

Alfred Boder

Alfred Boder Fine Arts

[Barry Oretsky - memorable  
images].

[ca. 1997]

CLIBERT'S UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES	
LOCATOR	2291.16
BOX	3
FILE	16



# BARRY ORETSKY

January 3, 1997

Dear Dr. Bader,

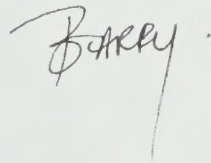
I hope that you and your wife are well. Dr. Bader's experience in Kirkland Lake may have prepared her for the difficult weather everyone is faced with.

My family is well and enjoying the school break. I am busy painting. I have enclosed a catalogue which was created for my exhibit at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. There was wonderful reception of my work and I even had the opportunity to lecture.

I recently met a man who is a Music professor at Queen's University who happens to know David McTavish. He will be showing the catalogue to Mr. McTavish and I will get in touch with him soon. I also hope to resolve my partnership issue very shortly.

I would like to wish you both good health and happiness in this coming year.

Yours Sincerely,

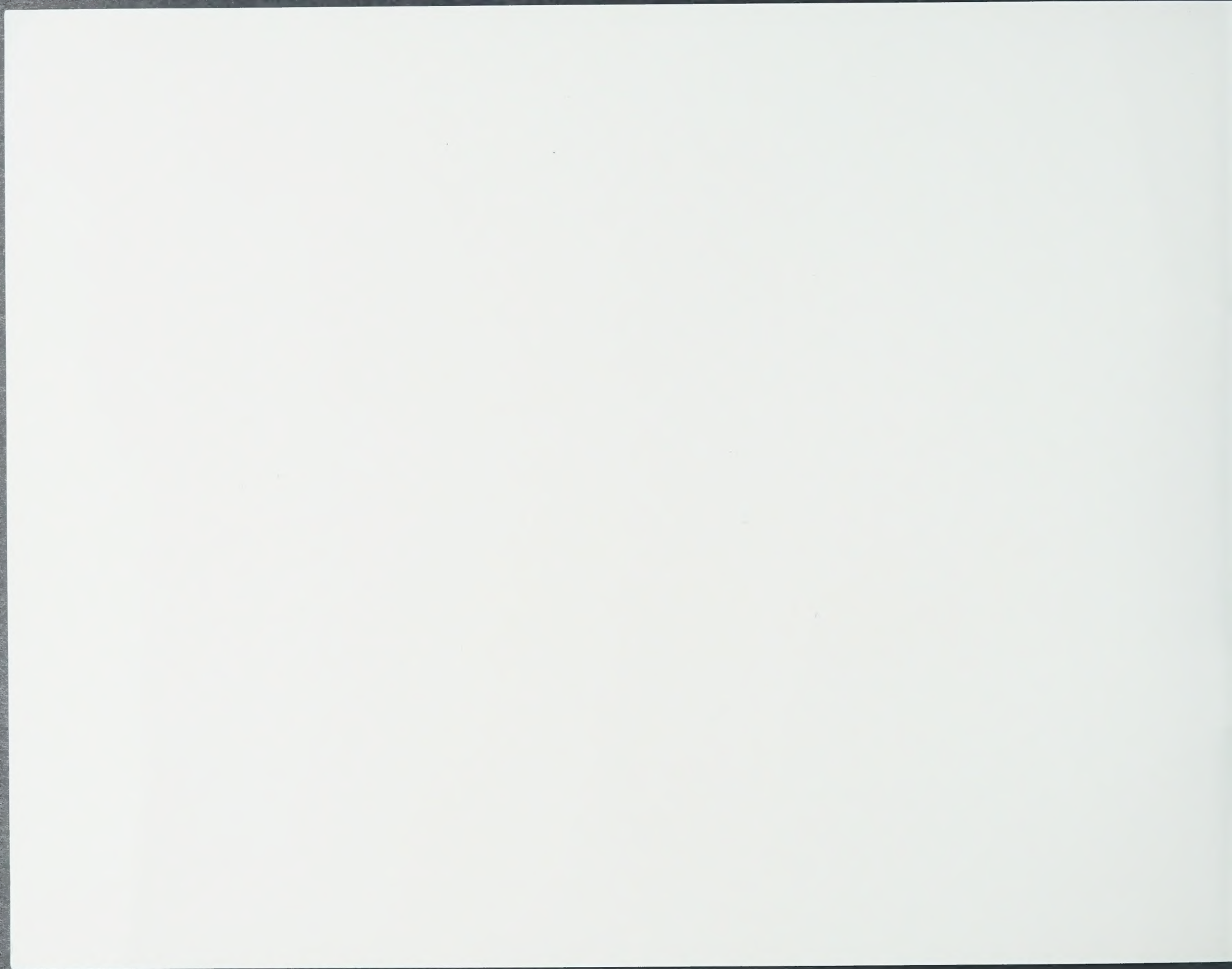






# BARRY ORETSKY

*Memorable Images*



# BARRY ORETSKY

## *Memorable Images*

October 21 - November 9, 1996

Robert Langen Gallery  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
Waterloo, Ontario

