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# THROUGH *Her Eyes*

BY JOHN O'HERN

When our first *Re-presenting Representation* exhibition opened at Arnot Art Museum in 1993, some people commented that there were too few women artists. I had selected what I considered the best traditional and edgy art from the few galleries who had an interest in contemporary realism and I hadn't considered their gender. Over the two years of preparing for the second of the *RR* shows, I discovered there weren't many women artists represented in the galleries. Recommendations from those who were represented and word of mouth fed a conscious effort to make the second and future exhibitions more inclusive.

In 2012, on behalf of the artists, **Alexandra Tyng** asked me to write the introduction for the exhibition *Women Painting Women—The Expedition and Beyond*. The blog "Women Painting Women" had begun in 2009 through the efforts of **Alia El-Bermani**, **Diane Feissel** and **Sadie Valeri**. It has become a phenomenon with exhibitions appearing across the country.

The artists I talked to five years ago had spent time together painting, talking about painting and talking about their lives as women. They ranged in age from their 20s to their 70s and discovered how much they have in common.

Recently, I asked Tyng how things have changed. She replied, "from my own point of view it looks as though there is still a gender disparity...but I do see a lot of artists working really hard to overcome these disparities in new and creative ways.

I know so many artists who are producing great work, and they are getting noticed. Some are curating all-women shows for the express purpose of disrupting the pervasiveness of the male gaze and highlighting how women see certain subject matter differently."

Women artists are celebrating inclusivity, painting the variety of human types in their male and female models—stunning beauty and "warts and all." They are giving voice to themselves and to their subjects.

In her own work, El-Bermani literally gives voice to a young African-American girl in the painting *Hear Me*. The girl's head is tilted back, her eyes shut, as she roars her discontent. "Roar" is artfully cut into the hair on the side of her head. She stands in front of a traditional white-on-white woven fabric that might have gone into the making of a fabulous dress or drapes in the elegant home of someone far above her own "station." Her body art and vociferous exclamation might turn off some people, but she can't be ignored. She might even be heard.

Tyng explores her family's stories by "painting imagined scenes rather than actual remembered events, so my memories remain very distinct and separate from my art. But in another sense painting is a psychological process. It's like therapy. My family paintings, like all my figure paintings," she continues, "are about relationships. I think about an important event or general situation or problem and I construct a visual image of it. In the process I have to continually dig deeper."

Her father, architect Louis Kahn, was Estonian. When he was 3 and living in Estonia, "his face and hands were burned when his clothing caught fire from an accident with hot coals...which had a profound impact on his life." Fire often appears in her paintings. In *Jaanipäev*, a young woman is crouched before a bonfire. Jaanipäev is St. John's Eve or Midsummer's Eve in Estonia when the solstice is celebrated with bonfires.

Tyng explains, "The young woman in the painting is my daughter, who spent a year in Estonia on a Fulbright Scholarship researching our family roots and creating her own experiences and connections. In the painting I think of the flames as memories that bend away from her, becoming part of her past as she reaches toward them."

One of my favorite people from the days of curating the *Re-presenting Representation* exhibitions is Emilie Price, who taught in one of the local schools. One day Price said I should see her daughter's paintings. It was one of those "oh no" moments that turned out well. Her daughter is **Lee Price**. At that time Lee was painting exquisite representations of light on gold damask fabric. Today she is renowned for her self-portraits—paintings portraying women's relationship to food as well as explorations of compulsive behavior.

In her more recent paintings, she stands facing the viewer, food in hand, caught in the act of consuming jelly doughnuts, ice cream and popsicles. In *Self-Portrait with Parfait in Floral Room* she attempts to

1. Alia El-Bermani, *Hear Me*, oil on aluminum panel, 40 x 30". Courtesy the artist.



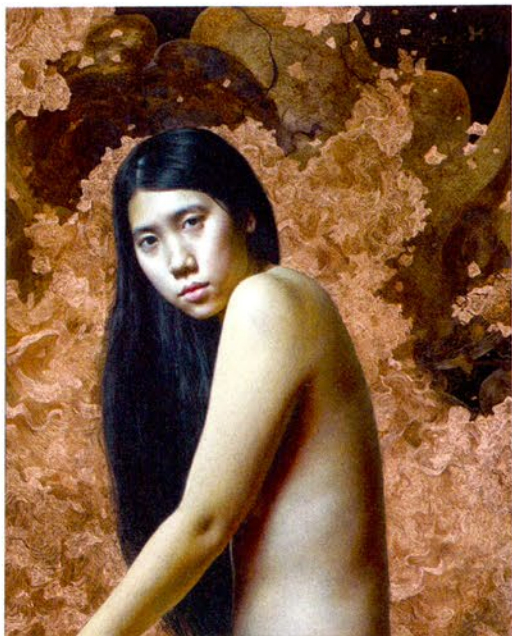




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2. Arden Gallery, *Artist Painting with Peonies*, oil on linen, 24 x 36", by Sherrie Wolf. 3. Haven Gallery, タイトル [Traces of feelings], oil on canvas, 29 x 24", by Miho Hirano. 4. Sirona Fine Art, *Karen with Cloud Cover*, oil on copper, 36 x 30", by Erin Anderson. 5. Sirona Fine Art, *Twins by the Trees*, oil on panel, 18 x 24", by Katie Miller. 6. Alexandra Tyng, *Jaanipäev*, oil on linen, 34 x 46". Courtesy the artist. 7. Haven Gallery, *Awakening of Spring*, oil, 24 x 18", by Laurie Lee Brom. 8. Haven Gallery, *Salvation*, oil on canvas, 36 x 26", by Chie Yoshii. 9. Sirona Fine Art, *Light Bright*, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 53", by Sarah Stieber.

melt into the background wearing a floral dress that matches the floral wallpaper. At an exhibition opening, she wore the same dress and nearly disappeared in front of the painting.

