DON BACHARDY A LIFE IN PORTRAITS

LARGE PRINT

THE HUNTINGTON

Don Bachardy (b. 1934) is one of the most prolific and celebrated portraitists in Los Angeles. While many artists of his generation focused on abstraction or conceptual art, Bachardy committed himself to creating portraits from life, over a career of almost seven decades. Through his art, he has captured extraordinary likenesses of individuals. Some were close friends, neighbors, or lovers. Others were celebrities, writers, intellectuals, or fellow artists. He developed techniques that allowed him to work quickly and to convey immediacy and intimacy.

At the center of Bachardy's world was his romantic relationship with the British-born writer Christopher Isherwood (1904–1986). Their shared Santa Monica home was a legendary gathering place for a glamorous community of artists, writers, directors, and performers. The Huntington holds the extensive archives of both Isherwood and Bachardy. Most of the works in this exhibition, unless otherwise noted, are from Bachardy's archive at The Huntington. Few of them have ever been exhibited. Generous support for this exhibition is provided by the Douglas and Eunice Erb Goodan Endowment and the Robert F. Erburu Exhibition Endowment. Additional funding is provided by the Pasadena Art Alliance, The Ahmanson Foundation Exhibition and Education Endowment, The Melvin R. Seiden-Janine Luke Exhibition Fund in memory of Robert F. Erburu, and the Boone Foundation.



NON-FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY WELCOME

This exhibit contains nudity.

Note: Objects may have shifted during installation. We've provided thumbnails to help identify specific subjects.

SECTION 1

Early Life

Don Bachardy was born in Los Angeles in 1934 to Jess and Glade Bachardy, who had moved there from the Midwest. Glade took Don and his elder brother, Ted, to see movies throughout their childhoods, despite their father's disapproval of the cost. The ritual made the boys just as enchanted by Hollywood glamour as she was. A fascination with celebrities and, in particular, a careful study of their faces, would inform Bachardy's career.



OBJECT ON WALL



Glade Bachardy

1962 Pen and ink on paper Loan of the Christopher Isherwood Foundation

OBJECTS IN CASE

Scrapbook ca. 1930 Glade Bachardy Mixed media

Glade Bachardy collected movie fan magazines and created scrapbooks with her clippings, a practice her son Don would also adopt. Her precise cutting and visually appealing arrangements of the clippings showcase hand skills and an artistic eye.

Don Bachardy and Glade Bachardy

September 18, 1951 Photographic print

Glade Bachardy

September 23, 1951 Photographic print

OBJECTS IN CASE (Continued)

Sketch of Montgomery Clift 1953 **Don Bachardy** Graphite on paper

Sketch of Bette Davis 1953 **Don Bachardy** Graphite and ink on paper

Snapshots from Film Premieres

Photographic prints, ca. 1950-1952

As teens, Don and his older brother, Ted, crashed Hollywood movie premieres and even the 1952 Academy Awards ceremony. They dressed in their nicest suits and took photos of each other with the stars, seldom encountering objections.

Top row, left to right:

Ted Bachardy with Janet Leigh Don Bachardy with Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall Don Bachardy at premiere of S*ingin' in the Rain*

Bottom row, left to right:

Don Bachardy with Lucille Ball Don Bachardy with Marilyn Monroe Don Bachardy with Gregory Peck

Don and Ted Bachardy and friends

August 24, 1952

Don and Ted Bachardy and friends at Crystal Beach

September 6, 1952 Photographic prints

Both Don and Ted recognized themselves as gay by the time they were teenagers, and spent time at Will Rogers State Beach in Santa Monica, a known gathering place for gay boys and men. Until Ted was able to buy a car, the trip took close to two hours each way on public transportation.

MURAL

Don Bachardy paints Mark Sufrin in his home studio, photographed by Tony Gunder, November 28, 1982. Christopher Isherwood Papers, The Huntington

Chris & Don

Bachardy was a first-year student at UCLA when his brother Ted introduced him to Christopher Isherwood in 1952. Despite an age gap of thirty years, Bachardy and Isherwood bonded quickly. They remained a committed couple until Isherwood's death in 1986. Both artistic muse and unfailing supporter of Bachardy's work, Isherwood appears in many of his portraits.

