

Culturally Speaking

By CORNELIA SECKEL

I WAS IN Oxnard, California visiting Heidi (my friend since we were 10 years old) and enjoying her company, her new friends and community as well as learning about Oxnard and the nearby towns of Ojai and Ventura (just an hour or so North of LA). My exploration of Ojai was limited to visiting several of the interesting shops featuring artists and craft-people from the surrounding area. In particular I enjoyed my time at Human Arts, a gallery of contemporary crafts, jewelry, furniture and paintings. Owners Hallie and Stan Katz were able to fill me in about the town and I hope to return there on a press trip and be able to explore all the places that were closed on that Easter Sunday. Ojai gained fame when the area was photographed to represent Shangri-La in the 1939 movie *The Lost Horizon*. Since that time Ojai has maintained the reputation of a "magical place", a haven for artists, musicians and health enthusiasts. As

setup—group exhibit and solo shows. There is also a gallery shop where artists can sell their smaller works and crafts.

From the Art Association we went to the town's Post Office and the WPA Mural depicting the History of Ventura County that was done in 1938 by Gordon Kenneth Grant and restored in 1966 by F. Trevors. The Works Progress Administration (renamed during 1939 as the Work Projects Administration; WPA) created by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was the largest New Deal agency, employing millions to carry out public works projects, including the construction of public buildings and roads, and operated large arts, drama, media, and literacy projects. Almost every community in the United States had a park, bridge or school constructed by the agency, which especially benefited rural and Western populations. Expenditures from 1936 to 1939 totaled nearly \$7



Johanna Spinks, artist, with Cornelia Seckel in Johanna's studio at the Bell Arts Factory

I understand it, the intrigue of this town brought numerous people who wanted to experience its other worldliness. Film people from Hollywood continued to come long after the filming was over; spiritual teachers held retreats and communities developed. The artists came for the ambiance and for the landscape. Today there are spiritual retreats, The Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts, numerous galleries, and museums.

Ventura (on the coast and just 12 miles West of Ojai) took on the overflow and developed into its own popular destination and artists' community. I went online and the city's site had a listing of the galleries, artist studios, associations, museums, schools, theatres, and historic sites. Heidi and I figured that the Buenaventura Art Association would be the place to start and gallery assistant Regina Raalsdkjflasdif was very helpful. The Association, established in 1955, has about 200 members. There are juried group shows of their members and each year solo artists are juried for a solo show. They began a 1st Friday Gallery Stroll, which continues to be very popular. The association has another gallery in the harbor with a similar

billion. Across the country millions of people had work from the WPA resulting in families having a roof over their heads, clothing on their backs and food on their table.

The next stop was the Bell Mattress Company. I had called earlier in the day and spoke with Moses Mora, VP of the Board, and he turned out to be a most excellent guide. Bell Arts Factory (www.bellartsfactory.com) was created in October 2004 with the decision to transform an historic 20,000 square foot former mattress factory on Ventura Avenue into a mixed-use community arts center. When opened in April 2006, over 20 artists worked in their studios, and 70 children per week, ages 6 to 12 participated in the multicultural Bell Arts Factory After-School and Saturday Youth Arts Program. 27 Artist Studios are open to the public on First Fridays of each month where artists can be seen working or displaying their art. In the Community Room there are poetry readings, play productions, exhibition and special events. Bell Mattress Factory was a custom manufacturer for more than 67 years, making mattresses in nonstandard sizes. This Arts center is an interesting mix of the for-profit



Heidi Robertson and Cornelia Seckel at the beach, Oxnard, CA

and not-for-profit. Owners Josh Addison and family established this art collective and center with private money. The Community Room is the not-for-profit component and has a governing board. The for-profit component is the rental of what has grown to be 40 studios including an arts school. Next to the factory building was an old house that has been reconverted to more studios and the Vita Art Center, a school offering art classes for children, teens and adults. (www.vitaartcenter.com). The entranceway opens into a large space that has a kitchen area which also serves as a "living room/communal room for the artists and people in the creative arts who are the tenants renting spaces of varying sizes. There are mailboxes set up for the tenants and even showers — quite handy when you have been working all day and need to switch roles and get to open school night. As we toured the building we stopped in to several of the artists' studios. Johanna Spinks (www.johannaspinks.com) seemed quite familiar and her excellent portrait paintings also got my attention. After a brief exchange we realized that we had a friend, Everett Raymond Kinstler (one of, if not the finest portrait painters in the US having painted over 50 cabinet members and presidents www.everettraymondkinstler.com) in common and had spent quite a bit of time at Ev's birthday party a number of years

ago. Well that was fun, there I was 3,000 miles from my regular life and yet the art world makes it a small community.

