

# Post-Modern Times

the journal of aesthetics and art history



## The New Aesthetics

When Pictures Stare Back at Us  
Art Schools and the Destruction of Art  
The Cult of Beauty

# PAINTING

## Post-Modern Times

### Publisher's Note

There have always been artists and connoisseurs who have striven to reflect upon their appreciations and acts, unhappy until they have understood and justified what they were doing.

**Dewitt H. Parker**

The Principles of Aesthetics

Where does one find the morphemes of a philosophy of art? We could start with the word "art" itself. As many subcategories of art are neatly defined, painting has been co-opted into the general meta category and has found itself without a distinct identity.

Pick up a book on the history of music and you will almost certainly find that it begins and ends with examples that can easily be classified as music. The typical survey on the history of art, on the other hand, will begin with painting, sculpture and architecture and end with any of the infinite possibilities that fall under the nebulous term of conceptual art. Admittedly, this can be traced to the painters of the early twentieth century whose experiments with mediums eventually abandoned painting altogether. But the result has been the bringing along of everyone who has ever taken brush to canvas.

*Post-Modern Times* moves beyond this quirk of history and language and returns to the core philosophical questions that are specifically raised by painting. After achieving a certain degree of mastery over the medium, where does one look for deeper meaning? One might suggest subject matter, or in the case of Michael Paraskos's theories that he refers to as the New Aesthetics we find another intriguing grounding for our inquiry—process.

— Stephen

### Cover:

Tjalf Sparnaay, BMG Fried Egg, 31.5 x 31.5 inches, oil on linen

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Eloy Morales  
*Harriet with Purple Hair*  
47.25 x 47.25 Inches  
oil on canvas

# The New Aesthetics

**P** psychologists tell of a condition called Stockholm Syndrome in which a victim of abuse will identify so much with the abuser he comes to believe the abuse is justified. We could argue that art suffers from Stockholm Syndrome. After a century of abuse at the hands of Marcel Duchamp and his heirs many of the anti-art principles that underpin conceptualism are, paradoxically, accepted by artists who claim to oppose and even despise conceptual art.

Take the idea that art is about something. The phrase “my art is about” is a common one, but by saying it we turn art into a form of concept illustration. When we say my art is about my feelings, or my memories, or a political or social event, what we really mean is here is my idea and here is my illustration of it. In that there is no difference with basic conceptualism.

This suggests there is a serious problem in pitting oneself against conceptual art, not because a lot of artists and art lovers do not share a dislike of conceptualism, but because many of them are unwittingly corrupted by conceptualist thinking. If we dislike conceptualist art because it illustrates pre-existing ideas we inevitably dislike a lot of apparently non-conceptualist art because it too illustrates pre-existing ideas.

This is particularly apparent in photorealism, where very few practitioners consider themselves conceptualists. But copying a photograph, or even a manipulated digital image, is by its nature a conceptualist act, a repetition of a pre-existing idea, even if we use paint. Indeed, European painters such as Gerhard Richter have built a career on exploring this conceptualist aspect of photorealism.

Faced with this the logical position for anyone wanting to propose artistic values that are not conceptualist is to become a kind of nihilist, rejecting the art world completely. Out of that rejection a new set of possibilities has space to emerge. This is what motivated the British artist Clive Head and myself in 2007 when we found ourselves in the somewhat comic position of trying to teach art at a summer camp in southern Germany to a group of students who spoke no English while we no German. Forced back on ourselves, our conversations coalesced into a series of pithy sayings on the nature of art, later published as *The Aphorisms of Irsee*. In these we sought to summarize a set of basic principles on art, whilst also cracking a few jokes. In both cases this was an anti-conceptualist act, setting out an alter-

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development or process**

nate basis for art, while also undermining through humor the po-faced tedium of so much conceptualist writing.

Yet what is important about the *Aphorisms* is not that it oppose conceptualism, it is the emphasis on setting a positive agenda for art irrespective of conceptualism. We came to call this agenda the New Aesthetics. As it developed we returned to the origin of the word aesthetics, which in its ancient Greek form was *aisthesis*. Unlike the modern word, *aisthesis* did not mean

beauty or prettiness, it meant the act of experiencing the world through the physical senses. The ancient Greeks themselves contrasted this with conceptualism, or rather *mathesis*, which meant conceptualizing an idea of the world in the mind.

An aesthetics based on *aisthesis* seems to fit far more fully the artistic process than conceptualist theory, or even historic aesthetic theory, as it focuses attention on material and physical things. This starts with the artist experiencing the physical world around them and this provoking a desire or need to respond. For artists that response is highly physical in the act of painting, for example, but it is also highly material in the artist’s engagement with color, brushes, canvas, linseed oil and turpentine. Each of these assaults a different sense and

requires a unique physical response. It is also physical and material in the final outcome of the process—the painting, sculpture or other work that is produced.

All of this should seem obvious to an artist, but contrast it to the desensitized and dematerialized work of the average conceptualist. Also compare it to the notion of having an idea and

illustrating it. An artist in this New Aesthetics scenario might have an initial impulse to make something because of an idea, or a feeling, or event, but the unpredictable nature of the aesthetic process, and the constant engagement with the material stuff of art, means that initial impulse is at best highly modified and possibly left far behind. In truth we can no longer say a work of art is about something, and instead have to acknowledge it is the product of an unpredictable development or process.

**Clive Head seeks a very credible response to his experience of the city. His work is underpinned with drawing to constitute space and form, but he rejects photorealism, conventional perspective and academic drawing.**



© Clive Head, courtesy Marlborough Fine Art, London

*Clive Head  
Artist Descending a Staircase  
75 x 104 inches  
oil on canvas*

The evolution of the New Aesthetics is ongoing too, attracting the interest of others, most notably Alan Pocaro, an art educator in Chicago, and Pierluigi Sacco, a well known writer on art in Italy. It has also led to some surprising revelations about art. One of these we are working through now is the idea found in Greek Orthodox Christianity that by placing such an emphasis on physical and sensory experience we do not end

up with a highly materialist art. Instead, again as in Orthodox Christian art, we seem to discover or create a material object that is both part of this world and transcendent or otherworldly. This has come to underpin how Clive sees his paintings, and is increasingly a feature in my writings on art.

Of course, the New Aesthetics is not in itself a justification for figurative art. It is an open-ended process that

takes different artists in different directions. This suggests it is not a doctrine or style, but a definition of the artistic process itself. Nonetheless, with its emphasis on direct and ongoing engagement with the physical world around us, the New Aesthetics creates a theoretical environment in which figurative art can flourish the like of which we have not seen in the art world for many decades.



*A Closer Look at the Titanic*  
9 x 12 inches  
acrylic on gessoed hardboard

**M**y artwork tends to gravitate towards a higher form of Realism or Hyperrealism. Subject matter is everything when you are a realist. Inspiration often happens during daily occurrences. I do tend to spend a lot of time researching and considering material before it is ready to appear in a still life painting. I am preoccupied with the aspect of aesthetics and it is true that I do want the imagery to appear like 'Eye Candy' by using primary colors, playing with

light, contrast and composition. It is important that I connect with the subject matter on a deeper level. Lately, I've been exploring imagery in a more narrative manner, both as a form of survey or journalistic approach while documenting aspects of popular culture and its impact on our consciousness and on society. Nostalgia often comes into play with elements within the composition, but it is vital that the imagery itself retains a current and contemporary flavor."

*text provided by the artist*

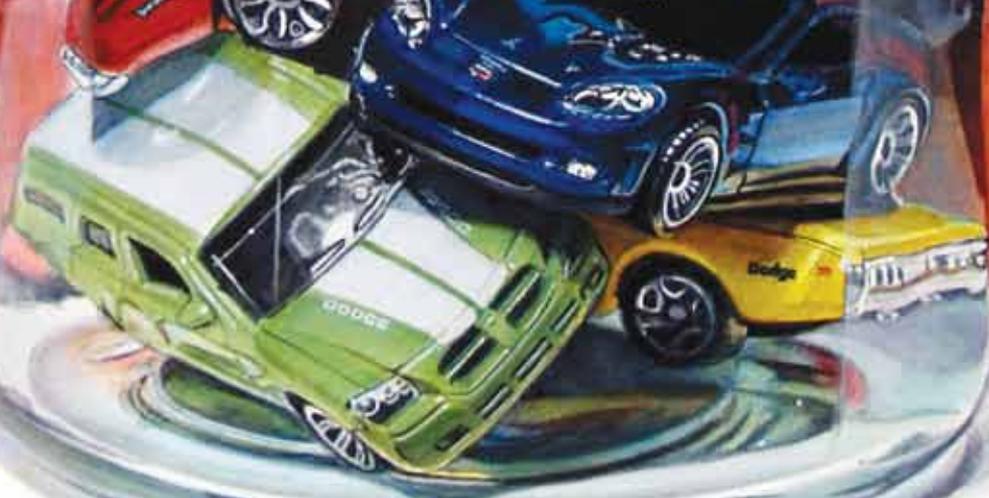


*A Monopoly of Lollipops*  
16 x 16 inches  
acrylic on gessoed hardboard



THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN CAR  
JONATHAN GINCEY

*Red & Orange*





9-11 on a Dice Roll  
11¼ x 14¼ inches  
acrylic on gessoed hardboard

Car Jam  
16 x 12 inches  
acrylic on gessoed hardboard



Tea with Emma  
12 x 12 inches  
acrylic on gessoed hardboard



Red Velvet Cup Cake, an Homage to Thiebaud  
12 x 12 inches  
acrylic on gessoed hardboard



*Spring Time*, 55.12 x 84.65 inches, oil on canvas

*Text and images provided by Paul Kasmin Gallery  
293 Tenth Avenue, New York, New York 10001  
www.paulkasmingallery.com*

**W**ell-known for his provocative, emotional realism paintings, Ceylan began *The Lost Paintings Series* as a contemporary exploration of the Orientalist gaze in all its facets. Upsetting both western and eastern master narratives, *The Lost Paintings Series* presents Eastern figures in a fascinating navigation of history, power and narrative. *Esmâ Sultan*, Ceylan's depiction of an eighteenth century Ottoman princess, renowned for her cruel disposition, draws on the empowering mythology of passionate, ruthless and assertive womanhood that characterizes accounts of her life. Visualizing feminine agency and even social transgression as at the heart of history, Ceylan interrogates the historically invisible. Rummaging through the past to make a startling com-

ment very much about the present, *The Lost Paintings Series* assembles a cast of lost characters and voices that embody the many silenced by both Orientalist and official nationalist histories. An Ottoman man gazes defiantly, cigarette in hand; a pair of male lovers betray a chaste farewell; a veiled woman stands before Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde*. In the words of curator Dan Cameron, "[Taner Ceylan makes] paintings that bespeak absolute technical mastery and precision, but which are also freighted with an emotional and sexual dimension usually absent from the genre—qualities that have set him apart from the prevailing tendencies in contemporary Turkish art, and which at times have also brought him outright abuse in the press."



*Birth of Hope*  
84.25 x 54 .75 inches  
oil on canvas

The Idea of Beauty has been greatly widened since the age of Plato. Then, it was only in order, proportion, unity in variety, that beauty was admitted to consist; today we hold that the moderns have caught a profounder beauty, the beauty of meanings, and we make it matter for rejoicing that nothing is too small, too strange, or too ugly to enter, through its power of suggestion, the realm of the aesthetically valuable; and that the definition of beauty should have been extended to include, under the name of Romantic, Symbolic, Expressive, or Ideal Beauty, all of the elements of aesthetic experience, all that emotionally stirs us in representation. But while this view is a natural development, it is not of necessity unassailable; and it is open to question whether the addition of an independent element of expression to the older definition of beauty can be justified by its consequences for art.

**Ethel D. Puffer**

The Psychology of Beauty



*Esma Sultan*  
70.87 x 66.93 inches  
oil on canvas

# Creation and

# Creativity

by Zeljko Kojic

**I**n the medieval period, when European societies had a theocratic organization, meaning that religious institutions and faith was the center of their general worldview, it was the case that people observed all of the visible world as God's creation. Nothing to be added to it, and it was perfect just the way it was. Renaissance art brought in some changes in the worldview, which can be observed through one Leonardo Da Vinci's sentence: "The painter's mind is a copy of the divine mind, since it operates freely in creating the many kinds of animals, plants, fruits, landscapes, countrysides, ruins, and awe-inspiring places." This understanding does not distance the painter, or the artist so much from the divine mind. But, it is stated that the mind of an artist has a certain freedom in creating. It does not just copy the things he sees in nature and in the world around him. Allowing more freedom to human beings as such, the Renaissance and later secular movements formed a gap between what it means to be the creator and a creative person—an artist.

Which portion of an artist's work is really being "created" by him and how does one create? It is understandable that the process of creating some piece of art should now be dissected or scientifically examined, as personal motives and personal processes can not be explained. A painting could be observed as a "building," with all its secret passages, doors, inner and outer decorative elements. Some are visible as they dazzle the observer, but most remain unseen and unnoticed by the untrained eye. Due to technological advancements and inventions of new painting techniques, questions of creativity and of ability to create have only heightened. Passionate artists are able to create the exact copy of the "divine creation," to imitate the divine mind with the same orientation to details as a supposed God would do. But, since this period of history of the Western world is marked as secular, which means that it does not predominantly believe in divine providence, leading to conclusion that human beings are sole creators of their destiny—that is an outline of the concept of humanism—we respectfully believe art also falls into that concept. But, humanism is

the ideology of immanence. Nothing "out of this world" can shape destiny of the world as such. A paradox occurs when we state that "art moves the boundaries" and shapes the future. As artists can "see" some things better than anyone else, and before anyone else, including contemporary scientists and philosophers. Van Gogh drew stars as spirals and trees touching the stars, for which he was laughed at in his time, but contemporary physicists confirmed that stars and galaxies in reality do look and function as spirals, and that trees really do have such inner potential that they would eventually reach to the stars if given enough time and nourishment.

Where does an artist draw his inspiration from, how is it possible for him to see things more truthfully than they appear to laymen of his time? Some say that "God speaks through them," but it is a statement that any modern man would doubt for a reason, although the question of God as a supreme being is of exquisite importance for both philosophy, especially the discipline of ontology, and religion. Are we, as people—artists included—conscious enough to see where our inspiration comes from? Maybe from traumatic events which do not reside in our living memory, as we have suppressed them? But how do we explain the providence? Suppressed memories always have to do something with the past and providence is for the future, the not-yet-experienced. An artist is somewhere between those two, experiencing life through these two opposite instances on the line of time. The basis of life is the life itself, the very feeling of "I'm alive" which we can evoke through creativity, the new, but it also must be linked with memory, the created, the old. That which is old is already given. It could be equated with God's creation—we cannot do anything about it, people cannot "change" the principles of nature no matter how hard they try, and in the same manner one individual cannot change its past, "that which had happened," but can use its content to express their current state of being.

~P-MT

Stephen Smith, *Hellboy and Borg*, 16 x 20 inches, oil on panel





*Raking Leaves*  
12.5 x 43 inches  
watercolor

**I**'m a realist painter; more specifically, I'm a hyperrealist or photorealist painter. Ever since I can remember I've always wanted my art to look real. Although I have enjoyed doing some abstract art, I could never see myself not painting realistically for very long. At a most basic level there is something intensely satisfying about painting an image on a flat piece of paper that doesn't look flat, but looks three-dimensional and real. For some artists, that is enough of a challenge to keep them happy for a lifetime. For them, the subject matter is secondary; "a tree, a woman, a racing car, a bowl of fruit-whatever, just let me paint something so I can make it look really good!" Although we might call these artists shallow, I wonder, are they? Do we ask the florist to do more than spend a lifetime creating beautiful flower arrangements? Do we say, "now you must say something profound with your flowers"? Do we make those demands to the furniture maker, jeweler, gardener, chef, or drummer?

In truth, I want to say something profound with my paintings, but I do not want to paint propaganda or anything like it. After all, is there anything more annoying than a

*text provided by the artist*  
self-righteous artist preaching his particular point of view?

