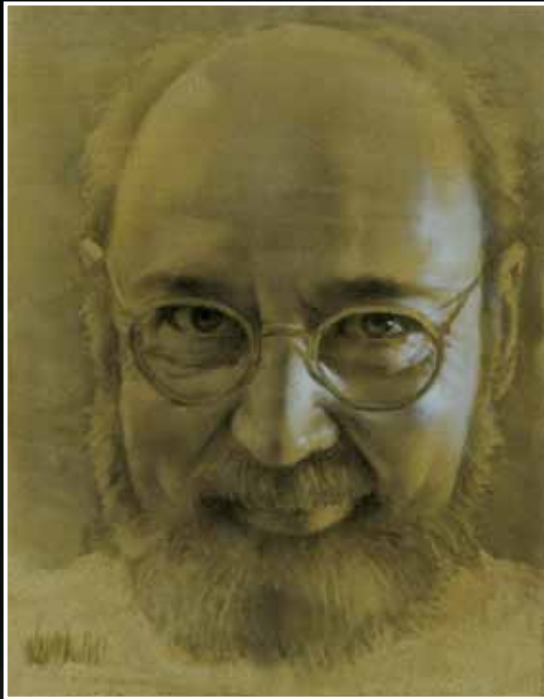


*franklin alexander*

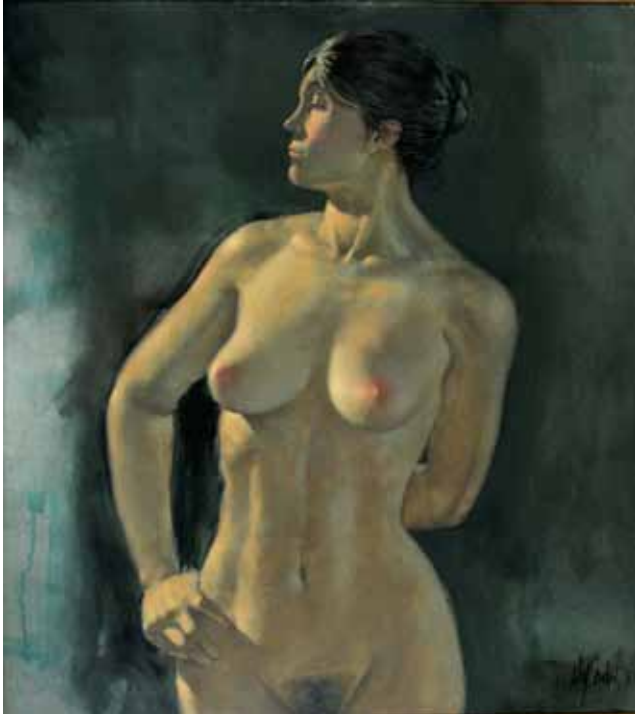


WORK

Cover: *The Artist*, 20 x 16

# *franklin alexander*

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*Maria*, 36 x 32, oil

Profile: Franklin Alexander  
by Raymond J. Steiner,  
Editor/Artwriter, Art Times

Quotes by Franklin Alexander

WORK

## PROFILE: FRANKLIN ALEXANDER 1925 — 2007

IT IS AN axiom that though there are fine artists and skilled teachers, rarely are those qualities found in one and the same person. Serious artists are wont to crave and need solitude for the germination of their work; teachers, though they might be familiar with their subject matter, require little more than an audience and a glib patter. Franklin Alexander — painter, philosopher, writer, teacher, Bach aficionado and amateur musician (he would randomly tootle sections of Johann Sebastian's Six Unaccompanied Suites with Cello on his alto recorder while contemplating the merits and faults of his latest painting propped up on his studio easel) — was, from observations of friends, family, colleagues, and students, an exception to that old axiom. His students — and they were many since he has for more than forty years taught at a dozen art schools and colleges, even being one of the co-founders of the internationally respected Woodstock School of Art in Woodstock, New York — all seem to concur on not only his considerable expertise and range of technical know-how, but also his sensitive imparting of that knowledge to his charges. By almost all accounts, Franklin Alexander knew his craft and dedicated his life to passing on its secrets to whoever sought his counsel. For some, he was not only a respected teacher, but a cherished friend and sometime father figure. One student recalled: "Franklin seemed most himself when he was teaching art." What more enviable epitaph might one want? To be seen as someone who has found one's true calling — indeed, to have found *oneself* — must surely be one of life's greatest rewards.



