KNOWLEDGE IS POWER!
I grew up on Edgerton Street, within walking distance of the University of Rochester’s Prince Street campus. I attended and graduated from School #23 on Barrington Street and Monroe High School. Former MAG Board president George Angle was my classmate.

My mother wanted me to do what she couldn’t do, meaning go to art museums and get a university education. I remember going to B. Forman’s (a well-known Rochester department store) and even recall my first dress, which had white polka dots.

I met my husband-to-be, Irving Germanow, at Temple Beth El Bible school. At the time, Temple Beth El was on the corner of Goodman Street and Park Avenue.

My first trip to the MAG was in 1934, and I was 12. I was a Girl Scout, and our troop, which was sponsored by Third Presbyterian Church on East Avenue, had a field trip to the MAG. Thus began a relationship that has now spanned more than 85 years—I’m 98 now!

From Monroe High School, I was accepted to Cornell University, and off I went in the fall of 1939. One of the first things that I did was to join a sorority, Alpha Epsilon Phi, and I still have a sorority sister, with whom I keep in touch, Edie Newman of Florida.

In the summer of 1941, I felt the need to be closer to home and family, so I applied and was admitted to the University of Rochester. I graduated in 1943 with a BA in Psychology. After graduation, I worked for Professor Radomski in the Psychology department, whose offices were in the Carnegie building on the northeast corner of MAG’s property. I was his secretary, having taken shorthand and typing at Mary McCarthy Secretarial School. My salary was $22 per week. Sadly, the Carnegie building was destroyed in a fire in January of 2015. An apartment building has been constructed where Carnegie once stood. During my junior year, I took an art history class and was formally introduced to the Memorial Art Gallery’s collection. For many years now, the MAG has been my home away from home.

I made lifelong best friends at the MAG, and they include Emille Allen, Alva “Vee” Angle, Mildred Boylan, and Mary Sue Jack. Sadly, Mary Sue, Mildred, and Vee are now gone. Emille has been like a sister to me. I remember one time that the couples—Mildred and Al Boylan, Vee and George Angle, and Irv and I—all took the same Creative Workshop painting class at the MAG. After class, we often would drive down East Avenue to The Brighton restaurant and enjoy cheeseburgers.

Volunteering at the MAG has been my career. Though I didn’t get a paycheck what I got was friends and memories. I have been an active member of the Gallery Council since 1972, serving as president from 1976–1978, and I was also a docent, graduating in the class of 1982.

Some of my favorite works in the MAG collection are Evening Glow by Wolf Kahn, Thomas Ridgeway Gould’s West Wind, Winslow Homer’s Artist Studio in Afternoon Fog, Genesee Oaks by Asher B. Durand, Hummingbird with Cattleya and Dendrobium Orchids by Martin Johnson Heade, Jacob Lawrence’s Summer Street Scene in Harlem, Peeling Onions by Lilly Martin Spencer, and Chinese Restaurant by John Sloan.

Haven’t I been fortunate to have such a long relationship with the MAG? And the relationship continues!

Essie Germanow
Honorary Board member, Gallery Council Member, and longtime friend of the MAG
In the spring of 2019, MAG was honored to host the world premiere of Lessons of the Hour, a 10-screen video installation by artist Isaac Julien. The immersive media artwork was commissioned by MAG and inspired by episodes in the life of Frederick Douglass (1818–1895), as well as by the issues of social justice that shaped Douglass’ life’s work.

MAG is excited to announce that, for a limited time, we will have online access to a single-channel version of Lessons of the Hour. Isaac Julien is a pioneer of the art of the moving image who, since the early 1990s, has innovated a distinctive nonlinear, multi-screen form of storytelling. Julien’s open-ended narratives propose that spectators actively interpret his work through a physical and sensorial immersion. Drawing from painting, architecture, photography, performance, and sound, Julien constructs poetic narratives of hybrid scenes.

Through extensive use of Frederick Douglass’ “timely words,” Isaac Julien gives expression to the zeitgeist of Douglass’ era, his legacy, and ways in which his story may be viewed today. The work was shot in Washington, DC, where Douglass lived late in life, and where his house in Cedar Hill has been kept almost intact as a National Historic Site; and in Scotland, where Douglass was an active member of the “Send Back the Money” movement, and where he delivered a number of anti-slavery speeches, which Julien restaged inside London’s Royal Academy of Arts. Douglass delivered more than 300 lectures in Scotland, Ireland, and England as he sought to affirm his struggle for equality as a global citizen who was very much ahead of his time.

