

# PA

Issue 80 | January 2017 | FORMATION





# BERNARDUCCI.MEISEL FORMATION

CURATED BY DIDI MENENDEZ

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# PA



# FORMATION

for-ma-tion  
noun

1. the action of forming or process of being formed.  
synonyms: emergence, coming into being, genesis, development, evolution, shaping, origination.
2. a structure or arrangement of something.

**Formation**, in other words, strongly relates to the principles of conception, the creative process, the birth of—in this case—something quite sublime.

*Formation* is also a 2016 song by Beyoncé. She sings, *I dream it, I work hard, I grind 'til I own it...* I imagine all the poets and artists participating in this exhibition and its accompanying *PoetsArtists* issue feel those words to be a truth, a powerful precept to live and work by.

In preparation of writing this introduction, time and again I gaze at the artwork with

my eager artist's eye and recite the poetry aloud with my hungry reader's voice, always in search for grace in form and in word, searching for a deeper truth that touches or shakes me. This body of work—presented as a collection of paintings and poems—seduces me with its beauty and substance. Allow it to stir you too.

## POETRY

*Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.*  
Robert Frost (1874 –1963)



Poetry appeals to our senses through words and phrases which can be taken literally or figuratively by means of descriptive as well as allegorical language. Like any art form, subjectivity plays a large part in which poems touch and move us, their interpretation invariably linked to our own experiences, often sparked by a flash of recognition and understanding.

*It's not easy to define poetry*, Bob Dylan once said, so who am I to attempt it? However, allow me the pleasure to illuminate this collection of poems and draw you in.

These poems are about regret, wistful recollections woven into elegies, mournful grievances about love dying and undying love. Gestures reminding us of youth and awkward growth and hurt and laughter.

These poems are conversations and explanations and recognitions, capturing personal histories in a snapshot of heightened awareness of those smallest of details and those awe-inspiring things so much larger than just our tiny selves.

These poems are about brutal thoughts and violence. About searching and finding the right words, beckoning, urging us to understand, to know, to please—I beg you—feel. They speak of accepting the paradox and tension of hopes and deceptions—those surprising yet somehow expected dishonesties and betrayals. About the beautiful bravery of rising above the mundane while immersing ourselves in the ordinary minutiae of daily life.

These poems are about rape and invasion and injustice and silent screams of frustration. About scars and trauma and disease—

physical and emotional. About awakening to and recoiling at society's rules of skin, dress, and acceptable behavior. About being shamed, rejected, ignored—fearing the dreaded invisibility that comes with longer life. Age, ugly and weak, beautiful and strong.

These poems are about the joy of feeling heartbroken and miserable and the guilty weight of feeling happy even when our world is crumbling. These poems are about life...

These poems—one by one—weave stories that unfold in the mind's eye like theater plays. They should, by rights, be heard. I invite you to recite these poems to yourself. Let your voice caress a silent room and allow yourself to *feel* and *see* and *understand*.

## PAINTINGS PAINTINGS

The human figure is one of the most enduring themes in the visual arts. It draws our eyes, firing up our sensory cortex in an evolutionary response of reading facial expression and body language. When representational artwork retains strong reference to the real world its impact is at its highest.

Formal elements and aesthetic properties—such as color and values, line and form, shape and texture, scale and perspective—play an important role in these paintings. Besides establishing the illusion of dimensionality, there's an emphasis on a narrative that attracts and retains the viewer beyond a first glance. There are no prescriptive formulas for what makes a figure painting successful—it is an elusive, intangible property that somehow the best artists know how to unite into a powerful expression that makes us stop and gaze. This collection of paintings offers exactly that.

Alas, today's technological world of internet and social media relentlessly bombards us with an astonishing amount and variety of visuals, so the challenge of the figure painter to create an impactful and eye-catching image has increased on many levels—far beyond the extent that any pre-digital revolution artist ever faced.

The breathless pace of current technology normalizes our strongly reduced attention span, with dire consequences for contemporary realism—the non-instant artwork that takes time, skill, and effort. Combining the results of a number of studies on how long viewers look at paintings I found that, on average, a viewer looks at a painting between two and 32 ½ seconds. According to the Louvre, visitors typically look at Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* an average of fifteen seconds. Wait... what?

The true lover of art looks at art for a sensory and emotional experience. The art expert focuses on the conceptual nature of an artwork as an expression of an idea. And the artist looks for all of the above as well as the technical facets of conception. We all seem to gravitate towards artwork that drives the entire psyche. Hopefully you find yourself among these three categories. Deserving more than a quick glance I want—no, urge—you to savor these wonderful paintings in a conscious and deliberate manner and really connect with them.

While not every artwork will attract us, those that do often generate sensations that we should honor and question, not only to enjoy that experience but also to know ourselves better. When art captivates us there's an opportunity for awareness on both a tangible and metaphysical level. Besides, it can become much more than just a private personal encounter; we can share our reactions with others creating a social experience by initiating a connection through art.

The paintings participating in **Formation** are curated by Didi Menendez, publisher of *PoetsArtists*, and are shown in New York City at one of the world's most prestigious art galleries championing contemporary realism.

Frank Bernarducci, Director and Partner at Bernarducci Meisel Gallery explains the premise of this exhibition, saying, "Formation is a group survey of young figurative painters. What do they have in common? They're all *women*. There, I said it."

With a glint in his eye he continues, "Formation will be part of our *First Look* program that showcases the work of compelling new artists whose work we believe warrants exposure. This will be the first time any of these painters have exhibited at our Gallery on 57th Street and we are looking forward to hosting the exhibition."

