

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Achieving Goals ‘I Never Dreamed Of’

One of Dr. Mark Podwal's first memories of his interest in art dates back to early childhood in Brooklyn, N.Y., when a drawing that he sketched of a train caught the attention of his kindergarten teacher. Before that, he said, it seemed as if his teacher had not even noticed his name on the roster.

By the time he was a third-year medical student at New York University, the focus of his art had shifted from trains to far more serious subjects. It was 1968, and he sketched a collection of politically themed black-line drawings to protest the Vietnam War, including

New York Magazine, and the New York Review of Books.

“David was very encouraging,” recalled Dr. Podwal, a dermatologist who practices in New York City. Years later, he would be represented by Forum Gallery, which also represents Levine.

From that point on, Dr. Podwal's avocation as an artist began to skyrocket. He drew politically themed works for the op-ed pages of the New York Times and also created scores of Jewish-themed drawings and gouaches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art reproduced his art on 14 objects, including a Passover plate, jewelry, note cards, and prints. The Metropolitan Opera also commissioned him to create a series of Mozart portraits to sell as greeting cards.

Dr. Podwal has made his mark in other media as well, serving as executive producer and writer for the documentary “House of Life: The Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague,” narrated by Claire Bloom and broadcast nationwide on public television in the spring of 2009.

He also did illustrations for a book by Harold Bloom and four children's books by Francine Prose.

One of his most recent books, “Doctored Drawings” (Bellevue Literary Press, 2007), is a retrospective of his line drawings, mainly from works on medical subjects that appeared in the

New York Times. One image from 1994, called “Mediscare,” portrays Congress as an octopus wielding a surgical instrument in each arm. “It's perfect for what Congress is doing to health care reform now,” Dr. Podwal said.

Another image from the book pokes fun at the circus of complexity surrounding the then-Clinton health plan. After the drawing first appeared in the New York Times, someone who worked in Dr. Podwal's office told him that she had fielded a telephone call at home from Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), whom she knew and “who was ex-

tremely upset with the drawing,” Dr. Podwal said. “If I can make a congressman upset by the drawing, I've achieved what I was trying to do.”

Dr. Podwal said that he is especially proud of the work he did on the “House of Life” film project. “I'm not religious, but I'm very emotionally attached to Judaism,” he said—so much so that every year, he and his family fly to Prague to mark Rosh Hashanah in the city's 700-year-old Old-New Synagogue.

“There's even a seat in the synagogue with my name on it,” he said.

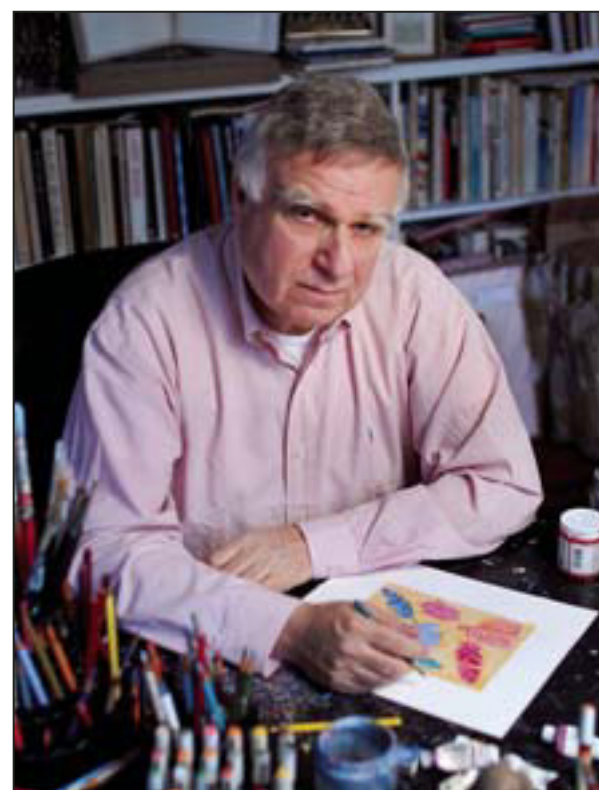
He wrote and illustrated a children's book about the synagogue, called “Built by Angels” (Harcourt Children's Books, 2009). The Jewish Museum in Prague published the book in Czech with a forward by Dr. Podwal's friend, Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel.

