

# COLLECTIONS

VOLUME 8 APRIL 2012

**Ture Bengtz: Life Lessons**



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Richard J. Baiano, PRESIDENT  
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D. Roger Howlett, SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW

169 Newbury Street  
Boston, MA 02116  
617-266-1108  
617-266-2381 fax  
childsgallery.com  
info@childsgallery.com



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COVER **Beach Scene – Swimming**  
**Circa 1940**

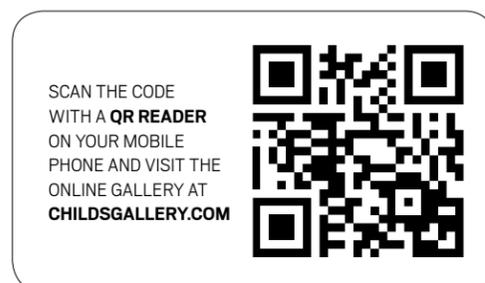
Oil on canvas

24 X 30 INCHES

COLLECTIONS  
Ture Bengtz: Life Lessons

Editor: Richard J. Baiano  
Assistant Editor: Stephanie V. Bond  
Staff: Julie Barry, Gina Canning, Kathryn Fields, Michaela Haffner,  
Matthew McDaniel, Sally Norton, and Caroline Stevens  
Photography: Darren Stahlman|[darrenstahlmanphotography.com](http://darrenstahlmanphotography.com)  
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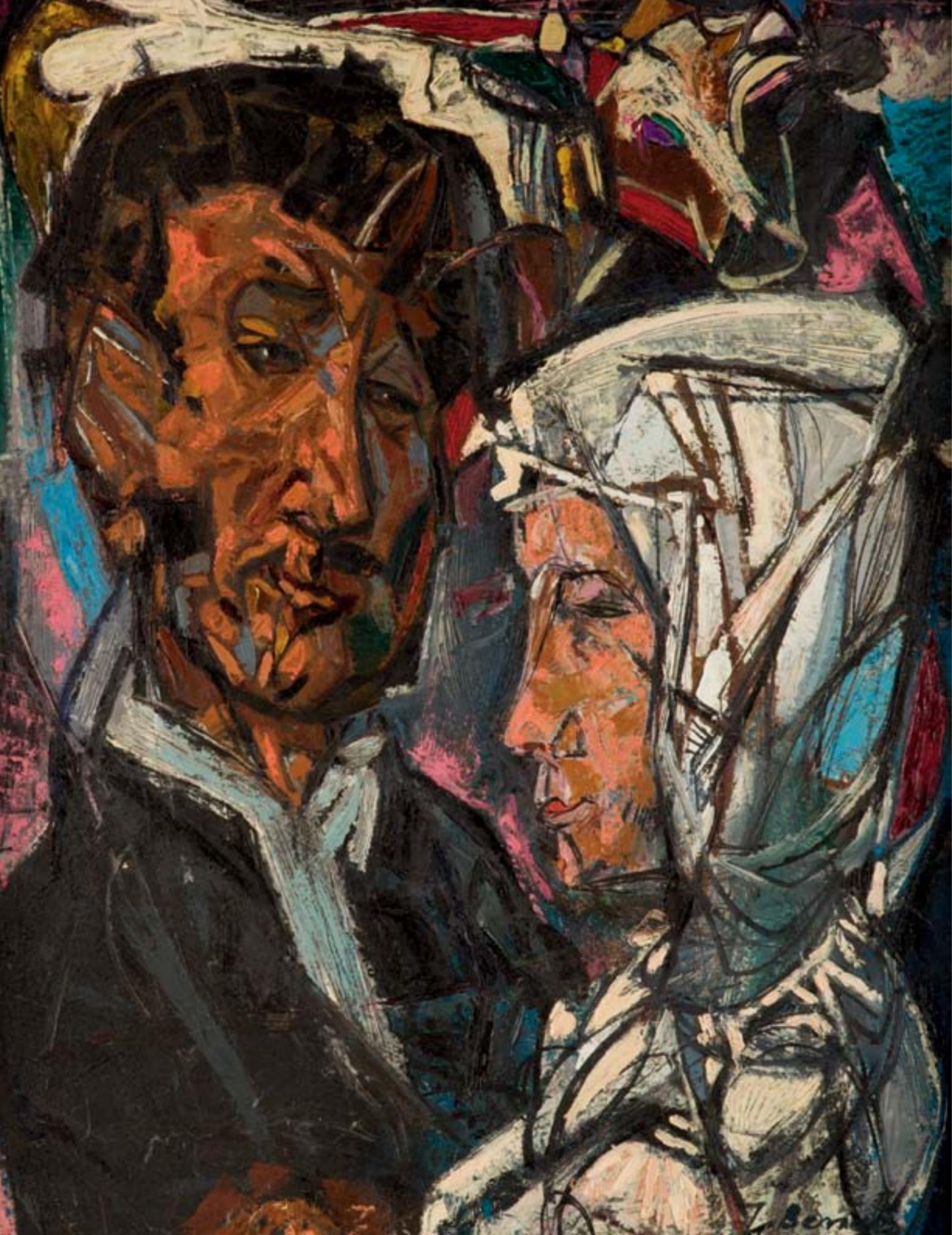
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## Ture Bengtz: Life Lessons