So I come up with a thousand different painting ideas—mostly landscapes. I look at my photos and sketches, and I wonder which one is best. I wonder, "will anyone buy this?" And then I think, "I shouldn't be asking whether someone will buy this—I'm an artist!" After that, I usually pick the idea that I feel most strongly about (and that I also believe someone will buy).

A few years ago something good happened to me: I decided I didn't like many of my ideas for paintings. I realized that I was repeating myself too often and I needed to start looking at the world fresh again. Now I've got a whole new stack of ideas and they energize me—I think about them all the time. Most of my subject matter was rural for the first twenty-five years of my career; now I'm fascinated with the small towns that surround me. I'm composing with the geometric elements of roads, buildings, back alleys and neon signs. The first paintings in this new phase have turned out to be some of my all-time favorites. And...—I've sold them, too."



*Anderson Farm Morning*  
9 x 26 inches  
watercolor



*Rainy Street Scene in Summer*  
7.5 x 17 inches  
watercolor



*Winter Coats #2*  
7 x 28 inches  
watercolor



*Winter Morning with Cows and Creek*  
9.5 x 28 inches  
watercolor



*King's Motel in Winter*  
9.5 x 9.5 inches  
watercolor

A large, stylized, teal-colored initial letter 'B' with a double outline and a drop shadow, positioned to the left of the main text block.

Beauty is neither extended to the whole field of all living things nor merely enclosed in this field. A marble block, though it is and remains lifeless, can nevertheless become a living form by the architect and sculptor; a man, though he lives and has a form, is far from being a living form on that account. For this to be the case, it is necessary that his form should be life, and that his life should be a form. As long as we only think of his form, it is lifeless, a mere abstraction; as long as we only feel his life, it is without form, a mere impression. It is only when his form lives in our feeling, and his life in our understanding, he is the living form, and this will everywhere be the case where we judge him to be beautiful.

**J. C. Friedrich von Schiller**

Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man

*text provided by the artist*

**P**aul Bond's art lives in the spaces between dreaming and reality. Having been born in Mexico in 1964, his work draws heavily from the Latin American genre of Magic Realism. Paul's paintings are a merging of symbolic, surreal and fantastic elements set in realistic atmospheres which allow him to create a world of unlimited possibilities. This concept serves a symbolic purpose in and of itself, as it reflects the nature of dreams. At times his art simply expresses the whimsical aspects of life with the purpose of lightening the hearts of his audience. Yet most works also carry deeper metaphysical and philosophical messages. His art ultimately strives to bring to life the world of our dreams and subconscious thoughts, fears and hopes—a psychoanalysis of our common inner landscapes if you will—in order to inspire self reflection and self awareness in the viewer.

Altering and juxtaposing familiar objects is often what gives Bond the symbols that become his visual language. As

he shares, “When viewing a scene, object or a line in a novel that moves me, my mind’s eye is continually imagining what elements I could introduce or alter to make a grander statement about what I am experiencing. I am continually envisioning potential paintings out of my daily experiences. The challenge is never lack of inspiration, but choosing which vision to bring to physical fruition in order to share those experiences with my audience. Choosing which visions are most universal in scope so as to connect with the largest amount of people whom I believe are exploring the same mysteries and asking the same questions as I am.”

Adding about his artistic motivation: “The physical world to me is often heartbreakingly beautiful and profound. And the best way I can know how to channel those deep emotions life inspires in me is by adding to it through a world of my own creation—a world intended to both deepen my own life experience and to stir the souls of my fellow travelers.”



*Eleanor Dreams of a Miraculous Rescue*  
30 x 30 inches  
oil on Panel

**T**his painting evolved from a photo of my niece, Eleanor. Her pose was so confident and determined, and I knew immediately that I would use it in a larger scene, although the bigger picture wasn't clear at the time. 6 months later, I was photographing elephants at a preserve in Bali when one laid down nearby, just looking up with soft, kind eyes. I was imagining what kind of life a captive elephant might lead, and it was then that I remembered Eleanor's passionate love of elephants—and the photo of her. The resulting scene became a story of innocence. Of a child's belief that she can always protect and nurture those things that she loves the most. And a prayer that the adult Eleanors of the world never stop cherishing whatever calls to them.

*The Girl Who Circumnavigated the  
World in a Dream of Her Own Making*  
72 x 40 inches  
oil on Canvas

**T**his painting is about trust and optimism. It is said that people who live in a world of uplifting thoughts aren't facing reality. But the fact is, their reality is different than others'. It tends to match their attitude. They trust that all is unfolding with purpose and their lives reflect that thinking. This is no simple philosophical pondering for me. Indeed, I believe this is the key to an expansive, fully lived life. Challenges still happen. But the difference in moving through them brings to mind the words of poet Patrick Overton:

“When we walk to the edge of all the light we have and take the step into the darkness of the unknown, we must believe that one of two things will happen. There will be something solid for us to stand on or we will be taught to fly.”



**T**his painting is an allegory on personal evolution. As we grow, we will often come to the edge of experiential boundaries. Boundaries that require us to examine and alter our beliefs of what is possible if we are to live a more expansive life. The home in the center of the heart-shaped tree represents the need to focus on what our own hearts call us forward to create and experience, for this is the current evolutionary drive in humanity. It's no longer about basic surviving, but about thriving. The comet in the background is symbolic of the two different ways that one can view these cathartic events: either as a destructive comet of catastrophe, or as a shooting star heralding positive change.

*A Home at the Edge of the World*  
24 x 16 inches  
oil on Panel



**T**he Beautiful is one of the immortal themes. It cannot die; it grows not old. On the same day with the sun was beauty born, and its life runs parallel with the path of that great beautifier. As a subject for exposition, it is at once easy and difficult: easy, from the affluence of its resources; difficult, from the exactions which its own spirit makes in the use of them.

**George H. Calvert**  
Essays Aesthetical

**T**hrough my paintings, I am forming a parallel between our life and that of an object through an ultra-realistic examination of its human potential. In an attempt to redefine the objects' natural purpose, the emphasis is placed on the exchange between them. I present these objects not as insignificant things, but as if each one has its own destiny. As humble as this may seem, their existence parallels the brevity of our life. The paintings' illumina-

*text provided by the artist*  
tion is meant to allure the viewer. Bathed in light, each one reveals its own mysteries. The details of their surface reveal signs of a life lived: dents, bruises, and more. It is as if they were having a conversation of their own, long before we approached the picture. Though presented in the traditional format of the still life, consider the moment is still, however, the objects breathing, moving and living. They mirror our life.



*Transitory Reflections: Cherries*  
8 x 8 inches  
oil on panel



*Transitory Reflections: Tangerine and Apples*  
16 x16 inches  
oil on panel



*Transitory Reflections: Artichoke and Plum*  
16 x 18 inches  
oil on panel

## Lost

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you  
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,  
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,  
Must ask permission to know it and be known.  
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,  
I have made this place around you,  
If you leave it you may come back again, saying Here.  
No two trees are the same to Raven.  
No two branches are the same to Wren.  
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,  
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows  
Where you are. You must let it find you.

David Wagoner

*text provided by the artist*

**I** am a borderlander at heart. I live and work along the boundaries: visual, metaphorical, natural, and spiritual. But these boundaries, though they form the very structure of our society, are remarkably permeable; they have a habit of softening, of becoming tangled and overgrown. It is within this softening—an oscillation between familiar constraints and inexplicable presences—that I situate myself as an artist. It is a liminal place where our human impulse to judge and hierarchize is quieted, where a natural way of seeing floats quietly to the surface of our hyper-stimulated minds.

In the simplest possible sense, my work is an exploration of the boundary between light and dark. I address this literally, with image and execution, but also metaphorically: this work speaks of the known and the unknown, the seen and the unseen. Though I work in many mediums, they all share common qualities of simplicity and directness. Drawing is my primary methodology, as it is extraordinarily well suited to my conceptual pursuits. The attributes of a monochromatic medium—at its core, an act of playing light against dark in order to achieve form and illusion—echo the distilled, ele-

mental aspects of the images. Drawing is a medium in which every choice is evident, every mark present and accounted for. It is intimate, intuitive, and direct.

My work represents an exploration of an inner wilderness by way of an outer one; it hinges on my belief that the natural world is not only an inherent part of us as human beings (and we of it), but that it is the original, exquisitely sensitive mirror in which we find our own inner terrain and wildness reflected. My work has always been an act of reverence for the natural world. There is an element of science in it, in the desire to study and observe. But there is an element of spirit, too, in the continual reaching for something just beyond the visible. The natural world possesses a magic for me, one which I attempt to elicit by working within the bounds of realism as one might work within a poetic form, utilizing the formal constraints to evoke something beyond the boundary of those very limitations. I strive to carve out a compelling space in which those peripheral presences can stand forth. A space of quiet, of conscious co-existence with both the seen and the unseen.”



*Echoes I*  
30 x 30 inches  
charcoal on mounted paper



*Spruce I*  
8 x 8 inches  
graphite on clayboard



*Origins*  
45 x 57 inches  
charcoal on paper

**I**n traditional symbolic language, in mythology, and even within the context of everyday thought, light and dark carry their own connotations of the known and the unknown.

This makes sense biologically speaking, of course, but for many people it reads on a deeper level as well, even if they cannot define it in any precise way. Light represents the rational, the mind, the enlightenment, the navigable, known world. It is vision and consciousness, safety, knowledge, and civilization. Darkness, on the other hand, represents the opposite: the mysterious, the instinctive, the underworld and unconscious. It is the bottomless depths of the sea, the reaches of deep space, or even the endless interior of our own minds. It is the unknown, the preternatural, the wilderness both within and without.

**J**ames Hollis speaks of myth as a rarified form of the greater human story, a way of evading the “heresy of literalization” that even scientific concepts often suffer. How many students of advanced chemistry or quantum mechanics are actually a bit surprised to find that an atom is nothing remotely akin, as it turns out, to the perfect globe represented by the beach ball in their science classroom, with dozens of tiny positively or negatively charged tennis balls whipping around it in predictable orbits? Symbolic language is not without a purpose; our great stories, much like the bottomless complexities of the molecular world, simply do not lend themselves to immediate or complete understanding. The symbolic (in this case, the mythological) modes of understanding the world are essential, in fact, so long as they are “understood as symbols, that is, images that point beyond themselves towards movements in the soul.”



*Firmament*  
30 x 42 inches  
charcoal on paper

# Robin Cole Smith

## Encaustic

*text provided by the artist*

**T**hough traditional charcoal drawings on paper or wood supports still make up a portion of my practice, an additional percentage of my work is primarily composed of layered encaustic drawings. I begin with the practical elements: the building of the cradled mahogany panels I favor as a support surface, and the many layers of encaustic priming with a highly absorbent ground to provide a reliable bonding surface for the encaustic medium. The drawing process, initially, is a very separate pursuit from the preparation of the support. The transparent nature of encaustic allows me to use it as a layering medium, suspending one layer of black carbon above another in beeswax and damar resin (the components of encaustic medium). I complete the drawings on vellum in their entirety before beginning the wax process, so that I can see clearly how the separate layers of drawing will align. I end with two to five layers of drawing, each on a separate piece of paper, which I then transfer—interspersed with layers of wax—onto the primed surface, with the help of a heat gun, burnishing tools and blades in the transfer and fusing process. The result is a technique that is certainly related to the traditional notion of encaustic, but which weds it with a very contemporary approach to drawing, and stretches the medium to the extremes of its stability, translucence, luminosity, and shine.

It is an involved and lengthy project, different from the more straightforward drawings I have done in the past, and I have found this working process to be slowly shaping and transforming my actual drawing technique. I am aware, when working, that part of what makes layering so intrinsically beautiful is its translucence, and part of what makes the translucence so beautiful is the simultaneous visibility of disparate drawings on separate layers, marks upon marks with differences of clarity and temperature depending on their place before or behind depths of wax. It is a truly a

case of the whole being more than the sum of the parts. As a result, I have learned to draw in a way that takes this into account, often redrawing certain passages in extreme detail on each layer, despite knowing that, when combined, many of these details will disappear into darkness. But it is a darkness of depth and texture only achievable with the conscientious creation of its component elements—a superficial layer of black would never achieve the same end. My process, once so meticulous, so careful with each mark, has therefore relaxed; I often leave passages loosely indicated, or with a different level of finish than I would on a traditional drawing because I know that it will change so substantially when combined with wax. The layering may obscure it, the wax may melt or change the shape of it, a bubble may destroy it, scraping may obliterate it, an upper layer of wax may penetrate too deep with its heat and move the pigment.

The wax is enormously unpredictable; a half-second too long with the heat source can liquefy the medium holding my charcoal drawing to such an extent that the image washes away like silt in a stream. I can—purposely or accidentally—boil the wax, or cause bubbles to appear mysteriously from lower layers only to rise and burst on the surface, either obliterating portions of the drawing, or (depending on the size, temperature, and level of intentionality) add beautiful, organic textures that could not be achieved any other way. Encaustic has thus provided my very traditional charcoal drawings with another language of mark to inform their visual conversation, one unique to this earthy, unpredictable mixture of beeswax and resin that has a pattern, purpose and mind entirely its own. My process, meticulous though it may be, particularly when compared with the traditional uses of encaustic, has actually loosened and freed my drawing considerably into a realm of fluid mark and anticipation.



*Instinct I*  
16 x 16 inches  
encaustic and charcoal on panel

B

ut the genesis of beauty is by no means declared because we know how to point out the component parts, which in their combination produce beauty. For to this end it would be necessary to comprehend that combination itself, which continues to defy our exploration, as well as all mutual operation between the finite and the infinite.

The reason, on transcendental grounds, makes the following demand: There shall be a communion between the formal impulse and the material impulse - that is, there shall be a play instinct - because it is only the unity of reality with the form, of the accidental with the necessary, of the passive state with freedom, that the conception of humanity is completed. Reason is obliged to make this demand, because her nature impels her to completeness and to the removal of all bounds; while every exclusive activity of one or the other impulse leaves human nature incomplete and places a limit in it. Accordingly, as soon as reason issues the mandate, "a humanity shall exist," it proclaims at the same time the law, "there shall be a beauty." Experience can answer us if there is a beauty, and we shall know it as soon as she has taught us if a humanity can exist. But neither reason nor experience can tell us how beauty can be, and how a humanity is possible.

