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## Rediscovery: An American in Paris, Robert H. Bizinsky's Paintings 60 years later

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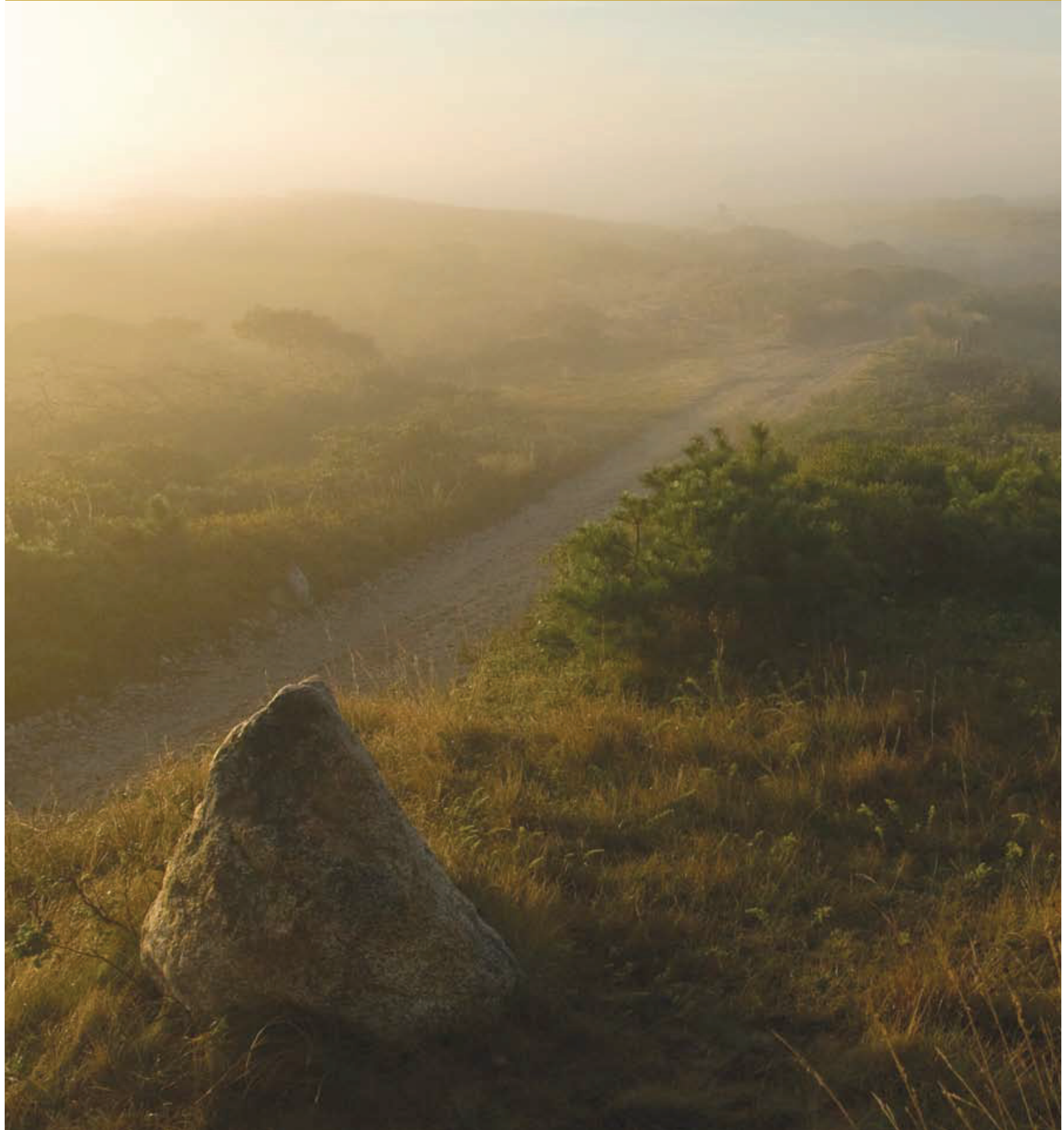
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## ROBERT H. BIZINSKY'S PAINTINGS 60 YEARS LATER

Presenting a vividly colored panorama of urban Paris and the French countryside enlivened with chromatic intensities, Robert H. (Hyman) Bizinsky (1915-1982) re-emerges from the shadows. This fascinating re-discovery of an American original bridges the charming ambience of Paris in the late 1940s with its current showcase in Connecticut.



# REDISCOVERING 'An American in Paris'

by Philip Eliasoph, Senior Arts Editor



With a debt to his post-Impressionist and Fauvist mentors, Bizinsky's romp through the cafes, corner bakeries and book stalls of the Latin Quarter, Montparnasse, or along the Quai St-Michel, evoke fragrant memories of Paris of yesteryear.

Like a dream sequence in a Chagall painting — (another Jewish artist drawn to the City of Light) — Bizinsky reveals an enraptured *joie de vivre* exploring the glories of Paris and its environs. Most notably, he studied with the eminent painter Achille Emile Othon Friesz (1879-1949), who was a disciple of Cezanne and one of the pioneers of the 'wild style' of Fauvism. Bizinsky's art — now and then — remains unquestionably a powerful body of exceptional paintings.