Cover image: Les Tournesols, 1996

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Oretsky, Barry, 1946-  
Memorable Images

Catalogue of an exhibition to be held at the Robert Langen Gallery  
Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, October 21 - November 9, 1996

Copyright 1996, Robert Langen Gallery and Barry Oretsky

Published by Teri Hranka for the Robert Langen Gallery





Messiah Food & Drink, 1995



Relever, 1992

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---

## FORWARD

I first became aware of Barry Oretsky's art in 1990 when I opened the April copy of *American Artist* magazine. I was moved by the clarity of the art and the dramatic use of contrast. The atmosphere in his work was electrifying, and gave me a feeling of immediacy, as if I were standing in the spot I was looking at. Of course Barry's manipulation of perspective had something to do with the ability to 'walk into the painting', but the use of colour and distinction of the light source was masterful.

When, in 1995 I was fortunate enough to again see his work, it was in the form of limited edition prints, and one of the images was that of "Sanctuary", a piece that was highlighted in that *American Artist* magazine of 1990. Again, the work affected me so strongly that I showed it to everyone.

In the autumn of 1995 I had the opportunity to visit Barry in his studio and see his art first hand. This visit was a profoundly moving experience, and I knew that his art was exactly what the Robert Langen Gallery (RLG) should exhibit. Thankfully the RLG's Art Acquisition & Exhibition Committee agreed, and so we embarked on one of our finest exhibitions.

The RLG is dedicated to providing knowledge,

stewardship, appreciation and enjoyment of Canadian art and culture. Following this directive, I am pleased to curate this exhibition and I know that the communities of Waterloo Region are about to view spectacular visions of Barry's world.

A work of art has many interpretations: from the vision of the artist, the perspective of the audience, the scrutiny of the critic. Barry's art will evoke feelings in all who view it, and you will be transported into a journey of past, present, and future.

This catalogue is meant to be used as a resource guide as well as a collector's item. I hope you will use it to understand the artist and thereby see the art in a larger context. Enjoy your journey.

I would like to thank the following contributors to the exhibition and catalogue. Without their assistance this show would not have been possible.

The WLU Art Acquisition & Exhibition Committee  
The WLU Senate Cultural Affairs Committee  
Stephen Rosen, Rosen Fine Art Ltd., Toronto, Ont.

and, of course, Barry Oretsky

*Teri Hranka, Curator*

## INTRODUCTION

There is a trap formed by the terms "expressionism" and "impressionism". I do not mean Expressionism and Impressionism with their capital "E" and "I", but rather the hope that there is a useful, even defining distinction between an artist who responds to the impressions drawn from the outside world and an artist who expresses himself subjectively. The faintness of that hope is nowhere more evident than in the work of Barry Oretsky.

The ways that painters have integrated photography into the processes of their work are legion. At first view Oretsky appears to use the photograph as a transparent filter, engaging his viewers through their familiarity with photography's visual conventions. Among the technical aspects of those conventions we can list: framing — the way the lens cuts out or masks off a section of the world; the effects of foreshortening as the camera transposes three dimensional space to two dimensions; the characteristics of film in recording colour and tone; the manner in which the camera focuses the image. But there is, of course, an obverse side to Oretskys' use of these conventions: the decisions he makes as to what to photograph and which images he chooses to paint and how he interprets the information in the process of painting.

Looking across a range of Oretsky's paintings we become aware — only gradually perhaps — at how differently the photographic information is transposed from picture to picture. In *Toll for William Blake*, for example, sharp focus is given to every section and each detail. The effect in the lower part of the picture is to keep our attention flicking from point to point in the man-made clutter filling the space. But the commanding aspect of the image is the sky. And it holds command precisely because of the visual tension Oretsky builds between the natural and the man-made worlds, a tension ironically underlined by the picture's title. It is a totally different approach we find in *The Weight of her Gesture* for here Oretsky eliminates all information other than the woman and the portrait she is drawing. By this selection — separating the figure from spatial anchoring — he emphasizes the woman's total absorption in her work. It is an absorption made poignant by her work's ephemeral character; the next rain shower will dissolve away what she has done.

Yet another approach occurs in *Les Tournesols*. Using the way we will accept a varied range of focus in photographs, Oretsky utilizes the soft-focus of the background to heighten the intensity of colour and form of the flowers. We can believe that, like the woman, we inhale their scent.