**J. C. Friedrich von Schiller**

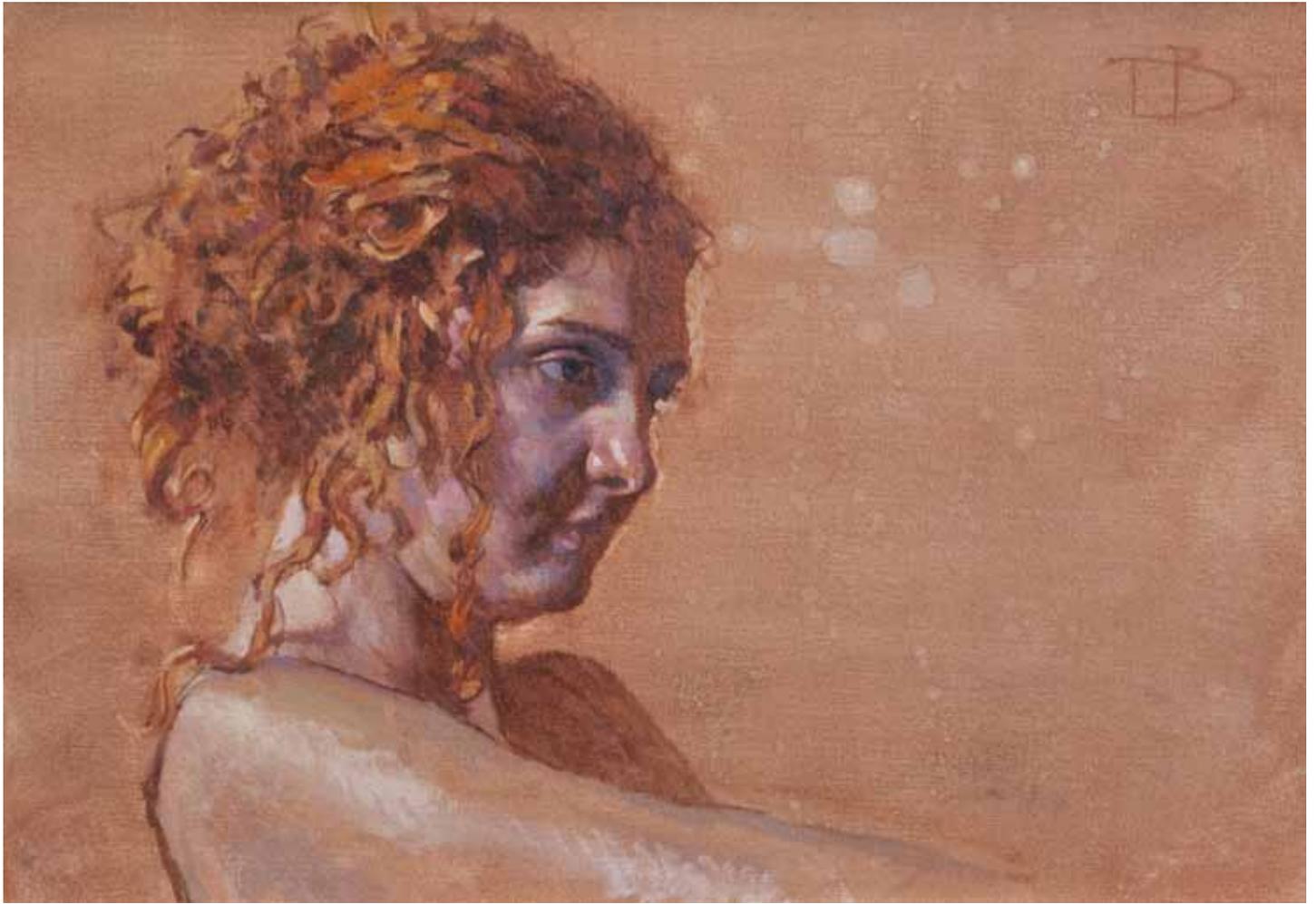
Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man

*text provided by the artist*

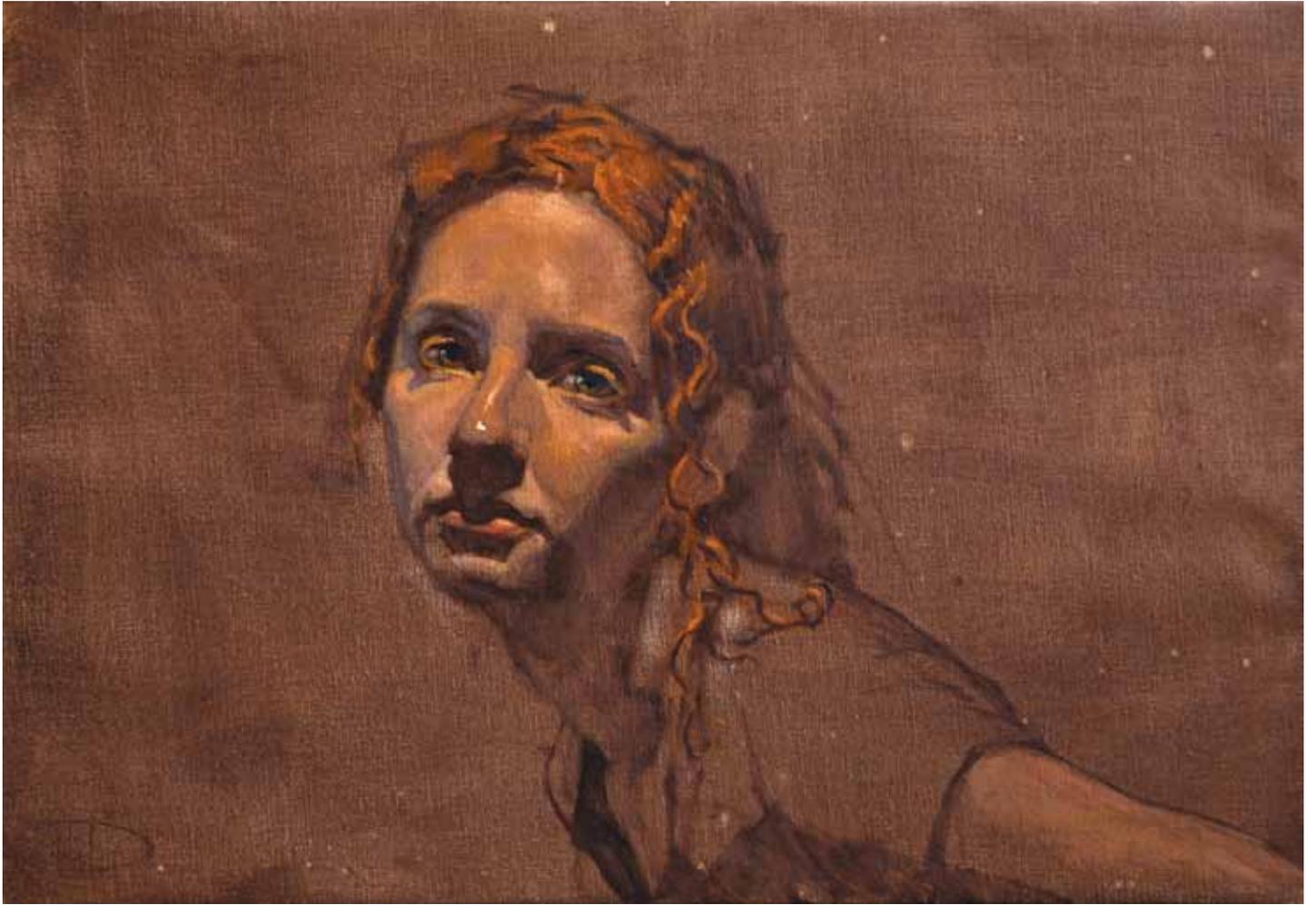
“**T**here are an infinite amount of shapes, angles, colors, contours, and edges in the human form, and studying them is a never ending journey which I plan to take as far as I can. I try to capture the character of my subjects in the most sensitive and truthful way possible, by digging ever deeper into the human experience, looking for hidden insights, bringing them into significance and onto the canvas.”

*Hoola Hoop Girl*  
36 x 48 inches  
oil on Linen





*Maddie*  
18 x 14 inches  
oil on linen



*Mary*  
18 x 14 inches  
oil on linen



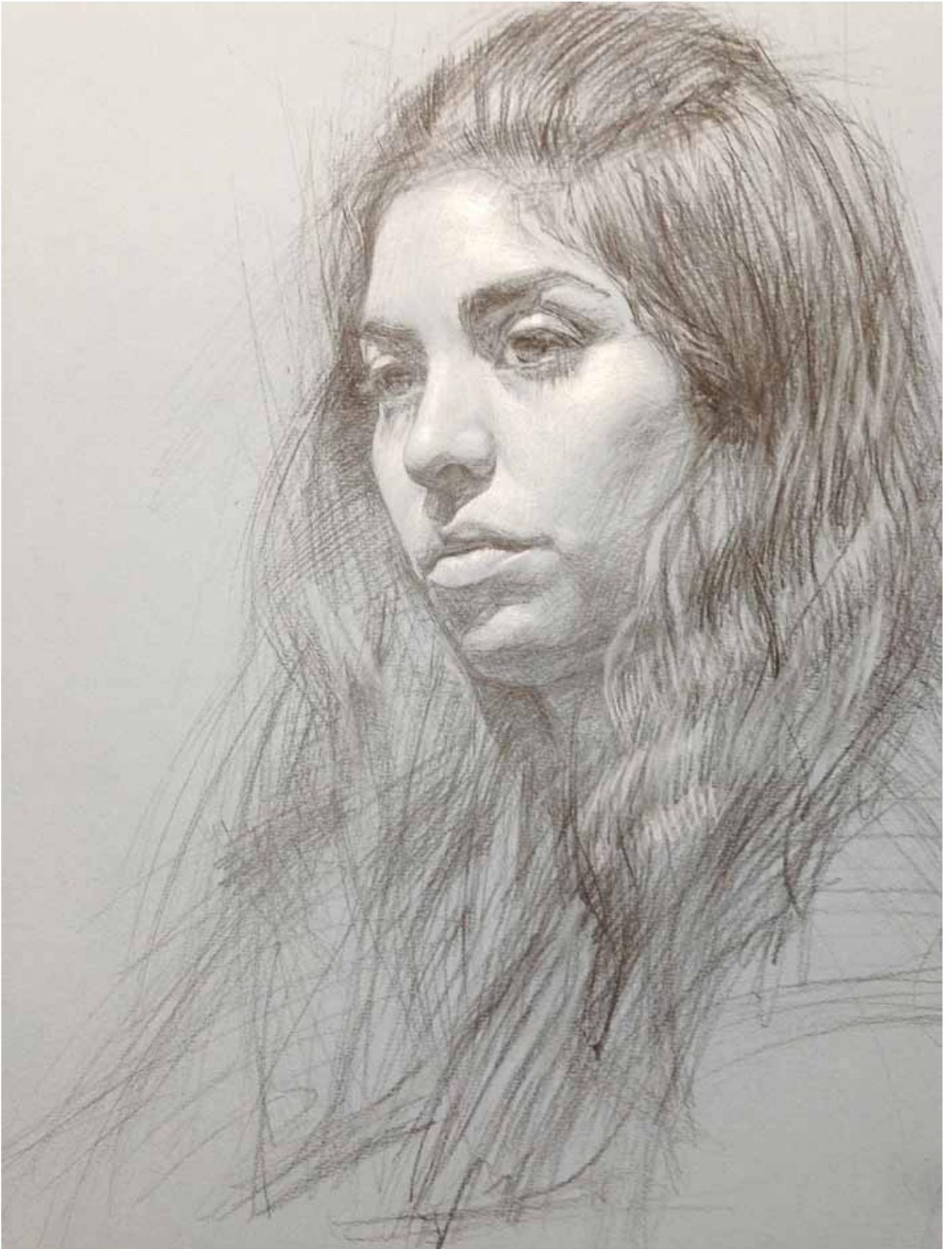
## Process:

“My father and teacher “Semyon Bilmes” is from the ex-Soviet Union, and a graduate of the Russian art academies, where a strong understanding of form and construction was cultivated. I try to infuse my figures, whether drawing or painting, with a sense of sculptural structure, as well as feeling and emotion. The paintings are all done in oil on linen. I tend to paint directly with minimal glazing and blending.”

*Isa*  
18 x 24 inches  
oil on linen



*Russia*, 18 x 24 inches, charcoal and chalk on toned paper



Val, 15 x 20 inches, charcoal and chalk on toned paper

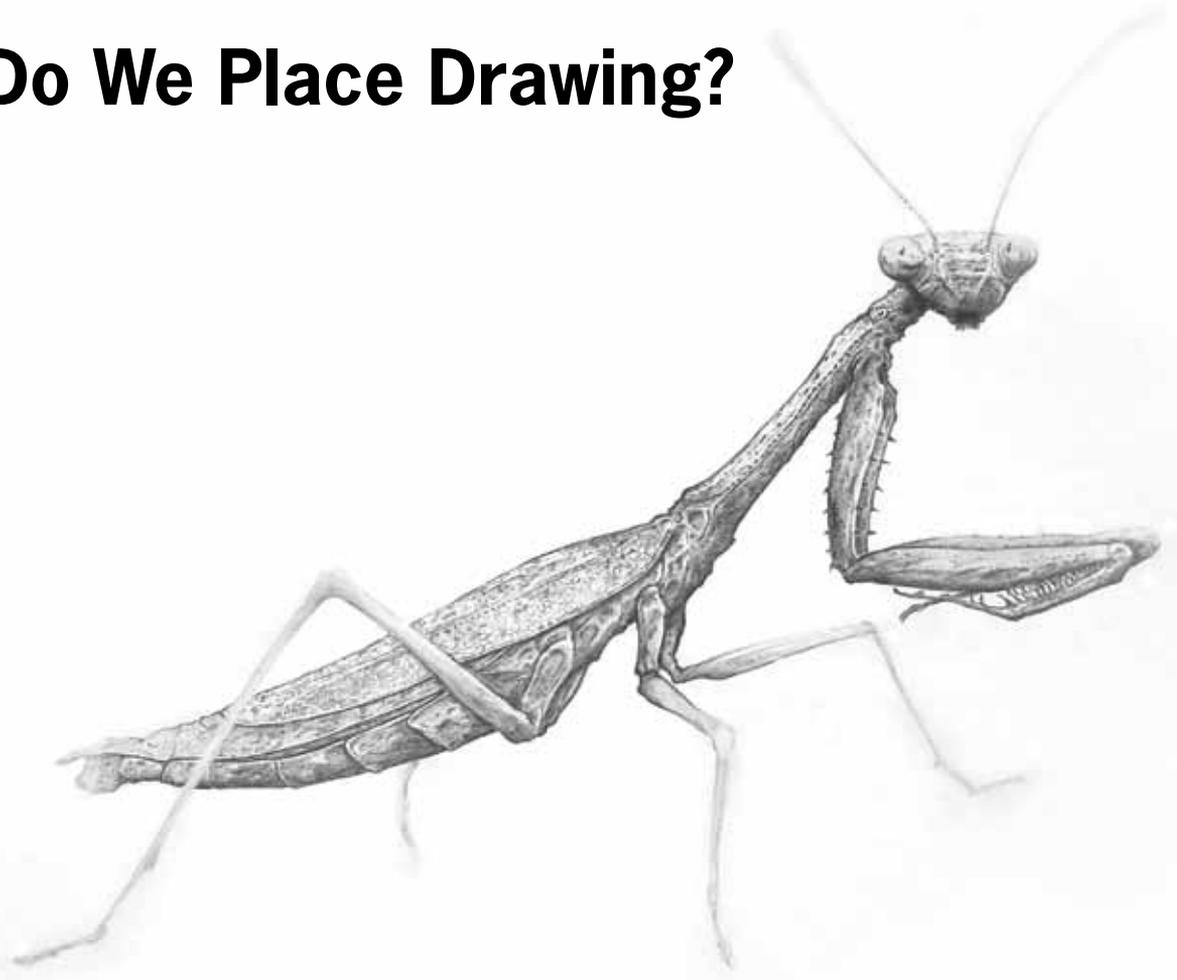
**D**aniel's work has been influenced by such masters as Rafael, Repin and Rembrandt, but the artist he most admires is his father and teacher, Semyon Bilmes. Daniel began his artistic education at the age of eight under Semyon's tutelage. His schooling is deeply rooted in classic nineteenth century Russian painting tradition, and his style inspired by his multicultural upbringing and international travels. At the age of 15 he became an instructor at the Ashland Academy of Art in Southern Oregon.

His work aims to capture the character of his subject in the most sensitive and truthful way possible. He achieves this by digging ever deeper into the human experience, looking for hidden insights, bringing them into significance and onto the canvas.

*Toni*  
18 x 24 inches  
charcoal and chalk on toned paper



# Where Do We Place Drawing?



Stephen Smith  
*Praying Mantis Drawing*  
16 x 20 inches  
graphite on board

**A** drawing can be a preliminary work, a finished piece in its own right, or both. In a sense it can be seen as the skeleton of a painting. Underneath many finished paintings is an original drawing. The subject may be sketched out or highly rendered on the substrate at the beginning of the process.

In the case of drawings in charcoal, graphite, conté crayon, and the like, these works are often considered by the artist to be complete. Traditional atelier programs insist that students master drawing before moving on to painting. Tone before color.

