

# The Welcoming Front Porch of the Archdiocese

An Interview with William R. Biddle, Executive Consultant, The Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Center for Thought & Culture

**EDITORS' NOTE** Before assuming his current role, William "Bill" Biddle joined the Tilles Center at Long Island University in 2016 and has almost 30 years of experience as an executive director leading artistic and financially successful performing arts facilities and presenting and producing in the arts. The geographic scope of his career spans from metro Detroit to Hampton Roads, Virginia to Long Island, New York. Biddle has presented more than 1,500 diverse performances and educational residencies, including Andrea Bocelli, Blue Man Group, New York Philharmonic, John Legend, Harry Connick, Jr, David Copperfield, and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. His programs have sold more than \$90 million in tickets, and fundraising totals more than \$70 million. During his tenure at the Tilles Center, Biddle successfully placed the Tilles Center on a financially sustainable path and raised private funds to renovate both theatres in the complex. Prior to leading the Tilles Center team, Biddle was the inaugural executive director of the award-winning, I.M. Pei designed, Ferguson Center for the Arts at Christopher Newport University in Hampton Roads, Virginia. A frequent winner of the Virginia Living Magazine's "Best of Virginia," the Ferguson Center sold more than \$30 million in tickets and more than two million patrons passed through its doors under Biddle's direction. Biddle has served in various leadership capacities with many professional and community-based organizations. He has served as a principal grant evaluator for state and regional arts organizations and is a consultant to national performing arts organizations. He has co-produced national Broadway tours and has been nominated and received numerous awards for excellence in the arts throughout his career. Originally from Salem, New Jersey, he received his education in theater and production management from Rowan University and as a professional theater program fellow received his Masters from the University of Michigan. In addition, Biddle is a graduate of the School for Public Assembly Management and the Commercial Theatre Institute.



William R. Biddle

**INSTITUTION BRIEF** The Sheen Center for Thought & Culture ([sheencenter.org](http://sheencenter.org)) is a New York City arts center located in NoHo that presents a vibrant mix of theater, film, music, art and talk events. A project of the Archdiocese of New York, The Sheen Center serves all New Yorkers by presenting performances and artists that reflect the true, the good, and the beautiful. Named for the late Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, best remembered as an inspirational author, radio host and two-time Emmy Award-winning television personality, The Sheen Center reflects his modern-day approach to contemporary topics. The Sheen Center is a state-of-the-art theater complex that includes the 270-seat off-Broadway Loreto Theater, equipped with five-camera high-definition TV and live-stream capability and a multi-track recording studio; the 80-seat Off-Off-Broadway Black Box Theater; four rehearsal studios; and an art gallery.

**Will you discuss the history and heritage of the Sheen Center for Thought & Culture and how you define its mission?**

One of the reasons I decided to explore this opportunity was when I read the "About" section on the website. I was truly captivated by the description of The Sheen Center and its mission. Named after the late Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, best known for his popular radio and TV ministry in the 1950s and 60s, The Sheen Center for Thought & Culture is a project of the Archdiocese of New York, presenting more than 75 events in theatre, film, music, and thought per season. The Sheen Center for Thought & Culture is a forum to highlight the true, the good, and the beautiful as they have been expressed throughout the ages. Cognizant of our creation in the image and likeness of God, The Sheen Center aspires to present the heights and depths of human expression in thought and culture, featuring humankind as fully alive. At The Sheen Center, we proclaim that life is worth living, especially when we seek to deepen, explore and challenge ourselves – Catholic and non-Catholic alike – intellectually, artistically, and spiritually.

It perfectly captures a wonderful goal for the Archdiocese of New York and I am grateful to be a part of such a lofty endeavor.

**Will you highlight The Sheen Center for Thought & Culture's programs, performances and events?**

Moving forward we intend to truly integrate visual, literary, film and performing arts and find ways to combine to create interesting performances and collaborations with a focus on faith and finding the true and beautiful in life. We will continue to offer thought provoking programs that explore difficult issues in our society and faith. We have had thought leaders such as Professors Robert George and Cornell West discuss Civility in America, and have had Broadway stars such as Kristin Chenoweth and Vanessa Williams. We have had several interfaith discussions with various religious leaders. Our stages and studios have been graced by many masters in their field. Our rental opportunities have included events with television artists from Henry Winkler to music icons like James Taylor.

