



150th Anniversary of the Metropolitan Museum of Art ...and Us...a True Story

In the autumn of 2018, I received an e-mail from an editor and writer who was working on a project for the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Met was planning the New York in Art 2020 Engagement Books, 2020 calendars, and The Met 365 Masterpieces 2020.

She was seeking copyright permission and the correct credit line for Brooklyn Bridge, a silkscreen done by Leon Bibel in 1938 which is in the Met Collection. They wanted to include the image in each of the formats.

Part of our representation of Leon's estate is to grant such permission, and of course, we were *over the moon* to receive such wonderful news.

They also needed an excellent file, which we provided. Everything was quite perfect. We sent in everything. They let us know that we could order directly from the publisher.

We contacted Leon's extended family. They were thrilled with the news.

We decided to send one of the formats to all of our wonderful clients who had collected Leon's work over our many years of representation.

Everything was going very smoothly. In early autumn of 2019, we were told that the printed calendars and engagement books were ready to ship. We put in an order and eagerly awaited the materials.

They were spectacular...beautifully printed, a wonderful selection of New York City images. Nothing could have been better.

We wrote to each of our clients and the family members and sent out the gifts to each of them.

It was an honor...but the even more special honor was another printed part of the collection called *Art: The Met 365 Masterpieces 2020*.

To imagine all of the thousands of treasures in the Met collection...and for them to choose a work of art by Leon, who we knew so well, and who was so deserving of the attention...well, it really didn't get better than that.

As the year drew to a close, I curated an exhibition of Leon's art with an emphasis on his silk screens, but including his work in many media. We were hoping that the publication of the materials would bring attention to the work that we had championed for so many years. We put the information of the new exhibition on our website, and then, within what seemed like milliseconds, we started hearing about a virus in China that was deadly and resulted in lockdowns of a city. There were primaries going on all over the country. Politicians running for office were making appearances all over the country. All anyone could think about was voting a lunatic out of office and saving our country from further disintegration.

And yet, those two threads kept colliding...there is a deadly virus spreading... and we are having a presidential election that gets decided first by the winner of the primaries.

People were traveling. People were congregating in crowded voting venues.

The news of a death on our shores made it more serious. Yet, nothing happened immediately except the attempt to minimize and say that we were not vulnerable to a major problem in the United States ...that whatever is going on "over there" will not come here.

Mitch and I were trying to pay attention to both phenomena at the same time.

The Whitney was about to open a simply amazing sounding exhibition: **Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art.**

We had seen the Diego Rivera murals in Detroit, and other Rivera art whenever we could, but the premise of this show was so close to our work in many ways, we just couldn't wait to go.

I recall very clearly that the opening to the public was on February 12, 2020. I never like to go to openings because the crowds can get overwhelming at major venues, but I remember thinking that the news can get worse...and I don't want to miss this groundbreaking exhibition, so we decided to go on opening day.

This is what I wrote to the Whitney, afterward:

On February 12, my husband and I were fortunate enough to see *Vida Americana*. The moment that it was announced, we could hardly wait for it to open.

The subject is of particular interest to us as we represent the work of a WPA artist and specialize in WPA era art.

It was remarkable....breathtakingly so...and I am so very glad that we went when we did.

I came home and directly afterward sent e-mails out to many of our clients and friends, letting them know that this was a must-see exhibition.

But, even that day was strange.

As we approached the museum, there was no line outside. We couldn't believe it. Then, there were no lines for admission. The exhibition had visitors, but none of the spaces had many people at all the entire time that we were there. *It just didn't compute.*

We went upstairs to have coffee in the afternoon, and we were the only ones there...on opening day!

We walked back to the F train through the Village, and the streets were empty and quiet. We had been paying attention to the news, but at that point, no one was predicting a catastrophe in New York.

It seems that was the day that something changed profoundly.

We had planned to see the exhibition again because it was so very worthy...really top-notch...but sadly, that was the last day that we rode the subway.

I can't believe that this astonishing exhibition might not be seen by the audience it deserves.

It is unfathomable.

My very best to all of you at the Whitney,
Phyllis Wrynn

Phyllis Wrynn,
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Please visit our website, <https://parkslopegallery.com/>

They wrote a sweet letter back, saying that they would share my story with their colleagues.

That was the day everything seemed to change for us.

Even though for most people, March of 2020 seemed to be when restrictions started and panic set in on many fronts, for us, it was February 12th, the day we saw one of the greatest exhibitions of all time...and the last one since then.

We have changed some of the exhibition, but much of Leon's work is still on view and will be for a few more weeks.

Needless to say, everything changed when the virus ravaged the world. We couldn't have events indoors. Every aspect of our work life changed. Looking at art was not at the top of most lists...which we totally understood.

It was just so sad for Leon to be in the spotlight, and have that moment collide with a worldwide tragedy.

If you'd like to make an appointment to see the exhibition, please send an e-mail and we'll be in touch.

We are observing all safety precautions...indoor masks...good air circulation, etc.
My very best,

Phyllis Wrynn
Park Slope Gallery
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