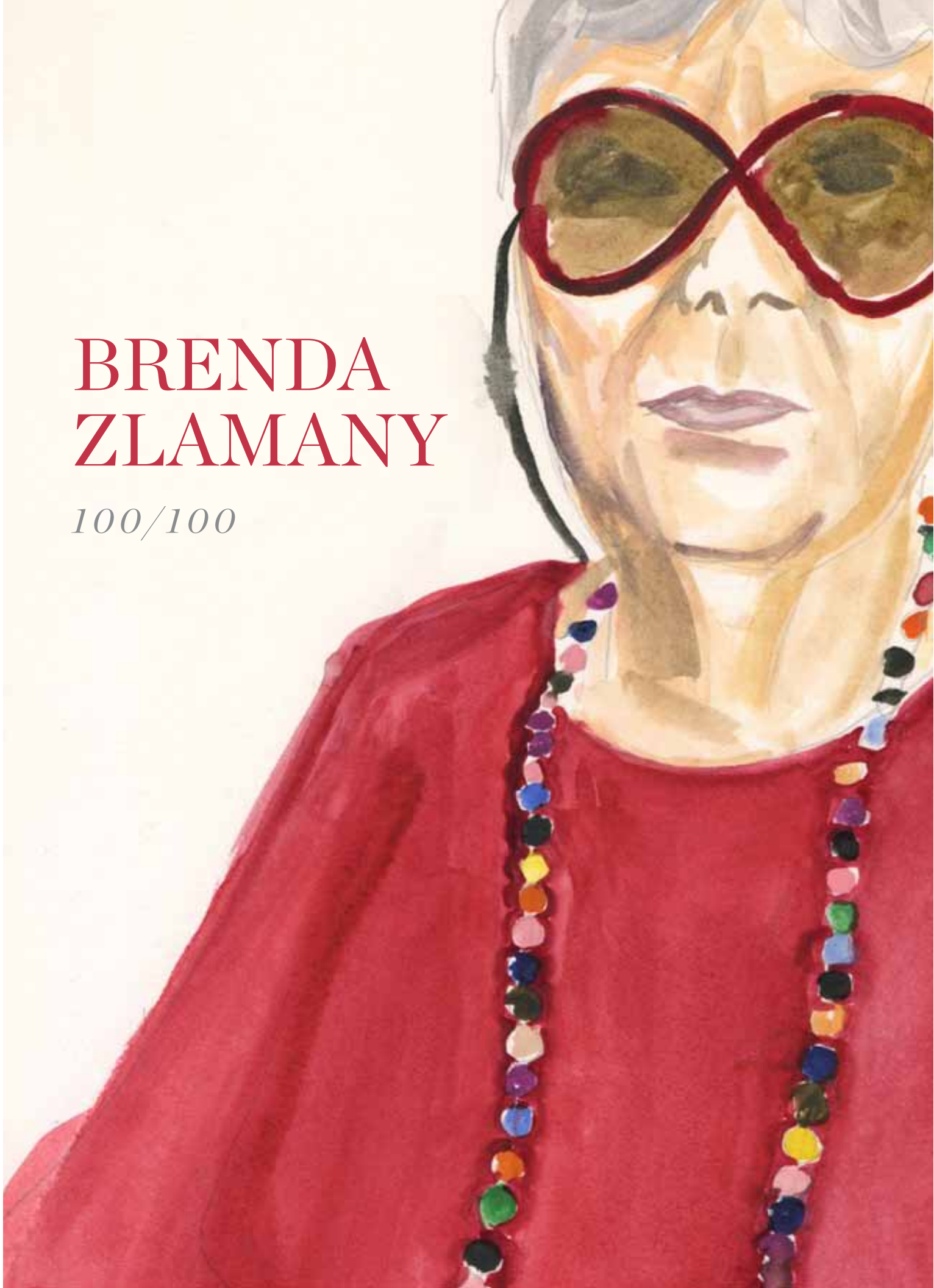


BRENDA
ZLAMANY

100/100





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100/100

Essays by

ALAN ZWEIBEL

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DAVID EBONY

BRENDA ZLAMANY: GOLDEN YEARS

Life is a journey. The places it takes us are unpredictable—sometimes disheartening but occasionally thrilling. Art is also a journey. The artist leads us—at least, those who pay attention—to places we have never been before, to realms of the imagination we have never encountered, and to paths toward truth we have never tried.

