

ART ROSENBAUM

Telling Stories

September 1-October 13, 2022

*Curated by Rebecca Brantley in conjunction with the Georgia Art Educator's Association.
All image courtesy of the artist's family & the Matney Gallery, Williamsburg, Virginia.*



PIEDMONT UNIVERSITY





Artist, folklorist, and teacher Art Rosenbaum (1938-2022) made a significant contribution to the American South, where he lived and worked for the past five decades. His expressive paintings draw from his deep knowledge of technical processes and art history. Many projects include his wife, the painter and photographer Margo Newmark Rosenbaum.

Born in upstate New York, Rosenbaum lived in the historic West Village of Manhattan in the 1960s. He hosted a radio show while studying at Columbia. In the early 1970s, Rosenbaum moved to Athens, Georgia, where he mentored numerous creative luminaries. He brought attention to now-revered folk artists and musicians, many of whom are subjects of his paintings.

Rosenbaum was named the first Wheatley Professor in Fine Arts Emeritus at the Lamar Dodd School of Art at the University of Georgia and is a recipient of the prestigious Governor of Georgia's Award in the Humanities. His collection of field recordings of traditional American music won a Grammy for Best Historical Album in 2008.

Lee Matney, *Art in his Studio*, 2022, digital photograph.

Arthur Spark Rosenbaum was born in 1938 in Ogdensburg, New York. He grew up in Indianapolis, Indiana. His father was a U.S. Army pathologist and mother as a laboratory technician. He studied art history and painting at Columbia University in the 1960s, where he met his wife, Margo Newmark Rosenbaum. During this time, Rosenbaum played banjo and hosted a folk music radio show.

This early self-portrait shows Rosenbaum in an interior urban space painted with thick, impasto brushwork that suggests the influence of abstract expressionism and post-painterly abstraction. It was painted while Rosenbaum was on a Fulbright in Paris. He later held a Fulbright Senior Professorship in Germany.



Art Rosenbaum, *Self-Portrait in Paris, or Boulevard Mortier*, 1964-65, oil on linen, 49 x 33 inches.



Over the Western River was painted while Rosenbaum lived in Iowa City, Iowa, where he served as professor at the University of Iowa. The imagery was inspired by a dream. It shows a gin-and-fresca drink and two nudes on a pontoon. Its three-part format suggests Rosenbaum's interest in using painting to tell a story.

This triptych shows Rosenbaum working with oil on a white ground. Soon, Rosenbaum would begin using layers of glazed oil paint on a tinted ground in the manner of Venetian Renaissance artists.

Art Rosenbaum, *Over the Western River* (triptych), 1969, oil on linen, 54 x 48 inches.

Rosenbaum and his family moved to Athens, Georgia, in 1976. Drawing on his interest in folk music from his experience at Columbia, Rosenbaum became both a collaborator and documentarian of traditional American music in his new home in the South. Often, Margo photographed these music sessions.

Winter Evening shows members of the Brown's Chapel Choir performing and using traditional instruments. The presence of a microphone, headphones, and a telephone suggests the incorporation of new technology and the act of recording.

Music from Brown's Chapel Choir appears on Rosenbaum's 2008 anthology [Art of Field Recording Volume II: Fifty Years of Traditional American Music Documented by Art Rosenbaum](#). An old-fashioned country church in Oconee County, Georgia, is visible in the background. Set at the close of day, this painting suggests the end of an era.



Art Rosenbaum, *Winter Evening*, 1980, oil on linen, 49 x 56 inches.



An airport appears against a mountainous landscape and stormy sky. An equestrian figure looks towards a group of laborers and a woman with a telephone stretches her arm outward. Rosenbaum described this work as a mystery and left it untitled to give room for interpretation. Despite its cryptic nature, though, it conveys Rosenbaum's ability to evoke complex narrative in a single composition.

This painting, like the others in this gallery, utilizes a glazing technique. Rosenbaum used many layers of oil paint to create vibrant, jewel-like colors.

Art Rosenbaum, *Untitled*, 1986, oil on linen, 58.5 x 78 inches.

Five figures stretch across this light-hearted canvas. They are members of the Lamar Dodd School of Art custodial staff. Rosenbaum asked the group to pose informally—or, to mess around. The man on the far right performed a side kick in response. Rosenbaum documents day-to-day life while highlighting workers at the art school.



Art Rosenbaum, *Messing Around*, 1991, oil on linen, 58.5 x 72 inches.

This self-portrait shows the artist in contemporary dress: denim, a camouflage shirt under a button-down, and a Panama hat. The vying designs of the two shirts shows Rosenbaum's love of dense pattern and recalls similar treatment of fabric in works such as *Winter Evening* across the gallery.

Suggesting the unique vision of the artist, the word "FLORIDA" appears backward, the way Rosenbaum would have viewed it in the mirror while painting. To the right, a mass of oil-soaked rags suggests the painter's craft and provides formal balance. The modulated cadmium red light background creates a shallow, flattened sense of space reminiscent of seventeenth-century figurative compositions that inspired him throughout his career.



**Art Rosenbaum, *Self-Portrait in Panama Hat*,
2008, oil on linen, 50 x 40 inches.**



The poses of the costumed figures, the compact compositions, and unusual lighting effects create a sense of unease across this series of six paintings. Through his use of use of carnivalesque imagery and expressive brushwork, Rosenbaum evokes one of his favorite painters, Belgian expressionist James Ensor (1860-1949), whose art often satirized society. Created during the era of COVID-19, Rosenbaum's use of masks resonates with the widespread use of face coverings. He suggests the polarizing effect of the pandemic on American society.

Art Rosenbaum, *Sextet*, 2020-21, charcoal on paper, series of six, 25 x 33 inches (each).



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