

GANDY BRODIE

MEMORIAL SERVICE

The New School, New York

November 10, 1975

Stanley Plastrik:

We begin our program with a recording of Gandy singing with Billie Holiday. I think it is the right note.

Friends, we've come here to talk about our friend, Gandy. Each of us knew him in a very different way. I and my family, for example, knew Gandy primarily as a superb teacher, and we shall forever be grateful to him for introducing our sons to the world of art. Others knew him in different ways. Some knew him as, how shall I say, in difficulty because like all of us Gandy was not always an easy person. But we remember him in our own ways and we all have in common the feeling about Gandy that this was a great, warm, human personality and a great creative artist. I think of him as one of the most spontaneously generous persons whom I ever knew. I recall some years ago admiring a new tie which I found attractive that he was wearing. Before I could say a word he had whipped it off and wrapped it around my neck and insisted that I take it. I still have that tie.

We are offering a simple and brief program today. The kind of program we feel that Gandy himself would have enjoyed. We have a list of speakers and we have some music because you know, of course, that Gandy was particularly attached to the world of music. Our first speaker is a sculptor and long-time friend of Gandy's, Isaac Witkin. I call upon Mr. Witkin to come to speak to us.

Isaac Witkin:

I knew Gandy for only a short period of time. Barely six months in fact -- but so profound was the impression he made on me that I lament his departure as if I had known him all my life.

People who knew Gandy went to describe their first meeting with him as a momentous event, which in some way radically changed the course of their lives. I am no exception to this.

Our first meeting was accompanied by a healthy degree of mutual suspicion culminating in a ten-hour discourse on the art of sculpture in which he methodically challenged my carefully cultivated sense of quality. Many of his postulations seemed outrageous to me at the time; I was surprised that someone had managed to outrage me again after all these years. I realized then that I had found a new teacher -- one with whom I could test and challenge every new idea and creative impulse.

Ours was certainly not a mutual admiration society in the beginning; we confessed our reservations about each other's work based on the few examples we had seen. My own work was undergoing a period of change and my many conversations with Gandy seemed to clarify the new direction I was taking. By the time he saw my work again it had moved closer to his own vision of sculpture, and he embraced it readily.

His support became a source of inspiration and I was overcome with a feeling of well-being at having discovered an artistic brother with whom I could share my love of art.

The ordeal still remained for me to see his work with which I was barely acquainted. A meeting was set to visit his studio in Newfane and I was filled with apprehension in case I did not like what I saw. I wanted so much to like his work but my first obligation was to be true to my responses.

I spent several hours looking at his works and slowly -- very slowly -- their beauty revealed itself to me. These were stubbornly resistant paintings -- put-off-making in their refusal to ingratiate themselves and to locate readily in one's experience. These were potatoes rather than flowers and their deep earthiness was born out of a true style. A style that continually aspires to efface itself (to quote Rodin) in order to express the essential nature of his subject matter. These paintings are imbued with a struggle to break down objective appearances -- to paint what cannot be seen while leaving the whole history of the pictures' evolution intact.

To describe Gandy as a teacher, I can think of no better way to stress his effectiveness than to recall his recent lecture to Bennington College sculpture students. In all my ten years of teaching in this institution I have never witnessed an applause given such as was given to Gandy at the end of his lecture.

He was a natural teacher who regarded teaching not as a chore but as an essential aspect of his creative endeavor. He had the rare ability to address himself to every individual student and to make them value and believe in who they were. There was no way any student of his could hide or avoid interaction. His method would ferret out the most meek and reticent and force him to react.

He never gave orders or laid down the law. Instead he would get people thinking along paths that would inevitably lead them to intuit with their own sensibilities and vision, while imparting to them a sense of quality and level with all the conviction of a true believer.

Gandy's vision of art was in opposition to the concept of modernism in all its superficial manifestations. This was not to say, however, that he was a reactionary or that he hated modern art. On the contrary, he loved the art of this century more than any other. He reacted to the narrow concept of Art History that did not embrace the whole panorama of artistic experience from Paleolithic art to Mondrian and Pollock, and insisted that he would rather look like Cézanne than Picasso. His vision was a full blown organic one deeply rooted in sensual and tactile nature.

