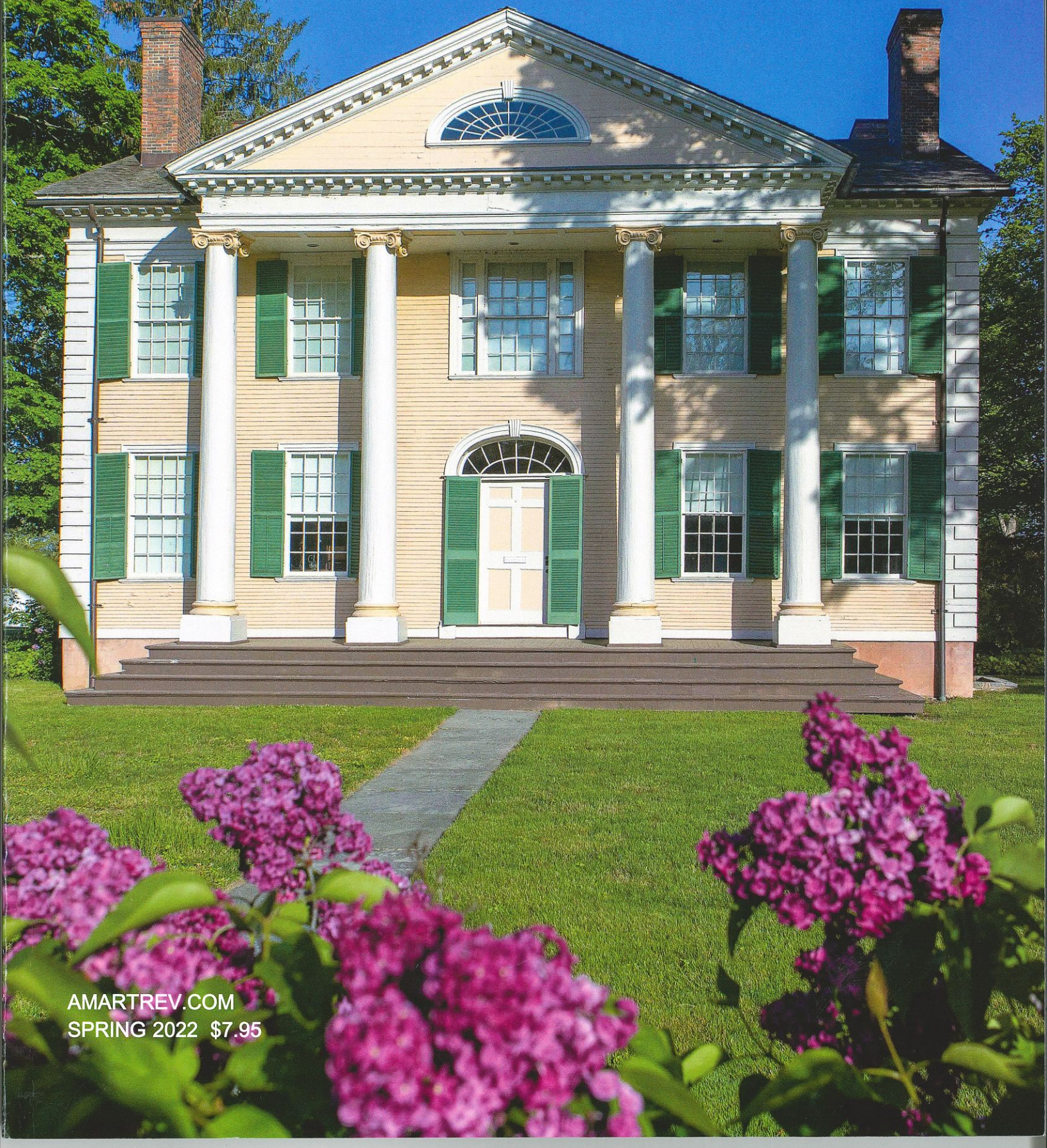


American Art Review

SPECIAL SECTION: OLD LYME, CONNECTICUT



AMARTREV.COM
SPRING 2022 \$7.95



ABOVE: *Still Life with Mannequin, Red Cloth (for L. Lotto)*, 1998, o/c, 29 x 37, Center for Figurative Painting.

RIGHT: *Portrait of Barbara S.*, 1972, o/c, 21 7/8 x 18, Vincent Arcilesi.

LEFT: *Street Scene*, 1961, o/c, 77 x 99, BNY Mellon.

Anderson's work since his death.

