



YOUR HOUSE,
*Haunted to
Order*

Open the creaking door into The Haunted Studio and meet Lewis B. Lehrman, Painter of Dark™.

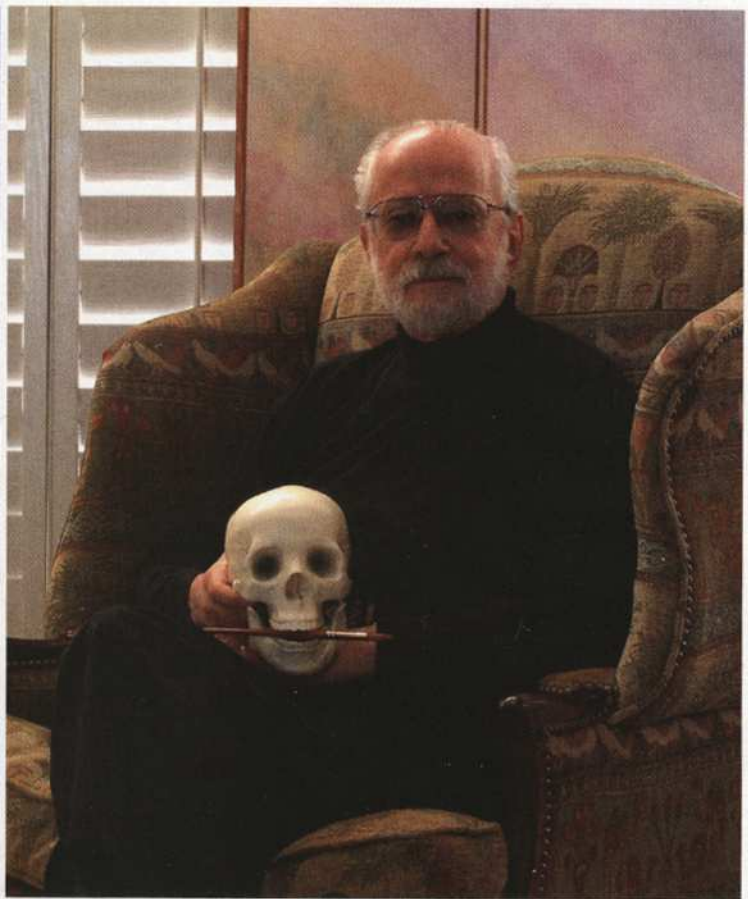
BY JENNIFER MYERS

LEWIS BARRETT LEHRMAN

A full moon hangs heavy in the dark sky. A shadowy figure hovers at an upstairs window, under a roof that pitches at an odd angle. An owl's eyes shine from the top of the surrounding pine trees. Who lives in this eerie haunted house? It could be you...



Lehrman calls this a "mood" painting, loosely based upon a somewhat derelict Victorian house that he had encountered. "I rarely portray a spooky house without a lighted window or some other suggestion of activity within or without the premises," Lehrman says of this painting, called "Mistress of Melancholy," available for sale as a print.



Top: The "Painter of Dark™," Lewis B. Lehrman, poses with his steadfast muse, nicknamed "Yorick." Lehrman finds him a great companion in The Haunted Studio, as he's quiet and a great listener.

Above: "The Final Guest" is one of The Haunted Studio's "mystery paintings" in which Lehrman invites each viewer to provide their own story. "Who is the final guest?" Lehrman asks with a grin. "And to what event in this forbidding castle are he (and we) arriving?" This is one of the artist's most recent paintings and is available for sale as a print.



This painting was commissioned by a man to celebrate the Halloweens his family had enjoyed at the house years ago. The house is now but a memory, and his four children, shown seated on the front walk, are grown and have families of their own. "I reconstructed the house both from his descriptions and a handful of old photos he sent me," Lehrman says. When the client saw the finished painting, he requested four color-matched prints as surprise Christmas gifts. Shortly after the New Year, Lehrman was touched to receive a wonderful note from one of the client's daughters describing the emotional moment shared when they opened their unique and special gifts.