The truth is that all human beings share the same life process. We are all individuals, yet we age similarly. Every minute each of us advances toward the inevitable state of being old—if we are fortunate enough to stave off the mortal challenges that life can present along the way. Few artists have addressed this conundrum. You can either fight the process (ultimately a losing battle) or embrace it, as the artist Brenda Zlamany has done in her extraordinary project *100/100*.

Zlamany, an estimable realist painter and portraitist, set out to paint watercolor portraits of a hundred residents of the Hebrew Home at Riverdale, New York. A celebration of the organization's centennial, *100/100* highlights people in their golden years. The endeavor is part of Zlamany's project *The Itinerant Portraitist*, an ongoing international effort to consider portraiture as a means of understanding the individuals who make up a community.

Zlamany spent weeks, mainly in summer 2017, as artist in residence at the home. Most of her subjects were in their eighties and nineties—several were over a

hundred—and long in retirement, when parental and professional demands are well in the past. About this work, she remarked, “With *100/100*, I am interested in aging: what is important at the end of life? In the face of loss—loss of loved ones, mobility, taste, hearing, sight—is joy still possible? What experiences from the past fuel happiness?”

With consummate brush knowledge, refined color sensibility, and total command of her craft, Zlamany focuses on the head and torso in each watercolor. She captures in the portraits a sense of the pleasures and disappointments of life experience that are inscribed on each face. Sharing with portraits by Alice Neel (1900–1984) an expressiveness achieved through heightened color and exaggerated line, Zlamany's images never romanticize the subject, nor do they linger on the abject.

Aiming for a faithful likeness with psychological depth, her approach recalls that of the English painter and portraitist Graham Sutherland (1903–1980), who preferred older portrait subjects. “Older people are more patient as subjects,” Sutherland remarked in the catalogue for a 1977 exhibition of his portraits at the National Portrait Gallery in London. “Children are restless; the middle-aged, especially women, are always constantly ‘rearranging’ their faces.... But I must agree that the last state of man holds for me the greatest interest. He [or she] has faced the responsibilities and temptations of life.”



Having sat for Zlamany, as one of the portrait subjects of *366: A Watercolor Portrait a Day*, part of her exploration of the art world, I can attest that there is an interactive, performance element to her endeavor. Her portrait-making process is one of looking, but you never feel that you are being scrutinized. Her work encompasses an exchange of ideas and experiences, a form of storytelling as meaningful as the resultant portrait itself.

She reinforces comments by her friend and mentor David Hockney, who said of his portrait subjects in a recent interview for the Royal Academy, "I'm looking. I'm looking. And most people have no experience in having someone look at them. I got to know them better, and they got to know me."