The Academy venue was particularly meaningful, as was the tightly focused selection of works: The traditional, sequential, skills-based art education that students receive at the Lyme Academy mirrors Anderson's own training as an art student in the 1940s and '50s, and his chain of instructors may be traced directly back to Frank DuMond and the Lyme Art Colony that centered next door to the Academy, at the Florence Griswold House (now Museum) in the early twentieth century. In 2011, Anderson was invited to

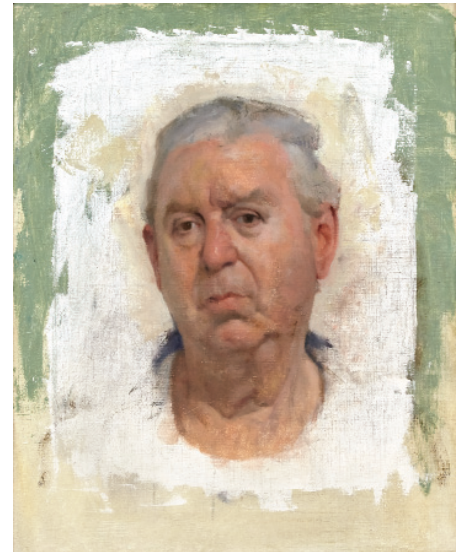


speak at the Lyme Academy's graduation ceremony and was given an honorary degree, confirming both his importance to

the Academy and its commitment to supporting contemporary leaders in figurative and representational art.

In so resonant a context, Anderson's portraits, still lifes, landscapes, and one heroic urban genre scene, seemed particularly at home in the Academy's Chauncey-Stillman Gallery. Each work demonstrated Anderson's affinities with the academic principles of drawing and painting, and also the independence and creativity that a sound knowledge of art's fundamentals could inspire. Not coincidentally, this connection between close observation, foundational training, and individual innovation has been at the heart of the Lyme Academy's mission since its founding by the sculptor Elisabeth Gordon Chandler in 1976.

In Anderson's small self-portrait of 1965, the artist's commitment to structure and composition is visible underneath a



ABOVE: *Morris Dorsky*, 1990-1991, o/c, 161/8 x 20, Stone and Betsey Roberts.

LEFT: *Self-Portrait*, c. 1965, o/c, 10 x 13, Orrin Anderson.

BELOW LEFT: *Hammock*, 1999, o/c mounted on board, American Macular Degeneration Foundation.

RIGHT: *Still Life with White Pitcher*, 1956-1958, o/c, 26 x 34, Allen Model.

BELOW RIGHT: *Portrait of Mrs. Suzy Peterson*, 1959, o/c, 30 3/16 x 26 15/16, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, purchased with funds from the Neysa McMein Purchase Award.



simplification of colors and forms. Indeed, here, as in all of Anderson's portraits, these formal elements only resolve themselves as a human figure because of how he has connected them on the canvas or paper at hand. The "connections" in Anderson's works are made first through a framework of lines that rely on precise proportions and measurements—"those are often the only things that hold a figure down," the artist once quipped—and next by a harmony of muted or "kissing" (Anderson's word) or similar tones. Portraits are heads before they are people; they are shapes before becoming a daughter or wife. Anderson has been quoted as saying, "I'm not particularly interested in 'realist painting.' I'm painting surfaces; I'm painting how things fall together and separate out."

Anderson's eye throughout this process was unblinking, recording unfiltered the subjects he chose. Any sentiment or politics or social commentary was tamped down, to allow the clarity and unfettered en-



durance of vision that his deceptively simple images required. This is not to say that Anderson's subjects aren't special. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Each person or thing is special because the puzzle of forms that comprise it is totally new and unique.

Born in Detroit in 1928, Anderson studied in his earliest years at the Art Institute of Chicago and at Cranbrook Academy in Michigan, and later at the Art Students League of New York. But his most enduring education as an artist was from libraries and museums, where he found inspiration in ancient Assyria and Egypt and the frescoes at Pompeii, and in Puvis de Chavennes, Corot, Degas, de Kooning, Roualt, Balthus, and Matisse. It was in the quattrocento, and in particular in the work of the Italian Renaissance artist Piero della Francesca, however, that Anderson found a kindred spirit.

Anderson's *Portrait of Mrs. Suzy Peterson*, painted in 1959, is brimming with



this legacy, underneath its surface calm. Blocks of color and strong lines form a scaffolding around the figure, uniting background and foreground across a single plane. The burnt orange-red of Mrs Peterson's shawl is repeated in the burnt

orange-red through the window and in the stripe on the far right; the mid-blue on her chest is echoed side to side, albeit in different hues, and the soft gray-whites form a cross shape around her, and against which her head is silhouetted. This color scheme and that cross are not accidental, of course—nothing in Anderson's art ever is. They allude to the religious narratives of Renaissance painting, to the colors worn by the Virgin Mary, and, in that swathe of yellow on the left, to the shimmer of gold in Byzantine icons too.

These references are everywhere in Anderson's art, but they are not at all the point. His is not an art of imitation or even aspiration; it is an art of distillation, in which all the extras disappear. And in this absence is the essence; in the blanks we find Anderson's deep and practiced knowledge, from his schooldays to his last. And that discovery is beautiful, and everything we need.