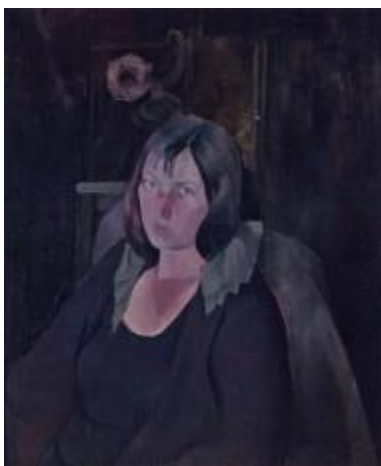


The Sun

The Courage of Her Convictions

By XICO GREENWALD, Special to the Sun | September 17, 2013

Biala: Vision and Memory, a recently opened retrospective exhibition at the Godwin-Ternbach Museum at Queens College, showcases the work of an independent-minded artist whose subtly colored figurative compositions have the courage of her convictions.



Edwin Dickinson, 'Portrait of Biala, Née Janice Tworok,' 1924

Estate of Janice Biala, with permission from Estate of Edwin Dickinson, courtesy Helen Dickinson Baldwin

Janice Tworok (1903-2000) changed her name to Biala to differentiate herself from her older brother, Abstract Expressionist Jack Tworok. The artist-siblings, Jewish immigrants from Poland raised on the Lower East Side, lived divergent lives.

An action painter, Jack Tworok played a leading role in shifting the center of the art world from Paris to New York after World War II. Biala, on the other hand, moved to France during the interwar period, where she socialized with some of the leading writers and artists in Europe, including Picasso, Matisse, Gertrude Stein, Brancusi and Ezra Pound. There she embraced the modernist innovations of synthetic cubism, making quiet cityscapes and interiors that emit the gray light of Paris.

This Queens College retrospective opens with an arresting portrait of 21-year-old Biala by her teacher Edwin Dickinson. The darkly colored portrait is softly modeled with crisp contours; Biala's gray eyes stare out in a confident, unflinching gaze.

Next to Dickinson's portrait are several ink-on-paper illustrations for Ford Madox Ford's "Great Trade Route," published in 1937. Biala met Ford upon arriving in Paris in 1930 and the couple remained lovers until Ford's death in 1939. Notable works from this period include dizzying paintings of bull fights, arena pictures alive with movement, and a roughly drawn portrait of Ford, with hash marks over rubbed graphite tones giving the writer's head sculptural form.

But it is after World War II that Biala came into her own. In "White Façade," 1950, the shuttered windows of Paris' limestone buildings are abstracted into thinly painted olive and ochre

TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

ESTABLISHED 1950

rectangles. On the right edge of the canvas a tree's foliage is also simplified into muted green geometry, as the blocky shapes and colors convey an overcast day.

"Nature Morte," 1963, a tabletop scene, features loose strokes of black carving out a white tablecloth arrangement. The canvas presents a wonderful interplay of negative and positive shapes. In "Table Chargée," 1963, Biala, working in collage, uses clusters of torn pieces of colored papers to roughly describe an interior.

In the 1980s and 90s Matisse's influence on Biala seemed to grow as her paintings flatten and objects, including cups, fruits, books and even a cat, are isolated in fields of color.

Neither during her long life nor in the years since her death has Biala's contribution to art history received the attention it deserves. Museum Director Amy H. Winter says "the politics of gender and style" and the fact that Biala "never fully embraced the mythic freedom and daring associated with abstract expressionism" left the painter "marginalized." Making "intimate" artworks while living in Paris "rendered her 'other.'" For Ms. Winter this overdue exhibition "serves as a tribute to artists who, like Biala, persist in remaining faithful to their personal vision."

BIALA: Vision and Memory on view through Octoberber 26, 2013 at Godwin-Ternbach Museum, Queens College, CUNY, 405 Klaper Hall, 65-30 Kissena Boulevard, Flushing, NY, 718-997-4747, www.qc.cuny.edu/godwin_ternbach

Biala and Brustlein, a concurrent exhibition featuring works by Biala and her husband, cartoonist Daniel "Alain" Brustlein is on view through October 27, 2013, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, 724 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY, 212-262-5050, www.tibordenagy.com