

# THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

PAINTINGS BY CAROLA PENN

November 7 - December 26, 2021



**ARTREACH GALLERY**  
at First Congregational UCC  
1126 Park Ave, Portland, OR  
[www.artreachgallery.org](http://www.artreachgallery.org)



**GALLERY HOURS**

Tues thru Fri 10am - 2pm  
Or by appointment with curator:  
[drsheldonhurst@gmail.com](mailto:drsheldonhurst@gmail.com)

## All The World's A Stage

from *As You Like It*, spoken by Jaques

—William Shakespeare

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. At **first the infant**, (1)  
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;  
And then **the whining school-boy**, with his satchel (2)  
And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
Unwillingly to school. And then **the lover**, (3)  
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad  
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then **a soldier**, (4)  
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,  
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
Seeking the bubble reputation  
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then **the justice**, (5)  
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,  
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances;  
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
Into **the lean and slipper'd pantaloon**, (6)  
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;  
His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide  
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,  
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is **second childishness and mere oblivion**; (7)  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

## THROUGH A LOOKING GLASS

There is something quite whimsical about the way Carola Penn (1945-2019) seeks answers to the major issues of identity in what were her forming years in the 20th century. She knew how to be a woman with the many marks of clarity required for the roles that ranged from family taxicab driver to cleaning lady, shopper and cook, style holder and performer. Indeed there is no better image than juggler.

What makes her art so delightful is her exploration that lightly touches on the various aspects of her own personal story. Her use of the comic strip character Lulu reminds us of how we shape ideas of ourselves in the world, even through such humor. The little girl returns in her own adventure in the world of art, as she dreams in Vincent Van Gogh's bed, smells his sunflowers and dares to take up the palette to make tactile surfaces on her art as he did,

I have found myself moving in and out of memories and associations with the artist's subjects. She refers to "Second childhood" as the stage from which she gets to interpret and update her first forays into identity formation. She knows the psychology of Shakespeare's "all the world's a stage" that leads to Erikson's careful analysis of how we develop our "sameness and continuity in time" until the end. The survey of these paintings offers riveting points at which we recognize the universal nature of her subject matter. Yes, we know the reading moments on the window sill when we reflect on life, and of the first shots of our recent COVID vaccination — our vulnerability is common. And whether it was at the kitchen sink or some other place, we have experienced our parents' watchful eyes even in their absence.

This exhibition does not intend to be definitive of Carola Penn, but to offer a chance to follow her lead, to make our own associations and references and see just where they might lead us. They have taken me to Chuang Tzu and Robert Burns, Shakespeare, Erik Erikson and Lewis Carroll. Where do they take you? And in art's "looking glass," what of yourself do they help you see again, maybe more clearly?

— Sheldon Hurst, Curator

### SOURCES: In ArtReach Library

Robert Burns. "To A Louse" [www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/louse](http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/louse)

Lewis Carroll, *Through A Looking Glass*. Middletown, DE: Readers Library Classics, 2021.

*The Book of Chuang Tzu*, Trans. Martin Palmer. NY: PenguinBooks, 1996, p. 20.

Jabès, Edmond. *The Book of Questions I*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1972/91.

John Stanley/ Marge Buell. *Late for School*. Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Books, 2006, p. 125.

Erik Erikson. *Identity and the Life Cycle*. NY: W.W.Norton, 198/1994, p. 22.

William Shakespeare. "As You Like It" Act II Scene 7 in *The Complete Plays of William Shakespeare*. Ed. Hardin Craig. Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1951.

Bill Schelly. *John Stanley: Giving Life to Little Lulu*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2017.