Though immensely informed and sophisticated he retained the exuberance of an innocent.

His work speaks for itself and his influence is already spreading. I'm deeply sorry he's not around to see it happen. He was a rare bird and I miss him.

Stanley Plastrik:

I don't know how many hundreds, even thousands of students of Gandy's there are around, but our next speaker, Burke Richardson, will address us speaking for Gandy's students. Mr. Richardson was one of his most recent students.

Burke Richardson:

All of us who studied with Gandy feel a rare and intimate glimpse into the strivings of the creative artist. That artist being Gandy and the artist within us all that he so gently urged and aroused. He as a teacher could choose any group of people as an audience and any situation as his forum. He had the ability and confidence to relate his unique ideas with such clarity that no matter how large the class you felt he was speaking directly to you. In essence he was, because he had such a personal attachment to each of his students and each of us to him. So, I have a few thoughts from some other students because no one student of Gandy could ever express the whole feeling of love and admiration we have for the man.

One student says, O.K. off the top of my head remarkable things about Gandy Brodie. His directness, almost disarming at first. He trusted his intuition about a person. He always seemed to demand confrontations in his relationship. It's like he needed to get to the nitty gritty right away. He always demanded that one made decisions and be able to articulate those decisions about one's work, one's self. How can you not trust a person who makes it clear that he is

benefiting as much from a relationship with you as vice versa? Gandy frequently paid me, and I think most of his students, the utmost compliment by indicating that I had really taught him something valuable which he could use in his life and work.

He was a phenomenal person. You never knew what to expect. Time spent with him was fraught with expectation, disbelief, admiration, anger, tenderness, exasperation and always a pervading sense of humor. A lot of what he taught me or confirmed in me had to deal with the potential of life out of death, growth out of pain, success out of failure, the synthesizing of opposites and extremes, romantic and classical, intuition and intellect, sickness and health, risk and restraint. Towards the end, that what you see in a person and in a painting comes a spectrum of energy that causes a whole.

Another student wrote Gandy a note several months ago on the back of a painting. This is the note that she wrote: "Gandy, I would like to give you this little drawing. I know it's not such a good idea. Richard told me of someone giving their painting to you as a gift and you used the canvas. But as this is just a little piece of paper and chalk, I'm not worried. I could/can never return to you all that I have learned from you. All the love, guidance you have given me could/can never be returned to you by love or words or money or drawing. But as you look at this and make one of your critical Gandy looks, you see how you have influenced me. My life is here to be seen."

As former students of Gandy Brodie's, we've all reserved a place in our consciousness for what we've learned from Gandy and what we feel for Gandy. He's left his paintings, his writing and his singing as testament of his life's work.

The wisdom he passed on to us is something that will forever challenge our life's work.

Stanley Plastrik: Our next speaker is Elaine de Kooning, artist, art critic and art teacher.

Elaine de Kooning: I first met Gandy in 1951. He heard I was in a wheelchair with a broken leg and he offered to wheel me to galleries and museums. We went to Joan Mitchell's first one-man show at the New Gallery. I had a plastic cast up to my hip and had to hop in and out of cabs on one foot, while Gandy would manage the chair for me. We had quite a routine worked out. Stairs were a big problem demanding total concentration and all the time Gandy would be pouring out a running commentary on Cézanne or Rembrandt while I was just trying to keep my

balance.