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APRIL 2-MAY 28, 2012

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## COLLECTIONS

LEFT **Couple**  
**Circa 1960**  
Oil on masonite  
24 X 18 INCHES  
Signed lower right.

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Childs Gallery Collections is the latest in a tradition of more than seventy years of gallery publications. As early as the mid-1940s, Childs Gallery presented a publication entitled *Currier and Ives Prints: A Collection*, which represented the carefully considered collection of a single owner. The *Childs Gallery Bulletin* (begun 1950), the *Print Annual* (begun 1976) and the *Painting Annual* (begun 1980) are firmly established in art-world circles and are represented in almost every fine arts library in the country.

We continue to celebrate collections, collecting, and collectors as a pivotal axis of the art world with this eighth volume of *Childs Gallery Collections – Ture Bengtz: Life Lessons*.

This is the second *Collections* volume dedicated to a Boston Expressionist following the May 2010 publication, *Anne Lyman Powers: Mid-century Expressionist*. Childs welcomes both collectors and art lovers to visit the gallery to learn more about Boston Expressionism, a newly-focused area of our expertise. This group of Boston artists, influenced by German Expressionists, favored narrative, figurative subjects, rather than the wide-spread abstraction that would become the predominant style of the time. Many of these artists fled the persecution on Europe during the Second World War, including such notables as Hyman Bloom, Jack Levine, and Karl Zerbe. These Boston Expressionists were influential in art-education as instructors at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, affecting future generations of artists with their style.

With special thanks to the artist's daughter, Lanci Valentine, Duxbury, Massachusetts.

# Ture Bengtz: Life Lessons

Four Decades of a Boston Expressionist Painter, Draftsman, and Storyteller

Ture Bengtz (1907 – 1973) was an anomaly in the Boston art world of the 1930s and 1940s. While his expressionist peers focused their works on political unrest, social injustice, and religious conflicts, Bengtz had a more optimistic view of humanity. The Finnish emigrant was no less a social realist, but he chose to depict life's simple pleasures and stolen moments of contentment rather than scenes of anguish and pain.

"He loved being an American citizen and was so grateful for the opportunities he had here," says his daughter Lanci Bengtz Valentine, by way of explanation. "He would sit at the kitchen table after a meal, and while sketching on a napkin, say absentmindedly, 'Gee, it's nice to be able to draw.'" That was an understatement. During World War II, the Raytheon Corporation hired Bengtz as a technical illustrator of radar equipment. His drawings were so exacting that they looked like photographs.

In addition to being an enormously skilled draftsman, lithographer, and painter, Bengtz was as gifted a teacher as a practitioner. Fortunately for Boston's budding art community, he willingly sacrificed personal studio time to dedicate his life to educating future generations, and he did so at the most influential art institution in New England.

If you wanted to become a modern artist in the 1930s and '40s in Boston, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts was the place to be. After the arrival of Karl Zerbe - German refugee and Nazi-branded "degenerate" artist - as head of the school's painting department in 1937, both the style and subject matter of contemporary art in the city changed drastically.

This was no longer the genteel world of privilege prettily depicted by John Singer Sargent and Edward Tarbell, but a frightening time of impending war, upheaval, and anxiety. While Zerbe opened students' eyes to the unsettling works of Max Beckmann and the German avant-garde, Bengtz taught perspective, anatomy, and volumetric representation as head of the Drawing and Graphic Arts Department. He would go "from easel to easel in the life classes, showing in a few swift strokes the essence of a model's gesture, and demonstrating how a three-dimensional form can be reduced to a two-dimensional surface yet can convince the viewer of its solidity as an object in space," recalled Bengtz's former Museum School student and teaching assistant Richard C. Bartlett.