In 1992, Oretsky visited the Holocaust Memorial at Auschwitz. He realized immediately that he had to paint

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---

the subject matter demanded a special manner of presentation. In particular he had to find ways of evoking the terrible past of that place while being in the material reality of its present. In the two paintings shown here he uses different means, but in both cases he exchanges a direct, single view for several superimposed images. In *The Children's Case* the identification photographs are juxtaposed with images of the clothing children were forced to exchange for camp uniforms. These symbols of the lives stripped from them are painted in a way that make them integral with the buildings themselves. In *Chaim* the reflection of a friend who accompanied Oretsky on his visit is imposed on images of concentration camp uniforms that themselves reflect both past and present.

As we spend time with Oretsky's paintings we come to appreciate just how personal a view we are given. The "objectivity" of the photographic sources is deceptive for those sources are defined by a particular eye and experience and attention. Their character is one of closeness, of intimacy even that is concentrated by the selective process of painting. In *The Wall*, for instance, there is no sense of termination left or right; the section we see is both part and whole, enclosed yet infinitely expandable. In *Relever* the "accidental" juxtaposition of the dancer and the column parallels the upward reach of both and the turn of their forms. Even in pictures with a broader horizon the sense of enclosure holds firm. The perspective of *Cap d'Antibes* is powerfully telescoped: the

yachts are notionally distant yet visually immediate and while the clouds contrast in tone with the sculpture, they curiously echo the roughened texture and silhouette of the figure. Oretsky works from the conventions of photography, the particular forms of its visual record that we, as viewers, largely unconsciously accept as common records of our world. But from those "objective" impressions Oretsky inverts the direction of our attention, subtly guiding us into the individual expression of experience he has to present to us.

*David Burnett*  
Toronto, June, 1996

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---



A Toll for William Blake, 1989

## BARRY ORETSKY — The Role of the Artist in Society

Painters are a part of a tradition which spans centuries. They have given much to civilization, painting with diligence and with reverence. Now we appreciate their work when we enter a museum to look at their work. But painters of previous eras suffered for their craft. If I'm not prepared to have respect for preceding art, my work would be just a one-off thing.

There's a valid distinction which I would make between the spiritual and the sacred. I see my particular calling as a painter and a Jew, drawing from the wellsprings of Torah truths which imbue each and every day of a Jew's life. That for me is spirituality put in practical everyday terms, from laws concerning kosher food to the observance of pilgrim festivals in the yearly cycle.

Such a fulfillment — termed a *mitzvah* in Hebrew for its sense of duty — is far more attainable than any mystic yearning for the sacred in other world religions. In terms of my art, it means that holiness is everywhere, waiting to be plucked, liked the holy apples about which the mystic rabbis of the medieval age sang to usher in the sabbath.

One becomes the other and in that transition, a totally

different experience has come into being. That for me is mystical. I think there is a wondrous spirituality when the creative process is expressed in paint. It sets us free to soaring new vistas. Chagall said it well — "Painting was as necessary to me as bread. It seemed like a window I could escape out of, to take flight to another world." (Marc Chagall *Painter of Dreams*, p. 90)

There is a full-blooded *hearty* holiness to Jewish faith that might catch some people unawares. That is part of the distinction which I make between the spiritual and the sacred: a Jew performs a *mitzvah* gladly — he runs to the opportunity because it is part of his own soul and his own spiritual reality.

That enthusiastic joy pervades my thinking and quantifies my art. I think I'm part of a greater artistic tradition whenever I explore the nuances in life. I enjoy examining details. There is so much information in a painting that a viewer might lose sight of in a cursory glance while walking through a gallery.

You can appreciate that there is an insidious compulsion to religious motivation for someone who is both Jewish and a painter. Like those who have followed this path before me, I sense that I'm religious and yet I work in a medium that some Jews with a spiritual inclination would shun.

BARRY ORETSKY  
MEMORABLE IMAGES

---

Artists must wrestle with spiritual values every time they put their brush to the canvas. "Spirit in its human manifestation is man's response to his You. Man speaks in many tongues — tongues of language, of art, of action — but the spirit is one; it is response to the You that appears from the mystery and addresses us from the mystery." (I and Thou, p.89)

There have been many notable Jewish abstract painters, but far fewer Jewish realist painters. Two hundred years ago, a Jew who aspired to be an artist found his calling as an itinerant craftsman, engraving seals on pewter plates throughout Bohemia, or bookplates in England.

It wasn't until the Age of Emancipation that Jewish art blossomed in Europe. Moritz Daniel Oppenheim, Solomon Alexander Hart, Camille Pissarro, Isidor Kaufman and Maurycy Gottlieb all created memorable works with an artistry on par with their non-Jewish counterparts.

A truthful painting survives close reading by evoking that inherent mystery in our spiritual existence. This observation, I think, is key to understanding high-realist painting, making painting analogous to poetry, rather than the novel form — shortened, pithy, succinct and not always transparent to elucidation on a first reading.

