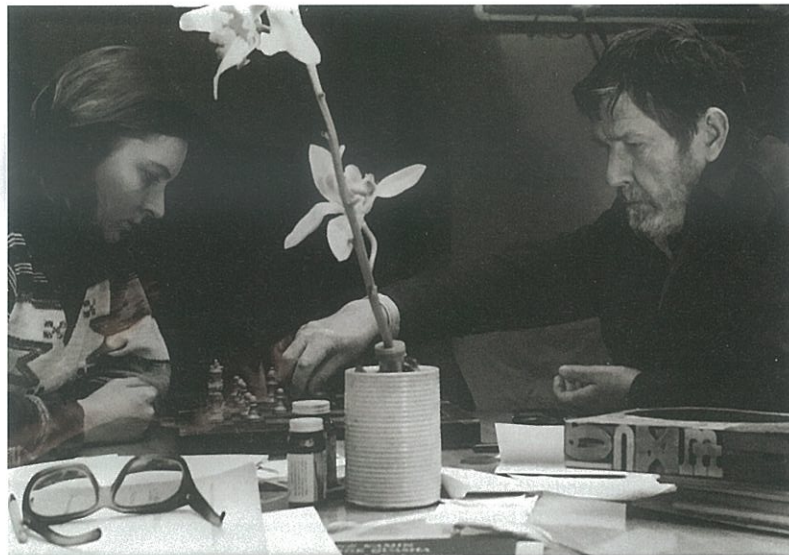


Joan La Barbara



John Cage and Joan La Barbara
playing chess, 1976

Courtesy
Joan La Barbara; photograph:
Michael McKenzie

What images keep you company in the space where you work?

Three '73 POEMS' lithographs (1992–93) by Kenneth Goldsmith and the hand-drawn title page; *The Heart of the Matter*, a photographic print by Meridel Rubenstein; photographs of my son and our current and past dogs and cats; concert posters; some of my scores; a photo from 1976 of John Cage and I playing chess before a rehearsal in his West Village loft on Bank Street; a vintage photo of Charles Dodge, Morty Feldman and Mort Subotnick that I call 'two storytellers and a *goy*', for obvious reasons (if you saw the photo, you'd understand); *the aloneness*, a print by Leslie Schneider, a college friend, from 1966; two stained-glass pieces that my son, Jacob, made for me in high school; a *retablo* from New Mexico with lots of wild musicians and dancers in masks; two drawings by Stephan von Huene; two charcoal drawings by Irving Petlin; *Voice Within a Voice I*, a painting by Anthony Martin; a painting by Jerry West; a painting by my stepson Steven Subotnick; a red-and-yellow wooden carved folk-art snake; a rug that used to hang in my father's office; and lots of plants.

What was the first piece of art that really mattered to you?
I recall being fascinated by Salvador Dali's *The Persistence of Memory* (1931) when I saw it as a child in the Philadelphia

Museum of Art. It must have been on loan for a special exhibition as now it is in the collection of MoMA, New York. In 2012, I wrote a concert work that I called *Persistence of Memory*. I had actually forgotten that was the title of the Dali melting-clocks-in-the-desert work. My composition juxtaposed sounds of cataclysmic events, remembered, captured, re-created by instruments, voice and samplers: car crashes, avalanches, severe weather, the crack in the space-time continuum. Maybe it reflected a recollection of the Dali work without my being conscious of it.

The elongated figures by El Greco were influential in high school; I saw them while on a trip to Europe. Francisco de Goya's 'The Disasters of War' series (1810–20) also greatly affected me when I saw it in Madrid.

If you could live with only one piece of art, what would it be?

Agnes Martin's minimalist works from the early to mid-1960s. I have a beautiful, well-worn and well-used catalogue from her exhibition 'KUNSTRAUM München, 20. November – 22. Dezember 1973' that I look at often. It sits on a shelf in my studio along with a number of art books that are important to me.

In 2011, I realized a long-held dream of composing an orchestral work inspired by these drawings. For *in solitude this fear is lived*, I placed the musicians of

the American Composers Orchestra around and in the audience, immersing the spectators in the centre of the orchestra to create my 'sound painting', beginning with a wash of wind sounds (prepping the 'canvas'), then creating the 'drawing' one note, one stroke, one sound gesture at a time until the living 'painting' was completed, breathing and soaring over the audience. It has been played only once. I would love to have it played again.

What is your favourite title of an artwork?

Guernica (1937) by Pablo Picasso.

What do you wish you knew?

Physics.

What should change?

Religious obsessions.

What should stay the same?

Love for all beings. Random acts of kindness.

What could you imagine doing if you didn't do what you do?

Architecture or painting.

What music are you listening to?

I'm a musician; I like silence.

I'm currently working on a choral piece (a commission from the Young People's Chorus of New York) remembering and honouring the young girls of Chibok, Nigeria, who were kidnapped because they were going to school, developing their minds, dreaming of futures now lost.

What are you reading?

The Blind Watchmaker by Richard Dawkins (W.W. Norton & Co., 1996 edition); *Take Up*

the Bodies by Herbert Blau (University of Illinois Press, 1982); *Six Plays by Lillian Hellman* (Vintage Books Edition, October 1979); *Moonwalking with Einstein* by Joshua Foer (Penguin Books, 2011).

What do you like the look of?

Snowfall; my son's face; my dog smiling (she's a Samoyed, they smile); the Manhattan skyline; Calla lilies.

Joan La Barbara is an American composer, musician and sound artist known for her experimentation in extended vocal techniques. She is the recipient of the 2016 John Cage Award. Since the mid-1970s, La Barbara has performed and recorded with composers such as John Cage, Philip Glass and Steve Reich, and jazz artists Jim Hall, Hubert Laws and Enrico Rava. She has collaborated with artists including Matthew Barney, Judy Chicago, Kenneth Goldsmith, Christian Marclay, Bruce Nauman and Lawrence Weiner. In 2008, La Barbara was awarded the American Music Center's Letter of Distinction for significant contributions to the field of contemporary American music. Her work will be included in the exhibition 'THIS IS A VOICE' at the Wellcome Collection, London, UK, from 14 April to 31 July, and she will appear at the Royal Opera House and perform at Café Oto, London, in April.