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GARSOOT
THE BEAUTY OF LIFE



Young David, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 36"

Dr. Paul Hertz – The Artist As Healer, The Healer As Artist

“Dentistry is often referred to as a science and an art; there is no finer combination in our profession than

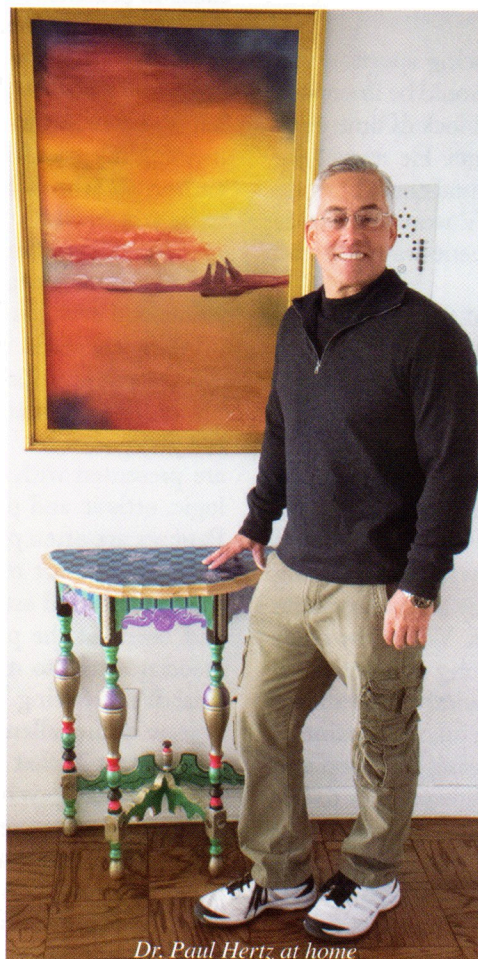
Dr. Paul Hertz. His experience with color, morphology, and texture allows him to fabricate functioning pieces of art in each and every one of his patients’ mouths. His artistic creativity and unique approach to improving smiles have improved the lives of thousands of New York residents in the past 25 years.”

– BOB BRANDON

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By VICTOR FORBES

A dreary drizzle was falling in the northwest Bronx as I made my way down Riverdale Avenue to the office of Dr. Paul Hertz, DDS. None other than the legendary gallerist Nina Seigenfeld Velazquez insisted that I meet the man. He was deserving, she said, of some coverage in *Fine Art* magazine. Nina, who was legendary in certain circles for her creation of the New Math Gallery in the wild and woolly days



Dr. Paul Hertz at home

of the Alphabet City art area of Manhattan and who was now curating exhibitions around town, told me, “Paul paints his world in vibrant color. He is a self-taught artist who loves to experiment with different themes and color palettes. His enthusiasm and genuine enjoyment of the painting process is evident in his work.” Well, that was good enough for me and as I approached his office, the drizzle became a torrential downpour and just like that, the road was looking more like a river and there was darkness on the edge of town. A patient was leaving as I entered and so did the staff.

Dr. Hertz and I discussed his upcoming exhibit at the Riverdale YMHA organized and curated by the aforementioned Ms. Velazquez as we toured his office, decorated with a collection of his work. The imagery was exactly as Nina described and well-suited for the space. Seascapes, portraits (the *Abraham Lincoln* is particularly memorable), cityscapes and renditions of Hasidic culture fit perfectly into their surroundings, adding a comforting and cheerful element to an office where people often come in with trepidation.

