

Lunch with Gloria Vanderbilt at Rats in Hamilton, NJ

Grounds for Sculpture

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**By Tammy Duffy
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I enter the gazebo, filled with glorious orange lanterns. This is a room of intrigue. Engaging paintings stand on easels along the walls. A few people mill about. I see Gloria and she instantly approaches me. Taking my hand ever so gently and looking into my eyes and says, "Hello. And thank you for coming today." I melt in her hand and I can't stop looking at her. She is just stunning. I touch her arm and feel the silk of her blouse. It is exquisite-- clearly, spun from the finest worms. It feels as though the fabric will dissolve in my hand. The color and pattern are splendid. Her entire outfit is flawless. Her shoes of gold balanced her in a perfect way. Gloria has an aura about her that is quite mystifying-- a Zen-like quality that is contagious.

Immediately she says to me, "What is that fragrance you have on? It's very lightly applied, yet enough to create a wonderful aroma and feeling. Not too much, just the right amount." I reply, "It's a fragrance by Salvatore Ferragamo called F. It's the men's fragrance for I never wear women's perfumes; I find them too floral and unpleasant." She smiles pleasantly surprised that it is a man's fragrance.

I had carefully selected my outfit that day. I had struggled with what to wear--should I wear one of my designs, something vintage, and something artistic? I chose to wear a crème colored vintage pillbox hat from 1940 and a cream colored, lightly sequined vintage Valentino (Oliver line) open back summer wiggle dress. In 1990, Valentino

created a line of clothing named after his pug dog, Oliver. I love that Valentino did this line; I am a total dog lover myself. It was the perfect outfit. Gloria loved my outfit.

Gloria and I began talking about her art. I shared with her two photographs that I had brought with me. She instantly remembered the pieces. They were lithographs of her artwork. These photos were of artworks owned by my best friend Baird Jones (who passed away in 2008). Baird was a large celebrity art collector during his lifetime. I used to photograph and help archive his collection.

More people began to come into the room so I walked around to look at her art and then took my seat.

Gloria gave a lecture about an amazing piece of sculpture she has at the Grounds for Sculpture in Hamilton, NJ. She also spoke about the paintings she had on display on the periphery of the room. The sculpture Gloria has in the park is entitled, Hearts Desire. (Hearts Desire is at the Grounds for Sculpture courtesy of the Sculpture Foundation)



Photo by Tammy Duffy

The Grounds for Sculpture is located in Hamilton, NJ. This wonderful lunch took place at Rats Restaurant in the Gazebo at the Grounds for Sculpture. GFS is not just any ordinary sculpture park; it is one of the world's greatest sculpture parks. There are over 300 sculptures on view in the exhibitions residing on 42 acres of land. I grew up on the land where this park sits. The land used to be where the NJ State Fair took place. I have glorious memories from my childhood of the NJ State Fair. Now that the fair is gone and the park is here, I continue to grow exquisite memories. Memories that have been sculpted by the genius of Seward Johnson. GFS has been built on a heritage that is 25 years old allowing the park to showcase incredible artwork, like that of Ms. Vanderbilt and others. The gardens at the Grounds for Sculpture are sculptures in themselves as they guide all those who enter into secret passages of hidden sculptural adventures.



Photo by David Steele

The founder of Grounds for Sculpture, Mr. Seward Johnson, is from one of America's greatest families, and understands the importance of giving back to the community. His choices have been to focus on not just his art, but all of the artists that are represented in the park. The park has grown significantly over the years with the amazing support of generous donors and patrons of the park. I have been a volunteer, docent and donor to the park for many years. I will continue these roles for I love the park and its entire splendor.

A little history of Gloria.....

Gloria was born in NYC and spent most of her childhood in Europe. She is the only child of railroad heir, Reginald Claypoole Vanderbilt. She studied art at the Art Students League in NYC and acting at the Neighborhood Playhouse. She was an actress for seven years. She also wanted to be a writer. As years went by Gloria wanted to devote all of her time to art. She often wishes she had followed her initial instinct of just being focused on art. She believes that all the arts feed each other.

The fashion part of Gloria's world started in home furnishings, i.e., sheets, glasses, all things for the home. It was very successful. She sold all over the United States.

