

Honoring Dorothy Lichtenstein: An Advocate For The Arts And Sciences



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By Annette Hinkle

When it comes to supporting the arts, you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone on the East End as devoted to the cause as Dorothy Lichtenstein.

The widow of pop artist Roy Lichtenstein, Ms. Lichtenstein established the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation, in the wake of her husband's death in 1997, to facilitate access to his work and that of other influential artists of his era.

Though she spends winters in warmer climes these days, Ms. Lichtenstein, who moved to Southampton with her husband in 1970, still considers it her home.

"The changes I've seen are massive, but they've happened little by little," Ms. Lichtenstein said during a recent phone interview. "When we were first out there, it was not known as 'The Hamptons.' One of the things we always missed as the '80s and '90s came was being able to get in our car and drive to Montauk in 20 minutes in the summer and go to Gosman's—which was one shack with a table outside—and eat steamers and cherry pie."

Ms. Lichtenstein's fondness for local institutions also extends to her strong affiliation with another organization that is a major player on the East End: Stony Brook University. Since 2008, she has served as a trustee with the Stony Brook Foundation, lending her support to an array of university programs and initiatives, particularly at Southampton Brook Southampton, which was formerly a Long Island University campus.

"Once I became familiar with Stony Brook, it was full of surprises for me, and there were so many things I didn't know about," she said. "The first involvement I had was with the writer's program when it was still LIU, so that's really a long-term program. I started going to a lot of talks by writers like Frank McCourt, and they were just so good. It was so much fun and really great."

That experience at the Southampton campus marked the beginning of Ms. Lichtenstein's long and fruitful relationship with the university. Since becoming a trustee, she has been an ardent supporter of the creative writing and film programs, both in Southampton and, more recently, in Manhattan, where Stony Brook University now offers screenwriting, television writing and film production with Christine Vachon and her company, Killer Films.

Ms. Lichtenstein is also a passionate advocate for Stony Brook's Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, the Springs home and studio of another famous East End artist couple, Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner.

"The odd thing is, I initially didn't realize Pollock-Krasner House was under the auspices of Stony Brook," Ms. Lichtenstein confessed. "I knew it had some connection to the foundation, but I was thrilled to find out the university was really a supporter."

Each year, Stony Brook University hosts a gala to pay tribute to an individual or individuals who have made a significant contribution to the university. On Wednesday, April 11, at Pier Sixty at Chelsea Piers in New York City, the university will recognize Ms. Lichtenstein at its 19th annual Stars of Stony Brook Gala.

Also taking part in the event will be longtime television journalist Jane Pauley and her husband, "Doonesbury" creator Garry Trudeau, who has created a special image for the gala program in Ms. Lichtenstein's honor.

For Dr. Samuel Stanley, the president of Stony Brook University, Ms. Lichtenstein's contributions to the foundation have been invaluable in furthering university programming—especially in terms of the arts.

"She's really been a leader," he confirmed during a recent phone interview. "Since she's been on the board, I think she has brought a really needed perspective, reminding us of the extra importance of the arts and the value of what's happening on our Southampton campus."

"She's been helping us launch the filmmaking program also. We realized there was a way to be engaged in the city, and were in need of a New York City spot. Dorothy stepped in and helped to make that happen," Dr. Stanley said. "She's been so generous about her network. She's so well regarded in the art field and knows so many people in so many areas."

“Some of her friends have also become supporters,” added Dr. Stanley, who noted that Ms. Lichtenstein was instrumental in finding donors to support a \$1 million matching gift challenge grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation to preserve the Pollock-Krasner House and expand the museum.

Additionally, in 2013, Ms. Lichtenstein made a \$1 million donation to the Stony Brook Southampton Graduate Arts Program, establishing the Lichtenstein Fund.

Robert Reeves, the associate provost of Southampton Graduate Arts Campus, explained that the fund is designed to support entrepreneurial programs and innovation in the arts to match the reality of what’s going on in the creative arts—like the campus’s new Audio Podcast Fellows program.

“She is the most authentically generous person I have ever known,” Mr. Reeves said of Ms. Lichtenstein.

But it’s not just the university’s artistic programming that has captured Ms. Lichtenstein’s attention. She also supports scholarships and university programs around the world, including paleoanthropologist Richard Leakey’s Turkana Basin Institute in Kenya, and Centre Valbio in Madagascar, where primatologist Patricia Wright is dedicated to conservation research. Ms. Lichtenstein has even visited the facilities to see for herself the research work going on there.

“I loved it, but Madagascar was a difficult trip, because there’s no infrastructure. But Patricia has been able to accomplish something amazing,” Ms. Lichtenstein said. “Marine science is another program at Southampton that is really fabulous, and the director, Chris Gobler, is doing great research on the bays.”

Ms. Lichtenstein has taken part in that research as well, by going along on boat trips from the Southampton campus marine center to deposit bushels of young clams into the bay to help clean local waters.

“I’ve learned a lot through my familiarity with the programs,” she said. “I was always interested in science—it was my best subject when I was in school. But for some reason I was attracted to the drama of art. But I always maintained the interest. Roy also had a really strong interest in science.”

For Ms. Lichtenstein, spreading the word and raising awareness about important issues in our quickly changing world is a mission she’s thrilled to be involved in, just like the pop-art movement that was so central to her husband’s work nearly half a century ago.

The depth of her support for these causes inspired Stony Brook University to confer upon Ms. Lichtenstein an honorary doctorate in 2014. At the April 11 gala, she will once again be recognized for her advocacy.

“One reason I’m happy to be honored is, I really like to expand the public’s view of what Stony Brook is and does,” Ms. Lichtenstein said. “It is known for science and excels at that, but there are so many other possibilities. They have a wonderful school of journalism and Alan Alda’s

Center for Communicating Science, which is focused on writing about science, so it is understandable to the average person.

“That is so important now.”

The 19th annual Stars of Stony Brook Gala honoring Dorothy Lichtenstein is Wednesday, April 11, at Pier Sixty at Chelsea Piers, New York. Cocktails at 6:30 p.m., dinner at 7:30 p.m. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit stonybrook.edu/gala.