It can be argued that drawing is easier than painting. Typically the number of tools is much more limited in the former rather than the latter—often consisting of only one. It also seems apparent that there are many that can draw but not paint, but few that can paint but not draw. This being said, drawing may be easier than painting but it is by no means easy. It is very difficult to create a convincing drawing in the traditional sense of the term, though inventing your own style and limiting yourself to it is something pretty much anyone can do. And this, unfortunately, is the easy path that so many have chosen.

by Stephen Smith

The refinement can vary significantly from drawing to drawing. Some artists are content to limit their pieces to outlines while others strive for a complete tonal range. But when does a drawing cease to be a drawing and become a painting? The obvious answer is when one switches medium. A painting, by definition, should involve paint, yet one can draw with a brush dipped in paint as easily as one dipped in ink. There is also the vague middle ground of colored pencil, wash drawings, pastel, etc. This is further complicated by printed techniques such as etching, which is somewhat akin to drawing, and lithography, which shares many qualities with painting.

Like all categories, what is and isn't a drawing must remain nebulous. But this doesn't mean we have to avoid all definitions. There is a comfortable center, far from the fuzzy edges of classifications, which can safely be labeled a member of any group. The imprecision of language is a given that does not have to end all communication.

The fact is, a fine drawing can display the skill and intelligence of an artist to a large degree, if not to the extent that a painting might. For this reason we should certainly consider drawings worth producing as ends in themselves and certainly worth looking at and contemplating.

~P-MT

Stephen Smith, *Jester and Dwarf*, 8 x 10 inches, graphite on board



# Art Schools and the Destruction of Art

by Michael Paraskos

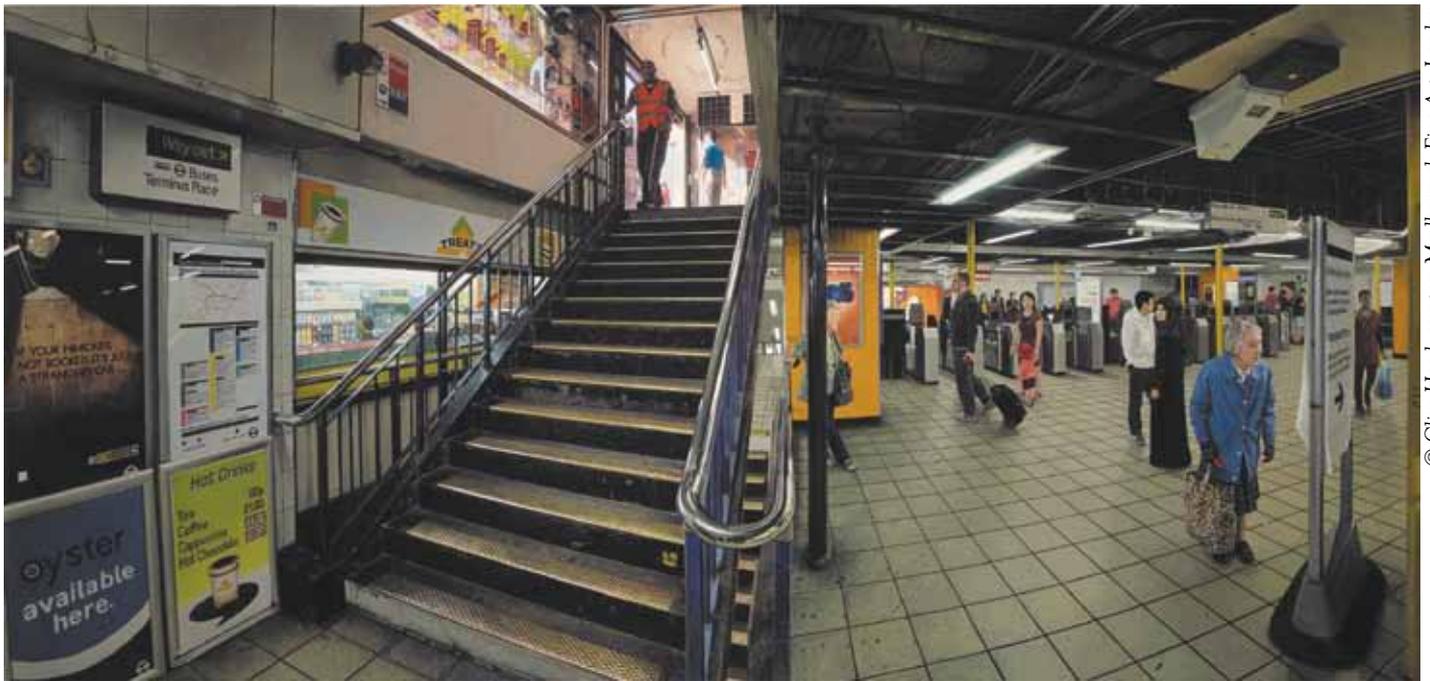
**M**y father tells a story of when he began studying at Leeds College of Art in the north of England in the early 1960s. The college, where luminaries of the art world as Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth had once studied, was then under the sway of a charismatic and revolutionary Head of Fine Art named Harry Thubron. Like many art schools in Britain at that time, Thubron encouraged the students to reject the art education of the past and come up with new ways of thinking about and making art.

Part of this, my father recalls, meant encouraging the students to take hammers to the college's collection of plaster cast reproductions of antique and historic sculptures. As at almost every art school in the country, these priceless reproductions of the Parthenon Marbles, the *Apollo Belvedere* and Michelangelo's *David*, to name just a few of the most typical, were reduced to dust. Thousands of them. One of the last surviving examples I saw was in Ireland in the 1990s, at Dublin's National College of Art, where a life-sized *Laocoön* was set in the middle of the student union bar covered in graffiti.

In British (and Irish) art schools at the time the plaster casts had as specific purpose. They were teaching aids in the drawing classes. Students in any provincial town, who could not possibly get to see a real Michelangelo, could at least see a life-size three-dimensional facsimile. And like their counterpart-

sin art schools in London and Paris, or Berlin and Rome, they too could learn from the great masters of art by literally drawing from their works. But as a militant reaction against the idolization of historic art took hold in the 1960s the plaster casts became symbols for an Ancien Régime, and like images of the monarchy in revolutionary France, targets for the mob.

These attacks on the plaster casts were also attacks on the notion that art students should learn art. The craft element of art, which encompasses not only technical skill in how to mix color but the ability to establish and compose credible pictorial space, was for the most part a learned facility. Most students acquired it to some extent. If you were lucky something in your genes or upbringing meant you were able to do extraordinary things with that learning, but that luck was possessed by the fortunate few, the people we used to call geniuses. In this, art is no different from cooking, where the ability to make perfectly tasty food is learned by many people, but the ability to be a Michelin starred chef takes something extra. It takes genius. In attacking the skill base for art education what we were left with was a notion that art is not a learned skill with some people possessing an additional 'X' factor, but that art is the illustration of an idea or meaning. As long as the idea or meaning is illustrated it does not matter how well it is illustrated. To maintain my cookery analogy, this is like asking a



© Clive Head, courtesy Marlborough Fine Art, London

Clive Head  
*Terminus Place* 2012  
 57.25 x 119.12 inches  
 oil on canvas

group of untrained chefs to make a tarte tatin then accepting what they come up with, no matter how good, bad or edible, because they say it is a tarte tatin.

It is a point not lost on musicians, writers, dancers and actors that it is only in the visual arts that we have a notion that teaching a baseline of knowledge is somehow wrong. At one time this sense of wrongness had at least a political mission to it, a revolutionary desire to dispense with the old. But in our own time it is more likely to be continued simply because two or three generations down the line art tutors no longer possess many technical skills to pass on.

Despite this, there is an argument to say there was an element of truth in the desire of art tutors like Thubron to destroy the old teaching systems. The methods Thubron and his contemporaries employed were wrong. Likewise, the outcome of an art world in which anything called art, at least by anyone powerful or rich enough to enforce their opinion, is accepted as art is deeply immoral. But the idea of great, or even moderately decent, art proceeding simply from technical knowledge or a direct emulation of historic art is also wrong. To suggest otherwise is to reify art, divorcing it from life so that it becomes no more than an object of decoration.

Thubron was in effect following in a long line of theorists

and philosophers, from Johann Gottfried Herder and Conrad Fiedler to John Ruskin and Herbert Read, by suggesting that art is an essential human activity that begins when a human being stands in the world and attempts to comprehend the chaos of that experience. In attempting to understand he or she begins to order that world, or we might say compose it, and in that composition we have the roots of art. If we place too much pre-existing knowledge or technology between the initial aesthetic or sensory experience of the world and the artistic process of ordering and composing then we risk responding not to the world itself, but to a cliché of it.

For many figurative and realist painters and sculptors today, particularly the hyperrealists and neo-salon schools, Thubron and his contemporaries are likely to be hateful figures who destroyed the technical basis for art. But their desire to free art from what they saw as its enslavement to an obsession with technique and its own history was sound. Art ceases to function as art if artists fail to engage with the world either through a fetishization of technology and technique, or excessive servitude to art's own history. It is a basic truth that can be summed up in relation to life drawing. The purpose of life drawing is not to learn how to draw like Ingres. It is to deal with the problem posed by the physical presence of a human figure in front of you.



*Draadjjesvlees*  
47.25 x 70.86 inches  
oil on Linen

**T**jalf Sparnaay's paintings hit the retina like bolts of lightning in a clear blue sky. No other painter confronts us quite so clearly with ordinary objects that we hold dear. Since 1987, he has been working on his imposing oeuvre, constantly seeking new images that have never been painted before. What he calls Megarealism is part of the contemporary global art movement of Hyperrealism, and Sparnaay is now considered one of the most important painters working in that style.

*text provided by the artist*

**"S**trongly influenced by Vermeer and Rembrandt but also by Ralph Goings and Charles Bell, I take the subjects of my oils from everyday reality. Utilitizing trivial or mundane items, I let reality run through my fingers afresh. My intention is to give these objects a soul, a presence.

Times stands still when I place these objects in a classical art arrangement, removed from the context of their day-to-day surroundings. Ideally, this sense of timelessness is the way in which my technique is close to the seventeenth century Dutch tradition.

I hope my paintings will allow the viewer to re-experience reality, to rediscover the essence of the thing that has become so ordinary from its DNA to the level of universal structure, in all its beauty. I call it the beauty of the contemporary commonplace."



*Knickers, 2011*  
55 x 35.5 inches  
oil on Linen

# Tjalf Sparnaay

## The Most Delightful Egg: Tjalf Sparnaay & Hyperrealism

By Laura Eliza Enrique

**T**he roundness of the eye is mirrored by the roundness of the orange and yellowish line, forming a perfect circle slightly to the left of the image's middle. The perfect circle is habituated by a smooth gradation of vibrant primary color red, to sassy secondary orange, to bright and lovely yellow. A delicate spot of white on the top, shining and reflecting. The perfection of the circle inhabited by this perfect chromatic scale conforms the perfect visual smoothness of the yolk. This perfect visual texture is continued from the inside to the outside of the yolk: pure white, with lighter and darker shades, contrast with the vividness of the center. The eye gets to see some bursts created by color; and the eye assumes the egg is already cooked. Irregular brownish curved lines delimit the silky white area. Right next to this darker perimeter, soft greenish blue, a subtle wave of light color in the background, closing the circle of balance. It is an 80 x 80 cm visual paradise of symmetry, harmony and rhythm: everything in its right place. From taste paradise to visual paradise: never has an egg looked so beautiful before.

I am describing contemporary Dutch artist Tjalf Sparnaay's painting of a fried egg. His work, including this perfect and delicious sunny-side up, is considered to belong to what art experts nowadays categorize as "hyperrealism." But I still doubt to what extent this is actually accurate. Let me go to the definitions.

"Hyper-" is a prefix, coming from the Greek, meaning "over, above, beyond." Therefore, hyperrealism transcends realism. Realism is a category used to classify every work of art produced in Europe, especially in France, in the second half of the nineteenth century. It would be used because of the very nature of these works: the aim of depicting reality, natural or social reality; the aim of describing, without judg-

ing. The problem appears when reality itself is transcended and redefined. Art needs to transcend and redefine this new reality. Realism becomes hyperrealism. But when looking at other hyperrealist works, I still wonder how these can be similar to my beloved fried egg.

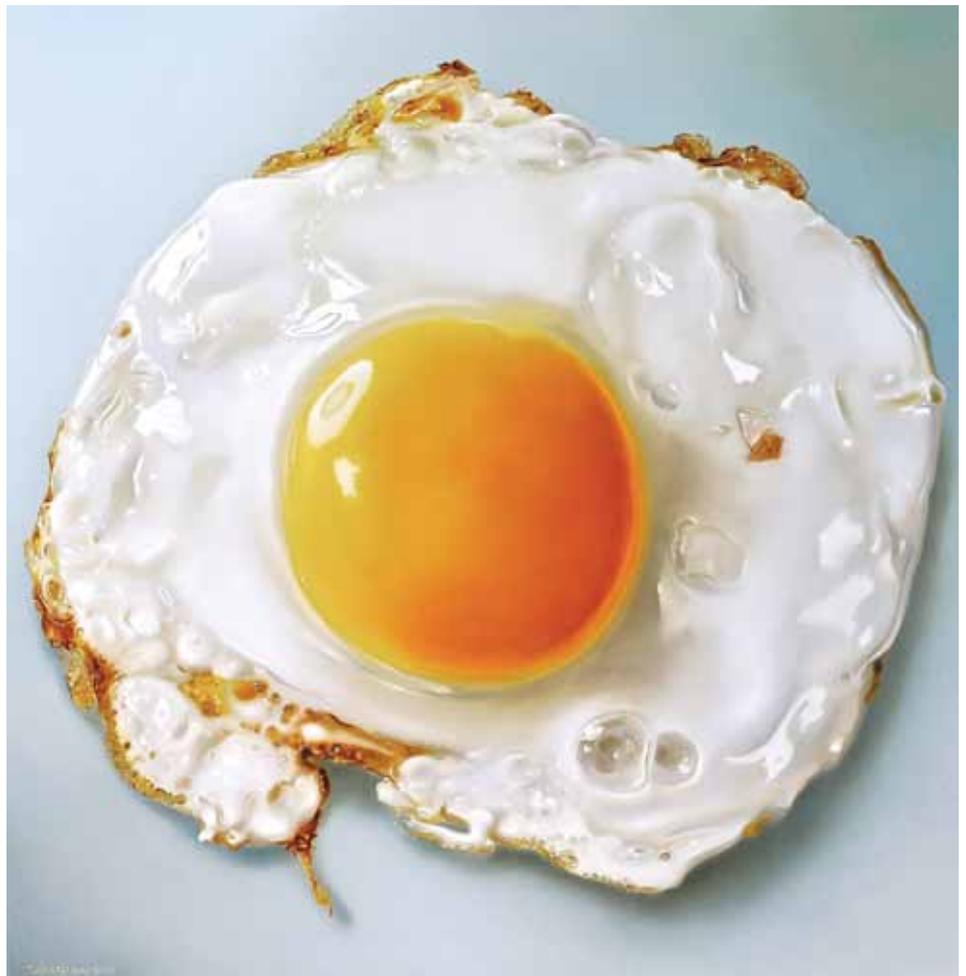
The difference between common hyperrealism and Sparnaay's hyperrealism is huge. The difference is the same difference described by American art historian Svetlana Alpers in *The Art of Describing*, between Italian and Dutch painting in the seventeenth century (just four centuries later). In this text, the main difference is the fact Italians narrate, while Dutch describe. Yes, regular hyperrealism, trying to be as real and raw and shocking as possible (because, isn't reality raw and shocking?), is still quite narrative. There is still some remnant of judgment of value, of critique (for some reason, subject matter is usually related to human nature, to nudity, to scatological situations). But how could it be otherwise possible? Surprise! An alternative is possible, and our perfect egg proves so: pure description, pure colors and bilateral symmetry, achieving pure objectivity and escaping the rigors of subjectivity (such as multiple planes, controversial color, etc). It is the fortunate track of the precise trajectory of a delicate paintbrush that remains loyal to the eye. Four centuries later, the Dutch did it again.