Clearly, none of this latter-day veneration came easily. From his first critical put-down at the age of 16 by Robert Brackman, his first art instructor at the Art Students League of New York, Franklin Alexander determined to alter that teacher's early assessment of his talents. In speaking with those who knew him most intimately — Pia, his first wife, and his two sons Paul and John — his single-minded resolve — in whatever pursuit fell into his orbit of interest during his life — most defined him. Once set upon a path, he was — like Captain Ahab — unswervable from the iron rails of will that laid out his course. While Pia, of course, lived with that unshakeable determination during their years of marriage, his son John (who now lives in his father's home and studio), in sorting through his father's personal papers and effects, came across it time and again in Franklin's notes, journals, files, and library. In sharing with me some of his father's highly detailed and meticulous files, John could only shake his head in wonder. How could he be so driven?

And driven by what? His art, of course — but more than that. His well-kept journals tell a good portion of the story. Divided neatly into three separate books — Art, Philosophy and Psychology — his observations, notes, comments and insights reflected the books on art, philosophy and psychology that made up the major portion of his personal library. Though artbooks are much in evidence

on his shelves, they consisted mainly of those artists he respected and admired; one suspects that most of his opinions, tastes and artistic vision grew out of his own creative journey from his early forays into abstract expressionism and, eventually, into the classical representation for which he was most known. In any event, the core of art and its pursuit that informed his soul was bolstered and enlarged by his intellectual curiosity in philosophy and psychology — the latter, specifically in the matter of human consciousness and, ultimately, in its pre-historical sources for it is herein that lies the mystery of mankind's creativity. However close Franklin Alexander came to logically resolving his search into the enigma of the human quest for visual expression, what he *did* learn transformed him from that 16-year-old would-be artist into Franklin Alexander: Painter, Philosopher, Writer, Teacher — and, we must not forget, Amateur Musician. It ought not escape the notice of the reader that all of these endeavors are means of communication, music even more ancient than image-making and both far more so than vocal and written language — communicative expression being a human trait that was of paramount importance to him.

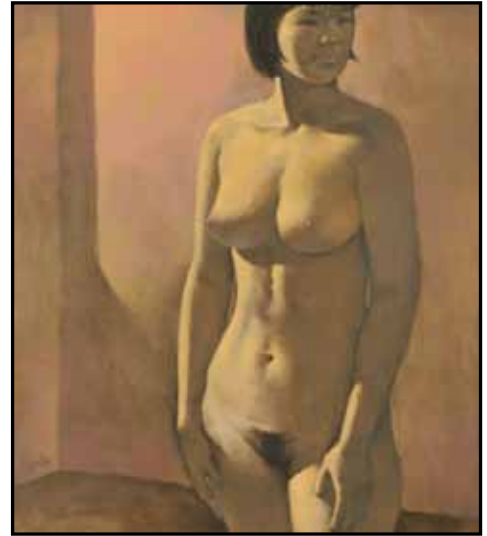


I suspect that Franklin Alexander's move from abstract expressionism to realism came about precisely as a result of his concern for clear communication — communication of one's inner psyche onto a canvas may be all well and good; communication of one's psyche to another *human being* in an intelligible manner even more so. Inevitably, his journey into human consciousness, creativity and communication rooted him in a profound mantle of humanism — and, hence, into a teacher *par excellence*. Thus, though he painted the occasional still life, town- or landscape, and a large number of portraits (including self-portraits) — and did so with considerable skill — it was to be the depiction of the human figure, sometimes in an interior, more often highlighted against a scumbled background, that would consume his mature years of artistic vision. This concentration on the worthiness of the human form as a motif, as evidenced by scores of studies and finished works, was also reflected in his teaching — both in the workshops at his studio as well as in the various schools at which he taught. His approach was classically academic — from having his students learn the rudiments of drawing and painting and then on to the living model, each step formally structured and assiduously adhered to, the importance of which was part of his method of imparting not only a thorough-going introduction to human anatomy but also to the necessities of good draftsmanship. As in his teaching, so in his painting. A Franklin Alexander nude is a consummate work of art. I once had occasion to come across several of them at a gallery that chose to exclusively feature

them and wrote that they appeared “closer to ‘Calendar Cheesecake’ than serious art” — to which he responded in a Letter to the Editor: “I hope and think Mr. Steiner’s judgement is wrong. But, he may be right. If so, I hope his argument will appeal to calendar publishers, since I can dearly use the extra 12 sales.”