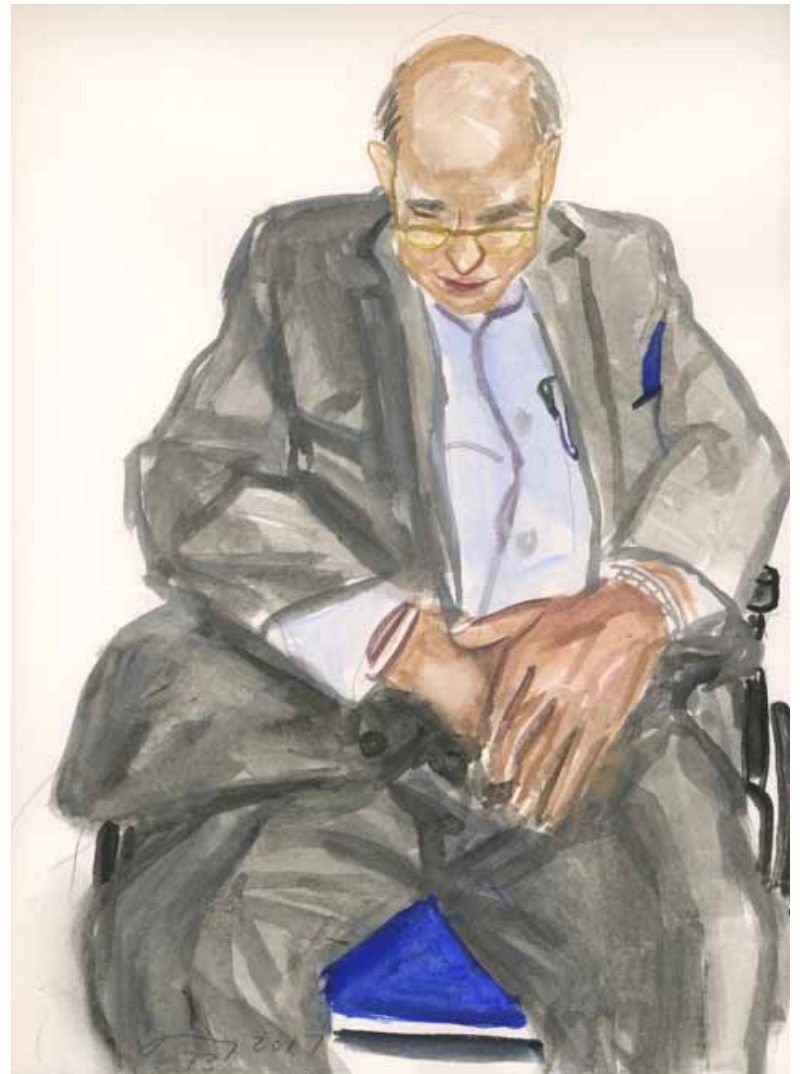
Drawing on many decades of life experience, the portrait subjects of *100/100* had countless stories to tell. And in turn they gained insight into the artist's life. In this unique and ambitious effort, Zlamany offers her sitters new roles—as dignitaries or life ambassadors, nearing the end of a long and profound journey.