From inspiring portraits to passionate life studies, each of these artist offers their own distinctive style of capturing the human figure. Each piece strikes me as a poetic narrative describing tangible and intangible aspects of life—some serious, introspective, or heartrending, others joyful, contemplative, or seductive. Generous are these artists who bravely expose their souls so that our eyes and minds may feast upon their toil. I invite you to spend some quality time with this superb anthology of poems and paintings.

Written by Lorena Kloosterboer © Antwerp, December 2016



My Obsession with Just Is My Obsession with the Temporal

Just ok / Just like that / Just  
like it / Just worry / Just there /  
Just so / Just as / Just because  
/ Just observed / Just disparate  
/ Just a part / Just trying / Just  
the paper / Just more / Just get  
/ Just because / Just like / Just  
the flower then / Or just / Just  
get / Just haven't / Just come  
back / Just in case / It was just  
that / It's just / Just once / It's  
just forgettable / I just want / Just  
after / Just an obituary / And just  
/ Just more / You're just / Just not

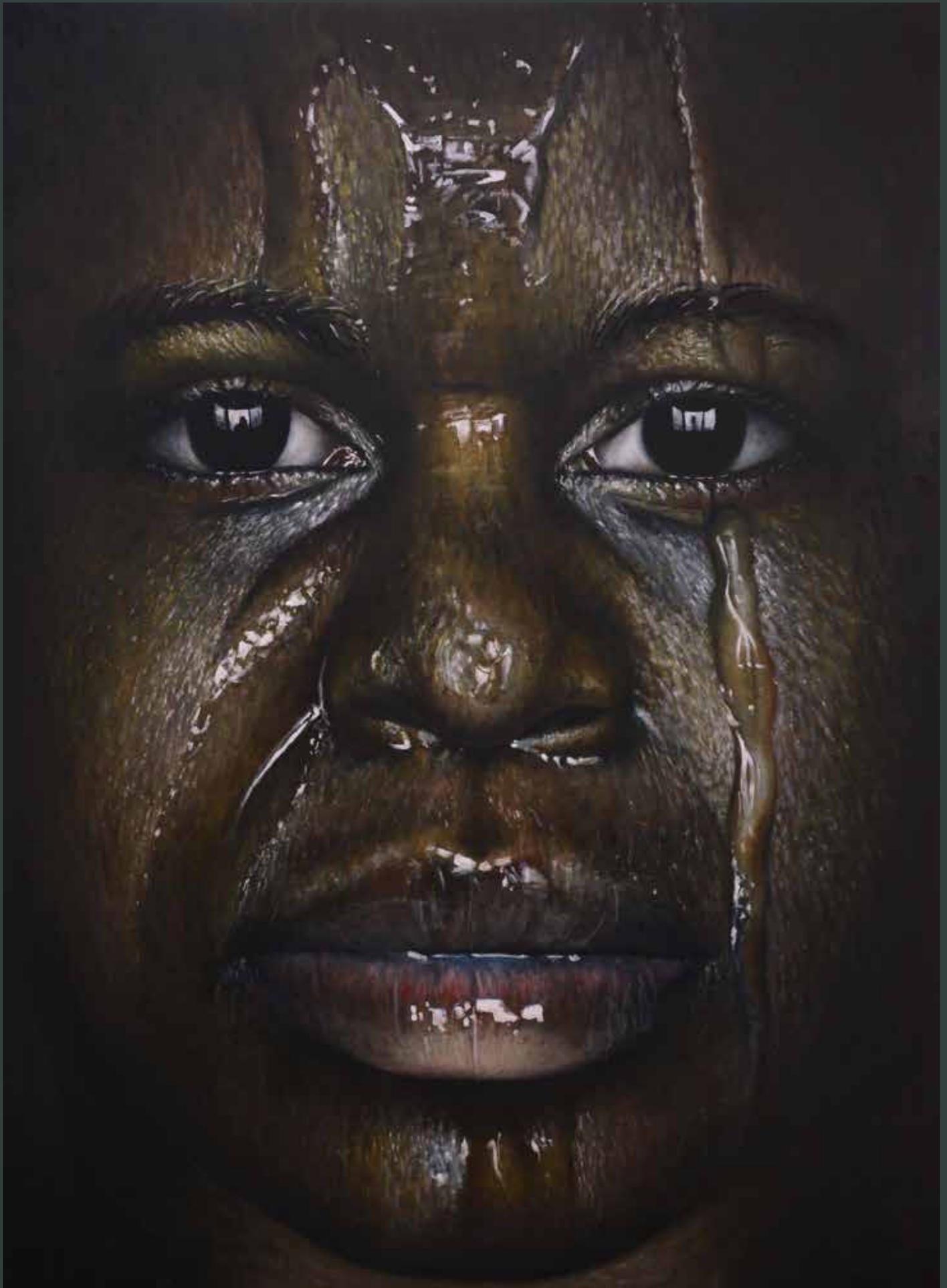
# Erica Elan Ciganek

Erica Elan Ciganek portraits depict close-ups of cropped faces, focused on truly seeing the individual beyond the veils of societal biases and preconceptions—beyond the identification of skin color or socioeconomic status that exist as structures to suppress, devalue, and dehumanize others. Rivulets of water serve a dual symbolism, in that the water represents the filter that skews our views that divide us, while also uniting us in our common human experience. Ciganek's work seeks to challenge society's rampant dehumanization—in particular regarding black people—by inviting the viewer to see beyond power structures and respond with a deeper, more visceral understanding that celebrates life and embraces the pleasures of discovery.

Ciganek's portrait, entitled *Miriam: Through the Parting*, shows a cropped close-up of a woman's face painted in a dark near-monochromatic palette which emphasizes the rich highlights of skin and water textures. The rivulets of water add to the beauty of the facial features and reshape it into a human topographical landscape. The title refers to Miriam, as described in the book of Exodus of the Old Testament, who guided the enslaved to freedom. Through this narrative Ciganek examines the potential of woman as a natural leader and defender of freedom, submitting that those oppressed gain empathy and wisdom through suffering, making them ideal bearers of truth.







