversation started where we introduced ourselves to each other. It was joyful learning about one another. I believe that she became a member and patron of the museum that day. A friendship with Alanna Zrimsek began the moment we met, as did her support for the museum. From that point forward she brought her knowledge, exposure to great art, and ideas into our lives.

Alanna Zrimsek is an artist, businesswoman, advocate, and wife of her late husband Morton Levin. Alanna invited Nicole Maria Evans, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections and I to her home in Butte, Montana in the Spring of 2021. We stayed in her home for two days learning more about her late husband who was the great Morton Levin. Alanna is a fabulous host with great style. We looked at hundreds of works of art by her husband. With delight we came to discover a master artist, who was a painter and printmaker. We listened to countless stories of her relationship of love and life with Morton. We were lucky to be introduced to the great depth and breadth of Morton Levin's work.

The time together was impactful and meaningful. We had found treasure, a person who lived his art, loved art and life, and was very passionate about what he made and why. He loved life, his wife, beauty, his children, students, romance, and women. He was not afraid to depict pain and tragedy. Levin was destined to create great things and he did. He was a teacher and a mentor whose students.

still to this day, speak of how he influenced their art careers and lives. Levine was a profound and prolific artist.

Alanna is the historiographer of Morton's life; she provided the details and touching stories behind their love story together and the artwork he created over the years. Her account of their shared life, and the story behind the art he created can be read in this exhibition catalogue. Alanna and Levin's family began the process of archiving and preserving his life's work for over 90 years. Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art's Curator of Exhibition and Collections, Nicole Maria Evans, worked closely and thoughtfully with Alanna over the last two years to produce the exhibition, and the result is a beautiful presentation with the highest aesthetic presence with historic content. The collection of work is remarkable.

Audiences relate to his work because of its representational style and subject matter. They are drawn to his skill, use of color, and honest imagery which makes this exhibition speak to so many people. Pieces depict, pain, love, life, death, beauty, war, aging, self-reflection, peace, and harmony. Because of this, viewers have an opportunity to walk through life as it was seen and experienced by Levin since he was a child in the 1930's until today.

Please enjoy and take your time with Il Maestro: Morton Levine A Centennial Celebration, it is our pleasure to present this great artist and his work to you.

INTRODUCTION

Il Maestro!

Works by Morton Levin, A Centennial Celebration

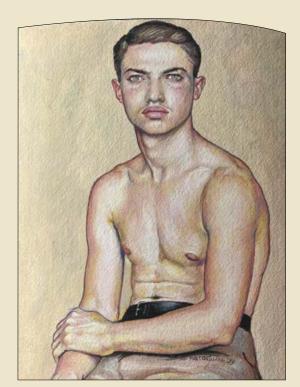
By Nicole Maria Evans, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections

Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art presents a celebratory exhibition, *Il Maestro*, *Works* by Morton Levin, A Centennial Celebration, June 9, 2023 through December 13, 2023. This unique exhibition features the work of whose passion and unbending desire for art making and mastery led him on an intriguing life journey touched by the effects of war, love, family, life and teaching. This retrospective of Levin's work is meant to mark 100 years of Levin's life and is the first of its kind in a museum setting. The intent is to draw attention to the diversity of styles, as well as the profound understanding of artistic techniques in Levin's career as an artist. The exhibition highlights a special selection of the artist's body of work beginning in the 1930s through 2005, while focusing on master works within his vast artistic repertoire.

Levin was born in 1923 into an intellectual and creative family with immigrant Jewish grandparents. He was deemed a child prodigy by age 9, and his parents who raised him in the bustling New York City borough of the Bronx, supported his efforts to achieve his goals as an artist. He developed artistically during a tumultuous period in world history. Levin lived through the Great Depression, gained educational opportunities that likely filtered funding through the Works Progress Administration (WPA), fought in World War

II and survived, experienced the fervor of modernism in Europe and the United States, and received an education in the arts post WWII through a G.I. Bill—also known as the Service Men's Readjustment Act of 1944. Morton Levin (1923-2020), a master artist With access to education, a passion for art, and a means to live, Morton Levin created art, lived art, and loved through art.

> Morton Levin's work is contemporary but recognized at its core for his skill and mastery of the classical human form. Levin's art education was profound, he studied painting with French Cubist painter Andre Lhote, sculpture with Ossip Zadkine a Belarusian-born French Cubist artist, etching with Stanley William Hayter a celebrated English Abstract Expressionist and Surrealist master printmaker, etching with Federico Castellon a Spanish American Surrealist painter, lithography at the Pratt Institute, and received his bachelor's degree in education from CUNY, City University of New York. Though his post WWII artistic contemporaries in the United States were delving into abstract expressionism, minimalism, and conceptualism, Levin was a devotee of the human figure. Each form in his work recalls the physical proportions visible in the Greek canon, while also holding true to foundational knowledge of academic study rooted in Renaissance humanism. However, these classically established forms are not eternally suspended in the past as their arrangements



Artist As a Young Man Self-Portait, 1939. Gouache on board 19.75 x 15 inches

time and reference time spent working with other artists. Like the history of art changes and private collections in the United States and with the tempestuous nature of politics, abroad. Publications include Morton Levin: economics, war, and contemporary thought Graphic Arts [1939-2012]; Morton Levin: or theory, so does the nature and form of Levin's work. Experimentation of materials, Beasts Revealed in Great Art: What is Illusory techniques, and styles mingle with in-depth expertise of foundational knowledge in art making. His elaborate shapes and figures The exhibition space is arranged in such a way appear to undulate in the motion of a to introduce visitors to Levin's joy for life and true breath of life. Men, women, and beast artistic spirit via various forms of art making entangled in provocative moments that speak over the years. Early works, war drawings, to classical mythology and biblical history but paintings, prints, etchings, woodcuts, and hold contemporary appeal.

Levin relocated to San Francisco in 1971 where of his life, family and friends also serve as he pursued a career as an artist, teacher, and gallerist. It was at his workshop and gallery that Levin continued his lifelong passion of A documentary film about Morton Levin, practicing art and teaching the foundations titled A Keen Observer, plays in the gallery of art to students and followers of his method.

Morton Levin Graphics Workshop and coowner of Winston Gallery in San Francisco, California. Levin's brother John Levin founded the gallery and later co-owned it with him from 1971-1996. Morton Levin then co-owned Winston Gallery with wife and partner Alanna Zrimsek from 1996 until 2019.

Levin's work is included in the permanent collections of the San Francisco Fine Arts Museums—Legion of Honor and The de Young; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut; Rochester Institute of Technology, New York; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City; Ogunquit Museum of American Art, Maine; Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California; San Diego Museum of Art, California; Milwaukee Art Museum, Wisconsin; New York Public Library; the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; The National Library of are mutable and change with the passing of Medicine, Maryland, Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, and many important public Drawings [1939-2014]; and A Fantasy of is Made Real, all published by Egret Books.

engravings fill the space. Didactic materials accompany the works on exhibit and images discussion points to interconnect familial and love relationships with his artistic life. space giving life to Morton's words and He was the Founder and Director of the experiences as you view the works on exhibit.

Thank you to Alanna Zrimsek and community of Great Falls, Montana. her cohort of associates who are It is because of her urgency, zest for dedicated to supporting the life work life, and deep love for Morton that of Morton Levin and the creation of this exhibition *II Maestro! Works* By Morton Levin, A Centennial Celebration, at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art. It is through their involved support, Alanna's vision, and combined memories of Morton Levin that his work is made available to us in this exciting retrospective of his life's work. Alanna gives great thanks to: The Levin Family—Martha, Louis, John and Estelle, Marianne, Philip and Lisa Oransoff, Juliette, Kevin Maraza, Josh Moss; Friends and Family—Matthew Berglund, Miyuki Hasegawa, Linda K Borton, Linda C Welsh, Christopher Borton, Warren Hill, Doug Zody, Marvin Webb, Kevin McCormick, Apo Bazidi and Burn A Light Productions Team.