77/100



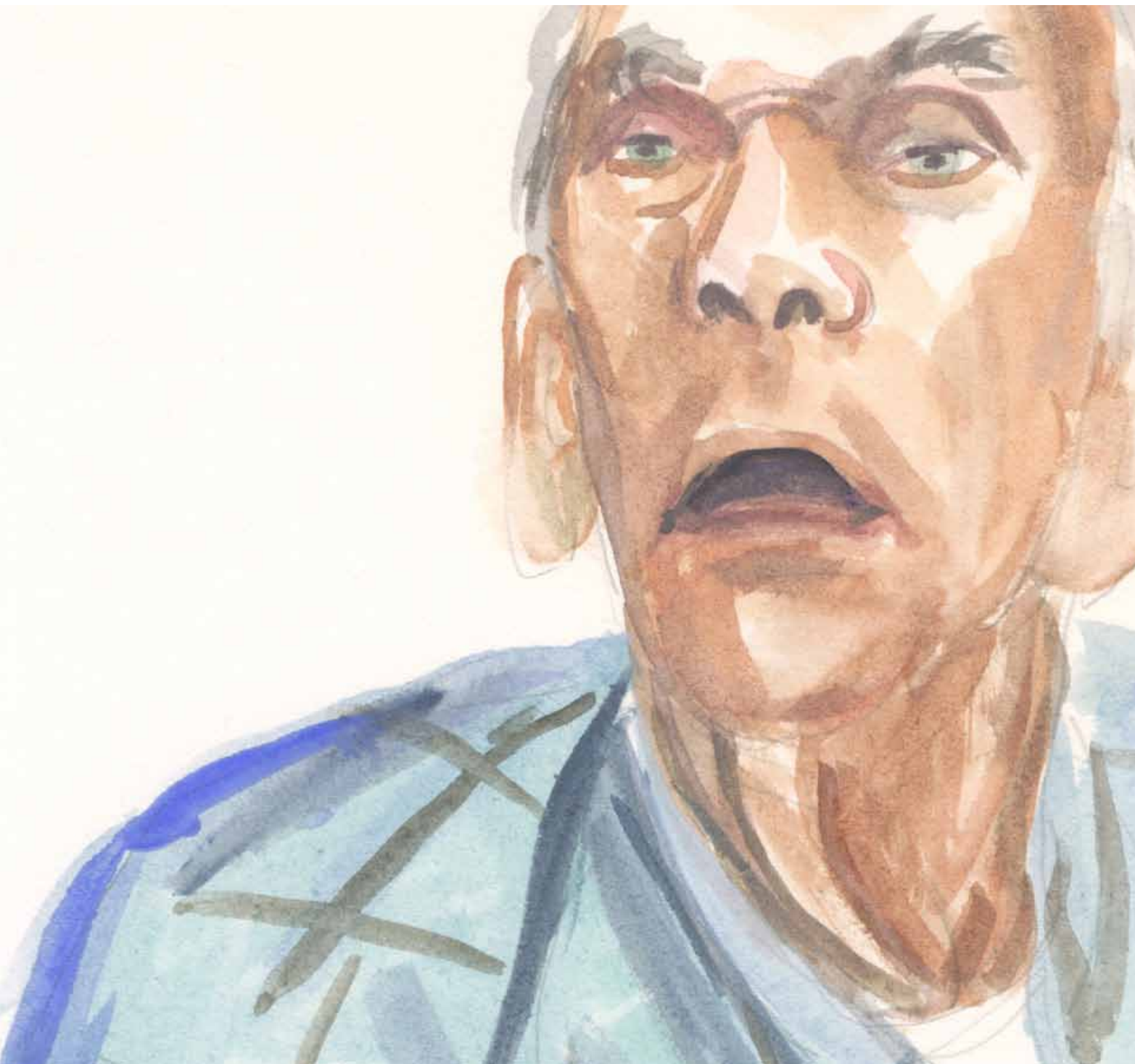
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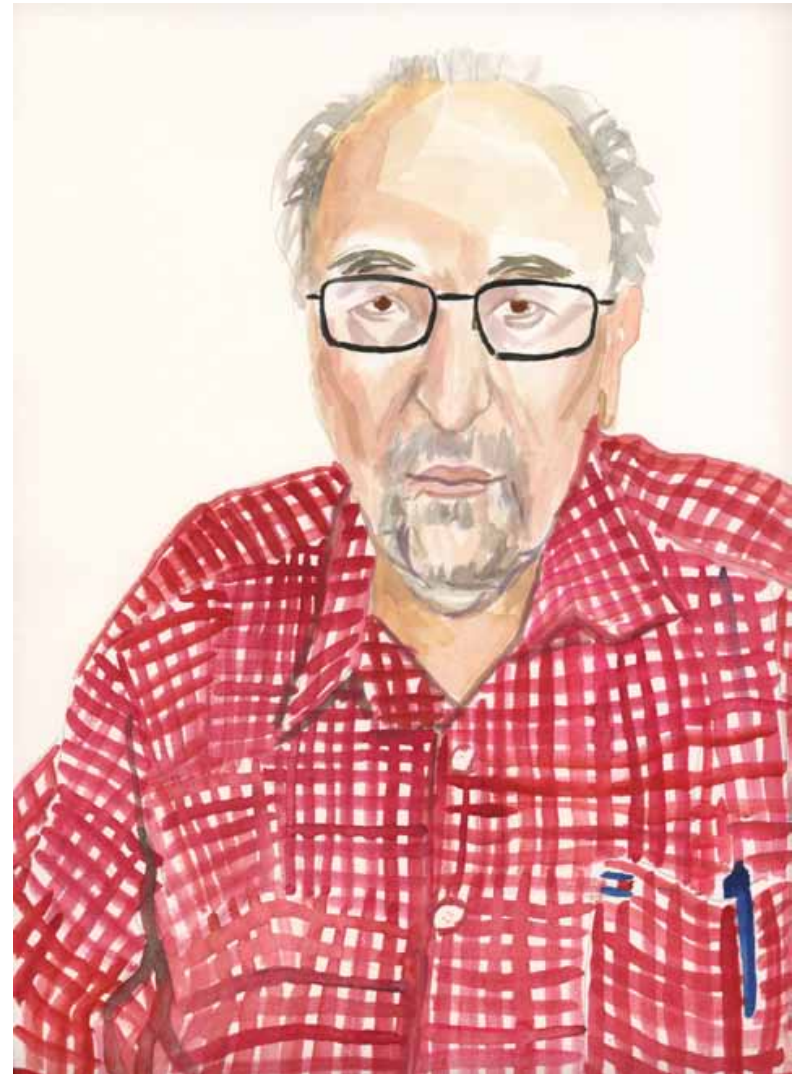
64/100 (DETAIL)