Before leaving town Moses offered to take us over to see WAV, a live work space for artists. The Working Artists Ventura (WAV) project is a \$59 million, state-of-the-art community designed for artists and creative businesses and completed in December 2009. The WAV community, in the heart of Ventura's Downtown Cultural District, offers affordable living and working space for over a hundred artists — painters, sculptors, dancers, poets, musicians, filmmakers and more. The artists bring to life a theater/gallery with performances, art openings and neighborhood gatherings. Arts-friendly small businesses, including coffee houses, galleries, cafes, wine bars and jazz clubs, are expected to draw foot traffic and contribute to the vitality of the community.

Right nearby are the Tortilla Flats Murals. The original murals were done in 1994-95 by Moses & MB Hanrahan of life in this part of town — Tortilla Flats, a community removed by the Freeway. The murals deteriorated over time and just a few years ago the city asked Moses and MB to re-construct the murals and they were installed along the walls of the underpass of the Freeway. Moses grew up in that community and as he showed us the murals I could hear



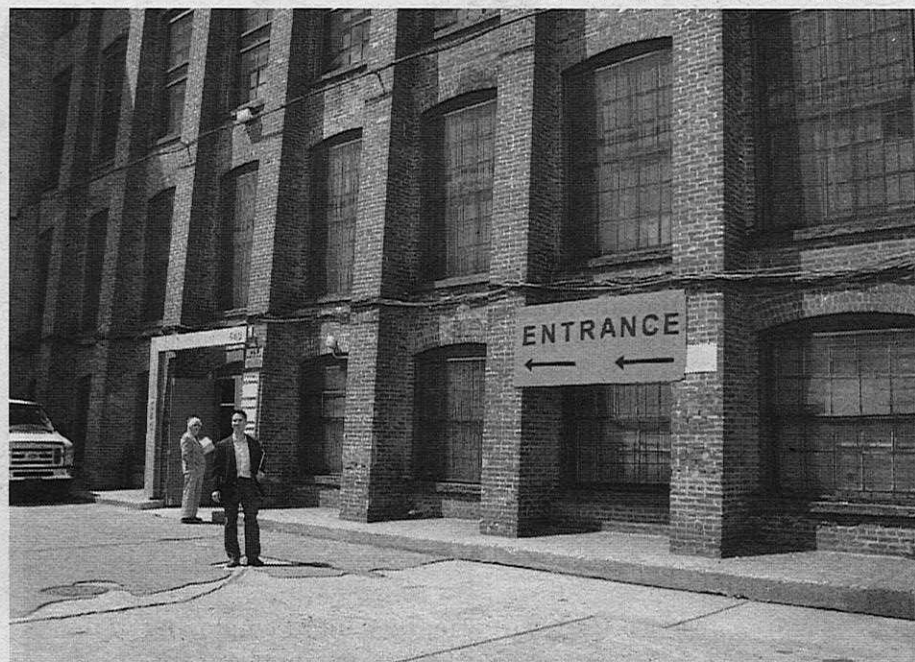
Heidi Robertson and Regina Raalsdkjflasdif at the Buenaventura art Association in Ventura, CA.

the nostalgia as he told us about the different members of the community depicted on the mural. What an interesting and full day we had. The sensibility of the community to the arts is apparent throughout the city. It seems to be an excellent place for creativity to flourish.

Meanwhile, I came back East to the 7th Annual Open Studio for YOHO Artists Studios located in Yonkers in the former Alexander Smith Carpet Mill and now for many years studio space for some 55 + artists and art related professionals. **George Huang** is the owner/manager of what he hopes will become a **Center for the Arts**. When I asked George if he was an artist he smiled and said, "This (as he waved his hand to include the entire space) is my art." For the past number of years George and a group of "tenants" have been working to this end. I have visited several times and each time there is something new. Recently they opened a **Community**

I could hardly believe the number of gorgeous pianos spread over several rooms of **Craftsman Piano**, a full-service piano restoration facility that specializes in Steinway, Mason, and Hamlin pianos. Owner **Joe Hanerfeld** treated me to a brief concert on a Rosewood Steinway D, 1886. It is one of the most beautiful pianos I have seen and has a hand rubbed satin finish and a price tag of \$120,000.00. I video-taped quite a bit of my tour and will make a short movie and post it on our website and YouTube in the next few weeks.