The Alpers argument was based on an analysis of Dutch culture as a knowledge and visually oriented one—a very trendy culture, aware of what was going on at that precise moment in the world, in terms of science, technology and navigational discovery. The argument can still be stretched out: when looking at the rest of Sparnaay's works, one may finish starving, because of the multiple depictions of food, but there are other multiple objects, such as cans of Coke and classics of the great

Dutch masters, wrapped in cellophane (my favorite, *The Milkmaid* by Vermeer, has just been done. God bless Facebook, because there I can follow the progress on the work of my favorite artists), and so on. What is going on today? Liberalism, free market, monopoly (yes, including food), a loss of aura (in Benjamin's terms). I bet Sparnaay is somehow aware of that (consciously or unconsciously). I've been studying in the Netherlands for one year, and it's been enough to realize to what extent they're aware of their surroundings. That is highly reflected on their educational system, for example.

Anyways, going back to the egg (because the egg was first, and no one can doubt that...or can they?), there is not much room left for moral or subjective judgment: the image is completed—balance in form, space and light. But there is room for aesthetic judgment: perfection, I would say. No one has taken the time to convey that much pureness and lightness in something as texturally complex as a fried egg—a complete challenge to the eye, I must say. Simplicity is sometimes the hardest to achieve, just as perfection (anyone trying to cook an egg knows about it; imagine trying to paint it!). Here I introduce an important quote by art historian Ernst Gombrich, from the introduction of the brilliant *The Story of Art*:

I think we can only hope to understand this if we draw on our own experience. Of course we are no artists, we may never have tried to paint a picture and may have no intention of ever doing so. But this need not mean that we are never confronted with problems similar to those which make up the artists life...Anybody who has ever tried to arrange a bunch of flowers, to shuffle and shift the colours, to add a little here and take away there, has experienced this strange sensation of balancing forms and colours without being able to tell exactly what kind of harmony it is he is trying



BMG *Fried Egg*, 31.5 x 31.5 inches, oil on linen

to achieve. We just feel a patch of red here may make all the difference, or this blue is all right by itself but it does not 'go' with the others, and suddenly a little stem of green leaves may seem to make it come 'right.' 'Don't touch it anymore,' we exclaim, 'now it is perfect.'

(Gombrich 1959, p. 14)

Yes, perfect. When I first found this on the web, I must say I was completely astonished. And if I was completely astonished, it was for two reasons, the first one being scientific, and the second one, more personal: first, because of the immaculate composition of the image; and second, because of self-identification. Since I learned how to grab a pencil (perhaps more than 18 years ago), I draw everything within my visual field (this is partly where my affiliation to art comes from), and food has probably been one of my most recurrent topics. I remember myself in primary

school trying to depict the most delicious piece of cake; I remember me in secondary school right before lunch time, and not having anything but a sheet of paper and my regular bunch of color pencils; I remember the precious gift I gave to the guy who had a crush on me in high school—the drawing of a fatty bacon cheeseburger (he still keeps it). I always thought if one day I'd become an artist, I'd have to paint food (among other cool stuff, of course). I do not dare to compare myself to genius Tjalf Sparnaay (quality and technique speak for themselves; plus there's a reason why I'm not an artist and he is), but, at least, I'm happy, believing in Gombrich's words and thinking there must be something in common.

So don't touch it anymore. Now it is perfect. The yolk didn't break, and the white remained white. Finding this egg was just sublime. This huge egg made out of blue, white and yellow painting, is the most delightful egg ever.



*Very Large Salad Bowl*  
47.15 x 70.86 inches  
oil on canvas



*Supersandwich!!*  
31.5 x 151.2 inches  
oil on Linen

# Tjalf Sparnaay

## Mega-Realism, Simplicity Multiplied a Millionfold

by Anna Marie Hazenberg

**“D**o you want your egg fried or boiled? Salt and pepper? Fresh orange juice? A cup of tea?” Reality presents itself to us afresh every day. On waking we can see, feel, smell, describe and use it. The reality of the things around us is so self-evident that we take it for granted. We break the egg on the hard rim of the frying pan without thinking. We set the timer to hard-boiled or soft-boiled and we pour the boiling water over the tea bag in the mug.

Tjalf Sparnaay takes the subjects of his oils from this everyday reality. Trivial items such as a fried egg, a breakfast, a bag of chips with mayonnaise, a Dutch raw herring with a little flag, a bunch of tulips still wrapped in cellophane play the lead roles in his pictures. Over and over again Sparnaay elects a subject taken from life. Recognizable, accessible, everyday and simple. Almost banal, and yet so fascinating as an object, as a Ding an sich. Sparnaay is not satisfied with the everyday reality we see repeated endlessly around us. In his paintings he lets reality run through his fingers afresh and gives it something subjective, a soul. He simplifies it and adds to it, enlarges it, thus opening our eyes to the tiniest details. The subjects he chooses are highly enlarged and removed from the context of their day-to-day surroundings. Placed in a classic art environment they lose their utility value and take on a new identity and a monumental character. A trivial object depicted down to the tiniest detail becomes a majestic work of art.

In the early eighties Sparnaay developed a fascination for photography. Walking around Amsterdam like a documentary film-maker he recorded the day-to-day life of the bustling city in snapshots. The fascinating thing about these photographs is the way he opts for quiet and clichéd moments. A bicycle chained to the bridge with a bunch of tulips under the carrier straps, a slice of bread and peanut butter with the first bite taken out of it. A literal, photorealistic approach to reality, moments captured for eternity. Using photography, he quotes

from daily life in the round. At the same time Sparnaay developed his skills for drawing and painting. It is here that we find the key to his current style and personal signature: “His paintings begin where the photograph ends.” Henceforth his photography is the point of departure for his painting.

During the eighties and nineties snapshot photography and the narrative line of his archaic work came together in what Sparnaay calls “Mega-Realism.” It was during this period that he also encountered Photorealism, a movement in American contemporary art where the artist depicts reality faithfully from a photograph, enlarged or otherwise. Sparnaay gains inspiration from the works of such famous photorealists as Charles Bell, Ralph Goings, and Richard Estes. Whereas the American photorealists are concerned mainly with documenting and representing objective reality, Sparnaay quotes, interprets and intensifies it. Sparnaay’s Mega-Realism combines his photorealist approach to everyday things with his archaic, magic realist work. Instead of representing the object using photography, in his mega-realist works Sparnaay takes the spectator on a journey “right through the thing.” The object is “explored” and “discovered” down to the smallest detail. Photography serves as Sparnaay’s sketchbook: the snapshots are studies for his paintings. The painting grows layer by layer. Sparnaay goes through the object he is painting like a kind of radiologist. Under the realistic surface of his paintings is the soul of the object, an essence we were never aware of before.

The pictures are easily accessible and we do not need an extensive knowledge of art to appreciate them. Initially they give us a window on reality, a *trompe l’oeil*. We could grab the “bag of chips with mayonnaise” right off the canvas, ready to eat. If we look longer we discover lots of fascinating details in the painted object. We suddenly notice thousands of jigsaw pieces and snapshots mingling in a play of brush strokes, hues, light and shade. The grains of salt play an in-



*Patat*  
39.37 x 59 inches  
oil on Linen

genious game on the “skin” of the fried potato; the calorie-rich mayonnaise tries to escape from the dented plastic tray. The plastic fork stands up like a lighthouse in a landscape of calories. This is a genre piece of contemporary consumer society, displaying the influence of great masters such as Rembrandt (in the refinement of detail and dramatic lighting) and Vermeer (who had a sharp eye for the beauty of small things and the moments of everyday life). Sparnaay quotes reality in various narrative lines and layers. “Is this ‘thing’ really so ordinary? I’ve never seen it like this! Does it tell us more than we think we see?” With his playful, humorous and at the same time extremely classical and painterly approach to the subject Sparnaay allows us to re-experience his chosen object at various levels. Each layer of the painting has been produced with intellectual precision, with photography as the point of departure. The sum of the photographic sketch and the painting is more than just a hyper-realistic picture of

the object. Reality and illusion go hand in hand. The paintings transcend the capacity of the most trained eye or the most sharply focused camera lens. The details in the picture are a multiplicity of snapshots, each developed with extreme finesse. The DNA structure of the object is shown in meticulous detail. Sparnaay penetrates to the essence of the subject: his aim is to show the Ding an sich, not just as an object. The paintings are an amalgam of the haptic qualities of the subject, as well as the idiosyncratic nature and personality of the object. Sparnaay gives the object back its uniqueness and originality in all its strength.

Sparnaay’s works are humorous and monumental, classical and yet lighthearted. In a word, a feast for the senses. Sparnaay’s Mega-Realism could be described as simplicity multiplied a millionfold. The details and focal points of his snapshot photography meld, giving what is at first sight a trivial, ephemeral subject an eternal value.

# When Pictures Stare Back at Us

by Zeljko Kojic

**A**shy side-look from a painted girl, a disinterested look of a musician on a photograph for his album, indirect addressing of a poet to his audience—those phenomena may signify that we are growing apart from each other day by day, especially in modern times, acting disinterested while simultaneously hoping to invoke other's interest. Their attempt to present themselves as gods oozing with self-esteem might appeal to some, while others find little interest in art which is presented in this manner. A more provocative approach is to make your paintings stare back at the observers. The experience is

**Through our "eye contact" we affirm their existence, we affirm that there is a being behind those eyes, who carries that gaze which it casts on us, and simultaneously it affirms our existence through a mirror-like process**

so much different when you see the fixated eyes of a person from the painting look at you. A certain contact is being brought about. You are no longer just a person observing another object "through a keyhole," as Sartre would say, but you are also being objectified—the painting is looking at you, the painting knows you are looking at it. If a painting is more provocative, maybe containing some elements which are not to be seen in public, or if it contains a bit of eroticism, then the temptation is even stronger. The purpose of art in the contemporary world is not just to be "pretty," in contrast to romanticism and classicism, it is more to help enhance your self-awareness. Paintings achieve that by becoming self aware themselves, by shamelessly gazing into you and by reflecting the time we live in.

Considering visual arts, the nineteenth century is rich with such pieces, and strictly for this purpose we could mention one great French painter, Édouard Manet, and two of his works: *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia*. Besides many other moments of nineteenth century society which are emphasized in those two paintings, they have in common that those painted women, presumably prostitutes, gaze at you. It is as if that prostitute is aware that she is an object, and that she knows you are staring at her, and now you cannot escape from her eyesight. Almost a century later, Jean-Paul Sartre tried to find out how do we affirm our existence in the world—since he was an atheist and any type of explanation containing words like "transcendence" or "God" were not even a little bit satisfactory. He found that we can affirm our existence in the world solely by the gaze of the other. He called that being-for-others, adding that third moment of being to the previously mentioned being-by-itself (the mate-

rial world) and being-for-itself (consciousness), in his study of ontology and phenomenology called *Being and Nothingness*. According to Sartre, we can know that we are alive and that we exist only if others affirm our existence by bestowing us with their gaze. Through our "eye contact" we affirm their existence, we affirm that there is a being behind those eyes, who carries that gaze which it casts on us, and simultaneously it affirms our existence through a mirror-like process. In the same respect, we acknowledge that the painting of *Olympia*, for example, has its own being because it acknowledges us as the observer—she does

not look away, but straight through our eyes, her look penetrating like an arrow through our being. Pictures staring at us also seem to admit that there is something in them that should remain hidden. It may be the reality we do not want to see, the reality we have tried to look away from for so long. The main "ace in the hole" of artistic movements such as impressionism, and wider social movements like realism and modernism, is that they try to face us with the real, the reality itself, either bare reality, the cruel reality, or the reality that is hidden, but still existent, still there.

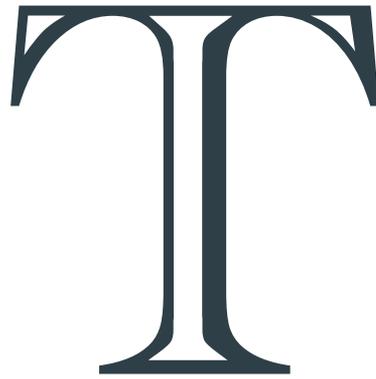
On the other hand, styles of visual arts linked more to postmodernism, but which have spawned out of realism—like hyperrealism and photorealism—tend to present the "unreal reality," and as they are visually more appealing, they also tend to carry out a critique of the contemporary period and current issues through art. Hyperrealism tends to present something which may never happen, an unreal reality that may never exist as the painting says, but in such a way that we think it is real. Although paintings which stare at us have the most powerful effect on most observers of fine arts, they do not look at us just through the eyes of those painted men, women, or even animals. Each painting "looks at us"—or is it better to say that it helps us face ourselves—with all its content, all the things we see on its canvas are partly a content of our own soul, and like all art, visual arts also help us articulate and observe our inner turmoil and confusion, helping us to find answers in a very subtle manner, in this very subtle but dynamic world.

-postmodern: the unreal reality

~P-MT

Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863





he aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance.

**Aristotle**

## Searching For Meaning

**T**here are moments when I ask myself if my work as an artist is making any difference in our present culture. Both in regard to my teaching or my painting I wonder if I have any influence on the place and times in which I live. Sometimes I think the answer is yes, but I confess that often I fear that the answer is no, and that my work really doesn't matter very much to the world around me. When the answer is "yes" it feels like I'm riding a powerful wave to shore and I can see my destination clearly ahead. The journey feels exhilarating and my life feels significant. However, I never quite reach the shore before the ever-present undertow carries me back out again to deeper water. I hope this analogy does not sound too macabre, but, it's true and it is what I struggle with.

I don't always understand what produces this inner struggle but I know it is connected to my own search for significance. I want my life to count for something and to have meaning beyond myself. Some days I go through the course of the week's responsibilities without worrying about this, but other times this subject haunts me.

As an artist, I want my work to offer the full package of what makes any work of art meaningful. Often, I refer to this as the combination of both craft and content. I want the "story" of the work to be compelling and for it to live and breath on it's own in regard to its level of "realism". However, for me it seems that both content and craftsmanship are always a wrestling match—not with each other but with me—striving to get both to a level where I feel satisfied. Rarely does it come easy for me and rarely do I feel content-

ment with my work at the end. I often will work and rework a painting long after I am supposed to be "finished." It may go out for an exhibition and when it returns I will find myself "correcting" something or adding something new as opposed to moving on to new ideas.

I have discovered over the years that I can lessen the energy of this wrestling match if I am very disciplined to storyboard an idea or image until I am certain it has the "strength" I'm looking for. When I can get an image sketched out and even let it sit for several months before working it up into a painting then it seems to go better for me. In fact, I have ideas that I have sketched from years ago that are in the "queue" for me to start. And if they pass my own personal test of time then I usually feel more confident the image is worth painting. Of course in this lengthy process I often get bored and will go off in another direction. I will convince myself that a small still-life or head study will be just a quick interlude and before I know it I have worked on this "quick interlude" for several months! Maybe that's the bane of perfectionism—from which I also struggle.

Lastly, the subject matter and symbolism to which I seem to gravitate most are images that reflect my own spiritual journey. My Christian faith is always finding its way into the work and becomes part of the story. This is not the case for every painting but by and large it is there in most of my larger and more labored works. I guess the quest for meaning and significance always leads me back to the bigger existential questions."

*text provided by the artist*

*Woman With a Burden*  
68 x 40 inches  
oil on canvas



## Perhaps it is time to make really wonderful paintings again

**I**f one traces the recent history of contemporary art in Europe and the U.S. one cannot help but see a decided diminishment in the visual power in art images that have been deemed “important” by critics and historians. It seems that the history of rejection and redefinition in the art world reached its apex with the Minimalists and Conceptualists in the 60s and 70s, who so exhausted the dialogue of defining and redefining art that by the 80s contemporary artists seemed to at last say, “perhaps it is time to make really wonderful paintings again.” And we do see, about that time, a degree of revitalization of the image as such. Yet, while all of the cathartic “rethinking” certainly broadened the definition of art, it is doubtful that it necessarily made the ground more fertile for the production of excellent images. A look at current art magazines would support this thesis.

