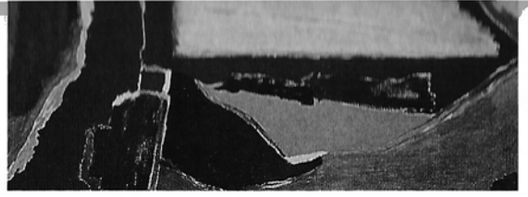
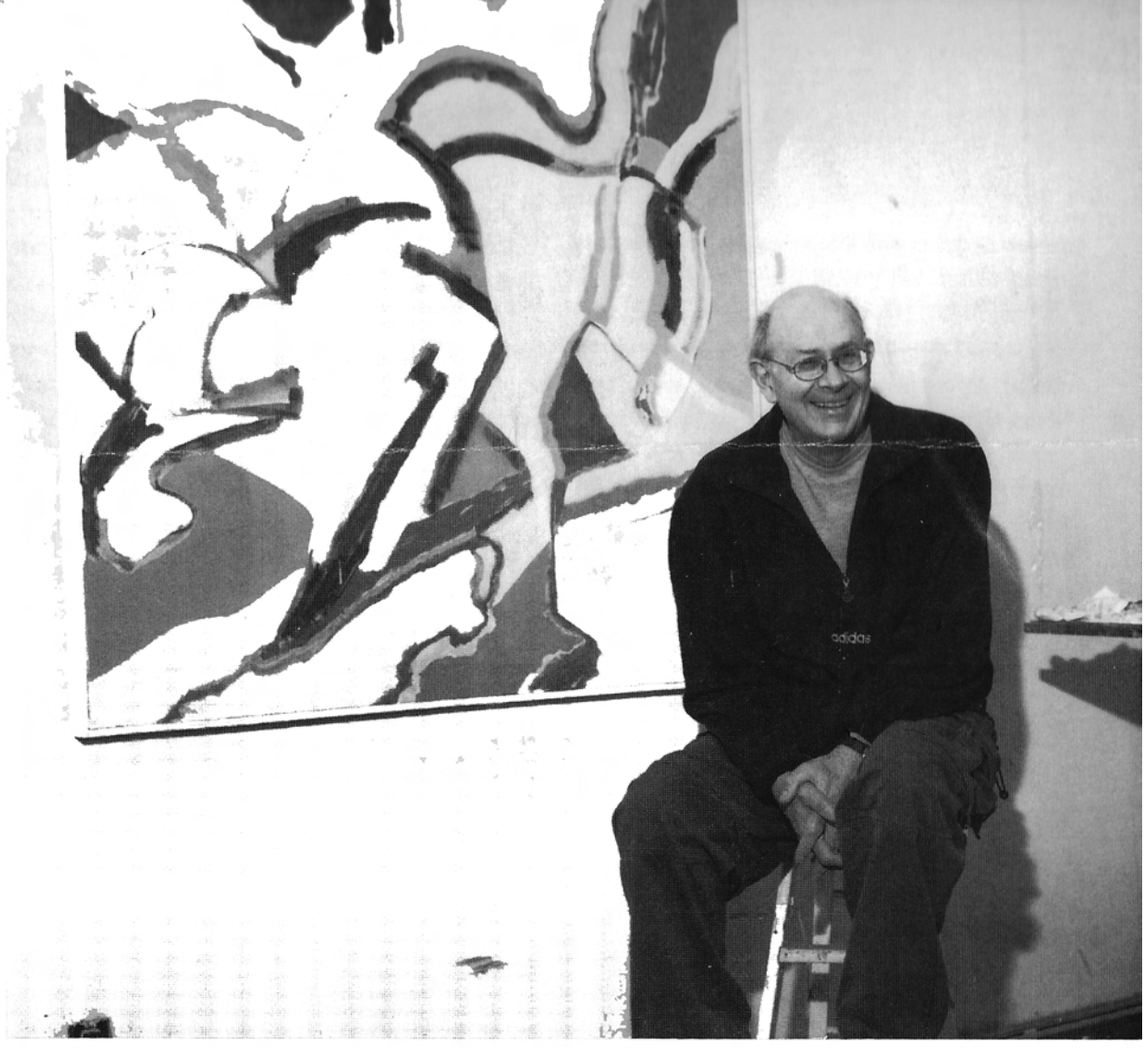


A Conversation with Stewart Goldman



An entire generation of Art Academy students has been indelibly, undeniably influenced by the thought-provoking teaching of Stewart Goldman. How many of us have been in critiques somewhat puzzled by his cryptic "Well, it has something to do with..." only to discover years later the resonating wisdom behind his pronouncements?

