

Artists Among Us: Artist Profile - Gerry Giliberti

by Eileen Casey



"Blind Liberty" Solar Plate Etching, 1996, From Black and White negative, 5" x 7". All images courtesy of artist.

Continuing with our profiles of artists both living and working in the Hamptons, our next artist is Gerry Giliberti, who lives in Springs, East Hampton.

Gerry Giliberti was born in the Bronx, and raised in Bethpage. He attended the school of Graphic Arts & Advertising, SUNY Farmingdale AAS, and also the New York Institute of Technology for Communications/Education where he received his B.F.A. He also received a M.S. in Education from Dowling College.

Having a classical B.F.A. education, including printmaking, photography, sculpture, oil and watercolor painting, illustration, etching, silk-screening and other specialized printmaking processes, including archival photographic processing techniques, Giliberti stated that he hopes to "lay the foundation to see simple images among complex textures."



As a print-based photographic artist who uses graphics,

Artist Gerry Giliberti in his Springs studio. *Photo by Eileen Casey*

photography, sculpture and digital imagery to create abstract, surrealistic images and constructions that bring the viewer into a new visual world, Giliberti commented that, "My intent is to create a photographic metaphor that explores the spiritual and the abstract. My artistic aim is to render reality somewhat unreal. The use of multiple media allows me the flexibility to capture subtleties and mysteries of light that help redefine the academic assumptions of what photographic art really is."

Continuing, Giliberti comments that, "I grew up in Nassau County and went to Plainedge High School, in North Massapequa. I got interested in photography in second grade when I got my first plastic camera, which I still have. Music came next and I became a product of The Beach Boys/English Invasion and started taking drum lessons, playing to records and then playing in bands. That hasn't stopped."

Giliberti has served as a Board member on the Springs Improvement Society, and as co-director of the East End Photographers Group. He is also a co-founder of The Image Gallery in Riverhead, and past co-director of the East Hampton Visual Arts Festival, as well as a staff instructor at The Parrish Art Museum. He has received numerous awards including the 2006 Crazy Monkey Gallery Most Original Work-Photo Sculpture, honorable mention in 2002 at the Hecksher Museum in Huntington, and the 1997-1998 Award of Excellence for printmaking at the Southampton Artists Exhibition at the Southampton Cultural Center.



"Gargoyle, Italy" Photo Construction, Polaroid Emulsion Transfer on Plexiglass, 2001, 6" x 6".

Giliberti has also received several grants including the 1998 Southampton Town Cultural Arts/Recreation Grant for Photographic Preservation of Southampton Township; the 1998 Suffolk County Decentralization Grant to Jump Start the Arts, and the 1996 Photographic Land Preservation - The North and South Forks from the same organization. In addition, Giliberti has been awarded the S.O.S. Career Advancement Grant from The East End Arts Council.

When did you start making art and what medium(s) did or do you work in or consider to be your roots in art?

Gerry Giliberti: I began taking black and white photographs after I received my first camera in the second grade. Like most kids I took pictures of my friends and interesting places and things that I saw on vacations and school trips. At that time I also began asking questions about my family photos and how they were made. Lots of them were turn of the century photographs from Italy and early location shots of New York and other close relatives in



"Lumen 3" From Lumen Print Series, 2007, 11" x 14".

taught me the most.

What is it about the Hamptons that brought you here and enticed you to stay, work, and pursue your art here as opposed to some place else?

GB: I first came to the East End in the winter of 1972. I was playing in a rock & roll club band (Topo) and a musician friend of mine from Queens had a gig at McDipples, a local Hampton Bays club a mile or so west of the Boardy Barn. He didn't want to make the trip anymore, and my band was looking for some better gigs so we took it. We began playing in the 'off season' - eventually crashing with the bartenders and then eventually renting and living in a 'band' house in Hampton Bays. Needing four credits to get my B.F.A. from NYIT my department chairman's wife, who worked at the Hampton Bays Elementary school library, recommended me to be the assistant to the District Audio-Visual Coordinator. I received my special study credits and graduated. Then I worked there for two years, went back to school, and eventually received

my family.

I continued using my plastic "Sabre 620" (620 film format) camera until I got into junior high school where I got interested in Graphic Arts and printing. I was fortunate enough to work with my favorite high school teacher, Mr. Weigand, who later taught at R.I.T. Weigand helped me buy my first 35mm camera - a Vivitar DTL 1000 with 50mm 2.0 and 135mm telephoto lenses. At that point I was basically in heaven. All of my basic darkroom techniques, including offset printing, platen/letter press work, silkscreen, dry point etching, photography and working in the "wet" photographic environment stems from those experiences. Concurrently, I was playing drums in a local kid rock band named "The Innovations" and making 8mm movies after school. My dream was to go to USC film school in California but my family couldn't afford it. But I was still so excited about photography and the other graphic arts that I coincidentally received some scholarship money from my father's union and went to SUNY Farmingdale for Graphic Arts and Advertising. Of all the universities and colleges I attended I still feel that Farmingdale is the best and

an NYS Art Teaching certificate and tried to get work as an art teacher. I continued to play music in the Hampton Bays, Southampton area, including the Dune Road beach clubs. Unable to get a job in teaching at the time I went back to school for Engineering at Farmingdale and began working in the electronics industry. I eventually bought property in Springs, East Hampton and built a home there.