It is very satisfying, therefore, to realize that throughout, there have been artists who were never the servants of “hot” trends in the art world, who never relinquished their

desire to make powerful, meaningful images despite very little mainstream attention, and who continued to pursue their very specific visions of reality. Texan Ron Cheek is one such artist. Having studied architecture and worked in architectural offices in his early career, Cheek developed an eye for form and for designed spaces. Eventually completing his studies at the Florence Academy, his need for a meticulous and disciplined approach toward visual invention was further refined. For over a decade now, his work could be characterized as possessing a classical realistic demeanor. Yet Cheek’s interest in religion, specifically his Christian faith, coupled with his passion for psychology (Cheek also holds a Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling from Colorado Christian University), has led him to a distinctive vision that is both contemporary and infused with that faith.

Ron Cheek’s art is not easily classified; it recalls Eakins in paint handling, but it is more allusive in the presentation of characters in any given painting. Where Eakins’

*by Dick Davison*

*Naive’s Descent*  
50 x 36 inches  
oil on canvas



image has a near-journalistic matter-of-factness, Cheek's image has the feel of a tableau in which each object or person in the scene is charged with meaning, sometimes clear, sometimes veiled, but always deliberate in their placement and interactions. Though Cheek's paintings are certainly representational and the spaces they portray generally obey the laws of optics, there is always a sense that what is presenting itself to one's eyes is unique, not a vision of corporeality in a conventional sense. If one looks at any particular portion of a Cheek painting, it could be said to fall cleanly into the atelier tradition, with an excellent sense of form and light gleaned from years of study. And while numerous observation-based analyses accompany every major work, as one would expect from a good realist, the result is stylistically more mythical, if one can use such a term. Actually it is Cheek's Christianity, embedded in his work to varying depths, which gives it a particular richness of character.

Ron Cheek has been involved in teaching since his student days. After several adjunct stints in Dallas, Fort Worth area schools, he founded the Texas Academy of Figurative

Art (TAFE) in 2007. This is a bold move for an individual artist in a world of five-digit population universities, accreditation bureaus, and online degrees. Cheek's academy, situated in the old downtown area of Fort Worth, is the quintessential art school. The students are a remarkable mix of practicing professionals, disenchanting university

students, and lay people who want to learn more about art. All are serious about being at Cheek's school, and all are willing to work within the rigorous curriculum that is essential to developing a viable visual acuity. A visit to TAFE is indeed inspiring, and in this writer's opinion it is this kind of learning culture that produces the most vibrant art. The facil-

**It is Cheek's Christianity, embedded in his work to varying depths that gives it a particular richness of character.**

ity itself presents a raw, utilitarian appearance, bejeweled by the drawings and paintings produced by the students. The work areas have varying degrees of enclosure and the students move comfortably between their own spaces and the classroom zones. Cheek himself is a calm and affirming leader in the environment. In a world that is filling up with institutional banality, Ron Cheek's studio and the TAFE constitute an extraordinary and significant abode for art.



# Ron A. Cheek



*My Days Are A Handbreadth*  
30 x 48 inches  
oil on canvas



*Vanity, Vanity*  
46 x 46 inches  
oil on canvas

**T**he concept of fine art, however, does not permit of the judgement upon the beauty of its product being derived from any rule that has a concept for its determining ground, and that depends, consequently, on a concept of the way in which the product is possible. Consequently fine art cannot of its own self excogitate the rule according to which it is to effectuate its product. But since, for all that, a product can never be called art unless there is a preceding rule, it follows that nature in the individual (and by virtue of the harmony of his faculties) must give the rule to art, i.e., fine art is only possible as a product of genius.

**Immanuel Kant**

*The Critique of Judgement*

**“W**anting to make a painting that was more realistic and sensuous than a photograph I decided to paint objects that emphasize light and the third dimension. Taking Caravaggio and Georges de la Tour as paradigms, I strove to create a realistic, “fool the eye,” depth which is generally lacking in photography.

Glass transmits, reflects and distorts light, its transparency emphasizes the three-dimensionality of the objects. and the space within the painting. Using landscape and cast shadows in the background adds more information about the light portrayed. The background informs the viewer as to the time of day, season, temperature and a good guess at relative humidity. This literal atmosphere reinforces the illusion of actual space.

Having attended school when art history mattered I was made aware of the concept of a figure/ground relationship in painting. The work of the past few years makes the ground merge with the object. The backgrounds have evolved into being as important and detailed as the glass objects that are the nominal subject of the painting. The complexity of the landscape also magnifies the transparency of the glass.”



*Thicket*  
44x 46 inches  
oil on linen



*Tapestry*  
32 x 52 inches  
oil on linen



*Morning Frost*  
34 x 46 inches  
oil on linen



*Labyrinth*  
34 x 52 inches  
oil on linen



*Autumn Rhythm*  
44 X 50 inches  
oil on linen

# The Nude Female Figure in Art

Masterpieces die ashamed  
When you take over the throne,  
Supreme beauty of your own  
Pure as intact virgin snow

Observing a well-sculpted female body evokes undeniable pleasure in everybody, whether for artistic motives or erotic arousal, regardless if the observer is a man or a woman—the landscape of a perfect nude female body is a sight we all are pleased to see.

We acknowledge that throughout the course of history, art has been made predominantly by men as they were striving to create perfection by engraving it in stone, paint it on canvas or linen and with contemporary digital arts men's strivings to imitate, mimic or "create" a perfect female body did not fade away. Cultural characteristics also played a significant role in determining the perfect ratio and size of the female body and figure. In Mauritius, people still consider fat and large women attractive and desirable as we assume it was the case all over the globe in the ancient times before written history. Numerous "Venus figurines" which have been found across Europe and especially in Irkutsk Oblast in Siberia, communicate to us the desired image of woman in ages past, as it is said they date from 38 to 11 millennia ago. Most of these "figurines" possess waists which are wider than the hips, big bellies and breasts of enormous size—something which would today be considered bizarre, grotesque or at least not so attractive. Certain researchers and historians claim (although others disagree) that the main reason for such proportions of these statues is that areas of women's body like hips and belly symbolize fertility—so, in a way, women were observed as sexual "objects" even back then but for completely different reasons than today—women were reputed according to their childbearing potential. The bigger the belly the more children she could bare and the bigger

the breasts the more food she would be able to provide. This may also be a symbol of fertility in general, as a big stomach is a sign of abundance of food.

Antiquity, primarily ancient Greek and Roman cultures, were the first to present the standard classical body ratio which is still considered valid today, and one great example is the famous *Venus of Milo* sculpture, dating from first century BCE. Carved out of marble stone, it is almost an archetypal symbol of woman's beauty and perfect breast-waist-hips ratio. As antiquity was more "materialistic" than the forthcoming Christian period of European history, they allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by the beauty of the body and to praise the pleasures of flesh. Pagan gods and goddesses, like Venus (or Aphrodite) and Apollo were depicted as perfect in shape, resembling perfectly built men and women of that age.

The rise of Christianity and ascetic ideal took their toll on arts and there was no interest at all to represent human bodies. The Renaissance revived the antiquity and gave birth to a new wave of painters and sculptors who showed their admiration for human body as such. Ever since the Renaissance period, the naked woman figure was an inspiration to many prominent artists and each era had its own way of presenting their beauty through various styles and painting techniques. Renaissance subjects were mostly associated with ancient Greek or Roman mythology, and thus Venus was again born through Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, wild huntress Diana, Leda and many more "Venuses" like *Venus of Urbino* captured the imagination of great artists and the art world. Each century after that rich period has been fascinated with woman's body in its own fashion, and many social and even philosoph-

by Zeljko Kojic



Tom Martin  
*Break Through*  
39.37 by 39.37 inches  
acrylic on aluminium

**Artists tend to reshape the given,  
raw material and make something  
beautiful out of it, something which  
speaks to our senses in a soothing way,  
comforting us that there are things in  
this world which are perfect**

ical currents were reflected on the art. For example, we can see in Edgar Degas nineteenth century paintings like *After the Bath*, *Woman Drying Herself* or *Woman Combing Her Hair* the rising interest of what is happening behind the curtain and how the world looks before we go into public and meet with other people. Women do not always have their hair combed. It takes time for them to prepare and people were becoming more and more interested in one another's privacy, so artists were conscious of it and were ready to reflect that "public mood" in their art.

The nineteenth century gave birth to various styles like Realism, Expressionism and Impressionism, but the twentieth century enabled each artist to express himself and apply his own style to their paintings, and thus we have Picasso, Dali, Modigliani, each of them representing nudity (among other subjects) through his own scope. Portraits of nude women were carried out more freely, more explicitly, openly, in lascivious poses and with an almost orgasmic expression on their faces, which might be a sign of emerging female emancipation and women becoming conscious of their sexuality, being finally able to express themselves freely, acting less like stuffy ladies and more like powerful women aware of their might.

Although this myriad of lascivious nude paintings may look like a prelude to pornography, it is not, as pornography is basically slavery to primary impulses while art is an expression of sublimed impulses reshaped by one's own soul, and at the same time art is a method to critique and an attempt to explain the society of the time. Artists tend to reshape the given, raw material and make something beautiful out of it, something which speaks to our senses in a soothing way, comforting us that there are things in this world which are perfect.

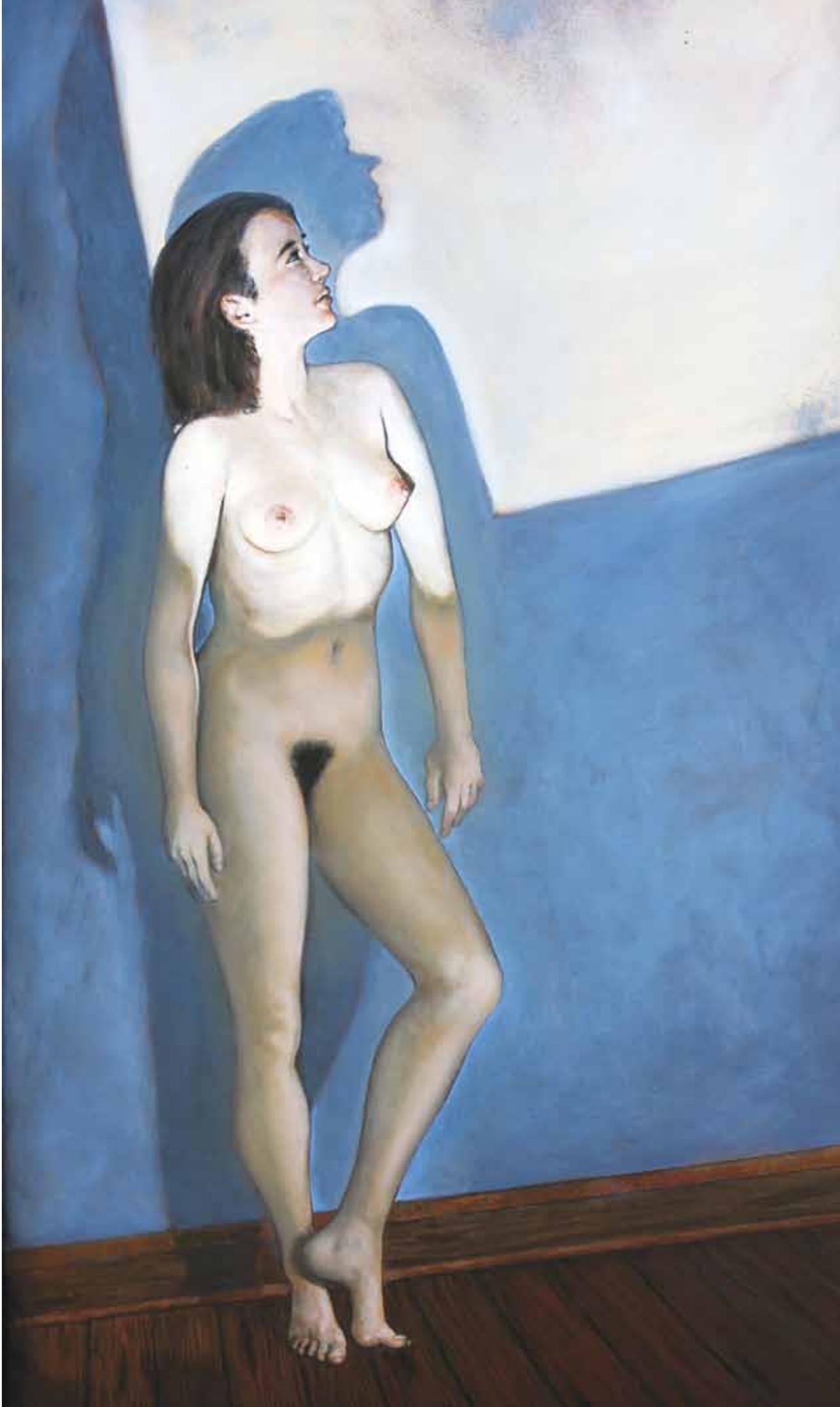
It seems that nowadays a thinner female body is more attractive than the classically proportioned ones of the antique. Blame could be partly placed on media influence, but we shall try to go deeper than that and find some cultural parallels—previously mentioned "Venus figurines" from some millennia ago had great bellies as food was scarce then and bellies were the symbols of fertility in all senses. But today, food is abundant. We do not have to kill and hunt for food anymore, thus we orient our minds towards beauty, something that is more sublime, as lust for food is sated. Sex is no longer primarily for reproduction, we now see it through the prism of fun and enjoyment. Although, it's still the waist area of a woman's body that is the most attractive to men—not breast, not the hips. The waist is the one that is crucial. Men could still be carrying some subconscious impulse that the waist is where the womb is located, and the womb gives birth, be it the birth of another human being, a child, or another fine piece of art. The waist is the one which inspires, which fuels up the artistic impulse to create in the same manner as it gives birth to a child. The process of creating art could be compared to giving birth, and it can be said that art is created by transmitting woman's spark to a man's soul, thus lighting up the fire of creativity.

*A perfect female body is the perfect blend of sublime  
beauty and raw, earthly desire.*

*It will give birth to new worlds and stars of heavenly  
gleam,*

*It will grant us with pleasures of merriment and suffering  
For she can create, break through the veil and  
Create on and on, throughout the eternity.*

**~P-MT**



Stephen Smith  
*Susan*  
36 by 60 inches  
oil on canvas

# The Cult of Beauty



*Inherent Bloom*, 181.5 x 30 inches, oil on canvas

**T**he book or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things - the beauty, the memory of our own past - are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers.

**C.S. Lewis**

**T**he *Cult of Beauty* is a series of eight representational narrative oil paintings employing symbolism from the worlds of religion, the occult and fashion to develop an allegorical series which pictures a religious-like devotion to the idol-god of beauty. The images inform this dramatic commentary on the human need to be considered worthy, acknowledged, loved and accepted while surrounded by a society that places so much value on appearances. The symbolic gauge of whether the figure considers herself acceptable or not, worthy or not, is a large yellow circle on the floor which is a reference to the Rings of Hell in *The Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*: an allegory representing the journey of the soul towards God. The circle in the *The Cult of Beauty*, however, helps define the present struggle of the vulnerable figure but also hints at a destiny that could result from choices based on the desire

to be loved for physical beauty alone. A stark and dimly lit environment helps transport the narrative out of the physical and into an internal place. Historically this place has been called by many names: the spirit, the well of the soul, the heart, the bowels, even the closet. What these names attempt to convey is a deeply personal place where human nature forms opinion, where love grows, fear lurks, worship rises, dreams evolve and choices are made. This is the setting for both the figure and the viewer of *The Cult of Beauty*.

However, the veneer of beauty has been stripped away to intensify the sense of vulnerability, exposing an isolated female who is contrasted by and constrained within an environment which attempts to depict her inner turmoil. This narrative is staged to allow the viewer an emotional but empathetic look at the discontented female.

