

New American Paintings

JURIED EXHIBITIONS-IN-PRINT

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Juror's Comments

Alma Ruiz

Curator, The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles



I have noticed that in recent years there has been an increase in artists who paint. Not that the act of painting was heading towards extinction, but for a while it seemed that artists who were interested in the medium were doubting themselves, or perhaps more likely, were doubtful of their ability to sustain a career as painters at a time when collectors, curators and gallerists were

seemingly more interested in other media. Photo-based work, installations, video, digital work and the emergence of drawing as an independent form—as the spotlight has shone on each of these, painting seemed to become less appealing. Painting was acceptable as long as it was done by artists with a proven trajectory such as Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, Bridget Riley, John Currin or Lari Pittman, to name a few. Young, emerging artists had a tougher time. However, in a world of changing tastes, this is true no more.

Judging from recent museum exhibitions and gallery shows, West Coast artists are openly expressing a strong interest in painting—and the results could not be more encouraging. Rejecting East Coast sensibilities and moving away from conceptual art, artists are embracing painting and a wide array of subjects ranging from abstract to figurative (including portraiture) to landscape (both rural and urban) to traditional (historical and still life). This is evident in the broadly divergent works that were selected to be featured in this magazine. As a curator at The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, I recently organized the exhibition “MOCA Focus: Alexandra Grant.” A local painter, Grant created five large “drawing-paintings” in which text, drawing, and painting come together in a harmonious integration of shapes, colors and textures. Grant’s unwavering confidence in her chosen medium echoes the attitude of many of today’s West

Coast painters, among them Sandow Birk, who stuck to painting even when it wasn’t the sexiest thing to do. Birk has become well known for his large pseudo-historical paintings depicting contemporary American themes. Sharing a similar interest in art historical painting, Eric Wert and Sherri Wolf both seem to delight in the straightforward representation of contemporary versions of Dutch still-life painting. Wolf, in particular, demonstrates her ease with different painting styles by contrasting the fluid brush strokes of her mythological scenes with the crispness of the fruits and flowers found in her still lifes.

Portraiture in a landscape or urban setting appears frequently in contemporary painting: for example, the adolescent girls sitting or standing around a pool, as seen by Deborah Hamon, or Marci Washington’s depiction of a lifeless young woman, dressed in a white nightgown, who floats in a pond. Autobiographical references are found in the work of Ana Teresa Fernández, who portrays herself in situations such as striking a sexy pose on top of an ironing board. Aron Wiesenfeld’s haunting portrait of a beautiful girl in a hoodie and short skirt is exquisitely rendered in monochromatic tones. She stands in the foreground of an austere landscape, her lost gaze, directed towards an indeterminate point outside of the painting’s frame, adding to the tension evoked by the dark gray hues. A decidedly male point of view is expressed by Danny Keith’s paintings of young men standing by a river. Beautifully executed, these works harken back to a postimpressionist painting style, yet feel very contemporary.

The suburban landscape is present in works by Danny Heller and Scott Foldesi. Jeffrey Gillette’s landscape of shantytowns on the outskirts of cities in southern California and Asia and Wendy Heldmann’s depiction of a house in the aftermath of a natural disaster resemble images that have become commonplace on TV and in newspapers, while Amy Bird’s and Will Noble’s respective views of woods and rivers, seem to represent a longing for a simpler time. Setting themselves



Aron Wiesenfeld

Princess charcoal on paper 50" x 38"



Aron Wiesenfeld

Rain charcoal on paper 50" x 38"



Aron Wiesenfeld

David charcoal on paper 50" x 38"

Aron Wiesenfeld

San Diego, CA

aronwiesenfeld@yahoo.com / www.aronwiesenfeld.com

b. 1972 Washington, DC

Education

- 2000 BA, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA
1990-92 The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York, NY

Exhibitions

- 2007 *Timmons Gallery, Rancho Santa Fe, NM*
2006 Timmons Gallery, Rancho Santa Fe, NM
Metalstone Gallery, New York, NY
Williamson Gallery, Pasadena, CA
2004 ANDLAB Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Sarasota Art Center, Sarasota, FL
2001 Merry Karnowsky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
2000 Williamson Gallery, Pasadena, CA

Awards

- 2006 2nd place, Drawing competition, Art Renewal Center
2005 Chairman's Choice Award, Art Renewal Center
1998 Dwight Harmon Scholarship (1998-2000)

Selected Collections

Digital Genetechnologies
Idea Max Corp.

Publications

American Art Collector Magazine, 8/06; 6/06
Art Renewal Center, 6/06; 6/05
Artweek, 1/01

I think of the characters in this group of drawings as undergoing a rite of passage. Each faces a self-imposed initiation, which by necessity must take place at the outskirts of society. This is a painful and lonely experience, yet also a heroic one in that the outcome and the means of getting there are uncertain. Much of the landscape imagery is an allegory of internal conditions—unformed in-between places, not nature, not city. Opposing elements temporarily coexist, and dark, indiscernible areas possess dormant potential.

Wiesenfeld

