Staten Island Museum's Artists/Ideas Series presents
Betty Bressi Retrospective

Opening Reception Sunday, January 25, 2015
2:00pm - 4:00PM
Staten Island Museum
75 Stuyvesant Place
Staten Island, NY 10301
P. 718 737-1135
StatenIslandMuseum.org
$5/Free for Members

This exhibition has been made possible, in part, through support from the New York State Council on the Arts and the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

Betty Bressi inspires us to use the queen of machines - the typewriter to make art! Poetry, dance and art - fingers get ready, our typewriters will await you. Use ours or bring your own manual typewriter.

On-going: Workshop: paper weaving and typewriter activities
2:00 - 3:00pm Typewriter Poetry - Travelling public/performance poet Billmarie will create unique poems for you on her 1950's pink typewriter.
3:00 - 3:30 Typewriter Performance - Deep Tanks Butoh with dancers Jayoung Yoon and Florence Poulan and percussionist/composer Kevin Norton.

Curator's Talk: Betty Bressi & Edith Susskind
Sunday, March 8, 2:00 P.M.
Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Place
Curator Robert Bunkin will discuss works by Betty Bressi and in the Edith Susskind Collection. Special guest speaker, Susan Visconti will reminisce about her aunt, Betty.

Lunch & Learn: Betty Bressi & Edith Susskind
Wednesday, March 18, 12:30pm – 2:00pm
Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Place
$25.00 Pastosa Box Lunch included
To register, call Loretta Lonecke at 718.483.7103 by March 11. Curator Robert Bunkin tours the works of Artist Betty Bressi and Collector Edith Susskind.

Cover image:
Detail: Watercolor Dots & Letters
Watercolor, colored pencil on paper, n.d.

BETTY BRESSI
Retrospective
January 25 through April 8, 2015
STATEN ISLAND MUSEUM

Related Programs
Betty's Typewriter Love Fest - a Second Saturday event
Saturday, February 14, 2015, 1:00 - 4:00pm
Free with Museum admission
Betty Bressi inspires us to use the queen of machines - the typewriter to make art! Poetry, dance and art - fingers get ready, our typewriters will await you. Use ours or bring your own manual typewriter.

On-going: Workshop: paper weaving and typewriter activities
2:00 - 3:00pm Typewriter Poetry - Travelling public/performance poet Billmarie will create unique poems for you on her 1950's pink typewriter.
3:00 - 3:30 Typewriter Performance - Deep Tanks Butoh with dancers Jayoung Yoon and Florence Poulan and percussionist/composer Kevin Norton.

Curator's Talk: Betty Bressi & Edith Susskind
Sunday, March 8, 2:00 P.M.
Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Place
Curator Robert Bunkin will discuss works by Betty Bressi and in the Edith Susskind Collection. Special guest speaker, Susan Visconti will reminisce about her aunt, Betty.

Lunch & Learn: Betty Bressi & Edith Susskind
Wednesday, March 18, 12:30pm – 2:00pm
Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Place
$25.00 Pastosa Box Lunch included
To register, call Loretta Lonecke at 718.483.7103 by March 11. Curator Robert Bunkin tours the works of Artist Betty Bressi and Collector Edith Susskind.
Betty Bressi was a fixture of the Staten Island art scene since she moved to Staten Island in 1970. She often exhibited her work at the Staten Island Museum’s juried exhibitions, winning a Weissglass prize in 1972 and a solo exhibition, Works on Paper, in 1987. Her art was inextricably linked to her career as an educator: she wanted to make the lexicon of art as accessible as possible to children and adults. This meant taking a reductive approach, which is echoed throughout the entire Twentieth Century, from the pure colors of the Fauvists, to the gridded structures of Cubism, and a decidedly abstract use of flat forms. By the 1960s this approach evolved into Minimalism, but Bressi’s version is full of playfulness, she never adapted the high seriousness of mainstream Minimalism.

A key encounter for Betty was meeting and carrying on a correspondence with the painter and “mother” of Minimalism, Agnes Martin. Martin’s work was always grid-based, with a simple very explicit system behind all of her works. No matter how precise, there is always evidence of the hand in Martin’s works, also characteristic of Bressi’s work. But Bressi added the element of play, and a sense of improvisation that Martin’s work, and most of the Minimalists, lacked. Bressi always maintained an intimacy of scale. The joy and intimacy of her work reflect her passionate admiration for the work of Paul Klee, that “trickster” of 20th century art.

Betty Bressi loved theme and variations, a musical form that is expressed visually by using the same basic structure, and improvising on that structure endlessly, like Bach’s Musical Offering. Indeed there’s something musical in Bressi’s use of pattern, letter motifs, shapes and lines...a kind of visual counterpoint, related also to jazz improvisation. Motifs and images dance on the page.