Isherwood encouraged Bachardy's artistic interests and offered advice based on his own career of sustained creativity and critical success. In 1956, Bachardy decided to focus on drawing from life and enrolled at the Chouinard Art Institute (later CalArts) and then studied at the Slade School of Fine Art in London. His first solo show in London followed very soon after, launching a career of international visibility.

OBJECTS ON WALL



Christopher Isherwood

1959 Graphite and acrylic on paper



Christopher Isherwood 1961 Graphite and ink on paper



Self-Portrait 1959 Graphite on paper

OBJECTS IN CASE

Don Bachardy and Christopher Isherwood

ca. 1954 **Jim Charlton, photographer** Photographic print Christopher Isherwood Papers

Don Bachardy's Letter to Christopher Isherwood

February 6, 1961 Autograph manuscript Christopher Isherwood Papers

Moving to London after several years of living with Isherwood was a shock to Bachardy. He and Isherwood wrote each other frequently, often role-playing as animals. Bachardy was a mischievous kitten named Kitty, while Isherwood was his protector, Dobbin, a gray workhorse. In this letter, Bachardy writes of his homesickness.

OBJECTS IN CASE (Continued)

Page from Christopher Isherwood's Diary June 1961 Typescript manuscript Christopher Isherwood Papers

Just a few months after arriving in London, Bachardy was offered his first solo exhibition at the Redfern Gallery, a wellrespected contemporary art gallery. Both Bachardy and Isherwood celebrated the momentous success of securing the show, which Isherwood wrote about in his June 9 diary entry. The October 1961 opening was a star-studded event.

Don Bachardy and Christopher Isherwood at their Sycamore Road home, Santa Monica

October 5, 1957 **Cecil Beaton, photographer** Photographic print Christopher Isherwood Papers

Don Bachardy's Letter to Christopher Isherwood

January 26, 1964 Autograph manuscript Christopher Isherwood Papers

Letters from Bachardy to Isherwood often recount his observations about various sitters. In this letter, Bachardy writes to Isherwood about the experience of drawing the legendary writer and activist James Baldwin in New York. He recalls, "He sat as still and as long as he could, which was neither very still nor very long, but I do like him."

The Hotel in Amsterdam play program

London: Royal Court Theatre, 1968 Christopher Isherwood Papers

In 1968, Bachardy was commissioned for another large set of portraits of performers, this time of the cast of a John Osborne play called *The Hotel in Amsterdam*. The Tony- and Oscar-winning Osborne was by then famous for his play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and is credited with reinventing British theater.

Portrait of Arthur Mitchell from Ballet Portraits 1965

Don Bachardy

Portfolio of prints Loan of Don Bachardy

As Bachardy's career progressed, he took on larger and more complicated projects. In 1965, Bachardy was commissioned to draw individual portraits of thirty star dancers of the New York City Ballet. The company's cofounder and dance visionary, George Balanchine, annotated this prototype with comments. The edition was never released, but Bachardy remained proud of the work.

OBJECT ON WALL



James Baldwin

January 23, 1964 (no. 2) Graphite and ink on paper

Artistic Circles

Through his relationship with Isherwood, who wrote screenplays for film and had Hollywood contacts, Bachardy was introduced to actors, directors, choreographers, musicians, and dancers. Isherwood's close friends included many of the most famous writers of the day in Los Angeles, New York, and London. Like him, some of the expatriates in this community had fled the rise of fascism in Europe; others had sought out the sunshine and flourishing gay scene in Los Angeles. When Bachardy joined the household, their social life increasingly included other visual artists.

OBJECT ON WALL



Evelyn Hooker January 24, 1977 (no. 1) Graphite and ink on paper

Dr. Evelyn Hooker was a professor of psychology at UCLA when she met Isherwood in 1949. Like Isherwood, she had fled Nazi Germany. The two remained friends for decades. Hooker's work refuted theories that considered same-sex desire a mental illness. Today she is considered a pioneer of efforts to decriminalize and destigmatize samesex relationships.

