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Legendary Provincetown gallery artists pay tribute to Sidney Simon

The trio of artists Varujan Boghosian, Paul Resika and the late Sidney Simon showed regularly at the legendary Long Point Gallery, which dominated the art scene in Provincetown from 1977 to 1998. They are together again for a show called “Trio of Friends,” which opens on July 17 at the Berta Walker Gallery in Provincetown.

The Banner recently spoke with Boghosian, Resika and Renee Simon, Sidney’s wife, about the life and legacy of their late friend and colleague. Boghosian and Resika worked with Renee to assemble the show, which runs through Aug. 9.

Although Simon died in 1997, his work lives on and this show is a rare opportunity to see it again.

Simon was born in Pittsburg in 1917. “At Taylor Allderdice High School, he was seen as a gifted child and it was prearranged for him to study art at Carnegie Tech [now know as Carnegie Mellon] as a special student, says Renee Simon. “He wanted to know everything there was to know.”

He enlisted in the Army in December 1941 and became a decorated war hero. He was a captain in the Army Corps of Engineers in charge of organizing Army war artists. An official combat artist, he served on the deck of the battleship U.S.S. Missouri with Gen. MacArthur when they signed the peace treaty. His painting of the surrender now hangs in the U.S. Pentagon.



Sculptor Sidney Simon in Truro. Photo
Blair Resika

After the war ended, he, along with artists Bill Cummings and Henry Varnum Poor, founded the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. “The studios were chicken coops,” says Renee. “Today, the chicken coops are gone and it is now a thriving art school with state-of-the-art studios.”

“He was a majestic person,” says Boghosian. “When you walked into [the Long Point Gallery and saw] his work or a group show there was always a surprise. He had a fantastic imagination. I was on the hanging committee [for the gallery]. Our shows were always hung with great taste but Sidney didn’t go for that kind of thing.

“For instance, his 1995 show at the Provincetown Art Association was in the small Hawthorne room,” says Boghosian. “His show was packed with his work.”

“He had been promised a larger room,” recalls Renee. “So he put everything he could in, so many kinetic pieces, floor to ceiling, hanging, moving. There was a sign, ‘Enter at Your Risk.’ It was so outrageous. This is the show everyone remembers. He made lemonade out of lemons.”

He began as a painter and became interested in sculpture because he loved movement. He worked in clay, bronze and terra cotta. Someone once told Renee that a one-man show with Sidney was like a group show because he had so many areas that he was interested in.

Resika speaks of Simon’s Four Seasons Fountain Sculpture in the inner courtyard of World Wide Plaza in New York. Sidney used his four daughters — Teru, Rachel, Nora and Juno — as models for each one of the seasons. It’s a lush classical fountain where people congregate year round. Resika and his wife, Blair, often stop there when they go to one of their favorite French restaurants nearby.

“There was a lot of wit in his sculpture,” says Renee. “He loved the imagery in his mirror series, where he would sculpt a figure in a fun house mirror so it looked totally distorted. And then when you’d look in the mirror, it was a perfectly normal figure. What do you see when you look in the mirror? Do you see yourself? Do you see something that isn’t there?”

Life in Truro and Provincetown during the Long Point Gallery years was like a magic carpet ride on a glorious merry-go-round. Simon worked in his studio mornings, played tennis in the afternoon and partied at night. It was all centered around his fellow artists at the Long Point Gallery, and Simon was the life of the party.

“It was like a club. They loved each other dearly. Once I overheard them talking about getting a common burial plot,” says Renee.

Resika speaks about Simon’s great charm. Everyone loved him and thought they were his best friend, he says.

Simon worked up until the day he died. “He had congestive heart failure but never let on he was going to die,” Renee says. “This lovely young doctor from Provincetown came over and told him. He was in total shock and said, “This is the worst news since the sinking of the Bismarck.”

He was working on a sculpture of his mother and wasn’t going to die before his daughter Teru finished the head. I would wheel him out to the deck and down to the studio and he worked with a blanket around his shoulders,” says Renee.

Art historian Eleanor Munro wrote in the catalog to his 1995 show at the Provincetown Art Association, “Sidney Simon’s imagination is as literary as it is plastic, and so rooted in perennial concerns (fascination with the human personality, love of friends and family, delight in myth, theatrics and word-play) that

the works give pleasure of a kind rarely met in the art world today.”

Simon studied at the University of Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts, the Barnes Foundation and the Grande Chaumiere in Paris. Throughout his lifetime, he won many honors, awards and fellowships, including The Prix de Rome Collaborative Prize, National Academy of Design Gold Medal and Gold Medals for Painting and Sculpture at the Century Association.

He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters on 1995.

Simon’s work is in the Whitney Museum, The American Embassy in Paris, the Corcoran Museum in Washington, The Century Association, the Pennsylvania Academy of Art, the Provincetown Art Association, the U.S. Dept. of Defense Historical Collection and in the chapel of West Point among others.

Sidney Simon was a compelling artist who was sometimes overlooked. Maybe this upcoming show will be the beginning of the long overdue recognition he deserves. Then a new generation will discover the wonders that this majestic man with his giant imagination and brilliant mind created.