



## Triple Threat Burt Young - Actor, Writer, Painter

*In the clearing stands a boxer  
 And a fighter by his trade  
 And he carries the reminders  
 Of ev'ry glove that layed him down  
 Or cut him till he cried out  
 In his anger and his shame  
 "I am leaving, I am leaving"  
 But the fighter still remains*

— Paul Simon, "The Boxer"

**BY JAMIE ELLIN FORBES**

**Ed. Note:** The genius of Paul Simon in describing this character makes you wonder how he comes up with this stuff. How aptly it may or may not describe Burt Young is a good question. A legendary actor with a mile of major credits including all six *Rocky* movies, Burt has seriously delved into painting and writing. We at *Fine Art* first met Burt at Artexpo and were re-acquainted in early 2013 at his studio in Port Washington for Jamie's video interview and a few days later at his very well-attended and exciting art exhibition opening at The Daulphin, right down the street. Burt is a movie star, without doubt, but he carries himself with a gentle meekness that is genuine and endearing. The first thing one notices about him is his kindness. He is a special talent whose art has an energy and vibration all its own.

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JF: It was a girl you say, that started you off in acting and that was after you started painting at the age of 12.

BY: I was pretty lonely and you know when you're feeling lonely, you find a beautiful girl. You figure if you look, this person helps to solve your headaches.

JF: Did it?

BY: It made new ones. (laughs)

BY: When I got nominated for an award I got two telegrams. One... See we had a Bowling Alley me and Frank. One said, 'If you win, mention Vinnie's Hideout.' And the second telegram was "Remember you owe everything to me, Love, Norma"

JF: that's interesting, so it was Norma who was checking up to make sure you remembered her?