Under his training hundreds of artists have formed the heart of life-affirming careers in the arts. Many of Stewart's former students have gone on to national acclaim while others hold significant teaching positions around the country. Many more continue to go to the studio confident in their journey. One way or another, his commitment to his art and his teaching has found its way woven into the daily patterns of his students. And what remains so remarkable is his ability to have his students confront the world—on their own terms.

On the occasion of Stewart Goldman's retirement after 33 years, *Art Academy News* wanted to record a few of his thoughts about teaching, his art, and his plans for the future. As a former and current recipient of his wit and wisdom, I was honored to ask Stewart to go on the record and talk about his experience.

As I recall, you came to Cincinnati and the Art Academy from Philadelphia in 1968. Do you remember what your first impressions were?

I was happy to have a job teaching painting in a studio school. I never went out to get a graduate degree. I just went into the studio and started working after undergraduate art school. I guess I never stopped to consider the implications of not having a graduate degree and the impediments it might have on my career.

I remember the light in the studios, the north light in the painting and drawing studios. It was just a beautiful place to be. I always had to turn out the flourescent lights when I came into the studio in the morning. I liked the size of the school, the intimacy, and the fact that I knew the names of every student in the school after a couple of weeks. My memory wouldn't let that happen today. I liked that the students all had the pleasure or misfortune of spending 12

Top: "Iso Feld," 40" by 40". Above: Goldman in his studio.

Stewart Goldman with Kim Krause, Professor of Painting and Fine Art. Below, right: "Marking Time," the title piece from Goldman's 2001 Chidlaw Gallery exhibition.

contact hours with me in drawing and 9 to 18 hours with me in painting over their first two years at the Academy. Then, I didn't relish the responsibility it placed on me regarding the students' education over their first years in art school. Today, of course, they have contact with a variety of people during their first two years at the Academy.

The Art Academy has changed a great deal since then. You've managed to outlast, what is it, four or five directors? What do you think have been the most significant changes since 1968?

The changes are numerous, yet in some ways nothing has changed. The introduction of an English class into the curriculum was the beginning of a steamroller toward the Art Academy studio school becoming a college. When I first arrived here a student was in the classroom from 8 to 5, five days a week, and most of that time was in the studio. Every sophomore had nine hours of painting a week. They all took a design class. Today the time is broken up between the academic coursework and the studio. The school hours have been significantly diminished. There has been a tremendous impact on the student economically. Tuition, as in all schools, has risen precipitously, and the necessity to work to support their education has impeded the time spent in school over the semester. This, I believe, has caused there to be less of a life in the Academy after classes are over at the end of the day.

You have developed a personal philosophy on how the fine arts should be taught, particularly at a small school such as the Academy. Can you touch on a few of the most important issues for you?

Empathy and trust. The making of art is a very difficult activity. It requires a personal commitment, intensity, and a significant amount of time that is often difficult to get in a college. There needs to be a tolerance for unlimited time to get to a result. Therefore there must be a structure that permits the student to move uninterrupted through his/her creative process. Kim, you once asked me why or how we stopped having majors in an individual discipline. For me I suspect it's because in my mind they are all interchangeable; art is art, not painting, not printmaking, not sculpture, not photography, not mixed-media. Drawing for me was a means to get there, not an end. It is the investigative tool. Having individual majors is having definitions and answers. In art school, definitions or answers often limit the expression. I found the longer I taught, the less I had to tell the student. I found it necessary to question but not to answer. Issues of color, composition, and form were the necessity of meaning, a burden the student had to bear. I had to find the right question that might propel the student to the resolution of color, form, and composition that answered his/her issues.

Most of us recognize the tremendous importance an active studio practice can play in informing and energizing one's teaching. You have always found time for the studio and continue to take risks with your work and have been exceptionally prolific. How did you manage to effectively work between the worlds of teacher/administrator and artist?

I remember reading Camus' notebooks many years ago. I was struck by his comment that the work he did (newspaper writing, I believe) supported his habit. Milton Avery went out to draw every morning before he had breakfast. Why? He had to start off working. If he didn't he thought he might not ever work again.

I had good role models in school. Larry Day, Louis Finkelstein, Mercedes Matter, and George Bunker were all fine teachers and prolific artists. They always had time for me. When I finished my studies at the Philadelphia College of Art I still maintained contact with these artists/teachers. They would often visit my studio and engage me in criticism and discussion.

The creating, the being in the studio is what feeds me. Without it, I would have nothing to give to the student.

How do you think teaching affected your work in the studio?

