



EVOCATIVE *Expressions*

BY JOHN O'HERN

Unlike his famed contemporary, John Singleton Copley (1738–1815), who was painting portraits of colonial luminaries in Boston, Ammi Phillips (1788–1865) painted the prosperous rural folk of western Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York. He painted perhaps thousands of portraits some being attributed to him only in recent years. His sitters considered their portraits to be status symbols. He advertised in a local newspaper that he produced “correct likenesses” with “perfect shadows and elegantly dressed in the prevailing fashions of the day.” To find clients he traveled extensively around the area in his 50-year career.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art categorizes Phillips’ portrait *Mrs. Mayer and Daughter*, 1835–40, as folk art. Writing for The Met, Carrie Reborra Barratt explains, “The poses, props, and settings for country portraits were no different from those employed by artists in the cities. These portraits, however, are restrained in every other respect. They are characterized by sharply defined forms, neatly organized compositions with clearly defined spatial arrangements, some with an almost mathematical precision and symmetry, generalized lighting, equal attention paid to all areas of the canvas, an absence of expressive brushwork, and an overall flatness and linearity.”

Amy Werntz is a painter and an interior designer. She depicts the interiority of her everyday subjects in her meticulously painted portraits of moments in the life of older women. She says of *Café*, “With this subject, I was drawn to the way the light from the adjacent window was almost making her glow, creating a halo around her head. She initially gives off an impression of smallness within her oversized shirt, but upon closer inspection, exudes the strength and resolve that can only be achieved through experience.” The painting received a Second Honor Award at the 24th Annual International Portrait Competition of the Portrait Society of America.

Often seated—ostensibly alone—in a café, they may

or may not have dining companions as they pause for a moment of reflection between bites. This subject appears ready to interject a well-thought-out point into a lively conversation.

Mythological characters have been depicted for millennia. Medusa had a liaison with the sea god Poseidon. Angered by Medusa breaking her vow of celibacy, Athena turned her into a hag with serpents for hair. Her gaze petrified anyone who looked at her. Yet, she is often the symbol of beauty and art, her face chosen by Gianni Versace to represent his brand.

Peter Lupkin brings Medusa into the present, immobile in a rocking chair by a window overlooking the sea. In contemporary terms, she is experiencing the Medusa complex, a period of frozen emotion. Lupkin has worked in his father’s stained glass studio since he was 14. “The

1. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Mrs. Mayer and Daughter*, 1835–40, oil on canvas, 37¹/₈ x 34¹/₄”, by Ammi Phillips (1788–1865). Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, 1962. 2. *PoetsArtists, Ruby Stemmed Vision*, oil on panel, 20 x 16”, by Ellen Starr Lyon.



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3. **Arcadia Contemporary**, *The Silk Wrap*, oil on panel, 24 x 18", by Rachel Li. 4. **Amy Werntz**, *Café*, oil on aluminum composite material (ACM), 16 x 12" 5. **Gallery Victor Armendariz**, *Medusa Complex*, oil on canvas, 48 x 36," by Peter Lupkin. 6. **Arcadia Contemporary**, *The Black Flower*, charcoal and graphite on paper, 46 x 34", by Arinze Stanley.



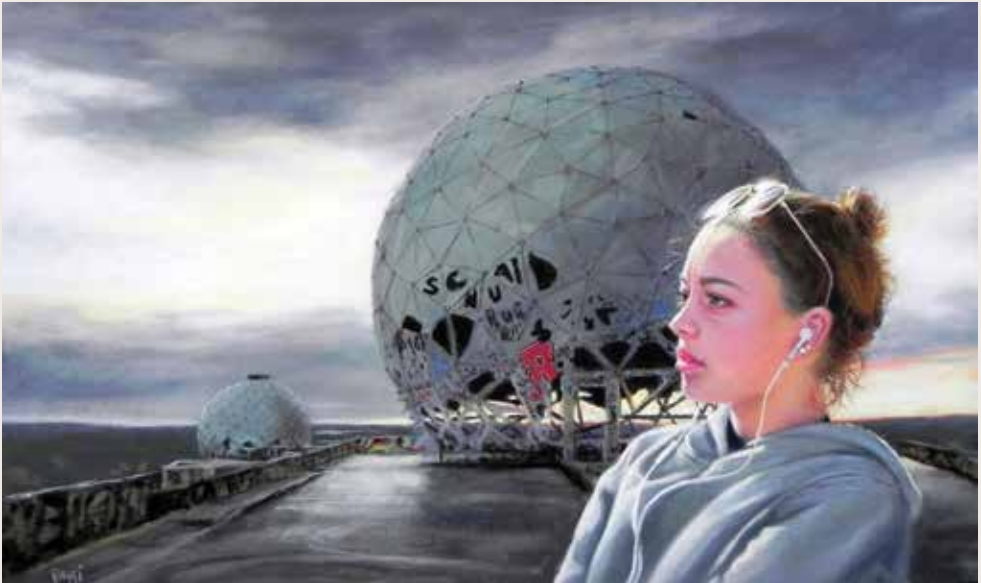
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artwork I create is a visual statement of my moral philosophy. The language I use to convey this philosophy in my pieces is one of traditional symbolism...Ultimately my goal is to use modern imagery in conjunction with traditional techniques and connect them with contemporary society, showing both the narrative's and the method's continued relevance."

