

SPEAKING WITH A LEGEND

JOSEPH SOLMAN IS THE LAST OF 'THE TEN'



Contributed photo

Joseph Solman founded The Ten, along with Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb. They were a group of New York City artists who broke from the mainstream art of American Scenic painters.

By Abby Luby

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Veteran artist Joseph Solman sits in a worn recliner in his living room bedecked with his richly colored portraits and street scenes, like old friends, work he's painted over the past 78 years. Solman, now 98, has lived and worked in the sixth-floor apartment on 10th street and Second Avenue for more than 50 years. Oddly out of place in his living room is a large, flat-screen television.

"I love to watch programs about animals," says Solman in a soft gurgle.

Since getting outside is an effort for the nonagenarian, TV images have partially replaced city parks, bridges, storefronts, rooftops, park benches, the inspirations for many of Solman's drawings and paintings. Driven by city wanderlust,

he would never leave his apartment without clutching his drawing pad seeking out that curious somnambulist pose of sleeping subway riders, folks taking respite in a park or pensive readers at the 42nd Street library.

In 1935, along with Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb, Solman founded The Ten, a group of New York City artists who broke from the mainstream art of American Scenic painters such as Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton. The Ten, which also included artists John Graham and Ben-Zion, proclaimed themselves radically different from current venues. Solman is the sole survivor of The Ten.

"It started because galleries were showing too many artists that we didn't like — too many dark, romantic pictures. We felt our drawings were more honest and stable and that we were doing better work."

At that same time, Rothko wrote

"Whitney Dissenters' Manifesto" a rail against the museum's show of American art. In 1940, after several of The Ten became better known, they disbanded. Although Rothko, known as Marcus Rothkowitz, and Gottlieb veered off to abstract expressionism, Solman steadfastly remained a figurative painter with his own expressionist bent.

An artist in the Works Project Administration during the Depression, Solman met and worked with many great artists. He befriended Milton Avery.

"Avery had a big influence on me when I was young and working in the WPA. That was a great program. I couldn't have worked without it. It's where I saw Paul Klee's work, which I liked very much."

Avery had called on Solman's writing expertise to write an introduction to Avery's famous set of

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Tomorrow in FAMILY: Coping with miscarriage.

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Solman

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five original etchings. Solman's literary talent became known early on when he became editor in chief for Art Front magazine, published in the late 1930s. Solman boldly introduced photography as an art form in the magazine.

In the early '50s, abstract expressionism was the new American art hegemony. Solman, pressing his agenda against any one dominant art aesthetic, partnered with Edward Hopper and Jack Levine and founded Reality, an artists' publication aligned against abstract expressionism.

His work paintings of back streets, coal bins, ice cellars, storefronts, were re-created in textured, luminous colors and jaunty angles.

"My streets scenes were more meaningful. They were romantic — just like the feeling between a man and a woman, but different. Here that same feeling can relate to something in the atmosphere that creates a feeling between the viewer and the painter."

Solman's sense of rhythmic textures within the form stretches our sensibilities of how we

can see the world. The sky over a harbor is a loose, slathery gray wash, a still life yields to quirky soft lines intoning an ethereal ambience. Faces in Solman's portraits are sometimes fuchsia, lime, ochre, fusing with similarly colored backgrounds. In 1999, Solman painted a green-tinted portrait of George Stephanopoulos, Bill Clinton's former adviser, who decidedly didn't buy the painting.

"The color gives faces a classic quality. And I didn't think it was important to explain it to some people although they thought it was (important)." Within facial features Solman folds in abstraction with small, multicolored brushstrokes or thickly textured paint enlivening a cheek or an eyelid.

Solman recently saw the movie "Alice Neel." He knew Neel in the '60s and '70s and intoning his own bravado brand of jocularly, Solman says, "Neel was the best portrait artist in the country, but then she wasn't really. First I was the best portrait artist and then I made her known."

His circle of friends included William DeKooning, Milton Avery, Raphael Sawyer and later on Solman would escape the

city's summer heat with Avery, John Sloan and Marsden Hartley to paint in Cape Ann, Mass.