We at the museum give gratitude to Morton Levin for promising the entirety of his life to the arts. For bringing his passion, skill, knowledge, and inventiveness to the world through his inspired and masterful works of art. We also thank him for his joie de vivre, which is made evident, not only in the art he created, but in the life he formed with Alanna, the friendships he made with his dedicated students at The Morton Levin Graphics Workshop, and the unique connections made with visitors at Winston Gallery who were curious enough to have a genuine art filled experience or conversation with Il Maestro.

It is with the kindest respect that we community driven event connects acknowledge Alanna Zrimsek for sharing Morton Levin's artistry with the military, military families, and Veterans.

this exhibition has come to fruition. As Morton's friend, lover and life partner, Alanna is the expert historian of Morton's life and work as an artist. She has coordinated this wonderful exhibition and collaborated with us at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art to make the exhibition a reality. We are more than grateful for her generosity and support of the arts and education here at The Square.

Praise must go to Sarah Justice, Executive Director of Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art for supporting all efforts made towards the transpiring of II Maestro! Works By Morton Levin, A Centennial Celebration. Her connection with Alanna began with art and continues today through friendship. Special gratitude to our Curator of Exhibitions and Collections, Nicole Maria Evans, for her enthusiastic collaboration and camaraderie with Alanna Zrimsek. Together they co-organized the installation and presentation of the exhibition in a way that best reflects Morton Levin's and Alanna's dedication to the arts. Evans' clever curatorial leadership also led to the development of the exhibition catalogue and schedule of events with related programming. Educational components related to this exhibition via Veteran's Art programming are made possible through the exceptional work put forward by Ellie Weber, Director of Education, This art learning with individuals in the The event aims to honor and improve the health and wellbeing of those who have dedicated their lives to the military for the greater good, for that our community is grateful. To all the museum team for their strength and determination to assist and support all aspects of the exhibition process, thank you to: Sara Johnson, Operations Manager; Danny Schaak, Facilities Manager; Natalie Woodson, Curatorial Assistant; Rob Kellenbeck, Education Assistant; Julie Easton, Director of Development; Marty Cappis, Bookkeeper; Brent Viste, Gift Shop Manager; and Krystina Theil, Gift Shop Assistant. It remains to be said that without the continued support of the Board of Director's exhibitions like this could not continue to take place at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, we are thankful.

Eric Heidle, designer, is the architect of this thoughtfully and creatively designed exhibition catalogue. Thank you, Eric, for your dedication to design and the arts in Montana, it is evident in your work and in your spirit. To our kind anonymous donor for your continued generous giving towards museum publications, because of this special sponsorship the museum can create educational materials that support the exhibitions and featured artists.

Exhibitions and programming presented by The Square are supported in part by the Montana Arts Council, a state agency funded by the State of Montana, National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the human endeavor, and National Endowment for the Arts. Additional funding is provided by museum members and the citizens of Cascade County, and generous support from Davidson Family Foundation, First Horizon Credit Union, and D.A. Davidson. Additional support from Kelly's Signs and Design, with special support from an anonymous donor.



Soldier leaning agaist ruins of an ancient castle built by Charlemagne in Westphalia Germany June 6 1945 Pen and Color Pencil, 7 x 5 inches





Narcissus, 1980. Woodcut 15 x 18 inches (22 x 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches Framed)

A Reflective Portrait of Life with Morton Levin Alanna Zrimsek and Morton Levin working in their San Francisco gallery.

By Alanna Zrimsek

My life with Morton was varied as we were He had a phenomenal memory, fun sense of student, model, friend, lover, wife, gallery of our time together. We lived a simple life rich with love, art, imagination and the joys of creating, sharing and learning.

Morton was a phenomenal artist, teacher and mentor. I never tired of watching him draw, paint or create etchings or woodcuts. He had such a natural facility for drawing and an ease of expression. I enjoyed helping him with simple tasks in the studio and Even though there was a significant age graphics workshop.

He had endless patience for artwork and was extremely disciplined and focused.

He was a generous teacher if one was open to learning. He believed in standards and working to create the best possible work lived fully just shy of his 97th birthday. One and was not easily satisfied. He was a tough critic. He had little patience for wasting time life force in his art. and was a quick judge of character. He was direct, honest and natural. He was happy to help others if they were serious. He liked and lived the quote from the Bible, "Jacob It is important to have this exhibit to was a plain man, dwelling in tents." He lived work and work ethic.

We both loved art, poetry, literature, nature, animals, music, theater and making art.

He elevated my life with his talent, discipline, experience, knowledge, imagination and playful love of life. His intellectual curiosity was limitless and he took joy in sharing his discoveries, thoughts, observations and passion.

together 42 years (1978-2020). I was his humor and was a great storyteller. He loved to recite and share favorite poems, speeches partner and book publisher. We spent most and quotes. It was always exciting to see his latest creations and discuss the work. We valued each other's opinions, critiques and honest responses.

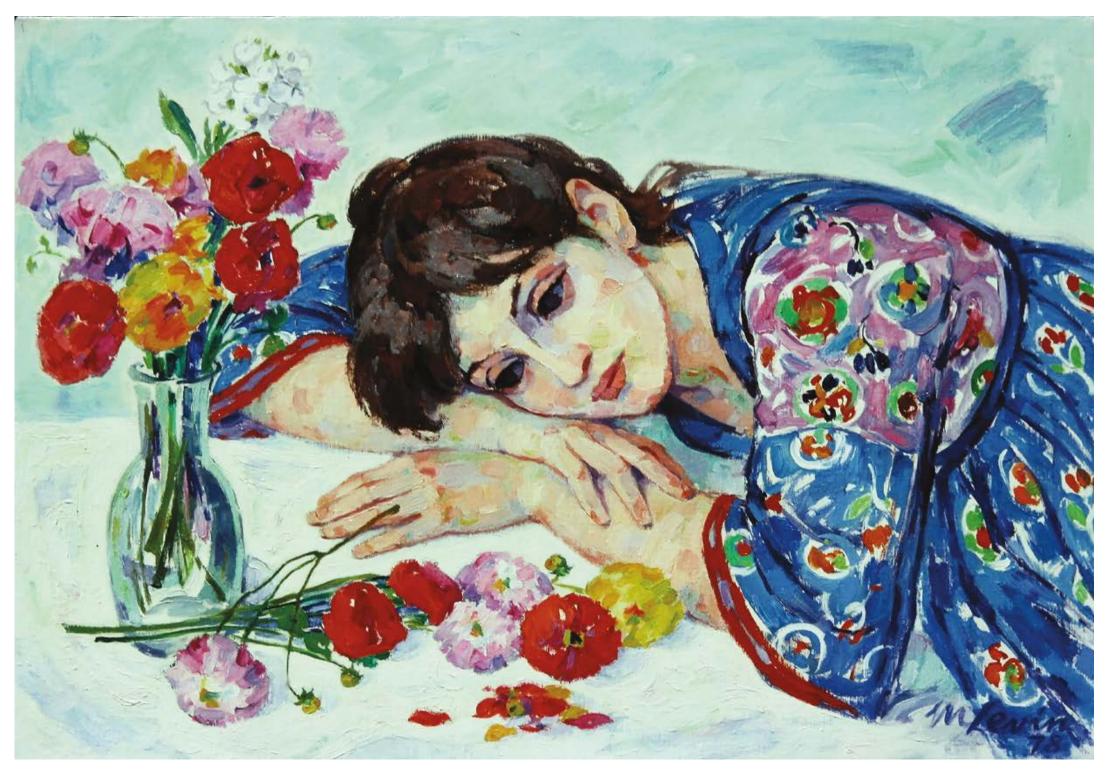
> His high standards and gifts inspired me to see more and work harder. He was also a good writer and editor and gave me valuable critiques of my written works.