OBJECTS ON WALL



Elaine de Kooning March 20, 1966 Graphite and ink on paper



Francis Bacon 1961 Graphite and ink on paper Loan of the Christopher Isherwood Foundation



David Hockney November 2, 1969 Graphite on paper



Peter Schlesinger October 17, 1967 (no. 1) Graphite and ink on paper

OBJECT ON WALL



Jim Ganzer January 9, 1973 (no. 1) Graphite and ink on paper

FOCUS

L.A. Artists

Bachardy also sketched his contemporaries in the L.A. art scene, including members of the "Cool School" associated with the city's influential Ferus Gallery—Ed Moses, Billy Al Bengston, Ed Kienholz, and Kenneth Price. In December 1970, Bachardy had a joint show in San Francisco with Ed Ruscha. The following March, he exhibited alongside Bengston, Price, Peter Alexander, and another Ferus artist, Joe Goode.



Ed Moses

July 2, 1969 Graphite and ink on paper Courtesy of Billy Al Bengston Studio Holdings



Jim Bridges August 6, 1967 (no. 1) Graphite and ink on paper



Craig Kauffman July 24, 1971 Graphite and ink on paper Courtesy of Billy Al Bengston Studio Holdings



Billy Al Bengston

August 10, 1967 Graphite and ink on paper Courtesy of Billy Al Bengston Studio Holdings



Peter Alexander May 30, 1977 Graphite and ink on paper Courtesy of Billy Al Bengston Studio Holdings



Kenneth Price July 2, 1970 Graphite and ink on paper Courtesy of Billy Al Bengston Studio Holdings



Robert Graham January 19, 1972 (no. 1) Graphite and ink on paper

Performing Artists

Bachardy's childhood fascination with famous Hollywood faces came full circle early in his career when stars he had admired from afar began frequenting his studio. Although influenced by the glamour of studio photography, Bachardy's drawings capture the sitters unfiltered. Bette Davis—whose portrait he had copied from magazines as a child—sat for him in 1973. Davis was so struck by his ability to render her raw, true likeness that, upon seeing her completed portrait, she remarked, "Yup, that's the old bag."



Alicia Markova

December 4, 1964 (no. 3) Graphite and ink on paper



Lotte Lenya 1961 (no. 1) Graphite on paper



Cecil Beaton October 31, 1964 Graphite and ink on paper



Bette Davis December 4, 1973 Graphite on paper

OBJECTS ON WALL



Jennifer West 1963 (no. 1) Pen and ink on paper



Charles Laughton 1959 (no. 2) Graphite on paper



Luz Offerrall May 17, 1973 Graphite and ink on paper



Igor Stravinsky March 24, 1960 (no. 4) Graphite on paper

FOCUS

Writers

Isherwood introduced Bachardy to many luminaries a generation or two older than him. These included queer writers Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, W. H. Auden, and William S. Burroughs. During independent stints in New York, Bachardy developed an especially close friendship with Williams and met a younger generation of artists and writers.



William Burroughs

December 10, 1976 Graphite and ink on paper



Truman Capote June 26, 1961 (no. 1) Graphite on paper



Tennessee Williams September 7, 1968 (no. 2) Graphite on paper



Wysten Auden 1961 Graphite and ink on paper

FOCUS

Gurus

Los Angeles-based writers Aldous Huxley (whose portrait is in the next room) and Gerald Heard were seekers like Isherwood, melding creative and spiritual pursuits in a way that influenced the next generation of Beats and hippies. Isherwood introduced Bachardy to Vedanta, the Hindu community to which he was deeply committed. For most of Isherwood's time in Los Angeles, Swami Prabhavananda was the leader of the Southern California Vedanta community.



Gerald Heard

1960 Graphite on paper



Swami Prabhavananda December 10, 1969 Graphite and ink on paper

Bachardy at Work

Bachardy's portraits are usually completed in one session of two to six hours. He often sits very close to his subjects and has an intense gaze that can be startling. "My method of work is an expression of my own peculiar psychological make-up," Bachardy says, "of my need to challenge myself and my sitter . . . with my stringent demands on the nerves, patience, and stamina of us both." Sketching quickly, he shapes line into form and shading into volume, sometimes leaving large portions of the body rendered in cursory fashion. His preferred media are graphic and ink wash, and later acrylic.