ERICA ELAN CIGANEK | MIRIAM THROUGH THE PARTING | OIL ON MDF | 49X36 | 2015



# Heidi Elbers

Heidi Elbers paints the human figure in loose, painterly brush strokes, always leaving the background white and vaguely nebulous in order to avoid distraction and maintain the focus on her subject. Her fascination with extravagant costumes started early in life. Embellishments related to Mardi Gras and the cultural history of the Bayou region—such as furs, sequins, and feathers—are used to accentuate physical beauty. Her latest body of work examines the balance between beauty and masculinity. Typical male activities—such as that of hunter, trapper, or soldier—form part of the narrative, often playfully juxtaposed against archetypal feminine traits.

Elbers' painting, entitled *Soldier*, is a portrait of an army veteran turned model, who embodies the perfect equilibrium between resilient masculinity and gentle, sensitive qualities. His pose and facial expression indicate fatigue and vulnerability despite obvious physical vigor, suggesting he is bracing himself for difficulties ahead. The iridescent feather stole draped across his shoulders is reminiscent of angel wings, representing a protective force, while the decorative golden corsage symbolizes the epaulette used as insignia on military uniforms, indicating rank and status. Elbers' loose brushwork skillfully captures intricate textures, delicately suggesting details that reinforce remarkable realism.



HEIDI ELBERS | SOLDIER | OIL ON CANVAS | 36X30 | 2015



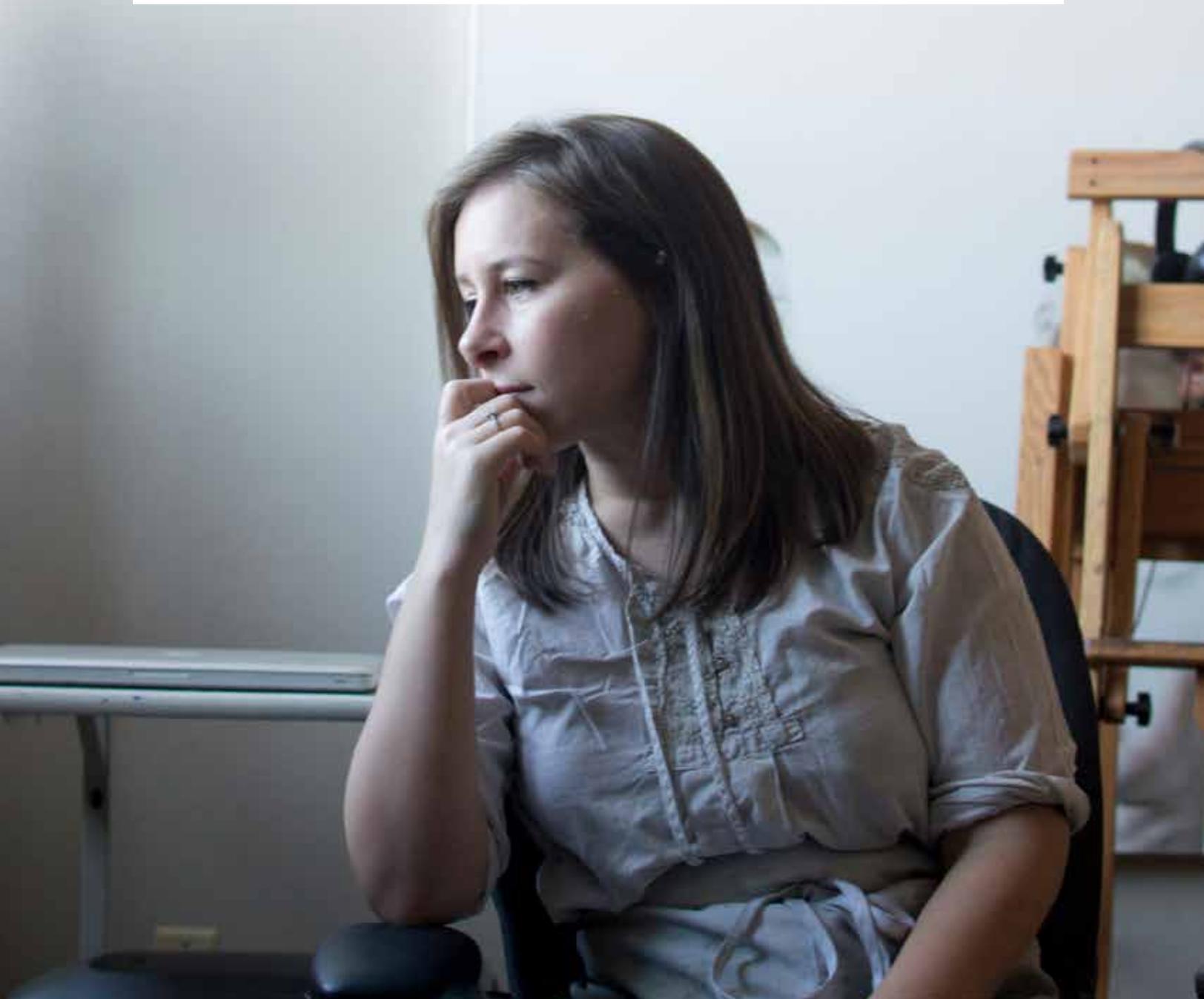
# Erin Anderson



PRACTICE | OIL ON COPPER | 36X30 | 2013

Erin Anderson paints the human figure using oil on copper sheet. In her body of work, she explores the dynamics of interpersonal relationships as well as the fundamental connections between humans and the environment. The interplay between paint and metal substrate allow her to portray different levels of reality, revealing dynamic and changing layers that can either be perceived directly or sensed instinctively. Her figures are anchored in a classical representational approach, exquisitely rendered in a detailed yet subtle manner.