I was pleased to get to see **Alex Kveton's** prints and **Jeffrey Milstein's** photographs at **Oriole 9** in **Woodstock, NY**. Alex, a well-known and highly accomplished sculptor, has recently explored printmaking. **Raymond J. Steiner** has written an introduction to Alex's soon-to-be-published monograph. Jeffrey Milstein's photographs are quite extraordinary and a recent monograph entitled *Cuba* has just been released. It is a



George Huang, manager (forefront) outside YOHO Artists studios housed in the former Alexander Smith Carpet Mill, Yonkers, NY



Outside the Bell Mattress Factory, Ventura, CA.

Gallery Space where tenants can have exhibitions. Every other month there is a **Gallery Night** with discussions and classes offered. I wandered throughout the several floors and sections talking with many of the artists who heartily expressed how much they enjoy working in the space. "It is like camp," one artist told me. Tenants are respectful of each other's privacy and at the same time available for socializing and helping one another.

beautiful little book with exquisite photographs "portraits" of Cuba.

Several new galleries have come to my attention in the last few months. **A.R.T.S (ARTISTS READY TO SELL)** is a gallery and marketplace in **Croton Falls, NY** whose focus is to exhibit and sell an extensive range of original works of art. It was founded by artists **Dyan Rosenberg, Carol Carpentieri, Phyllis Smith, Alex Tureaud, Marjie Kern** and **Suzanne Ashley**, all local residents of

Croton Falls. The gallery will feature paintings, sculpture, pottery, photography, fiber art, jewelry, artist made/ designed clothing and furniture. **A.R.T.S.** operates through renting display and sale space to vetted artists and artisans. **Dyan Rosenberg** said: "My hope is that the gallery becomes a 'clubhouse' for artists and patrons alike and provides a space for the exchange of ideas. We hope the public will join us for wine and cheese between 3-6 pm on the first Saturday of every month." Artists interested in joining this venture should call 914 276-2209 or take a look at; www.arts6gallery.com

Karen Whitman and **Richard Pantell** have opened their own gallery, **Bearsville Graphics Studio Gallery**, at 68 Tinker Street, in **Woodstock, NY**. In addition to showing their own prints and paintings, they will be exhibiting the works of prominent printmakers **William Behnken, Michael Di Cerbo, Steven Hazard, Bill Murphy, Carol Wax**, and ceramic artist **Randi Martin Kish**. Periodic theme exhibitions, lectures, demonstrations, and concerts will be announced.

The **Martin Lerner Gallery** was founded in the spring of 2010 in **Roxbury, New York** in the Catskill Mountains with the mission "of promoting, collecting, and preserving great works of art that recognize and reflect diversity and the many different forms of expression and viewpoints

in our contemporary world. The Gallery will reach out to its audiences through innovative exhibitions and shows in the spirit of conveying a sense of and encouraging participation, appreciation and understanding of art on all levels through different artistic mediums and styles." The **Grand Opening** will be Sunday, June 19th with celebration from noon till 8pm. Take a look at their site at www.martinlerner-gallery.com where you will find additional information not only about the gallery but the inns, restaurants and resorts in and around **Roxbury, NY**.

In my April online **Culturally Speaking Column** I posted several videos: **The Concert at Kaatsbaan International Dance Center, Tivoli, NY** and the **Chili Bowl Fiesta**, a fundraiser for the **Women's Studio Workshop in Rosendale, NY**. Take a look. They give a flavor of the events and Hollywood filmmakers should have no fear of competition. Take a look at our ever-evolving website www.arttimesjournal.com and while you're online become a facebook fan of **ART TIMES**. Use this page to let us know about the things you're doing. Soon to come (when I learn how to do it) is a blog form our Editor **Raymond J. Steiner**. Here you can read his **Peeks and Piques!** and other thoughts he has.

See you out and about and be sure to say hello.



(L) Alex Kveton, printmaker & sculptor, with Rick Pantell, master printmaker, (R) Jeffrey Millstein, photographer, with Lenny Kislin, curator at their exhibits at Oriole 9, Woodstock, NY