OBJECT ON WALL



Mrs. Cyriax

1961

Graphite and ink on paper

OBJECTS ON WALL (Top to bottom, Left to right)



Gregory Evans October 25, 1979 Pen and ink on paper



Patrick Hogan July 31, 1974 (no. 2) Graphite and ink on paper



Mark Valen September 15, 1977 (no. 1) Graphite and ink on paper



Aldous Huxley August 2, 1962 Pen and ink on paper Top to bottom:

OBJECTS ON WALL (Top to bottom, Left to right, continued)



Self-Portrait January 27, 1974 Ink on paper



Christopher Isherwood February 17, 1969 Graphite on paper



Harold Rosenberg March 24, 1966 (no. 2) Graphite and ink on paper

QUOTE

"The departure of my sitter is like the breaking of a spell. I never alter any detail of the work I've done once the sitting has ended."

-Don Bachardy

Collaborations

Bachardy and Isherwood were lifelong collaborators, both personally and creatively. While significantly more established in his career by the time they met, Isherwood looked to Bachardy for feedback about his writing. It was Bachardy who came up with the title for Isherwood's groundbreaking novel, *A Single Man* (1964). Isherwood in turn steadfastly supported Bachardy's career, not only helping him make connections but also allowing him the space and freedom to develop as a person and an artist.



QUOTE

"Bachardy is so shockingly direct in his approach, so completely innocent of calligraphic trickery and selfassertion, that his achievement at first glance looks easy. It is not. It is the product of relentless discipline."

-Christopher Isherwood



Christopher Isherwood June 20, 1979 Acrylic on paper

OBJECTS IN CASE

Nick Wilder, David Hockney, Don Bachardy, Christopher Isherwood, Lee Brevard, Gilbert Haacke, and David Dambacher on Catalina Island

1976 **Joe Macdonald, photographer** Polaroid print Christopher Isherwood Papers

Don Bachardy and Christopher Isherwood at home on Adelaide Drive

March 30, 1968 **David Hockney, photographer** Photographic print Christopher Isherwood Papers

Don Bachardy, Christopher Isherwood, and Peter Schlesinger 1968 Andee Cohen, photographer Photographic print Christopher Isherwood Papers

OBJECTS IN CASE (Continued)

Don Bachardy and Joan Didion 1981 Polaroid print Christopher Isherwood Papers

October Los Angeles: Twelvetrees Press, 1981 **Don Bachardy and Christopher Isherwood** Printed book

October presents in parallel Isherwood's and Bachardy's respective creative pursuits. For the month of October 1979, Bachardy drew at least one ink portrait every day, with sitters including Gore Vidal, David Hockney, Joan Didion, and her husband, John Dunne. Isherwood wrote a diary entry for each day. The sleek, elegant book brought the two kinds of observation together and underscored that their matured partnership was one of equals. Also on view are Bachardy's datebook for October 1979, where he diligently recorded his sitters on each day, and a manuscript page of Isherwood's contribution to the volume.

Don Bachardy's Datebook

1979 Autograph manuscript Loan of Don Bachardy

OBJECTS IN CASE (Continued)

Page from Christopher Isherwood's Diary

October 1979 Autograph manuscript Christopher Isherwood papers

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Christopher Isherwood's notes on Bachardy's artistic approach

Date unknown Autograph manuscript Christopher Isherwood Papers

These notes record Isherwood's thoughts about Bachardy's style, possibly for publication. While sometimes beleaguered by the impatience and insecurity of a younger partner, Isherwood was unwavering in his support of and admiration for Bachardy's work and work ethic.

