

Sawdust and Spectacle: Under the Big Top in Small Town America
Artist Bios

Gifford Beal was born in New York City in 1879. As a teenager he studied with William Merritt Chase and graduated from Yale in 1900. He became the longest-serving president of the Art Students League of New York, where he also taught in 1931 and 1932. Successful as a painter, printmaker and muralist, Beal applied his talents to both the public side of pageantry like the circus and quieter, everyday moments like natural landscapes and fishing scenes.

Paul Lewis Clemens was born in Wisconsin in 1911 and studied art at both the University of Wisconsin and the Art Institute of Chicago. He moved to Los Angeles in 1944 and became well known for a series of movie star portraits—Henry Fonda, Mia Farrow, Ethel Barrymore, Claudette Colbert, Jane Wyman and Ronald Reagan, among others—commissioned by Life magazine.

Clarence Holbrook Carter was born in Portsmouth in 1904. After graduating from the Cleveland School of Art, he spent a year painting in Europe and then returned to Cleveland to find considerable success as a professional artist, even during the Depression, enjoying prizes every year in the Cleveland Museum's annual May Show, exhibiting at other important museums and selling his work to public and private collectors. He later lived in Pittsburgh and Bucks County, Pennsylvania, before settling in rural New Jersey for the rest of his long, productive life. His artistic vocabulary underwent several major shifts but he is best known for his regionalist American Scene paintings, including a number of oils and watercolors devoted to a favorite subject since childhood, the circus, especially the unexpected glimpse behind the tents.

James Gantt was born in 1911 in Kansas City. He spent much of his youth working odd jobs on farms and in a circus. He eventually won a scholarship to the Kansas City Art Institute where he studied with Thomas Hart Benton. In his own paintings Gantt revisited the everyday Midwestern subject matter he had “lived and experienced, what I know from the ground up.”

Starting at age 14 **Fred Johnson** enjoyed a 65-year career creating—often purely from his imagination—huge, colorful sideshow banners, which were the hand-painted equivalent of advertising billboards. He spent 40 of those years, 1934-1974, as an employee of the O. Henry Tent and Awning Company in Chicago.

Yvonne Twining Humber, one of only two women in this exhibition, was born in New York City in 1907. She studied at the National Academy of Design and the Art Students League. From 1935-1943 she worked for Boston's WPA Federal Art Project, painting in a style that reflected the precise, regionalist realism of the era. In 1943 she married and moved to Seattle where her reputation and painting quickly gained her acceptance in the art community.

Henry Keller spent eight years working for the Morgan Lithograph Company, designing circus posters, before he began his long career (1903-1945) as an influential drawing and watercolor teacher at the Cleveland School of Art. He also ran an informal summer program at his family home outside Cleveland and exhibited his own work in major institutions around the country. Among his students who became well-known, successful painters were Charles Burchfield, Frank Wilcox, Clarence Carter and Paul Travis, the latter two reunited with their teacher in this exhibition.

Walt Kuhn is perhaps best remembered for his organizing role in the famous Armory Show of 1913, which successfully proved there was an American market for modern art. Born in Brooklyn in 1877, he had his first exhibition at the Salamagundi Club in 1905, the same year he did his first illustration for Life magazine. Kuhn was skilled in many artistic areas, but his reputation today rests on the haunting portraits of circus and vaudeville performers he painted as introverted, weary, and vulnerable.

Yasuo Kuniyoshi, born in Japan in 1893, arrived in the United States in 1906, studying first in Los Angeles and then in New York at the National Academy and the Art Students League where he later taught. By the 1930s he was well established as an American painter, photographer and printmaker. He won a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1935. Kuniyoshi is known for his paintings of circus performers, nudes and ordinary objects.

Sonny King was born in Sydney, Australia. His childhood was divided between a staid boarding school and the colorful environment of "Silver's Circus," one of Australia's most famous traveling circuses owned by his father, Mervyn King. He studied art at the East Sydney Technical College, then left for England to pursue a career in graphic design. He lived in London and Geneva, Switzerland before moving to America where he became an award-winning art director and graphic designer. King was President of Creative Tool, the Computer Graphics company in Los Angeles. His main titles, special effects and computer animation appear on many television shows including "Seinfeld," "Mad About You," and "The Drew Carey Show." Following the death of his father, Mervyn, King created a series of 13 dioramas in which he sculpted various acts from Mervyn's circus. Constructed of polymer clay, wood and 12 volt led lighting, "Silver's Circus & Zoo: The Art of Sonny King" had its premiere in a solo exhibition at the Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles from June, 2007 – October, 2007. In September, 2007, it was featured in a segment on CBS Sunday Morning with Charles Osgood entitled "Memories Under The Small Top." King's paintings and sculptures are represented in private collections in England and the United States. He currently lives in Beverly Hills, CA with his wife, the screenwriter Katherine Reback.

Angelo Pinto was born in Italy in 1908 but grew up in Philadelphia where he studied art with Dr. Albert Barnes, a millionaire inventor who became the eccentric art educator, collector and founder of the Barnes Foundation. Interested in supporting disadvantaged talent, Barnes took Pinto to Italy and to Matisse's studio in France. He later sent him on another painting trip to North Africa. The artist established himself by doing color photography for Life and Look magazines and designing stage sets in New York. In 1934 he returned to the Barnes Foundation where he taught for nearly six decades.

Yeteve Smith was born in Columbus in 1888, studied from 1926-1929 with John Hopkins at Ohio State University, and was active in the Ohio Art League and the Ohio Watercolor Society. The influence of another Columbus painter, George Bellows, is often noted in her robust, colorful figures and portraits.

Frank Anderson Trapp, born in Pittsburgh in 1922, is better known as an art historian and museum director than as an artist. Nonetheless he exhibited in Pittsburgh from 1938 through 1950 and was represented in the Carnegie 1946 show, *Paintings in the United States*. He was educated at Carnegie Institute of Technology and at Harvard University.

He taught at Williams College and then at Amherst, where he became director of the Mead Art Museum.

Paul Travis was born in 1891 in rural Wellsville, Ohio, and graduated from the Cleveland School of Art in 1917. After a year in the army and another year teaching in Europe, he returned to Cleveland to begin a 50 year stretch of acceptance into the Cleveland Museum of Art's annual May Show. Travis taught at his alma mater from 1927-1957. A transformative trip to Africa in 1927 made an indelible impression and greatly influenced the subject matter of his paintings. Hearing an account of a circus train wreck, for example, was more than enough excuse to revisit, on canvas, the African animals that had so strongly captured his imagination years earlier.

David C. "Snap" Wyatt took classes at Cooper Union and supported himself designing displays for department stores until he began his prolific career as a sideshow banner painter, once receiving an order from the Barnum & Bailey Circus for 90 banners. Each canvas was so large that he had to attach charcoal to a long bamboo pole in order to see the size and scale of his preliminary sketch. His nickname is said to be itinerant sign-painter slang for snapping up whatever work is available.