Anderson's painting *Practice* conceptualizes the idea of a method to center, balance, and ground oneself during difficult times of transition. The dynamic composition suggests movement around a tranquil motionless figure seeking equilibrium. The static ellipses suggest a rotating movement that will eventually line up in perfect symmetry once inner balance is restored. The stark contrast between the superb chiaroscuro of traditional portraiture and the strongly defined, brightly lit ellipses make this a striking piece, perfectly juxtaposing contemporary abstraction with an ageless time-honored expression.





NN1 | OIL ON CANVAS | 24X24 | 2016

Michelle Doll's paintings center on the human figure in touchingly intimate poses that speak of those silent, fleeting moments of physical interconnection between people. She portrays the significance of emotional energy—either present or desired—which she captures in a delicate realism infused with easy sensuality. Doll examines the profound significance of the power of love, our desire for touch, and the fragility of unity. Doll's subjects are real people portrayed from an introspective viewpoint. To avoid influencing the viewer with a title, Doll catalogues her work with the initials of her models so we may

experience the artwork from a purely personal perspective.

Doll's piece entitled *NN* is a meditation on the positive aspects of love, honesty, and connection. Portraying the intimate love and sincere tenderness between the couple skillfully and insightfully provokes a sense of vulnerability and intimacy usually hidden from the rest of the world. Beautifully painted skin surrounded by elegant fabric, detailed lace, and gleaming jewelry allow us a motionless glimpse of a tender, affectionate gesture between two people exuding warmth, comfort, and wellbeing.



# Michelle Doll

# Shana Levenson

Shana Levenson paints contemporary portraits in a classical approach, in a quest to go beyond realism to capture the personal truth and genuine essence of the subject. She seeks a deeper connection with the people she paints, sharing their personal stories and experiences with sensitivity and respect.

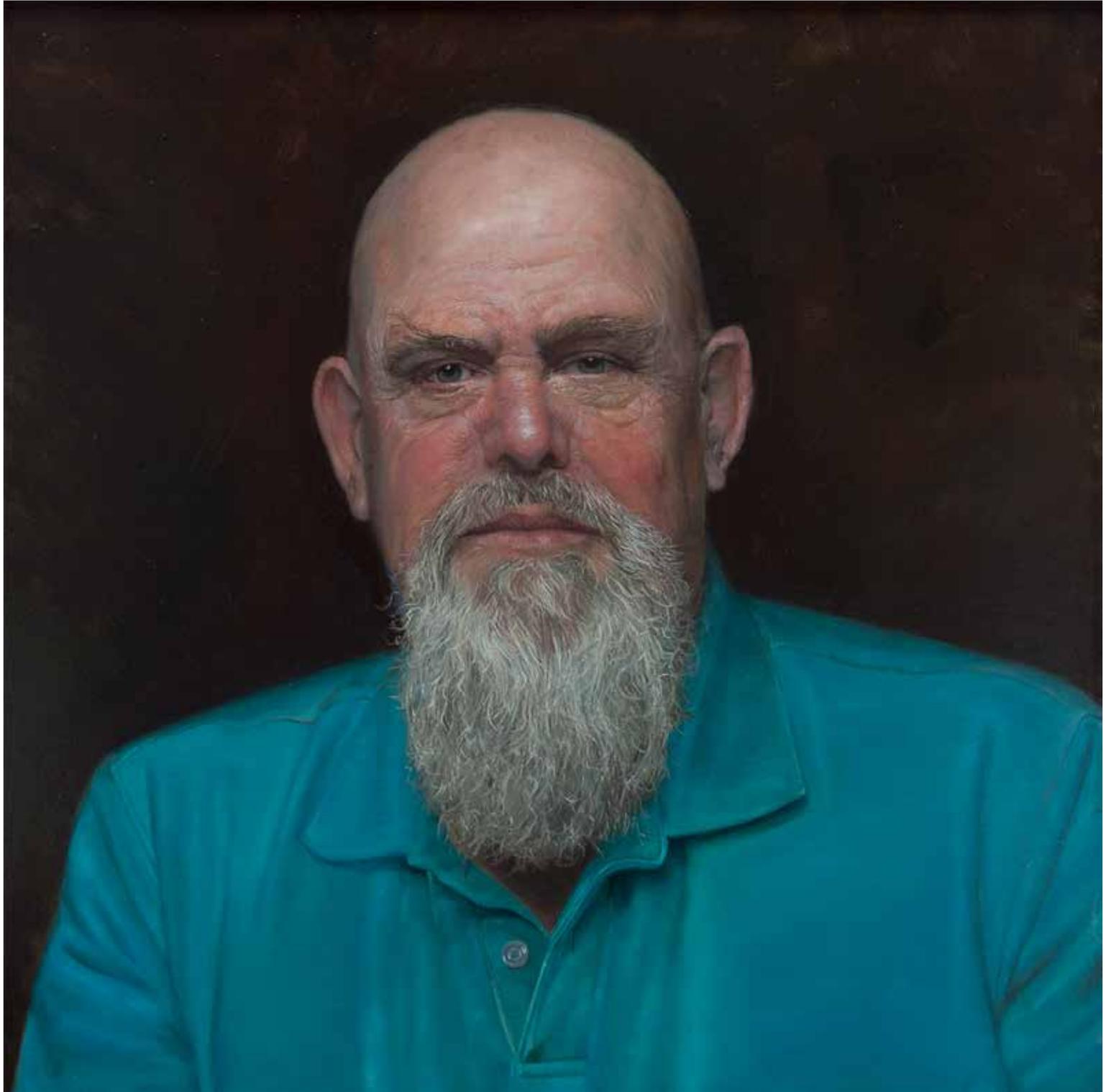
Levenson's portrait, entitled *Paul*, is part of her series *Beyond the Illness* in which she examines personal stories of survival as well as loss surrounding life-threatening ailments. This serene and elegant portrait depicts a stately man with a calm, compassionate gaze and delicate features comes alive in vivid color. Knowing that this man is a heterosexual long-term HIV/AIDS survivor who lives with a disease that—against all odds—has not defeated him in the past three decades, places this