From the moment we met we seemed to be continuing a conversation begun ten years before. There was never any small talk. Our discussions were always rooted in decades or centuries, rarely the current scene (for which Gandy usually had the greatest contempt). He did have his key figures among contemporaries - Rothko, Kline, de Kooning, Pollock, Gorky, but always in relation to giants of the past, Cézanne, Rouault, Soutine, Rembrandt. Often when I met Gandy, he'd be carrying one of his own paintings. It was inevitably a one-man show packed into one painting. Gandy worked over his paintings endlessly, adding layer to layer as one concept engulfed another. As his impastos built up, his images were pared down, sometimes almost to the point of invisibility. His surfaces and colors were always dense, compressed, worked-over. You could see his love for Rouault and for Ryder in the way that he groped for his forms and closed up the space. He worked over certain of his paintings for years. His method was both additive and reductive. His work had a tremendous intensity. I remember a crucifixion that he made in the early 50's. I saw it at the old Tanager Gallery on Tenth Street. It's almost impossible to paint an authentic crucifixion in the twentieth century, but he did. It wasn't an assumed sentiment. The feeling about the subject came through in the way he painted it - forged it.

Gandy was not a restful person to be with. He bristled with impassioned opinions on every subject. I went to the movies with him a couple of times - entertaining, trivial, Hollywood films made to be seen and instantly forgotten, but not for Gandy. Afterwards, when we were talking about the movies, it was as though we were discussing War and Peace or The Brothers Karamazov. Gandy wouldn't let anything pass through his consciousness without thinking about it. I sometimes used to think he thought too much. He never relaxed. He forced me to have opinions on subjects I didn't feel it necessary to have opinions about. Is that or is that not a beautiful ashtray or sunset? It was exhausting, but it was invigorating.

When I painted his portrait three or four years ago through a stream of Gandy's consciousness, his way of thinking affected my way of painting. It was irresistible. I had to struggle to get my own ideas down on canvas past Gandy's ideas. But his ideas got onto the canvas anyhow. They became part of the portrait. Even Gandy's clothes seemed to have opinions. His jacket, the blue hat he was wearing. Gandy's ideas and opinions had force, momentum. When we were both teaching at Carnegie-Mellon in '67, I was fascinated by how he got through to his students. Someone would show him some confused, chaotic canvas and

Gandy would begin talking about Grünewald or Rembrandt. He'd take off. He lifted the level of consciousness, and the students would somehow flounder after him. They'd be confused, but sometimes doors were opened. For a few of the more responsive ones, their lives were changed because Gandy walked through. I feel that way about my life. I got a lot from Gandy; he was generous, he was intense; he was vulnerable; he was brave, very brave. He was also full of fun, full of life. When one of his students, Dick Meyer, called to tell me about Gandy's death, I felt it's not fair. All that energy, all that humanity. But, of course, he left it behind for us in all that work.

Stanley Plastrik:

To our next speaker I personally shall forever be in his debt because among the many things that he has done for me is that he introduced me and my family to Gandy and his family. May I ask Meyer Schapiro to come up here now.

Meyer Schapiro:

Hearing those who have talked before me, I am so touched by the examples they have given of what was genuinely Gandy that although I knew him for almost thirty years, I feel inadequate in telling of my own experience of Gandy.

I met him around 1946 or '47 when he came to my door and rang my doorbell. I hadn't heard of him at all. He wanted me to look at some pictures of his, some drawings and one or two paintings; we became close friends through that meeting. I loved his work. It seemed to me of the best by painters of his age, his generation; I was impressed particularly by the fact that he was entirely self-taught, and in an innocent and aspiring way, in a manner that the French call "primaire" with an air of condescension to those who have not learned through teachers and schools, who have no diplomas or degrees. But Gandy's self-education runs, of course, through all you have heard about him; he was a witness to the power of the human being with an authentic thirst for knowledge and love of the beautiful and with a sense of the imaginative, stirring and pure in ideas to achieve an insight and truth sometimes beyond that of better instructed people.

I don't think it's necessary to praise Gandy as an artist to this gathering; you all know his work. Yet, I believe that this work is not really known sufficiently. When properly exhibited in its whole range, I even think it will surprise most of you and will appear stronger and deeper, and more moving than has been recognized. While his paintings

make us aware of his personality, what was most responsive, delicate and humane in his nature might have escaped the notice of some who knew him without having seen his work intimately and in its fullness. I think of his art as a bearer of his nature in a deeper way than can be guessed from what is said about it.