difference between us (31 years) we grew in many ways together. We were a good balance, support and inspiration for each other. It is hard to believe he is really gone as he had such a strong presence and life force. He survived the Normandy Invasion as a young Army infantry soldier in WWII and can see and feel his intelligence, love and

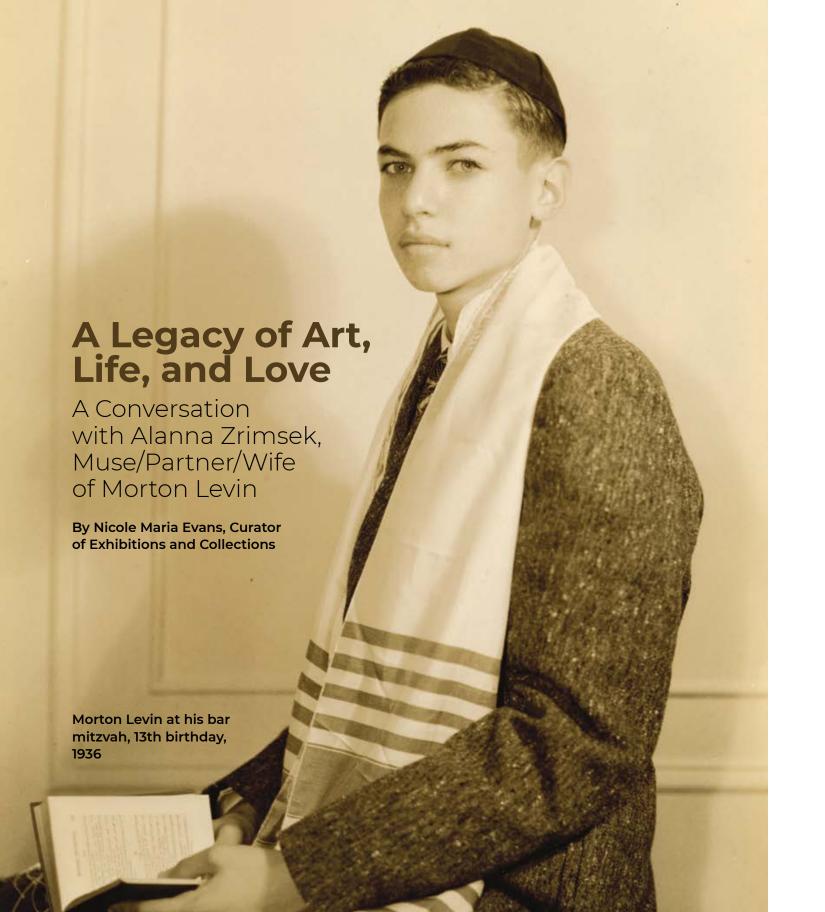
This year is the 100th anniversary of his birth.

showcase and share an overview of his life's simply his whole life and was true to his work. His art is a celebration of beauty, truth, ideas, wisdom, imagination and shows the importance of mastering drawing, painting and printmaking techniques to successfully use the power of form, design, color and composition in visual expression.

> As you view these works and the film, listen and adhere to Morton's words, "Artists are keen observers." May you see and experience his passion, insights and enjoy the work.



Girl with Dahlias 1978. Oil on canvas, 22.75 x 32.75 inches



Nicole Evans: Alanna, tell me a bit about did the covers for the school's art magazine Morton. Where can you begin?

Alanna Zrimsek: Morton Levin was a professional artist, educator, co-founder and co-owner of Winston Gallery in San Francisco, CA and Founder/Director/Maestro/Teacher Workshop (MLGW) in San Francisco, CA. City in The Bronx (one of the five boroughs of NYC). He was the second born and had an elder sister and vounger brother. His grandparents were Jewish immigrants, and his parents, aunts and uncles were all firstgeneration Americans.

NE: This exhibition, *II Maestro: Work by* Morton Levin. a Centennial Celebration. showcases highlights from a lifetime of NE: It seems to me that art was an integral artwork. His work has great visual impact and demonstrates true skill. How did he important life experiences he encountered. develop his passion for art?

He began seriously drawing at the age of 4 years. He knew he was an artist when he was 5 years old. He just loved to draw. He was encouraged and supported by family, relatives, and teachers in school and later by a soldier. He was sent to England as an other artists and professors. His family was of humble means, hard-working, artistic, in the Normandy Invasion (D-Day). His best and cultured.

system, that allowed him to grow as an artist. What life experiences do you think survival quilt because his friend was inspired impacted his development as an artist?

Morton went to the largest high school in America, James Monroe High School, The brightest academically gifted students from all over New York City attended this school. It jacket pocket and a sketchbook and some had a wonderful art department run by two poems in his pack. He memorized many professors that were artists. Max Wilkes and Doris Rosenthal. These two artists guided and mentored Morton and a few others. Morton was singled out for prizes and often

which showcased the best student visual art and poetry.

During the summer of his last year of high school, Morton and his best friend volunteered for a new program to help of the Morton Levin Graphics Art Workshop farmers in the country farms as men were being drafted for WWII. This was the Land He was born in 1923 and raised in New York Corps program envisioned and promoted by journalist Dorothy Thompson. Morton spent the summer working on a farm in Vermont where he had a favorite cow named Ruth and learned to cut and bale hay, care for goats and horses, hoe and fill a grain silo and take goods to market. He loved helping on the farm and made a few drawings and prints of his experience.

> part of life for Morton, the very expression of Fully integrated into his young life. Did that change after high school?

AZ: After high school graduation he and his best friend enlisted in the Army and started college. He was called to serve and became infantry man to train for and participated friend was sent to Europe as a replacement and died shortly thereafter. This deeply **NE:** I can see that he had a great support affected Morton and was a sad loss and memory for him all his life. He had some by him to seek combat duty. The war was one of his biggest life influences and he was grateful and felt lucky to have survived. He made sketches across Europe as he had 3 colored pencils, a pen and a Bible in his poems on guard duty which he recited his entire life. He said this practice helped to keep him awake and alert late at night when he was tired.



Preparatory Drawing for print (Brother John Levin,) 1939

upon his return?

AZ: When he returned, he went back to college. Of the things he created when he Living and creating in the East Village in returned were five War lithographs. The the 1960's was a creative and interesting lithographs were exhibited in New York time of social change. He studied etching City at a gallery show featuring the work of with Federico Castellón and lithography at

the famous Mexican artist Orozco. This was an honor and Morton's first significant showing and he received a good review from Emily Genauer a then famous New York art critic. After graduation he soon went to Paris to study art and paint.

He had the GI bill which enabled him to live and participate in the artists' life of Paris in the 1950s. He studied painting with André L'Hote a known cubist, etching with William Stanley Hayter at Atelier 17, sculpture with Ossip Zadkine and had his first one man show at Gallerie Breteau. He met and enjoyed the friendship, work and discussions of other artists and Parisian life. He met and later married a French woman, and they had a baby girl.

NE: What a rich history of important opportunities to grow as an artist in France. Incredible. Alanna, you have been his muse/ partner/and wife for 45 years, and I know you lived in San Francisco all these years. How did life change

for Morton after his first marriage?

AZ: They moved to the United States so NE: The tragedy of WWII resulted in intense Morton could support them, and he found devastation. You also mentioned the guilt work in Advertising/Commercial Art Studios. over the loss of his dear friend and the role He later taught art and did freelance work art played in keeping himself well during and worked for Pantone when they were war times. What was his life like for him developing their famous color system. But their marriage ended, and he moved to Manhattan's East Village.

The Pratt Institute for the Arts. He then designed and had his own press made. He showed his work at galleries and in the Greenwich Village Art Shows.

NE:What I am noticing is that despite life's upsets and circumstances Morton was unyielding in his passion and his pursuit of the arts. When did you meet Morton? What was that like?

AZ: You are right that Morton was devoted to creating art and was a diligent, imaginative, and prolific artist. He was like that from the time he began to draw and paint.

