

# BOOK REVIEW

## When brush and lens meet



Authors Ward Hooper and Holly Gordon

REVIEWED BY JEFFREY SANZEL

*‘It was uncanny how we discovered that similar subject matter had attracted our attention, as did our affinity for color and light. When Ward explained that he changed color, moved things around and added and replaced shapes according to his inner vision, I laughed and replied that that was exactly how I created my images! Parallels between his painting and my photography continued to reveal themselves as our relationship developed. Pure serendipity ... or were we destined to meet?’*

— Holly Gordon

The word “celebration” echoes within *Parallel Perspectives* (City Point Press), and that word — “celebration” — perfectly reflects the work of Holly Gordon and Ward Hooper. The book celebrates the extraordinary joining of an aesthetic. It shows the work of these exceptional artists, but, like in all great art, it is impossible to fully define. The fusion of these talents is alchemical. Striking, beautiful, mesmerizing on their own ... but together, something that is harmoniously “more than.”

In her preface to the book, Denise Bibro uses words like “combustible” and “urgency” contrasted with “companionship.” How these disparate concepts came together is what the Gordon-Hooper connection is about.

As Peter Pitzle sites in his foreword: “Far from wishing to mark how different brush is from lens, I think Holly Gordon and Ward Hooper say something about how the two can relate to one another as dancers rather than adversaries.” The idea of unification rather than the conflict is what creates the synergy in their works. He takes this further: “If one thinks of color metaphorically as

having, say, a musical quality, then part of what you ‘hear’ in their work is their harmonies, the color duets, their riffs ...”

As a rule, the visual arts — as opposed to the performing arts — are a solo venture. It is an isolating endeavor, even after creation. Here, the creative impulse has found a complementary existence for two exceptional and exceptionally bold artists, and *Parallel Perspectives* gives insight into its root and growth.

On a personal level, art — and this collaboration — was a lifesaver. Their work brought them together when they were both dealing with challenging life-events. A brief sketch is offered on their individual histories before focusing on their joint ventures.

Hooper, who lives in Northport, was a package designer and design director in New York City. Sketches made on the LIRR grew to bold watercolors, influenced by the “West Coast School” (Brandt, Wood, Kingman, etc.). He painted for many years, winning awards and having his work published. When his wife became ill, he stopped painting to care for her. “My wounds were still open from my wife’s death when Holly walked into my life.”

Gordon was first given a camera at 5 years old, and the photographic passion has stayed with her ever since. The Bay Shore resident studied and created art throughout her entire life. But it was her husband’s sudden death that brought her back more intensely to photography. “Traveling at every opportunity, I photographed my way throughout the world with no preconceived

notions it would lead anywhere except to keep me afloat during this turbulent time.” In 2001, she began working with a digital camera and this expanded her range of styles.

Gordon and Hooper were brought together by a journalist who had written about them independently but was unaware of their personal struggles. Gordon first saw Hooper’s work — his painting *Long Island City* — on Facebook and immediately thought of her own *Night Lights*. She reached out to him to see if he saw a correlation. Thus began dialogue that led to a meeting. “Here were two strangers,” says Hooper “serendipitously brought together who found that within our own individuality and mediums of expression, we had been living, working, and creating in parallel lives.”

Throughout the book, they share artistic as well as personal anecdotes. These include frustrations born of health issues. The mutual support in this unique and intimate relationship is honestly disclosed.

The book offers not just the finished works but the preliminary sketches and photos that would metamorphize into fully realized pieces. This glimpse behind the curtain further enhances the richness of the book’s offerings. Noted is the similarity with the collaborative work of artists Arthur Dove and Helen Torr. Much of this is neatly clarified by Bree Shirvell, who also provides excellent perspective on the mediums and their historical significance. Gordon’s photo-liminalism (creating layers by adding and removing shapes and adjusting

opacities) is also explained, along with much of her process.

The pleasure of the book is also in the ability to flip back and forward, tracing certain visual themes. And while seeing art in the context of a show is always satisfying, the tome allows for a more extended perusal that grows with each viewing. As much of the work is of Long Island, there is the additional pleasure of recognizing many of the subjects and seeing the breath-taking transformations. (On a personal note, over the days of reading the book, I found myself returning to about a half a dozen studies that I found particularly moving and inspirational. To know that I can revisit these pictures at will is a further reminder of the power of a book of art.)

One can only hope that their work becomes the subject of a documentary. The added layer of seeing the works as well as the artists in process would be an additional record of this unusual and fascinating story.

Through his or her work, an artist gives a glimpse into thought and soul. There is power in a single image that often hundreds of words cannot match. Here, we are treated to nearly two hundred of them, exquisite in their vivid colors and intriguing invention. Their work is a mutual reflection of life, heart, and mind and *Parallel Perspectives* celebrates that art.

Distributed by Simon & Schuster, *Parallel Perspectives* is available at Book Revue in Huntington, Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com.

# PARALLEL PERSPECTIVES

THE BRUSH/LENS COLLABORATION



HOLLY GORDON & WARD HOOPER