## ARTIST'S COMMENTS: CAROLA PENN

As old age encroaches, I've been reminiscing about my childhood. I grew up in the 1950's in the hills of Oakland, California. My parents were first generation, ambitious offspring of Jewish immigrants from Hungary and Russia, anxious to take their place as Americans. Though we were comfortably middle-class, there was discord in this idyllic existence. Our family's culture and traditions were at odds with most of our neighbors. There was constant tension and anger within the family: father/son conflicts, unequal treatment of sons and daughters, and an overwhelming pressure for achievement. It was the period after WW II when many women who had experienced independence in the workplace felt compelled to return to stereotypic roles as homemakers. We could feel the anger and frustration of our mother with constrictions defined later by the Feminist Movement.

These memories are source material for a series called "Paintings from my Second Childhood." My intent is to capture a dual consciousness in the work; to paint images I was drawn to as a child while incorporating the experience and jaded awareness of an adult. I create a visual language of geometric shapes, symmetry and positive/negative space to express the drama of this life symbolically. I use simple compositions with flattened color and perspective to express distance in time and problems of memory in patchwork patterns. I borrow techniques and sources that suggest a messy, textured child's world which include: scraping into media, finger painting, mud pie construction, coloring books, 'famous paintings' and comics. Titles and subtle alterations to subjects often suggest adult consciousness.

I began these paintings with acrylics on small plywood panels backed by 1' x 2' frames about 15 years ago. As their numbers grow, I group them into series that show aspects of a search for identity. The 8 groups presented here are made up of 9 to 12 panels.

In "Portrait of the Artist As..." Lulu becomes the artist/connector of body parts that do not quite align. My Lulu is a variable figure without the mechanical elegance of a comic book character. I use the figure of a modified "Little Lulu" in "Who Am I, Anyway?" as an alter ego. "Parents Come with Baggage" present views of family dynamics. The tabletop becomes a stage for interactions and power struggles. "Sisters" shows 3 generations of sisters fighting, misunderstanding and allying as friends. I use symmetry to suggest the similarity of their predicaments by forcing of their bodies into triangles with competitive breasts. "Girl Dreams" revisits fantasies of fairy tales. "Working Women" is a tribute to women of my mother's generation who became my first role models.



**Second Childhood: Working Women Series, 2016 (one arrangement)**

*Personal identity* is based on two simultaneous observations:  
the immediate perception of

**one's selfsameness and continuity in time**

and the simultaneous perception of the fact that

**others recognize one's sameness and continuity.**

—Erik Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*



*Leaving Home* from **Second Childhood: Who Am I Anyway?**, 2003-2017

The Outline said to the Shadow,

“First you are on the move, then you are standing still;  
you sit down and then you stand up.

Why can’t you make up your mind?”

Shadow replied,

“Do I have to look to something else to be what I am?”

—*The Book of Chuang Tzu*



*Self Portrait as My Mother, 1985*

Only I do hope it's my dream, and not the Red *Queen's*!  
I don't like belonging to another person's dream.

—Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*

(Editor changed "Red King" to Red Queen for the particular situation)



*Time, Life, Fortune* from **Second Childhood: Working Women Series**, 2016  
From **Portrait of the Artist**, 2003

O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as ithers see us!  
— Robert Burns (1759-96)





*Artist with Palette* in **Portrait of the Artist**, 2003, Acrylic on wood, 49" x 42"

It is not certainty which is creative,  
but uncertainty we are pledged to in our works.

—Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions I*

# CAROLA PENN

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS & PROJECTS

- 2020-21 *Fragments* @ Stumptown Downtown Cafe, Portland, OR  
2020 *Who Am I, Anyway?* @ Nationale Gallery, Portland, OR  
2019-20 *Woodlands* @ Portland International Airport, Portland, OR  
2018 *Disruptions* @ ArtReach Gallery, Portland, OR  
2014-15 *Forest Paintings* @ Mark Woolley Gallery, Portland, OR  
1998-2014 *Open Studios* @ Seed Building, Portland, OR  
2011 *Drawings* for documentary film, “Everyday Sunshine: the Story of Fishbone”  
2005 *Material/Ethereal* (two artists) @ Lower Columbia College, Longview, WA  
2003 *Paintings from My Second Childhood* @ Mark Woolley Gallery, Portland, OR  
2001 *More Dust and Vapors* @ Mark Woolley Gallery, Portland, OR  
1998 *New Paintings* @ Mark Woolley Gallery, Portland, OR  
1997 *Carola Penn & Piotr Janowski* @ Polish Museum of America, Chicago, IL  
1995 *Compartments* @ Acanthus Gallery (aka Mark Woolley Gallery), Portland, OR  
1994 *Recent Paintings* @ Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR  
1994 *Silverton Art Center*, Silverton, OR  
1992 *Assembled Paintings* @ Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR  
1991 *Exteriors* @ Cabell Center, Catlin Gabel School, Portland, OR  
1990 *New Work* @ Littman Gallery, Portland State University, Portland, OR  
1988 Renshaw Gallery, Linfield College, McMinnville, OR  
1987 *Missing Pieces* @ Quartersaw Gallery, Portland, OR

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *Around Oregon Annual* @ The Arts Center, Corvallis, OR  
2012 *Avoir un Don, Architecture*, Concordia College, Portland, OR  
2008 *Three Artists* @ Glen and Viola Walters Cultural Arts Center, Hillsborough, OR  
2008 *Politik: Left, Right and Center* @ North Bank Gallery, Vancouver, WA  
2006 *Alien and Sedition* @ Woolley at Wonder, Portland, OR  
2004 *21 Years of Studios* @ Cathedral Park Place, Portland, OR  
2003 *A Celebration of the Forest: Ten Years Later* @ Lower Columbia College, Longview, WA  
2001 *A Celebration for Jack McLarty* @ Portland Artists, Portland, OR  
2002 *City Change: Selections from the Visual Chronicle of Portland*, Portland, OR  
2000 *Anniversary Exhibition* @ Quartersaw Gallery, Portland, OR  
1997, 1999 *Art Slate* @ Veterans’ Memorial Hall, Condon, OR  
1998 *North and Northeast Portland: Selections from the Visual Chronicle of Portland* @ Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center, Portland, OR  
1998 *Heads* @ Wentz Gallery, Pacific Northwest College of Art, Portland, OR  
1996 *Let Them Eat Cake* @ Mark Woolley Gallery  
1993-94 Group shows @ Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR  
1993 *A Celebration of the Forest behind My House before Logging* @ Blackfish, Portland, OR  
1993 *Reflective Environments* @ Salem Art Association, Salem, OR  
1991 *Oregon Biennial* @ Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR  
1990 *Never Before Funded* @ Bumbershoot Arts Festival, Seattle, WA  
1990 *Four Painters* @ Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR  
1990 *Apartheid and Racism* @ Blackfish Gallery, Portland, OR  
1989 *Oregon Biennial* @ Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR  
1988, 1990, 1994 *Artquake* @ Portland, OR

## **SELECTED COMMISSIONS and COLLECTIONS**

SW Washington Medical Center, Vancouver, WA  
Lower Columbia College, Longview, WA  
Yale School, Ariel, WA  
Washington State University, Vancouver, WA  
Kows for Kids on Parade, Portland, OR,  
Land O' Lakes collection Boly/Welch Building, Pat Welch, Portland, OR  
Squalicum High School, Bellingham, WA  
Central Oregon Community College, Bend, OR  
Portland Visual Chronicles, Regional Arts & Culture Council, OR  
Capitol Walls Mural Project, traveled to Salem, Beaverton, and Portland, OR  
Paul Sposato and Richard Matkin, Portland, OR  
Nancy and Andrew Glass, Portland, OR  
Susan and Alan Trump, Calabasas, CA  
The Esterle Family, Encino, CA

## **TEACHING**

2003-5 Workshops at Yale Valley Arts Festival, Ariel WA  
1998 Workshop at Oregon College of Arts and Crafts, Portland, OR  
1990-4 PNCA Extension classes in painting, Portland, OR