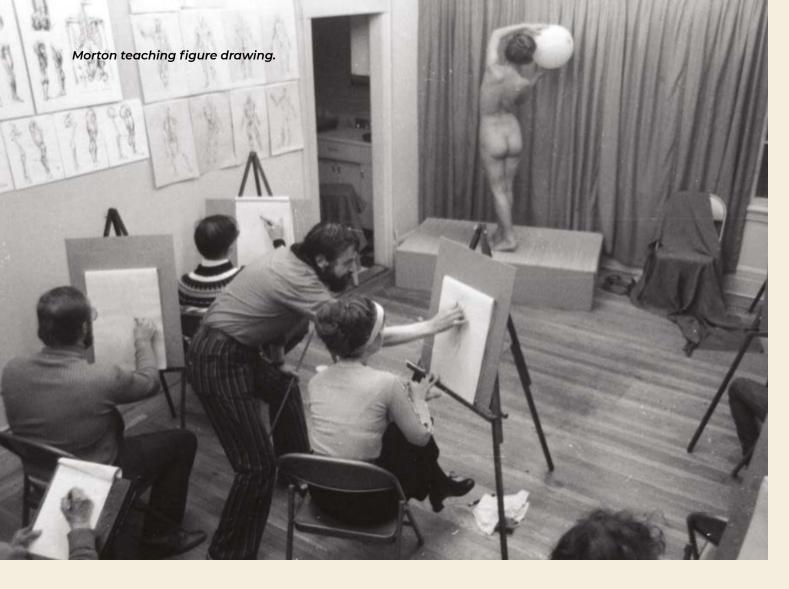
In 1971 he moved to San Francisco and with his brother co-founded and co-owned Winston Gallery which exclusively exhibited and sold his work. He continued his work as a fine artist and teacher. He founded and taught at his Morton Levin Graphics Art Workshop where in 1978 he met me, his future second wife who studied with him and posed for him. We lived simply and worked

together, and I also had an outside job. Boy with Flute (Brother John Levin), 1939. He taught life drawing, anatomy, painting **Print 14 x 11 inches** and printmaking classes until 1989 at his Morton Levin Graphics Workshop. We disciplined and had endless patience for his Gallery from 1996-2019.

in visual form. Drawing, painting and printmaking made him happy. He often NE: What inspired Morton to continue to whistled while he worked and also create and teach all these years with such talked to himself. He was extremely dedication?



were together for 14 years and married work. He was a master at drawing, painting, in 1992. I later founded Egret Books and etching, engraving, woodcuts and wood together we published his artist books engraving, silk screening, lithography, and other works. We co-owned Winston mono printing and letter press. He also did limited work in sculpture, commercial design and display, wood carving and He loved and needed to express himself made silver and copper jewelry.



paint, and use graphic arts as it was his joy and passion.

Good draftsmanship and design, and skillful use of different media and materials made his work original. I think his use of invented and his love of women, the human figure, music, animals, the relationship of men and women, procreation, emotion and reason, nature, beauty, the psyche, mythology, social injustice and his experiences and the forces of good and evil all made his work personal

AZ: Passion, Ideas, Observations and Life... A and his choice of medium to best express his need to express himself. He loved to draw, subject. He often developed a series from an initial work, like Women of the Bible, Patriarchs and Prophets, The Professions, Erotic Series, Anti-Clerical Series, Fantasy of Beasts in Great Art Drawings, Life Cycle Etchings etc.

tools and invented monsters in his work. He felt it was his purpose, passion, joy, an endless challenge and gift to be respected and honored. Art and art making, art study and art appreciation and the sharing and teaching of art was his heart, soul and life force. Creating was like breathing for him...It was a joy and necessity.

NE: Tell me about his process, where did he **AZ:** The 2023 Paris Gibson Square Museum start from and how did he work?

AZ: He started work by drawing and he anniversary of his birth and a memorial researched and pushed himself to explore show as he died in 2020. Morton's work is and develop ideas and images beyond his in museums and private collections. He initial ideas and inspirations and made has always been more of an artist's artist as

thumbnails. A work could take months, weeks, days, years or sometimes could be executed in an hour or two or a life or line drawing or small watercolor in minutes... Whatever he did he used all of his talent, experience, ability/skill, intellect, emotion and his hand and eye coordination was first rate. He had a keen trained eye, deep understanding of anatomy, design, the science and use of color and materials and the principles of art, perspective, form and light.

He worked mostly alone or in relationship with a model material objects. He did not wait for

inspiration though he had more ideas than Morton with The Rape of the Luna Moth. time and was inspired by what he observed, went to the studio everyday except Sunday. If he had a specific idea he did drawings and thumbnails to further explore and expand show and sell his work. his ideas and vision and then designed his final work before executing unless he was I believe it is important to honor quality painting or drawing from life in situ with a figurative modern/contemporary work that model, still life or self-portrait. He did a few adheres to and builds on the standards and works with two or three models but that disciplines exhibited throughout the great was rare. He did not welcome distraction history of world art. Morton was a dedicated while working. Sundays were mostly a day and gifted artist who devoted his life to of recreation, exploration, family/friend time adding his vision and creations to our world. but he almost always had his sketchbook He captured the times as a modern creator, or watercolors with him for a quick sketch, visionary and unique voice and a spirit study or painting outside. He loved the that honored the history, humanity and creative process and to work.

Morton's work?

of Art retrospective of his work and is his first solo museum show. It is also the 100th



learned and felt. He was very disciplined and he was a figurative artist his whole career and from 1971 forward he was dedicated to working and solely relied on the gallery to

principles of great art and added signature work to that history. He created inspired and NE: What does it mean to continue to exhibit inspiring beautiful works of art that should be shared and appreciated.

Unforgettable Lessons of a Lifetime

By Matthew Berglund

Being with the Maestro in his studio is one of my life's greatest treasures.



Morton Levin and Matthew Berglund.

My relationship with the artist began after walking into his gallery on Sutter Street in San Francisco in the 1990s. The narrow space of 7ft was covered from floor to ceiling with rich colored paintings like stained glass and prints of velvet black ink. It was a mosaic of mastery and passion.

Morton emerged from behind a screen at the back of the gallery where it was dark except for a drafting lamp aimed at with poignant observation, from the epic to a worktable engulfed in tools. I remember it like a theater spotlight—on center stage always a sketch, a gravure plate, or book of with years of use. And we always reflected great art.

twenty. There was so much to learn from him reverence and humility.

and the content of that space. Fortunately, my naive inquiries and enthusiasm earned me a return visit. The master no longer held workshops in life drawing and printmaking but was generous with tutelage and frank with critique. We would meet for lunch and a séance, review my student work, and carry on with diverse topics of art and life. Mentorship grew to friendship, and over the years, to paternal love. Morton would encourage me to go to Chicago for architecture school, attend my graduation with Alanna, follow my career with vigilance, and receive my newborns into his 95-yearold hands.

Time in the studio amidst decades of his work was potent for me. I'm grateful he shared so much—it was his precious time to be otherwise given to creative toil. Morton would say life is short, but a life well spent at hard work on what you love is a long life.

Lessons culminated with a diversion into memory, revelation of craftsmanship, or veneration of the masters. We might search for un-exhibited works that narrated events from the artist's youth, the War, or years in Paris—Morton's recollections were filled the intimate. Or we might explore one of his many handmade tools or easels, burnished on the work and life of the great masters, who Morton never ceased to study and by The artist was in his seventies, and I was which he measured his own life and work in



Tribute to A Keen Observer

By Apo W. Bazidi

Film Director, Social Justice Documentary Filmmaker, Founder & CEO of Burn A Light Productions

As a filmmaker there are many stories that can inspire you. However, when you're telling a story of an artist who has the same passion and commitment it's a different feeling and responsibility. I wish I had met Morty more than briefly to get to know him personally. When I met with Alanna and heard about Morty's life achievements and dedication to his craft; it immediately sparked an excitement through my experiences as an artist and what also got my attention was his commitment to his art. He never stopped creating even when he was in the front lines in World War II. I am humbled to tell a story of an artist who lived through 10 decades against all the odds, yet never stopped believing in his vision and craft. I am very happy to share his story with his loved ones and the community to inspire other artists and people.