55/100



95/100



21/100



33/100



71/100

ALAN ZWEIBEL

PORTRAITS OF MY PARENTS

It extends beyond the likeness of the features. Well beyond whether the portraits accurately replicate noses, ears, chins and hairstyles. This art is not about exactitude. Or even approximation. The triumph here is about capturing the spirit of the subjects. How, with a few watercolored strokes of a brush, the ageless essences of what lies within are brought to light.

That's my takeaway when I look at Brenda Zlamany's renderings of my parents, Shirley and Julius Zweibel. Sure, I can easily scroll through all the pictures from countless albums to view how they have morphed from children photographed in a black and white world through the decades to becoming the elderly statesmen of their own four children, eleven grandchildren and fourteen great grandchildren who visit them at the Hebrew Home at Riverdale.

But I'm most impressed with the intangibles that have defied time. The transcendent nuances that have somehow survived despite the inevitable changes to appearance and mobility. The same subtle expression of my father, a highly skilled jeweler who worked so hard to give us everything that was unavailable to him as a child of the Great Depression. How he took me to Yankee games and placed one foot ahead of the other to measure the distance of my practice tosses when I threw the discus for my high school track team. The familiar glow from my mother, a housewife in an era



JULIUS AND SHIRLEY ZWEIBEL, 2017

when motherhood was an art form, who encouraged me to follow my dreams of becoming a writer. Who, in 1972, approached a Catskills comic named Morty Gunty in a Lake Tahoe coffee shop and asked if he'd like to see some of the jokes her son wrote. And their combined attitudes that filled our home with love, levity and optimism in addition to the security that comes from knowing that no matter what life presented, we can meet all challenges head on because we're a team that would always be there for each other.

I can also detect a sadness. In their eyes. In the slight downturn at the corners of their mouths that were not present just a few short months ago. Despite their courageous attempts at normalcy, there's the silent display of grief from losing my sister Fran this past May. Their beautiful second child who, in so many ways, embodied the combined traits of all that our family held dear. Yes, I'm the comedy writer but Fran was funnier than me. She was the understanding best friend to our younger sister Barbara. The wisdom dispensing biggest sister to our brother David. And the peacemaker who'd step in to settle disputes when she thought that any of us were holding onto anger for too long. We all carry the heartache of Fran's passing. We ask God why did this happen to such a life-loving person and look for signs that she still has an ethereal presence. We all feel the loss. Yet in Brenda's paintings I see my

parents' loss. Their pain. Their puzzlement. And their brave attempt to weather this cruelest blow of outliving a child.

But mostly I see contentment. The satisfaction of knowing they lived a full and rich life as best as they possibly could. As a couple. They got married in 1949 and during the following sixty-eight years they perfected their dance. Growing with each other. Learning from each other. Complimenting each other. Always making each other laugh. They still do. Sure, my dad has bouts with the onset of dementia. There are times when, well, when he is somewhere else. But in the intermittent moments of lucidity, when he returns and is once again here with us, he is sure to tell our mother that he loves her, that she is beautiful, and that she is his reason for living.

I love Brenda's portraits. Since they were sent to me, I have looked at them often. I am looking at them now while I write these words. However, if there is any flaw I can find in them, it's that my parents were painted on two separate pages. They should have shared one. That's who our parents are. A pair of people who were always combined to be one person. Shirley and Julie. Mom and Dad. Mimi and Poppy. Each name never said without the other. As if they were one person who happened to have two names. One soul that's shared by two bodies. They're lucky. We're lucky to still have them.