Working in consultation with professor Celeste-Marie Bernier of the University of Edinburgh, Isaac Julien imagines the person of Frederick Douglass through a series of tableaux vivants. Composer Paul Gladstone Reid created the film’s original score.

Be on the look out for information on how to access the single-screen version of Lessons of the Hour. It will only be available for a limited time, so be sure to catch it before it’s gone, and in the comfort of your own home!

Commissioned and acquired by the Memorial Art Gallery with the partnership of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and with generous support from Mark Falcone and Ellen Bruss, the Zell Family, Ford Foundation, VIA Art Fund, Lori Van Dusen, and Deborah Ronnen and Sherman Levey. The commission and acquisition were also made possible by Barbara and Aaron Levine, the Maurice and Maxine Forman Fund, the Marion Stratton Gould Fund, the Herdle-Moore Fund, the Strasenburgh Fund, and the Lyman K. and Eleanor B. Stuart Endowment Fund at the Memorial Art Gallery, and the Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Production of the work was generously supported by Metro Pictures, New York; Victoria Miro, London/Venice; the Arts Division of the University of California Santa Cruz; and by Eastman Kodak Company, on whose film stock the installation was shot.
Notice of an exciting new program appeared in the November 1940 Gallery Bulletin: “The Gallery is enlisting in its service to the community a group of its members who have shown their faith in its work and values through years of interest and active support. Organized as the Women’s Council, this service group...will broaden the basis of interests and activities which form the Gallery’s program, bring new contacts and points of view, and express the fullness of community-participation which is the precious obligation of such a social institution in a Democracy.”

In 1940, MAG’s original matriarchs were still in leadership positions, although they were anomalies in a man’s world. They had guided its course for 27 years: founder, Emily Sibley Watson, was 85; Gertrude Herdle (Moore) had been the second director of MAG for 18 years, having succeeded her late father, George Herdle; and her sister, Isabel, was assistant director. Implicit in the founding of the Women’s Council was a shared legacy of values and vision that the three entrusted to women who were as dedicated as they were: engaged community participation through educational activities developed around the visual arts.

Earliest Council-supported projects provided classes for talented, underprivileged city children in the summer of 1941 thanks to funds raised by selling subscriptions to a film series. Success built upon success. Vibrant projects and festivities remain vivid in the community’s memory—the Medieval Faire, the April in Paris ball, many Art in Bloom events, Just Jazz, An Artists’ Affair, as well as the support of ongoing fundraisers like Clothesline and Art and Treasures. With success, the goals became ever more ambitious. The Women’s Council took on the major responsibility for establishing a restaurant at MAG, after they had whetted everyone’s appetite with a popup cafe during La Revue Blanche. Support of major exhibitions and publications has fostered the high quality of programming that the community has come to expect from MAG. And always, it was about the art: the first major art acquisition by the Council for the collection was Hyacinthe Rigaud’s sumptuous 1731 Portrait of the Archbishop of Paris, given in 1968.

Forty years later, in celebration of its 80th anniversary and donations of over 70 artworks, curator Nancy Norwood has organized an exhibition of Council gifts, on view in the Lockhart Gallery from July 25–October 11: 1940/2020: In celebration of the 80th Anniversary of the Gallery Council of the Memorial Art Gallery. Work by artists including Rachel Ruysch, David Hockney, Chuck Close, and Kiki Smith will be on view in the exhibition, while larger paintings by Helen Frankenthaler, Hyacinthe Rigaud, and others will be designated by special labels in the galleries.

As it did in 1940, the Women’s Council continues to respond to the times; in 1993, it voted enthusiastically to expand its membership to include men, and to change its name to the Gallery Council. True to the charge given to its original members, the Council continues to support MAG’s “precious obligation” in its ongoing support of art and education.
A sentiment currently circulating online during this election year is the statement, “Think of the most vulnerable person you know, and vote in their best interest.” This is a phrase we have kept in mind for the installation of Zoe Leonard’s seminal artwork, I want a president, now in the Forman Gallery. The poem is also supported by four artworks from the MAG’s permanent collection by women and artists of color.