But New York was always home base to Solman, a city he claims is changing every day. His cluttered but comfortable apartment is over what used to be the Second Avenue Deli, a kosher dining institution since 1954. The deli closed last year after problems with the landlord. Ten years ago, deli owner Abe Lebewoh was mysteriously murdered — the crime is still unsolved. Abe's brother, Jack, ran the restaurant after his death. Now the deli is gone, supplanted by a bank.

"There are changes in the city about every two weeks," says Solman, who ventures out as much as possible with the help of his home aide. "The size of the streets change and so do the buildings. The deli is now a bank — there are banks on every corner. How many banks do we need? We don't have enough money to put in so many banks."

Solman is represented in major museums and galleries including the Hirshhorn Museum; the Smithsonian American Art Museum; the Phillips Col-

lection in Washington, D.C.; as well as the Whitney Museum of Modern Art in New York. Critics have described Solman's work as a fusion of representationalism, cubism and abstraction.

In one of the many books on Solman's paintings crammed into his bookshelves, he shows us the 1930 piece, "Solman Sign Co." and says it was a semi-abstract work. Floating haphazardly on assorted square signs are prosthetic limbs, special corsets, neck braces, a crutch. The number "51" painted in a garish orange over black hangs near a small white oval sign at the top with delicate cursive letters reads "Solman's Sign Co."

"I saw these surreal objects in a storefront and I painted it straight," says Solman, pointing to the reproduction in the book. "In those days, a piece became semi-abstract if you put one letter in it, which was enough to make the work more serious. If you put a whole sign in it you were telling a story."

Painter Joseph Solman in his New York City apartment.

Contributed photo



Art seen

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Museums & Nonprofit Venues

THE ALDRICH CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM Arturo Herrera: *Castles, Dwarfs, and Happychaps* Imagery from children's books and other popular culture sources create a hybrid of works that are familiar and foreign. Through Sept. 2, \$7-\$4 for seniors and college students; free for members, children 18 and younger, kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers and all visitors on Tuesdays. Tuesday-Sunday, noon-5 p.m. Closed Nov. 5, Day of Thanksgiving and Christmas. 228 Main St., Ridgefield. 438-4519 or www.aldrichart.org.

THE BARNUM MUSEUM Grand Adventure: A Celebration of the American Spirit in Bridgeport One-hundred-year-old museum showcases the life and times of Barnum, General Tom Thumb, Lavinia Warren and Jerry Lind, an Egyptian mummy (named Pa-to) and a 1,000-square-foot scale model of a five-ring circus. Permanent exhibit. **P.T. Barnum: Bethel to Broadway to Bridgeport** Guides visitors through Barnum's life and career, from his hometown of Bethel, through his American Museum on Broadway, and his later years living in Bridgeport. Permanent exhibit. \$5, \$4 for seniors and students, \$3 for children 4-17; free for children younger than 4 and members. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; Sunday, noon-4:30 p.m. 820 Main St., Bridgeport. 931-1104 or www.barnum-museum.org.

BRIDGE MUSEUM Flora and Fauna Themes and symbols in the decorative arts of China. Through Sept. 9. **The Bruce Museum: A Century of Change** Highlights the museum's nearly 100-year history and joins in the celebration of the recent publication of the Greenwich Library Oral History Project's book. Through Aug. 19. **Fakes and Forgeries: The Art of Deception** More than 50 examples of fakes of Western painting and sculpture from the Middle Ages to the modern era. Through Sept. 9. **Changes in Our Land** Permanent display of the region's environmental and historical development. **Zip, Beep and Whir: Toys of the 20th Century** Favorite toys from the 1900s. Through July 8. Paintings by more than 20 artists, including William Merritt Chase, Joseph DeCamp, Daniel Garber, Child Hassam, Willard Metcalf, Theodore Robinson, John Singer Sargent, Robert Spenser, John H. Tachtman and J. Alden Weir. \$7, \$6 for seniors and children 5-12; free to children younger than 5. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. 1 Museum Drive, Greenwich. 889-0376 or www.bucmuseum.org.

FLORENCE GRISWOLD MUSEUM The Circle of Friends Works by artists of the Florence Griswold House. Through July 1. In addition to the original 1817 Griswold House, where the artists of the Lyme art colony lived, the museum features a contemporary Merrifont gallery, education center, historic gardens and a restored artist studio. \$8, \$7 for seniors and students, \$4 for children 6-12; free for children younger than 6. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. 98 Lyme St., Old Lyme. 860-434-5542 or www.florencegriswoldmuseum.org.

