

Preface



Would we be looking at Lotte Lehmann's art if it were done by anyone else? Probably not. And she'd be the first to admit, as she said to me in a 1972 interview, that she wasn't a particularly good artist, though she said in her farewell recital that she considered herself "definitely an artist." She also said it gave her great satisfaction; she needed to be creative.

In Lehmann's first career she'd found creating characters on the opera stage allowed her imagination to become the person that she was singing. That might be easier for an actor who is speaking but is tricky with the voice of

an opera singer sailing over the orchestra and filling the hall without amplification. Lehmann was a great singing actor.

In her second career, as a recitalist, Lehmann accepted the challenge of presenting art songs as miniature dramas, with all the story-telling possibilities found in an opera role. The concentration of the time frame, lack of sets, props, and costumes only added to the challenge of convincing the audience of the import of the poetry carried on the shoulders of the singer and pianist. Every aspect of the body, but as she emphasized, the eyes could do so much to convey



meaning. Lehmann's involvement as a singing actress was thus experienced by every member of a recital audience.

Lehmann was to take her opera and Lieder experience into her third career, teaching interpretation. She always emphasized that she was not a vocal teacher, though her students often received hints that they appreciated. No, that tricky word "interpretation" was the focus of her teaching, whether in master classes before large sophisticated audiences, or in the private lessons of her living room. And these classes and lessons resulted in preparing a whole

generation of successful opera and recital performers. You can see and hear Lehmann teaching both opera and art song in Volumes III–V of this series.

So, Lehmann's fourth career could be seen in a variety of creative outlets. She wrote her autobiography, pedagogical books, a novel, a fantasy story, and books of poetry. And she painted, drew, worked in mosaics, ceramics, tiles, cartoons, and bits of felt. The last-mentioned seemed her invention and she spoke often about those creations. Her cartoons may have provided her the most fun, often depicting students, friends, or even opera characters at their most vulnerable.

This artistic creative world, then, is the subject of this eighth volume in the series. Lehmann might have been embarrassed by it, but it helps round out the whole person and, whether great art or not, is part of her legacy.

Here's what she wrote about herself in her [*Of Heaven, Hell & Hollywood*](#) in the words of Caruso while he painted caricatures in Heaven: "...be sure to avoid Lotte Lehmann who would certainly try to paint me, and God forbid, nobody would recognize that portrait."

Lehmann writes a self-portrait in that same piece:

...surrounded by easels and collections of oil and watercolors. She was absorbed in her work and did not notice me until I went right up to her. She smelled dreadfully of turpentine. Her painting smock was repulsively dirty—even for a painter. She was surrounded by her pets—she must have gotten a special permit to keep them with her... "Hello," she answered absentmindedly, "the light is not very good to-day, I can't obviously get these clouds right—or do you think they are good?" They weren't, and I said so. She threw me a haughty glance and said: "You don't understand a thing. This is intentional. No one has to know that these are clouds, it is quite enough that I know it. And, please get out of my clay, you are spoiling all my pots." Then I saw that the weird figures around her were also samples of her art. Ceramics, God help her! [At the point that the narrator of the piece praises her Sieglinde, Lehmann replies:] "Yes, perhaps; but this is my real vocation. Through all my incarnations I have been developing as a painter. Don't let's talk about singing. I get stage fright at the mere mention of it." [She asks him to leave so she can concentrate.] "No one is supposed to steal my time trying to chat with me. Frances has a workshop beside me. She paints and makes pots and you can be sure she builds houses and hammers and saws like crazy."

You'll see from the table of contents that Lehmann's art interests often followed her professional musical career. There's a whole chapter inspired by opera roles and you'll see several that are based on the poetry from song cycles. Her other inspiration came from the faces of friends, family, famous conductors or composers.

When I visited Lehmann in the home she shared with Frances Holden there was ample evidence of her art. That's why you'll find a chapter devoted to photos of Lehmann's art as it was found throughout their house. Missing are photos of the tiles that marked each step of the staircase. All of this art activity could not have been accomplished without the support of Frances. And I don't mean just moral support. No, Frances was active in helping Lehmann's projects: firing tiles in the kilns, building frames, and hanging the artwork. There was constant work to be done and Frances seemed to love doing it.

Dr. Herman Schornstein, a personal friend of both women, recently wrote me:

The yard was also “cluttered with art” –a tile of Marian Anderson among others, over the outdoor fireplace. And also the fountain (which Frances must have made) had tiles embedded. Behind the garage/workshop was an abandoned dog house with tiles of dogs over the entrance. Frances also fired items. I admired a clunky but iridescent glazed ashtray in the second living room. Months later when [their friend] Haldor was visiting and we were chatting in the living room she picked it up and gave it to him. “I made this. Would you like it?” He’d never said anything about it. And wasn’t a smoker. Frances also did sketches and watercolors. I hinted, with similar success, about liking to have one of them. She said they weren’t of sufficient quality. She was also critical that too much went to the [Lotte Lehmann Archive at UCSB], without regard for quality. [Regarding the two kilns] Frances said to me “Lehmann just couldn’t bare waiting to see the results and ‘didn’t understand’ (which I doubt) the lengthy clay firing and cooling process so Frances ‘had to’ buy a second kiln.

This assemblage of Lehmann’s artistic endeavors doesn’t claim to be complete. Many of her pieces were given to friends and students; she did sell works in exhibitions, and many larger works are stored at Special Collections of the UCSB Library. Since I plan to update this volume, if you have a Lehmann artwork, please photograph it and email it to me at dengar@hawaii.rr.com

I will of course credit anyone who can send such additions.



Epilogue

As I finish this multi-volume and something over a five-year effort on behalf of Lehmann's legacy, it's become clear to me that I've been afforded the honorable task of working in this medium that allows for audio, video, and certainly lots of photographic representation of Mme Lehmann's art. And yes, Madame is what I called her, what we all called her. She was still a vivid and visible presence at the Music Academy of the West when I was there to study double bass in 1961. Lehmann appeared at the dress rehearsal (and probably performances) of the MAW operas and the last master classes of the season in opera and art song given by her excellent successor, Martial Singher. After all, she was one of the founders of the institution and was proud of what it continued to accomplish.

Since these books have amply covered her life and legacy, what I want to mention now is her continued imprint on me as I've produced these presentations. When I've made an artistic or even a mundane decision, there's always been a small but potent voice that asks, "Would Mme Lehmann approve of this?"

Am I trying to please or impress her? In some way, yes. But on the more important artistic level, though I do admit to hoping to attain some of the same high standards to which she aspired, I want my work to represent the best that we can both offer.

Finally, though this series is at an end, I can still enjoy Lehmann's recordings, her books, and try to emulate the demanding, active, creative, and productive life that she has so clearly demonstrated. I admit to some degree of nostalgia: seeing the photos of her home where I watched her teach, reviewing the artwork that I viewed on my visits there, hearing her speaking voice in my radio interviews with her, all these and more mark my association with this strong personality. The young singer whom I drove to private lessons with Lehmann has recently died. So have many other of Lehmann's students; those who live on are now retired and many have even stopped teaching. Beyond nostalgia then, it is my hope that these presentations will demonstrate Lehmann's art, teaching, and creative energy for many years.