*text provided by the artist*

# The Cult of Beauty

## The Garment

**I** found myself focusing on the garment as a compelling symbol which, along with the tools and devices used for making clothes, would work allegorically to explore moral, social, spiritual and psychological issues. The practice of making clothes carries deep meaning for me, reaching as far back as my grandmother who lovingly made all my clothes while I was growing up. It includes my admiration for my mother's beauty and her dashing wardrobe that I used to pilfer as a teenager, speaks of time spent designing and sewing my own clothes and making dresses for my daughter, takes into account an early introduction into retail clothing at sixteen and my adult vocation as a clothing designer and manufacturer—a career in the fashion industry that spans more than thirty years. The concept of the garment was a thread that ran through my entire life as a symbol representing ideas of covering, family, adornment, strength, character, expression, beauty, power and grace. I knew I had found a clear symbol that I totally understood.

The influences of this symbol bridges five generations of women in my family, covering the entire twentieth century. As I was born in 1951, I chose to depict a new series in the

mid-twentieth century using era specific vintage clothing and fashion industry devices that would speak from a place of my earliest memories. As current fashion designers constantly reach to the past for their inspirations, I felt that the setting of my thesis would be right in step with the trends and our current admiration in Western society for all things vintage.

With all this personal history in mind, I started a new series, and though the subject matter moved more toward moral and social issues, it still dealt humorously with the pursuit of idealized beauty and its trappings. I introduced glamour with beautiful vintage dresses like Grace Kelly might have worn. The idea of a trap or prison was addressed with two props: a wire bird cage and a 1940s dress form which also has a cage-like structure on the lower half. The bird cage, which imprisons the freedom of flight, would connect with the cage of the dress form, informing the viewer on the theme of human entrapment. However, in *Clipped Wings*, I chose to communicate the same idea by trapping the seemingly unsuspecting female figure, who is seen inspecting a caged, polka dot bird inside an even larger cage—a cage within a cage.”



*Clipped Wings*  
36 x 36 inches  
oil on canvas

# The Cult of Beauty

## Symbolism and Signifiers

**T**he topic of sacrificial obeisance to the idol of beauty is explored through the use of the props and imagery which work to direct the narrative in *The Cult of Beauty* series. Some signifiers support the theme of ritualism in the series while others were chosen to underscore the concept of measurement, and still others represent the struggles of the flesh. So, I started again. I stripped away the beautiful dresses and replaced them with skin-toned vintage undergarments and accessories.. Each piece was chosen to support the theme of the struggles with the flesh. The slip was flimsy and by itself left the body exposed—implying vulnerability. The silk dressing robe, while beautiful, displayed a peacock motif—a well established symbol of vanity. The flower on a veiled hat was chosen to adorn the head of the preteen girl on the edge of womanhood who seems frustrated with playing dress-up in *In-*

*herent Bloom*. In addition to the undergarments I included the dress form from the previous series and added the measuring tape and a large yellow circle, which along with the corset, would work well together to reinforce the idea of comparative measurement.

### The Corset

The Latin word for corset is “corpus,” meaning: body. The purpose of the corset is to conform the body to fashion, worn to reform and then hold the body into a desired shape for aesthetic purposes. The Corset, which binds and constrains the body, became a powerful symbol in my work with its ability to speak about the distortion of truth while alluding to the lack of satisfaction with ourselves and broaching the subject of self-manipulation through cosmetic surgery. I also liked the



*Capitulation*, 36 x 48 inches, oil on canvas

message of the corset strings and their ability to be pulled, undone or tangled by the wearer or by others, reinforcing the idea of self-criticism and the intimidation many of us feel when compared to the concept of perfection.

### The Dress Form

The personality of the dress form changed when I began the *Cult of Beauty*. It had been a funny inanimate object in the trapped series, a squeaky wheeled comic relief that made me smile—sort of like PIXAR's little computer-animated robot character, *Wall-E*. But in this new series—with the gloves off—it's disguise of innocence was flung aside and the villain exposed. As the work developed it became a cruel figure, the enforcer of unattainable standards that Western culture holds in such high esteem. The dress form, now no longer comical,

seemed at home in his sinister role, dominating the capitulating female and functioning as an authoritative figure, a dictator, an idol, the god.

### The Circle/Ring

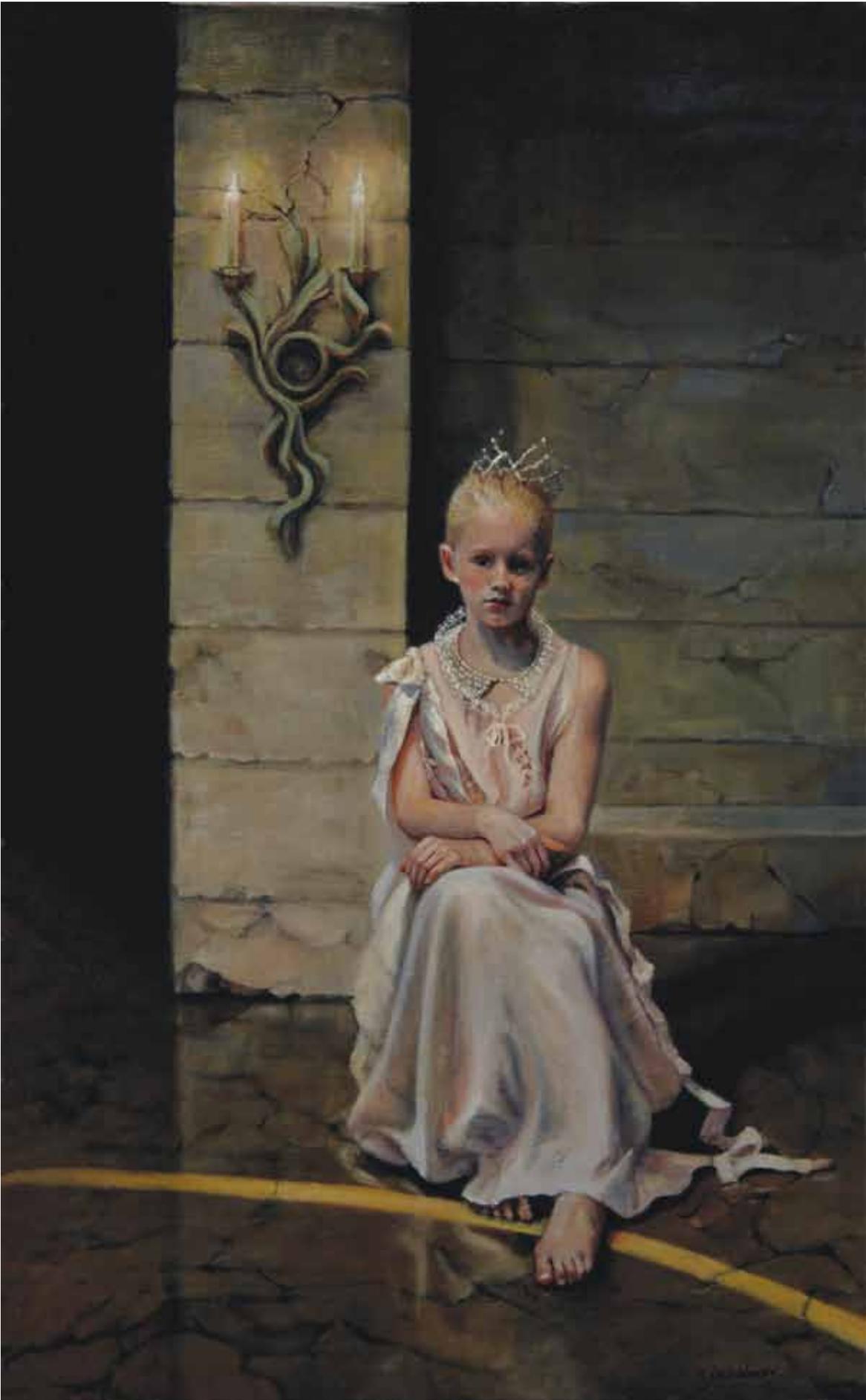
The circle was used throughout the series as a gauge of measurement because of its multiple layers of meaning referencing social issues while functioning as a symbol for both the light and the dark side, the good and the evil, the religious and the occult. At first glance the large yellow circle on the floor may conjure up the use of enchantments and spells in ceremonial witchcraft and Satanic worship that we have seen in B-rated movies. *Dante's Inferno* explored the ring as a symbol for the layers of hell, each ring representing different vices that entangled souls into sin. In the trilogy of *The Lord of The*

Rings, Tolkein used the notion of the Great Ring of Power as an expression of man's greed to rule over others as well as the willingness to be ruled by his own lusts. On the other hand, the circle (or ring) is also a multicultural emblem of fidelity in marriage and a representation of the idea of eternal com-

mitment. C.S. Lewis also wrote about this simple geometric shape in the chapter, "The Inner Ring" in his book, *The Weight of Glory*, referring to the circle as a universal measurement of human judgment regarding the concepts of inclusion or exclusion, acceptance or rejection.



*Cloistered*, 30 x 30 inches, oil on canvas



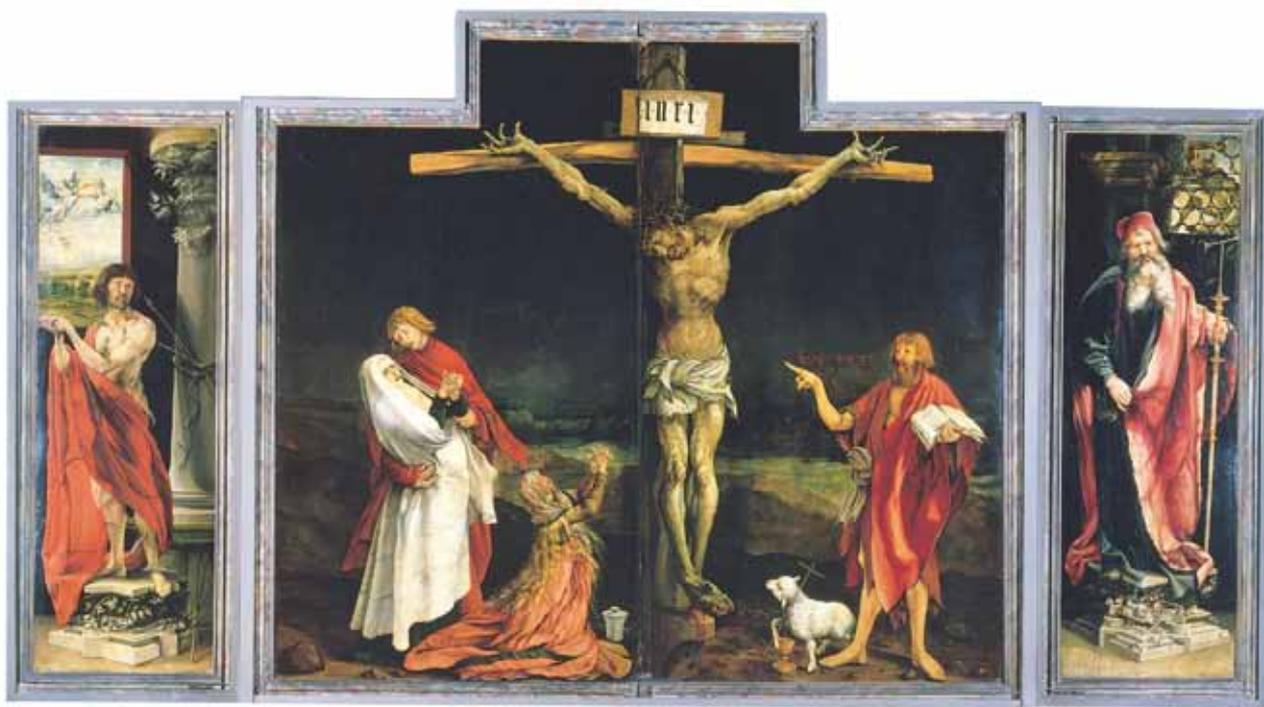
*Make Believe*  
30 x 18.5 inches  
oil on canvas

# The Cult of Beauty

## Religion

**"A**s a Christian I view life through the lens of my beliefs. Though my work tends to the darker side of the emotional spectrum, my Christian beliefs seem to saturate

my work, dealing with eternal and moral themes; i.e., this body of work presented for my thesis reflects the transcendent quest that began when Eve reached for the apple."



Matthias Grunewald, *Isenheim Altarpiece*, closed, Musee d'Untelinden, Colmar, France.



*The Cult of Beauty Altarpiece*  
 Left panel, *I Dreamed a Dream*, 72 x 24 inches  
 Center panel, *My god—My god*, 84 x 66 inches  
 Right panel, *My Precious*, 72 x 24 inches  
 oil on canvas

**I**t was my intent that the altarpiece in *The Cult of Beauty* cause the viewer to connect the level of devotion and self-sacrificial attitudes of the women in my paintings with that of the Christian martyrs and Christ’s crucifixion. The historical religious gesture of the central painting references the crucifixion of Christ, while the side paintings, though alluding to the martyr and patron of the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, are also reminiscent of the story of the two thieves on either side of Christ at Golgotha. The left side painting of my altarpiece entitled, *I Dreamed a Dream*, is particularly reminis-

cent of the thief that speaks to Christ, saying, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.” The title of the right side painting in the triptych is, *My Precious*, from that very familiar line in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy; the term was given to the great ring of power by those who were devoted to and enslaved by it. I thought this name provided the perfect bridge for the metaphor of the second thief on the cross at Golgotha with the bewitched half-female, half-dress form figure who appears transfigured and totally given over to the cult of beauty.”



ell, I know, after all, it  
is only juxtaposition,  
Juxtaposition, in  
short; and what is  
juxtaposition?

**Arthur Hugh Clough**

*text provided by the artist*

**"T**he *Juxtapose* series was sparked effectively as a way of questioning what reality is and also to raise questions on just how much we perceive photography as an accurate representation of real life. The series itself at present is a further development in terms of subject matter of my past work which focused on consumption, branding and a healthy way of life. I was and still am very much interested in a healthy diet and way of life, so I take on imagery such as foods and their packaging and combine them in juxtaposition with the figure or other elements that are out of context. I manipulate color, scale, subject and human capabilities in my paintings. By creating a situation like this in paint I aim to raise questions over what is real, what could be real and why something cannot be real. The series is ever progressing and I can sense it taking further new elements onboard in the near future."



*Yellow*  
74.8 x 39.37 inches  
acrylic on aluminium composite panel





*A Little Bit Of Love*  
39.37 x 55.11 inches  
acrylic on aluminium composite panel

*Sundae on a Sunday*  
63 x 43.3 inches  
acrylic on aluminium composite panel



*Contemplation*  
39.37 x 55.11 inches  
acrylic on aluminium panel



*Out Of The Blue*  
47.25 x 55.11  
acrylic on aluminium composite panel



esthetics has for its object the vast realm of the beautiful, and it may be most adequately defined as the philosophy of art or of the fine arts. To some the definition may seem arbitrary, as excluding the beautiful in nature; but it will cease to appear so if it is remarked that the beauty which is the work of art is higher than natural beauty, because it is the offspring of the mind. Moreover, if, in conformity with a certain school of modern philosophy, the mind be viewed as the true being, including all in itself, it must be admitted that beauty is only truly beautiful when it shares in the nature of mind, and is mind's offspring.

**Frederich Schiller**

Aesthetical and Philosophical Essays

*text provided by the artist*

**I**am interested in working with reality, reflect it in my paintings. I try to adhere to the line where reality coexists in natural form with my inner world. It is important for me to pass through paintings my vision of things. I believe in the immense power of the images and their infinite possibilities.”