I find a kind of irony, when you contemplate the span of man's life from 'dust to dust'. Our life is dust, a fact I confirm everyday in the morning prayers. "All the nations are as nothing before You, as it is written: the nations are as a drop from a bucket; considered no more than dust upon the scales! Behold, the isles are like the flying dust." (Isaiah 40:15)

A painter deals with dust — materials that have a very limited life span. A small detail if you ignore everything else will tell you a lot about the rest. It may seem futile to make such efforts to perfect art. But we mirror previous history. We do things over and over again, endlessly striving for betterment.

My optimism makes me see inevitable progress, in spite of the setbacks of society. The spirituality of our present workday life is frequently overlooked. Modern man is too busy making money and working hard to see divine intervention. Quite simply, there's an up and down to our life — we're down here in our busy material world. The spiritual seems to soar far above us, far beyond our lowly vantage point.

Art can bridge that up-and-down otherness. There is a closeness to God springing from daily material things... even paint on a canvas. Think about the meticulous statements concerning the *material* not the *spiritual* in the



BARRY ORETSKY  
MEMORABLE IMAGES



The Children's Case, 1995

Jewish morning prayers. Here is an excerpt concerning the preparation of incense for the altar:

"The balm is no other than a resin which exudes from the balsam trees. The lye of Carshina was used for rubbing on the onycha to refine its appearance. The Cyprus wine was used in which to steep the onycha to make its odour more pungent."

You can almost see the priest with mortar and pestle, grinding the special ingredients for the service. Truly, dust is a metaphor for human life and human endeavour.

With that in mind, I go back to a further metaphor for my work. A painting is like a child. I encourage it to grow from the dust. Then it is strong enough to be independent, to stand freely on its own in a world of adversity. I can't keep it in my home forever. But I will visit my work three or four years later to re-examine a painting that I did. When I'm painting a work, I see it in parts 'like the flying dust'. To see it in totality, I have to get away from a painting for a period of time. Then I can view it as you might.

#### *Close to St-Rémy*

Although I have been attracted by French images, sometimes I choose an English title for them. That is the case with *Close to St-Rémy*. Choosing Impressionist titles

feels natural to me. St-Rémy is the location of the asylum where Van Gogh spent important months painting the countryside. *Close to St-Rémy* was painted right behind the asylum where Van Gogh was incarcerated, just 100 yards south from the back door. He must have walked up and down the path where my son and I stood dozens of times with his painting kit hung on his back. There are various places in the area where visitors can see an old mill or a cherry orchard where he painted.

The Impressionists painted thickly and spontaneously in the technique called *impasto*. I'm moving in this direction. Some of *Close to St-Rémy* is very *impasto*, especially the roadway. I put down the texture then I built on top of the texture.

My son was the last element painted in *Close to St-Rémy*. Everything else was in, and then everything impacts on him and I could ascertain appropriate colour values. Colours must be true to the image and true to the experience that I created. If a face is among green leaves, there will always be reflective light. That's why I start with the background, to create the environment first. If I were to finish the figure first, then create the background, the two images might be totally different life experiences in totally different colour values. In that case, an adjustment would be needed either to the background or the figure.

BARRY ORETSKY  
MEMORABLE IMAGES

---



Close to St. Remy, 1994

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---



**The Weight of her Gesture, 1995**

People are allowed to do things now that they could not do at the beginning of the era of Impressionism. People in Arles thought that Van Gogh was a madman. He was institutionalized for the majority of his adult life. They didn't want any part of him. But today, they hail him as a son of Arles and a prime exponent of their values.

The most astounding thing about Arles is that you go up and down the streets there and you see stalls vending Van Gogh trinkets, Van Gogh T-shirts, Van Gogh greeting cards. In spite of this current popularity, the townsfolk of that era chased Van Gogh out of town. He was disturbing their town and they sent him to St-Rémy.

I find this situation unconscionable but that is human nature. And here I have painted my son in the same glade where an individual struggled for his personal and intellectual freedom and through all of his paintings he created a kind of beauty, creating order out of madness.

I would suggest that poetry is the underpinning of a painterly motive. "Demanding and surviving close reading" should be a leitmotiv for a painter's goals. You see, an artistic statement is really a short poem. I don't see myself as a verbal poet, but I strive to be a painterly poet. The idea of succinctness is crucial — Edward Hopper, the great poet of silence has been an influence on my expression.

It is interesting to ponder Edward Hopper's popularity that sprang from the cultural nationalism of the 30s. Hopper has always attracted me because he transcended the borders of the United States. He knew that American art could not be sustained by an insularity within the borders of the continental United States. The lesson for me in contemplating his work in France is that art does not lose its national purity in other cultures.

