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You are here: [Home](#) / [Alumnus Profile](#) / Meet Charles Ritchie, Cortona '76

Meet Charles Ritchie, Cortona '76

April 29, 2012 By CIAO 2 Comments



Artist Charles Ritchie standing in front of the window where he has been painting for 27 years. January 2012. (Photograph by Samantha Ritchie.)

Known as “Charlie” during the summer of 1976, Ritchie’s career has brought honor to the University of Georgia AND to the Cortona program. He studied Art History, Painting, and Graphic Design in Cortona, and he graduated the following year, 1977, from UGA with a BFA in Art/Graphic Design. The Pineville, KY native then went on to receive his MFA in Painting from Carnegie Mellon University in 1980.

Ritchie has served the National Gallery of Art as Associate Curator, Department of Modern Prints and Drawings, since 1988. During that time, he has also made art: beautiful, exquisite, timeless images that have earned him scores of solo and group exhibits across the country. (For a complete list of his impressive professional and artistic “creds” go to:

<http://www.charlesritchie.com/biography>

We were quite honored that Charlie took a few minutes away from his drawings to talk to the C.I.A.O. newsletter.

Brief synopsis of career history

While at the University of Georgia I did a lot of experimenting. I studied drawing and painting, then landscape architecture, and finally took my degree in graphic design. For grad school I returned to painting at Carnegie Mellon University and discovered the urban north with its rich collection of works by the masters. After graduating, I moved to the Washington, DC area and found a job in the sales shop at the National Gallery of Art. Eventually I worked my way into the education department where I gave tours and lectures, became a curatorial research assistant, then an assistant curator. Now I’m an associate curator and I maintain to the modern graphic art collection in the prints and drawings study room while curating exhibitions and answering public inquiries. I’ve done shows on John Taylor Arms, Robert Rauschenberg, Max Weber, and various focus exhibitions on the National Gallery’s holdings. Simultaneously, I’ve been developing and exhibiting my own drawings in commercial galleries and other venues. I’ve found that being at the National Gallery has been a wonderful way to continue to educate myself about art. And with a bit of discipline on my part, my day job supports enough studio time for a career as an artist.

Biggest surprise about Cortona

“What surprised me most was seeing the actual works of art. Having grown up knowing reproductions, my summer 1976 trip to Italy, France, and Switzerland was my first significant encounter with the real thing. After viewing Michelangelo’s carvings, the Slaves, at the Florence Academia, I understood his statement regarding studying the stone to unlock the forms within the material. The thick relief of Van Gogh’s paintings shocked me. At first I didn’t like what I saw. The experience taught me if you really dislike something, look again. There might be a lesson there. Van Gogh’s paintings remain among my favorites, especially their topographies.”

Greatest challenge

“In Cortona I was a graphics major but I was beginning to realize my heart was in painting. A lot of private soul searching dogged me as I had an uncomfortable feeling I was on the wrong path. Learning so much about the process of painting, seeing the works of masters and absorbing art history helped me to rethink

CORTONA NEWS



Special Report: Going Global

Special Report: Going Global University of Georgia Studies Abroad in Cortona Immersive Fine Art Studies in Italy The Cortona program was featured in an

interesting article in pdnedu digital edition, The Magazine for Emerging Photographers & Photo Educators. The online publication of pdn news: Photo District News. In 1970, the ... [Read More...]



2011 Faculty & Student Show & Reunion in Athens

The UGA Studies Abroad, Cortona, Italy Exhibition was on display through January 21st on the 3rd floor of the Lamar Dodd School

of Art building in Athens. The exhibition displayed the work of students, faculty and staff of the three semesters (Spring, Summer and Fall) in 2011. There was a program and reunion of students and faculty who ... [Read More...]



A Talk Directly to Cortona Alumni Hearts

As ardent supporters of the School of Art, the Friersons hold a very special connection to Cortona as you can read below in Ann’s

wonderful talk delivered to the Cortona students gathered for the January 21 reunion in Athens. Ann’s lifelong passion is gardening, and nature, along with an ever expanding appreciation of art. She is Past ... [Read More...]

ALUMNI INPUT PLEASE

school. I eventually resolved to return to painting going to graduate school at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh."

Favorite class

"Painting was exciting because I discovered how much I loved to work on paper, not canvas. Additionally, I learned how to thin acrylic paint to the consistency of watercolor leading to my discovery of watercolor as my primary medium; it remains so. Art history was fantastic too. While researching and presenting a talk on Ghiberti's Gates of Paradise I realized how compelling the study of past art and artists could be and discovered how much I enjoyed lecturing. It primed me for curatorial work and the talks I currently do on my own art." (Note to recent alums: in early years students had to select an art history topic to research prior to going to Italy, and then present a lecture on the topic while in Cortona.)

Life lesson learned

"One of the first things I did when I arrived in Cortona was go to the bookmakers and have a sketchbook made out of the wonderful indigenous Fabriano paper. Although that particular sketchbook never really took off, not long after I graduated from Georgia, in fall of 1977, I started the sketchbook/journal series that continues to this day and is at the core of my creative practice. Currently I have 136 books and counting. Although I maintained all kinds of random notebooks before the one I acquired in Cortona, this was the first time I thought concretely and formally about keeping an ongoing volume of drawings for myself."



