

# ELINORE SCHNURR

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## Elinore Schnurr: A Brief Autobiography

I am a contemporary representational painter who uses real scenes to evoke and celebrate the complexities of personal interaction in a world of global connectedness and the desire for transcendence in a secular world.

In 1960, after studying composition at the Hans Hoffman School in Provincetown, earning a BFA degree from the Cleveland Institute of Art, and spending six months studying the great masters of painting and sculpture in the museums, churches and galleries in Europe, I moved to New York City.

I had come to view myself as a subjective painter, so I took to the streets to see what might engage my interests in this new environment. I found the comings and goings of people fascinating; philosophically, the anonymity and perpetual motion fed the angst I felt and wanted to express. I spent a lot of time in the Wall Street area; the canyons of stone facades seemed a perfect stage for following people about and observing them, sketchbook in hand. I drew simplified solid figures in sunlight. They later developed into hollow figures, perhaps because of the emptiness I felt in my relationship to the man-made environment in which I found myself. Many of these paintings were of walking figures, passing each other anonymously. Works from this period are now in public collections, including the Cleveland Museum in Ohio and the Smithsonian Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., and in law firms and corporations in the USA and abroad. One of the very first of this series was in an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1962 entitled *Recent Painting USA: The Figure*.

During the '60s and '70s my paintings reflected the threat of physical violence that was directly related to the riots in my Columbia University neighborhood caused by the social unrest instigated by the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. Newspaper and magazine photographs of these events supplemented my direct experience on the streets. I kept visual notebooks, juxtaposing photographs and thoughts, cramming them together to form new associations, the grainier the photographs the better. These emerging composites informed the paintings I was making. My explorations also led me to the countercultures of Zen and Eastern thought as a counterpoise to the violence that seemed to have overtaken our society. The solid or hollow, formerly empty figures became transparent; I painted figures that one could walk through: formless form, colorless color; a counter-culture response to the chaos surrounding me.

### [World Trade Center Series](#)

*The World Trade Center Series* is based on drawings and crude black and white photographs I made in the lobby of Tower II between 1984 and 1989. I had discovered that shafts of reflected sunlight cascaded into the lobby in the spring and fall around noontime. The people approaching or leaving the elevators seemed to dissolve in the light as it struck the mirror-like surfaces of the elevator doors and the adjacent walls and/or in the darkness of the elevators.

Many of these paintings were created in watercolor/gouache on paper, a particularly fluid and flexible medium that allows the color, light, and shadow to occur in a spontaneous way. The individual aspects of the figures were retained through attention to body language rather than specific details. The larger paintings are rendered in oil on linen, reflecting a more deliberate approach. Most of the World Trade Center Series paintings have found places in law firms and corporate offices in the New York region and beyond, such as McKinsey and Co. and Pfizer Inc.

### [Interiors Series](#)

In time, my palette became richer and darker in color and tone. The ongoing Interiors Series began almost as a contradiction to the way light had begun to take over the figures, rendering them almost invisible. I began to explore the darker spaces of hotel lobbies, cafés, and bars, all public spaces, but lighter in psychological tone.

There was more communication and interaction among and between the figures, and I enjoyed making small paintings on location.

After choosing a café, for example, I would order a coffee, set up my pochade box and small board, and get to work. I concentrated on the mood, the colors, and the space, quickly fitting people in as they appeared, like people walking on and off a stage. Some aspects of the space and figures were implied, others defined; again, the individual aspects of the figures were suggested through body language.

These small oil paintings often became studies for larger works painted in my studio. As the paintings developed, they acquired more complicated color resonance, textures, and compositional subtleties, and greater intensity in a poetic and philosophical sense.

As I move around the city, I look for interiors that excite my imagination — the elegant, the sleazy, the extraordinary, the mundane — and try to express how these spaces interact with the people in them. In this way I seek oneness of experience, allowing the push and pull of the paint to metaphorically become a substitute for reality.