portrait in a new light. Levenson has brilliantly captured Paul, who has come to terms with the uncertainties and suffering in life, bravely and unwaveringly staring back at us with kind-heartedness and profound wisdom.

*Sibling Bond* is part of *Portraits of Parenthood*, Levenson's series of portraits focused on the oft-unspoken dichotomies of contemporary parenting. In it she captures the strong bond between her children. The eldest child, strong and spirited, protectively embraces her younger sibling who seems timid and in need of comfort. This painting echoes maternal love and documents the hope that her children will remain close to each other for life. It is a portrait of love and resilience during difficult times, superbly capturing universal human gestures and expressions of affection.







PAUL | OIL ON DIBOND | 24X24 | 2015

SIBLING BOND | OIL ON DIBOND | 36X24 | 2016



# Nadine Robbins



Photo by Jeffrey Hunter

Nadine Robbins uses an academic approach grounded in atelier tradition to achieve artwork that honors the historic legacy of portraiture depicting today's world. She paints ordinary people from all walks of life with distinct emotional clarity. Robbins captures inner beauty in a touching and oft amusing manner that suggests intimacy, tenderness, and an understanding of the human experience, emphasizing the duality between bravado and vulnerability.

Robbins' painting *She-Ra* explores the secret habits and guilty pleasures we all hide from the outside world. The model is Matthew Hittinger, whose guilty pleasure is his secret identity—being a poet who's always observing and documenting the world. In this portrait, the poet wears a crocheted crown similar to that of his favorite fictional character She-Ra, Princess of Power. Just like her, he must chant words

to transform himself and tune into his artistic powers to be able to write. The striking analogous color scheme, rich textural details, and masterful brushwork contribute to this captivating piece.

*Epic* is a portrait of Robbins' son at age ten, expertly capturing the tender transition between childhood and adolescence. Wyatt poses with typical teen bravado, wearing a trilby hat and his favorite clothes. The boy's serious posture—while wielding a World of Warcraft sword that reveals his impressionable, youthful inner world—endears him to the viewer. Despite the Ray Bans, one senses sensitive youthful eyes staring back at us. The juxtaposition of the dark figure, the light background, and the value spectrum in the shadows creates an eye-catching contemporary portrait. At the time, the teen's in-word was 'epic' which contributed the title.



PIGGINS





SHERA | OIL ON CANVAS | 24X24 | 2015

**Omalix**





THE HEADDRESS | OIL ON LINEN | 24X24 | 2015

Omalix paints the female figure with an emphasis on a personal narrative through which she explores her emotions and experiences—those which she cannot express in any other way. Her classical, highly skilled approach to textures and details reflects her love for realism. Despite high detail, she aims for visible brush strokes that retain evidence of the presence of her hand. Omalix strongly believes that the act of painting always translates into a form of self-portraiture, whether she paints herself or a model.

Omalix's painting, entitled *The Headdress*, shows a portrait of a wide-eyed young woman wearing a crown of flowers, a symbol of fertility and womanhood. Her expressive eyes speak of conflicting emotions; fear, hope, and longing. It is an introspective and symbolic piece about the stage of life between youth and maturity, when all young women must make difficult choices that will determine their life path. The painstaking details of the flora, and exquisite texture of the hair and skin contrast starkly against the ominous dark background, giving the figure an angelic luminosity.

# Sylvia Maier

Sylvia Maier paints American narratives in broad, supple brush strokes, inspired by Rembrandt's raw mystery and the passion of the Renaissance. Influenced by her biracial heritage she examines current cultural differences within familiar social settings in public places. Maier approaches each piece by sketching an impromptu scene that catches her eye, after which she recreates the tableau with models in order to gain deeper artistic insight and work out the subject matter. She aims to capture a multicultural figurative world, where art, music, ceremony, and tolerance reign.

Maier's painting *The Bread Cutter* shows the gestures of an archetypal woman hard at work, expressed in a loose and succinct approach. Reminiscent of Degas' *Laundresses*, its boldness and lack of superfluous detail invites the viewer to appreciate the subject's highly recognizable posture, see the strength in her back and the delicacy of her touch while cutting bread. The diagonally oriented pose invites the viewer's eye to wander, and the skillful placement of vivid colors emphasize the solemn simplicity of the figure.

Maier's piece, entitled *Mothers Milk*, is a slice-of-life glimpse into a Brooklyn café, vaguely reminiscent of Norman Rockwell's *The Runaway*. While the women are absorbed in passionate discussion, the child is the only one noticing the spilling milk, symbolizing the differences in perception and perspective that each of us have at any given moment in time. The Maizena references Maier's Afro-Latin food culture; the touch of bright yellow counterbalancing the more muted overall palette.

