

# AESTHETIC REALISM FOUNDATION

141 Greene Street ∞ New York, NY 10012

Summer 2018

Dear Friend,

I am writing to you with great pleasure, and with a sense of urgency as well. I am Barbara McClung, Aesthetic Realism associate and New York City public school science teacher. This letter is about the beautiful, kind, and practical education Aesthetic Realism, founded by the American philosopher Eli Siegel—and about the vitally important not-for-profit foundation that is based on it and teaches it.



Barbara McClung

Aesthetic Realism is knowledge that can make for logical and accurate happiness and true pride in a person's life. Further—and this has tremendous national and international meaning—it explains the cause of the huge injustices afflicting people's lives today, including racism, war, economic brutality, shootings in our schools. I say soberly: it is knowledge that can have these finally end.

Eli Siegel founded this philosophy in 1941. "*The world, art, and self explain each other,*" he showed: "*each is the aesthetic oneness of opposites.*" Aesthetic Realism is taught at the Foundation in a rich curriculum of classes in, for example, poetry, music, anthropology, education, the visual arts. There are thrilling dramatic presentations, including those by the Aesthetic Realism Theatre Company on subjects from Shakespeare to rock 'n' roll. Aesthetic Realism consultants and associates present monthly seminars—for instance, "What's True Expression—in Life, Love, Art?"; "The Debate in Every Person: To Feel More or Less"; "What Does Getting Ahead Really Mean?"; "Can There Be Real Love without Criticism?" And later in this letter I'll speak about our much loved outreach programs; and you'll read too about consultations for individual men and women. It was through these consultations that my own life changed magnificently.

## The Two Purposes in Everyone

Aesthetic Realism differs from every other approach to mind in showing that the deepest purpose of a person is *to like the world on an honest basis*. And it explains that there is a battle in everyone between that purpose and another desire: for *contempt*, "the addition to self through the lessening of something else." Aesthetic Realism shows unequivocally that contempt is the cause of all injustice. And it is a person's contempt that causes his or her deep unsureness and "low self-esteem." I feel passionately that for there to be a safe and just world, contempt must be understood and criticized, and accurate like of the world studied and encouraged—as Aesthetic Realism so mightily makes possible for the first time in human history.

To give an idea of the importance of this foundation, I'm going to quote six posts from the *Aesthetic Realism Blog*. Each introduces and links to something on our website.

I begin with a post about that agonizing subject which many people have thought to be unsolvable: *racism*.

**Michael Palmer**, *sportswriter & Aesthetic Realism associate*, writes:



Michael Palmer

Despite advances made in civil rights over the years and the fact that this country elected—and re-elected—its first African American president, the horrors of racism are still rampant in our nation, as to jobs, housing, education, and more. What needs to be for prejudice and racism to end completely is in issue 1264 of *The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known*, titled “Racism Can End,” and I want all of America to know it. Aesthetic Realism’s understanding of this subject, the newness and greatness of what editor Ellen Reiss explains, are urgently needed. This landmark issue begins with Ms. Reiss’s commentary on Eli Siegel’s definitive lecture *Aesthetic Realism as Thought*. She writes, for example:

“...Aesthetic Realism shows—greatly, efficiently, kindly shows—that for racism to end we have to be against the thing it begins with: contempt for the world itself. Further, racism won’t be effectively done away with unless it is replaced with something that has terrific power. What needs to replace it is not the feeling that the difference of another person is somehow tolerable. What is necessary is the seeing and feeling that the relation of sameness and difference between ourselves and that other person is *beautiful*. People need to feel, with feeling both intimately personal and large, that difference of race is like the difference to be found in music: two notes are different, but they are in behalf of the same melody; they complete each other; each needs the other to be expressed richly, to be fully itself.

“It is possible for millions of men, women, and children to have an emotion about race that is like an art emotion. And it is necessary. It will happen when America is studying Aesthetic Realism.”

>>[Read more AestheticRealism.org/racism.can.end](http://AestheticRealism.org/racism.can.end)

The periodical just quoted from, *The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known*, is so notable for the honesty and needed knowledge, superbly expressed, that are always in it. And I hope you will read, too, the Foundation’s *Mission Statement*.

## The Teaching Method That Really *Succeeds*

One of the joys of my life is to have taught in New York City classrooms for over 30 years using the Aesthetic Realism Teaching Method, and to have seen that through it my students became really excited about learning and kinder to each other. “The purpose of education,” Eli Siegel showed, “is *to like the world through knowing it*.” I want teachers everywhere to know that this educational method not only enables students to *learn successfully*—it is also a means of opposing and ending prejudice! Here is a blog post by noted educator Rosemary Plumstead:

**Rosemary Plumstead**, *Aesthetic Realism consultant with All For Education, teacher educator, and NYC science teacher (ret.)*, writes:

All across America, school administrators and teachers are meeting instances of bullying and its devastating effects on the lives of young



Rosemary Plumstead

people. The National Education Association estimates that 160,000 children “miss school every day due to fear of attack or intimidation by other students.”

