Family Matters
three Generations of Women

SUZANNE HODES

Thursday, June 20 through Wednesday, September 25, 2013
Self-Portrait (After G. Bellini), 2004
Charcoal, Conté, pastel on paper, 30" × 41"
INTRODUCTION

Artistic production and activism are at the core of the Women’s Studies Research Center’s (WSRC) mission, so it is extremely fitting that the WSRC would present this exhibition by local artist Suzanne Hodes, who has devoted an entire lifetime to both pursuits, quite often in concert with one another. In addition to the paintings, drawings, and prints in “Family Matters: Three Generations of Women,” the WSRC presents a supplementary exhibition of artwork and archival material from her work with Artists for Survival, an organization that educated the public on the dangers of the nuclear arms race.

“Family Matters” explores legacy, memory, reverence, and love. Through the eyes of a daughter, a granddaughter, and an artist, Hodes probes for the essence of what it means to be intimately connected to another human being: to see that person for who she really is, to feel empathy, to engage with care and compassion. The work conveys Hodes’ s fondness for both her subjects and their surroundings—living rooms, streetscapes, favorite tables and chairs. Hodes captures intimate moments in time with finesse and chronicles both the sweetness and pain of aging with great sensitivity. Spanning nearly three decades, this retrospective celebrates the sustaining forces of creativity and womanhood in one family, expressed by one artist.

It is an honor for the WSRC to pay tribute to a Brandeis alumna and revered local artist who, 33 years ago, co-founded one of the longest standing artists’ studio communities in the region just down the road from Brandeis. Hodes’s commitment to art and social justice originates right here in Waltham, Mass., where she lives and maintains an active studio to this day. May her devotion to her work and to Brandeis’s social justice mission be an inspiration to the budding artist activists that walk this campus today, as Hodes did more than five decades ago where her artistic career began.

MICHELE L’HEUREUX, CURATOR

This exhibition is made possible thanks to support from the Gary David Goldberg ’66 and Diana Meehan Endowment for the Arts.

COVER IMAGES:
Self-Portrait Drawing in Blue Smock, 1988, charcoal, Conté, pastel on paper, 41" x 30"
Grandmother’s World, 1979, pastel on paper, 40" x 50"
Reverie, 1989, pastel, charcoal, Conté on paper, 41" x 30"
FACE TO FACE: THE ARTIST AND HER SITTERS

In her exhibit, “Family Matters,” Suzanne Hodes’s museum-quality work strikes me as the 21st-century embodiment of 19th-century poet Henry Longfellow’s advice to artists: “O sculptor, painter, poet,/Take this lesson to your Heart/That is best that liest nearest,/ Shape from that your work of art.” Here in these paintings, drawings, and prints, we see Hodes probing and meditating on “what is nearest,” capturing elusive, endearing, and sometimes tough moments within loving relationships.

Hodes grew up in cosmopolitan New York, where art was news. We see how from New York the artist evolved her artistic paths. Long ago, Hodes chose paper and canvas as arenas for action. She found “artist mentors” in her teachers Arthur Polonsky and Oscar Kokoshka. Still others are “artistic ancestors”: Cezanne, Matisse, Alice Neel, and Joan Mitchell. This list’s divergent sources suggest how Hodes has mined art’s history. In her Self Portrait (After G. Bellini), she explicitly cites Giovanni Bellini’s St. Francis (1480). Visual art has unique powers to encourage viewers to look and to bravely embrace their subjects. The liveliness Hodes knows in art’s history animates her work.

New York streets and interiors persist as “characters,” even though Hodes left New York for Boston 50 years ago. The city that “stole the idea of modern art,” (Serge Gilbaut, 1984), that provided the artist’s subjects, still celebrates art. The city of her youth and the site of reunions with her mother keeps reverberating in Hodes’s works.

But the lead characters are her sitters. Hodes conjures them so individually through color, form, space, and brush gestures that each deserves to be named. Hodes’s mother is Helen Nadell Hodes; her grandmother is Martha Nadell. Hodes painted her mother over a span of 18 years, so we see her mother aging. Hodes tapped the triptych form that painters used for sacred subjects to depict her mother in her New York City kitchen. This triptych, My Mother Three Times, lets us observe in three ways. In all three views, Hodes has placed herself at a distance from her mother. She is watching from outside looking in. In other paintings we feel the artist holding her mother close. Fearlessly, she moves closer to observe and depict skin with its wrinkles, aging thinning hair that still curls—features modern cosmetics advertisers urge us to conceal.
In a fresh sense, Hodes’s artworks become “conversations” between the artist and the sitter. Hodes is the seer—the chooser—relishing colors and forms that will inform us about her many feelings about the sitter. Drawing and painting elicit different feelings. Drawings feel more intimate, close—immediate—even if the drawing is on a huge scale. Materials blend differently; personalities also blend. In the studio, I heard Hodes speak of her mother’s artistic nature. Here in *Memory of Mother in her Apartment at Dusk*, I see Hodes projecting herself and her enjoyment of lively colors to adorn her mother. In this work, the artist and her mother seem to blend.

Hodes is a master of figurative space. Nimbly, she can move the viewer close or keep us at a distance. In one large drawing, *Metamorphosis*, she addresses her acute awareness of her mother’s age. In this large work she drew her mother seated, imagined naked. But behind her seated mother, only the artist and we can see a tall, dark, embracing, shadowy figure.

It is important to know that Hodes is concerned with privacy and necessary boundaries. Throughout these portrayals, Hodes chooses to study closeness, tenderness, and love. Her work challenges us as viewers to hold onto and look at our lives, our homes, families, and friends. Her work suggests we be quiet, look, feel, and cherish the now.

