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Bern Porter Chronology

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A Salute

to

Bernard Harden Porter

Physicist
Painter
Editor
Cartographer
Poet
Illustrator
Sculptor
Engineer
Urbanologist
Publisher
Photocollagist
Bibliographer
Essayist
Teacher

VISIONARY - REALIST  SCIENTIST - ARTIST
BERN PORTER CHRONOLOGY

1911 Born February 14 on a farm in Porter Settlement, near Houlton, Maine, fourth generation of Irish settlers.

1917-1924 Beginnings of art study in Houlton elementary school and by private instruction.

1924-1928 At Houlton High School active in art, school band, newspaper, yearbook. Wins regional and state prizes for oratory.

1928-1929 One year at Ricker Classical Institute. First production as a publisher; leads to his use of maps as an experimental art form.

1929-1932 Transfers to Colby College on a scholarship. Student instructor in physics. Works his way as janitor, bellhop, kitchen hand in girls' camp. Becomes aware of the conflict in his mind between science and art. B.S. degree in 1932.


1934-1935 Starts work on beta rays for doctoral degree. Health breaks down. At the height of the Depression he holds odd jobs briefly as motel attendant, assistant store manager, window dresser. When all work peters out, enters Hartford House in New York City, a federally sponsored home for unemployed white collar workers. Takes up painting again and executes his first sculpture.


1940-1945 Assigned by draft board to the Manhattan District, the secret project for development of the atom bomb. At the Department of
Physics in Princeton University, meets Einstein and Oppenheimer. The Art Department of the university puts on the first one-man show of his career: bone sculptures, surrealistic photographs, industrial brass constructions, etc. Contributes to The Leaves Fall (1942-1945). Transferred to the Radiation Laboratory in the University of California, Berkeley. Visits Henry Miller at Big Sur; commences correspondence with Osbert Sitwell, Lawrence Durrell, Paul Rosenberg, Kenneth Patchen, and others, in preparation for books on Miller's life and works. Edits and publishes six books by or about Miller (1944-1946). Transferred to Oak Ridge, Tennessee; growing doubts about the morality of creating an atom bomb. Contributes to the little magazine Circle (1944-1946).

1945 Resigns his job as physicist on August 7, day after the explosion of the atom bomb on Hiroshima. Works as an engineer for a few months; enhances his proficiency in the art of photography through his knowledge of physics. More than ever convinced that science and art ("Sciart") must combine to reveal the beauty of natural form.

1946-1949 Retreats to hills north of San Francisco. Burst of creative activity — maps, montages, photograms, poems, essays, Art Techniques (1947). Publishes Berkeley (1947-1951). Henry Miller Bibliography (1947). Founds the Schillerhaus in Sausalito, California, a center of "creative thought wherein the many who came there, not as a school or forum, exchanged notes on design, poems, art forms and life"; also the Contemporary Gallery, art center for encouragement and exhibition of works in the Abstract Expressionist style by young unknowns. Issues the Sciart Manifesto: "Finite worlds of infinite reality revealed by the tools and discoveries of Science are ripe for aesthetic development." The Union of Science and Art (1948).


[The years 1962 through 1967 are fully documented in Part IV of James Schevill’s biographical sketch, which follows this Chronology.]

