

On Painting Leslie Sacks

In the winter of 2012, I met the art dealer, Leslie Sacks, at his gallery in Brentwood, Los Angeles. A handsome man with deep-set eyes, wearing a hipster toque, he asked me to paint his portrait for a Skira publication, *African Art from the Leslie Sacks Collection: Refined Eye, Passionate Heart*, preferring a painting to a photo of himself. At the time, the director of the gallery, Lee Spiro, commented what an enormous complement this was because "Leslie really only likes African art and Picasso".

I was sent many photos to work from, photos showing his amazing head of hair, some with his wife, some with Lee. I chose one in his gallery office surrounded by things he loved - African sculpture, a David Hockney print.

While painting, I came to know this could be the final portrait of a dying man and realized the toque he wore when we met had covered his hair loss from chemo, his deep eyes those of a sick man. The watch on his wrist became symbolic of time running out.

Leslie loved the painting when he received it but apparently stared speechless, perhaps unable to digest the reality of this image compared to his present reflection in the mirror. His reaction might explain the decision to print the painting in sepia, a colorless, less representational version, though closer to Leslie's reality - a man in the process of disappearing. Leslie chose to put his dedication under the portrait, his only piece of writing in a book filled with 38 essays and descriptions of his collection by experts in the field.

I had an opportunity to see a rough copy of the book at the January 2013 opening of the gallery exhibition, *Women's Art Now*. My paintings were installed beside Elizabeth Peyton, and included works by Helen Frankenthaler, Nancy Graves, Pat Steir, and more, with keynote speaker Judy J. Larson, former Director of the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. The exhibition benefited *Women's Voices Now*, a not-for-profit organization, founded by Leslie, concerned with advancing women's rights to free expression in Muslim societies, one of his many philanthropic endeavors.

Unfortunately, Leslie was too ill to attend the opening.

In the fall, Leslie managed to hold a just printed copy of the book in his hands. He died on September 26, 2013.

Even though the book was mailed to me not long after it was published, it is only now, three years later, that I have been able to open it. I didn't have a chance to know Leslie well but through this book I feel the honor he bestowed upon me in asking me to paint his portrait for a final representation of his "refined eye and passionate heart".

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