When art expert Gene Shannon and his wife Mary Anne asked me to write an authoritative introduction to Bizinsky's career, my interest was immediately aroused. Shannon, founder of the internationally respected Shannon's Fine Art auctioneers in Milford, Connecticut, demonstrated a prescient appreciation for Bizinsky's legacy by guiding his artistic Estate. "We believed — right down to our toes — in the artistic quality of these canvases," which the Shannon's first viewed in Los Angeles in 1989 when they were being safe-guarded by the artist's widow, Eleanor Anita Guggenheim.

This special event — hosted at Southport Galleries, is the first time viewers can appreciate Bizinsky's major oil paintings produced *en plein air* — and on site during his Paris years of the late 1940s. "Surprisingly, this artistic treasure trove has been totally overlooked," commented gallery director Katherine Cissel. "We are so pleased to participate in this eye-opening event — and to welcome new visitors to Southport's blossoming arts and culinary scene."

Through a wrinkle in time, and the Shannon's' heroic intervention, most of the paintings in this show have not been viewed in over 60 years. Many



of these works were included in gallery showings in Paris between 1947-49 gaining critical accolades and widespread praise.

In the May 27, 1949 "L'Edition Europeenne du New York Herald Tribune" [published in Paris], Bizinsky's works were critiqued for their "distinguishable temperament" which "never lose a constant quantity of spontaneity, freshness, and lyricism."

Christopher Isherwood, whose legendary "Berlin Stories" shaped Broadway's "Cabaret", spoke glowingly: Bizinsky "can make you share his appetite for a scene so that you wish you could eat it. I suppose [he] gets this affect by his highly evocative use of color. But behind this brightness, there is something more mysterious and sophisticated."

Bizinsky, a native of Atlanta, Georgia, was a battlefield artist during WWII serving as a corporal in the US Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division in the North African campaign. His eyewitness account were depicted in the infamous Battle of the Kasserine Pass in the Tunisian desert in February, 1943 when General Rommel's – the "Desert Fox" – outnumbered American tanks "I have felt the hot and cold breath of my buddies as life ebbed out of their gaping wounds," the artist wrote.

And that harrowing episode was documented in a series of 580 watercolors, pen and ink and pencil sketches now in the U.S. Army Historical Center in Washington, D.C. His works were featured in the National Gallery's "Soldier Art" exhibit in the summer of 1945.

With the wonderful benefits of the G.I. Bill, his tuition at New York's Art Students League was covered, fortuitously placing him under the instruction of Hans Hofmann. Recognizing his talent, Hofmann wrote to his colleagues teaching at the ateliers and art academies of Paris: "The cultural Attache at the U.S. Embassy in Paris declared in the Parisian press: 'The G.I. Bill produced at least two artists of extraordinary talent who won later fame. The first, Norman Mailer. The second, Robert Bizinsky whose modern landscapes are now commanding top prices in Paris salons.'"

As a master of the "quick sketch," his methods expanded into a facile use of oil paint. With a strong affinity for the seductive powers of post-impressionism and Fauvism, Bizinsky's art continued the tradition of the School of Paris. Evoking the energies and passions of Matisse, Derain, Dufy and Utrillo, he transformed their styles into his own signature manner. Sparkling in their vitality, these fresh canvases offer contemporary viewers an authentic insight into Paris before the era of mass tourism ushered in 1958 when Pan Am launched its transatlantic fleet of 707 Boeing jets.

Each image depicts an authentic sense of time and place. Just as he was captured in a famous photograph for the August 22, 1949 edition of LIFE magazine, Bizinsky's art validates the sensations we have cherished of Paris in our imaginations. "One can't photo-shop or fake a photo like that," commented Kelsey Biggers, gallery owner. "It authenticates his presence and helps us to respect Bizinsky's biography." Sissy Cargill Biggers quickly chimps in: "I've been to Paris innumerable times but I've learned to see it new ways through the artist's eyes."

From the shadows of time – its cozy cafes, juxtaposed streets, elegant bridges and grand monuments – these colorful locations are frozen in our joyful memories. It's been a personal privilege to delve into the life of Bizinsky. For an American painter who held such an esteemed place among his fellow painters in Paris, one should feel gratified to see him resurrected for a new viewing audience.

Too often earnest and hard-working artists have been all but forgotten – despite a remarkable legacy. I consider this as an unquestionably significant body of newly discovered paintings. Allowing us to wander aimlessly around the very *idea* of Paris – Bizinsky's art – now and then – is inescapably *'tres magnifique'* □

**"Robert H. Bizinsky: An American in Paris"**

*Presented at Southport Galleries,  
330 Pequot Avenue, in historic Southport Village*

*For gallery hours and information, call (203) 292-6124  
or visit: [www.southportgalleries.com](http://www.southportgalleries.com)*

*The exhibition closes on December 3<sup>rd</sup>*