HAMMOND MUSEUM AND JAPANESE STRAW GARDEN Incarnation Works by Korean artists. Through Sept. 8. **Swaddling Cultures** Works by Reena Kashyap. Through Sept. 8. **Mythical Landscapes: Intimations of an Order** Works by Martin Ries. Through Sept. 8. Wednesday-Saturday, noon-4 p.m. 28 Devesu Road, South Salem, N.Y. 914-869-5033 or www.hammond-museum.org.

HOUSATONIC MUSEUM OF ART Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; open Thursday until 7 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.; Sunday, noon-4 p.m.; closed all state and major holidays. 900 Lafayette Blvd., Bridgeport. 352-5052 or www.hctc.com.

KATONAH MUSEUM Changing exhibitions and educational programs, featuring six major exhibitions a year. Free. 10 a.m.-noon; \$5, noon-5 p.m.; \$3 for students and seniors; free for members and children younger than 12. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Summer hours (May 1 through Labor Day): Daily, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving.

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS Museum Medieval Maiden to Modern Saint Laura Coyle and Nora Helmann curate the exhibit on Joan of Arc. Through Labor Day. **Crosses and Crucifixes Exhibit** Being shown through today as a celebration of the Christian faith. Permanent exhibit featuring the history of the Order. Winter hours (Tuesday after Labor Day through April 30): Wednesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Summer hours (May 1 through Labor Day): Daily, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving.

Christmas and Good Friday: 1 State St., New Haven. 865-0400 or www.kofb.org.

NEUBERGER MUSEUM OF ART — PURCHASE COLLEGE Man and Nature Works by Cleve Gray. Through Sept. 2. **Fugitive Artist East** Works by Richard Prince. Through today. \$5, \$3 for seniors and students with ID, free to members and children younger than 12. Tuesday-Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; Saturday-Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Neuberger House, Purchase College, 735 Anderson Hill Road, Purchase, N.Y. 914-251-6100 or www.neuberger.org.

SMALL SPACE GALLERY International Mail Art EXHIBITION The Arts Council of Greater New Haven presents artist-designed postcards, which can be purchased for \$10 with proceeds benefiting Save the Children. Through Wednesday, Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. 70 Audubon St., second floor, New Haven. 772-2788.

STANFORD MUSEUM & NATURE CENTER Heavens Above Photographs of the universe from the Hubble Space Telescope. Through July 29. Monday-Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. \$8, \$6 for seniors and students with ID, \$4 for children 4-17; fee for members and children 3 and younger, and Stamford residents on Wednesdays. 39 Scofieldtown Road, Stamford. 322-1646 or www.stanfordmuseum.org.

WADSWORTH ATENEUM MUSEUM OF ART Connecticut Contemporary Works by 24 visual artists from Connecticut. Through Aug. 12. **Paint and Fortune** Five centuries of European masterworks. Through Dec. 9. **Picasso to Pop: Aspects of Modern Art** Some of the ateneum's holdings, including works by surrealists, super-realist and pop artists. Through Nov. 18. \$10, \$8 for seniors (62 and older), \$5 for students; \$3 for children younger than 12 and members. Wednesday-Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. 600 Main St., Hartford. 860-278-6707 or www.wadsworthateneum.org.

YALE PEABODY MUSEUM Yvonne Peabody Pioneer of the Year Exhibition inspired by the world's largest wildlife photography competition. Through Sept. 3. \$5-\$7, free for members, Yale students, children younger than 3 and everyone on Thursdays. Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, noon-5 p.m. 170 Whitney Ave., New Haven. 432-5050 or www.peabody.yale.edu.

Galleries

ARTPLACE Memory Reconfigured Mixed media and installations by Diane Pollock and Sandy Westel. Through today. Wednesday-Sunday, noon-4:30 p.m. Southport train station, New York/Westbound side, 400 Center St., Southport. 265-9847.

ARTSPACE BRIDGEPORT Resident artist exhibit Sculpture, fine prints, drawings, paintings, multimedia, photography, etc. Through June. Call for hours. 1042 Broad St., Bridgeport. 336-0435.

