

# Legacy

Turning Family History Into Art™

*Letter Perfect*  
A Calligrapher Remembers Mom

*Rebecca Sower*  
Scrapbook Artist with Heart

*Heidi Swapp's*  
*Passion for Paper*

*Cyber Art*  
Creating with High-Tech Tools

Introducing 'Passages': Our new special section filled with extraordinary scrapbook and journal pages!

AUTUMN 2003 \$5.95 US • \$8.95 CAN





# Portal Visions

## MIXING MEDIA AND MEMORIES

by William Grabowski

As we begin to seek a full understanding of our lives and spirit, unlikely elements often surface to spark the process. Sorting and sifting through the histories housed in our attics can be an inspiring process. It was for me. Yet I almost hesitated to disturb the peace I sensed upstairs. "Stuff" from multiple families and generations were mixed together and seemed content to rest in boxes and peacefully co-exist. We should all be so lucky. Yet re-opening the boxes opened new possibilities. Those dusty boxes, weathered old trunks and suitcases held links to a past, and opening them permitted me to re-enter that time. They were portals. And so my artwork was to become.

### *Portal Vision*

20"x24"x16"

I chose one of my mom's old suitcases from the 1940s, stood it on end and affixed photos of adjacent walls from an old house to the inside. I hoped to convey the feeling of a passageway unexpectedly opened. My dad's older brother died as a young boy. We didn't know why or when. But his photo surfaced one day in a family portrait, my grandparents and my father beside him. He stares out at us softly sad and sweet. I decided he needed to be in this first piece. I printed his portrait on HP inkjet premium transparency film, glued it on a piece of clear sheet acrylic and set it a couple of inches from the photo. The effect allowed for natural light to project his image on the back wall of the case. Printing photos on transparencies would become an important element of this *Portal* series. A broken heirloom goblet was adhered to itself with epoxy and then attached to the walls of the suitcase to suggest his life — delicate and broken. To finish, I set the piece atop a remnant from a telephone table, over a sky of clouds.





## *Original Owners*

14"x24"x14"

Another portal began with a photo of my aunt proudly holding her newborn son. Gertie and my mom were cousins and best friends and lived next door to each other. Shot from the steps of her stoop, she sits in her porch in Rego Park, Queens, welcoming the viewer. I decided to rebuild her home. I gathered acrylic boxes from a local plastics fabricator to make use of the many transparencies I had printed. The idea evolved further when I stumbled across my old wooden building blocks, darkened now with age but still etched with my scribbles. I would build with them again. One last time.

The transparencies were glued to the acrylic with 3M Super 77 Spray Adhesive. Wooden pieces were hot glued to each other and affixed to acrylic with double-sided clear carpet tape. The boxes were attached securely to each other with methylene chloride, supplied by the plastics vendor. The entire work was then placed on a marble chessboard, reminiscent of the kitchen floor they had washed and waxed so many years ago. The clear boxes allowed me to place images on many sides. My mom, her brother, neighbors, and even a blueprint of the house found a place on the piece. It was my intent to construct a home similar in shape and spirit to the place that they all knew, and where I was born. →





## *A Son* 6"x9"x6"

I came across a photo of an unknown woman. A friend or relative perhaps. No one seems to know. But her gaze and her demure pose prompted me to create a fiction about her, a fiction open to many interpretations. I found a tattered old doll—a *Nora Welling* sailor, it turns out. He was to become her

partner. The woman and the seaside photo (Westhampton, New York) were again inkjet transparencies. The choice of image output (transparency) lends itself to subtleties, sometimes engaging the viewer. Here one may close the "door" for one perception and open it for another. Viewer's choice.

Transparencies from each piece were enhanced in Adobe Photoshop 7.0, adding color saturation and image sharpening. They were printed by selecting *premium inkjet transparency film* from the *paper type* menu and *best from print quality*.

As a postscript, I found a slip of paper regarding my father's brother, the boy in "Portal Vision:" his certificate of burial. It prompted me to journey to the files of the New York City Municipal Archives. There I found George had died of pneumonia after tonsillitis in 1923, soon after this photo. Age 7. My dad was 4 at the time. Seven and four are the same ages my daughters are now. I felt a strong empathy with my grandparents for their loss, and for my father, who lost a companion and mentor he never spoke of.

Understanding the links between our lives and histories can open new possibilities. For me, they helped create a remembrance for the past and began to nurture a legacy for the future. 🌿

*William Grabowski is a mixed-media artist and an elementary school art teacher from Huntington, New York. He can be reached via e-mail at: wmgski96@hotmail.com.*