As the Museum School was dominated by figurative, rather than abstract, expressionists, drawing skills were especially crucial. Bengtz's lessons proved invaluable by continually stressing "the interrelationship of drawing and painting and the importance of a strong technical foundation combined with individual expressiveness," asserts Judith Bookbinder, art scholar and author of *Boston Modern* (2005).

And when it came to his own works, Bengtz was often more experimental and less wedded to a single figurative style than fellow Boston Expressionists Jack Levine, Hyman Bloom, and David Aronson - even venturing into pure abstraction, a style antithetical to that group.

"One can see by the prints of Ture Bengtz what a restless spirit possessed him," wrote his friend and fellow artist Will Barnet. "Each new litho was like a different part of himself, demanding a new experience. Sometimes it would be technical, sometimes spiritual, sometimes structural, sometimes an atmospheric mood, sometimes social, sometimes retrospect, sometimes just a plain everyday human event; nothing escaped this restless man. Since he did not have a consistent style, he could be versatile and adventurous with all the human emotions."

One of Bengtz's true gifts was his mastery of lithography. For him, "life on the stone was one big adventure, somewhat like a child playing with castles in the sand," wrote Barnet. "Geometric line and planes burst in across the stone, mixed with the literary and narrative tall tales. Yet through all the turmoil emerge pieces of strong craftsmanship, with passion capturing the dynamics of the moment."

*Cocoon II* (c.1955) is a case in point, depicting a vagrant napping peacefully on a bed of newspapers in the Boston Common. Is the man dreaming of getting a job? By exaggerating the size of his subject's hands, Bengtz shows him [PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 22]



TOP RIGHT **Self-Portrait, Circa 1955**  
Charcoal  
20 X 14 1/2 INCHES  
Signed in charcoal lower left. Signed in pencil lower left.

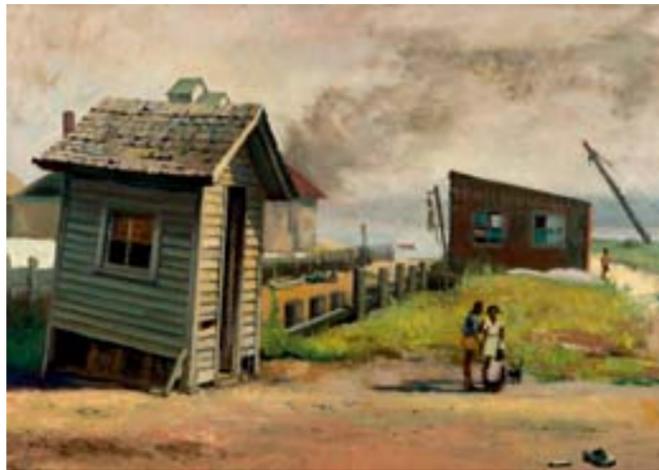
LEFT **Young Girls, Circa 1960**  
Pen, ink, and wash  
22 X 17 INCHES  
Signed in ink lower right. Titled in pencil lower left.



1



4



2

**1**  
**Outside Chandler's**  
**1941**  
 Oil on canvas  
 23 1/2 X 34 INCHES  
 Signed lower right. Exhibition labels verso.  
 EXHIBITED  
 "Directions in American Painting", Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA, 1941; "15 Years of Museum School Alumni", Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, 1942.

**2**  
**Oyster Bay**  
**Circa 1940**  
 Oil on canvas  
 20 X 28 1/2 INCHES  
 Signed lower right. Title and exhibition label verso.  
 EXHIBITED  
 "137th Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture", Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, PA, 1942.



3

**3**  
**Lobster Fisherman**  
**Circa 1956**  
 Oil on masonite  
 15 1/8 X 14 3/8 INCHES  
 Signed lower right.

**4**  
**The Backroad, Long Island**  
**Circa 1940**  
 Oil on masonite  
 28 3/4 X 36 1/4 INCHES  
 Signed lower left. Exhibition label verso.  
 EXHIBITED  
 "Directions in American Painting", Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA, 1941.