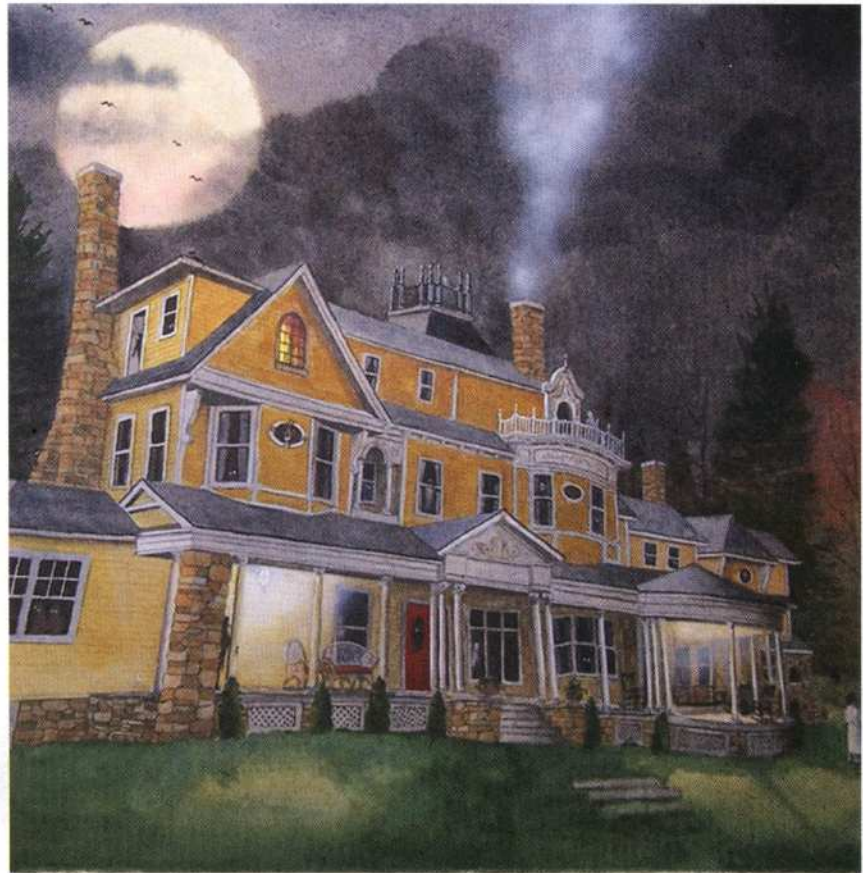
Yes, you can request to have your house haunted! If October is your favorite month and Halloween your holiday of choice, you will be enchanted with The Haunted Studio and its proprietor, Lewis Barrett Lehrman. Over the past 10 years, The Haunted Studio has completed more than 80 commissions for paintings of an unusual sort. Lehrman begins with a photo of a house—be it your current home, the one you grew up in or the Victorian house down the street—and any fond memories or requests you have, and creates an astonishingly detailed—and spooky—watercolor painting.

Lehrman is neither a Halloween freak nor following a desire to be the art world's answer to Vincent Price. His fascination with nighttime scenes started when, at age 11, his parents packed him aboard the night train from New York to spend a month with relatives in Michigan. Too excited to sleep, the young Lehrman, already a budding artist, stared out the window for hours, unable to take his eyes off the glow of the lights in the homes and buildings he passed along the tracks.

As he grew into adulthood and launched his career as an artist, it became apparent that his favorite subject was painting night scenes. In 1984, after three decades in commercial art, Lehrman moved to the Berkshires of western Massachusetts, fulfilling his dream to have a country house with an adjacent gallery where he could dedicate his time to painting.

"Maybe one out of every 10 of my paintings was a night scene," Lehrman recalls. "It was only a matter of time before I created my first Halloween-themed painting."

In the 1990s, he was savvy enough to realize that eBay, the online auction



This commissioned painting, "Burn Brae Mansion," portrays an actual inn in the Adirondacks of New York State, originally one of nine summer "cottages" built for heirs to the Singer sewing machine empire nearly a century ago. And yes, Burn Brae has its own resident ghosts. The painting's owner has granted Lehrman permission to offer it as a print, now listed on his Web site.



Ever a lover of country inns and bed-and-breakfasts, Lehrman's inspiration for the painting titled "There's Always a Vacancy at Hauntley House" is an odd one. "I tried to imagine the spookiest, scariest country inn one might possibly come upon after a long day's drive in unfamiliar country," the artist explains. This painting is available as a print.

site, would be an excellent way to widen the audience for his artwork. He posted some good-quality color prints on eBay, and soon a purchaser suggested that he have a dedicated Web site. It was early in the age of online business, but Lehrman persisted, and The Haunted Studio was born. Soon after its launch, The Haunted Studio received its first request for a commission.

"After owning my own business in the past, I had gained a personal creed: to make sure that all of my clients are happy," Lehrman says. "If a client is not satisfied with how their commissioned painting is developing, I will refund their deposit!" How many times has he had to honor this return policy? Not once.