This final anecdote serves on several levels since it not only points up the dangers of a critic assessing an artist on the basis of only a small portion of his work, but even more pointed, allows for an insight into Franklin Alexander in particular and into the plight of the fine artist in general. Not only did his response reveal a subtle sense of humor in this most disciplined of artists, but it also lays bare the deplorable neglect in our society of the dedicated, accomplished, skilled, and largely unsung ‘toilers of the field’ who, in spite of all their proficiency and learning, can barely keep financially afloat. It is a sad commentary on our present-day artscene wherein solid draftsmanship, expertise and knowledge of one’s craft are considered passé, and that the likes of Franklin Alexander and his kind are fast becoming an endangered species. Kudos then to his family for ensuring that his legacy is not lost by preserving his papers, to his students and colleagues for holding him up as a model for future artists to emulate, and to the Woodstock School of Art for honoring him by mounting this major retrospective of his life’s work. For a man who long held it beneath himself to court the tawdriness of the art market, such a tribute to his memory would surely not displease him.

**Raymond J. Steiner**  
**Editor/Artwriter *ART TIMES***  
**July 2009**



Profile Illustrations:

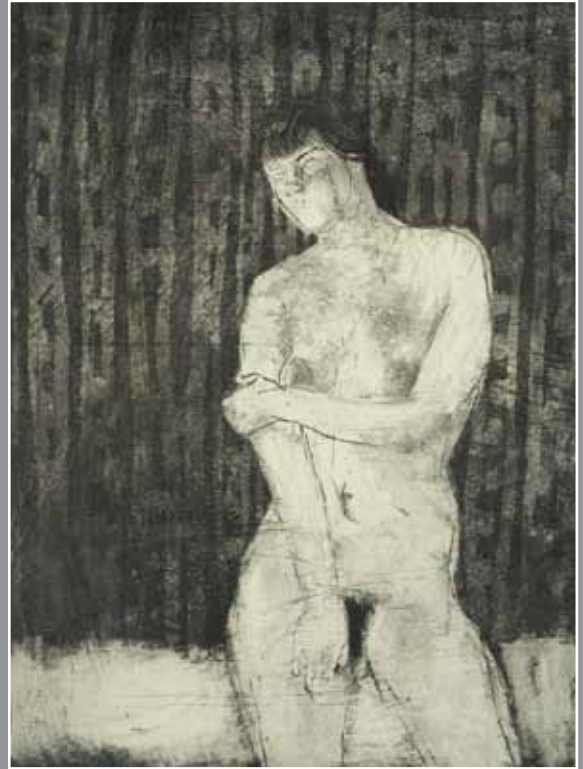
P 1 - *Self Portrait*, charcoal, 18 x 14