Barry Blast

Best or most striking memory

"We were in Italy during the summer of America's Bicentennial. For the 4th of July our group celebrated with a costume party at one of the beautiful outdoor cafes. I dressed as a rock star wearing a Panama-style hat with star-shaped sunglasses and cardboard guitar that I cut out; I dubbed myself "Barry Blast". A loudspeaker poured out music for the evening and suddenly the most raucous American rock and roll jumped from the speakers. I must have sprung ten feet in the air, started dancing around like a crazy person. Everybody joined in and the dancing and

laughing lasted until we couldn't stand up any more. I woke up the next morning without the guitar, hat, and sunglasses. Still seems like a bit of a dream actually."

Have you returned to Cortona?

"Yes, in the summer of 1988, my wife Jenny and I rented a car and drove all over Tuscany. I sketched in my journal and attempted to visit as many Piero della Francesca paintings as we could find. It was wonderful. I might go back to Italy but next stop is Ireland in Spring 2013 as I have been offered a Ballinglen Painting Fellowship." <http://www.ballinglenartsfoundation.org/>

Tell us a little about your family

"Jenny Lyle and I met at the University of Georgia in drawing class, spring 1976. She actually went on the Cortona trip the year after me, summer of 1977. Jenny took my name when we married in 1984. Extremely talented and my toughest critic, Jenny frames my drawings, makes my sketchbooks, and is consultant for all that I do. She has a green thumb and revels in our garden whenever she can. Our daughter Sam arrived in 1994. She's now a senior in high school and an artist who combines her wide-ranging abilities with a tremendous interest in the natural world and the environment. Sam plays guitar and is the best disc jockey I know. She is constantly turning me on to great new music."

What do you do for fun?

"Play guitar. I've been studying with an excellent teacher for the past few years. Also, I enjoy working in my journals; it's fun and the center of my life."

Latest book read

"Letters of Wallace Stevens (edited by Holly Stevens, University of California Press, 1996). Not only is he a great poet, he could leap across subjects and ideas with breathtaking finesse in his private writing. I admire his personal life too. He was a both an extraordinary writer and a successful insurance executive and he liked doing both. Stevens believed a day job can enrich your art. That's certainly my experience."

My Fantasy Artist Dinner Party

"I can't hold it to just artists. Let's call them creative individuals: Emily Dickinson, American 19th century poet. I could read her poems for the rest of my life and still glean new meanings each time; Nick Drake, British 20th

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We have ONLY email addresses for many on our CIAO list. If you prefer only email contact, please let us know your city/state and your year/semester for future regional "reunion" planning. To keep costs to a minimum, we use email almost exclusively, but providing us your mailing address and ... [Read More...]

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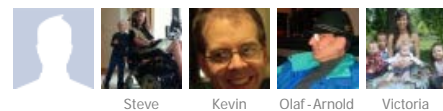
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We have ONLY EMAIL addresses for many on our CIAO list. If you prefer only email contact, please let us know your city/state and your year/semester for future regional "reunion" planning. To keep costs to a minimum, we use email almost exclusively, but providing us your mailing address and phone number would complete our records should a "snail" mailing be warr...

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UGA'S CORTONA CAMPUS TOUR

century folk musician and composer whose ethereal acoustic songs are my desert island disks; Michelangelo, Italian 16th century artist. I think his late crucifixion drawings are the greatest drawings of all time; hands down; Giorgio Morandi, Italian 20th century painter. How deep is the world if you stay in the same place and look at the same thing? Morandi showed us profoundly deep; Wallace Stevens, American 20th century poet whose imagistic compositions probe the interdependence of reality and the imagination.”

Cortona Campus Walkthrough Tour led by recently retired, program director **Rick Johnson**. Shot in the spring of 2009 and edited by Spenser Simrill.



Streetlight and Doorway, 2010-2011 (watercolor, conte crayon, graphite and white pen and ink on Fabriano paper; 7 5/8 x 8 inches). Private collection

Current project(s)

“I feel very fortunate to have two galleries that show my work, Gallery Joe in Philadelphia and BravinLee programs in New York. In addition, I have a print publisher, with whom I make limited edition intaglio prints, Center Street Studio in Milton, Massachusetts. Currently I’m working hard on drawings for a show that opens at my New York gallery this fall. An exhibition of my recent drawings has traveled from my Philadelphia gallery and is now on view at the Cornell Fine Arts Museum at Rollins College in Florida. I will present a talk there in April so I am currently preparing that lecture. For me, speaking about my sketchbooks and drawings has become very exciting part of being an artist. A recent review of one of my lectures can be found here:

<http://bulletin.arcadia.edu/2012/01/charles-ritchie-where-dreams-and-reality-collide/>”

<http://www.charlesritchie.com/>

You can find a wide range of Ritchie’s art, sketchbooks, and other materials at

<http://www.charlesritchie.com/>

Filed Under: [Alumnus Profile](#)

Comments

Shari Egan says:

May 1, 2012 at 11:28 am



Hi Charlie,
Greatly enjoyed your very inspiring article and reading about and seeing your amazing artwork on your website and the other links you provided. It’s good to see how you have evolved as an artist and museum professional. I remember you and your wife Jenny from UGA. So, you were the one in the bistecca photo! We all treasure those times. You may not remember me since I was only a freshman but I do remember you..
Greetings and the best of luck to both of you from a fellow alum circa Cortona 1976,
Shari

REPLY

Charles Ritchie says:

May 2, 2012 at 11:41 am



Hi Shari,
Thanks for your message and for your kind response to the article.
I pulled up the Cortona group photo from 1976 and I remember seeing lots of you that wonderful summer. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/truemc/2362361381/sizes//in/photostream/>
Good to hear from you. Jenny and I send our best and thanks again for your lovely note.
All good wishes, Charlie

REPLY