Theresa Bernstein Celebrated

NEW YORK CITY — On February 5, American Modernist Theresa Bernstein attended her 70th retrospective at Jean Whalen Fine Art. A jam-packed gallery, fans applauded this extraordinary artist as she entered, waving and blowing kisses to the crowd.

With cameras flashing, Bernstein gave a sketching demonstration, using six-year-old Alexandra Marie Valenci as her model. The exhibit continues through Saturday, April 18.

Among the many guests were Parks and Recreation Commissioner Henry J. Stern, and Michael Rabin, deputy commissioner of Mayor Rudolph W. Giullian's Department of the Aging, who greeted gallery guests and read a letter from the mayor: "On behalf of the residents of New York City, I proudly salute you for your dedication and faithful commitment to New York Realism. Throughout this century your work has expressed an extraordinary humanity that appropriately depicts the daily life of New Yorkers ... and at the same time chronicles life in New York City throughout the past 70 years."

Joan Whalen also read letters from President Bill Clinton, extending his warmest congratulations, and from Joan Kuebler, executive director of The Art Students League of New York.

When asked the secret of her longevity, Bernstein replied: "I don't know."

Bernstein, among other realists in this century, has been somewhat overshadowed by the art world's focus on more abstract artists. Now, concurrently with the Whalen exhibition, she is receiving public and critical attention as part of a year-long traveling exhibition: "The Philadelphia Ten: A Women's Artist Group 1917-1945," currently on view at Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia on January 30. The group was formed on February 17, 1917 in response to the male-dominated The Eight, later called the Ashcan School.

Born in Philadelphia in 1880, Bernstein showed early talent and interest in art. At the age of 17, she won a Board of Education scholarship to attend the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, now Moore College of Art. She enrolled in the four-year Normal Art Course for training teachers in 1907, studying under Elliott Daingerfield, Daniel Garber, Harriet Sartain, Henry H. Snell, and Samuel Murray.

Later, she studied with William Merritt Chase at the Art Students League in New York City. One of her earliest works, "Daniel Garber's Studio" (1910), is included in this retrospective. In the 1920s, along with Jean Sisan, she helped form the Society of Independent Artists.

Adhering to Robert Henri's philosophy that "art cannot be separated from life," Bernstein, a superb colorist, chronicled decades of America's urban and seaside life.

At the gala, Theresa Bernstein signed for her fans and posed for pictures.

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