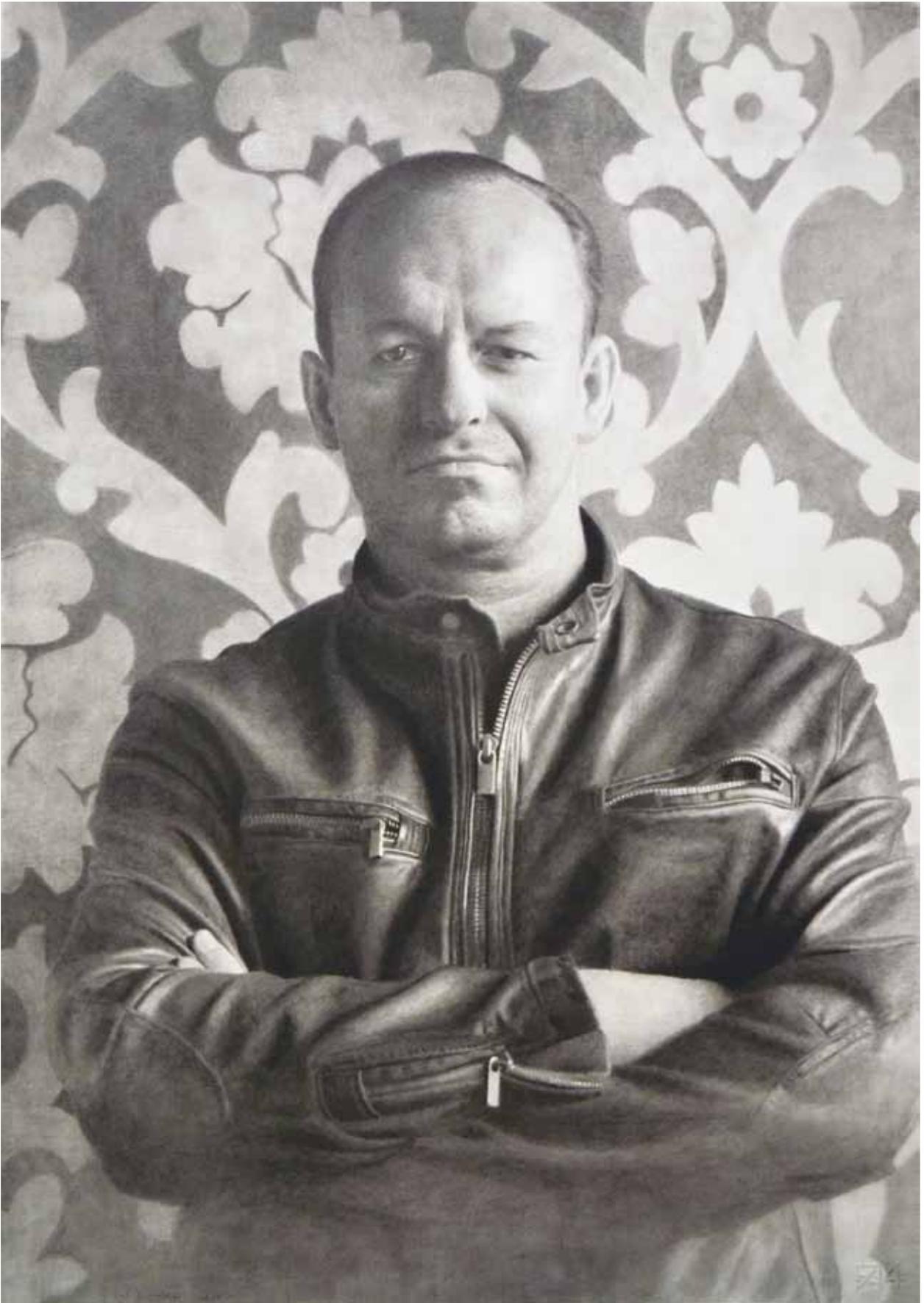
*Paint in my head*  
63 x 63 inches  
oil on panel



*Francisco*  
44.88 x 57.48 inches  
oil on board

*Estela*  
23.62 x 15.74 inches  
oil on canvas





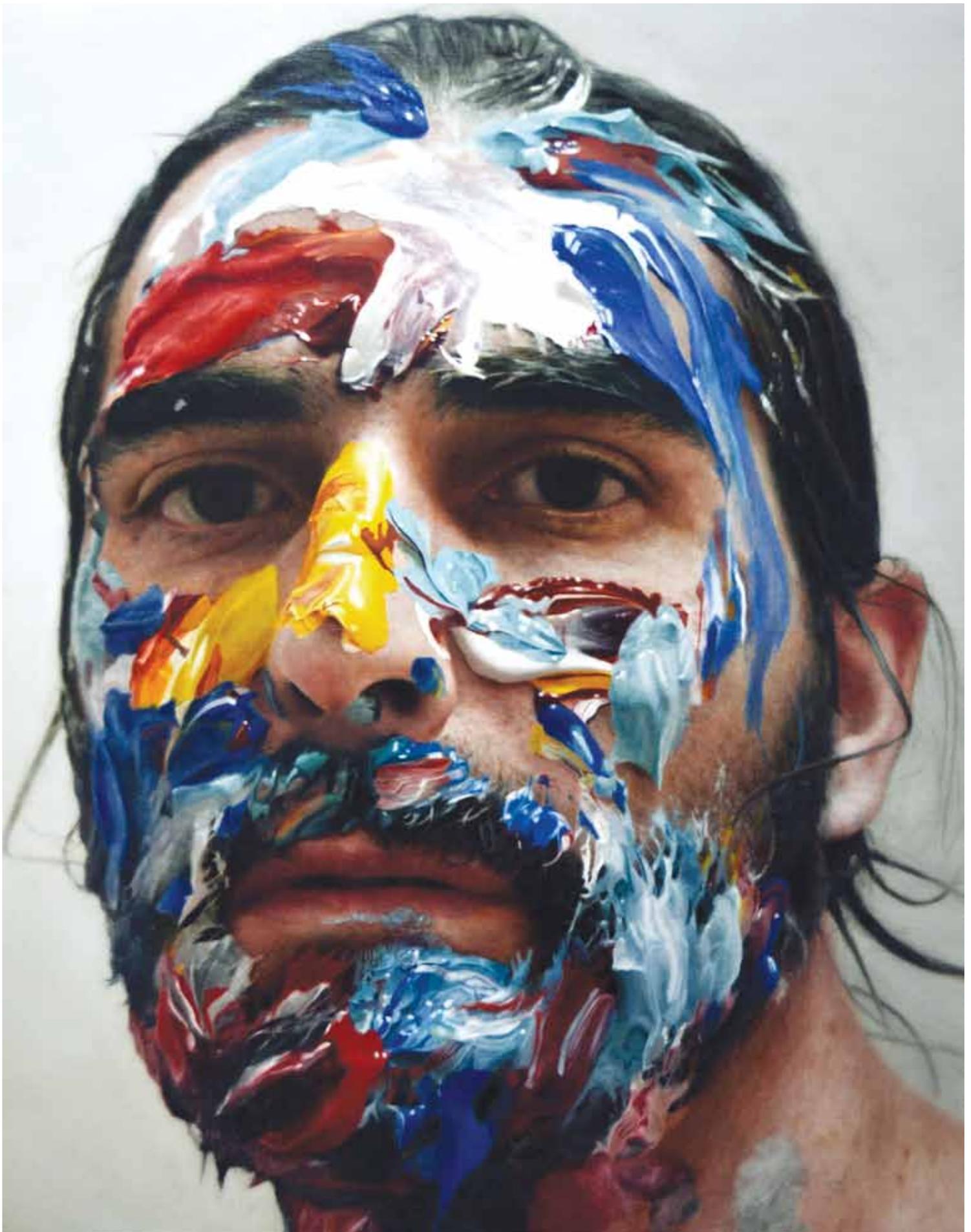
*Pedro*  
27.55 x 19.68 inches  
graphite on paper



*Harriet with White Hair*, 51.18 x38.18 inches, oil on canvas



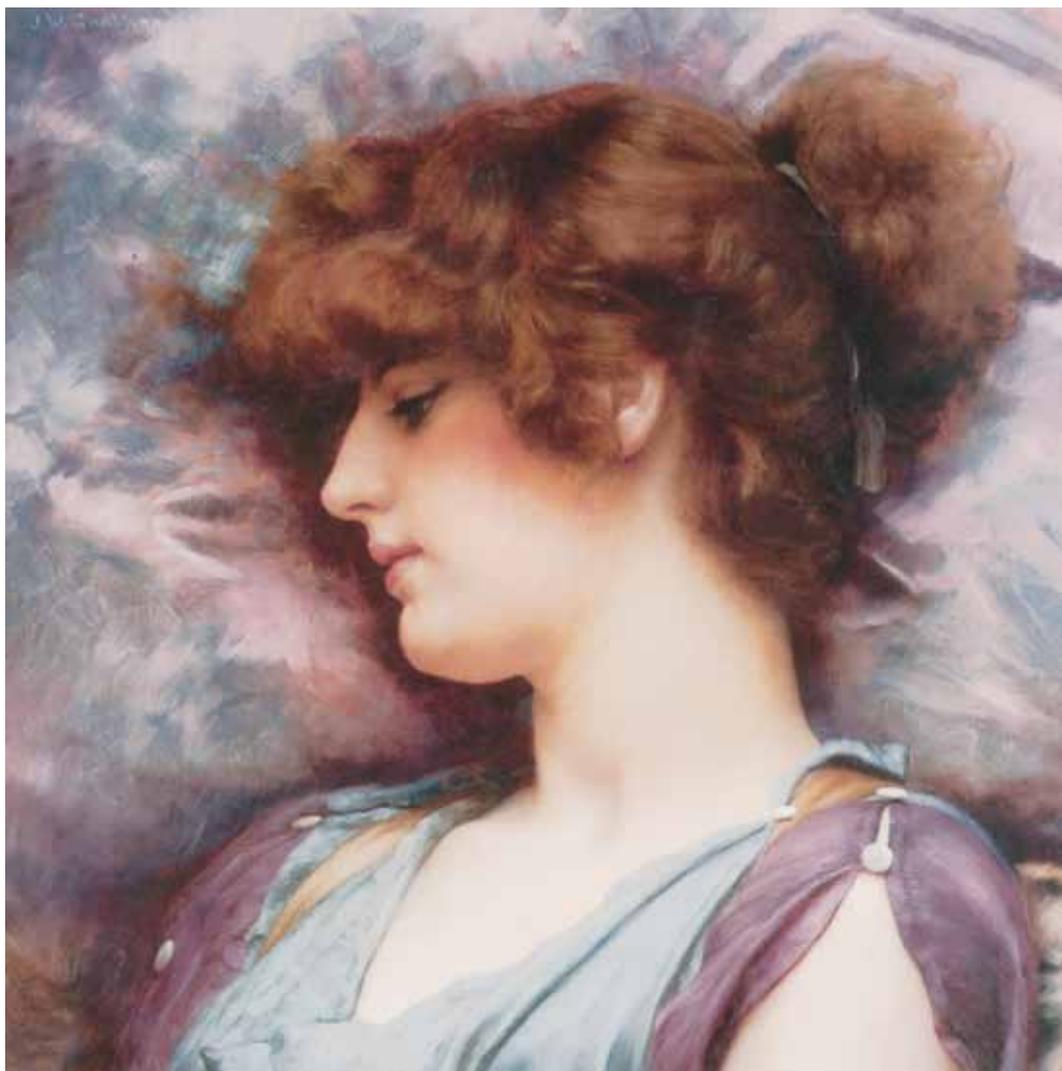
*Carla in the Forest*  
27.55 x 39.37 inches  
graphite on paper



*Paint in My Head*, 63 x 63 inches, oil on board

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John William Godward, *Far Away Thoughts*, 1892

***Post-Modern Times:*  
the journal of aesthetics and  
art history**

is dedicated to highlighting the work of the most gifted contemporary artists and exploring the aesthetic ideas they address.

The most difficult task in producing *Post-Modern Times* is finding artists that possess the skill and sagacity to achieve the high standards we hope to maintain with this journal. Feedback and artist recommendations are highly encouraged. We appreciate the overwhelmingly positive response we have received thus far.

As representational painting returns to the forefront of a discipline that has long been dominated by simplistic gestures and banal observations, *Post-Modern Times* will continue to celebrate the most adroit and compelling contemporary artists.

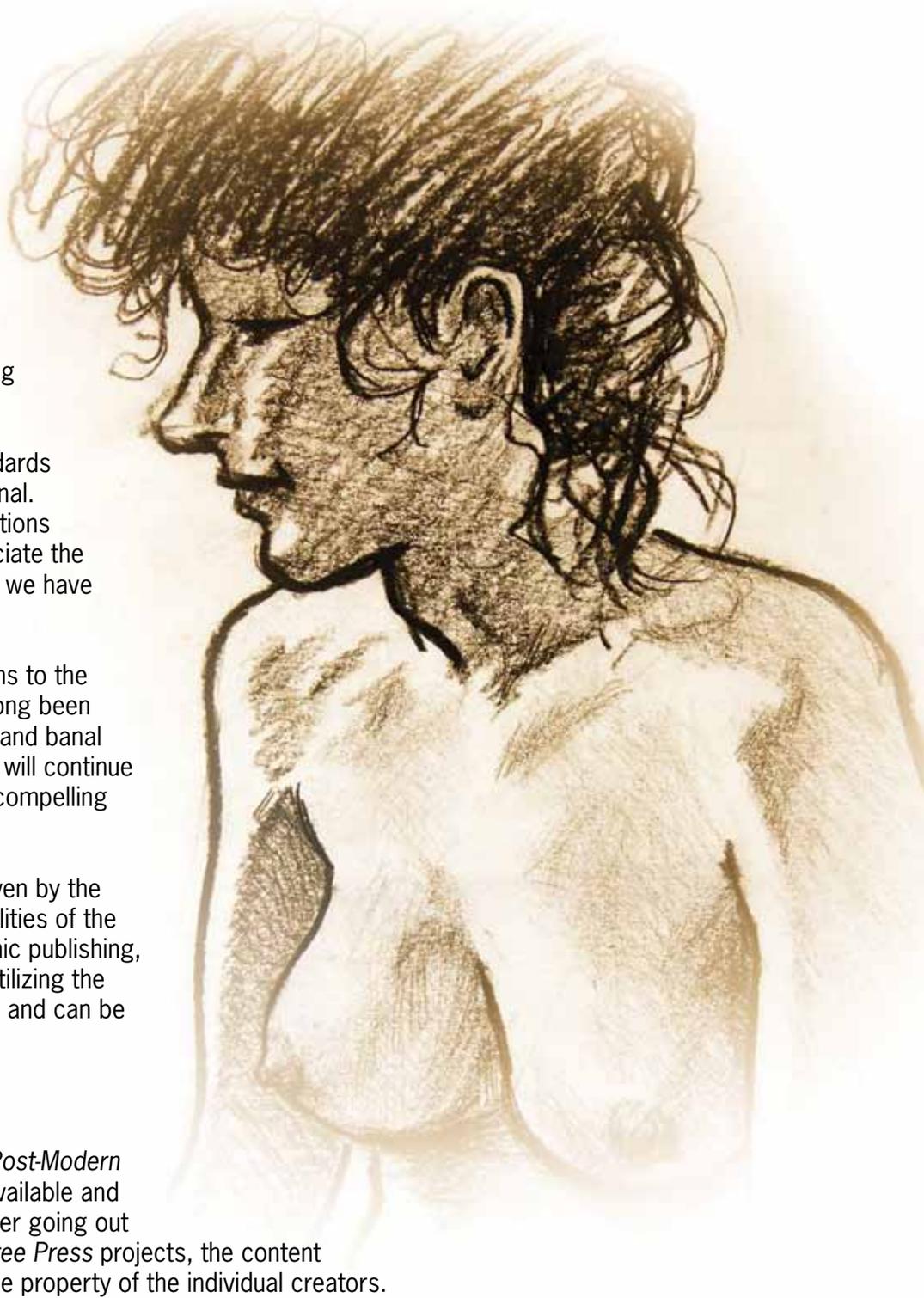
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Using this strategy, all issues of *Post-Modern Times* will always be universally available and easily accessed in addition to never going out of print. As with all *Birmingham Free Press* projects, the content of this journal is copyright and sole property of the individual creators.

Submissions are welcome and may include artists who feel their work is of a high technical caliber and have a philosophy behind their art that is relevant to the goals of the journal; academic and philosophical essays inspired by the artists featured in the journal; open-access academic and art historical essays for the website and the journal when appropriate; and general interest essays and news items for our blog.

For further information contact:  
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