During the 1970's she ventured into the fashion world, licensing her name for a line of scarves with Glentex. In 1976, Indian designer Mohan Murjani's of Murjani Corporation launched a line of jeans that had Gloria's name embossed on the back pocket. They made my rear end look fabulous! They were more tightly fitted than the other jeans on the market and I loved them! Gloria went on to launch fragrances (8 of them), dresses, blouses, sheets, shoes, leather goods, liqueurs and accessories. Jones Apparel Group acquired the rights to Gloria Vanderbilt's jean company in 2002. She was one of the first designers to make public appearances.

Gloria had her first one-person exhibition of paintings at the Bertha Schaafer Gallery in 1952. Her collages of drawing, painting, fabric and decoupage were shown at the Hammer Gallery in 1969. Her work was so popular and inspirational that Johnny Carson turned his Tonight show over to the exhibition. Memory, one of her collages, was issued as a stamp by the United Nations to commemorate the World Health Organization and UNICEF. Gloria has received numerous awards, including an honorary Doctorate

of Fine Arts at Moore College of Art in Philadelphia and the International Fine Arts College in Miami, Florida. As well, she has been the recipient of the National Society of Arts & Letters Gold Medal of Merit and the Anti-Defamation League Woman of Achievement Award

In 2001, her first exhibition opened entitled, Dream boxes. This exhibition was held at the Southern Vermont Arts Center in Manchester, Vermont. The show was a complete success. She has exhibited her paintings in many galleries throughout the United States. She had a one woman show at the Neiman Marcus in Houston, TX where she received the Neiman Marcus Fashion Award. She has designed banners for Lincoln Center in NYC as well.

Gloria understands the arts, her heritage has been important in sculpting American art as we know it.

Gloria Vanderbilt then shared the details about her piece at the Grounds for Sculpture, entitled, Hearts Desire. She stood in front of us with a large thin wooden dowel in her hands in front of a projected screen. She used the dowel to point at the screen to describe her work. I loved the use of this unsophisticated tool. It brought back memories of my childhood in school where the traditional pointer was made of wood. Everyone was riveted on Gloria.



Photo by Tammy Duffy



Photo by Tammy Duffy

A few years back Gloria was at a party at a friend's house and Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were there and saw her Dream boxes on display in the house. The Dream boxes are Plexiglas boxes which tell a story. Mr. Johnson had the idea to enlarge one of them, making it life size, and install it at the Grounds for Sculpture. Gloria never thought of making the Dream box at that scale but happily moved forward with the execution of the life-size Dream box for Grounds for Sculpture. Mr. Johnson had the genius idea to install the piece in a secret garden: When you approach it, you approach it through a forest. You come around a corner and suddenly there it is. There is a pathway what leads into the box. It leads you into a fairytale.

The piece is called Hearts Desire. Gloria really wanted to call the piece, Hiraeth, which is a Welsh word defined as homesickness tinged with grief or sadness over the lost or departed. It is a mix of longing, yearning, nostalgia, wistfulness, and the earnest desire

for the Wales of the past. It's also defined as homelessness for a home to which you cannot return. A home which never was, a nostalgia and yearning. A grief for the lost places of your past. She thought to name it that was too difficult to pronounce so she changed the name to Hearts Desire.

As you see the piece from a distance you see a figure leaning into a covered clear box that holds a heart. The heart is encased in glass. The figure is trying to reach the heart and is unable to because of the glass. There are additional figures which represent a quote by Susan Sontag. "You do not grow up missing what you never had. Throughout life there is hope over you and inescapable longing for something you can never find."



Photo by Tammy Duffy



Photo by Tammy Duffy

Additional descriptions of the piece by Gloria

- Each figure in the box represents a spirit of this quote by Susan Sontag.
- There is a clamp which is very hostile and aggressive which is holding a block of ice. This represents the desire for "it". The heart (which was a piece of Stuben glass in the original dream box) is the central part of the sculpture.
- There is a glass skull adjacent to this clamp. This skull represents the unknown and the future at stake.
- There is a figure trying to reach the block of ice that is in the clamp and it cannot. There is another figure trying to reach the heart and cannot because it's enclosed in glass. The heart is closed off, protected.
- There is a serpent trying to kill purity and beauty and all the things we love and believe in.
- There are other figures around that are focused on the heart in the box. None of them can reach the heart.