Before closing, be reminded that “Family Matters,” presents only a facet of this artist’s prodigious career. Her work is always “about something”—from growing trees to rushing rivers and from the horrors of war and violence to the environment. In her seventh decade, Hodes continues to explore many facets of life. She devotes two recent major canvases to the horrors of the Gulf Oil Spill. Always this artist moves us to feel and to act.

**DIANA KORZENIK**

*Diana Korzenik, painter, writer, Professor Emerita Massachusetts College of Art, received The Boston Globe L.L. Winship Literary Award (1986) for Drawn to Art, A 19th Century American Dream and the American Library Association’s Leab Award for Objects of American Art Education (2004).*
Grandmother’s World, 1979
Pastel on paper, 40” x 50”
Mother in Her Orange Robe, 1989
Oil on canvas, 49” x 38”

Mother Reading, 1989
Charcoal, pastel, 17” x 12”
My Mother Three Times (triptych), 1989
Charcoal, Conté, pastel on paper, 50" x 92"
Suzanne Hodes grew up on West 96th Street in New York and took long walks with her family up and down Broadway, enjoying the colors, lights, stores, and crowds of people. During her high school years, she spent many afternoons looking at paintings in the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. With many galleries opening, New York was an exciting place for an aspiring artist.

Starting college at Radcliffe on a General Motors scholarship, Suzanne majored in biochemistry, and took the only available art class at the Fogg Art Museum. There she met the museum director Agnes Mongan, who admired her drawings and changed her life. Ms. Mongan arranged for Suzanne to spend two summers at the Skowhegan school in Maine. There Suzanne learned of the lively creative arts department at Brandeis, and transferred to Brandeis to major in studio art. (While at Brandeis, Suzanne met chemistry professor Henry Linschitz. Six years later, they were married.)

One day in drawing class, Suzanne’s teacher Arthur Polonsky praised one of her portrait drawings and mentioned that Oskar Kokoschka ran a summer art school in Salzburg, “The School of Vision,” that might interest her. Spending a summer painting in watercolor from clothed models for twenty-minute sessions, with critiques a few times a week from Kokoschka, was a powerful learning experience.

After graduating from Brandeis, Hodes returned to New York and attended Columbia University, which had a one-year MFA program and provided art students with shared studios near the college. She had the good fortune to have Meyer Schapiro as her advisor. In her thesis project, “The Composition of Form and Structure in the Paintings of Vermeer and Mondrian,” she related the tightly composed realistic space of Vermeer to the syncopated rhythms and abstract structure of Mondrian. She received a Fulbright Fellowship in Painting (1963) to study in Paris, and a Bunting Institute Fellowship in Printmaking and Painting (1970–72) to work in Israel.

There has always been a deeply personal narrative in Suzanne’s work, as in the portraits of people who have had a strong influence on her life: her mother, grandmother, and other family members depicted in this exhibition.

The peace group “Artists for Survival,” which she cofounded in 1982, organized over a hundred exhibitions and worked for a nuclear weapons freeze. The group’s archives are now in the Museum of Modern Art Library in New York.

Suzanne’s recent solo exhibitions include “City Rhythms,” at Regis College, MA (2011); ”Reflections: Paintings,” at Artana Gallery, Brookline, MA (2008); and ”Suzanne Hodes’s New York: Expressionism Redefined,” at Joan Whalen Fine Art, New York City (1999).

Suzanne’s work is in many museum, corporate, and private collections, including Rockefeller University, Fidelity Investments, Fogg Art Museum, DeCordova Museum, Rose Art Museum, Four Seasons Hotel in Prague, Wempe Jewelers in New York City, and, most recently, the New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT.

For more information and images:
www.suzannehodes.com
Self-Portrait Drawing in Blue Smock, 1988
charcoal, Conté, pastel on paper, 41" x 30"
Mother Two Times (Apartment at Night), 1989
Oil, charcoal, Conté on paper, 22” x 30”
Reverie, 1989
Pastel, charcoal, Conté on paper, 41” x 30”

Metamorphosis, 1977
Charcoal, pastel on paper, 50” x 40”
Memory of Mother in Her Apartment at Dusk, 1990–2004
Oil on canvas, 46" × 56"
LIST OF WORKS

Grandmother’s World, 1979, pastel on paper, 40” x 50”

Self-Portrait (after G. Bellini), 2004, charcoal, Conté, pastel on paper, 30” x 41”

Mother in Her Orange Robe, 1989, oil on canvas, 49” x 38”

Reverie, 1989, Pastel, charcoal, Conté on paper, 41” x 30”

Self-Portrait Drawing in Blue Smock, 1988, charcoal, Conté, pastel on paper, 41” x 30”

Mother Two Times (Apartment at Night), 1989, oil, charcoal, Conté on paper, 22” x 30”

Apartment at Night, 1988, monotype, 12” x 18”

Metamorphosis, 1977, charcoal, pastel on paper, 50” x 40”

My Mother Three Times (triptych), 1989, charcoal, Conté, pastel on paper, 50” x 92” overall

Memory of Mother in Her Apartment at Dusk, 1990–2004, oil on canvas, 46” x 56”

Three Minutes to Midnight (Adam and Eve), 1984, lithograph, 24” x 19”

Young and Old, c. 1969, etching, drypoint, 6” x 7.5”

Together, 1968, etching, 12” x 12.5”

Mother Reading, 1989, charcoal, pastel, 17” x 12”

Three Generations, 1977, charcoal, pastel, 27” x 20”