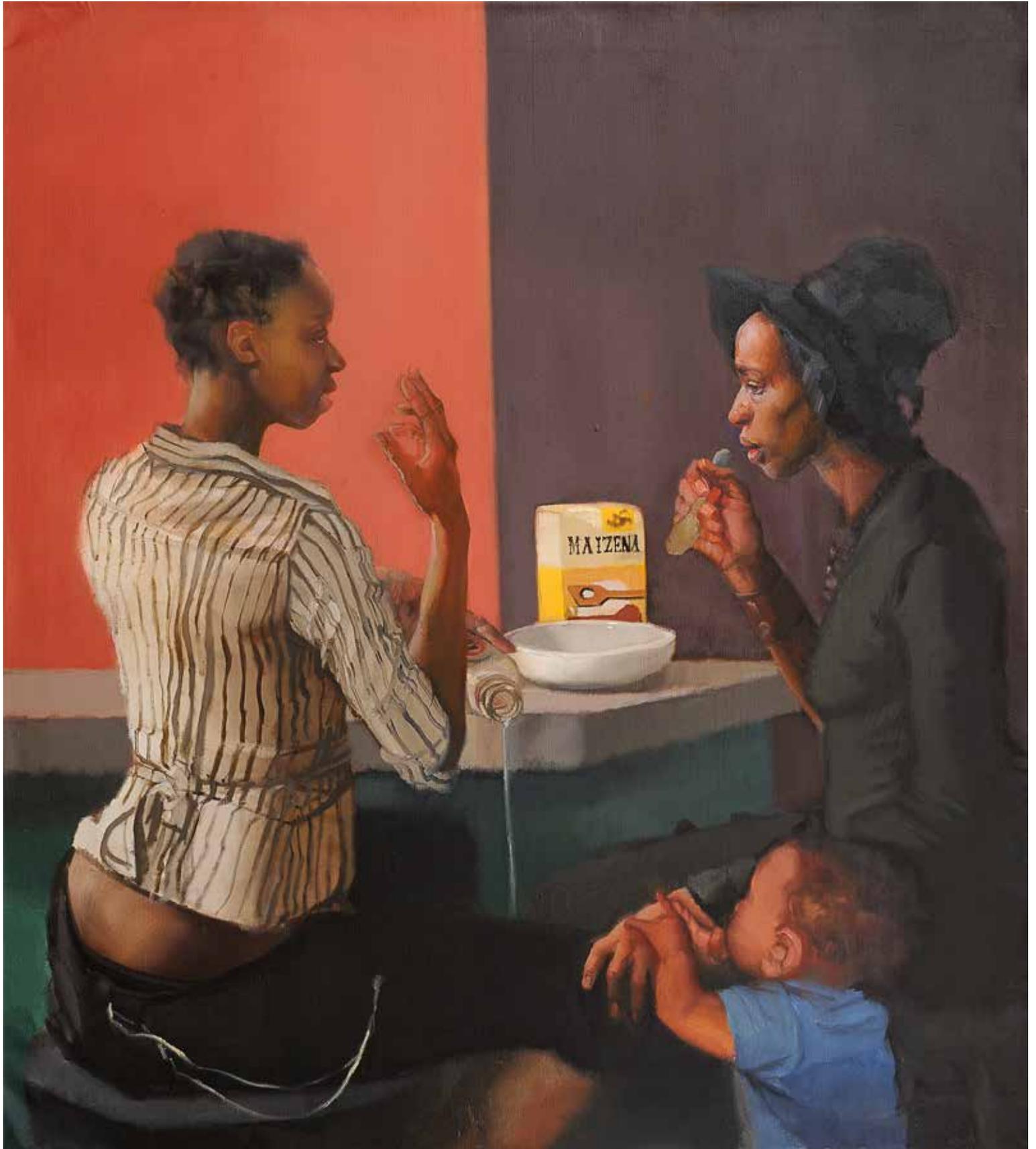
The subjects in *The Card Players* are Maier's friends as observed at a local café that serves a multicultural community. This is a contemporary form of an Americana-inspired painting—clear, strong brush strokes perfectly show the mood of the setting without the need for minute detail. Unpretentious gestures, laid back facial expressions, and robust, simple shapes are emphasized in a muted color scheme, resulting in an intimate moment shared with the viewer looking into this late-night café setting and its after hour activities.







BREAD CUTTER | OIL ON CANVAS | 44X72 | 2008



MOTHERS MILK | OIL ON CANVAS | 48X54 | 2008



CARD PLAYERS 4 | OIL ON WOOD | 72X48 | 2009



4 MOTHERS - WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED | OIL ON LINEN | 75X60 | 2016

# Jenny Morgan

Jenny Morgan paints the human figure breaking away from classical approaches by using striking color schemes and inventive surface treatments that give a fresh interpretation to traditional portraiture. Her method involves the annihilation of impeccably painted portraits, sanding them down to strip away layers in order to symbolically reveal physical and spiritual wounds of the flesh. In her work, Morgan seeks to examine the complexities of human relationships and to expose the psychological multiplicities of the ego. Morgan's innovative color-use, interesting compositions, and partially abstracted content superbly come together in a highly-sophisticated body of work.

Morgan's painting, *Lifted*, depicts her close friend Caitlin holding twin sons. This piece focuses on motherhood, the emotions connecting family and friendships, and the decision modern women face regarding procreation. In this piece, the transformative power of motherhood is seen in the purposeful, serene look of the woman—depicted in grisaille, symbolizing the stability and strength of a marble sculpture—while protectively and firmly holding the children who are full of light, life, and color. Morgan's emotional involvement shines through in the sensitive and alluring expression of the subject matter.



LIFTED | OIL ON CANVAS | 60X48 | 2016 |  
COURTESY OF DRISCOLL BABCOCK GALLERIES, NEW YORK.



BREAK OF DAWN | OIL ON CANVAS | 30X24.5 | 2016 |  
COURTESY OF DRISCOLL BABCOCK GALLERIES, NEW YORK.

