

THREE TO WATCH

There is a lot of superb art being made these days; this column by Allison Malafronte shines light on a trio of gifted individuals.



ODILE RICHER (b. 1978),
Dandelion, 2017, oil on panel, 44 x 34
in., RJD Gallery (Bridgehampton, NY)

ODILE RICHER (b. 1978) makes paintings that read like giant, gorgeous pages in a surreally romantic yet strangely realistic storybook. Metaphors, myths, allegories, allusions — all can be found in this Canadian artist's highly detailed creations. Trained as a museum technician, Richer is primarily self-taught. She also studied at the Saidye Bronfman School of Fine Arts (Montreal) and the Academy of Realist Art (Toronto).

Richer's paintings are feasts for the eye that make us pause and ponder. They contain both overt and hidden symbols, and trying to solve the puzzle — or surmise what the artist was after — is only half our reward for close observation. In a painting such as *Dandelion*, for instance, several interpretations might apply. "This painting actually represents spring, hope, and youth in a romantic world," Richer explains. "The young woman is like a flower beneath glass, in the same way we might frame flowers to preserve their color and beauty. Presenting the model behind glass also alludes to the idea of preserving youth. She holds a puffy flower near her mouth as if it were a breath of life, or as if she had made a vow, or held a secret."

The artist's affinity for storytelling is complemented by her love of antique and vintage items, fashion, fabric, and jewelry. These accoutrements make regular appearances to further set the stage and context for each narrative. Richer devotes significant time not only to recreating their tactile appearances but also to transmitting how they feel or what memories they may bring to mind. Not surprisingly, her creative process is time-intensive and requires ample forethought, sometimes up to a year in advance. "My ideas accumulate and become more complex as time passes," she says. "I often say that a painting comes to fruition as a result of extended meditation."

Richer is represented by RJD Gallery (Bridgehampton, NY).



THOMAS BROADBENT (b. 1955) has been fascinated with animals, especially birds, since childhood. Born in Miami, Broadbent moved to Manhattan in 1998, where he studied at Empire State College and the School of Visual Arts. Although his colorful watercolors may initially seem like light-hearted illustrations, there is much more to them than meets the eye. They are, in fact, symbolic narratives with direct messages, often suggesting that these seemingly simple animals have something to teach those who overlook them. "I like to think that these birds are completely heedless to all the important works of man," the artist says. "We as humans create our own meaning about our place in the world in the form of literature (books), architecture, and technology, but we basically exist in a bubble. Nature, life, the universe, or whatever your definition might

be, marches onward in time. We as humans are but a footnote. Hubris and vanity might tell us something else, but nature is uncaring and wild."

In addition to his well-known bird paintings, Broadbent's artistry encompasses varied subjects and media, including sculpture, installation, and works on paper. Whether it's a painting of a bird pecking apart a book of mathematical theory, an outdoor installation billboarding an ironic phrase, or a watercolor of an upside-down umbrella, all of Broadbent's works offer commentary on both the accepted norms and glaring deficiencies of humanity's self-created systems.

Broadbent is represented by Front Room Gallery (New York City).

THOMAS BROADBENT (b. 1955), *Sacred*, 2017, watercolor on paper, 70 x 63 in., Front Room Gallery (New York City)

MAI WYN SCHANTZ (b. 1975) creates works on stainless steel that capture her connection to nature while evoking the simple joys of getting lost in it. Having earned a B.F.A. from Denver's Rocky Mountain College of Art & Design, she has been working with metal for nearly 20 years: "I was initially drawn to metal because of its slickness as a painting surface, but soon I recognized it as a way to capture nature in a contemporary context. A unique juxtaposition results between the industrial material and my nature-based subject matter."

Schantz first cuts the metal to the size that best suits her chosen subject, then secures it to a wooden support. She masks the areas that will retain the metal's lustrous, reflective state, forgoing sealers or varnishes that would alter it. Those areas to be decorated are prepared with industrial primers, then painted in oils because she loves their luscious, buttery texture and how they slide along the metal's slick surface. Although the painted areas look tightly realistic from a distance, the fresh, lively color of each brushstroke can be enjoyed up close.

Belying their effortless appearance, Schantz's paintings — the categories of which include Elements, Trophies, the West, and Northwoods — necessitate deliberate design decisions. A painting such as *Catching the Sky*, for instance, is both art and design: it allows us to see and feel the rising of the birds through its narrow, vertical orientation, and also through a composition that grows in spaciousness as our eye travels upward.

Schantz's paintings contain a simplicity and serenity that counterbalance our complicated times. "Despite our high-tech, modern world, we are still innately tied to the land," she notes. "My paintings are about this relationship. They are an exploration of our evolving and often tenuous union with nature, as well as our inherent desire to connect with it."

Schantz is represented through her own studio-gallery, Mai Wyn Fine Art (in Denver's Art District), as well as Trove Gallery (Park City, Utah). Her next solo exhibition will appear at the Foothills Art Center (Golden, Colorado) from July 27 through October 14, 2018.

MAI WYN SCHANTZ (b. 1975), *Catching the Sky*, 2016, oil on stainless steel, 72 x 26 in., private collection

