2008 Alumni Award for Distinguished Career Achievement
Honoré Sharrer Zagorin ’38

The Bishop’s School has always encouraged its students to have the courage to be themselves and find their place in the world. Honoré Sharrer Zagorin ’38 took that message to heart. Over the past seven decades her art has moved audiences, baffled them, or sometimes both. But through it all, one thing has remained clear: this is a woman who is not afraid to go against the grain and paint the stories that she wants to tell.

The daughter of an army officer, Honoré grew up traveling wherever her father’s work took the family. By the age of fifteen, she had lived in Washington, DC, Alabama, Louisiana, the Philippines, and France. At age sixteen, her father was transferred to Coronado and she began her Bishop’s experience.

It was her mother who first taught Honoré to paint. Her mother had studied painting years before with George Luk, the American realist known for his depictions of the working class and inner city life. While a student at Bishop’s, Honoré’s artistic talent was recognized when she won The American magazine’s Youth Forum Prize.

Upon her graduation from Bishop’s, Honoré began a journey as colorful as it was unexpected. She moved to Connecticut to study for one year at Yale University’s School of Fine Arts. The following year her work was shown at the Golden Gate International Art Exhibition in San Francisco. Not long thereafter, she moved to San Francisco to study at the California School of Fine Arts. The next few years saw Honoré working as a welder in shipyards in California and then New Jersey. All the while she continued to paint.

In 1946, Honoré’s work caught the eye of Dorothy Miller, a curator at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. Several years earlier, Miller had started organizing a series of shows called the “Americans” exhibitions. Miller’s goal was simple: assemble a diverse group of unknown American artists and present their work. Honoré’s paintings were selected by Miller for the “Fourteen Americans” exhibition of 1946.

That same year, Honoré began work on what many critics consider to be her masterpiece, “Tribute to the American Working People.” Comprised of five panels, the painting depicts dozens of everyday workers sitting, standing, and dancing. "In
this picture I painted ordinary people,” Honoré once said. “It is these distinguished-undistinguished players that moved and interested me." The painting can now be viewed at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC.

Honoré often displays what is known as “magic realism,” in that she uses realistic techniques but the subjects of the art itself are quite fantastic and surreal. In Honoré’s 1984 painting “Resurrection of the Waitress,” for example, a waitress drowns and then is carried out of the water by a flying sphinx who attaches an eggbeater to the woman’s hair to pull her up to heaven.