OBJECT ON WALL



Christopher Isherwood

1983 Acrylic on board Loan of the Christopher Isherwood Foundation

OBJECTS ON WALL



Thom Gunn February 22, 1981 Ink on paper



Mary Kienholz September 29, 1977 Graphite and ink on paper



Christopher Knight February 19, 1983 Ink on paper



Eleanor Phillips January 5, 1980 Pen and ink on paper



Max Hoff July 17, 1982 (no. 2) Pen and ink on paper



Tony Sarver October 26, 1979 Pen and ink on paper

OBJECTS ON WALL



Trisha Brown February 16, 1986 (no. 1) Acrylic on paper



Natalie Leavitt November 16, 1986 (no. 5) Acrylic on paper



Tim Hilton October 18, 1986 (no. 3) Acrylic on paper



Penny Little August 1, 1985 (no. 1) Acrylic on paper



Dagny Corcoran June 24, 1985 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper



Nick Wilder August 12, 1980 Acrylic on paper

A Daily Practice

Although Bachardy had gallery exhibitions beginning in the 1960s, both in the United States and Europe, the vast majority of his portraits have remained with the artist. Rarely missing a day in his studio, Bachardy typically produces upward of four portraits a day, often seeing two or more sitters and completing at least two finished portraits in each session. He seeks out some sitters and is solicited by others. This habitual artistic practice has resulted in more than 17,000 artworks over seventy years, making him arguably one of the most prolific artists of his generation.



OBJECTS ON WALL



William Wyler July 21, 1980 Pen and ink on paper



Julie Wilson August 27, 1986 (no. 1) Acrylic on paper

OBJECTS ON WALL (Left to right)



Self-Portrait April 16, 1986 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper



Christopher Isherwood July 27, 1981 Ink on paper

Isherwood's Death

Bachardy produced more portraits in 1985 than at any point in his career. The subject of most of them was his partner, Christopher Isherwood, who was dying of cancer. Bachardy used watered-down black acrylic paint with a Japanese brush for these portraits, and soon after Isherwood's death set aside both the implement and the monochromatic approach.

His portraits of Isherwood declare many things: You are magnificent. You are mortal and frail. You are everything to me. You have set me on a path as an artist and a human. I will love and work again after you are gone. Isherwood died on January 4, 1986. Bachardy was fifty-one years old. He had lived with Isherwood for thirty-three years.



OBJECTS ON WALL (Left to right)



Christopher Isherwood October 19, 1985 (no. 3) Acrylic on paper

Don Bachardy painting Christopher Isherwood 1985 Wayne Shimabukuro, photographer Photographic prints

OBJECTS ON WALL (Left to right)



Christopher Isherwood

November 26, 1985 (no. 9) Acrylic on paper Loan of the Christopher Isherwood Foundation



Christopher Isherwood November 26, 1985 (no. 8) Acrylic on paper Loan of the Christopher Isherwood Foundation



Christopher Isherwood December 13, 1985 (no. 4) Acrylic on paper Loan of the Christopher Isherwood Foundation

SECTION 6

Color

In these portraits, one can see Bachardy's playful and experimental use of color. Acrylic paint—his medium of choice in these later works—lends itself well to his daily painting practice. Acrylic dries quickly, allowing multiple layers of paint to retain vibrancy and contrast while permitting the artist to finish a large work in a short period. Bachardy has used the medium's flexibility to create technical challenges for himself. He sometimes paints an entire sheet in a base color or pattern before the sitter arrives.



OBJECT ON WALL



Self-Portrait Early August, 1995 Acrylic on paper

Clockwise from top left:



John Fleck April 12, 1995 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper



Burton Jones January 25, 1987 (no. 3) Acrylic on paper



Emerson Sy May 28, 1995 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper



Barbara Diamond September 12, 2005 (no. 3) Acrylic on paper



Laurie Bernhard July 1, 2003 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper



Curley Bonds November 7, 1996 (no. 1) Acrylic on paper



Michael Parks October 15, 2003 (no. 3) Acrylic on paper



Andrew Brandt November 18 and 20, 2004 (no. 4) Acrylic on paper



Crystal Martin March 5, 2003 (no. 4) Acrylic on paper The Howarth & Smith Collection



John Fitzherbert April 18, 1995 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper



Tamara Toumanova January 17, 1995 (no. 1) Acrylic on paper



Mary Agnes Donoghue March 18, 1993 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper



Brian Bedford May 1992 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper

Nudes

In 2001, Bachardy embarked on a series of portraits of nude sitters. A patron arranged for the sitters to arrive daily. Over two years, Bachardy created more than 800 acrylic paintings on paper, an impressive output of this diaristic practice. Men, women, and couples modeled for him—allowing him to observe and depict a range of bodies and poses. These are just a small selection of the seductive, engaging, intimate, and often vulnerable portraits from the series.