Characteristic of Gandy and most essential in his self-awareness as well as in his vision of nature was his haunted sense of the fragility and solitude of living things. He saw the surroundings of the city world as dark, hard and burdensome, as in his pictures of the tenements, of gloomy buildings, while cherishing at the same time what was young, fresh, growing and aspiring in his surroundings. He chose, in fidelity to those feelings and to a poetic attraction, to picture strange, dark slum walls and strata of hard rock, but also the little bird, the eggs in the nest, the young deer, the fallen branch, the wilted flower, in a long patient effort to realize their mysterious qualities through a painted surface which is as material and as exposed to time as the objects themselves. I do not hesitate to speak about the choice of subjects because as Baudelaire wrote many years ago: "the choice of the subject is half the work of a true artist". It has a significance, a resonance of its own and in the process of art it generates much that we value as pure form or color without attention to the theme itself. But when known more intimately, the qualities of the subject reveal to us how an artist is moved and grows. Gandy's were a commitment very far from the trends of the artists around him; they made his work seem to many observers untimely, refractory, even eccentric in this clamorous often dogmatic world of the art of our day. He never cut himself off, however, from that art. He felt himself very much a part of it, and was keenly attentive to what was going on around him, while holding in a most convinced and stubborn way to his own perceptions and goals, sustained by his loving knowledge of great art that had outlived the fashions of its time. He responded with joy and reverence to whatever in human life and nature, as well as art, satisfied his longing for a purer, more authentic existence. A brooding soul, painfully conscious of the incomplete, the struggling, the antagonistic and destructive in human beings and most of all in himself, he strove to surmount these, with a dolorous feeling of his own weakness. He sought redemption through both his art and his tender concern for the young -- his family and his students. He knew, and how well, the ravages of egoism in his own soul and was all the more deeply moved by the selfless in art, in music, in poetry, in thought, in spiritual life in general, above all in love and friendship.

Very early when I first met him, he yearned for the noble in art as a



model of self-transcendence. Of this personal goal his art, I believe, is a true fulfillment.

Stanley Plastrik:

The sculptor, Oded Halahmy was, I believe, the last friend of Gandy's to spend some time with him. He will speak to us now. Mr. Halahmy:

Oded Halahmy:

My dear friends: Gandy was a very dear friend to me; he will remain very dear. He left us, but we will continue to follow the wisdom we all learned from him. Gandy's tradition was a spoken one; he listened and spoke. We, too, can pass on his words that we heard.

The day he left me he asked that I teach him three crucial words in Hebrew. The words were:

AHAVAH (Love), AVODAH (Work), and CHOCHMAH (Knowledge)

With those words, he felt he could understand.

Though we will all miss his physical presence, the wonder of Gandy's intense, poetic spirit will remain in all of us who knew and loved him.

Thank you.

Stanley Plastrik:

Fred Sherry has known or knew Gandy since the age of five and was a long-devoted friend. He will play some cello pieces as his part in this program. Mr. Sherry ---

Fred Sherry:

I am going to play Stravinsky's Elegy and a prelude from a Bach suite.

Stanley Plastrik:

We all know the intensity of Gandy's relations with children and with the world of poetry. Our next speaker, a teacher and a poet is Richard Lewis, who is going to talk to us on that subject. Mr. Lewis --

Richard Lewis:

One of the last remarks I remember Gandy saying last summer about his paintings was his desire to paint 'elemental' things. I was particularly moved by this statement -- for it seemed to me that he had made a kind of peace between Gandy the poet and Gandy the artist. Gandy would thrive on the resources of language -- much of what he was saying on its own being a flush of brilliantly poetical insight that sometimes teetered on the edge of describing his paintings away. To me, what was important was the painting -- be it a gull, a dead bird, a tenement, the birth of a fawn or a fallen tree. It was in these things that Gandy was a poet -- not in the traditional sense of one who creates poetry through the written word -- but in the final transformation in which his words eventually found their expression in paint -- creating those images, which in a poetical way, were of a life which only the painting could convey.

He was a poet sharing the universals of poetry with us -- condensing from complexity the sharpness and distinctiveness of a single image which suggested to the viewer a poetry we perhaps all inhabit.