**5**  
**Boy, Long Island**  
**Circa 1940**  
 Oil on masonite  
 16 X 12 INCHES  
 Signed lower right.



5



6



7

**6**  
**Boston Common**  
 Circa 1940  
 Oil on canvas  
 24 1/8 X 35 7/8 INCHES  
 Signed lower right.

**7**  
**On the Train**  
 Circa 1945  
 Oil on board  
 12 1/2 X 15 3/8 INCHES



8

**8**  
**Coney Island**  
 Circa 1940  
 Oil on canvas  
 23 1/2 X 29 1/2 INCHES



9

**9**  
**Men in Boat**  
Circa 1958  
Oil on canvas  
24 1/4 X 36 INCHES



10

**10**  
**Woman Fixing Hair**  
Circa 1960  
Oil on masonite  
23 7/8 X 13 3/8 INCHES



11

**11**  
**Reclining Couple**  
Circa 1960  
Oil on canvas  
20 X 24 INCHES  
Signed lower left.

**12**  
**Picnic**  
Circa 1955  
Graphite  
12 1/2 X 13 3/4 INCHES  
Signed lower right.



12



13



14

**13**  
**Spear Fishing**  
**Circa 1965**

Oil on masonite  
18 X 24 INCHES

**14**  
**Women at Beach**  
**Circa 1960**

Oil on canvas  
24 1/4 X 30 1/4 INCHES



15

**15**  
**Peaches**  
**Circa 1962**

Mixed media  
24 X 48 INCHES  
Signed lower right.

**16**  
**Man and Woman Running**  
**Circa 1965**

Mixed media  
18 5/8 X 25 INCHES



16



17



18

**17**  
**Dancers**  
**Circa 1970**

Pen and watercolor  
10 1/2 X 13 1/4 INCHES

**18**  
**Two Boys Wrestling**  
**Circa 1965**

Mixed media  
16 1/2 X 23 1/4 INCHES  
Signed in ink lower left. Titled in pencil lower left.



19

**19**  
**Beach with Factories**  
**1941**

Watercolor and gouache  
15 3/4 X 22 1/2 INCHES  
Signed and dated lower right.

**20**  
**Harbor Scene**

Watercolor  
18 X 24 INCHES



20



21

**21  
Cocoon II  
Circa 1955**

Lithograph  
10 X 13 INCHES

Edition of approximately 20.

This print depicts a man napping on a newspaper on Boston Common. The dome of the State House is just visible in the upper left corner.

PUBLISHED  
The Lithographs of Ture Bengtz, The Art Complex Museum, Duxbury, MA, 1978, p.84-85.

**22  
Young Girl (Lanci)  
Circa 1948**

Etching  
9 1/2 X 4 1/4 INCHES

Edition of approximately 15.

A portrait of the artist's daughter, Lanci.



22

**23  
Picnic  
Circa 1940-45**

Etching  
4 X 5 INCHES

Edition of approximately 15.

**24  
At the Beach  
Circa 1945**

Etching  
4 3/4 X 7 INCHES

Edition of approximately 20.



23

**25  
Hens  
Circa 1950**

Lithograph  
8 X 9 INCHES

Edition of approximately 30.

According to the artist's family, this was one of the first lithographs Bengtz made.

PUBLISHED  
The Lithographs of Ture Bengtz, The Art Complex Museum, Duxbury, MA, 1978, p.119.



24



25



26

**26**  
**Catechism**  
**Circa 1955**

Lithograph  
 9 1/2 X 13 INCHES

Number 6 in an edition of 30. Numbered in pen lower left margin.

**27**  
**Family**  
**Circa 1948-49**

Lithograph  
 10 X 15 INCHES

Edition of 20.



27



28

**28**  
**Couple (Parents)**  
**Circa 1950**

Color Lithograph  
 10 X 13 1/2 inches

Edition of 30. Signed in pencil lower right margin; numbered in pencil lower left margin.

The catalogue of Ture Bengtz's lithographs suggests that this print may be as simple as a portrait of the artist's parents or as complex as a sort of 'Scandinavian Gothic.'

PUBLISHED  
 The Lithographs of Ture Bengtz, The Art Complex Museum, Duxbury, MA, 1978, p.107.

**29**  
**Farmor**  
**Circa 1936**

Gouache  
 16 1/8 X 11 7/8 inches

Signed in pencil lower right.



29

[CONTINUES FROM PAGE 7] capable of work; and even as he sleeps, those hands serve him well, one as a pillow, the other clutching part of the paper - the "Want Ads," perhaps?

Though society often looks down on the homeless, Bengtz takes a kindlier more hopeful view.

But to fellow artists like Richard C. Bartlett, it is the virtuosity of the print that transfixes, as he explained in *The Lithographs of Ture Bengtz* (1978): "This runs the gamut, with tusche washes, transferred oak leaves, chamois cloth rubbing, sleight-of-hand crayon work, acid-burning techniques – the whole vocabulary in the process. The amazing thing is that those devices are so appropriately used that it takes a fellow lithographer really to notice them."

