



MELINDA CAMBER PORTER

IN CONVERSATION WITH

ROY LICHTENSTEIN

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Front Cover:

Roy Lichtenstein in his studio at 105 East 29th Street, New York

ca. 1984

Courtesy Roy Lichtenstein Foundation

Photographer Unknown

Back Cover:

Melinda Camber Porter, 2005

Collection of the Melinda Camber Porter Archive

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MELINDA CAMBER PORTER  
IN CONVERSATION WITH  
ROY LICHTENSTEIN  
New York, December 18, 1983

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

You once said that passion and deep emotion would be diluted if expressed in a “painterly” way, and that somehow a very intense emotional content is diluted by direct expression or by “emotional form.”

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

Well, the only thing I remember saying in that area is that the cartoonists have taken emotional subjects like war and love and done them in a clinical way, and that does not dilute the content. But I don’t think that I could agree that serious emotion is diluted by a painterly style or an expressionist style. It’s sort of the reverse. But it depends on what kind of emotion. It gets complicated, you know. The passion about a subject or the content wouldn’t necessarily be diluted at all by a painterly style. But obviously my painting isn’t involved with that and I don’t think painting has to be. I think it certainly can be. De Kooning or...most expressionist painters are involved with their emotions and...everyone is of course but...

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

I was talking about it in terms of your particular work at this moment, because what I notice is a very painterly treatment of small parts of the canvas.

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

But it’s still a “cerebral” painterly use because I’m mixing it with those other areas: with the brush strokes that are not real. I don’t know how to phrase this, but all brush strokes are obviously done with brush strokes but the “depictive” brush strokes, let’s say, illustrate something rather than emitting the emotion. All brush strokes that you make spontaneously seem to have emotion in them. It may be that spontaneity equates itself with emotion or something.

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

Yes. On the other hand, when you decide to, say, borrow the brush stroke of printing or of a very formalistic style you can still be using it in the service of and sense of your own style.

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

Yes.

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

“And there can be a hidden emotion behind it, but it’s not the same as the brush stroke that we find here, the “painterly” brush stroke.

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

I agree.

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

Which are definitely—

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

More spontaneous brush strokes—

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

More spontaneous.

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

Yes.

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

And almost I felt them as a kind of yearning—

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

Yes.

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

For something lost.

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

Yes.

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

There was this feeling for the past—nostalgia would be the wrong word.  
Yearning, perhaps—

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

Yes.

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

—is the impression that I got.



**Fig. 2**

Tape recorder used during conversation between Melinda Camber Porter and Roy Lichtenstein, 1983  
Collection of the Melinda Camber Porter Archive

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

—a desire to break out of something and do something else because I have been doing meticulous strokes without modulation which you could think of as being more cerebral than emotional. It's hard for me to know whether they really are more cerebral than emotional. It's not that clear cut. You would have to say that Mondrian was not emotional nor Malevich. You get into funny areas there. You see, I am intellectual about painting usually, but only in order to make the painting work. Of

course, you have to be emotionally involved in a painting. It's just that the emotions that I've depicted in the "cartoon" paintings, the emotions of love, and war, and so forth, were not the emotions that I was actually dealing with.

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

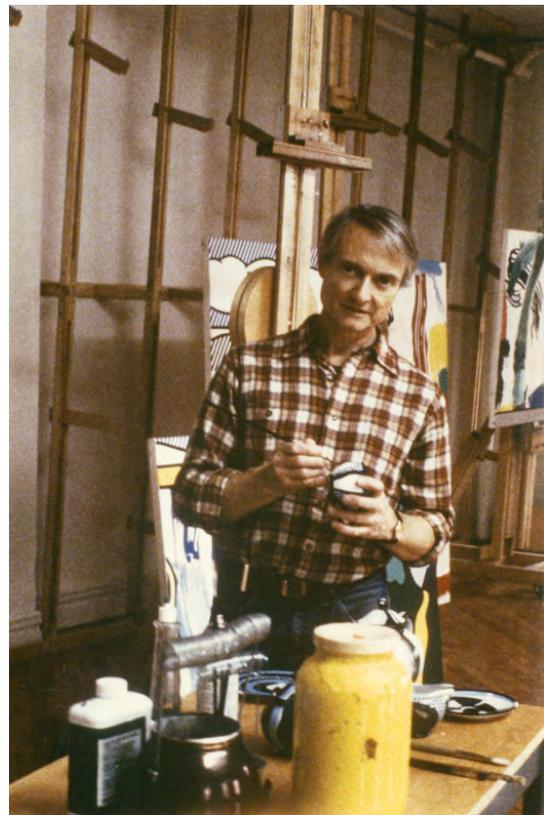
What kind of emotions were you expressing?

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

The emotions I deal with are placement and a kinesthetic sense of position and color. I am removed from the emotions I am depicting because they are usually ironic or are even silly sometimes. But the emotion a painting contains should be a unity. And it is another emotion altogether. Many talented people have mixed up these issues. You can obviously make a relatively stupid expressionist painting or make a pretty good one, and the fact that you're flailing around throwing paint at it, doesn't make it good or emotionally powerful. Do you see?

