



## Acknowledgements

It is a great pleasure for me to see my husband's paintings exhibited once more at the Columbus Museum of Art. For this I have a great many people to thank, starting with my late husband, Paul, who left us such a substantial legacy in his work. Foremost among those who have helped, I thank the late Edmund K. Kuehn, assistant director at the then Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, who organized and curated the exhibition of Paul's work in 1964.

In the current effort, Director Nannette V. Maciejunes, Chief Curator Dominique H. Vasseur, and their colleagues have been most gracious partners in realizing this exhibition and accompanying catalog. I admire their expertise and thank them for their eloquent comments in this volume. Art historian and essayist Ann Bremner and historian Louis Rose have placed the artist into a larger context, recognizing the multiple dimensions of his work.

Jane Hoffelt, graphic designer and much more, has produced an elegant and comprehensive visual document in this catalog that will remain as a significant record of the exhibition long after it has closed. Ruth Ann Newcomer has my warm appreciation for providing invaluable assistance with proofreading and a great deal else.

In addition, I gratefully acknowledge the cooperation and contributions of archivist Joanne Ziegler; our long-time framers Val Pennington and Craig Hackman; photographer Randy Weidenbusch; our gallery partners across the country; and the several individuals who have generously shared works from their collections with the museum and its audience.

It is my hope that in this catalog and exhibition we have presented and interpreted Paul's work as he might have wished.

—Erika Bourguignon

Paul-Henri Bourguignon, 1966  
Photograph by Stan Vingle, *The Columbus Dispatch*

## Paul-Henri Bourguignon: Director's Foreword

In 1964, the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts (as the Columbus Museum of Art [CMA] was then known) held an exhibition of work by the Belgian-born Columbus artist Paul-Henri Bourguignon. In the fifty years since that exhibition, the CMA has changed greatly, just as Columbus has grown and become more sophisticated, more aware of the world and confident of its place in it. Over these years, the Museum has shown thousands of works of art by hundreds of artists—local, regional, national, and international. Many of these artists were already famous when we exhibited their work, and some have become so since. In the media-driven world we inhabit today, fame is, of course, a very slippery thing—here today and sometimes gone tomorrow. Paul-Henri Bourguignon may never have been internationally famous in his lifetime, but that fact never stopped him from making art and continuing to find beauty and interest in visual images. Although we cannot be sure that fame was all that important to him, we know with certainty that his art was.

It's intriguing and appealing to look back across those years, revisiting the work of an artist who led a terrifically interesting life. Paul-Henri Bourguignon traveled widely, tried his hand at varied professions, and honed his creative skills in painting, photography, and literature. As an artist, he was conversant in many of the leading artistic styles of the twentieth century, especially those of the School of Paris and of his native Belgium, as well as the mid-century abstraction of both New York and Paris. Bourguignon's art was never imitative, but one can find characteristics in his work that show him in close step with some of the more famous painters of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. In his work, much of which was made right here in Columbus—his adoptive home from 1950 until his death in 1988—one feels his connection to the larger art world.

Some who visit this exhibition may have known Paul-Henri Bourguignon or may even recall his first CMA exhibition fifty years ago. Many others will be too young to have such memories. They may know his work from subsequent exhibitions in Columbus and elsewhere, or they may be encountering it

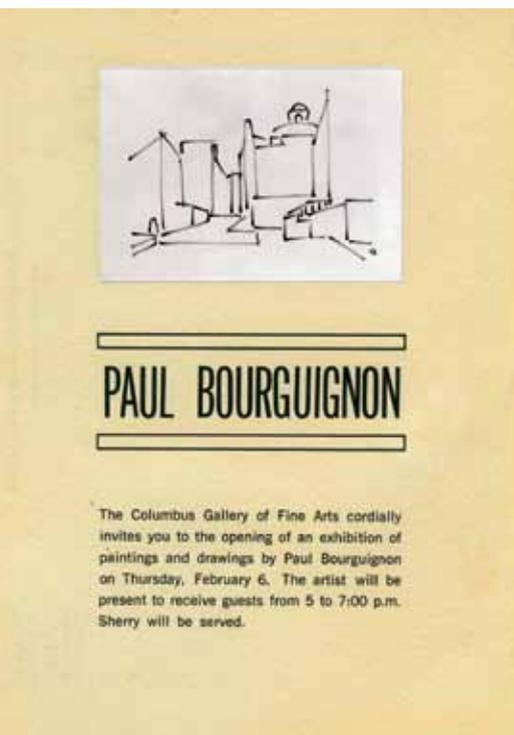


here for the first time. We are pleased to be able to present the work of Paul-Henri Bourguignon to a new generation of Columbus residents and Museum visitors, who will discover the art of this fascinating and accomplished artist with fresh eyes.