JULIUS AND SHIRLEY ZWEIBEL,
PORTRAITS 2017



TOP ROW: 8/100 SHIRLEY WEINTRAUB, 9/100 HYMAN MARTIN; MIDDLE ROW: 10/100 MORRIS DUCOFF,
13/100 EDYTHE KERSHNER; BOTTOM ROW: 20/100 SELMA BACHNER, 21/100 ARTHUR BACHNER



TOP ROW: 19/100 ADELE WEITZ, 52/100 RICHARD GRASKE; MIDDLE ROW: 16/100 SHIRLEY ZWEIBEL,
17/100 JULIUS ZWEIBEL; BOTTOM ROW: 98/100 RUTH BRUNN, 35/100 JUANITA CARO



TOP ROW: 67/100 MARK MARCUCILLI, 36/100 GLORIA CIMINO; MIDDLE ROW: 87/100 JOAN JACKSON, 64/100 WILLIAM SHELDON; BOTTOM ROW: 56/100 DEBORAH RIVERA, 40/100 IDA STONE

TOP ROW: 71/100 MURIEL PALLEY, 95/100 MABEL MILLS; MIDDLE ROW: 34/100 HERBERT BIRNBAUM, 38/100 RITA CASEY; BOTTOM ROW: 54/100 MIGDALIA PERSAUD, 50/100 SABINA MOSS



BRENDA ZLAMANY is a painter who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Since 1982 her work has appeared in over a dozen solo exhibitions (including, in New York City, at Jonathan O'Hara Gallery, Stux Gallery, Jessica Fredericks Gallery, and E. M. Donahue Gallery and, in Brussels, at Sabine Wachters Fine Arts) and numerous group shows in the United States, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Museums that have exhibited her work include the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei; the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver; Frankfurter Kunstverein, Germany; the National Museum, Gdansk, Poland; and Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent, Belgium. Her work has been reviewed in *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *ARTnews*, *Flash Art*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, and elsewhere and is held in the collections of the Cincinnati Art Museum; Deutsche Bank; the Museum of Modern Art, Houston; the Neuberger Museum of Art; the Virginia Museum of Fine Art; the World Bank; and Yale University. Zlamany has collaborated with authors and editors of the *New York Times Magazine* on several portrait commissions, including an image of Marian Anderson for an article by Jessye Norman and one of Osama bin Laden for the cover of the September 11, 2005, issue. Grants she has received include a Fulbright Fellowship (2011), a Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant (2006–07), a New York Foundation for the Arts Artists' Fellowship in painting (1994), and a Jerome Foundation Fellowship (1981–82). She received a BA from Wesleyan University in 1981.

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This book is dedicated to my daughter, Oona, who on her visits to the Hebrew Home contributed her marvelous sense of humor to the portrait sessions, who propped me up when I was emotionally drained from the work, who took incredible photos of the project's progress and who never fails to amaze me with her insights.

DAVID EBONY is a contributing editor of *Art in America*. The author of numerous artist monographs, he is also a frequent contributor to *artnet News* and Yale University Press online.

ALAN ZWEIBEL is an original *Saturday Night Live* writer whose work in television also includes "It's Garry Shandling's Show", which he co-created and produced, *The David Letterman Show* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. A five-time Emmy Award winner, Alan is also a best selling author who collaborated with Billy Crystal on the Tony Award-winning Broadway play *700 Sundays*. His parents, Shirley and Julius Zweibel, live at the Hebrew Home.

ABOUT THE HEBREW HOME AT RIVERDALE

As a member of the American Alliance of Museums, the Hebrew Home at Riverdale by RiverSpring Health is committed to publicly exhibiting its art collection throughout its 32-acre campus including the Derfner Judaica Museum and a sculpture garden overlooking the Hudson River and Palisades. The Derfner Judaica Museum + The Art Collection provides educational and cultural programming for residents of the Hebrew Home, their families and the general public from throughout New York City, its surrounding suburbs and visitors from elsewhere. RiverSpring Health is a nonprofit, non-sectarian geriatric organization serving more than 12,000 older adults in greater New York through its resources and community service programs. Museum hours: Sunday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Art Collection and grounds open daily, 10:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Call 718.581.1596 for holiday hours and to schedule group tours, or for further information, visit our website at RiverSpringHealth.org/art

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