

CANVAS COHORTS

At the Art Complex Museum,
Mel Leipzig paints his friends

By Jody Feinberg
THE PATRIOT LEDGER

DUXBURY

When you step into the exhibit “Mel Leipzig and Friends,” you’re likely to feel as if the artists are welcoming you into their studios. Leipzig painted artists amidst the richness of their work spaces in Marshfield and other New England locations, and portrayed them with the realism of a photograph and the intimacy of a personal connection.

“I like people and find everyone beautiful and fascinating,” said Leipzig, 82, a Trenton, N.J., artist known for his portraits and whose work is in the Whitney Museum and Cooper Hewitt Museums in New York City. “I want people to connect with these artists and feel almost as if they’re in the room with them, that they should

be held there.”

Although Leipzig has exhibited in many galleries, this Art Complex Museum exhibit is unusual because each portrait is paired with a work of art by that artist. It’s like a double look: the studio and the work itself. That pairing was suggested by Marshfield artist Laura Tryon Jennings, who met Leipzig at his show at the Cape Cod Museum of Art in 2011 and pitched the exhibit idea to Art Complex Museum curator Craig Bloodgood. In addition to Jennings, there are portraits of Linda Pochesci of Boston and Eastham, George Nick of Concord and Lois Dodd and Carmen Cicero of New York.

“The exhibit exceeded every sort of thing I thought would happen,” said Bloodgood, who selected six artists

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■ Laura and Bill, The Wedding Painting, by Mel Leipzig

Leipzig paints his friends, colleagues

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from more than 100 Leipzig has painted. "I didn't realize that not only does he paint these people, but he's a force of nature and they love him. That comes through in his paintings, and it's hard not to love his whole approach."

As a young painter at Cooper Union in New York City who found inspiration in Manet, Leipzig rejected the school's emphasis on abstract expressionism and simplicity. In the works on view, most painted in the last few years, he filled his large canvases – 4-by-4 and 4-by-3 feet – with all the details



■ Ocean Edge, by Laura Tryon Jennings, is part of the exhibit.

If you go

- **What:** Mel Leipzig and Friends
- **Where:** Art Complex Museum, 189 Alden St., Duxbury
- **When:** Through Nov. 5
- **Gallery talk:** 1 p.m. Oct. 21
- **Admission:** Free
- **Info:** 781-934-6634, artcomplex.org.

of the interior, just as a photograph would reveal them. But he also took imaginative liberties and removed the studio walls to allow views of the outside, and often skewed angles and perspective.

"When you're looking at something, your eyes move here and there," he said. "I want to get in everything I see. But I have to solve the problem of getting everything to work together."

He paints without sketching or photographs and with a color palette of red, blue, yellow, white and sometimes black.

"It is limiting, but it harmonizes the painting," said Leipzig, who taught for 45 years at Trenton Community College. "You don't need a lot of colors to create color."

In his 2014 portrait of Jennings, the artist sits with brush in hand in a studio without walls next to an easel and her husband, Bill, who is playing a guitar. A tree overhangs an open French door with a view to the ocean. Hanging next to it are Jennings's paintings, "Foot of the Ocean" and "Ocean Edge," bedroom scenes with no people, yet evocative with the rumpled sheets of an unmade bed, a guitar, a book, coffee cups and seaside light coming in through the windows.

He painted Pochesci, a former art student, curled up in an armchair with a book and her dog, bordered by her painting in progress of a house exterior and skewed street views of



Boston front doors. Pochesci's painting is a beachfront Cape home, door and window open to the blue ocean, filled with shadow and light and two orange Adirondack chairs that draw in the viewer.

Visitors can meet Leipzig, who tells stories with the ease in which he paints, when he gives a gallery talk this month. He will bring the portrait of Bloodgood and Tryon he paint-

ed earlier this month during the installation of his exhibit. In his ninth decade, Leipzig paints as though his life depends on it.

"Everybody should do something creative in their life," Leipzig said. "It's very life giving."

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■ A painting by Linda Pochesci is part of the exhibit, "Mel Leipzig and Friends."