# Victoria Selbach



Photo by Ava Selbach

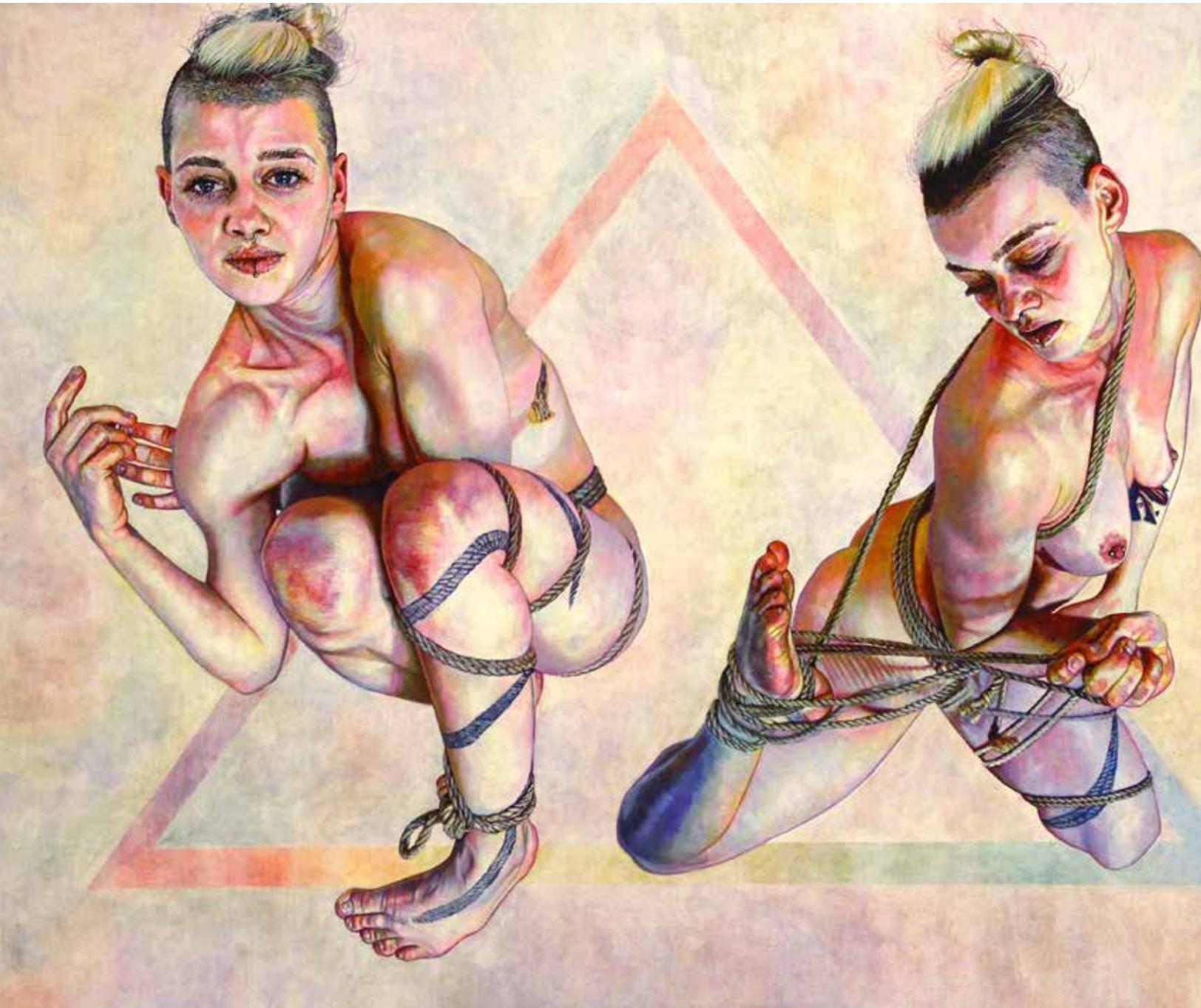
Victoria Selbach paints the female figure in celebration of the vitality and strength of the contemporary goddess—the heroic indomitable spirit in all women. Through her art, she seeks to examine individual experiences and shared journeys that connect us in meaningful ways, and how they influence our interactions with the world. Pondering on the complexities that ultimately contribute to who we are and how we behave, Selbach searches for a deeper truth, seeking enlightenment through the act of painting.

Selbach's painting entitled *The Slip* depicts a casually seated female figure from an idiosyncratic elevated perspective. Exploring how preconceptions affect a woman's place in the world, this piece shows a woman in a nonchalant pose suggesting an unconcerned detachment from superficial scrutiny and opinion. The creamy flawless skin contrasts superbly against the opulent textures of fur, lace, and velvet, while the fluid lines of her contours invite our eyes to roam shamelessly, savoring every detail.