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

I'm quite aware of the fact that the emotion the artist feels whilst painting, which



**Fig. 3**  
Roy Lichtenstein in his studio at 105 East 29th Street, New York  
ca. 1984  
Courtesy Roy Lichtenstein Foundation  
Photographer Unknown

could be, let's say, excitement, is not necessarily the emotion he is depicting. It's the same, you know, in writing. Nor do I equate spontaneity with "emotion."

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

Even humor is an emotion.

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

Absolutely! But I was trying to explore the significance of that movement, of the brush which we call a painterly brush stroke. I felt, and I don't know why, that there was something lyrical about them.

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

I do them, of course, knowing that I can correct them with depictive brush strokes. I know, in advance, the appearance the brush stroke will create, so that they appear spontaneous but are in fact as restrained as any other style. Nobody just throws paint; it's got some purpose. You're directing it and it may look spontaneous because you're making single uncorrected brush strokes. But I do it with the knowledge that I'm going to be able to adjust it and change it or remove it or paint over it. These painterly brush strokes are both spontaneous and directed. That's not exactly the right word. Controlled, I guess is better.

**Melinda Camber Porter:**

Yes. You said, though, that you wanted to bring—

**Roy Lichtenstein:**

And I like that. I mean, you know, there's a different texture. It's not different from many other painters' textures, but it's different from anything I've been doing. I suppose I did something like it in the fifties. And so that feels good: to resurrect something I did years ago and mix that with my recent style of painting. I always thought I would try to mix these styles of brush strokes but I feared it would dilute the impression I was trying to create, making a cartoon. No, not the cartoon necessarily, but it was the commercial technique, the apparent commercial technique. Actually, I tried it often and it usually did dilute the work. It was just nice and fun but it made the painting less interesting. So I've found a way, eventually, I guess, of combining the brush strokes in an integrated way.

MELINDA CAMBER PORTER  
British, 1953–2008

Melinda Camber Porter was born in London and graduated from Oxford University with a First Class Honors degree in Modern Languages. She began her writing career in Paris as a cultural correspondent for *The Times* of London. French culture is the subject of her book *Through Parisian Eyes* (published by Oxford University Press), which the *Boston Globe* describes as “a particularly readable and brilliantly and uniquely compiled collection.”

She interviewed many leading cultural figures in film and literature from Europe and America over her career. These included Nobel Prize winners Saul Bellow, Gunter Grass, Eugenio Montale, and Octavio Paz, writers including Joyce Carol Oates, Joan Didion, and Frances Sagan, and filmmakers Michael Apted, Martin Scorsese, and Wim Wenders, among many others. [Audio recordings are available for more than fifty of these cultural interviews.]

Her novel *Badlands*, a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, was set on South Dakota’s

Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. It was acclaimed by Louis Malle, who said: “better than a novel, it reads like a fierce poem, with a devastating effect on our self-esteem,” and by *Publishers Weekly*, which called it, “a novel of startling, dreamlike lyricism.”

A traveling art exhibition celebrating Melinda’s paintings, curated by the late Leo Castelli, opened at the French Embassy in New York City in 1993. This exhibition, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the French Embassy, traveled to cities across the United States through 1997.

Peter Trippi, Editor of *Fine Art Connoisseur* magazine said: “In our era of slickly produced images, teeming with messages rather than feelings, Melinda’s art strikes a distinctive balance between the achingly personal and the aesthetically beautiful. This equilibrium has developed, at least in part, through her discerning openness to a range of historical *mentors*, William Blake being the figure she has admired most passionately,” and “not surprisingly

she finds particular pleasure in Gauguin’s notebooks, which erase the boundaries between image and word.”

A film documenting the creation of her paintings featured in the art exhibition *The Art of Love* showed regularly on Public Television stations nationally, and a collection of her poetry and paintings, also entitled *The Art of Love*, served as companion to the show.

Her paintings have also served as the primary inspiration and as backdrops for several of her theatrical works. She created the backdrops, book, and lyrics for the musical *Night Angel*, with music by Carmen Moore, which was originally performed at The Clark Theater Lincoln Center, in New York City. She created the book, lyrics, and backdrops for the rock-opera-in-progress, *Journey to Benares*, with music, direction, and choreography by Elizabeth Swados, which was performed at the Asia Society and Museum in New York City in November 2003.

Robin Hamlyn, noted world expert on William Blake and senior curator of Tate Britain’s Blake and Turner collections, delivered a lecture and wrote a book on her watercolors entitled *William Blake Illuminates the Works of Melinda Camber Porter*. Mr. Hamlyn writes about her, “I believe that all great art is, in its essence, defined by fearlessness. Both Melinda Camber Porter’s and William Blake’s works exemplify and illuminate the fearlessness that is part of the very essence of all great art.”

Melinda Camber Porter leaves a prolific and creative legacy with thousands of paintings; more than two hundred hours of audio and film interviews with global creative figures in the arts, film, and literature; and tens of thousands of pages of writings: novels, plays, essays, journalism, and volumes of poetry. Her creative and spiritual works will be enjoyed for generations to come.

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