**Will you provide an overview of The Sheen Center for Thought & Culture's facilities?**

We have two theaters, the Loreto and the Black Box. The Loreto is a neoclassical proscenium house with 19th century architecture and details that have been lovingly restored to this unique and beautiful space. Our Black Box is a "funky downtown" theater that allows us to present performances to a smaller audience. We have a beautiful, light-filled art gallery and four studio spaces. We also have a chapel just off our entrance that reflects the history of the building as the Church of Our Lady of Loreto which stood in the space some 100 years ago.

**The Sheen Center for Thought & Culture is planning a new exhibit in October. Will you discuss this exhibit and what guests can expect to see?**

We are thrilled to be exhibiting the work of two artists who are dear friends of the Archdiocese of New York. Both Jan Dilenschneider and Lynn Mara have exhibited in some of the most prestigious art galleries in the Tri-state area. To have them together for the exhibit, "There will always be light, there will always be hope" at the Sheen Center is magnificent. Even more exciting is that we are going to exhibit their work beyond the gallery space and into our common areas and studio spaces. This is the perfect time to show the work of these two artists whose pieces bring you to joy, to light, to hope.

**The Sheen Center for Thought & Culture has an experienced and engaged board. How valuable has it been to The Sheen Center's work to have such a dedicated and supportive board?**

I have only been working with the board for a few months, and even in that short time and during the hiatus from live performances, we have seen incredible dedication and support. Our board members fully understand the value of our mission and the need to offer art in all its forms to bring people closer to their faith and to really see the true, the good, and the beautiful.

**How critical are metrics to track the impact of The Sheen Center for Thought & Culture's work?**

Very important. We are a revenue based nonprofit within the Archdiocese of New York. Our ticket sales are an indicator, but so are our memberships and sponsorships. We know we are doing good work because of the results.

**How did the Sheen Center for Thought & Culture adapt the way it works to address the challenges caused by the pandemic?**

Like many performing arts organizations, we made the pivot to virtual events since so many folks were looking for digital content. We stuck to our mission and offered a variety of online events for our patrons. Moving forward, we will be incorporating virtual and hybrid events into our programming as virtual programming allows us to increase our reach outside of our existing footprint.

# SHEEN CENTER

FOR THOUGHT & CULTURE

**The Sheen Center for Thought & Culture is located in New York City. Will you highlight The Sheen Center's commitment to New York's recovery and rebuilding from the pandemic?**

Our first exhibit in the gallery emerged from the vision of our newest board member, Amanda Bowman. The exhibit is entitled Portraits of Grace. It captures in photographs the Church's response to the pandemic. You can really see the good work that was accomplished by so many throughout the Archdiocese. The gallery exhibit is the gateway to a deeper and comprehensive website (<https://www.portraits-of-grace.com>) that was created to highlight the incredible accomplishments achieved by the good people of New York. The website includes photos, video and testimonials and serves as the starting point for the live version of this project that will include video mixed with

live performances by musicians and spoken word artists showcasing work created during the pandemic based on their experiences and how their faith and community helped get them through the pandemic.

**What are your priorities for the Sheen Center for Thought & Culture as you look to the future?**

We will be working with our board to create an ambitious new strategic plan that will guide our actions into the future. In a post-pandemic world, all arts centers will be struggling with remaining fiscally sustainable. The Sheen Center will be no exception and we will live within our means by balancing original diverse programming and rental programs. I view The Sheen Center as the welcoming front porch of the Archdiocese where all people are welcome and we showcase the true and the beautiful in life. We want to engage the curious in a family-friendly environment providing thought provoking programs to inspire our patrons to learn and engage more in both faith and arts programs. We intend to be financially sustainable as a leader in faith-based programming taking a national leadership posture through collaboration, serving as a resource and providing professionally produced performances for our regional audiences and suitable for touring. I am truly inspired by the words and life of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. My favorite quote of Archbishop Sheen has now become my daily inspiration for The Sheen Center – "Believe the Incredible and you can do the Impossible."