THE SLIP | ACRYLIC ON CANVAS | 48X26 | 2014

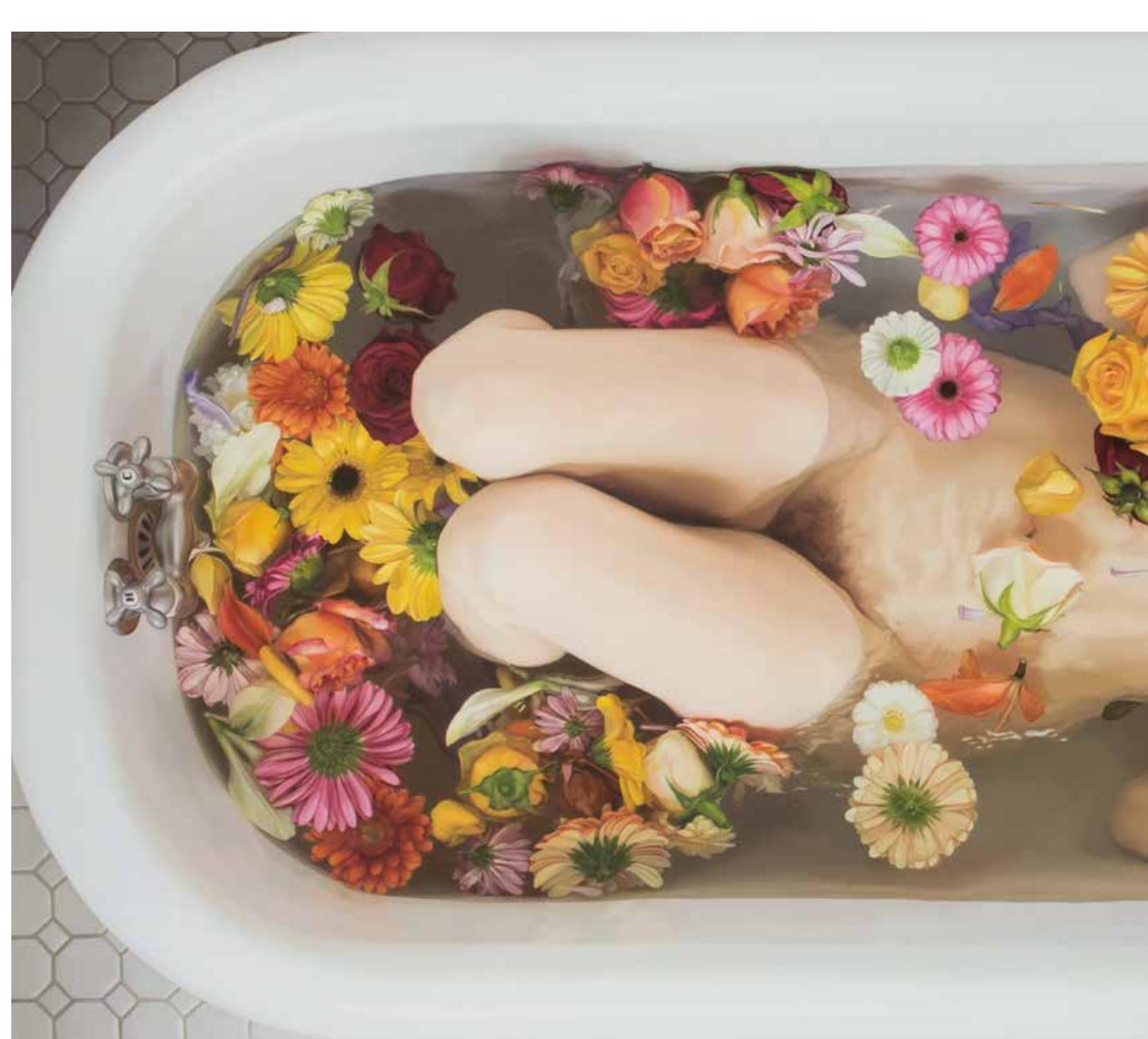
# Sarah Muirhead



Sarah Muirhead's art has its roots in portraiture and medical illustration, clearly visible in the way she conveys the physical embodiment of the human spirit. Muirhead focuses on characteristics such as pleasure and pain, expressing them in a visceral, anatomical, and critical manner. At close view, splendid details of patterns, pulsating with life, convey close examination of her subject matter, with an emphasis on the quality of flesh, skin textures, and muscle density. Her impressive body of work not only examines the physicality of human anatomy but also provokes questions about self-expression, identity, and gender.

The model who inspired Muirhead's double portrait, entitled *Self Restraint*, is the Shibari artist Kasia. Shibari is an ancient Japanese form of artistic rope bondage usually involving suspension, which traditionally involves two people—a dominant rigger and a submissive subject. However, Kasia is a solo performer using ropes to show strength and agility, transforming submissive bondage into an expression of power, control, and athleticism. Muirhead captured the vulnerability, resilience, and emotion of her subject by beautifully contrasting the taut riggings against the rope marks on the supple tattooed skin, and honors her essence by suggesting that a tangible restriction can become a personal means of expression.





LEE PRICE | FLOWERS | OIL ON LINEN | 65X29 | 2015

# Lee Price



Lee Price paints the solitary, isolated female figure from an elevated downward-looking viewpoint that suggests self-reflection—looking at oneself from a psychological perspective. In her work, Price examines our relationship with food and how compulsive behavior is often expressed in secrecy and solitude in unusual settings, such as bathtubs and bedrooms. While her exquisitely detailed work conveys an apparent atmosphere of pleasure, the underlying implications emphatically touch upon our fears—and sometimes our reality—of feeling out-of-control panic, paralyzing guilt and shame, and energy wasted on self-destructive behavior. The strength and perceptiveness of Price's work is reinforced by a vivid, contemporary color palette and gracefully detailed realism.

Price's painting entitled *Flowers* is a departure from the darker premise of compulsive behavior. In response to the poignant feedback from viewers who found solace and recognition in her work, Price set out to depict genuine and attainable comfort.

*Flowers* is about the joy of being surrounded by beauty and harmony, about finding a sense of consolation and inner peace through simple, positive actions. The peaceful immersion of the solitary figure surrounded by luscious flowers exudes wellbeing, serenity, and self-acceptance. Price expertly captures the gentle splendor of the petals, the luxurious balminess of the water, and that peaceful moment of pure bliss.

37 WEST 57TH STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10019  
BETWEEN 5TH AND 6TH AVENUES  
3RD FLOOR

# BERNARDUCCI.MEISEL