Every exhibition comes about thanks to the hard work of those who are passionate about an artist and the work. In the case of this retrospective, I wish to thank Dr. Erika Bourguignon, the artist's widow, for her generosity to the Columbus Museum of Art and to acknowledge her devotion and commitment to her husband's art. Similarly, I express my gratitude to Jane Hoffelt and Ann Bremner, both of whom have been good friends of Erika Bourguignon and supporters of Paul's work. At the Museum, numerous staff members have brought their time and talents to the realization of this exhibition. Sarah Rogers, executive deputy director; Cindy Meyers Foley, executive assistant director; and Rod Bouc, deputy director for operations, have ensured that all departments have given their customary expertise and cooperation to the exhibition and its associated events. Melissa Ferguson, director of marketing and communications, has sparked our community's interest in Paul-Henri Bourguignon and his work. Melinda Knapp, chief registrar and exhibitions manager, and Greg Jones, exhibition designer—along with Michele L. Ulmer, exhibition design production assistant, and David Holm and Darren O'Connor, preparators—have carefully attended to every aspect of care for the artworks and production of a most handsome installation. This volume has benefited from the rigorous attention of Chris Duckworth, chief editor. Finally, I wish to thank Dominique H. Vasseur, chief curator, for finding in Paul-Henri Bourguignon's work a connection to the past that lives again in the here and now, which is what great art can do—be present for us to experience and enjoy for years to come.

*Nannette V. Maciejunes*

Bourguignon's 1964 exhibition at the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts (now Columbus Museum of Art)



Paul-Henri Bourguignon exhibition invitation, Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, 1964

## Paul-Henri Bourguignon: Curator's Statement

*Dominique H. Vasseur*

Columbus is a city of many surprises. During my first few years as curator of European art at the Columbus Museum of Art, I was somewhat discouraged by how few local collectors of European art there seemed to be despite the Museum's strong collection in this area. When in December 2008 I was invited to visit with Dr. Erika Bourguignon, a noted anthropologist, to discuss a possible donation of a work of art and art books, nothing could have prepared me for the amazing home I was to step into or the graciousness of its owner.

One can often tell quite a bit about someone from their home: their style of living, the kind of things they treasure, what matters most in their life. Erika Bourguignon's home retains much of its appearance and character from the many years she shared it with her artist husband, Paul-Henri Bourguignon. And although he passed away in 1988, Paul's presence is very much alive in this home. His art is everywhere; no room is without multiple examples of his work. On one wall a strong face might peer forth from darkness, on another landscapes open up views from Haiti, Peru, or Europe. Another wall might hold an abstract painting, while on a table, a group of unmatted drawings looks

*Paul Bourguignon's studio*



*Night People,*  
1987, acrylic

as if it has just been reviewed. Among these many works by Paul are artworks by other artists, notably European artists Paul knew or admired, and books—hundreds of books—and records and all sorts of natural and manmade objects: things one might expect an artist and an anthropologist to appreciate and collect. No room, however, holds the charge of Paul's studio and study overlooking the front of the house from its second floor. There one has the feeling that the artist has just stepped away from his easel and may return at any moment.

Over my years of visiting with Erika Bourguignon, I have come to respect Paul's art immensely. I can sense the solid talent behind his work—his interest in people and places, in principles such as compassion, and in matters of the spirit. Looking at his work as a whole, as in the 2009 retrospective at the Ross Art Museum at Ohio Wesleyan University, one can see the artist recognizing and digesting the dominant European art trends of the twentieth century, never copying but rather working in or through styles similar to those of Édouard Vuillard, Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Georges Rouault, Amedeo Modigliani, and perhaps even looking several centuries further back to El Greco. His early figurative style loses its fussiness and detail and becomes simple and bold, sometimes vividly colorful and other times, quietly monochromatic. Many of his late works seem to leave the world of reality altogether and exist as intersecting patches of light and dark, of color and shadow. But Erika has assured me that the figure is always there, and I take her word for it. Paul's art seems always to be about people and places.

