



art

THE GENEROUS TEACHER

A new exhibition and retrospective look at the work of the late Robert Douglas Hunter, whose career began with the Masters of the Boston School.

BY MICHAEL CLAWSON



Robert Douglas Hunter was widely known as the torchbearer of the famed Boston School of Painting, but as younger artists reflect on his long career, they first acknowledge his kindness, generosity and fierce intellect.

Hunter, the prominent Boston still life and landscape painter, died August 14, just a month away from a new exhibition of paintings that showed he was still growing as an artist, even after more than 60 years of his work. He was 86.

"He was an amazing man, a true gentleman and intellectual," artist Bruce Bauman says

of the late painter. "He had an encyclopedic knowledge of art and painters. And he was a master at composition. He knew how to arrange shapes and value so they had unity. His paintings had mood, almost like poetry."

Bauman and Hunter had weekly painting sessions for nearly 14 years. "We would start early and head out to paint for several hours. Then we'd come back for lunch and critique each other's works," Bauman says. "We never really talked while we painted, but when we got back to the house it was a real education listening to him talk. It

was a special time in my life. He gave me the highlight of my career when he came to one of my shows and bought one of my works. That's the kind of guy he was."

Sergio Roffo, a coastal landscape painter and former student of Hunter's, echoed Bauman's descriptions of the painter. "He was so generous with his time and his talent. He shared with everyone," Roffo says. "He taught me how to paint. He was a just a great man. And a great painter. He was so meticulous and so prolific. He just never stopped painting."

