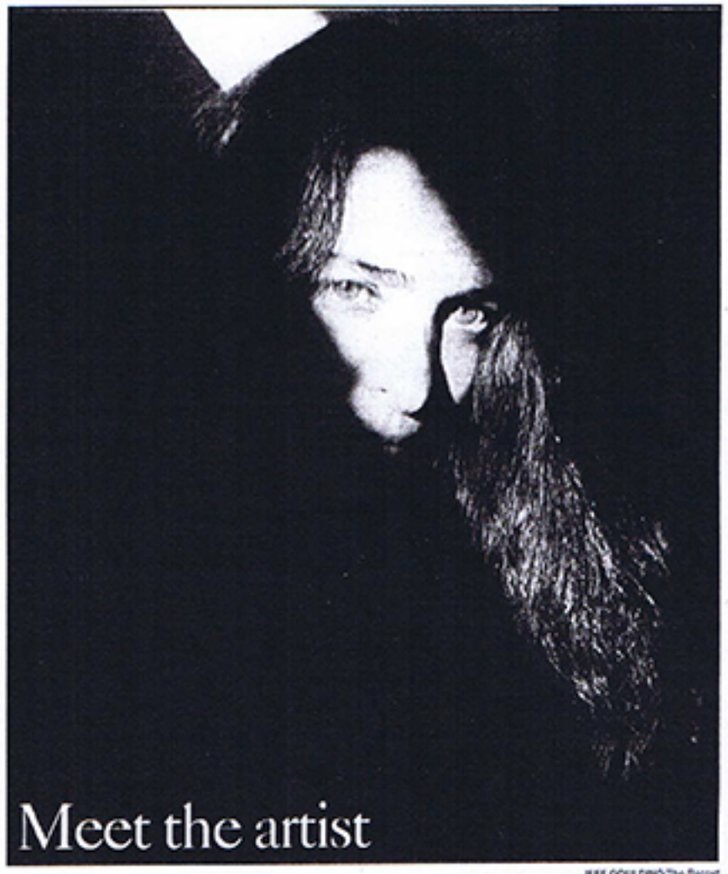
The Times Herald RECORD
ULSTER COUNTY Edition
Weather: Becoming windy; page 2 | Middletown, N.Y. 10940 © Times Herald-Record | Wednesday, February 8, 1995 | 50 cents

ULSTER COUNTY NEIGHBORS
The Times Herald-Record — February 8, 1995

This week in NEIGHBORS
Artist faces up to reality
– pullout



Meet the artist

JEFF GOULDING/The Record

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Elisa Pritzker of Highland wants her art to express her own personal style and the way she has of looking at the world. "It's interesting to see things in a different way," she said. "I like to have all the things in common life (in my artwork) and change the meaning." At left is Pritzker's painting, "Face – Portrait of my Mind." Story, photo, page 3.

Artist comes face to face with life

By Gay Hiroko Taguchi
Record Correspondent

HIGHLAND — Artist Elisa Pritzker has dedicated her life to a special dialogue: one spoken in transfigured still life paintings and finely etched faces fashioned out of rough-hewn stone.

"This is a conversation I have with nature," she said of her unorthodox still life portraits of apples and pumpkins, and of her captivating stones.

"It's interesting to see things in a different way," she continued. "I like to have all the things in common life (in my artwork) and change the meaning."

For the last three decades, the 38-year-old painter, sculptor and theater director has traveled her own singular path that has stretch over three continents, and evolved into a deepening exploration of self, nature, and society. Her work has been shown in more than 50 exhibitions, from her native Argentina to Europe, New York City and the Hudson Valley. She has won a variety of awards and, recently, the National Museum of Women in the Arts selected her portfolio to be on permanent file for study by scholars and students.

She is now preparing an exhibition of her work to be shown in Jerusalem this April. And locally she has plans for an exhibition at the Lynn Prince Gallery in Poughkeepsie this summer.

Born in Argentina, she was 8 when painting, drawing and sculpture beckoned her. She took art classes for youngsters at a local college.

