

## Honoring the Artist: Cornelia Foss



This week's cover artist, Cornelia Foss, is one of those people you love to be with. Not only does her casual demeanor make you feel comfortable, but also her give-and-take is filled with intellectual insight and emotional honesty. There's none of that subtle (or unsubtle) arrogance attributed to other artists with her outstanding reputation. She's your confidant and friend, sister and mother.

**Q:** I know you like being out here, away from New York, enjoying your home and garden in the summer. So what's doing around the house?

**A:** Oh, my life is boring here. I do errands, paint, and have friends for dinner. That's it. Oh yes, we did have some excitement the other day: our dog Rufus got lost. He's 16 years old, and this has never happened.

My husband and son took a walk, and the dog was following them, which they didn't realize. Anyway, he was running down Lumber Lane, dodging cars, and thank goodness some family stopped and picked him up. They even took him to the vet to see if he was OK. Some people are so nice.

**Q:** What a relief for you. Otherwise, things are calm, eh? Maybe that's why you always seem so positive about your life.

**A:** Well, there's no such thing as an easy life. If it weren't for one difficulty, it would be another difficulty.

**Q:** What is it about you that make things a bit difficult? Some personal habit?

**A:** I worry. Have you ever had a tune in your head, and you can't get it out of your mind? That's me. I sing "Happy Birthday" to forget it. But there are other things I can't easily forget about. Like a painting I'm doing or what I'm going to make for the first course at dinner.

**Q:** In those cases, what do you do to stop worrying?

**A:** I do my favorite thing, paint. If I don't get to paint, I get grouchy and irritated.

**Q:** Speaking of painting, do you think that people are born with talent?

**A:** I don't believe in talent. Painting is learnable and teachable. I can't teach people to be great artists, but I can teach them to be good artists. Cezanne had no talent whatsoever. But he was obsessed with painting and invented a whole new art form. Arnold Schoenberg said, "Genius is the ability to develop."

**Q:** Your teaching experience at the Art Students League and the National Academy has obviously helped form these opinions. Have you ever learned things from your students?

**A:** I'm still leaning things from them; it's inspiring. And it's astonishing what they can learn, too, especially when I look at their faces when they're painting.

**Q:** Besides not believing in talent, what one thing do you believe in?

**A:** I'm madly in love with brush strokes, even though Realism is popular today.

**Q:** What else do you believe in?

**A:** I believe in luck. It's amazing; some people have an interesting childhood and interesting parents and still have bad luck.

**Q:** But you had a special childhood and special parents and certainly good luck.

**A:** Yes. I was lucky. I grew up in Italy and then when I was six, we moved to Berlin. Then we went to St. Louis where my farther had a teaching position at Washington University in Greek and Roman Archeology. After awhile, we moved to New York where he taught at Columbia.

**Q:** And the best luck, if I may say so, was meeting Lukas, your future husband, in Italy.

**A:** You bet.

- Marion Wolberg Weiss

Ms. Foss work can be seen at the Elaine Benson Gallery in the Southampton Inn until Aug. 19 and at DFN Gallery in New York. (212-334-3400)