P 2 - *For Pia*, oil, 9 x 11¾

P 3 - *Misha*, oil, 36 x 32



*Man and Horse*, oil, 48 x 42



*In Jeannie's Room*, etching, 12½ x 9½

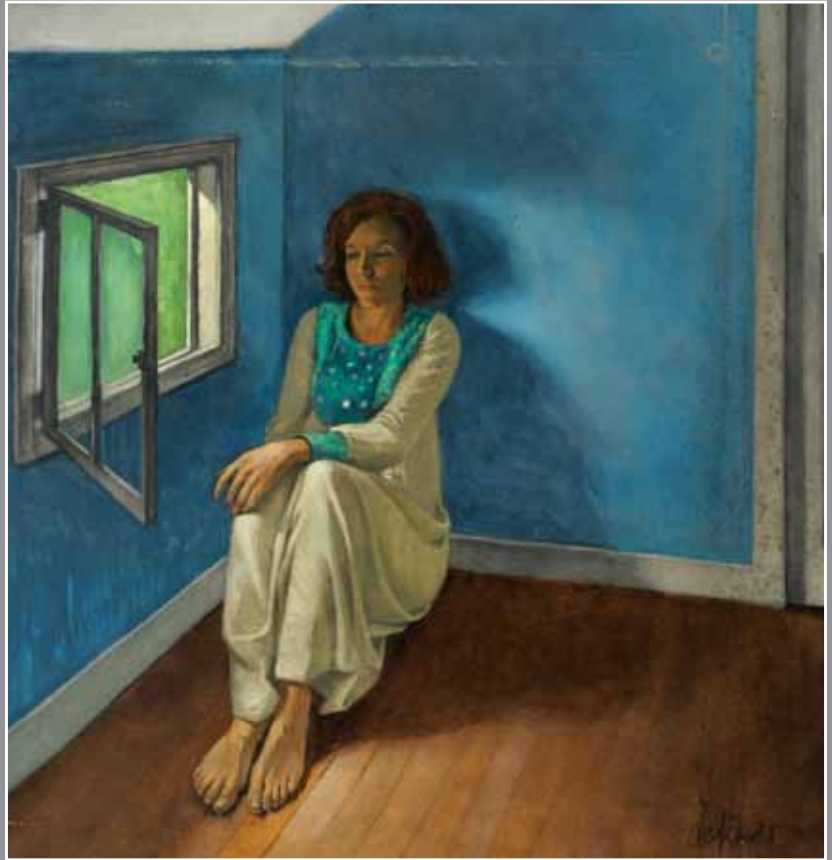


*untitled*, oil, 43¼ x 31¼



*The Recorder Player*, oil, 48 x 44

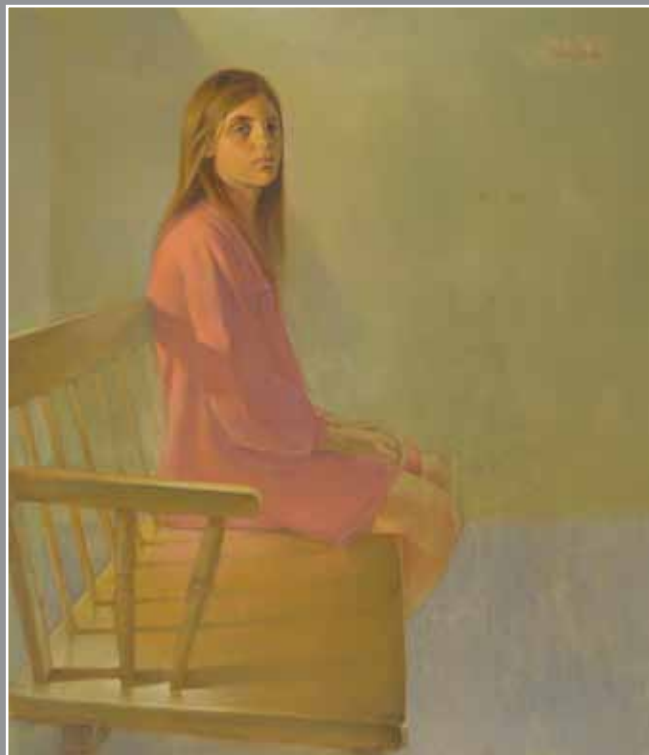
*“Like Schubert I don’t ‘compose’. I merely  
‘remember’ the ‘songs’ I paint.”*



*The Window, oil, 48 x 46*



*At the Door*, oil, 52 x 48



*The Bench*, oil, 48 x 42



*Edna's Monday*, oil, 58 x 48



*White Blouse*, oil, 48 x 48



*Martha*, oil, 36 x 32



*Priscilla*, oil, 48 x 42

*“Life to me is a naked woman. Nothing has ever excited my senses more.  
A sunset is bucolic. A nude brings the blood to one’s face.”*



