

## Bernard Perlin

### Artist Biography

In addition to his successful career as a commercial artist and as an artist-correspondent during World War II, Bernard Perlin (1918–2014) is best known for his postwar social realist canvases documenting New York City's street life and his fine-line silverpoint portraits. Born in Virginia to Jewish immigrants from Russia, Perlin moved to New York in 1934 to enroll in the New York School of Design. Upon completing his studies, in 1936, he continued his training at the National Academy of Design and the Art Students League. He quickly fell in with the social network of the writer Glenway Wescott, who was introduced to Perlin by the artist Paul Cadmus. The two became romantically involved, despite the ongoing relationship between Wescott and his longtime partner Monroe Wheeler, then a new curator at the Museum of Modern Art.

In this creative milieu, Perlin posed on the beach for photographs taken by his friends Cadmus, Jared French, and Margaret Hoening French, under the collective moniker PaJaMa. He also modeled for the photographer George Platt Lynes. In turn, his friends, including Lynes, Cadmus, and Wescott became the subjects of his distinctive and elegant silverpoint portraits. In one set of four drawings, Perlin imagined Wescott, Wheeler, Lynes, and Lincoln Kirstein—founder of the New York City Ballet—as mythological gods in the style of Michelangelo. At the same time, Perlin became known for his murals, receiving commissions from the United States Treasury Department (1939) and the United States Maritime Commission (1940).

During the war, Perlin worked for the Graphics Division in the Office of War Information, where he designed propaganda posters and met his mentor, Ben Shahn. He then became a war artist-correspondent for *Life* and *Fortune* magazines, documenting the war efforts in North Africa and the Pacific. When he returned to the U.S. in 1946, he began to paint in earnest at the encouragement of Shahn, while continuing to work commercially for a number of publications. Perlin, living in Manhattan's Lower East Side, found inspiration from the urban world around him and, in 1948, received his first solo exhibition at M. Knoedler & Co., New York, which included the best known of these postwar realist paintings, *Orthodox Boys* (1948).

Perlin moved to Italy in 1948, partially funded by a Fulbright Scholarship, where he left behind the realism that had preoccupied him in the United States in favor of colorful, enigmatic landscapes, still lifes, and figures. In Rome, he participated in the city's robust gay social scene alongside Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, and Jean Genet, and won the first of two Guggenheim Fellowships (1954 and 1959). After six years away, Perlin returned to New York, where he produced paintings documenting the city's nightlife. At a party thrown by Lynes, Perlin met the model Edward Newell, with whom he would spend the rest of his life, and, in 1959, they settled in Connecticut to escape what Perlin observed to be the competitive, ego-driven art world, dominated by Abstract Expressionists. Though he stopped painting for several years in the 1970s, Perlin resumed work that grew increasingly abstract until his death, in 2014.