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TODAY'S MASTERS™

Three to Watch: Artists Making Their Mark

There is a *lot* of superb art being made these days; this column shines light on a trio of talents.



SEAN BEAVERS (b. 1970) cannot remember a time when he did not want to draw, and the fruits of this dedication can be savored today in his exceptionally realistic paintings. One might even use the word *surrealistic* to describe his still lifes, which often feature objects arranged in frame-like wooden boxes or set before the sea. These evoke variously Joseph Cornell, Salvador Dalí, and René Magritte, yet somehow feel completely contemporary.

Beavers also paints the female figure well, having moved in that direction while earning his BFA at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Now, based in the rather quieter town of York on the coast of southern Maine, he teaches drawing and painting at the New Hampshire Institute of Art and Sanctuary Arts in Eliot, Maine. Although he has undertaken commissions for AT&T, *The Wall Street Journal*, Random House, and other corporate clients, Beavers is now focused entirely on his paintings, which require from three weeks to several years to complete.

“My most recent series of still lifes represents the ideas that everything is in a state of change and that we desperately try to hold on to the temporal. The simple fact that we are alive means that we will someday die. I think that’s part of the reason that I paint, to some-

how delay that process, to hold on a little bit longer to a moment or thing that will never exist again.”

Quite logically, Beavers sees his serene, slightly mysterious works “as symbolist. The subjects of my paintings usually represent something other than the objects themselves, like dreams, desires, frustrations, spirit, emotions, whatever I’m thinking about at the time. It’s unlikely that viewers will understand exactly what I’m trying to say, but I hope they will walk away with a sense of it, and their own interpretation of what the piece means.” Mission accomplished: These are indeed pictures to visit and revisit, ones that shift in power and effect based on what we bring to them.

Beavers is represented by Arcadia Fine Arts (New York City), The Banks Gallery (Portsmouth, NH), The Cooley Gallery (Old Lyme, CT), Quidley & Company (Boston/Nantucket), and Trudy Labell Fine Arts (Naples, FL).

SEAN BEAVERS (b. 1970)

OCEAN IN A BOX

2008, OIL ON PANEL, 40 X 65 IN.

QUIDLEY & COMPANY, BOSTON/NANTUCKET





ALEXANDRA TYNG (b. 1954) is one of those rare painters who works as easily on an intimate scale as on a grand one. She can draw back and see the landscape from afar, picturing it as a magnificent piece of the earth's quilted surface, and then just as effortlessly she zooms in on a quiet corner of a hidden lake where canoers steer through a drift of eelgrass. To paraphrase the old saying, she can see the forest and the trees.

Born in Rome and raised in Philadelphia by her architect parents (one of them the renowned Louis I. Kahn), Tyng earned academic degrees at Harvard and Penn before teaching herself traditional oil painting techniques by trial and error, by examining the Old Masters, and by watching others paint. Her landscapes focus mostly on Maine, where she has summered since childhood. She also paints the Philadelphia area, where she still lives, and is much in demand as a portraitist.

In the early 1990s, Tyng thought of a new way to explore her longstanding passion for landscape: She began taking reference photographs from small planes and helicopters. "I held on to my seat pretty tight the first time I went up," she laughs. "The pilot joked that I was going to leave fingerprints embedded in the vinyl! But when I saw all that beauty spread out below me, I knew this was worth getting used to." She was soon photographing with abandon, absorbed in her vision.

Tyng now takes two or three such flights or copter rides each year, developing these reference shots into aerial paintings of the glacier-carved mountains and valleys of Maine and Philadelphia's bustling waterfront. From the air Tyng examines the abstract inter-

play of land and water. She sees water as the "great leveler and concealer, with islands and lakes marking the undulations of the earth's crust." In 2007's *Outpost, Isle au Haut*, for example, fingers of land and water plunge on a bold diagonal across the canvas, striped with late afternoon shadows, giving the viewer an awed sense of immense scale and geologic time. Tyng's vision spreads out before the viewer, the golden light picking out the details of the town in the middle distance, and lighting up the sea and land masses selectively. A beautiful sense of peace and contentment pervades the scene.

Tyng's big-picture vision is not confined to what she sees from the air, however: Maine is blessed with numerous mountaintops affording broad vistas, and she has painted from many of them. People occasionally appear in her more intimate eye-level landscapes, but more often she merely hints at their presence. No matter Tyng's location or viewpoint, the viewer senses her deep connection to the land, her appreciation of its varied details, and her understanding of mankind's place in the natural order.

Tyng's next solo show, *Above and Beyond*, is at New York City's Fischbach Gallery January 8-31. She is also represented by Gross McCleaf Gallery (Philadelphia) and gWatson Gallery (Stonington, ME).

Text by NANCY BEA MILLER (artist and writer, Narberth, PA)

ALEXANDRA TYNG (b. 1954)
OUTPOST, ISLE AU HAUT
2007, OIL ON LINEN, 34 x 56 IN.
GWATSON GALLERY, STONINGTON, MAINE



ANN GALE (b. 1966)
BABS WITH RIBBONS
2007, OIL ON CANVAS, 48 X 42 IN.
HACKETT-FREEDMAN GALLERY
SAN FRANCISCO

ANN GALE (b. 1966) paints portraits that avoid the obvious: Bypassing the exact appearance of her sitters, she offers us instead penetrating glimpses into their inner lives. Gale arrives here through a slow working process that entails many weeks spent with the sitter, drawing on paper in graphite or mixed media, then painting in oil on canvas or masonite.

Sitting together for such long periods allows Gale to know her sitters uncomfortably well; all the while she works and reworks the paint into ever shorter and more fragmented brushstrokes that threaten to meld the figure into the neutrally colored wall beyond. This dissolution is particularly noticeable in the face and hands, passages where we usually seek clues about the person depicted.

Not surprisingly, Gale has long admired Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) for his bold breaking down of form, which was pushed further

in the figurative sculpture of Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966). His fragmentation has been carried forward by two masters still working today — Lucian Freud (b. 1922) and Antonio López García (b. 1936). Gale has inherited not only their cool, tonal palettes but also the atmosphere of vague melancholy that accompanies them.

Yet one will never mistake Gale for Freud or López García, who work in broader slashes of paint. Indeed, the most compelling areas of Gale's surface teem with dabs, seemingly a swarm of charged atoms emanating from the sitter toward the painter and viewer. This effect offers psychological insights fraught yet not alarming, insights no photograph could ever convey.

Having earned her BFA at Rhode Island College and her MFA at Yale, Gale now teaches art at the University of Washington in Seattle. She is represented by Hackett-Freedman Gallery in San Francisco. ■