*"There will always be light, there will always be hope.*

*Art and culture are critical for reflection, entertainment and renewal.*

*Artists' interpretations are often what we need to make sense of*

*things around us. That is why I am pleased that two of my favorite*

*artists have had work on display at The Sheen Center for Art and*

*Culture. Jan Dilenschneider and Lynn Mara both show incredible skill*

*and talent in their paintings. Their exhibit, 'There will always be light,*

*there will always be hope,' is what we all need now! And, of course,*

*those are precisely themes preached by 'the Light of the World,' Jesus!"*

**- His Eminence, Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York**



# JAN DILENSCHNEIDER



*There Will Always Be Light*



*Trees in the Mist*



*Leaves in the Morning Light*

## About Jan Dilenschneider

*Emerging from a family of artists, Jan Dilenschneider has painted all her life. Yet, she never had a desire to exhibit or sell her work until the spring of 2013, when a friend simply insisted on buying two paintings.*

*Soon afterward, her studio doors opened to the world. She was offered a solo show at the prestigious Galerie Pierre-Alain Challier in Paris' historic Le Marais district, which started a remarkable chain of events: four successive additional annual solo gallery shows in Paris, followed by a solo show in the Abbaye Saint Andre in Avignon, European Art Fair at the Grimaldi Forum in Monaco, and Art Paris Art Fair in the Grand Palais.*

*Domestically she has had five solo shows at Bellarmine Museum in Fairfield University, Sill House Gallery at Lyme College of Fine Arts, Griffin Gallery in Ohio, and to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Palace Theatre.*

*She participates in studio work with Silvermine Art Guild and has won awards at Silvermine and The National Academy of Design in New York and The North Shore Art League in Chicago.*

*The Institute of International Education, which administers the Fulbright Scholarship Program, established the Janet Hennessey Dilenschneider Scholar Rescue Award in the Arts as part of the IIE's Scholar Rescue Fund to protect free expression and creativity in challenged countries around the world. She is currently working on a Fulbright Residency program with Silvermine Art Guild.*

*She serves on the Board of Connecticut Arts Council, Family Centers in Greenwich, Connecticut, and is a member of Silvermine Art Guild.*

*She has developed a unique style of expressionistic painting. Though many art critics have compared her work to the Impressionists, she says that while she loves their color palette at heart she is an Expressionist. Her inspiration comes from the ever-changing landscape around her Connecticut home. Living by the sea, she is inspired by shore grasses bending in the breeze, blue skies reflecting in the cool water and extraordinary trees silhouetted against the green lawns.*

*She and her husband, Robert, live in Darien, Connecticut. They have two sons, Geoffrey and Peter.*

## Jan Dilenschneider – Artist Statement

“As an artist one wants to be relevant and make a difference in peoples lives. I have thus chosen the title of my first Manhattan exhibition to be “There will always be light, there will always be hope.” It is a reminder to the viewer that art can heal, art can soothe the soul.

Artists have the right and responsibility to communicate a message and this is what I want to say at my first exhibition at The Sheen Center for Thought & Culture in October.

One can look into the light reflected through and between the trees and see beyond the deep troubles many have experienced in the last year.

The painting *There Will Always Be Light* is an example of uplifting, soothing light. Part of the energy here comes from the contrast of the blue/mauve water against the slightly golden light. I love generating this kind of effect. I say the colors “sing” together.

Similarly, in the *Trees in the Mist* painting, the flowering tree next to the light green budding tree uses the special color relationship called “simultaneous contrast.” They are opposite colors on the color wheel with one color modifying and enhancing the other. They “vibrate” and “sing.” Creating these color relationships is my passion.