There is a solution to this national tragedy! In her tremendously important article, middle school teacher and Aesthetic Realism associate Zvia Ratz describes how her students’ desire to bully people changed through the mathematics lessons she taught.

She begins with a simple equal sign, and then, using more complicated algebraic equations, shows her students how things that *look very different* can actually have *equal value*. As students see an accurate and beautiful relation of sameness and difference in mathematics—opposites so horribly pitted against each other in bullying and all prejudice—they *learn*, and become kinder!

>>[Read more AestheticRealism.org/education](http://AestheticRealism.org/education)

## The Longed-For Understanding of Love

I could use this entire letter to talk about how Aesthetic Realism sees the subject of love, what I learned about this subject, how I changed, and how my marriage to Dan McClung is thriving as a result. For now, here is a blog post by my friend Carol McCluer, about love and a wonderful poem.



Carol McCluer

**Carol McCluer**, singer and actor with *The Aesthetic Realism Theatre Company*, writes:

Before I studied Aesthetic Realism, though I didn’t have trouble getting men to make a lot of me, my relationships didn’t succeed, and I felt so empty and loathing of myself. Then, in Aesthetic Realism consultations I learned that the purpose of love is to like the world through another person. I heard questions like the following: “The opposite of using a person to like the world is to use that person in some way to glorify oneself. What do you think you’ve loved more, Ms. McCluer—men, or *your* effect on them? Is the power you want the power to conquer a man or the power to see, to know?”

A poem I love by Eli Siegel is humorously and deeply on this subject: “Is It Me, Darling, or Somebody Else, God Knows Who?—A Love Poem.” It’s about the desire—attained by the speaker in the poem—to have a man flatter and adore her above all else. In issue 987 of *The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known*, Chairman of Education Ellen Reiss writes about the music of this poem:

“It has the breathless triumph of a woman whom a man has made more important than the whole world. But Eli Siegel is the person who so mercifully understood the pain a woman feels even as she is triumphant—because she knows she has not shown her true self to the man, nor has he tried to see it. The sinking disappointment that accompanies her victory is in this poem’s music too, as the lines both eagerly swell and piteously droop.”

Studying Aesthetic Realism has made it possible for me really to love a man, Kevin Fennell, my husband, and also to feel that it is I, the real me, who is being loved.

>>[Read the poem AestheticRealism.org/poem](http://AestheticRealism.org/poem)

## How Art Answers the Questions of Our Lives

It is my careful opinion that humanity will be immensely grateful to Eli Siegel. His vast scholarship took in every aspect of reality and can be seen in the hundreds of recorded lectures he

gave and in his writing, including his poetry and much more. His scholarship was always warm; it had in it an understanding of people and their feelings. He saw and explained what philosophers and critics across the centuries were trying to find out: what beauty is, art is. And further, he showed that art and our lives are inseparable: that all art, in its technique, answers the questions of our lives. Here is a blog post on the subject:

**Harvey Spears**, *photographer and Aesthetic Realism associate*, writes about an article by John Stern, published in the Municipal Engineers Journal:



Harvey Spears

What can we learn about ourselves from one of the most historic buildings in New York City? In his article “Grand Central Terminal: A Study in Beauty and Meaning,” John Stern, Tri-State Regional Planner (ret.) and Aesthetic Realism consultant, takes us on a new and exciting journey through Grand Central Terminal, one that describes this magnificent building as never before. His basis is the following great principle, stated by Eli Siegel: “*All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves.*”

Some of my earliest childhood memories are of my family’s yearly trips to Portland, Maine, on the New York Central. I remember entering Grand Central Station and being awestruck by the vast open space with many people going in diverse directions, and by the huge, concave, blue-green ceiling filled with constellations and glowing stars; they seemed so close and comforting, I wanted to touch them. I didn’t know that what I was so affected by was the relation of *near* and *far* in that ceiling, and that I needed to make sense of these same opposites as I thought about the people in my family—who, while close to me, had a meaning that went far beyond my confined way of seeing them as *mine*.

Mr. Stern writes in a way that will make for both greater appreciation of Grand Central Terminal and a new understanding of oneself.

>> [Read the article AestheticRealism.org/grand.central](http://AestheticRealism.org/grand.central)

Part of the Aesthetic Realism Foundation is the Terrain Gallery, which opened in 1955 under the directorship of Dorothy Koppelman. The groundbreaking principle just commented on has been its basis all these decades, and its exhibitions have included some of the best work of the time. Never was there a more distinguished and alive gallery!