- There is an armless figure and another is trying to help the armless one. The armless doll will never get her arms back but she is getting compassion from a human person. The “armed” figure is confident that it can help the armless doll because it is using compassion to do so. This represents a phrase that Gloria lives by, “Always be kind to everyone you meet, for everyone is fighting a large battle.”
- There is a small Marilyn Monroe in the sculpture to represent some of the amazing Marilyn Monroe’s that Mr. Johnson has made in the past.
- There is a bottle with dolls encased in it. The dolls are trying to break out of the bottle. This represents whatever we are all trying to break out of.
- The heart is in the cube and no one can break into it. There is also a lot of cellophane to protect the heart even more
- There are dice that represent chance, love, and the unexpected. You never know what life is going to deal you.
- The squiggles of paint on the glass add dimension and depth. They represent the quality of being unavailable, more mysterious, and more guarded.
- The mirrors create the illusion of looking at things in many ways. When she did this piece she did it subconsciously. When they enlarged the piece she had to really think about what her intent was for each piece of iconography in the dream box. She learned a lot from doing this enlargement of her dream box.



Photo by Tammy Duffy

The interpretation by Gloria in this piece is very humbling in many ways, yet opens to interpretation as the viewer’s experiences come to the work in varied ways. One must walk around the piece several times to self interpret and enjoy its entire splendor. Gloria’s provocative and imaginative art urges the viewer to think as well as to appreciate.

Gloria reminds me so much of Louise Bourgeois. I met with LB many times at her Sunday art salons in NYC. She would critique my abstract paintings. Louise was the one who got me to work in mixed media. My friend Mark Kostabi, international artist and composer, introduced me to Louise many years ago.

Gloria then went on to speak about her paintings that were on display on the easels that are gracefully placed in the periphery of the room. The first painting she explains is a one she did of her dear friend Carol Matthau, entitled, **“Do you love me?”** Carol has been Gloria’s muse over the years and she has done endless paintings of Carol. Gloria and Carol have known each other since they were 14 years old. From the time they met until the time just two years ago that Carol passed away, Carol would always ask Gloria, “Do you love me?” It would drive Gloria mad that Carol would ask this constantly for decades. Gloria always responded with, “Yes, I love you.” So this painting is called, “Do you love me” as an homage to her dearest friend Carol. The painting was done to capture the exact expression Carol would have when she would ask the question, do you love me?



Photo by Tammy Duffy

Another one of her muses, Aurelia Thierre, the grand daughter of Charlie Chaplin is shown in the painting, **Aurelia with Bird and Cat**. Aurelia’s mother (Charlie Chaplin’s daughter), Victoria, has a circus. It tours throughout Europe and is very popular. It’s similar to what we see here in the USA with Cirque du Soleil, but a scaled down version of it. Aurelia has been on the trapeze since she was born. Her mother has choreographed a show that tours all over Europe and the world. The show is coming to Lincoln Center on July 24th, 2013. It will be there for two weeks. It is absolutely magical. It’s full of fantasy, magic and strange things happen. There is a very small cast; it’s only Aurelia and two others. It’s really worth seeing so everyone should go and check it out. One can go to this link to get signed up for an alert for the ticket sales.

<http://www.stubpass.com/theater/other/aurelias-oratorio-tickets/>

The next painting, **Cecilia’s Flower Arrangement**, is representative of another muse of Gloria’s, Mrs. Johnson. Gloria wanted to display her beauty in this painting.

The way Gloria makes her paintings is quite unique. She uses paper that is very thick. She soaks the paper in water and then lays the paper down on the floor. She then does the painting. This technique and Gloria’s style of painting reminds me of the work of Helen Frankenthaler.

Flirty girl at the party is an image of a girl Gloria saw flirting with men at a party. When Gloria returned home that evening she instantly painted this painting so not to forget the body language of the kittenish girl.



Photo by Tammy Duffy

Other Paintings Shown by Gloria at the Luncheon



Photos by Tammy Duffy

After Gloria's lecture I had the wonderful opportunity to sit next to her at lunch and ask her all the questions I wanted. I asked her what her favorite place to visit was. She said, "Italy, particularly Capri and the Lake Como area". I told her I love Italy and have been there 19 times. I shared with her that I love Rome and she responded with, "I find Rome very masculine so I do not like it as much." I can see why she would say that, for it is very masculine now that I think about it. Maybe that's what I love about it so much. It represents the ultimate Italian man, magnificent art, architecture, wine and food. Actually there is a very personal reason why I love Rome so much. That's for another article.