#### *The Weight of Her Gesture*

Chalk was my original entry into making art; I did thousands of pastel portraits. The transition from chalk to paint is a difficult one because paint functions very differently and I had no one to help me make that transition. Chalkwork has always fascinated me. The title related to the woman's pressure in applying her chalk to the sidewalk as well as the weight of her experience that she brings to bear in making that mark.

I took different photographs which gave me other opportunities to interpret the chalk girl. I found that one photo which I took of the chalk girl included a hat on the pavement. When I had the choice, I found that to have her little hat where you could drop coins into it, would make it a little too folksy as a busker on the street.

I ultimately decided on the simplicity of this composition. As a painter, I know that private moment. When I say

BARRY ORETSKY  
MEMORABLE IMAGES

---

this woman doing her chalk drawing on the ground in Montpelier, I could relate to her work. In the hustle and bustle of our daily existence, we don't usually spend that much time with anything or anyone. Painting the likeness of an individual is like listening to a piece of music over and over again to learn about its nuances. In the detail is the essence.

To see this young woman making her mark on the sidewalk was inspiring. I doubt that she could ever have told me why she undertook such an ephemeral project. While I prepared to take my photographs, I kept a certain distance, leery of encroaching upon her special integrity. As I moved around in the background taking photographs, she continued, oblivious of my presence. Now we can share that time with her. A photograph only rarely allows us that special sense of sharing — through the application of paint on canvas, we come to experience more fully that rare incident.

The chalk girl was indeed special, someone making a dustmark and playing in the dust. Even the most commonplace things in our existence — like dust — deserve our esteem. There is an insight from the Talmud on the importance of dust and water for Moses. Water protected him when he was cast into the Nile while dust shielded him from retribution when he killed the Egyptian. As a consequence, Moses was told that his brother instead of him must smite the water and dust. "It is not right that

they should be smitten by your hand; therefore let them be smitten by Aaron." (Tanchuma, Va'era No.14,f.99b)

Dust evokes the relation to the Eternal. We are all grains of sand in the desert. We begin from dust and we return to dust. In spite of that circularity, the chalk girl continues, making her mark and saying she exists in this meagre way, just some coloured dust on the ground. If the rain comes as she works, the endeavour will be washed away. And we will be all washed away. The simple act of rubbing chalk on a sidewalk raises such immense questions for us. Who knows if our life has any meaning at all?

The drudgery of drawing in chalk has some negative connotations for me. It was how I paid my way through art school. I was a carney hustler with my portraits. So too, *The Image Maker* springs from the carnival experience, expressing an autobiographical insight. I painted that lifestyle because I wanted to express what that world had to say about life. There are many metaphors about the carney experience.

When I compare the photos that I worked from for *The Weight of Her Gesture*, the edges are sharper on the painting and the colour tones on the arms are considerably different. If I think it is necessary, I take more informative images. I even changed the background to beige from cool blue.

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---

I found the limpid background interesting as I masked her out. I took my toothbrush and spent eight hours a day building on one colour after another. And all these droplets accumulated. I didn't want to use an air-brush because that would have been a mechanical input that wasn't right. Just as her mark is a random mark, so too the dots on the background had to be a random accumulation. The chalk will go through all the random crevices of the surface and you see a haphazard swath across a granular surface.

Everything else would have been a distraction. In that regard, *The Weight of Her Gesture* is a minimalist painting. I had other images of her with other people's legs going by and a window in the side but the effect was too busy. This was a most spontaneous and dramatic moment, in which I eliminated everything else. She is just a woman, a human being, making a line upon the ground to express in some linear way that she exists.

I think the chalk girl is a fifer, much like Manet's *Fifer* which I included in my portrait of *Jimi Hendrix* in 1976. She is part of another generation trying to make a mark not in our audible space as a fifer but on physical space, the ground as canvas. Her mark is just as haunting as his when the fifer calls on his flute.

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---



Cap d'Antibe, 1994



## BARRY ORETSKY — The Creative Process

It seems to me that there's a constant tug-of-war between realism and romance. To my mind, the entire creative process springs from that wonderful give and take.

A water image is often what I find compelling when I sit down to think about gathering ideas and putting them on canvas. Flowing water is a wonderful metaphor for the creative process. *"The matter is like a cave which lies by the seashore. The tide rises and the cave becomes full of water, but the sea is no less full."*

On my palette are liquid pigments that ebb and flow. Don't forget that acrylic is water-based and handles in a way that is different from oil paints. With the tip of my brush I can cause wavelets that spread outward on my palette, just like eddies and coves. The scene which I will have in mind is born in water-based pigments.

Just like a swimmer or a sailor, I approach a canvas with a happy expectation, looking far to the horizon and the vista of pure water spread out before my eyes. Like a sailor with his hand on the tiller, I see all that awaits.