*Leaves in the Morning Light* offers a different approach. The under painted canvas is then covered with a dark “Prussian Blue” and the images of the leaves are revealed via a squeegee and sponge. The leaves come alive. The sunlights are re-enhanced to remind the viewer that there will always be light.

Until recently most of my work has emphasized preserving the heart of nature – wanting people to be more aware of the importance of protecting our ecology.

Whether it is healing and calming the soul and creating hope or promoting protection of our ecology, I believe the artist has a mission, even a responsibility, to highlight what is helpful or needed in the world. I love the saying, “If words could say everything we would not need artists.”

The still life or landscape is often a stand-in so the color, the stroke, the movement can play themselves out.

According to the artist J.M.W. Turner, color should define and enhance the emotion of the subject, not just accurately color it.

Freedom of gesture and stroke is important and one of the keys to my work, be it bold and slashing, wispy and wavy, or soft and blended. I want the work to look fresh... in motion.”

### Comments about Jan Dilenschneider's work by the French Gallery owner Pierre-Alain Challier:

“When I first exhibited Jan Dilenschneider's paintings, they met with immediate success. Ever since then, the American artist has met with collectors in Paris, eschewing the customs and expectations of contemporary art.

Classically trained in oil on canvas, Jan Dilenschneider became a master of emotions and movement in the wake of the devastating hurricanes, which profoundly have influenced her, by opening up the prospect of abstraction as a means of catharsis. Her style suddenly became more spirited, teetering between representation of the real and abstraction, ultimately drawing these together.

Jan Dilenschneider is a very involved artist. She throws herself headlong into the painting, revealing the life force of the water and wind, highlighting the beauty of the world and the need to preserve its landscapes. One can sense the intense energy in the depth of her canvases.”

### Comments about Jan's work by famous French landscape designer Louis Benech:

“What I like about Jan Dilenschneider's paintings is the power of her lines and the support of the material. They portray the contradiction between nature's true fragility and our unswerving tendency to believe that it is eternal – in all our conscious unconsciousness.

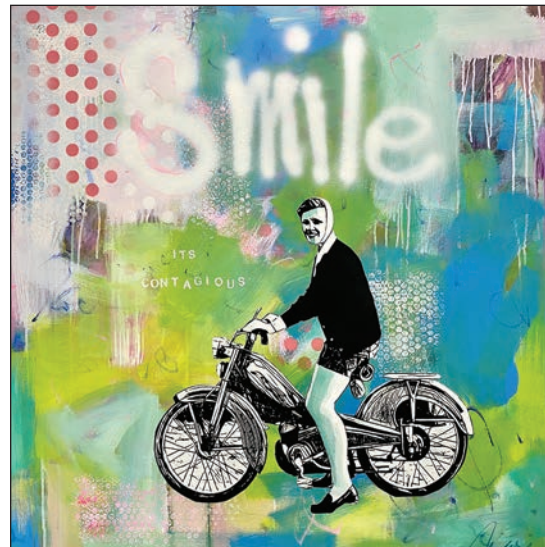
I personally do not appreciate softness – like Jan Dilenschneider we must dare to be brutal and to be transported by our work when creating.”



# LYNN MARA



*Love Your Neighbor*



*Smile. It's Contagious*



*No Man Discovers Anything Big (Unless He Makes Himself Small)*

## About Lynn Mara

Artist and Long Island native, Lynn Mara is a prolific painter that captures the American spirit through her iconic works. Her Impressionist style turned abstract expressionist was influenced by friend and fellow Southampton artist, the late Jack Reggio, as well as Andy Warhol, Fairfield Porter, Helen Cantrell and Richard Diebenkorn. Her multifaceted tableaus preserve American culture with modern flair. Whether it's abstract American flags (portrayed in vibrant colors well beyond red, white and blue), horses (from a perspective that pushes and expands beyond the limits of the canvas), surfers, beachgoers, farmers, people doing what they do – her paintings are “big,” executed in her signature bold color, layers of under painting and mixed media, particularly in her more recent mixed media collage work that she refers to as “conversation starters.” These are painstakingly arranged and packed with various media, historical context, and scriptural or lyrical “truths” that reflect on popular American issues and topics in an amusing way.

