

Palette Pleaser: The Life & Work of Louis S. Glanzman

By Victoria Lassonde

Self-taught, world-class illustrator Louis S. Glanzman has “never wanted to be known as an ‘artist’” – at least, not the kind associated with gallery exhibitions and critics’ lofty dialogues about color, composition and other abstract ideas. Glanzman’s work is more concrete, based on facts and history. His pictures, bring words and stories to life in a way that is both evocative and visually stunning.



Photo Credit: Pat Johnson

*Internationally recognized illustrator
L. Glanzman at his studio*

Those qualities, among others, make him the ideal person to create a collection of vignettes called “Images of the American Revolution: The New Jersey Shore and Pinelands,” a series of acrylic illustrations that depict historical scenes from Revolutionary War battles that were fought along the shore and in the Pinelands, many of which have been lost to memory.

Now retired from a long, successful career in commercial illustration, but continuously working, the 87-year-old Glanzman has partnered with the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission on the project, which will include 10 to 14 illustrations, each sponsored by a New Jersey nonprofit organization. The finished pieces will travel throughout the county to educate the public, and when the historic Cedar Bridge Tavern in Barnegat eventually gets converted into an interpretive center, a number of Glanzman’s paintings will be on display there.

It all started when Glanzman painted, for his own pleasure, a picture of the Affair at Long Beach, a.k.a. the Barnegat Light Massacre. He painted the Barnegat Light beach as it may have looked that day, strewn with the bodies of Capt. Andrew Steelman’s men, who were murdered where they slept on the beach by a Tory group led by John Bacon. Glanzman had been inspired to do the piece after taking a trip there with his wife, Francine.

Now the Commission is seeking sponsors to pair up with each finished piece. Some of the scenes may include the Toms River Blockhouse Fight of 1782; the death of Loyalist Capt. Davenport, the same year; and Kashmir Pulaski’s defense of Tuckerton in 1778. So far, Glanzman has completed three of the paintings in the series: Affair at Long Beach, the Affair at Cedar Bridge Creek, and Bacon at Rose’s Tavern.

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Glanzman’s original paintings and drawings adorn the walls throughout his Medford home, where he and Francine have lived for 23 years and where the couple recently sat down to talk about Glanzman’s accomplishments.

Originally from Baltimore, Md., but raised mostly in Virginia, Glanzman moved around a lot as a kid, due to his father’s work as a traveling salesman, and he used his talent for drawing to sketch his surroundings, though he was never formally trained in fine art because he “didn’t care for school,” he said.

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Growing up, he followed the illustrators of the time, his idols: Harold von Schmidt, Norman Rockwell, George Petty. Both his mother and maternal grandfather had artistic talent, he said, but “my first awareness of so-called art was in the comics.” He entered the field just as comic books were starting to become popular. Under the name Lew Glanz, he wrote and illustrated a comic book character called “The Shark” that appeared in the “Amazing Man” comic book series in 1940.

“I enjoyed drawing ... and comic books were my vessel,” he said, along the way learning the proper techniques for drawing human anatomy and visual perspective. “I was very lucky, I was able to expand my imagination,” he said.

He was 19 when Pearl Harbor was bombed in 1941, and he and his father Gustav, a World War I veteran and “a staunch patriot” as Glanzman described him, “both stood up and volunteered” to give their service. They enlisted in the Army, where the younger Glanzman became an aircraft mechanic.

“But I was always drawing pictures,” he said. “Sometimes I would sit in the cockpit and draw the activities around me.”

The Army sent him to school at the Aviation Institute of Maintenance in Philadelphia, and then to work at the Gunter Air Force Base in Alabama, which led him to work for Air Force magazine, which took him to New York City, where he met editors and other professionals in the publishing industry, and his career in editorial illustration took off from there. By accepting an invitation from the Society of Illustrators, he achieved a whole new level. He became acquainted with Norman Rockwell and others he had long admired.

From 1966 to 1976, he illustrated 80 Time magazine covers, including the issue that came out the week Apollo 11 astronaut Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. Thirty or 40 of those covers are on display in the Smithsonian Institute’s National Portrait Gallery, Francine said.

Over the years, he has done work for the National Geographic Society (which involved, at times, traveling with archeologists and historians), Life and Reader’s Digest magazines, for book publishing houses like Bantam and Penguin and for companies like Standard Oil. He has illustrated countless paperback covers, DVD covers and hardcover anthologies. His work hangs in such historically significant places as Philadelphia’s Independence Hall, where one can find his depiction of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, commissioned by the Daughters of the American Revolution, and at the Astrid Lindgren Museum in Sweden, where some of his drawings of Pippi Longstocking were included in a show this summer.

He always worked on a freelance basis, he said, because “I never wanted to be an employee,” and at all hours of the day or night, because “I didn’t pay attention to the clocks.”

As a Long Islander, Glanzman was naturally inspired by the ocean and the seashore but, not wanting to be categorized as a specific kind of illustrator, he intentionally varied his subject matter, he said, his style ever changing.



Detail of *Affair at Cedar Creek Bridge* by L. Glanzman illustrating the last documented land engagement of the American Revolution on December 27, 1782 between notorious loyalist Captain John Bacon and parts of the Patriot Mansfield Militia.

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Whereas Rockwell was known for painting people, Von Schmidt was an action painter known for his western scenes, Glanzman explained.

“Between the pair of them, I was influenced to paint adventure pictures,” he said.

At the heart of every one of Glanzman’s pictures is a story – in other words, his pictures are readable. Sometimes the story is his own creation, and sometimes it’s someone else’s, fact or fiction, which he has interpreted, not without the occasional hint of personal commentary. “Illustrating life,” as he called it.

But his first love, from an artistic standpoint, is history. With meticulous research and flawless accuracy, he has rendered people, places and events from just about every period in history clear back to the dawn of human civilization, using various media on every imaginable surface, from paper to brick. His preferred medium for color is acrylic paint, mainly because it dries fast, and that’s important because he works fast – a vital skill in the magazine publishing business.

In the course of 50 years, Glanzman’s creativity and speed have produced untold thousands of individual works – a fact that makes it nearly impossible for him to name one of which he is most proud or most fond.

His “favorite” piece, at any given moment, is the one he is working on, Fran offered.

He made the decision to pursue commercial illustration, he said, as soon as he discovered that, with his talent, “I could make a dollar” to support the family that relied on him. As testament to his success in that regard, the Glanzmans have four daughters, nine grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

Glanzman has often looked to his family members and to the mirror for models. His girls, when they were little, made ancillary appearances in many of his pictures, and one of his grandsons is the model for a character in a children’s storybook.

Those interested in sponsoring or hosting a completed illustration in the County’s “Images of the American Revolution” series should contact Cultural and Heritage Commission Director Tim Hart at (732) 929-4779 or thart@co.ocean.nj.us. For more information about the artist, visit louisglanzman.com.



Louis S. Glanzman’s painting “Bacon at Rose’s Tavern”.