Commenting on her recent work she says, "Most women are brought up to be givers. To nurture others at the expense of our own needs. We hide our appetites, not just for food but in many areas of our lives, and then consume in secret. In my most recent works, the women seem to be coming out of the closet. Eyeing the viewer—not censoring their hunger. My

paintings ask what is it that truly nourishes us and how truthful can we be about the size of our hunger?"

Sherrie Wolf says, "My images have evolved from a love of art history and a desire to present multiple levels of expression to my viewer." She included art historical references with postcards of famous paintings, which evolved into being the entire background of some paintings, establishing a vast vista behind still lifes of vases and flowers.

In *Artist Painting with Peonies*, a peony is displayed in a glass of water

sitting on a reference book on Manet opened to an illustration of his *Branch of White Peonies and Pruning Shears*. In Wolf's painting, the shears have become additional leaves. The "artist painting" appears in a postcard of Sargent's *The Fountain, Villa Torlonia, Frascati, Italy*. Jane de Glehn and her husband Wilfred were frequent traveling and painting companions of Sargent as well as models for his paintings. She was from a family of five established woman artists.

She wrote to a friend about the painting, "He [Sargent] has struck Wilfred in looking

at my sketch with rather a contemptuous expression as much as to say 'Can you do plain sewing any better?'...Wilfred is in shirt sleeves, very idle and good for nothing and our heads come against the great panache of the fountain."

The suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote, "I would have girls regard themselves not as adjectives but as nouns." Having established themselves as nouns, a century later they have become verbs.

*Within the pages of this special section are works by some of the female artists working today. The pieces exemplify their*

*"Each painting you buy says something about you. Make sure your collection tells your story."* — Pati Maguire, artist

*unique artistic voices, the styles they have honed with years of practice and the overall vision for their artwork.*

Anne Harkness strives to design paintings that offer a refreshing approach and an engaging subject matter with a positive outlook. Her newest *Diptych Series* continues to surprise her when she paints, as "each new painting is affected

differently by the color versus black-and-white compositions," she says. "In some cases color invades the monotone canvas; in some, an expectant character leads us out of the black and white. I love that each painting carries me into new solutions, with new challenges, delivering new insights."

Every painting Beth Forst creates, she says, "comes from that sacred place



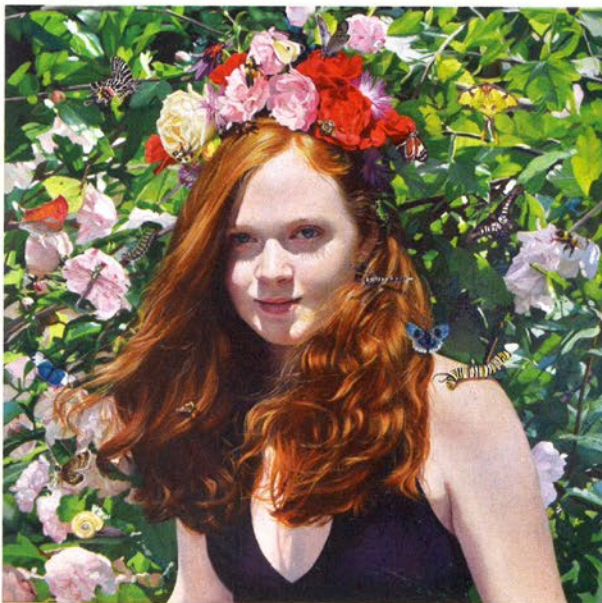
COLLECTOR'S FOCUS  
**WOMEN ARTISTS**



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10. RJD Gallery, *The March of Time*, oil on panel, 24 x 24", by Odile Richer. 11. RJD Gallery, *A Habit that Refuses to Die*, oil on wood panel, 30", Amanda Greive.  
 12. RJD Gallery, *When She Wears Flowers in Her Hair*, oil on canvas, 30 x 30", by Bryony Bensly. 13. Stephanie Hartshorn, *Vanilla Dream*, oil, 24 x 30"

within that is truly joyful." She sees the contagious effect that spreading this joy has and feels privileged to call herself an artist. Forst adds, "My collectors often visit me just to feel the energy I create in my work. It is so 'feel good' that a whole room full of it will lift you."

The artwork of **Debbie Kinson**, represented by **Bowersock Gallery** in

Provincetown, Massachusetts, has been described "as the scenery of the mind and heart." She is most known for her brilliant and warm colored images of birds, staged in ethereal-kissed settings often touched with gold. They are often birds in flight surrounded by orange-reds and golds.

"This is an artist who is speaking to more than the beauty of her subjects. Debbie is

interested in these creatures as symbols of freedom, spirituality and mystery," gallery owner Steve Bowersock says. "They have a unique way of morphing from quiet, peaceful encounters, to ones which excite and energize."

New York-based artist **Brocha Teichman** believes there is an intense, transcendent beauty in the world that passes by quickly.