At the same time that I have gotten to know and appreciate Paul's work, I have often grappled with the thought of his living and working in a Midwestern American city at a time when his western European roots must have made his life, dare I say, challenging. Of course, there was the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts (now the Museum of Art) and there was Eva Glimcher's Pace Gallery, which brought an array of contemporary art to the city, but for the most part Columbus was not a sophisticated city or one with a great history of interest in the visual arts. Columbus must have been a difficult place for him to call home artistically, yet still Paul created a vast body of work here. Many of his paintings translate memories of his travels (sometimes aided by photographs or postcards) into drawings, gouaches, and acrylic paintings. Looking at these works, I have begun to feel that I understand Paul's motivations to some extent. While "land-locked" here in Ohio, Paul's art allowed him to extend his reach to people and places he had known before, journeys made and enjoyed, times past that he cherished. Italian film director Federico Fellini once said that "all art is autobiographical," and Paul's art seems to fit this thought perfectly. His work served to give his life extension temporally, geographically, and spiritually. It connected him to places and people he remembered, to exotic lands and places once well known, to faces remembered for decades, and to the spiritual underpinnings that can unite diverse human experience.

Naturally, all of these life experiences and memories can be found in Paul's art. Yet while many of his works seem to be evocations of people and places, those that deal with the realm of the human spirit, the religious spirit, are among his most moving. His early depiction of his patron saint, Paul, from 1934 (p. 36), while modern in its boldness, could have come from a medieval stained glass window. St. Paul's large dark eyes are indeed windows into his soul, and the tilt of his head expresses his thoughtful contemplation of mankind and its need for redemption.

Was Paul-Henri Bourguignon a religious man? In honesty, I do not know. I do know that he took up religious themes—the Bible and the life of Christ—throughout his many decade career. The image of Jesus he created as part of his *Via Crucis* series

(p. 57), now owned by St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Upper Arlington, is of Jesus the man, before his tormentors hours before his crucifixion, humbled, bowed, wracked by doubt and fear and fully aware of the brutal death that awaited him. A survivor of World War II, Bourguignon knew of the brutality of man to fellow man, of the atrocities. His art, when it has a religious subject, seems consciously to strive for a universal voice, to speak to people of all faiths, and to include everyone. Doubtless, many conversations he had with his wife Erika, a respected scholar, also helped him see the humanity and divinity in all people.

My first 2008 visit to Erika and Paul-Henri Bourguignon's home was followed by other regular visits. Each time I encountered new work by Paul that Erika had just discovered in a portfolio or drawer and had had framed. When Erika mentioned with some pride that Paul had received a one-man exhibition at the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts in 1964, it seemed that 2014 offered the perfect moment to revisit that exhibition and his work. And how fitting to be able to present again *La Mantilla* (page 51), a painting that the Museum purchased from the 1964 exhibition. As Edmund K. Kuehn, then assistant director, wrote to Paul, "Many viewers expressed a liking for the painting (the whole show for that matter) so Mr. Young [Mahonri Sharp Young, then the CGFA's director] and I decided that we would make everyone happy by acquiring it. Your show was a brilliant success." What a pleasure and how appropriate to revisit Paul's art in this, a fiftieth-anniversary retrospective exhibition.

The house that Erika and Paul lived in, where Erika continues to live, holds so many marvelous memories and so much wonderful art. From the earliest work that Paul framed, his 1924 pastel *Bruges* (p. 34), to his last painting before his death in 1988, *The False Witnesses* (p. 75), many of these gouache and acrylic paintings, pastels, and drawings have graced the walls of the Bourguignon home. Several of them appeared on our walls fifty years ago in 1964. Now we have the extraordinary opportunity, as well as the great pleasure, of having them shared with us, and our visitors, once again.

*Sonata for Flute and Bird*, 1966,  
in Erika Bourguignon's study



*St. Paul*, 1934, in the  
Bourguignon dining room