BENDEHN GALLERY Process Contemporary art and installations that give insight into the steps artists go through in creating their works. Through Saturday, Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thursdays until 7 p.m.; Saturday, noon-5 p.m. Greenwich Arts Center, 299 Greenwich Ave. 622-9986 or www.greenwicharts.org.

CARRIAGE BARN ARTS CENTER Life Lessons: The Model as Muse Drawings, paintings, prints and sculptures by area artists. Through July 1. Tuesday-Friday, noon-4 p.m.; Saturday-Sunday, 1-5 p.m. Wavery Park, Wavery Avenue, New Canaan. 972-1895 or www.carrriagebarn.org.

CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY PRINTMAKING Blue Print Members' exhibition of interpretations of blue. Through Aug. 11. Monday-Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Mathews Park, 299 West Ave., Norwalk. 859-7999 or www.contemrints.org.

THE CHESTERFIELD GALLERY Oil paintings and pastels Works by local artist Robert Selkowitz. Call for hours. Chesterfield Inn, 1404 Shippan Ave., Stamford. 978-1227.

CITY LIGHTS GALLERY Visions from the Heart The Barron Festival, the Kennedy Center and the City Lights Gallery present a juried exhibition of artwork of more than 60 artists with disabilities from 15 states. Through July 21. Free admission. Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-6:30 p.m.; Saturday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. 37 Markle Court, Bridgeport. 365-8522 (ext. 229 for reception tickets).

CORVUS ART CENTER Christ's View & Message of Love Artistic exhibition of works by Dr. Ala Bashir. Call for hours. 845 Whalley Ave., New Haven. 389-7410.

EXPOSURE GALLERY OF PHOTOGRAPHY Documentary Heritage Images by Walker Evans and Eugene Atget. Through July 14. Wednesday through

Saturday, noon-6 p.m., and by appointment. 1 Whitney Ave., New Haven. 494-4905 or www.X3photography.com.

FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY — THOMAS J. WALSCH ART GALLERY Empress Sculptures by Michael Ryera. Through July 29. Sunday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Benson Road, 254-4000.

FERGUSON LIBRARY Seaside Secrets Works by award-winning Connecticut children's book authors and illustrators. Through June. Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-9 p.m.; Friday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. 1 Public Library Plaza, Stamford. 364-1000.

FIRHOUSE ART GALLERY Land and Sea Artists' favorite land and seascapes. Through July 19. Thursday-Sunday, noon-5 p.m. 81 Naugatuck Ave., Milford. 206-0016 or www.milfordarts.org.

FINN GALLERY Hot! Hot! Hot! Greenwich Art Society presents a juried exhibition open to members and non-members. Through July 17. Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. Greenwich Library, 101 W. Putnam Ave. 629-1533 or www.greenwichartsociety.org.

THE FLOW OF ART GALLERY Double artist Works by Emilio Grossi and Ervin Nussbaum. Through Wednesday. Call for hours. 16 Rifer St., Norwalk. 838-0500 or www.flowofart.com.

GALLERY 105 Two Painters Works by Laura Barr and Laurie Rahrer. Through July 27. Thursday, 5-7 p.m. or by appointment. New Alliance Bank, 195 Church St., New Haven. 772-2788.

GREENWICH ART SOCIETY One-person art show Transparent watercolors and color photographs by Joyce Heck. Through June. Call for hours. Barnum Financial Group, East Building, 225 High Ridge Road, Stamford. 629-1533.

GREENWICH WORKSHOP GALLERY OF FAIRFIELD Art and Illustration exhibit Works by Daniel Brown. Call for duration of exhibit. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Fairfield. 255-4613 or www.greenwichworkshop.com.

IMAGES GALLERY Watercolor art exhibit Works by Stamford resident Margaret Osnes. Through June. Monday-Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. 202 Sound Beach Ave., Old Greenwich. 637-4193.

KARL SODERLUND GALLERY & STUDIO Seascapes and Marine Art New works by Soderlund. Through June 30. Tuesday through Saturday, 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m. 1657 Post Road, Fairfield. 319-1929.