A KEEN OBSERVER

A Conversation with Morton Levin

The transcription below is from A Keen Observer, a Film by Apo Bazidi and Alanna Zrimsek, 2023. The original conversation occurred in 2007 during a Public Television Interview between Morton Levin and Lynn Ruth Miller. The show was titled What's Hot Between the Covers on Pacific Coast TV, a program that discussed newly released publications. In 2007, Morton released, A Fantasy of Beasts Revealed in Great Art: What Illusory is Made Real.

You know what I say?

That artists are keen observers. They look very carefully.

I knew I was an artist when I was five years old. I had a fever in my stomach to draw, and I began to draw, and people began to look at me, you know, teachers, friends, parents. "This kid is a prodigy, a genius!"

Then people ask me, "Well, what do you want to do for a living?". I said, I wanted to become an artist. Well, artists don't earn much money. I said, I don't give a damn. I love to draw. So I continued to draw. And the more I drew, the better I got. And then people began to encourage me.

we were cultured. And my father came from a family of eight brothers. So they were very interested in art, music.

My uncle took me to the Metropolitan Museum when I was about six or seven. I around with reproductions of the paintings. I had a, you know, a ridiculous ambition.



Morton with his mother, sister and brother.

I said, "Wow, these are great. You know, I'm going to do that". And one of my uncles said, "Well, maybe, you know, you can become one of the great artists."

"I'm going to become the greatest."

My father encouraged me and he bought me a little oil painting set when I was seven I came from a family that was pretty or eight. So I started smearing around with cultured, actually. We were very poor, but this stuff. And by the time I was nine, I did a marvelous painting.

I did a lot of copying of the Masters because I said to myself, in order to become as good as these guys, I better get more disciplined in my work and start. So I would copy them was only interested in the Masters, and so not with the idea that I'm going to do things I was exposed to it. And there were books just like them, but I want to master the craft.

Opposite: German Dead, War Drawing, by Morton Levin, 1944

One of my uncles was playing for the And we were so poor that my father lost his Philharmonic Orchestra in New York. He a bohemian because he knew artists in Greenwich Village. And so he introduced me to famous artists when I was about ten Well, I'm mostly self-taught, but I did go to years old.

But to get back to my grandfather, he was an artist. Because in those days, they didn't have color photographs. And my grandfather used to airbrush color on it. He had a big set 1942, I was 18 because when I was 18. I of oil paints. So he gave me his oil painting set. And I looked at it and I said, "Hey, I'm not going to use this stuff." He said, "Why not?" I said, "It's made in Germany. The Nazis!"

Morton's Childhood Bedroom, 1941. Charcoal on paper 20 x 14.5 inches

job. We were on sort of food stamps and we wasn't making much money, but he became got canned goods. You know, this was in the depths of the Depression.

> school. And when I was in high school, I was singled out as a prodigy. By the time I got into college, I spent a year there. And then Pearl Harbor happened.

> enlisted. And because I was an artist, they said, okay, we'll put you in camouflage division first. I took basic training and became a sharpshooter marksman. I had a good eye then. And so because they said, well, we need replacements in the infantry. So they sent me to the Infantry.





War-The Infantry, 1945. Lithograph, 12 x 9 inches



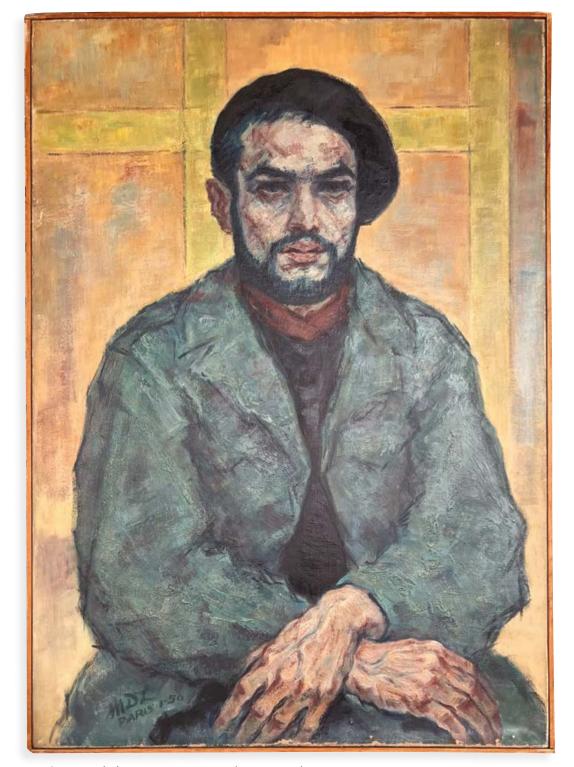
Page from Morton's war letters to his mother.

In 1943, they sent me over to England it. So, I was lucky. Very, very lucky. preparing for the invasion of France. And Weygand called the Battle of France is over...." It was a terrible time. But, you know, there were intervals where you just wait. You there were many casualties. know, you're not constantly in a battle.

to fold them up and put them in an envelope and send them home. I had about two or a Bible, although I wasn't that religious, but I had a Bible. I had two grenades hanging over

Churchill, my hero, said, "What General I was in the eighth Infantry Division and that Eighth Infantry Division had a 300% turnover, which means that there were that

We went back home. The first ones, because Yeah, well, I made a sketch as well. And I used they told us, well, you're going back home because you're going to go to Japan. Right after the atomic bomb dropped, and then three colored pencils and a fountain pen and about a couple of months later, I was deactivated, sent home. And so I did five lithographs.



Self-Portrait in France, 1950. Oil, 37 x 26 inches



Morton posing in front of his artwork.



Morton with his first wife and child.

of years because I wanted to finish my to Paris to paint. So that's where I studied her, I did a lot with her, so much so that she got pregnant and got a kid there. I said, "Oy." Went back to New York with a family.

I hung around in New York for a couple I was painting but I had to get money. So I said, well, I'll have to get a job in advertising. education. So I got my degree in the I made a portfolio. See, it was with all my University of New York. And then I went fine art drawings. You know I'm going to show them I could draw, but these guys, with André Lhote, which was one of the they would look at and say, "Yeah, but can big Cubist painters. I stayed there for three you do commercial art?" I said, "I'll tell you years. I got stuck with a woman there, a what I'll do. I'll work for you for a week. And beautiful French, gorgeous girl. I painted if you think I haven't earned anything in that week, don't pay me." Well, at the end of the week, they paid me. I didn't do that advertising too long, just for several years. And then I decided to teach.



Morton in his advertising studio in New York City.



Morton in France, 1950s.

better. So I taught life drawing anatomy, going to write. perspective, the principles of color, of light.

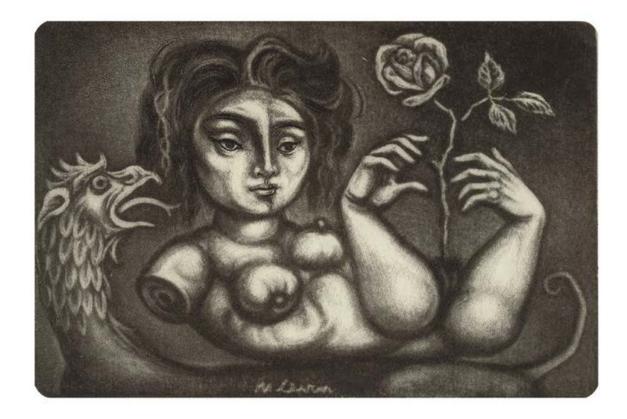
Well, today there are no standards anymore. disciplines. I taught the disciplines, which is the same thing as you have to learn If you're going You know what I say, artists are keen to be a writer, you have to learn grammar. observers, they look very carefully. They're not going to teach you to be a writer. If you don't have it in you to write, you're not going to write.