Gandy loved to play -- and in this he had the gift to be wonderfully alive to the spontaneous. My own children remember him for the clown he could be, the song and dance man who carried them standing on his feet around the kitchen table. He seemed to juggle sense and nonsense, to be somewhere in the child's daring and the child's wisdom. He was a poet who could take any thing and make it sound like something. In this he had the gift to be, in the best sense, 'elemental'.

One of his favorite poets was a girl who was only five years old named Hillary Anne Farley. Her words were about elemental things -- not so much as Gandy painted them, but as Gandy, the man, could immerse himself and delight in them. These poems by Hillary were a child's vision -- which encompassed what Gandy seemed to be saying in one way or another to us -- the need of expression -- to express.

#### SUN GOES UP

I love the juice, but the sun goes up; I see the stars

And the moonstar goes up,

And there always goes today. And the sun

Loves people. But one always dies.  
Dogs will die very sooner  
Than mummies and daddies and sisters and  
brothers because  
They'll not die till a hundred and  
Because I love them dearly.

THIS IS A POEM

This is a poem about god looks after things:  
He looks after lions, mooses and reindeer and tigers,  
Anything that dies,  
and mans and little girls when they get to be old,  
and mothers he can look after,  
and god can look after many old things,  
That's why I do this.

Gandy was also fond of a number of Eskimo poems -- and one which' I  
came across yesterday reminded me very much of him -- for this reason  
I would like to read it. It is entitled DANCE SONG.

My song, that one, it begins to want to come out,  
It begins to want to go out to my companions, there  
being a request for singing,  
There being a request for dancing.

My song, that one, it only, it also comes back, that one,  
my companions.

Asking to be made happy.

Point Hope, Alaska

Gandy admired Dylan Thomas's poem IN MY CRAFT OR SULLEN ART as well as THE FOUR QUARTETS of T.S. Eliot's -- which I remember him reading to himself in his studio in Newfane. He wrote some poems himself -- one, which I would like to read -- for him.

When pretence  
No longer pretends to  
be a diver  
And there is no air  
To be shared among the  
Unnaturalness of my  
hateful dwarf  
I shall return to the city  
of simple splendor and  
Lay my head on a wreath  
of stone  
I have never asked God a  
Favor he would not have

granted otherwise  
It is too much to hold Spring  
on a leash  
And parade in the smallness  
of men.

(1955)

DGenuine poetry is not born easily. It is nurtured within the conflicts of place and time and human frailty. Like Gandy's own manner of painting, it becomes itself after a labor of choosing and refinement -- an urgent reassembling before it is fully visible -- fully formed and alive. Gandy Brodie brought us such poetry -- and it more often than not speaks of his desire for 'elemental' things. It is the poetry of a man who was a painter -- and who, I believe, caught the deepest responses of the man to himself and to his world. For this kind of generosity -- for this kind of poetry -- I, for one, am grateful. His friendship, his teaching and his art -- truly mattered.

Stanley Plastrik:

What could be more in place to end our program than for us to hear a recording of a song composed by Gandy, in which he plays the piano and sings. The title of the song is "The Singing of the Spheres".

We awake, the dawn will speak of love

Our arms will but abide when we awake

the heavens up above

No longer have to hide for we have

found the reason to be young

Rhyme for being here and we have found  
a song that can be sung through every  
tear.

And now we make a vow that has no words  
The words are banished with our eyes

Now we hear the singing of the spheres  
within our very sighs

Oh we have found a love that is so firm  
that never fades

It's no mistake

There'll be no reason left to yearn  
When we awake

When we awake, the dawn will speak of love

Our hearts can but abide

When we awake the heavens up above

No longer have to hide

For we have found the reason to be young

Rhyme for being here

And we have found a song that can be sung

Through every tear

And now we make a vow that has no word

The words are banished with our eyes

Now we hear the singing of the spheres

Within our very sighs

We have found a love that is so firm

That never fades -- it's no mistake

There'll be no reason left to yearn

When we awake

When we awake

When we awake