*Couple (Parents)* (c.1950), another work at Childs, also combines a compassionate view with extraordinary technical execution. As in Grant Wood's iconic *American Gothic* (1930), the subject is an elderly working-class couple with careworn faces. But unlike the cold, stoic pair in Wood's famous painting, Bengtz's subjects are quite close, heads tilted toward one another and with uplifted faces, suggesting a strong bond and contentment

"I know of no one else who drew this way," writes Richard C. Bartlett. "The geometric treatment of the hair, kerchief, and jackets should not really work in combination with the more naturalistic faces, but Bengtz could pull off the contradiction of styles, although few others can. Perhaps it is the consummate control and self-confidence that rule out any challenges of his approach. Always one to find the most direct way to achieve an effect, Ture wrapped a soft rag over his index finger, rubbed this on a soft litho crayon, then rubbed it on the stone where he wanted smooth-toned transitions of values. The passages done this way rival air-brush effects."

"As a printmaker, Bengtz had a knowledge of color lithography unrivaled in his generation," adds Sinclair Hitchings, former Keeper of the Prints at the Boston Public Library (home to the Ture Bengtz print *raisonné* collection). The artist was so obsessed with the possibilities of the process that he installed a lithographic press in his house in Melrose, as well as in his summer home in Duxbury. To share his skills and knowledge, Bengtz co-founded The Boston Printmakers association in 1947, continuing his involvement with the highly regarded art group until his death in 1973. He also had his own show, *Bengtz On Drawing*, on WGBH public television in the late '50s.

"Often teaching saps the energies of a person who might otherwise be a notable artist, writer, or musician," explains Hitchings. "It was not that way with Ture Bengtz. He had the capacity to do many different things and do them well."

Though universally respected for his bravura lithographs, Bengtz was also a superb painter. Veering between the social realism of the Ashcan school and the more primal figuratism of the Boston Expressionists, the artist liked to focus on people at play or leisure, capturing the spontaneity of the moment with his exuberant brushstrokes and boldly vivid hues. Though very different in emotional intensity, *Beach Scene – Swimming* (c.1940) and *Men in Boat* (c. 1958) both convey the mesmerizing translucency of the ocean, so refreshing and inviting in the former, and more mysterious and somnolent in the latter. As a lifelong lover of fishing and the beach, Bengtz was a master at mirroring the various hypnotic effects of water.

Even in his later abstractions, Bengtz could communicate the co-existence of energy, movement, and calm in the ocean. "He was past recording patiently the exact appearance of things," explained Richard C. Bartlett. "He had already done that. He was now in a liberated state that allowed him to go for the essence of the subject, and the emotional responses."

"Ture Bengtz was a restless experimenter," noted Bartlett. "This was true of his work in other media too, but it shows most dramatically in his lithographs. He didn't want to be cast in one mold, and then repeat himself endlessly. He wanted the fun of trying new things."

Ture Bengtz's continuous experimentation and reinvention are visible in the artist's forty-year retrospective at Childs Gallery. This one-person show of the artist is the first since the 1998 exhibit "Beyond the Shore" held at the Art Complex Museum in Duxbury, which Bengtz helped design. One of the museum's galleries was later named for the artist and his wife of 36 years, Lillian.

Although Bengtz exhibited at many Boston and New York galleries throughout his lifetime, many of these exceptional works have never been seen by the public before. Bengtz's work is represented in the collections of numerous national institutions, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Fogg Museum, Cambridge; Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC; and the Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio. TINA SUTTON, Arts & Style Journalist



30



31



32

**30  
Duxbury Bridge, 1973**

Color Lithograph  
18 X 24 1/2 INCHES  
Edition of 12.

**31  
Sailing, 1973**

Color Lithograph  
17 X 24 INCHES  
Edition of 12.

**32  
Sailing #85, 1973**

Color Lithograph  
16 1/2 X 24 inches  
Number 8 in an edition of 12.  
Numbered in pencil lower left.



**Ture Bengtz** Finnish-American (1907-1973)  
**Windmills, 1973**  
Color Lithograph  
17 X 23 INCHES

Edition of 12.  
PUBLISHED: The Lithographs of Ture Bengtz, The Art  
Complex Museum, Duxbury, MA, 1978, p.111.

This lithograph depicts the windmills of Aland, Finland, where Ture Bengtz lived until he emigrated to the United States at the age of 18. In 2007, the Aland Postal Service issued a stamp based on this print to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the artist's birth.

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**Ture Bengtz** Finnish-American (1907-1973)  
***Birds in Tree***  
Circa 1960

Oil on masonite  
24 X 18 INCHES  
Signed lower right.

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