At 16, her formal art education began. And while she did earn a bachelor's degree in ceramics in 1976, her studies in art and other creative endeavors, such as acting and theatre direction have never ended.

Her wide-ranging career has seen her teaching ceramics, design and theatre, as well as directing small theatrical productions in Spain.

But today, Ms. Pritzker's focus is solely on her paintings and sculptures. The body of work now displayed in her home reveals a maturing artist with a distinct style.

And while her earlier works are often portraits done in flamboyant splashes of color, her latest work entails a conscious paring down of color and form.

> *"One day, say, I don't have eyes. I can still paint. If I don't have hands, I paint with my feet. I want to die as an artist."*
>
> — Elisa Pritzker

"My most recent works are done in a simple style," she said, as she pointed to the various figurative and still life works in her kitchen.

While traditionally such subjects are taken from real life models, not so with the unconventional Pritzker. She paints entirely from the mind's eye.

"I never want to copy," she said as if it were a commandment. "I understand nature as too lovely. I want to say my thing in my own style."

Part of that style is often a glorification of nature in its rich simplicity.

For example, a cluster of red apples seem to radiate golden rays.

The portrait is symbolic of nature's radiance, she said.

"You can get answers in many places, you don't have to go to philosophy," she said.

In a corner of her home are a series of her most personal and favorite works.

Two of them deal with the human condition.

"Displaced," shows a man whose face has been cut into thirds. The middle section of the face is displaced a bit to the right.

"He is a common man," she explained. "If you don't find your purpose, then you are displaced.

"You have to have a purpose, of why you are here," she said. "They you can live truly."

After completing that painting, she felt compelled to do a companion piece. Called "Man with Three Visions," it features a portrait of a man who has three pairs of eyes and who is is not entirely whole.

Ms. Pritzker explained that the first pair of eyes are looking up "toward heaven, the spiritual, faith." The second is an "ordinary" view of reality, she added, and the third is "looking toward nature."

At the bottom of the portrait are three squares. One square has an X.

Ms. Pritzker explained that this is a man who sees life in many different ways, but who also takes a stand, makes a choice.

"The looking is a purpose too, if you're looking you're alive," she explained.

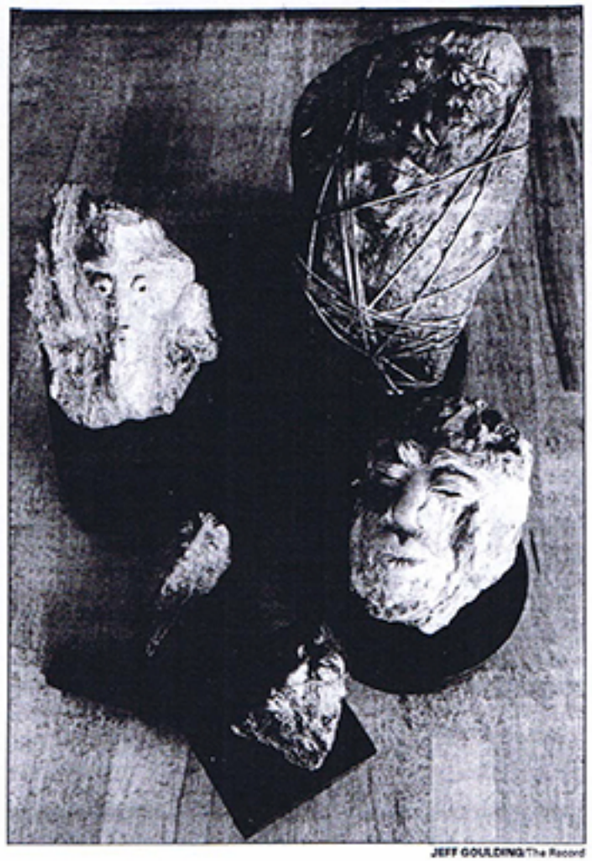
"If you make your vision at different levels, you can get different answers," she said. "But the looking is a purpose too. If you're looking you're alive.