Obviously it diminished the time I had to work in the studio. I often could not get back to a piece on successive days. That had the biggest impact on the work. I chose to work on paintings that permitted me a memory of the experience, that is, an image, a feeling that I could hold onto for several days. Though I often didn't have control of that. I think of Matisse wiping his image clean at the end of a day if it wasn't right. I suspect if I had done that I might not have any work at all. I would leave the image, marks on the surface, and expect that I would remember where I was or had been.

The work was always in some way autobiographical though there were times when I didn't recognize the source until some time after the painting was finished.

I think it's interesting how certain things can get into the images, but it may take years before we recognize their significance. Your most recent work appears to be completely non-objective, yet I sense a strong connection with the pieces you completed during that first fellowship you had in Germany. And weren't they based on drawings you had done from the trees surrounding the villa? How did this new work come about?

There are two kinds of artists, the simple-minded and the muddle-headed. I'm one of the muddle-headed, so any question about my work brings up a whole range of issues. First where do you begin? I think of my work as having a history, so to find cause and effect is always difficult for me because the issues that are involved in the development of a work have taken place over a considerable amount of time. I suppose that is why I ramble a bit in my discussions in the classroom because nothing is ever absolutely clear to me and it takes a while to find the focus. But once it is revealed, it is quite beautiful. And *Beautiful* is where I want to be.

With that as a preface I will attempt to answer your question.

I went to Feldafing with a particular objective in mind. After about two days I discarded it and started drawing and working in watercolor and then mixed media pieces before I began painting from all these works. Sometime earlier in my history I became interested in a narrative, a narrative that was created by the interaction of color and forms as they migrated across my vision. This became a party to this experience as I translated the drawings and watercolors to multi-panel pieces. It wasn't the first time I had worked this way. A similar experience occurred after returning from a trip to Italy (1985) where I confronted for the first time Duccio's Maesta and Lorenzetti's mural on good government. I painted a mural for Cincinnati Bell (1990). That painting was clearly a landscape that was created on 12-inch squares, though in that case they were all part of one surface while with these new works all squares were on separate panels and moving away from a representational reality. Those were the paintings that took me into the present experience with the non-objective pieces I exhibited in the Chidlaw Gallery in December 2001.

Yes, the exhibition in Chidlaw was beautiful. But so was your show at the Linda Schwartz Gallery earlier in the year. When you add in the month long residency in Munich in March and the double knee replacement in September, it appears you don't plan on slowing down much in retirement. What are you looking forward to in 2002?

Well, for one I just want to keep working. Hopefully things will continue to fall into place. The next event on my calendar is the opening on March 4, 2002 at the Actives Museum in Wiesbaden, Germany of the portfolio "Tales of Slavery and Deliverance." It will be shown along with the paintings I did last March in Munich. What is interesting about this event is that the portfolio was translated into German and published last October and will be available for the first time at this exhibition. Anna and I are still seeking a publisher here in the States.

There is nothing else that is concrete in my schedule of activities other than the continuation of work in the studio.

I have hopes: a gallery in Europe and another outside of Cincinnati in the States. I will be seeking that in the coming months.

Congratulations on your continuing success in Germany. Here's a final question. The Academy has been a significant part of your life over the past 33 years. Looking back, is there a fond memory or two you would like to share?

Above everything else it has been the students that have kept me engaged at the Academy. I was often asked, "Do you have any good students this year?" Well, I always had good students. I've always had students who put out the effort that made being there for me worthwhile. I think of all the kids who achieved success and the role that the Academy played in enabling their careers.

I consider myself very fortunate to have taught art in a small studio school environment for the last 33 years. From the very beginning, I remember Paul Wilhelm popping in to visit me in the first days in Cincinnati to make sure I was comfortably settled in my new apartment. This has been like a small family with all the affection and disagreements that often happen between brothers and sisters, although at times a bit dysfunctional.

There are many memories that I shall cherish of my experiences at the Art Academy, but I'd like to comment on just this one. I was always interested in extending the boundaries of my experience as I was of my colleagues. The successes were not as great as I would have liked but there were a few, and they keep expanding. I remember a trip to the Ukraine with my wife Kristi (Nelson), April Foster, and Jay Bolotin. We were there for an exhibition of works on paper by Cincinnati artists. The first evening as we were walking down some stone steps on a pitch-black night in Kiev, Jay turned to me and said how familiar this all seemed to him. Was it that way for me? Our both coming from an Eastern European background made it all part of some unconscious psyche. You see, my grandparents were from a small shetl outside of Kiev, and I was now as close to their roots as I had ever been. Later on this trip as we were returning from Kharkiv and were to be met at the station in Kiev the director of the Kharkiv Museum explained our travel this way: "You will be met at the station by a man in a black coat. He will be wearing a black hat and driving a big black car with the license plate____." Our translator leaned over to me and said, "Just like James Bond."

—Kim Krause