Lehrman's talent is extraordinary. Many people cannot conjure an image in their head from a description, let alone create a painting that illustrates a stranger's memories of childhood or times past. But Lehrman, mainly by e-mail and occasionally by telephone (he has rarely met any of his Haunted Studio clients in person), communicates with his clients, requesting photos and memories that will become the focus, the backdrop and the details in his finished painting.

"I cherish that people let me into their memories and allow me to help preserve them," he says. "Plus, I have a great time creating the paintings!"

The Haunted Studio's process is quite simple: A client sends photographs and detailed requests by e-mail or regular mail (original photos are scanned and returned). Lehrman then creates a full-color study painting that he e-mails to the client to assess and revise. He does not charge for revisions and has willingly and patiently

redone a study as many as six times, committed to the idea that his clients should receive exactly what they want.

"I especially love building in the memories requested by my clients and preserving them," Lehrman explains. Haunted Studio clients have requested additions to their paintings, ranging from specific Halloween decorations to adding Spider-Man on the roof or a witch on the front lawn (complete with bubbling cauldron) to a client's late parents peering from their former room's window. "Think spooky!" Lehrman advises on his Web site. "I'll make it happen."

When the study is approved and the painting nears completion, Lehrman adds finishing touches, including his signature "spooks"—rarely fewer than 13 and often more. Clients report the fun they and their children and grandchildren have trying to find them all.

Then comes Lehrman's favorite part: receiving his clients' reactions when the painting arrives and is uncrated. Many clients, especially when the painting has included heart-felt childhood memories, are moved to tears. The woman who commissioned the painting titled "All of My Very Favorite Halloween Memories" wrote: "First of all, let me say that when I opened it, I was thrilled! I cried! I couldn't see the details for the tears! When I finally dried my eyes and saw the fabulous detail in that picture, I was flooded with the very warm memories of that house and my childhood. Lew, you work wonders! You have captured the view of the house I had in my mind, and my sister and brother and myself going off to trick or treat."

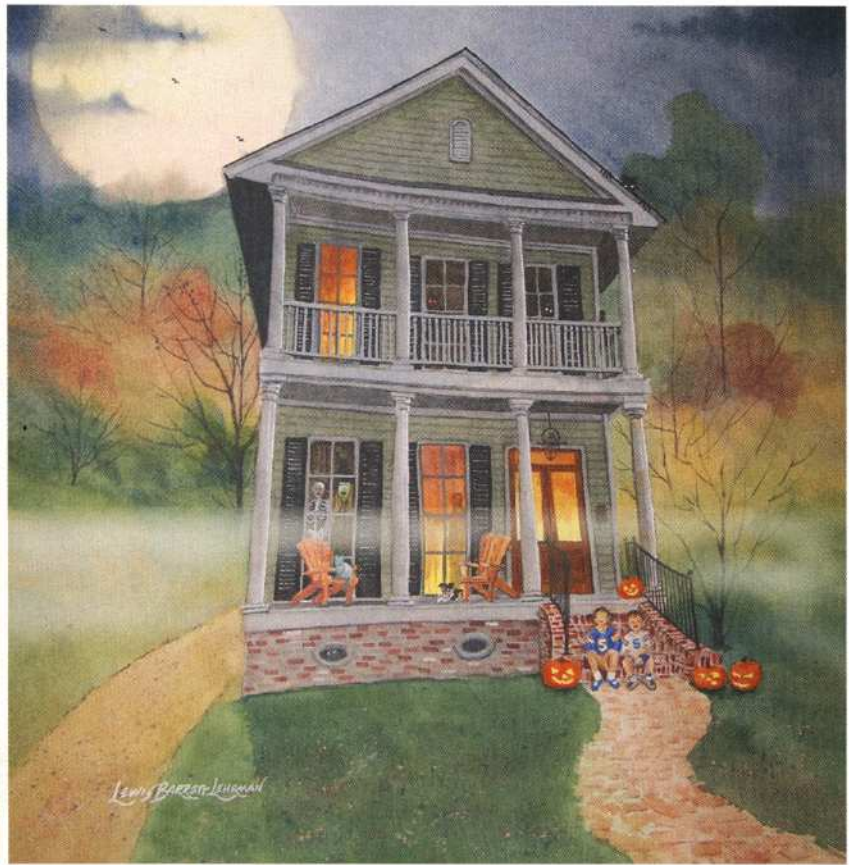
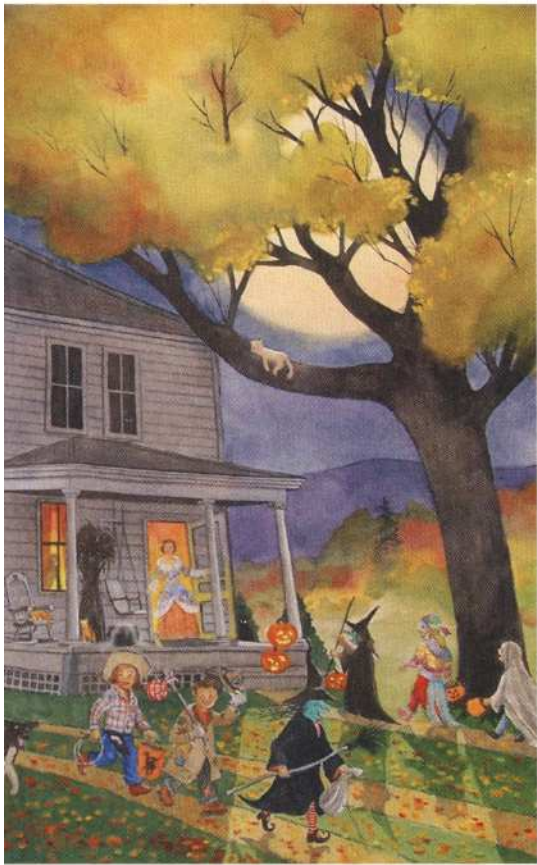
Evidence of The Haunted Studio's popularity and the loyalty of Lehrman's