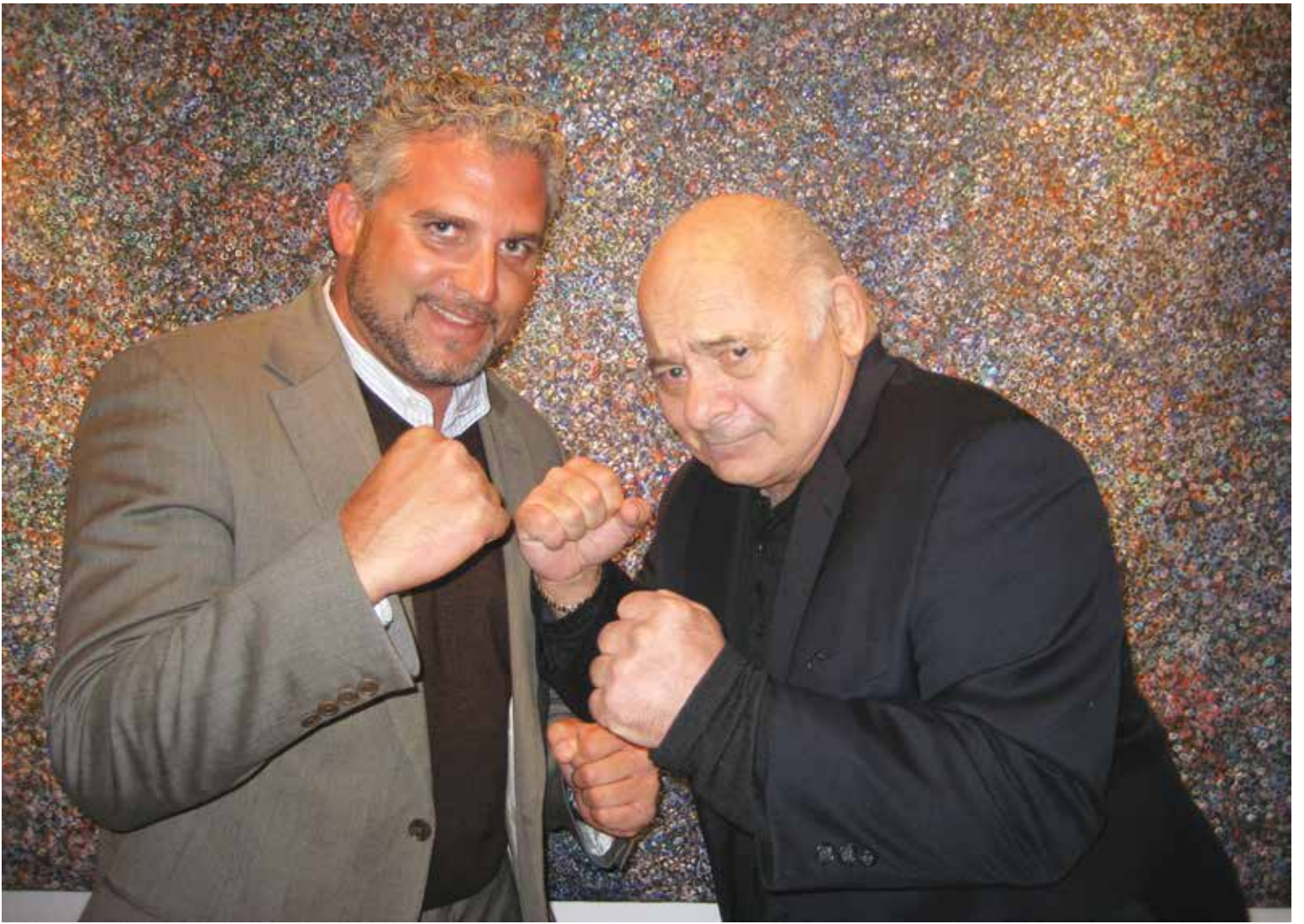
BY: Yeah

JF: So once you got into acting what doors did that open for you? How did that change your life?

BY: It made me able to talk to people. In the old days I wouldn't address anybody if I didn't know you for years. I just was raised very closed-mouth.

JF: Well, your painting is very expressive. So, you had been painting since you were 12. Did the world of acting change your painting, did you develop your personality or what you had to say





Ali-Frazier? No. It's Nick Korniloff -Young Partner | Director | Art Miami LLC - Young







through your painting? Do you think you channeled yourself into your painting?

BY: I think all communications go hand in hand. Whether your an actor, a musician, a poet, a believer. We're all on the same trajectory and where we could all hold hands. Different forms take different forms.

JF: So, as long as people are communicating through their genius talent whether it's acting or dancing or athletics or painting, they're communicating. Do you think it's from their soul or do you think it's just from the intellect or just a combination?

BY: I think it's sensual.

JF: Oh do you really?

BY: Yes I do.

JF: So life feels good to you.

BY: Yeah

JF: So when it feels good and you paint, let's say you have the two blue boxers up there on what almost looks like a Mondrian-type background. The orange and the green and the white and the red gloves are placed strategically within the composition. Does it feel good? Do you know the moment you're done? You feel good when you've made your statement?

BY: A lot of times, I don't know when I'm done. I had a woman... a critic in Montreal once. I don't think much of my work and she said, she's 'pleased that the picture first tells a story before the canvas, during the canvas, and after the canvas.' I was flattered with that, cause that's what it means to me too.

JF: It's about telling the story. It's a story of the heart, the mind,

the combination.

BY: I lend my heart where I can. I let projects or people borrow it.

JF: That's generous. That's very generous.

BY: Very rewarding for me.

JF: The line of your paintings looks to me as if you're accessing another space, a deeper space.

BY: Yeah. We all are, if we leave ourselves alone and don't do too much detriment. I do run pretty deep.

JF: They look to me as if they are a pure statement from an introspective or deeper personal space and they are unfiltered and they take on the shapes and the persona of the space.

BY: See that painting with the boat and the people with the hats?

JF: Yes, oh that's brilliant.

BY: They could be going somewhere, escaping from someplace, or trying to go someplace new. It's a vision of us, the viewer where we place them. I hope they're going someplace new.

JF: I like the way the leaves begin to reach the sky.

BY: That's a portrait of my mom. My momma died when she was 99 and I wanted to paint her, which I have before. I start with the blues, like the color of her eyes. But, then I felt she's always going to be a part of an atmosphere and of the earth's climate and so, I just made the trees sort of defy gravity and lean in an odd way and that's my mom.

JF: That's beautiful. That's beautiful and you grew up in Corona Queens correct?

BY: I was there when I was 15 and a half. Later on, I had a





At Bronx Day honoring Dion (far right), are Danny Aiello, Dominic Chianese, Ed Pinckney, Burt Young and Rita Moreno. Quite a line-up of immortal Bronxites further immortalized with their names inscribed on street signs marking The Bronx Walk of Fame, on the Grand Concourse, just outside the Bronx County Courthouse where the ceremony was held. A long fly ball from Yankee Stadium. Photos above by JAMIE ELLIN FORBES



Burt with Nicholas Kouniloff and Jon Voight.