Clockwise from left:



Robert Dorfman May 27, 2003 (no. 3) Acrylic on paper



Jeffrey Kennedy December 27, 2003 (no. 3) Acrylic on paper



Alan Berry July 30, 2002 (no. 1) Acrylic on paper The Howarth & Smith Collection



Rob

September 2, 2002 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper The Howarth & Smith Collection



Tim Hilton December 31, 1994 (no. 4) Acrylic on paper



Tom Long November 26, 1997 Acrylic on paper



Lisa Bounau March 16, 2002 (no. 3) Acrylic on paper



Jake Burgess June 6, 2002 (no. 3) Acrylic on paper The Howarth & Smith Collection



Self-Portrait July 4, 2004 Acrylic on paper

Documentarians

After his partner's death, Bachardy oversaw the creation of the Christopher Isherwood Foundation and the placement of Isherwood's archive at The Huntington. He granted permission for the publication of Isherwood's diaries and selected love letters, edited by Katherine Bucknell, and for a new biography of Isherwood, also by Bucknell (*Christopher Isherwood Inside Out*, 2024).

Tina Mascara and her late husband, Guido Santi, directed and produced a documentary about the couple, *Chris & Don* (2014). Excerpts of Mascara's documentary about Bachardy, *Face to Face: Don Bachardy* (2025), can be viewed in the lobby of this gallery. Peter Macaulay, also a portrait artist, is a friend and mentee who sought out Bachardy after discovering his work. Left to right, top to bottom:



Peter Macaulay February 20, 2017 Acrylic on paper



Katherine Bucknell January 18, 2015 Acrylic on paper



Tina Mascara January 19, 2019 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper



Guido Santi January 1, 2019 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper



Michele Bradley May 2, 2000 (no. 3) Acrylic on paper



Dennis Christopher November 22, 2000 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper



Gus Harper August 14, 2001 (no. 3) Acrylic on paper



Ted Bachardy March 23, 2003 (no. 3) Acrylic on paper



Ben Youcef December 14, 2015 Acrylic on paper



Puko August 7, 2012 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper



Marlon Seperak March 14, 2016 (no. 1) Acrylic on paper



Sandro Kopp November 10, 2011 (no. 1) Acrylic on paper



Tim Hilton May 30, 2017 Acrylic on paper



Joey Scialfa June 2, 2012 (no. 1) Acrylic on paper



Andre DeLoach February 19, 2019 Acrylic on paper



Richard Sassin December 4, 2011 (no. 2) Acrylic on paper



Harriet Zeitlin March 27, 2014 Acrylic on paper



Anthony Sanchez-Solis

November 9, 2019 (no. 1) Acrylic on paper



Ron Nelson November 12, 2020 Acrylic on paper



Shirley Squid-Ouchi February 21, 2020 (no. 1) Acrylic on paper



Jose Gomez January 9, 2022 (no. 1) Acrylic on paper

MURAL

Don Bachardy in his studio, photographed by Bill Scobie, 1984. Christopher Isherwood Papers, The Huntington

Self Portraits

One of Bachardy's most frequent subjects is himself. He keeps a small mirror in his studio next to his easel, allowing him to make self-portraits, sometimes spontaneously, and often in his ubiquitous white tank top. When a sitter did not show up for a scheduled appointment, he would make a self-portrait instead. These late paintings show Don in his eighties—his gaze still intense and his keen eye for detail and psychological depth still penetrating. Now in his nineties, Bachardy remains a prodigious artist, painting and working in his studio adjacent to the home he once shared with Isherwood in Santa Monica.





Self-Portrait March 19, 2016 (no. 1) Acrylic on paper



Self-Portrait August 8, 2018 Acrylic on paper



Self-Portrait November 19, 2018 Acrylic on paper