Above: Guided by old photos and childhood stories, Lehrman rolled back the decades and filled his client's painting with treasured memories of the Halloweens and autumn evenings of her family's past. "I cherish the correspondence I receive when clients open the crate containing their finished painting," Lehrman says. "Though I receive that for every painting I create, the feedback on this one was among the most enthusiastic and emotional I can recall."

Top right: In the first photo that Lehrman saw of this house, it was submerged nearly to the second floor in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The house's restoration by its owners had begun even as he was creating the painting. The painting includes a host of "spooks," as do nearly all of The Haunted Studio's commissioned paintings, unless specifically requested otherwise by a client. "Children love to try to find them all," Lehrman says, "and I daresay grownups enjoy doing so as well!"

Right: What happens to all of those pumpkins that remain unsold on Halloween eve? This painting, "The Pumpkin Sellers' Halloween," suggests one possible answer. The cheerful glow of the jack-o'-lanterns counteracts the darkness of the Victorian home in the center.



clients is the free *Halloweenist* newsletter e-mailed monthly to more than 3,300 subscribers. In addition to his painstakingly detailed work—in watercolor, no less—Lehrman writes a six-page e-newsletter that includes his latest works, occasional dissertations on art, new items and prints for sale, and a “disembodied” brain teaser.

Lehrman’s artistic career started in commercial art and graphic design, and has continued to include teaching the techniques of watercolor and artistic journaling at schools nationwide, including Arizona’s Scottsdale Artists’ School. In addition to this hands-on classroom instruction, Lehrman has authored six books on art for artists. And, more than a decade ago, he was instrumental in aiding the launch of

International Artist magazine and served as their founding American editor.

Now, he says happily, his time is mainly taken up with commissioned works requesting the Haunted Studio’s spooky talents. Lehrman’s *nom de plume*—“Painter of Dark™”—is an intended play on artist Thomas Kinkadee’s moniker, “Painter of Light.” Kinkadee’s popular paintings are as bright and cheerful as Lehrman’s are dark (yet still cheerful), and there would be no mistaking one artist’s work for the other’s. There is always something distinctly charming lurking among the shadows, drawing the viewer in. The paintings may be full of spooks but also full of warmth—like a neighborhood bonfire on a crisp Halloween night. ❧

For more information, visit Lew Lehrman and The Haunted Studio at www.HauntedStudio.com or by e-mail: Lew@HauntedStudio.com.



Opposite: The home that served as an inspiration for "A Carriage Awaits" is situated in eastern "horse country," therefore it seemed natural to feature a ghostly coach-and-four, attended by spooky figures. This client also owns a large barn where horses are boarded. For his first commission, he called upon Lehrman to portray the stable's annual Halloween party, at which the costumes are worn not by owners or grooms, but by the horses!

Below: This painting, "Thirteen Spooks, Maybe More," is one of the earliest titles in The Haunted Studio's Gallery and still a most popular subject. As a matter of fact, there are indeed many more than 13 spooks hidden around the premises. This painting is available as a print in four sizes, as are many of The Haunted Studio paintings, from small to quite large.