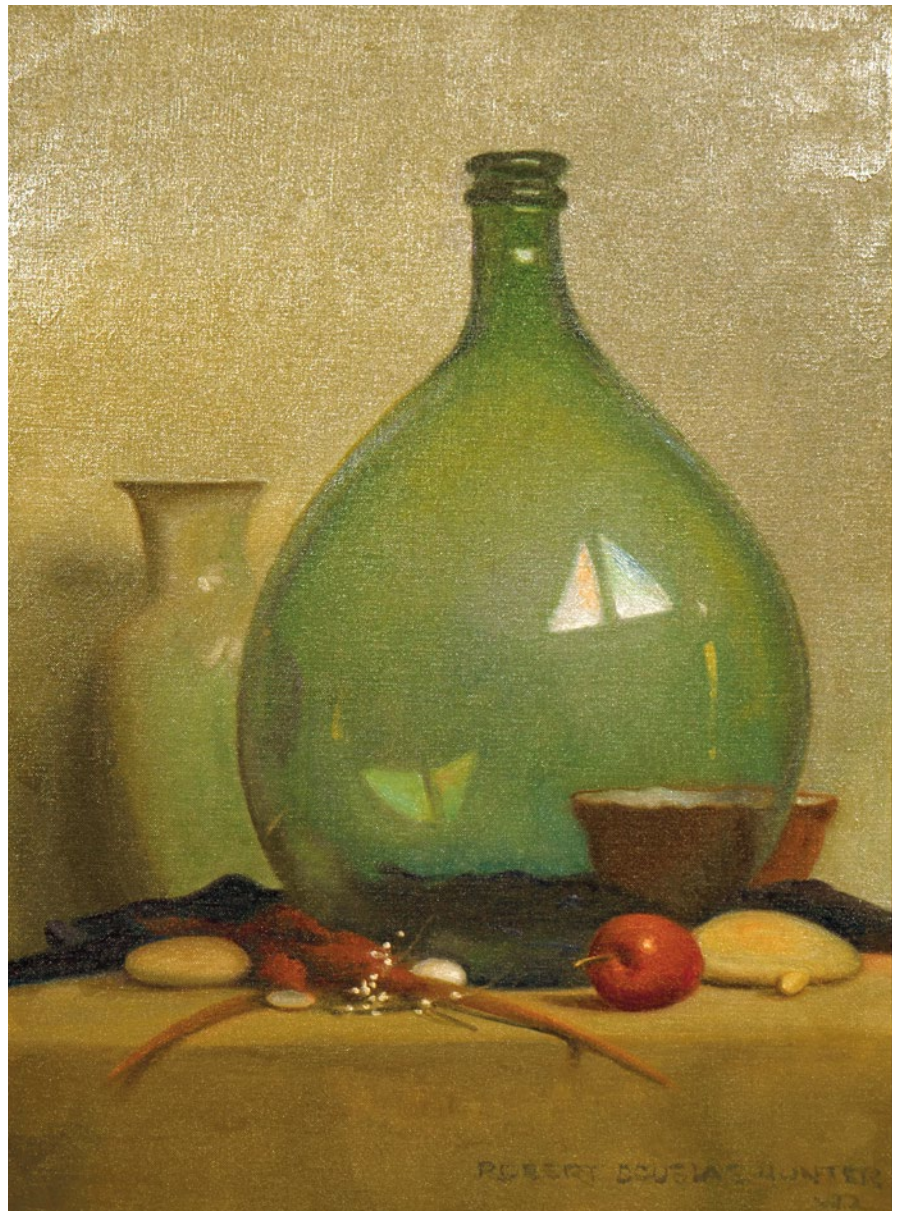
Born in 1928 in Dorchester,

Massachusetts, Hunter knew he wanted to be a painter at 7 years old. After high school he joined the Marines and then later attended the Vesper George School of Art beginning in 1949. It was there that he met, and later studied with, painter and teacher Henry Hensche, though that education started with a major setback, says his wife of 46 years, Elizabeth Ives Hunter.

“Bob went down to Provincetown to study with Henry. He rented a room and then left most of his money and all his possessions in the room while he walked to the art supply store. He got back to the room to find there had been a fire and the building had burned to the ground with everything he had,” she says. “Henry and his family put him up overnight and paid for his bus ticket back home.” She adds that the two eventually did study together.

Later, while posing for a study, Hunter became acquainted with Boston School painter R.H. Ives Gammell, whose work would influence the young painter immensely. “My husband was fascinated by the historical and technical information that Gammell could impart,” says Elizabeth. “As time went on he expressed his interest in working with Gammell, and that opportunity finally came in 1950. Formally, as teacher and student, it lasted until 1955, but informally thereafter.”

The learning opportunity would also connect Hunter with his future wife, whose father was one of Gammell’s assistants.



2



3

1
Robert Douglas
Hunter in his Boston
studio. Photo by
Kevin Thomas.

2
*Arrangement with a
Large Demi-John*, oil
on canvas, 22 x 16"

3
*Still Life with Sand and
Shells*, oil on canvas,
20 x 36"



4



4
*Arrangement with
 a Large Dark Brown
 Bottle, oil on canvas*

5
*Bahama Still Life,
 oil on canvas*

6
*Arrangement with
 Apples, Tangerines
 and Kumquats, oil on
 canvas, 25 x 40"*



5



6

They would go on to have three children together.

Years later, after all the Boston School painters were gone, Hunter would share his knowledge and his memories with the younger generation of painters coming up behind him. Elizabeth says, “His pleasure, his gift, the thing he loved to do most was sharing what he knew with other people. This wasn’t formal classes, but informal talks and discussions and getting people on the painterly path. He never stopped sharing.”

She adds that he was also a very particular painter. “When he was putting a still life together he didn’t want to be interrupted. But as soon as the arrangement was set he was more than happy for you to come in and talk,” Elizabeth says. “He looked at still lifes as abstract design—he wanted to convey peace and serenity. He wanted to paint with the naïve eye of someone who had come down from Mars. It was a question of positive and negative space, and all those forms and random objects.

“His studio is chock-a-block full of artifacts. The house is that way, too, all over

the place. I’m sitting in my kitchen and I’m seeing 14 things. And to the dismay of my cleaning lady, he didn’t want anything dusted because he might want a dusty piece for a painting,” she says, adding that Hunter had a cat named Batman that would weave through all the artifacts and, remarkably, never knock over any of the jars, pots and bottles that are iconic characters in his works.

At the time of his death, Hunter had several pieces that were incomplete, including one that is on his easel now. “I’ve had a difficult time going in his studio,”

Elizabeth says. “I got crying so hard I could only vacuum half the room. It’s going to be very hard to be in there and see the unfinished piece on the easel.”

Hunter’s last new works will open in the exhibition *Hunter and Harrington*, with artist James Harrington, starting on September 27 at Tree’s Place in Orleans, Massachusetts. That show, scheduled before he died and not canceled at the request of his family, will run through October 9, the same day a career retrospective opens at the Guild of Boston Artists. ●

HUNTER AND HARRINGTON

When: September 27–October 9, 2014; September 27, 5 to 7 p.m., opening reception

Where: Tree’s Place, Route 6A at 28, Orleans, MA 02653

Information: (508) 255-1330, www.treesplace.com

ROBERT DOUGLAS HUNTER: RETROSPECTIVE

When: October 9–November 1, 2014; October 16, 5:30–7:30 p.m., reception

Where: Guild of Boston Artists, 162 Newbury Street, Boston, MA 02116

Information: (617) 536-7660, www.guildofbostonartists.org