"You are displaced, in a sense" she added, her eyes distant in thoughtfulness, "but you have a purpose."

Ms. Pritzker's other works include a wry comment on original sin. Her painting entitled "Adam and the Apple," features exactly that.

"They say Eve was the one that was compromised, but no, he's compromised too. It's not all her fault.

"It's like a statement, a small statement," she said.



JEFF GOULDING/The Record

"Stone Heads" by Elisa Pritzker were created from rocks she picked up in Spain.

Another painting, called "Witness" shows a pair of wise eyes that are looking at a row of rough rocks. A single, polished stone stands in isolated relief.

"The eyes are looking at the process of creation," she explains.

Besides incorporating stones in her paintings, she also does stone sculptures.

"Stone Heads," feature a group of small stones with human faces. Rather than carve the face, she uses a technique she developed using stone powder and glue.

"One day I saw a stone and I said that looks like a face," she said.

The expressions on the stones seem to come alive. What are the expressions?

"I don't say this is a happy person, or today I have a good or bad day," she explained.

"When you have the technique inside you don't have to think all the time," she said. "If you're so intellectual you miss a part of being human — the spontaneous.

"Sometimes I start something and I don't understand," she mused. "Then when I finish I understand.

"Always it's scary," she said, of the creative leap into the unknown, "(but) it's happy — it's life."

And that life is not necessarily about pursuing artistic success.

"If I'm great or not, this is not my design," she said. "I'm really close to Van Gogh. I know he was always pushing out.

"I don't want to care about that (success), I paint, I work, I try to express myself, my way of life."

And while working on her art is a solitary endeavor, Ms. Pritzker also feels a need for community.

"The artist has a lot of time to herself," she said. "You have a language with a canvas and brush. It's a private moment.

"But I need to expand (myself such as) in teaching and the cultural center," she said.

That center is the Highland Cultural Center, which she established last year with her husband Enrique Rob Lunski. It is a way to promote cultural and artistic activities in the area.

In all, art for Ms. Pritzker is a sine qua non.

"I don't think there is me without art," she said.

"One day, say, I don't have eyes," she hypothesized. "I can still paint.

"If I don't have hands, I paint with my feet.

"I want to die as an artist," she said without hesitation.

"When I started my career, people told me, 'you're crazy. You will be poor all your life,'" she said. "But I'm really happy, because I'm doing what I like."

Profile

Elisa Pritzker,
Painter, sculptor and theatre director

AGE: 38

PERSONAL: Married to Enrique Rob Lunski.

Related Art Experience:
- **1994 - Present:** Founder and artistic director for Highland Cultural Center.
- **1994:** Curator and Juror of National Juried Art Exhibition for Highland Cultural Center.
- **1994:** Organizer and Curator of Annual Juried Exhibition for UNISON Arts & Learning Center, New Paltz, NY.
- **1994:** Professor of Ceramics at UNISON Arts & Learning Center.
- **1991 - '93:** Alzamora SA, Art designer for major import-export Spanish food company.
- **1990 - '92:** Theatre Director for Urban Teatre, Plays in Palma de Mallorca and Barcelona, Spain. Officially chosen to represent Palma at the 9th International Marathon of the Arts.
- **1982 - '89:** Professor of Visual Arts, Ceramics, Design and Theatre at various colleges and high schools in Argentina.

EDUCATION:
- **1980:** Superior Institute of Visual Arts, Mar del Plata, Argentina.
- **1983:** Studies in Theater Direction, Body Expression, and Acting, Mar del Plata, Argentina.
- **1976:** BA in ceramics art, Mar del Plata, Argentina.

RECENT HONORS AND AWARDS:
- 1st prize, Columbia Pacific University (CPU), San Rafael, CA, Review Art Contest, October 1994.
- 2nd place (professional category) logo contest, Railroad Bridge Co., 1994.
- Award of Excellence, 1994 Manhattan Arts International Cover Arts Competition.