## **RESIDENCY**

1998 Centrum, Port Townsend, WA

## **SELECTED PUBLICATIONS**

Peter Frank, *"The Human Ecology," Artvoices Magazine*, Spring 2015  
*The Daily News*, Tom Paulu, Entertainment, 2/17/05  
*Portland Tribune*, Weekend Life, 7/16/04  
*Oregonian*, Arts and Entertainment, 4/18/03  
*Oregonian*, "Pick Hit," 5/25/01  
*Oregonian*, D.K. Row, "Painters' Painter" 5/8/98  
*The Polish Museum of America*, catalog, Harold Johnson, "Carola Penn," 1997  
*New American Paintings*, Spring 1996, Volume 1, VI  
*Artweek*, Lois Allan, "Carola Penn at Acanthus Gallery," 12/95  
*Reflex*, Matt Ferranto, "Carola Penn at Acanthus (Portland)," 12/95  
*Reflex*, Lois Allan, "Retracing the Landscape," 8/94  
Lois Allan, "Forest Lives; Julia Stoll installation Blackfish Gallery," *Artweek*, 1/6/94  
*Oregonian*, Randy Gragg, "Anderson Moves Along Difficult Artistic Route," 6/17/94  
*Artweek*, L. Allan, "Natural Acts; Reflective Environments, Bush Barn Art Cntr" 4/93  
*Oregonian*, Randy Gragg, "Critic's Choice; Paintings with Weight," 1992  
*Oregonian*, Randy Gragg, "Critic's Choice; More Than First Met the Eye," 5/4/90  
*Willamette Week*, Renardo Barden, "Openings; Portland State University," 5/2/90

## **EDUCATION**

1986 BFA Painting, Pacific Northwest College of Art  
1967 BA Art, University of California, Berkeley  
Studies in printmaking, calligraphy at Portland State University, Portland, OR



*Nurse with Shot from Second Childhood: Who Am I Anyway?, 2003-2017*

“Hmm. . . I think I’ve got an idea  
how we can get even, Annie!”  
— Little Lulu, *Late for School*



# CHECKLIST: CAROLA PENN (1945 - 2019)

## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

### ***Portrait of the Artist, 2003***

Acrylic on wood, 49" x 42"

### ***Parents Come with Baggage I, 2003***

Acrylic on wood, 49" x 42"

*Sweep*

*Stack of Children*

*Come Down to Earth*

*Shape Game*

*Dinner*

*The Dance*

*Empathy*

*Mind Game*

*Rest*

### **From *Second Childhood: Who Am I Anyway?*, 2003-2017**

Acrylic on wood, each c. 17" x 14"

*Cyclist II*

*Leaving Home*

*Shop Around*

*Nurse with Shot*

*She Takes the Bride*

*Ballerina Waitress*

*Haircut*

*Vacuuming Dandyions*

*Cookie Thief*

*Diver*

*Reading in nook*

### **From *Second Childhood: Who Am I. Anyway?***

*Van Gogh's Sunflowers*, 2016

*Van Gogh's Bedroom*, 2016

*Van Gogh's Chair*, 2016

### **From *Second Childhood: Working Women Series*, 2016**

Acrylic on wood, each c. 17" x 14"

*Girdles*

*Stewardess*

*Stroller*

*Presser*

*Secretary*

*Sopper*

*Schlepper*

*Juggler*

*Bunny*

*Time, Life, Fortune*

*Waitress Ballerina*

*Librarian*

*Shopper*

*Cakemixer*

*Shopper*

### **From *Second Childhood: Girl Dreams*, 2003, 2016**

Acrylic on wood, each approx. 17" x 14"

*Fairy Princess*

*Queen II*

*Queen I*

*Moth/Butterfly*

*Fairy Godmother*

*Mermaid*

*Bride*

*Handstand*

*Ballerina*

**From *Second Childhood: Sisters Series*, 2003**

Acrylic on wood, approx. 17" x 14"

*Laughing*

*Back to Back*

*Breast to Breast*

*Hugging and Kissing*

***Self Portrait as My Mother*, 1985**

Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 38"