

LOOKING AT JUSTICE



Photo credit: David Hume Kennerly

Twenty-five New York Artists Paint Retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor
— Now on View at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington

by Sara Evans

A portrait, as any painter worth their salt will tell you, is always more about the artist than the subject. The sitter provides a foil or bouncing off point for the artist — an opportunity for the artist to convey their individual style and substance. Yet when the sitter is as prominent as Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, any painter would be put on notice that this is a rare chance to take your best shot. When the 25 members of the Painting Group were asked if they would like to participate in just such a project, they were collectively and individually bemused. An all-day sitting last October with the Justice, arranged by Walter Bernard, who is both a member of the group and a respected publications director, was simply too good to refuse.



David Levine

The Painting Group is a decades-old, venerable New York City art institution, a group of painters deeply committed to the principles and traditions of rigorous training, meticulous draftsmanship, and realism. Originally started as a deliberate and conscious reaction to minimalism, abstract expressionism and color-field art, the Painting Group has met every Wednesday night in Soho, sharing a model in a supportive and collegial atmosphere. This life-drawing session is a highpoint of the week for them, an artistic refuge. Music plays softly; concentration is intense. The walls of the studio are hung with prints and posters of the works of artists who inspire the group — Rubens, Sargent, Robert Henri, and the Group's own beloved David Levine.

The New York art world is fiercely competitive, often bitchy and vicious. The stakes, both financial and personal, are high. In contrast, the Painting Group provides a real oasis for its members. Painter Hannah Achtenberg Kinn notes, "The 'Masters,' Dan Schwartz, David Levine and Aaron Shikler, all come around to quietly observe what we are doing and offer positive, constructive advice. It's heaven to be with people who support and encourage and cheer you on." The Painting Group is very exclusive. Membership is by invitation only, and to keep the group small and manageable, a new member is admitted only when a vacancy occurs and potential members must be nominated by existing ones. Before being admitted, portfolios and resumes are carefully vetted. Some of the painters in the group are full-time professionals, such as noted portraitist Aaron Shikler; famous cartoonist David Levine; and Daniel Schwartz, whose work is in The British Museum, The National Academy and the National Portrait Gallery. Other members include the executive director of a large, special education school and treatment center in Brooklyn, a stockbroker, and a contractor. But regardless of



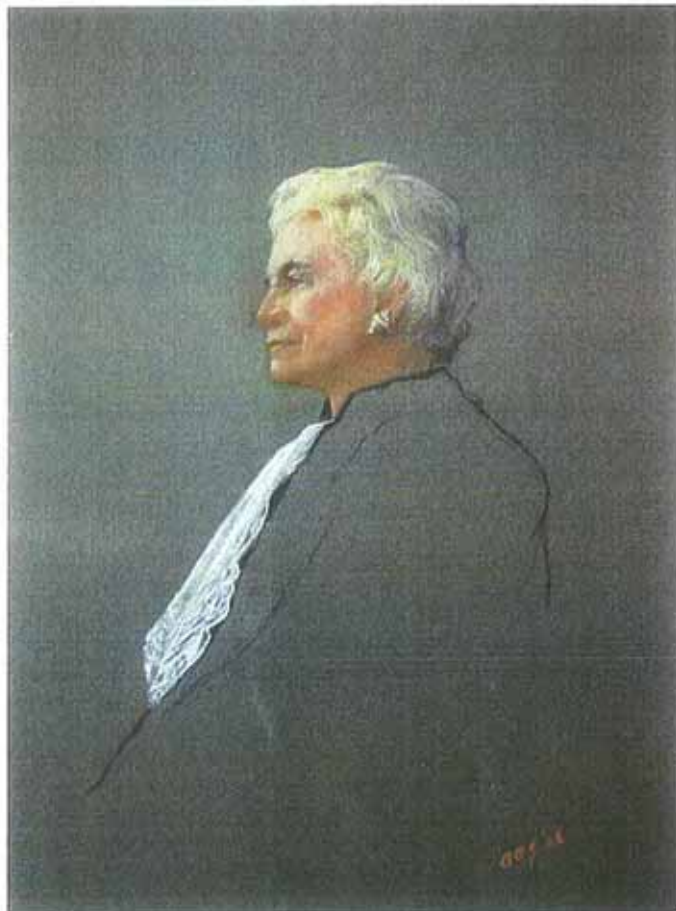
Hannah Achtenberg Kinn

whether they are full-time professional artists or not, all of them have shown and each is deadly serious about their art.

The notion of painting Sandra Day O'Connor as a group project is intriguing. She is, after all, a woman of many faces. The 102nd Supreme Court Justice and the first woman Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, O'Connor was appointed in 1981 by Ronald Reagan. She proved to be the consummate judicial compromiser. She took the notion of the swing vote to levels never before seen on the court. She could be tough and steely, or soft and compassionate. She has made a point of appearing feminine, taking her "first woman" role very seriously. She always shed clear light on complex issues. During her twenty-five year tenure on the Bench, she was invariably dignified—and deeply

beloved by her clerks and colleagues. When she retired in 2006, it was universally acknowledged that the Court and the nation had sustained a great loss. In the course of the all-day sitting last October, the members of the Painting Group found Sandra Day O'Connor relaxed and charming, joking and bantering, and taking great interest in what each was doing.

All twenty-five iconic portraits of Justice O'Connor will be on display at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington throughout the summer. The exhibition will then travel to Sandra Day O'Connor's alma mater, Stanford University, in California. ♦



Aaron Shikler



Irene Hecht

MO GALLERIA®
den **A** **rte**
MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART



Art DC 2007

april 26th - april 30th

At the gallery:

André Masson,
Karel Appel
Guillaume Corneille
Jacques Doucet
Sigfried Stolpe
Igor Mitoraj
Heiner Mayer

Limited editions jewelry by:

Arman, Pol Bury, Jorge Jimenez Deredio
Yoko Ono, Tomas Sanchez

Galleria MOdenArte
608 Banyan Trail, suite # 115, Boca Raton FL 33431
phone: 561.241.6239
www.modenarte.com
infousa@modenarte.com