So I would teach art, which was much If you don't have it in you to write, you're not

In painting or in art you have to know the

Selected Works

Context by Alanna Zrimsek



Demeter, 1972Mezzotint etching, 3 x 4 ½ inches

The soft velvety inked beauty of this printed image comes from the technique of mezzotint which allows the artist to scrape and burnish an image to life after roughening the copper plate. The ink adheres to the different textures of the plate and the burnished surfaces are wiped clean and then the inked image transfers to the paper under the pressure of the printing press. This image of Demeter is an unusual and mystical interpretation of this mythical woman/goddess of agriculture and mother of Persephone. The darkness represents Winter and/or famine when Persephone must live in the Underworld and the blossoming rose represent new life on Earth in Spring and Summer the time when Persephone lives on Earth. I believe that Demeter's twisted body without legs with her arms reaching upward represents struggle and evolving transformation. The myths of Demeter describe her fight to save her daughter from Hades, her Earthly powers over feast or famine agriculture and her ability to maneuver on Earth and in the Underworld. She is also known as the leader of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The use of mezzotint adds to the surrealistic and mysterious power of the image.

The Professions (The full series appears on pages 44 and 45.)

Medicine, 1968 Etching, 8 7/8 x 11 3/4 inches

This series of etchings focuses on social criticism/commentary from the artist's perspective. These works express an honest, caustic, sympathetic and sometimes bawdy visual social commentary and criticism of the professions and professionals. As one examines the individual works one finds a wealth of imagery, perspectives and behaviors to ponder. The works explore their subject and subjects on many levels with intelligence, humor, psychological and societal depth in a signature style. Morton sold many prints of Physician to doctors who often commented that they saw medical colleagues that they considered malpractitioners in the work. Morton believed his etching Judge was his best in the series.

He was also gratified that Physician and an etching titled Medicine (not part of the series but a compliment to the genre) were purchased as part of The Department of Health and Human Services' (Washington,DC) collection and the whole series was purchased and exhibited by the owner of a film company in NYC as well as individual works that are included in various museums and collections. As many times as I've studied these works, I still see new things and I have been viewing and appreciating this series for 44 years. My two favorite works in the series are Judge and Cleric which both battle the effects of the sacred and profane.

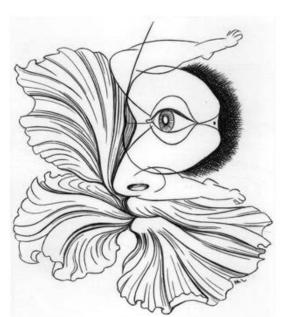


La Primavera, 1986

Etching, 10 x 8 inches

This etching is a celebration of life and the joys of dance, coupling and Spring expressed in line. The figures are half human. It is interesting that the female is half bird so she can fly and the male is half horse so he is tied to the Earth. They are new versions of mythological creatures that add to our visual lexicon. On a personal note, this work was inspired by a random day when Morton and I happened upon two papiermâché costumed people greeting people in Golden Gate Park. A man was dressed as a life-sized lobster and the woman was a unicorn. We stopped to compliment them, and the man's tail was detaching so I helped him fix it while the Unicorn invited Morton to dance with her.





Apple of His Eye, 1987

Engraving, 47/8 x 4 ¼ inches

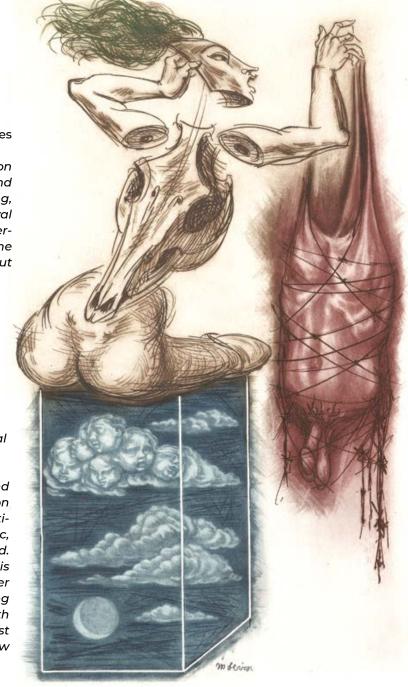
Apple of His Eye showcases Morton's imagination, understanding of anatomy and carving skill. The copper plate is exemplary. This image was created months after I had recovered from serious bouts of Iritis in one eye. Morton lovingly accompanied me to ophthalmology appointments for frequent eye injections to save my sight. This was not an easy procedure for him to witness. Ironically late in life, Morton received regular eye injections in one eye to save his sight from macular degeneration. I accompanied him and he gave his gifted and kind Retina Specialist a print of this engraving.

Flesh of the Mystery, 1973

Etching mezzotint, 13 3/4 x 7 5/8 inches

This colored etching is what Morton would call a Trouvé (found/find in French) as it is an interesting, provocative, deep, and rich portrayal of human/animal existence experienced and explored through the body and its flesh with and without bone. It is also an exploration of the mystical and mysterious aspects of creation as the flesh of life and the regeneration experience, we share and question. The male and female are expressed with physical and non-physical tension in relationship with each other in a surrealistic way that invites psychological questioning and provides a visceral, emotional and powerful experience.

The use of color, mezzotint and embossing add further dimension to the imagery and the multidimensional universal, cosmic, and physical mystery conveyed. The masterful draftsmanship is undeniable and adds to the power and beauty of the work. This etching inspired me to study etching with Morton and was one of the first works I saw in his gallery window display in 1978.





Double Portrait, 2005 Oil on canvas, 28 3/4 x 40 1/4 inches

This double portrait of Morton (the artist) and me Alanna (wife and muse) was not planned as a double portrait and so it is two separate canvases painted and framed together. Morton asked me to pose after he finished his portrait. It is an interesting work for many different reasons. He is in his 80s gazing out at the world with an experienced intensity, and I am in my 50s with a more reflective gaze. These different decades were both fertile and productive times for each of us. His color palette is softened but still vibrant with expressive brushwork. At the time of this portrait (2005) he was enjoying

having more time to paint after so many years mainly devoted to drawing and printmaking. He felt happy and free to get back to his beloved oil paints and easel. Because the work changed from a self-portrait to a double portrait he had the composition problem of the blank space behind the two heads. At first he solved this problem by adding a painting of a landscape which worked well but he wasn't satisfied with that idea. He finally decided to scrape out the landscape and added a version of his first oil painting of the horse and wagon with his father posing (done at age 9) so the double portrait became a partial family portrait and a timeline of youth and maturity with a bit of New York painted in San Francisco.



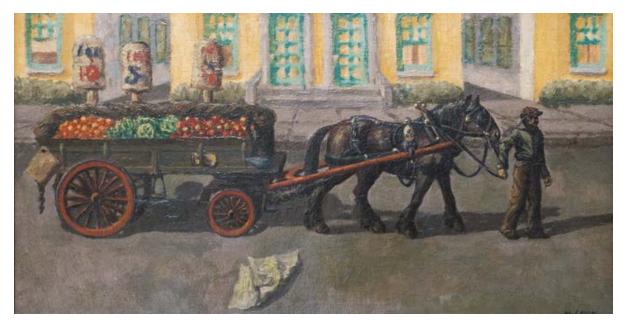
Girl with Dahlias, 1978

Oil on canvas, 22 3/4 x 32 3/4 inches

This painting is very personal for me as it is the first painting that I posed for. I was wearing an embroidered Afghani dress that I bought from a refugee in Paris in 1977. Morton had seen me wearing this dress to class and later asked me to pose for him in it. I had never modeled before so He had me pose for a shorter time and then I was nervous. He posed me sitting on the floor leaning on a cloth covered box serving as a table. He painted two watercolors of the pose. He also did a watercolor study of my hands. The next time I came to the studio he had a stretched canvas with a loose drawing of me and the table sketched on it and his oil paints and palette setup. I got into the pose and he began painting me only this time there was a vase with dahlias on the make-shift table. He painted for a couple of hours. He instructed me how to hold my pose

time I came to the studio he had watercolor studies of the flowers by his easel. The flowers were already loosely painted on the canvas so I posed as he continued painting me. He finished painting me and then scumbled the background in. The next time I came to studio the painting was almost complete.

about a week later he was ready to show me the final painting. It was a romantic work as he captured a dreamy mood in my gaze and the dress, flowers and background are beautifully painted with a harmony of Springtime colors. Morton gave me a framed watercolor of the vase of dahlias as a thank you gift for posing. At that time, we could not know that we would spend 42 years together. My first modeling experience and this painting of Girl with Dahlias led to an ongoing artist and model relationship and allowed me to stretch as needed. The next and a lasting love partnership and marriage.



