

Leiber Museum

by Evelyn J. Mocheichel

Glitz, Glamour, Abstract on Display



Each year we attend the annual Garden Tour fundraiser benefiting the Animal Rescue Foundation (ARF) and discover beautiful gardens, tranquil settings and breathtaking displays that delight the senses. This year the gardens were located throughout the Springs area of East Hampton. There was an added surprise to the tour, and that was the inclusion of directions to a little museum we had not heard about before, The Leiber Museum. The ARF pamphlet guide described the Museum as "offering an unparalleled retrospective of their creations over the last several decades".

Nestled in a wooden area between Amagansett and East Hampton, we came upon the huge wrought iron gates at the entrance to the park-like setting. Walking a short distance on the grounds we saw the impressive, columned brick building sitting majestically. Adjacent to the couple's home, the Museum's garden grounds were designed by Gerson, using the same techniques he uses to create his massive canvases. The Leiber Museum is currently housing a partial, but substantial collection of Judith and Gerson



Leiber's works. Upon entering the building, guests are instantly astounded by the exquisiteness on display. This joint exhibit demonstrates the accomplishments of this talented couple and their shared passion for art. Married for 68 years, the couple met in war torn Budapest in 1946. Mr. Leiber was a G.I. at the time and declares when he saw Judith Peto "it was love at first sight". Their story of her family's survival during the war and escaping to the United States reads like an exciting romance novel. Almost seven decades later, this marriage of two great artists continues and each demonstrating their astounding talent and creative genius.

The first rooms entered held walls of glass cases with overhead lighting similar to low level moon beams dancing on the objects d'art. Judith Leiber handbags are stunningly magnetic as you view them in the cases stretching into several rooms and an upstairs loft. Each glass case stuns with its allure and each case following continues the amazement of the creative brilliance of Judith Leiber. To be able to see more than 500 of these treasures in the heart of the Hamptons is not to be missed! More than 80 of her artful handbags are on permanent display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and other major museums, so this exhibit is close and convenient for East End visitors. A Contemporary Modernist Painter, Garson Leiber's huge paintings are in an adjoining gallery.



stroke of genius planned by the dynamite couple.

When viewing Judith Leiber handbags in person it is easy to understand why she was selected to design handbags for every First Lady since 1953. The dazzling beauty of these handbags, many covered in rhinestones, semi precious jewels, gold, metals, mother of pearl, furs and imported leathers, are favorites by First Ladies, celebrities and collectors around the globe. Nancy Reagan had Judith Leiber bags to match her inaugural gowns they are now in the Smithsonian for public viewing. The bags on display in the Leiber Museum range from sophistication, whimsy and stunning opulence. Animal shapes are a popular theme. There was a golden horse, a penguin covered with crystal rhinestones, a polar bear with onyx eyes or a Buddha shaped purse covered in multicolor crystal rhinestones. My favorite was a Tiffany inspired dragonfly with thousands of colored embedded beads. These handbags, with their intricate detailed pieces are handmade by skilled crafts persons working with tiny tweezers to manipulate the tiny crystals and beads. While the bags are desire by many, they are now collectible items and hard to obtain, es-

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New York Times, Hilton Dramer, former art critic, once wrote praising Gerson for his mastery and skill of composition of color. To be able to enjoy both collections in one location was truly a

pecially the vintage designs.

The day of the Garden Club tour both Mr. and Mrs. Leiber were on hand when guests arrived. We saw Judith Leiber outside walking her miniature dog and Gerson Leiber was inside welcoming guests in the painting gallery section of the Museum. Soft spoken, warm and friendly, this gentleman in his early 90's was as vibrant as someone a decade younger. Easy to chat with, Gerson Leiber talked to the guests that approached him with questions about his paintings. The room was filled with an extensive collection of paintings all dated 2013. When we commented to him about this being a massive undertaking done in one year, Mr. Leiber smiled and told me "with the severe winter we just had on the East End recently, I had plenty of time indoors to paint". An explosion of color forms each painting and the vibrancy of each work of art, along with his creative titles, displays that even after seven decades, Gerson is still energetically creative, with no signs of retiring.

The Leiber Collection is on display through August 2014. Take a peek at the Museum's website to see the breathtaking beautiful handbags and paintings on display. You will then want to see them in person! The website also announces upcoming exhibits after the Leiber Collection leaves at the end of August. The Leiber Museum is located at 446 Old Stone Highway, East Hampton, NY 11937 (631) 329-3288. The Museum is open Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday from 1 - 4 pm. www.leibercollection.org