“I've always had a talent for drawing, but I never thought I'd do anything with it,” he said. “I've achieved goals I never dreamed of.”

The amount of time that Dr. Podwal currently spends on his art and book projects is hard to quantify, he said, as his commissioned work is driven by deadlines.

And although he described dermatology as a visual specialty, he believes that is the only parallel between art and his medical specialty.

“Art gives a great opportunity to be creative and imaginative,” he said. “In medicine in America, if you're creative



Irritating a congressman with one of his drawings was a great achievement, Dr. Mark Podwal said.

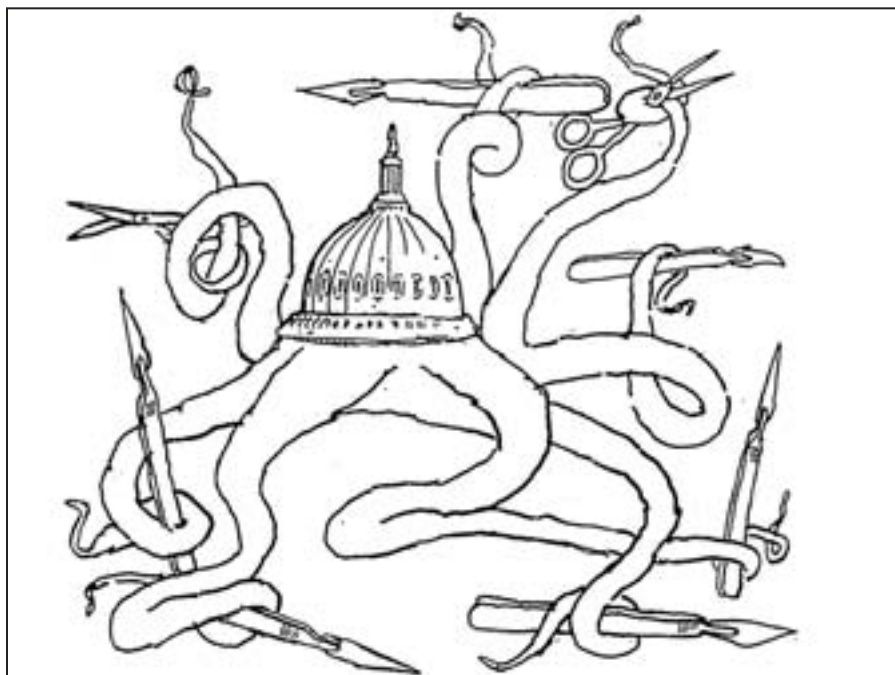
and imaginative, you're more likely to wind up in a malpractice suit, because you're not following the guidelines of your peers. Of course, there are creative and imaginative discoveries made, but as a practitioner, you tend not to be too creative and imaginative.”

This month, New York University will honor Dr. Podwal with its inaugural Alumni Award for Medicine in the Humanities.

What's next for the dermatologist who prefers painting and watercolors to line drawing?

Dr. Podwal said he is toying with the notion of illustrating the “Hebrew Melodies” poems of Lord Byron, as well as the Book of Ecclesiastes. ■

By Doug Brunk



Dr. Podwal's “Mediscare” appeared in the New York Times in 1994, but “it's perfect for what Congress is doing to health care reform now,” he said.



Dr. Podwal created “Matzoh Moon” (acrylic, gouache, and colored pencil on paper) in 2004.

works on the killings of student protesters at Kent State University in Ohio and the bombing of Laos.

Martin Begun, who was associate dean of the medical school at the time, was so impressed by Dr. Podwal's surrealistic gouache paintings that he provided a space for him at Alumni Hall, the entrance to the medical school, to stage his first solo exhibition.

That event caught the eye of famed urologist Adrian Zorngniotti, who introduced Dr. Podwal to David Levine, the renowned political and literary caricaturist who drew for the New Yorker,

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