Her work has been featured on the Hampton Jitney, at MetLife Stadium in the Legacy Club, and she was the 2017 Hampton Classic poster design winner. Her flag paintings were a gift to each member of the LPGA Solheim Cup in 2019 in Scotland. Her mediums include acrylic paint, oil pastels, hand cut stencils, spray paint, and photographic images for her most recent collage work, among others. There's tremendous light and hope and optimism in her work, and sometimes, just a little irony.

She is currently working on a 10th anniversary piece since Super Bowl XLVI for the New York Giants which will be given away at Giants Stadium this season.

She is a member of the Silvermine Art Guild, New Canaan, Connecticut, and Guild Hall, East Hampton.

## Lynn Mara – Artist Statement

“People often ask how long I have been painting and I tell them I have been an artist since my earliest recollection. As a child, I learned under the experienced hand of Southampton artist, Jane Doescher, at her studio on South Main Street. However, my mother was my biggest source of encouragement. I think we're all intuitively born artists, creators.

For me, paint is the way music comes out of my horn. It's an expression of joy and love and gratitude. It's what I do when I'm happy and I paint nearly every day; eight, ten, twelve hours a day. Painting is more like play than work. I lose all track of time while I'm painting in my studio.

But this past year, during the pandemic, was the most transformative period in my art career. For sure, it was a gift of time whether we recognized it or not. It helped me focus on what's important and what is not. God, family, friends, health and yes, the sense of purpose that I derive from

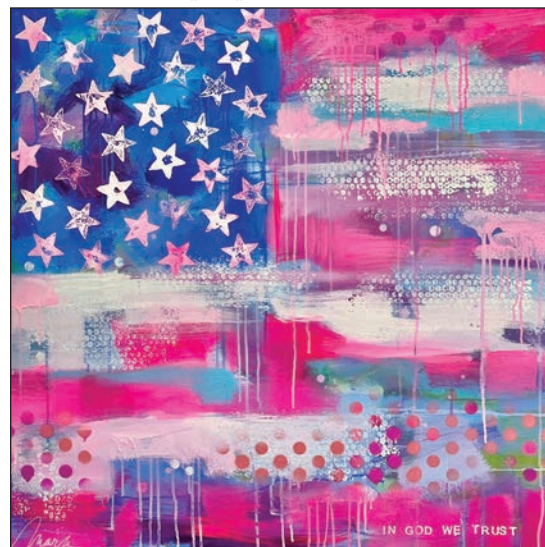
painting and a sense of connectedness to every person and all of nature.

This transformation occurred on long walks during COVID. I paid a lot of attention to nature, particularly when the shoots and bulbs began to emerge as they always do in late winter to early spring. Those shoots and bulbs, signs of hope, and the tenderest and most fragile origins of life, push up from their dark underworld through the rock-solid frozen earth. They bloom and become exactly what they are intended to become in all their beauty and splendor; nothing more, nothing less. They don't fight or resist their Creator. They have no fear, anger, jealousy, self-loathing, or self-consciousness. It occurred to me that the same life-giving spirit and energy that “draws” the shoots and bulbs to itself is drawing you and me too. We just have to get out of our own way.

So, I went back to the studio and began to paint with abandon. I lost the fear of failure and self-consciousness. I experimented with new and old materials I had in the studio, but in a new way. It was very exciting. I fell back in love with spray paints, pastels, mixed media and collage work. I began to hand-cut my own stencils and apply layers upon layers in abstract paintings and so much more.

The one constant through all my years of painting, however, is my bold use of color. That's the heart of my music. It's actually hard for me to tone it down. One gallery owner once described my work as having a joie de vivre (meaning an exultation of spirit). That's exactly what I want viewers to experience. A lightheartedness. Joy. Happiness. Hope. A sense of peace and that all is well with the world, exactly as God intended it to be.

Yes, it's been a very good year. My heart is full of gratitude.” ●



*In God We Trust*