LES BEAUX ARTS GALLERY Photographs and monographs Works by Greenwich artists Vicki Natter Fitzgerald. Through July 5. Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m.-noon; and Sunday, 10 a.m.-noon. Round Hill Community Gallery, 955 Round Hill Road, Greenwich. 869-1091 or www.

roundhillcommunitychurch.org.

MATHEWS PARK 14 Sculptures Traveling exhibition of sculptures uses contemporary styles and materials. Through July. Daily, dawn-dusk. West Avenue, Norwalk. 212-965-5790 or www.14sculptures.com.

MAYOR'S GALLERY — GOVERNMENT CENTER domo-terra ... booming nature Works by Donna Callaghan. Through Friday, Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. 868 Washington Blvd., Stamford. 325-8259.

PICTURE THIS OF WESTPORT Houses and Horses Paintings by Judith Lambertson and sculptures by Marcia Spick. Through July 28. Call for hours. 606 Post Road E. 2227-6861.

PMW GALLERY The Piccaso Print Prints by Ann Chemow. Through July 1. Hours by appointment. 590 Roibury Road, Stamford. 322-5427 or www.pmwgalteryplus.com.

RIDGEFIELD GUILD OF ARTISTS BARN Camera Works Celebrates the tools and techniques of photography. Through July 8. Wednesday-Sunday, noon-4 p.m. Halpin Lane. 428-8863 or www.rgoa.org.

ROCKWELL ART AND FRAMING — NORWALK 7 Surfaces New works by the seven-artist collective known as ArtWhi!. Through July 6. Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. 15 Marble Ave. 424-1200 or www.rockwellartandframing.com.

ROCKWELL ART AND FRAMING — WESTPORT Light, Color, Concept! Works by Ted Horowitz. Through July 17. Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. 15 Marble Ave. 424-1200 or www.rockwellartandframing.com.

ROCKWELL ART AND FRAMING — WILTON More Than Meets the Eye Works by Stamford photographer Phyllis Slinch. Through July. Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. 379 Darbury Road. 762-8311 or www.rockwellartandframing.com.

ROSENTHAL GALLERY — RICH FORUM The Silk Road Art in a variety of media by Fairfield County and national artists. Through Saturday, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; Sunday, noon-5 p.m. 307 Atlantic St., Stamford. 325-4486.

ROWAYTON ARTS CENTER Plein Air and Shakespeare on the Sound The center's June exhibit. Through July 1. Tuesday-Saturday, noon-5 p.m.; Sunday, 1-4 p.m. 145 Rowayton Ave. 868-2744.

SETON ART GALLERY — UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAVEN Mixed-media exhibit Works by Liz Maran, Sara Sutro, Jan Cunningham and Karen Dow. Call for hours. 300 Boston Post Road, West Haven. 931-6065.

SLO HUNT FARM TROST Fresh Perspectives in Studio Furniture Works by faculty and students from the Purchase College School of Art-Design. Through July 8. Call for hours. 44 Uptown Road, New Milford.

355-0300 or www.hurdhillarttrust.org.

SILVERMINE GUILD ARTS CENTER The Speed of Light Works by James Rosenquist. Through July 15. Tuesday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. 1097 Silvermine Road, New Canaan. 966-9700 or www.silvermineart.org.

STANFORD ART ASSOCIATION Stamford's Art Treasures: Past, Present, Future A project to honor the artists of Stamford. Through July 19. Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, noon-5 p.m. 35 Franklin St. 325-1139 or http://stanfordartassociation.org.

STANFORD ART GALLERY — UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT Sun Spots Works by Andy Hammerstein. Through Thursday.

Monday-Thursday, 8:30 a.m.-7 p.m.; Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m.-noon. 1 University Place (Washington Boulevard and Broad Street), Stamford. 251-8400.

WESTCHESTER ARTS COUNCIL Seeling Stories Celebrating children's books and the local artists who illustrate them. Through July 28. Tuesday-Saturday, noon-5 p.m. Arts Exchange, 31 Mainatonek Ave., White Plains, N.Y. 914-428-4220.

WHITE SPACE GALLERY Third Summer In Surreal, abstract and contemporary works from emerging artists and sculptures. Through July 21. Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; appointment until 7 p.m.; Sunday by appointment. 1020 Chapel St., second floor, New Haven. 495-1200 or 800-397-3792.

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