

LENNART ANDERSON

1928–2015

BY PAUL RESIKA

Our great painter Lennart Anderson, born in Detroit in 1928, went to the Art Institute of Chicago and Cranbrook Academy in Michigan. When he came to New York City sixty-five years ago, Degas and de Kooning were his spiritual companions. The art world or fashion hardly touched him in spite of the fact that when we met in 1955 he lived on East 10th Street in New York next door to Bill de Kooning, Milton Resnick, and Esteban Vicente.

Lennart worked from nature; he called it “humble pie” and grand compositions he called “pie in the sky.” His still lifes, both stoic and sensual, are among the most beautiful pictures of our time. The nude as a noble subject was his ambition. The grand figures and street scenes in his first big exhibition at Graham Gallery amazed all of us young figure painters. Hilton Kramer, reviewing one of his later shows, called him a Degas for our time. Lennart once said of Degas: “I was excited by this austere man, whose work reflected such pain, almost disgust, as well as a passion for his goal.”

Lennart has been compared to Balthus but his real kin, I think, is Edwin Dickinson who was his teacher for a few months at the Art Students League in New York.

Lennart worked for many years on the *Idylls*, grand figure compositions full of light, air, and sun. He said of them, however: “I can see these pictures as passive decorations. Pictures that stay on the wall and seduce only if one is of a mind to be seduced.”

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For a while we shared a cabin in the woods on the Ramapo River in New Jersey, about an hour from New York. I remember him in the winter on the pond in his ice skates, always perfect with superb form. And I hear he played ball as a boy in Detroit, too. I'm sure it was beautiful.

Macular degeneration cut him down fifteen years ago but somehow he found a way to make beautiful small pictures. I don't know how, but he did, which he showed at the Leigh Morse Gallery last year.

Lennart liked the following quote by Yeats from *The Cutting of an Agate*, which I believe showed something of his taste and character: "Only that which does not teach, which does not cry out, which does not persuade, which does not condescend, which does not explain is irresistible."