The Springs is an enclave of artists of all kinds who have a sense of community. I slowly became part of that community and became involved with the East End Photographers Group, Jimmy Ernst Artist Alliance (now the Artist Alliance of East Hampton) and the Springs Improvement Society.

How do you support yourself as an artist?

GB: I work a number of jobs like all artists on the East End. I support myself by working as a writer, photographer and designer of Technical manuals for an international company. I do music gigs with the Blue Collar Band and The Surf Dogs and try like every other artist to do exhibitions and sell work. I was also an educator at the Ross School, where I integrated math and science with many aspects of art.

One interesting photographic job was working with Leslie DiRusso, the Executive Director of the Heinrich Harrer Project, where I helped process 50 limited edition archival black and white portfolios of selected photographs from the Heinrich Harrer "Seven Years In Tibet" international exhibition all signed by Heinrich Harrer.



"Maine Porch" Silver Gelatin Print, 1998, 11" x 14".



"Italian Bike" Faux Copper Plate Digital Print, 2008, 11" x 14".

Why live and work in the Hamptons as opposed to elsewhere?

GB: The East End has been my home for most of my life now so there really isn't anywhere else I'd like to go. The East End and, in particular Springs, are great places to meet and work with other artists and to keep inspired to do new work.

What local environmental or historical aspects of the Hamptons do you relate to that may or may not be reflected in your medium?

GB: Initially the East End landscape was the most important to me but as the years went by the local history and the importance to preserve it became clear. I serve on the board of the Springs Improvement Society - a group whose primary mission is to preserve and keep from disrepair Ashawagh Hall, a 19th century building located in Springs. Also the preservation of Accabonac Harbor is of great importance to me and I'd like to see the reversal of any commercialization of it other than fishing.

What artists do you feel have influenced you and or your work?

GB: One of my biggest photographic influences is Edward Weston. I was first exposed to Weston's work when I was in high school. At the time Weston's "Pepper #30" was for sale for \$500. I had to make a choice of attempting to buy a



"Roots" Silver Gelatin Print, 1974, 11" x 14".

coverage. I got him the photo, we laughed about it - and from that day on we were friends until he passed some years later.

What advice would you give an emerging artist?

GB: Keep doing what's important to you and, if you can, find someone to promote your work for you.

print or use the tuition money for college. At the time this was a lot of money. Now the print is worth over \$500,000. Woulda, coulda, shoulda! I didn't get the print but found Edward Weston's daybooks when one of my friends told me about a second-hand bookstore on Hampton Road in Southampton just down from the Sip & Soda luncheonette. The Weston writings inspired me to find new images, work on camera and darkroom techniques and take time to record the technical details of his work. Weston's informal writings also helped me focus on the everyday occurrences that inevitably influence and lead to new image making.

Another influence was Jay Hoops, a photographer from Southampton, and especially her neighbor, Michael Lakakis, a Hellenistic sculptor. I had just purchased a new Nikon camera and was taking photographs and came upon Lakakis' house and yard. I photographed some of the sculptures in the yard and was totally inspired by the shapes. From that brief experience I created a series of simulacra photographs depicting human form in nature. I went back a year later and showed the photos to Lakakis hoping for some advice but instead was asked if I had photographed a particular sculpture. The sculpture had been stolen and Michael asked if there was a photograph of it so he could get the insurance



"Pumps" Springs, East Hampton, Faux Copper Plate Digital Print, 2008, 11" x 14".

What gives you an edge (if any)?

GB: Because I am a graphic artist I'm able to interpret images in many different media. This enables me to work with an image in one medium that may or may not work in another.

What are you working on now, and are you involved in any upcoming shows or exhibitions?

GB: I'm especially interested in archival photographic processing techniques and in such early techniques as albumin prints, photogravure, and gum bicarbonate printing. I led a tour at the Parrish Art Museum in October of "Modern Photographs: The Machine, the Body, and the City," which focused on the use by noted photographers of these and other esoteric photographic processes. I will also be in a group show with the East End Photographers Group at the Levitas Center for the Arts at the Southampton Cultural Center in December of 2008.

• To view more of Giliberti's work or to contact the artist directly go to www.ggiliberti.com or email ggiliberti1@optonline.net.



"Italian View" Venice, Italy, Photo Construction, Polaroid Emulsion Transfer on Plexiglass, 2001, 4" x 6".

Updated: November 5, 2008, 4:22 pm

www.hamptons.com/The-Arts/Artists-of-the-Hamptons/5358/Artists-Among-Us-Artist-Profile-Gerry.html

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