Dr. Hertz had a pleasant yet-business like demeanor with the build of an athlete



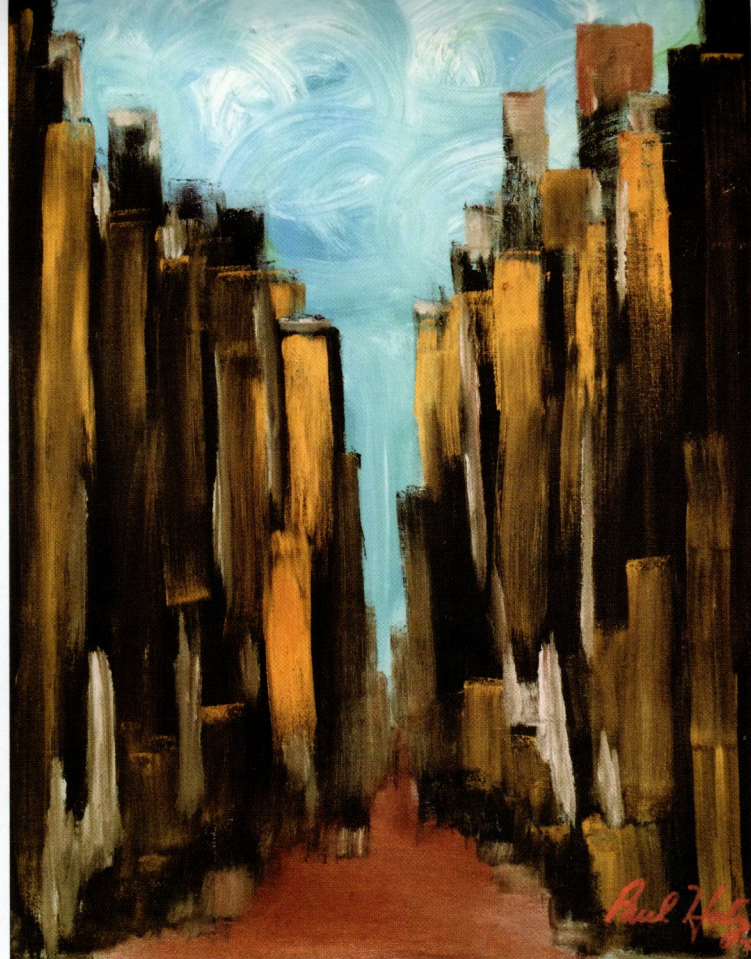
Exuma, oil on canvas, 36" x 24"

who loves para-sailing and other adrenalin-inducing sports. After more small talk about the art world, he asked if I would be interested in a dental exam, in that he now had a three hour block of time open due to the storm canceling the afternoon's patients. He must have sensed something and I soon found myself in a dental chair. Directly in my line of vision was a tranquil rendition of a woman and her daughter on a beautiful Caribbean beach. The scene was kind and friendly, transporting one to a peaceful place.

A standing room only crowd of patients and friends attended Dr. Hertz's one-man show later that week. It was a long way from Frieze or The Armory, but a rather perfect setting for a neighborhood dentist with a love for art who found early on he had a sensitive touch that translated to dental tools as well as paint brushes.

His penchant for the creative life was initially influenced by his grandfather, "a garment worker who saw himself as an artist. He took classes in art and languages," related Dr. Hertz, "and would show up at family functions in costume as he was always taking acting lessons. He saw himself as an elitist, a fancy kind of socialite yet he never had any money or formal education. When my sister and I were at our grandparents apartment as young children, they didn't have a TV so when we were asked to sit quietly, we watched him at his easel and were always told, 'Just be careful of the paints.'"

In his youth, the patriarch was grabbed during his sleep and forced to join the Polish Cavalry, which never allowed Jews to become cavalry soldiers, but he became one. After his second tour when he thought he would be allowed to return home, he was told otherwise and went AWOL. He made it to Paris where he met my grandmother who was born in 1900 and witnessed atrocities as a child in Ukraine. She was there (after living in the US for ten



Cityscape, oil on canvas, 18" x 24"

years) to testify at the war crimes trial of a general who led Cossacks in practicing their battle maneuvers on unarmed Jews in her hometown. She escaped as a child when her family packed her up in a cart, hidden under straw. Somehow she made her way to the coast and a boat to America where her newfound freedom allowed her to become part of the Suffragette movement. In Paris, after meeting my grandfather, who was ten years her junior, she told the authorities who recaptured him that he was her future husband and so he was freed.