### [Outside Looking In Series](#)

In this most recent series, I am working with images that I see as I pass by bars and cafés with glass windows that reflect the images of the street, intermixing them with the images of the people inside and the interior spaces. At Times Square, one of my favorite venues, there is an additional dimension of media images from the electronic billboards mixing with and cutting into the people having drinks on the other side of the glass. Media images have become part of our immediate reality, forever cutting into the collective sense of our relationship to each other. In these paintings, I am carrying the ideas inherent in the Interiors Series of people together in bars and cafés into another dimension by fracturing the people through the images on the glass, metaphorically displaying another aspect of intrusion into intimate connectedness.

Reflections, and motion when caught with a camera, create transparencies and multiple layers that become the building blocks from which my paintings are constructed. The layers are woven together, creating patterns that become ways of seeing the immediate world in front of us, behind us, and multiple views in between. The reflected reality is often visually indistinguishable from the physical reality, the two blending together in a flattened and collage-like way.

### [In Our Mind's Eye Series](#)

I had been searching for many years for a way to express the duality of the human mind that allows us to experience an immediate situation, such as sipping a glass of wine in a comfortable bar with a friend while seeing photos of the latest terrorist attack “in our mind’s eye.”

The sidewalk-to-ceiling glass windows of a bar on Broadway at Times Square became for me the perfect vehicle to express this duality. There are people behind the glass occupying a physical space, and there are electronic billboards reflected on the glass that can be altered to express the inner world. In this other current series the images become collage-like with a life of their own, but with a structural reality related to the real spatial world. These paintings became narrative in a way that my former paintings had not.

From the *New Haven Register*:

“Elinore Schnurr’s *‘Do We Care?’*, another painting of fragmented narrative, literally overlaps in both storytelling and paint. Here, a world of everyday activity is disturbed by a corner area that hints at potential destruction, the narrative and painting coming together in a dreamlike surface dissonance.”

## About the Artist

Schnurr has an art studio in Long Island City, Queens, New York. During 2014 to 2016, she has had three major commissions: a 140" x 60" triptych painting in oil on linen of Grand Central Terminal during Rush Hour for the Lobby of 4540 Center Blvd in Long Island City, a TF Cornerstone residential tower; a 74" x 110" diptych painting in oil on linen, entitled *A Possible Conversation*, for the Lobby of 80 DeKalb in Brooklyn, a Forest City Ratner residential tower; and a 35" x 122" painting of the East River waterfront as seen from Long Island City for the conference room of a construction company in LIC.

Over the years she has exhibited widely. Her most recent solo shows were at the H. Pelham Curtis Gallery at the New Canaan Library in New Canaan, Connecticut and the Dougherty Gallery at Crescent Grill in Long Island City, both in 2014; in 2011 she was one of four artists representing the United States in Nordart 2011 at Kunstwerk Carlshutte, Budelsdorf, Germany. Previous solo exhibitions were at the Atlanta Art Gallery in Atlanta, Georgia, Capricorn Galleries in Bethesda, Maryland, and the DFN Gallery in New York City, to name a few. She was the recipient of the Thomas B. Clarke Award for figurative painting at the National Academy of Design (now, National Academy Museum) in New York in 1986 and the Second Place Award at the Butler Institute of American Art Midyear in 2002.

From Review by Lois Wiley at the *Tribune Chronicle*:

“...second-place went to Elinore Schnurr of New York for ‘Vodka Bar #1’, oil on canvas, which pictures a dark interior, lit only by lights over the bar and a lamp on the table. The excellent color achieved by the artist’s dark palette is impressive.”

She also received an NEA Grant and a NYFA fellowship during these years. In a parallel career, she has created commissioned portraits for at least 75 individuals and families in home and office settings.

Her paintings are in museum collections including the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., the Museum of the City of New York, and the Museum of Fine Arts in St Petersburg, Florida, to name a few, and she has work in more than 50 corporate collections and hundreds of private collections in this country and abroad.

Elinore Schnurr continues to explore life and art through figurative paintings.

Paintings: [elinoreschnurr.com](http://elinoreschnurr.com)

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