

Helen Werner Cox Artist Statement

Manet, Revisted, 2020

By collaborating with my models in the development of portraits, I give them voice. Their intent and my interpretation provide the work with multiple layers of meaning. In this double portrait, we were exploring the objectification and stereotyping of people by reversing roles in famous artworks. Manet's Olympia afforded us an opportunity to address both sexual and racial issues. As the painting evolved, I directed my focus to the unique personalities of the models. No longer mere symbols, they are portrayed as individuals. Paradoxically, the painting is an affirmation of their sexual identities at the same time as it underscores the prevalence of sexism and racism in history and society.

A Brief Biography, 2021

Starting in her highchair with paper and crayons, Helen Werner Cox grew up with art materials. Thus, it is no surprise she ended up studying art in college. She taught and administered art programs for thirteen years—ten in Boston, MA; three in Long Beach, CA. During this time, working with at-risk youth in poverty neighborhoods, she became interested in the development of literacy and the parallels between the development of art and language in young children.

While teaching middle schoolers in Long Beach, she transitioned to the school library, where she worked with the same population for the next fourteen years, using art to renovate two school libraries and creating interdisciplinary programs with a focus on reading.

At the young age of 55, physically and emotionally exhausted from years of challenging work, Helen was fortunate to be able to retire before she became fossilized. Taking a year to regroup and rest, it was natural to drift back to an earlier form of fulfillment—making art. With a lifetime of experiences and the self-discipline to work hard at something, she devoted herself to improving her craft and for the first time, regards herself as an artist.

When Van Gogh began his art career at the age of thirty, he considered the possibility that his career might not last that long. For Helen, an older woman approaching her artistic development in the latter half of her life, his words resonate:

I need not rush myself too much—there is no good in that, but I must work on . . . as regularly and fixedly as possible, as concisely and pointedly as possible . . . I have walked this earth for thirty years,

and, out of gratitude, want to leave some souvenir in the shape of drawings or pictures—not made to please a certain taste in art, but to express sincere human feeling.