Simple Gifts

Very few artists get a 75-year-plus work life and yet, it apparently wasn’t quite enough for Elizabeth (Betty) Bressi. Well into her 9th decade, this Staten Island-based artist was productively engaged, drawing and writing poetry.

What explains such vigor? There’s force of habit, naturally, but Ms. Bressi was also blessed with indefatigable curiosity. In one of the last entries in her final notebook, at a time when she was not able to leave home easily, she drew a tiny, expressive gingko leaf in colored pencil. Gingkos grow near her house in Grasmere. A few pages away, she began a poem with a perfectly compressed and lovely line:

I look again for Venus among tonight’s heavy clouds.

Ms. Bressi, who died in 2014 at 96, was a career educator, a poet, and as Island museumgoers have known for 40 years, a resourceful and high-spirited visual artist.

As a teacher, she understood that knowledge begins with the acquisition of fundamentals: Basic colors and plain-spoken shapes, single syllables and small numbers.

As an artist, she brought the same basic elements into play, repeated or combined, adapted or interwoven, as players in a visual drama. She might take a word, or just some type, a shape (or several shapes), some patches of color or some strips of carefully hand-colored paper (like Matisse, she painted her own paper) and then, depending upon her intentions, she might develop a drawing or a painting, a basket-like “vessel” or woven hanging.

In 20th century art terms, she understood the similarly-minded innovators of her era, from Paul Klee to the mid-century American Minimalists. And, having grasped their findings and conclusions, she developed her own ideas and strategies.

Viewers who have some experience of her work will find fresh adventures in Betty Bressi: A Retrospective. Newcomers – lucky them – will get to enter her remarkable realm for the first time, with surprise after surprise.

The fortunate citizens of an art-saturated place like New York are accustomed to cultural encounters that deliver beauty, pleasure, humor, intellectual stimulation and, more rarely, flashes of transcendence. Pleasure and humor, beauty and wit, plus transcendence... It’s a lot to demand: But Betty Bressi’s work is up to it. And then some.

Michael Fressola, Art Writer

Robert Bunkin, Art Curator

Letternet Series: Os & Is

Japanese Internment Camp in Winter
Watercolor, January 1943

Simple Gifts
20th Century Artist

Betty Bressi was a fixture of the Staten Island art scene since she moved to Staten Island in 1970. She often exhibited her work at the Staten Island Museum’s juried exhibitions, winning a Weissglass prize in 1972 and a solo exhibition, Works on Paper, in 1987. Her art was inextricably linked to her career as an educator: she wanted to make the lexicon of art as accessible as possible to children and adults. This meant taking a reductive approach, which is echoed throughout the entire Twentieth Century, from the pure colors of the Fauvists, to the gridded structures of Cubism, and a decidedly abstract use of flat forms. By the 1960s this approach evolved into Minimalism, but Bressi’s version is full of playfulness, she never adapted the high seriousness of mainstream Minimalism.

A key encounter for Betty was meeting and carrying on a correspondence with the painter and “mother” of Minimalism, Agnes Martin. Martin’s work was always grid-based, with a simple very explicit system behind all of her works. No matter how precise, there is always evidence of the hand in Martin’s works, also characteristic of Bressi’s work. But Bressi added the element of play, and a sense of improvisation that Martin’s work, and most of the Minimalists, lacked. Bressi always maintained an intimacy of scale. The joy and intimacy of her work reflect her passionate admiration for the work of Paul Klee, that “trickster” of 20th century art.

Betty Bressi loved theme and variations, a musical form that is expressed visually by using the same basic structure, and improvising on that structure endlessly, like Bach’s Musical Offering. Indeed there’s something musical in Bressi’s use of pattern, letter motifs, shapes and lines…a kind of visual counterpoint, related also to jazz improvisation. Motifs and images dance on the page.

Robert Bunkin, Art Curator

City Lights
Oil on Canvas, c. 1960
From the Collection of Mr. & Mrs. John Visconte

Vessels from l. to r.: Red & Black Vessel, Green Vessel-Water & Sky, Watercolor Vessel, ca. 1990s
Betty Bressi was a fixture of the Staten Island art scene since she moved to Staten Island in 1970. She often exhibited her work at the Staten Island Museum’s juried exhibitions, winning a Weissglass prize in 1972 and a solo exhibition, *Works on Paper*, in 1987. Her art was inextricably linked to her career as an educator: she wanted to make the lexicon of art as accessible as possible to children and adults. This meant taking a reductive approach, which is echoed throughout the entire Twentieth Century, from the pure colors of the Fauvists, to the gridded structures of Cubism, and a decidedly abstract use of flat forms. By the 1960s this approach evolved into Minimalism, but Bressi’s version is full of playfulness, she never adapted the high seriousness of main-stream Minimalism.