## Parents & Children

I consider myself one of the luckiest mothers ever, because I’ve been learning from Aesthetic Realism what it means to see one’s child both personally and widely; as ever so close to one, as coming from one’s own body—and as coming from and standing for the whole world. A result has been a relationship with my daughter, Jennifer, that we both cherish.

I’ll give a brief example of what I learned—from a class for Aesthetic Realism consultants and associates, taught by the Chairman of Education, Ellen Reiss. A mother can

look at her child and feel, “She’s so different from me!”—and both parent and child can use their difference to feel uncomfortable, angry with each other, and hurt. In that class, when I spoke about feeling very ill-at-ease because my daughter, then a child, didn’t behave with the decorum I thought she should have, Ms. Reiss asked me: “Do you put too many limits on how Jennifer McClung should be—and on how she can surprise you?...What does it mean to see a person as real, to see the full reality of a person? She has cataracts in her, and thunder, not just the grass blowing on a spring day. And she’s entitled to it because she is real!”

It is an honor to study with Ellen Reiss. Her passionate desire to be just to Aesthetic Realism, her knowledge, wide scholarship, good will, and integrity make her the most important educator in the world today.

I’m very glad to include now a blog post about children.



Barbara Kestenbaum

**Barbara Kestenbaum**, who has been active in the labor movement and worked in Special Education, writes:

I remember, when my son was born, looking at his tiny fingers with awe and asking, “Who is this little boy?” And as many parents do, I worried, “Will I be a good mother?” When I read “The Child,” a chapter of Eli Siegel’s *Self and World*, I began to see that a very young person is in the midst of large questions about nothing less than the world itself. And I saw with excitement, they were my questions too! Here are sentences from that chapter—which has in it such enormous and kind respect for children:

“As soon as a child is born he has all the appurtenances and qualities of personality that a professor has, or a broker has, or a grandmother has, or a general has....

“A baby has been born. That baby may be called Joseph. Joseph will not know just where he is; but he will want to find out. He has needs. Those needs, if met at all, will be met by an arrangement of the larger world and himself. When Joseph’s needs are met, a feeling, however unexpressed, will occur amounting to: ‘We make a team.’ Joe will want to eat; there is food in the world. Joe will want to see; there are things to be seen, and there is light in the world. Joe will want to crawl, and walk, and run; and there is space in the world to be crawled in, to be walked in, to be run in.... Joe will want to love, and there are things to be loved, whether he successfully does so or not.”

>>>[Read more AestheticRealism.org/the.child](http://AestheticRealism.org/the.child)

## The Knowledge People Are Looking For

I could write many pages about our Outreach Programs, through which people of all ages are meeting, and learning from, Aesthetic Realism. These take place at, for instance, libraries, schools, senior centers. There are the events for young people at after-school programs throughout the metropolitan area. There are the events for seniors, such as “Using Love, the Family, & Age to Like the World.” There are the anti-bullying programs presented by Emmy award-winning filmmaker Ken Kimmelman.

The last blog post I'll include is on *the cause of war*:

**Christopher Balchin**, *educator and Aesthetic Realism associate*, writes:

This year marks the hundredth anniversary of the end of World War I, yet today the brutality of war continues. And there is animosity between nuclear powers, and fear of wider conflicts. People ask: What impels nations to go at each other with murderous intent? Why, with all the work of the various peace movements and the existence of the United Nations, has war continued? Is there no answer?



Christopher Balchin

It is urgent for everyone to know that Yes, there is an answer. In "What Caused the Wars," issue 165 of *The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known*, written in 1976, Eli Siegel, using historical and literary texts, shows the definitive cause of war, where it begins in the self of every person. And since the cause is given for the first time, we have the real means of understanding and preventing war. Every world leader making decisions is a self, and the understanding of self in this writing is remarkable, beautiful, *true*. I say this with the experience of having studied history and international relations in depth, including at Oxford, and having taught world history for many years.

With all our advances in science, technology, and communication over the past one hundred years, the crucial understanding of self and the cause of war has been absent. It is *here*, as Eli Siegel describes the elemental forces in self that impel a human being's actions. He shows in logical, passionate sentences how these forces have been at work in the international doings of nations in history, and under our own skin. For example, he writes:

"It is necessary to see that while the contempt which is in every one of us may make ordinary life more painful than it should be, this contempt is also the main cause of wars. It was contempt that made for the trenches of France in 1915; it was contempt which made for the labor camps of the Second World War....

"The next war has to be against ugliness in self. And the greatest ugliness in self is the seeing of contempt as personal achievement....Respect for what is real must be seen as the great success of man."

>> [Read more AestheticRealism.org/what.caused.the.wars](http://AestheticRealism.org/what.caused.the.wars)

It is very clear that the beautiful, kind, so needed work of the Aesthetic Realism Foundation should be known by people in America and around the world!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barbara Spetly McClung". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Barbara Spetly McClung  
Aesthetic Realism Associate