Horse and Wagon, 1932Oil on Canvas Mounted on Panel
13 x 21 inches

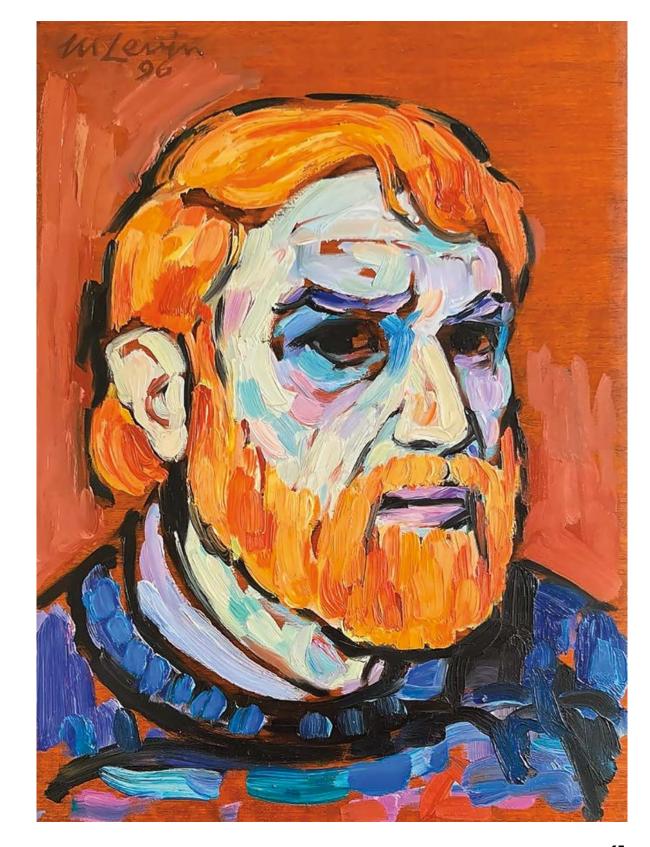
This painting of a vendor's fruit cart/wagon and horse was painted from life in the Bronx, NY. The man holding the horse's reins is Morton's father, Louis, posing in the street near the family's apartment.

Painted in the early 1930's, it is Morton's first oil painting done at age nine. He already understood the importance of composition and design as the crumbled newspaper in the street draws the eye to the importance of the subject and balances the composition. His use of the paint and his draftsmanship is mature beyond his age and experience.

Self Portrait, 1996

Oil on canvas, 17 3/8 x 13 inches framed

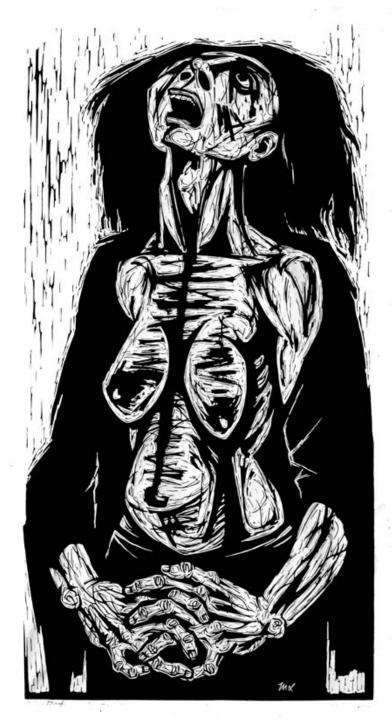
This self-portrait was painted in San Francisco in 1996 a few years before the Millennium/21st century and captures the artist's red hair, red beard, and his vibrant presence. His gaze expresses an intense and inquisitive intelligence as if he is looking beyond. The brushwork is confident, and the oil paint is beautifully manipulated and looks buttery. It is an accurate likeness of the artist in a blue sweater that he often wore as blue was his favorite color. I live with and treasure this portrait as it allows me to feel physically close to Morton.





The Rape of the Luna Moth, 1978 Mural painted on paper and mounted on canvas, 9.3% ft x 14 4/25 ft

This mural depicts the bestial nature and often wild, drunken, and lustful behavior of the mythological halfman half-horse Centaur in pursuit of a personified female Luna moth. The title suggests that the Centaur will rape and overpower the Luna moth. I wonder if the Centaur will be left without his conquest as the moth flies away? The scale and dynamism of the figures, lightening bugs and insects are painted with such brio, bold color and agility that the work is a tour de force of passion and brushwork beautifully designed. This mural was originally painted on paper in situ for an Artists and Models party. The paper was later mounted on fine Belgian linen canvas.



Stabat Mater, 1987Woodcut, 40 ½ x 20 ½

This expressionistic woodcut cries without sound and represents the pain and trauma of loss. It recalls the suffering of Mary during the crucifixion of Christ, her son.



Crucifixion, 1987 Woodcut, 19 x 50 inches

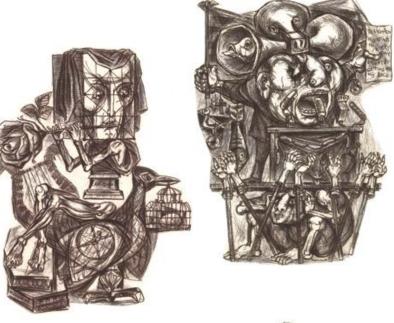
This large expressionistic woodcut interprets Christ's commitment to sacrificing himself. It shows his pain and instead of an act of complicity shows Christ actively nailing himself to the cross. The bold cuts are designed to express Christ's power, pathos, and beauty. This woodcut was carved over weeks and when it was time to ink the woodblock and pull a print it was a privilege to see the impressive black and white image on paper. Morton lived with this print for a few days and then turned the woodblock over and began carving the image anew as he felt he had not created his exact vision. The second version is the final version and is slightly different than the first version but that is why Morton is a real artist. Morton's ability to take endless pains to create the best possible work and his dedication to upholding standards was a life lesson in integrity that I value beyond words.



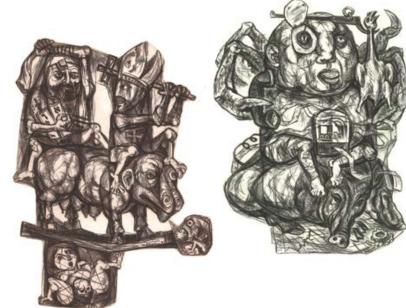
Old Man and Death, 1964 Aquatint etching, $77/8 \times 9^{3}/4$ inches

This etching is a powerful exploration of life and death in black, white and grays. There is a depth of emotion expressed using line, texture, washes of movement and complex facial expressions. The artist was proud of this work and the copper plate which shows the results of using non-traditional materials mixed into the initial ground and aquatint which he manipulated using different states in the acid before printing. This work was done in the artist's prime, and it was not a self-portrait. Eerily, or prophetically, during the last days of his life when he was very thin, he looked very much like this man.