In college, Paul started sculpting but never painted until after dental school when he was gifted with his grandfather's brushes, paints and even his easel, which he uses to this day. "It's a wonderful thing because I think of him whenever I am painting."

In relating his creative side to his professional practice, Dr. Hertz states, "I made up the phrase, 'Not all dentists are artists, but the good ones are.' Dentistry is an art. You have a set of tools and are presented with a problem. The problem has mechanical, biologic, artistic and psychological components all at the same time. Patients are often physically uncomfortable as well as mentally anguished. The art of dentistry is being able to solve the problem functionally and esthetically while balancing the mental condition and needs of the person. My father was a dentist. Several of his associates said to me pre-dental school, 'Why do you want to do this? It's so boring.' But that is not the case. Every single filling is unique and challenging." To do the work well, Dr. Hertz states, "is truly art in that the subtleties in dealing with the individual on a physical and psychological level are there. Seeing colors, blending, seeing line angles, seeing shapes — you are sculpting all the time. A single filling could use four or five colors to blend with the natural tooth structure. I do think that the skill set of doing dentistry made painting that much more sensible. The dexterity from working with minutiae and the work that we dentists do made the movements of

is a past-time. I don't do it for any other reason other than that I enjoy it. Working hard at dentistry allowed me to paint without formal training. In reverse, playing with the paints and moving paints around taught me and helped me with blending colors for my dentistry. My best work," he says, "is never seen in dentistry. You want people to say, 'Oh you have a beautiful smile,' not 'nice teeth,' or 'the dentist did a great job with that front tooth.' The ultimate is that people do not realize they are looking at work I did."

To keep in balance, Dr. Hertz starts his day with Reiki, a process by which healing occurs through the use of Universal Energies that are always present around all of us. This form of healing is credited to ancient Japan although there are similar teachings from most successful cultures throughout history. "It is not religious but many have equated the Universal Energies with or coming from God. An example of this in our culture would be someone giving off a good vibe. Reiki is directing those energies for good rather than responding to them. It is energy healing from absorbing the universal energy. I don't use it directly on patients, except very rarely. I use it indirectly with patients who are very stressed and anxious."

"You can sense a patient's anxiety, nervousness and sometimes panic. Reiki supplements my positive, confident energy to put those patients in a more relaxed state. I practice on myself every day, directing my energy so that I can be the best that I can for my patients. I don't often speak of this with them because it may be in contradiction with what they expect from an Ivy League-trained doctor. Many would not understand the concept, but I know they appreciate the result."

Reiki clears one's brain, sort of like meditation, and Dr. Hertz cites his practice as enabling him to come up with wonderful ideas every day. His creativity has led to one patent that is active from which he gets a small royalty every month. He has also devised an entire implant system which is currently at the patent office awaiting approval. "It is," he states, "a method of making implants less expensive and more available to a greater number of people." Perhaps one of these inventions will allow him to trade his drills and x-ray machines for more time to spend in front of his grandfather's easel, which is still set up in his apartment.

To lead the life of an artist is one of his goals. As is becoming a full-fledged participant in that complex machine with many moving parts known as the art world. "The success of each level from studio practice, making, buying, selling and collecting," states Christine Kirouac, Director, Verge Art Fair, "can each be measured by varied and independent means.



Churchill Downs, oil on canvas, 18" x 16"

Gallery representation and sales are concerns that can sometimes stress as opposed to support the often forgotten foundation of what art is supposed to be about: the artist's work and necessity to create."

"It's a strange world I don't totally understand," adds the artist/dentist. "People say painting is so relaxing and it is. But my goal is to complete, not to paint. I see it as another challenge. I am just trying to duplicate what I see in my own vision. It changes as I go along. Often, I will go into my box of paints and while looking for one, find another. My supplies are not very organized, and I often will use what presents itself to me. Maybe this is universal energy. Everything else is so organized in my world, I don't need to organize that."



Amanda, oil on canvas, 36" x 24"

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