Burt with Jean Claude and Christo



at right: Burt with Fine Art Editor-in-Chief Victor Forbes at his one-man exhibition opening at the Daulphin book store in Port Washington, Long Island New York.



restaurant in The Bronx on Gun Hill Road.

JF: Oh did you really? That's a nice neighborhood.

BY: For 35 years. We had a big place, a lot of fun. I even did a play there with a friend of mine to bring some more business. *Love Letters*, you ever see *Love Letters*? Two people read and it's quite gorgeous.

JF: Yeah, that is a beautiful one.

BY: It's written so beautifully, any two people can play it. In fact, they are gonna do it here at the local theater, they asked me if I would take an award.

JF: That's a beautiful piece.

BY: Yes it is.

JF: You have an ingenious viewpoint and you have a multitude of talents.

BY: I have a new play. It's called *Artist Found in Port Washington Flat*. I shot a hologram of me, a full-length hologram. A beat-up looking guy. He's the conscience. I come in the theatre and interact with my conscience, who is the hologram.

JF: Yes. Greek theatre had the chorus. They had the other voice.

BY: I don't call him a chorus, he's a... He's a pain in the ass I tell him. He don't change. I'm the one that has to be bright.

JF: So what made you step out of the mold? I'm sure you're different from the community you grew up in. What made you step out of the mold?

BY: I'm a very courageous man.

JF: It takes a lot of courage to step out of the mold.

BY: I'm a fighter... in all ways.

JF: And you have two new paintings upstairs for a poetry book.

BY: Yeah.

JF: That a gentleman from Italy has come in to show you, is that correct?

BY: Yes.

JF: So your pictures are going to be published in that poetry book?

BY: Yeah.

JF: So where do you get the courage from, because it does, it can be very raw to be in the arts and to say to people through your writing or through your acting, through your painting, 'This is who I am.' And you're raw, you're exposed, you're nude, you're on display.

BY: Yeah.

JF: And you seem like you're a very sensitive soul so, how did that work for you?

BY: First of all, I have a wonderful partner. And second, the children, my daughter, her children are great. And I have a pack of friends I have for 60 years. They believed in everything I ever do. And again, I was a great fighter. Even before the marines.

JF: So when did you realize that you had this courage and that you're going to have to step out in life? Was it painting that had shown you that you had something different to offer? What compelled you to step out?

BY: I've been physically fit. I knew I could fight physically. And so it was an early step as a young man. Cause of my neighborhood we all could be scaredy cats. I realized you step to the plate and whatever comes by you can make the most of it. Whatever comes by. You don't have to win at the plate, you don't have to hit a home run, but if you feel the dirt and if you feel the tension, use it.

JF: So, what I was impressed with was your courage, the ability,



I just know how hard it is to be in the arts, but I know people who are in the arts can't do anything else other than be in the arts. They're artists in their heart and their soul. So when they step out the door if they could do anything else as well they would do it, I'm sure. Did you feel any of that when you were developing your writing or painting or your acting?

BY: Back from what you just said. I had the vigor before acting. I had the good fortune of studying with Lee Strasberg. He was my only teacher and mentor so to speak. From the same girl (Norma), she wanted to study with Lee Strasberg. She worked in a bar, she couldn't get in. Lee was one of the foremost, from the actors, still one of the great teachers. So I figured I didn't get in anyways. So I wrote him a letter saying "Dear..." Now I have a memory, I don't make it up. "Dear Lee, if an acting background is a prerequisite read no further. Hello, if you're still with me, acting, none, but life credits been... a first (?), b homicide inducement, c. for assault, very flighty." and I said "Seriously Lee, I don't know if acting as anything for me or vice versa, but I'm treading water. See me." So he called me to his apartment in Central Park West. By now I knew he had Marlin Brando, Marilyn Monroe. Knew I knew about him to find out how to reach him. So in those days I didn't talk at all. So he sits me down and he's trying to probe me and I'm answering one-syllable answers. I go "yeah", just go "yeah" "no" "yeah." He says, "I don't think you can be an actor," he says to me. So I get up and leave. He slams the table. He says, "Sit down, I never saw such tension in a man's face."

JF: Oh, that's interesting.

BY: "But, I feel you're an emotional library." He says, "Will you work with me?" and I grunted "yeah." And I never stopped.

JF: That's quite a story that's amazing. So your chemistry for life, your ingenious qualities just attracted you to all these other rare geniuses to get out what you had to get out I would imagine.

BY: Lisa included.