Then I begin, mixing the pigments and transferring them to the white canvas in front of me. It's a very liquid

process. I move with the flow of the paint and the image. My initial fear is like entering a cold pool. You put your toe in and you think you might not want to go further. It's too cold! But sometimes you just jump in, overcoming the cold.

To my mind, a major distinction between realism and romance is the presentation of allegories of life. A romantic sensibility lets an artist choose images that are filled with allegory. I certainly am more than happy to have people see a romantic sensibility in my work. That immediately separates my art from dry factuality.

But there are limitations to a romantic view of life and art. Not all romantic art is filled with sweetness and light. Remember some of Rembrandt's more startling images? A painter who looks without blinking at a dissection of a side of beef forces the viewer to see some of the harsher realities of life. Many of my images are far removed from that cold reality.

Light is another metaphor of the creative process. When an image is significant, I pursue its meaning in its own special light. I shift it for the best angle — even get down on my hands and knees if I have to while I view an object in its own special illumination. Light, after all, is an essential quality of what I must contemplate. Sometimes when I look for a simple explanation of the process that an artist follows, I suspect that there's

BARRY ORETSKY  
MEMORABLE IMAGES

---

meaning in painting simply because there's a special light clarifying a subject.

I don't want to be glib. In spite of this talk about water and light, I still can't voice the primal thoughts which move me to practise art for long hours each and every day. You might as well ask a violinist why she practises late into the night until her fingers are sore and her wrist is stiff. At special moments we're all aware of that special something that reaches out and grabs us wordlessly. That's the special something which gives meaning to a painting without any word being spoken.

You and I can see a great painting and come to feel the truth expressed. We may not have words to describe the achievement, but we sense it wordlessly.

Art lies outside the artist — approachable yet other. With that humbling thought in mind, I revert in my daydreams and strategies to my own work. Nevertheless, I'm in charge and I work with all the elements of that great otherness which is art.

When a painting is worth more than a second glance, it augments human worth and discovery. I often find that the painting process is augmented by the artistic achievements of others. There's no need to paint in silence. I listen to music or spoken narratives. Just as you do different tasks during the day and they become

second nature as you do it, painting has technical challenges that are faced in small areas, occupying one part of my mind while another part of me listens to music.

The reality of painting is often months of loneliness and isolation as a painter pursues the craft of painting. Once I have finished a painting, I feel drained and listless. In that intermediate phase before a new work is begun and just after the last is taken down from the easel, I'm afraid of having failed in this attempt.

Artists are often beset by a sense of urgency. The clock is ticking. I sense that clock and that need to produce. On any particular day I might think about breaking away from the responsibility of painting and going out for a jaunt on my bicycle, but I often worry that if I don't finish a section that I'm painting, my sense of guilt would be overwhelming.

It must sound as if I'm a workaholic. I cringe to admit I find it difficult to break away from my work and do everyday things around the house. A peculiar sense of guilt and urgency won't allow me to take my bike, leave the studio and ride for two hours when the weather is inviting. There is continually a demanding sense of producing enough to warrant the luxury of time away from the craft of painting. If I get far enough into my painting, I just might ride the bike *briefly*.

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---



Chaim, 1995

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---



Carousel, 1995

### **Picking the Elements of the Painting**

I pursue images. I will shoot thousands of slides searching for those special images in terms of exploration and meditation. They hold visual elements and metaphors inherent in the image.

I have found that I take pictures without consciously composing the subject matter. When I get back to my studio, the selection process involves sitting down with a slide projector and spending time with each image to become acquainted with its obvious and less obvious details.

When I project a slide to examine the photograph in full detail, I ask myself what attracted me to the subject matter in the first place. Not every photograph will be successful. If a painter wants the viewer to explore the entirety of a work and not come to one basic issue, then he or she must focus detail. I have found in the past I put everything that I possibly could into a painting. Sometimes that profusion of detail made the viewer uneasy.

While in France, I thought a book stall and a man with a greyhound looked interesting. The dog which seemed to bring so much vitality to the scene did not become an element of a painterly work. It remained resolutely a dog.

On another occasion I saw a group of men playing *boule* and photographed them. They passed their day rolling wooden balls into a circle and then measuring the results of each pitch. Their measurement expresses a symptom of the times we live in. The old men I photographed that sunny day in France cast long shadows — a few stood stiffly at attention while the rest were at ease. One man crouched to measure the pitch. With his tape and his careful geometry, he might have been a figure from William Blake, measuring the world. I'm sure that one day I will make a painting from this photograph because the allegory of measurement is so powerful. The name of the painting would have to be *The Measurement of Man*.

Once I have made the commitment to an image and decided upon my interpretation, the follow-through for me is craftsmanship. A painting is the sum total of its elements. The painter can subdue, enhance or eliminate. I maintain firm compositional control by relying on precise preliminary sketches.