The Physician, 1969 Etching, 11 3/4 x 8 7/8 inches

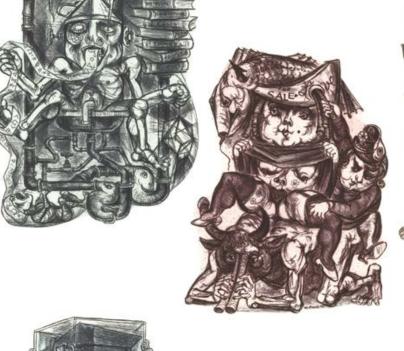
The Actor, 1968 Etching, 11 3/4 x 8 7/8 inchess

The Aesthete, 1969 Etching, 11 3/4 x 8 7/8 inches

The Cleric, 1967 Etching, 11 3/4 x 8 7/8 inches

The Politician, 1969 Etching, 11 3/4 x 8 7/8 inches

The Merchant, 1969 Etching, 11 3/4 x 8 7/8 inches













The Philosopher, 1968 Etching, $11 \frac{3}{4} \times 8 \frac{7}{8}$ inches

The Pedant, 1968 Etching, 11 3/4 x 8 7/8 inches

The Whore, 1968 Etching, $11 \frac{3}{4} \times 8 \frac{7}{8}$ inches

The Soldier, 1969 Etching, 11 3/4 x 8 7/8 inches

The Judge, 1968 Etching, 11 3/4 x 8 7/8 inches

The Scientist, 1969 Etching, 11 3/4 x 8 7/8 inches

Morton Levin was born in New York City (1923-2020). He was a professional artist, painter, printmaker, and educator whose work has been exhibited in museums and galleries in the United States and Europe. His work is included in the permanent collections of the San Francisco Fine Arts Museums—Legion of Honor and The de Young; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut; Rochester Institute of Technology, New York; Yale University Art Gallery, New Have, Connecticut; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City; Ogunquit Museum of American Art, Maine; Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California; San Diego Museum of Art, California; Milwaukee Art Museum, Wisconsin; New York Public Library; the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; The National Library of Medicine, Maryland and many important public and private collections in the United States and abroad. Founder and Director of the Morton Levin Graphics Workshop and co-owner of Winston Gallery in San Francisco, California. Levin studied painting with Andre Lhote; sculpture with Ossip Zadkine; engraving with William Stanley Hayter; etching with Federico Castellon; lithography at the Pratt Institute; received his bachelor's degree in fine arts from CUNY, City University of New York. Publications include Morton Levin: Graphic Arts [1939-2012]; Morton Levin: Drawings [1939-2014]; and A Fantasy of Beasts Revealed in Great Art: What is Illusory is Made Real, all published by Egret Books.

Alanna Zrimsek was co-owner of Winston Gallery with Morton Levin, her partner and celebrated master artist, until 2020. Zrimsek is owner and publisher of Egret Books. Recent work includes paintings, drawings, poetry and a children's book, The Wobblies. Currently working on a second children's book and placing art in collections. Exhibiting online and most recently at Sebastopol Center for the Arts, Sebastopol, CA, Soma Arts, CA and participated in the Extraction: Art at the Edge of the Abyss with an exhibit at The Uptown Gallery in Butte, MT. Zrimsek studied drawing, printmaking, and painting in master classes with the artist Morton Levin at the Morton Levin Graphics Workshop in SF, CA.

Apo W. Bazidi is the Film Director for A Keen Observer, 2023. He is a Social Justice Documentary Filmmaker, Founder & CEO of Burn A Light Productions. He is an award-winning Kurdish storyteller who believes in the importance of global cultural interactions. His films explore social issues including the refugee crisis, immigration policy, and women's rights. Bazidi is also the founder of Burn A Light Productions, a social impact creative studio based in San Francisco. Resistance is Life - 8 Best Feature Documentary Awards; The Ruth Story - 2 Best Short Documentary Awards; How Far is Home - 2 Best Short Documentary Awards.

Matthew Berglund is Director of Design for Presidio Bay Ventures. Berglund was born in 1976. As a young man, Matthew studied drawing, painting and printmaking with Morton Levin. He went on to study architecture, and holds a Masters degree in the field from the Illinois Institute of Technology, in Chicago. A member of the American Institute of Architects, he has held leadership positions

at Goettsch Partners and Handel Architects executing design and construction projects globally. Matthew currently serves as the Director of Design for Presidio Bay Ventures, a leading Real Estate Development firm in the Bay Area. Matthew maintains an artistic practice in the mediums of watercolor and woodblock printmaking.

Nicole Maria Evans is Curator of Exhibitions and Collections at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art in Great Falls, Montana. In addition to the featured exhibition OBJECT#: A Permanent Collection Exhibition about Museums and The Practice of Collecting Art, her recent exhibition projects include Peter Koch:The Book as a Work of Art; Beyond Intention: A Contemporary Fiber and Mixed-Media Arts Exhibition, featuring the work of Jennifer Reifsneider, Ashley V. Blalock, and Maggy Rozycki Hiltner; Dr. Charles Smith: Black History Lessons: VESSEL: Formative Works by Peter Voulkos. Prior to her position as Curator at The Square, she held the position of Curatorial Research Associate at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston for the exhibition GOYA: Order and Disorder. Evans was a fellow at the Smithsonian Institution Latino Center Museum Program conducting language research and translations for the National Museum of the American Indian, as well as co-founder of the Itinerate Arts Collaborative in San Diego, California. Evans holds a seat as Treasurer on the Board of Trustees of the Montana Art Gallery Directors Association (MAGDA). She has served in curatorial, research and educational roles at the C.M. Russell Museum, Tufts University Art Gallery, deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, UCLA Hammer Museum and The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Evans holds a Master of Arts in Art History and Museum Studies from Tufts University and her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art History from University of California Los Angles (UCLA).

Eliza Weber is Director of Education at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, where she manages and facilitates a rich and vibrant studio arts education department for all ages, including multiple community outreach programs under the umbrella of The Love for The Arts Program. Eliza completed her MFA at Arizona State University. Originally from Great Falls, she received her BFA from The University of Montana. She has completed short residencies at Medalta in Alberta, Canada and The Pottery Workshop in Jingdezhen, China. Eliza was an Artist in Residence at Pottery Northwest in Seattle, Washington, and afterwards an Instructor at Kansas State University. She served on the board of the Ceramics Research Center for two years in addition to the board for NCECA (National Council on Education of Ceramic Arts) as a Student Director at Large.

Eric Heidle s a designer, photographer, and writer living and working east of Montana's continental divide. A graduate of Montana State University's graphic design program, he has worked as a book designer, art director, copywriter, and photographer. His design work has appeared in How, Print, Communication Arts, Graphis, and AdWeek, and his writing and images have been published in Montana Outdoors, Backpacker, and Big Sky Journal. His short story "Ace In the Hole," collected in the anthology Montana Noir, was nominated for an Edgar Award by the Mystery Writers of America in 2018. He works as the Communication Director for the Montana Arts Council, Montana's state arts agency.

ABOUT THE SQUARE

The Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art (The Square) in Great Falls, Montana has been exhibiting art, teaching art and supporting the development of contemporary art and artists since 1977. Housed in the historic Central School built in 1896 by Paris Gibson, the founder of Great Falls, Montana.

The Square is known for its exceptional exhibitions featuring local, regional, and nationally renowned contemporary artists.

In addition, the museum houses an outstanding art collection and a unique outdoor sculpture garden. Exciting exhibit and outreach programming strengthens our mission to bring art into our community to support an inclusive experience that is thought provoking and welcoming. By extension, the museum celebrates the practice of art making through our studio art education courses in ceramics, printmaking, painting, drawing and more!

Opposite: The Professions: The Aesthete, 1969. Etching (detail) **Back Cover Image:** Double Portrait, 2005. Oil on canvas, 28 3/4 x 40 1/4 inches