*Mara's Morning*, oil, 54 x 48



*In the Shadows*, oil, 36 x 36

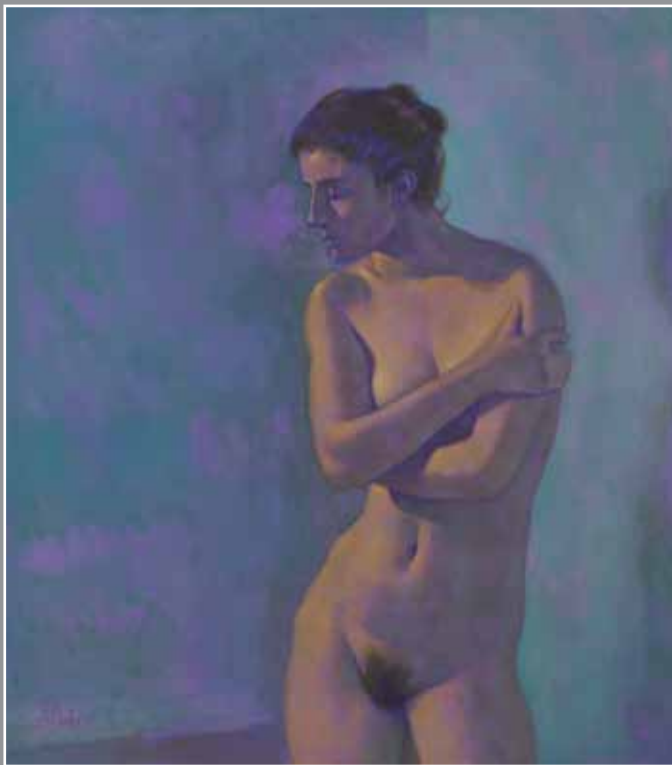


untitled, oil, 36 x 32

*“My only effort in life has been to survive. Not to survive, that is, as an artist, a philosopher, or even a teacher. My effort has been to survive - pleasantly.”*



Window's Light, oil, 36 x 32



*Blue*, oil, 36 x 32



*untitled*, oil, 36 x 32



*untitled, graphite, 13 x 17*

*“If they think I’m an artist, I must be an artist.”*



*Seated Lady, charcoal, 25 x 19*



*untitled*, graphite/charcoal, 14 x 11



*Nadja*, graphite, 14 x 20½



*The Yellow Wall* oil, 36 x 32



*Model Resting*, oil, 36 x 32

*“I’m experiencing real excitement, all alone in my studio, without other eyes of judgement, superior disdain, or unwarranted adulation. Life is beautiful.”*



*Her Back*, oil, 30 x 24



*Claire*, oil, 36 x 32



*It's amazing how painting still excites me. And how I keep learning! I remain an octogenarian with a student's enthusiasm.*







*“...art has served me well. I can think of nothing else I might have done in life that would have served me better.”*

**Franklin Alexander** was born in 1925. He studied at the Art Students League of New York; New School for Social Research, New York; University of Florence, and the State Institute of Art, Florence, Italy.

He was a member of Audubon Artists, New York City; a life member of the Art Students League and the Woodstock Artists Association; and was a co-founder of the Woodstock School of Art, where he also served on the Board of Advisors and as an instructor.

Mr. Alexander taught at the Institute of History and Art, Albany, New York; State University of New York at Albany; Dutchess County-Community College, Poughkeepsie, New York; Ulster County Community College, Stone Ridge, New York; State University of New York at New Paltz; Barrett House, Poughkeepsie, New York; Art Students League of New York, Woodstock, New York; and held summer workshops at his home in Woodstock.

A few of the institutions in which he exhibited include the Davanzatti Palace, Florence, Italy; the Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts; Washington and Jefferson College, Pennsylvania; the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York; the Institute of Man and Science, Rensselaerville, New York; Allied Artists of America, the National Arts Club, Audubon Artists, and the National Academy of Design, all in New York City.

In addition to many other prizes, Mr. Alexander received the Woodstock Foundation Award, the Berkshire Museum Purchase Prize, the Coughtry Memorial Prize, the Peebles Memorial Award, the Shandoff Prize, the Peter S. Nikitas Award, the Hirsch Memorial Award, the Melrose Memorial Award, and the Medal of Honour from the National Arts Club.

His work is in the collections of Albany Medical College, New York Medical College, Dutchess Community College, Ulster County Community College, Dollar Savings Bank, Northern Dutchess Hospital, Woodstock Artists Association, Institute of History and Art, the Berkshire Museum, the New York State Legislature, the New York State Department of Health, and many others.

He contributed articles to American Artist magazine and The Artists Magazine.

He died in 2007.

*“What my kids will do with an attic full of paintings, I have no idea, and even less concern. Painting, for me, has been the sweet juice of the orange. The paintings themselves are the left-over peels.*

*I am not, and never have been, an artist. But a lot of people have enjoyed my paintings, almost as much as I have enjoyed painting them. That’s got count to for something.*

*I touched a couple of lives. And that’s legacy enough.”*