### ***The Popcorn Vendor***

Many colours in this painting are washed out because of the direct sunlight. I have referred to the painting as "a kaleidoscope of textures and sensory pleasure." Broadening the palette beyond the colours one might have seen in the street emphasizes the kaleidoscopic quality of the pinwheels.

*The Popcorn Vendor* is technically one of the most difficult paintings I have ever tackled. Working out the pinwheels was an enormous task. A pinwheel has a subtle geometrical shape. Otherwise it would be a flat card rather than a shape in three dimensions. Sometimes in the way that the light struck the pinwheels, they are translucent. They are also a high-key colour rather than low-key in relation to the blandness of people. The pinwheels are not subdued as the people are. They took forever to figure out because they are a complex abstraction and the focal point of colour in the image.

Other colours were highlighted in this image. One woman wears red as a counterpoint to the insipid tones of the popcorn vendor. Moreover, he was totally disinterested in the women. They likewise were disinterested in him, further heightening his blandness.

The man on the far right is just walking off the edge of the canvas. With this compositional effect, even though he is striding off the image, his shadow pulls him back into it. The strong image on the ground forces you back into the image, framing the image, rather than taking off. If the shadow were on the other side, I would have to eliminate it, because he would seem to fall out of the image.

### *Minnow*

I hope modern man doesn't make the mistake of mixing up sacred notions with notions that are simply solemn. In so many ways, a holy Presence comes to us. Sometimes I am most struck by the metaphor of water when I contemplate the divine goodness of the life we are given.

I painted my daughter Avital in *Minnow* because it expresses a wonderful moment that I wanted to capture for her. It was an amazing thing to see a young person at this stage of development, at a moment that is truly fleeting. Some might feel that the subject matter of a serious painting should be an adult, not a child frolicking in the water. It is true that young children as subject matter run the risk of seeming to be yet another nymph image from the Victorian period at the turn of the century. For me, *Minnow* is more than that. This is the beginning of experience, if we recall the experience of learning to swim for the first time.

The limpid quality of the painting was very difficult to achieve and a choice had to be made to limit the amount of reflection across the surface of the water. As an adult we look down at the child, looking down and looking back to our own childhood.

That quality of reminiscence and optimism is at the heart of the holiness of the present moment. It's a challenging

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---



Minnow, 1994

BARRY ORETSKY  
MEMORABLE IMAGES

---



Tapis d'Orient, 1996



belief, making us reconsider the meaning of the world around us. If God seems remote and unapproachable, this world can fade to a shadow of its pristine glory. Then, when our faltering convictions are restored and a special something which might be called peace, contentment or insight pervades our vision and thinking, the faintness is banished. It can be prompted by the vision of a child swimming in shallow water.

Whoever comes to view this work will recognize that the suffusion of colour is part of our shared willingness to experience. In this way, more is demanded of the viewer. I think painting is passion.

### **Coaxing Creativity**

Some writers feel pleasure in feeding clean white paper into a typewriter. The expanse of untouched paper stimulates the creative process. There is an analogy to preparing canvas. Time is needed to select, stretch and prepare a canvas. Sometimes it's a leisurely process permitting time for contemplation; at other moments, simply a job to hurry through.

I try to determine what the natural size should be for the image. If it is too small, I find that I'm coming back down into the photographic experience. I try not to be limited to the proportions of a 5x7 photo from a print shop.

The next stage is to project these images and to see if they are worthwhile to explore and commit to. I must determine if there are elements that I will find satisfying.

There is a necessary mental and physical tautness throughout this selection process. Painting involves concentration and physical strength. One thing that happens when you keep your arm in the air for eight hours every day is that gravity tones the muscle.

I reach a painting's reality when I set up my palette. Once I have embarked upon the ritual of mixing paints and applying them to the canvas, I find the centre of my concentration and contemplation. When that happens, time no longer seems to exist for me. The long bouts of painting and the painting itself become one with each other.

Thus unfolds the days of painting — I mix paints on a given day and continue to use the layout of pigment on palette on the following day, simply lifting cling-wrap from the acrylics.

Mixing paints has become instinctive for me. The beauty of a regimented palette system is that I can see true colours and remember what I have mixed in to achieve the harmonics.

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---



Apres Midi, Avignon, 1996

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---

I have my own way of arranging acrylic paint on the palette. And I have filled my palette for 25 years that particular way. A given colour is always in the same place on my palette so I never have to grope for it.

The minute I put one colour out of sequence, my hand goes to the intended location automatically and then I have to stop and look for it. It might just be reversed with a neighbouring colour, but in that split-second of having to stop and check the palette, I might lose the flow of my thinking. Memory plays a part to know how the paint is going to dry.

I know I'm finished when I'm satisfied that I have resolved all the elements. There is a sense of completion. It's done! To overpaint and continue to make choices is an unwillingness to accept a finality. I have learned intuitively that it is over.