Photo by David Steele

We spoke about the new version of the Great Gatsby that was just released. She has not seen the new movie yet. I had. She asked me what I thought of the new version of the movie. I hesitated before I answered her; I wanted to find the right words-- I highly disliked the new version. The first thing I said to her was, "They wrecked the fashion." She replied, "I knew it; I knew they would do that." I went on to say the fabrics were not supreme and they modernized the 1920's look. Gloria then asked me, "What did they do to Daisy (played by Mia Farrow in the original movie)? What did they do to Myrtle Wilson (played by Karen Black)? Mia and Karen ruled the screen in 1974. The new ladies did not in my opinion. There was an ambience that existed in the original movie that is completely lacking in the new version. It's more an ad for Prada than a movie. I must say though, I did enjoy the soundtrack. I was disappointed in Leo's performance, (I have always loved Leo in all of his movies) but how could anyone ever compare with Robert Redford in 1974. Ralph Lauren did all the menswear in the original movie. It was impeccable. That level of sophistication was lost in the new movie. I told Gloria she should go see Hangover 3 instead of the Great Gatsby. I loved all the Hangover movies and even if the new one is a dud, (which it was not, I saw it on the 23rd), who cares because you get to stare at Bradley Cooper for over one hour. That alone makes it worthwhile to go for he is quite handsome. He could just stand there and say nothing in the movie and we would all still swoon. This same swooning is what I did after the first and after the 20th time I watched the original Gatsby with Robert Redford (and for that matter any movie with Robert). Redford's charisma is mystifying. The pink suit that Redford wore in the original Gatsby was just delicious. If a gentleman came to my door today looking like Redford, tailored like Redford and in that pink suit, I would never let him leave my home. The tailoring that Redford demonstrates (he could be in a pair of jeans and a cowboy shirt and still look amazing) where ever he went and goes to this day, is impeccable. I think Bradley Cooper is on a road to become a Hollywood legend, not just an actor in Hollywood. I think if he gets coaching from more of the legends, (look what DeNiro did for him in Silver Linings Playbook) like Redford, his world will skyrocket. He should do lunches with the masters in Hollywood not the punks and the pretentious. A wise friend of mine said recently, "Always get a few opinions, don't do it alone, pick the best guidance from each and go with that." (*Quote by, Mark Kostabi*) I said to Gloria, "I am a diehard lover of old cinema. I have dozens of old movies on VHS that I watch all the time. I used to love watching the classics with my Father. No one

should ever remake these old classics for they will never be able to do it right in my opinion. Can you imagine if someone tried to remake *Gone with the Wind*?" I do not know Hollywood, but I would suspect that those financing films like the new *Gatsby* film are not true lovers of old cinema. If they were they would never lend the money to make these films.

We went on to talk about her paintings and I mentioned that they would make lovely fabrics. I turn my abstract paintings into fabrics for my fashions, making them extremely unique. Gloria's paintings would look lovely as a fabric for a garment. She was excited by this. With the digital world we live in, you can create anything.

Gloria does not go to a lot of museums or galleries today. She is very passionate and entrenched in her own work she does not have the time. She has an exhibition coming up in June in Toronto that is rather edgy. There is a painting in the exhibition entitled, "Black Hole." This painting demonstrates a woman being sucked up into a black hole. She likes putting these types of aspects into her work. The edginess brings a certain balance to the paintings and she really enjoys that. "It must be beautiful", Gloria states, to be a great painting." Gloria goes on to say, color is what intoxicates her. Gloria loves color.

I brought with me Gloria's book entitled, *Obsession* to have her sign it for me. She obliged me and signed it beautifully. She loved that my name had so many "Y's" in it for she loves to connect her name to the "Y's". She dedicated the book to "Q" when she wrote it. I asked her, "Who is "Q"? Gloria looked at me, giggled with a huge grin on her face and said, "Q" stands for question." We both laughed so hard. I told her, "That is brilliant!"

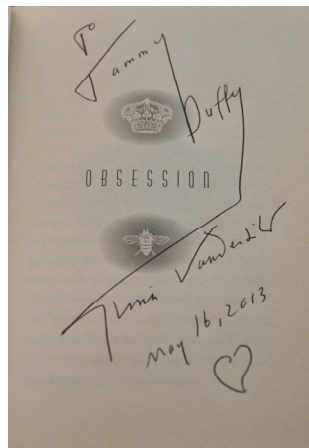


Photo by Tammy Duffy

There is one place that Gloria said has not been to that she would love to visit, the moon. She put me over the moon with our wonderful interactions and meetings that day. I will cherish this day forever. I love Gloria, she is a precious gem! I can't thank Gloria enough for all her generosity of time to make my day a glorious one.