A key encounter for Betty was meeting and carrying on a correspondence with the painter and “mother” of Minimalism, Agnes Martin. Martin’s work was always grid-based, with a simple very explicit system behind all of her works. No matter how precise, there is always evidence of the hand in Martin’s works, also characteristic of Bressi’s work. But Bressi added the element of play, and a sense of improvisation that Martin’s work, and most of the Minimalists, lacked. Bressi always maintained an intimacy of scale. The joy and intimacy of her work reflect her passionate admiration for the work of Paul Klee, that “trickster” of 20th century art.

Betty Bressi loved theme and variations, a musical form that is expressed visually by using the same basic structure, and improvising on that structure endlessly, like Bach’s *Musical Offering*. Indeed there’s something musical in Bressi’s use of pattern, letter motifs, shapes and lines…a kind of visual counterpoint, related also to jazz improvisation. Motifs and images dance on the page.

Robert Bunkin, Art Curator

---

**Simple Gifts**

Very few artists get a 75-year-plus work life and yet, it apparently wasn’t quite enough for Elizabeth (Betty) Bressi. Well into her 9th decade, this Staten Island-based artist was productively engaged, drawing and writing poetry.

What explains such vigor? There’s force of habit, naturally, but Ms. Bressi was also blessed with indefatigable curiosity. In one of the last entries in her final notebook, at a time when she was not able to leave home easily, she drew a tiny, expressive gingko leaf in colored pencil. Gingkos grow near her house in Grasmere. A few pages away, she began a poem with a perfectly compressed and lovely line:

I look again for Venus among tonight’s heavy clouds.

Ms. Bressi, who died in 2014 at 96, was a career educator, a poet, and as Island museumgoers have known for 40 years, a resourceful and high-spirited visual artist.

As a teacher, she understood that knowledge begins with the acquisition of fundamentals: Basic colors and plain-spoken shapes, single syllables and small numbers.

As an artist, she brought the same basic elements into play, repeated or combined, adapted or interwoven, as players in a visual drama. She might take a word, or just some type, a shape (or several shapes), some patches of color or some strips of carefully hand-colored paper (like Matisse, she painted her own paper) and then, depending upon her intentions, she might develop a drawing or a painting, a basket-like “vessel” or woven hanging.

In 20th century art terms, she understood the similarly-minded innovators of her era, from Paul Klee to the mid-century American Minimalists. And, having grasped their findings and conclusions, she developed her own ideas and strategies.

Viewers who have some experience of her work will find fresh adventures in *Betty Bressi: A Retrospective*. Newcomers – lucky them – will get to enter her remarkable realm for the first time, with surprise after surprise.

The fortunate citizens of an art-saturated place like New York are accustomed to cultural encounters that deliver beauty, pleasure, humor, intellectual stimulation and, more rarely, flashes of transcendence. Pleasure and humor, beauty and wit, plus transcendence… It’s a lot to demand: But Betty Bressi’s work is up to it. And then some.

Michael Fressola, Art Writer

---

Robert Bunkin, Art Curator
Staten Island Museum’s Artists/Ideas Series presents Betty Bressi Retrospective

Opening Reception Sunday, January 25, 2015
2:00pm - 4:00PM
Staten Island Museum
75 Stuyvesant Place
Staten Island, NY 10301
P, 718 727-1135
StatenIslandMuseum.org
$5/Free for Members

This exhibition has been made possible, in part, through support from the New York State Council on the Arts and the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

Related Programs

**Betty’s Typewriter Love Fest- a Second Saturday event**
Saturday, February 14, 2015, 1:00 - 4:00pm
Free with Museum admission
Betty Bressi inspires us to use the queen of machines- the typewriter to make art! Poetry, dance and art – fingers get ready, our typewriters will await you. Use ours or bring your own manual typewriter.
On-going: Workshop: paper weaving and typewriter activities
2:00 - 3:00pm Typewriter Poetry - Travelling public/performance poet Billinarie will create unique poems for you on her 1950’s pink typewriter.
3:00 - 3:30 Typewriter Performance - Deep Tanka Butoh with dancers Jayoung Yoon and Florence Poulan and percussionist/composer Kevin Norton.

Curator’s Talk: Betty Bressi & Edith Susskind
Sunday, March 8, 2:00 P.M.
Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Place
Curator Robert Bunkin will discuss works by Betty Bressi and in the Edith Susskind Collection. Special guest speaker, Susan Visconti will reminisce about her aunt, Betty.

Lunch & Learn: Betty Bressi & Edith Susskind
Wednesday, March 18, 12:30pm – 2:00pm
Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Place
$25.00 Pastosa Box Lunch included
To register, call Loretta Lonecke at 718.483.7103 by March 11.
Curator Robert Bunkin tours the works of Artist Betty Bressi and Collector Edith Susskind.

Cover image:
Detail: Watercolor Dots & Letters
Watercolor, colored pencil on paper, n.d.