In 1992, New York City-based artist and activist Zoe Leonard sat at her typewriter and wrote a poem entitled “I want a president,” in reaction to her friend Eileen Myles’s run for president that year. Myles, a poet and activist, entered the race against George W. Bush and Bill Clinton as both an Independent and an openly gay, female candidate. Myles’s NYC community—and by extension, Leonard’s—was directly impacted by the AIDS crisis and ongoing poverty. The poem was originally meant for publication in an LGBT magazine that had shuttered, so the piece was instead photocopied and distributed by hand. In this way, the piece transforms from a poem to an engaging material artwork meant for broad distribution.

Since then, I want a president has been a political and cultural touchstone for those in the LGBTQ+ community. In many ways, Leonard’s piece is a call to action: by boldly stating the qualities she wants in a president, she creates a space for others to make demands of their leaders. This appeal for engagement serves as a manifesto to rally around, whether or not one is personally associated with any of the marginalized groups Leonard describes in her declaration, including LGBTQ individuals, the needy, and the sick.

For many, the most vulnerable person they know is theirself, or at least those much like them. One could certainly argue that Leonard’s poem continues to impact the American political landscape.
Judith Schaechter, (detail) I've Trampled a Million Pretty Flowers, 1995

Ja’Tovia Gary, Still (detail) from Giverny I (NÉGRESSE IMPÉRIALE), 2017 © Ja’Tovia Gary. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, NY
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GIL BATLE’S MEMORIES OF PRISON

WRITTEN BY JESSICA MARTEN
CURATOR IN CHARGE/ CURATOR OF AMERICAN ART

Born and raised in San Francisco to Filipino parents, the artist Gil Batle spent over 20 years in and out of California prisons for fraud and forgery. During this time he marketed his self-taught skills as an artist—the same ones that got him convicted for forging IDs and traveler’s checks—earning the respect of his fellow inmates by drawing their family portraits, tattoo designs, and greeting cards.

After serving his time, in 2008 Batle moved to a small island in the Philippines and began to depict his life behind bars in searing detail on the surface of ostrich eggs. The artist begins by drawing with a pencil on the surface of the egg and sculpts the minute detail of his scenes using a high-speed dental drill. The creative impulse that has threaded throughout Batle’s life has now found an outlet in these otherworldly eggs covered with narratives of institutionalized gang violence and racially segregated cell-blocks.

About San Quentin West Block II, Batle said, “San Quentin’s West Block is the closest thing to Hell that I can imagine. It holds more than 700 inmates. The noise level was as loud as a football stadium during a touchdown. There is no way to describe this place. My first term in prison, I was in awe walking past each cell. Each cell had its own character. From daily quiet living in one cell to violent arguing or fighting in the next. I tried to capture that place in this egg. Not even close.”

SAN QUENTIN WEST BLOCK II IS ON VIEW IN THE FOLK ART GALLERY.
I am excited to recommend *Ninth Street Women: Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler: Five Painters and the Movement That Changed Modern Art* by Mary Gabriel. Gabriel takes her time diving into the personal lives of these five women and the indelible marks they made together on postwar New York. The title is inspired by the *Ninth Street Show* of 1951, an exhibition that put New York City artists in the spotlight. She chooses to use the artists’ first names in her writing, making them feel more like friends as you read. Clocking in at 716 pages of content, this book is meant to be savored in pieces. It is also worth taking some time to look at the sections of photographs and paintings interwoven in the text.

In a male-dominated art world, these women stood on their own despite two of them being married to well-known painters! MAG has works by de Kooning and Frankenthaler in our permanent collection, with Frankenthaler’s *Seer* currently on view. I hope you come visit the museum and library soon!
For more information about programming, events, tours, and all things MAG, visit our website at mag.rochester.edu, or follow us on social media: @MAG_Rochester (Twitter), magrochester (Instagram, Facebook)

Accessibility
Wheelchairs are available in the Vanden Brul Pavilion coatroom. The auditorium is equipped with an assistive listening system made possible by the Mark and Bobbie Hargrave Hard of Hearing Fund of the Rochester Area Community Foundation, the MAG community access endowment fund, and an anonymous donor. To schedule a sign language interpreter or touch tour for the blind, or to request a braille or text calendar, contact cander35@mag.rochester.edu (585.276.8971). People who are deaf or hard of hearing may call via relay service. We also offer a special cell phone tour for the visually impaired.

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*Half-price Thursday admission after 5 pm is made possible in part by Monroe County.

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