As for the ritual of finishing a painting, there are different friends who know when I'm finishing a painting and they come over. They like to see the signing of the painting. I cannot see the painting as a complete entity for at least a year or two after it is done, because I continue to see it as pieces. I cannot see it with the immediate impact of totality that a person fresh to the painting might bring.

Upon completion of a work, an inertia sets in. When I'm painting day after day, the focus of my eyes takes on a

sharpness. When I finish, there is soreness in my eyes that sets in. The muscular tension of focussing at a short distance is quite distinct. I go through this until I go back to painting again.

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---



Entre Dans, 1996

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---

Barry Oretsky was born in Owen Sound, Ontario in 1946. He received his early training at Toronto's Central Technical School. He furthered his studies at St. Martin's School of Art, London, England, and later lived in Israel.

Barry has worked in advertising, as an art teacher, and has been a full-time professional artist since 1986. He is now a permanent resident of Toronto, Ontario, but continues to travel internationally to further his art.

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 1996 **Robert Langen Gallery**, Waterloo, ON  
1995 **Drabinsky Gallery**, Toronto, ON  
1995 **Drabinsky Gallery**  
1994 **Drabinsky Gallery**  
1994 **Fifth Avenue Art/Antique Show**, New York  
1993 **High Museum Art/Antique Show**, Atlanta  
1993 **Fifth Avenue Art/Antique Show**, New York  
1993 **Galerie Michael**, Beverly Hills, CA  
1993 **Rehs Gallery**, New York, NY  
1993 **The James M. Haney Gallery**  
Amarillo, Texas  
1993 **Rehs Gallery**, New York, NY  
1992 **Drabinsky Gallery**  
1992 **Miami International '92**, Florida  
1991 **Boston International '91**, Mass.  
1991 **Odon Wagner Gallery**, Scottsdale, AZ  
1989 **Gallery Schillay & Rehs**, New York, NY  
1986 **Beth Tzedec Museum**, Toronto, ON  
1980 **Nancy Pool Studio**, Toronto, ON  
1970 **Gordon Gallery**, Tel Aviv, Israel  
1968 **Beth Tikvah Synagogue**, Toronto, ON  
1968 **Pollock Gallery**, Toronto, ON  
1967 **Canadian Biennial**, Winnipeg, Man.

## COLLECTIONS

- TSN**, The Sports Network, Toronto, Ontario  
**Quinn International**, Argua, Switzerland  
**ChildHelp Fund**, Washington, D.C.  
**The Gordon Group**, Toronto, Ontario  
**Solomon and Solomon**, barristers, Toronto, Ontario  
**Tara Investments**, Grand Cayman Islands  
**Fallbrook Holdings**, Toronto, Ontario  
**Reliable Fur Company**, Toronto, Ontario  
**Jason Meat Company**, St. Louis, MO  
**SANWA B K**, New York, NY  
Numerous **private collections** throughout Canada and the United States

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---



The Wall, 1992

BARRY ORETSKY  
MEMORABLE IMAGES

---

**PAINTINGS**

1. **Les Tournesols**, 1996  
acrylic on canvas  
30" x 40"
2. **Messiah Food & Drink**, 1995  
acrylic on canvas  
33.75" x 40.75"
3. **Relever**, 1992  
acrylic on canvas  
26" x 39.5"
4. **A Toll for William Blake**, 1989  
acrylic on canvas  
48" x 60"
5. **The Children's Case**, 1995  
acrylic on canvas  
32" x 47"
6. **Close to St. Remy**, 1994  
acrylic on canvas  
36" x 48"
7. **The Weight of her Gesture**, 1995  
acrylic on canvas  
36" x 48"
8. **Cap d'Antibe**, 1994  
acrylic on canvas  
30" x 40"
9. **Chaim**, 1995  
acrylic on canvas  
36" x 48"
10. **Carousel**, 1995  
acrylic on canvas  
30" x 40"
11. **Minnow**, 1994  
acrylic on canvas  
30" x 40"
12. **Tapis d'Orient**, 1996  
acrylic on canvas  
24" x 36"
13. **Après Midi, Avignon**, 1996  
acrylic on canvas  
30" x 40"
14. **Entree Dans**, 1996  
acrylic on canvas  
27" x 40"
15. **The Wall**, 1992  
acrylic on canvas  
30" x 40"



BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---

**NOTES**

BARRY ORETSKY  
*MEMORABLE IMAGES*

---

Design by Teri Hranka

Colour transparencies by Barry Oretsky

Colour Separations and Printing by  
Quality Print  
of Kitchener, Ontario

'The Role of the Artist in Society' and 'The Creative Process'  
are excerpts from an upcoming book  
by  
Barry Oretsky and Tyrus Reiman