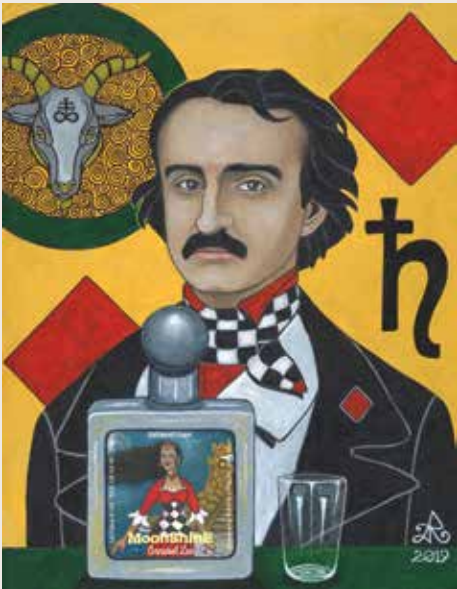
The following pages celebrate the art of portraiture and the many manifestations it can take. Through an expansive range of mediums, subject matter and intent, artists—and the galleries that represent them—share their unique perspectives on portraiture and its allure. While their approaches vary greatly, there is one common thread the artists share—the desire to capture humanity in its infinite expressions.

Arcadia Contemporary is known for showcasing some of the best representational and figurative artists working today. Among them are Rachel Li, Carla Paine and Arinze Stanley, whose vastly different approaches to portraiture yield equally evocative results. "Arcadia Gallery has always placed a strong emphasis on two aspects of an artist's work that we feature in the gallery; the first is a high level of skill that shows superior draftsmanship and technical ability,"

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7. PoetsArtists, *Still Listening*, pastel, 12 x 20", by Daggi Wallace. 8. Roopa Dudley, *Poe-Trait*, acrylic on canvas, 14 x 11". 9. Arcadia Contemporary, *Long Winter*, oil on canvas, 25 x 21", by Carla Paine. 10. Suzanne Vigil, *Homage to Frida*, colored pencil on drafting film, 24 x 26". 11. PoetsArtists, *Modern Day Superhero*, oil, 30 x 24", by Amy Gibson. 12. Roopa Dudley, *Immigrants (Sadia Feisal & Roopa Dudley)*, acrylic on canvas, 40 x 30". 13. Suzanne Vigil, *Persephone and the Six Seeds*, colored pencil on drafting film, 28 x 32". 14. Blue Rain Gallery, *Leticia y Andrea*, acrylic and mixed media on panel, 60 x 48", by Erin Currier.



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says gallery owner Steve Diamant. “Secondly, and just as important, is what we call an artist’s ‘signature style.’ Does the artist paint in a way that makes each one of their works unique and immediately identifiable? It’s one thing to be able to paint or draw well, but it’s another for collectors to immediately recognize the work because of the unique way the artist paints.”

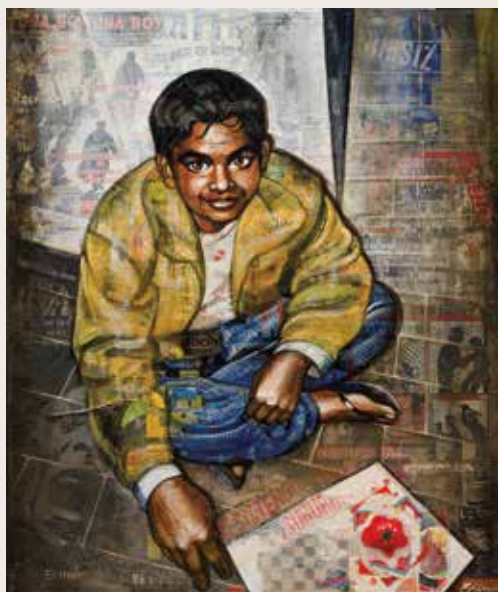
Portrait artists Amy Gibson, Ellen Starr Lyon and Daggi Wallace are part of the *PoetsArtists* community, and with the support of the organization, they’ve either been featured in a recent show and/or have established representation by a notable gallery. “The community of artists we publish and promote at *PoetsArtists* have the option of submitting to monthly themes or group exhibitions, which I make available to them,” says Didi Menendez, a *PoetsArtists*’ spokesperson and patron of the arts. “We also partici-

pate in national and international calls such as the Art Renewal Center yearly call for representational artworks and *Painting The Figure Now* at the Wausau Museum of Contemporary Art...and the annual *Miniature Holiday* show at Abend Gallery [in Denver].”

Gibson is represented by 33 Contemporary in Chicago, the partner gallery of *PoetsArtists*. Her piece *Modern Day Superhero*, featured here, highlights the strength and resilience of children; while Lyon’s self-portrait pays homage to artist Frida Kahlo. Born in Berlin, Germany, Wallace’s portrait draws from memories of Cold War times.

When **Roopa Dudley** paints portraits, she wants to reveal the history and hidden mystery behind them. “To do this, I find out as much information as I can about my subjects, mostly through research or personal observation, and compose it in a way where

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15. Blue Rain Gallery, *Sri Lankan Plasmic Tomato Vendor*, acrylic and mixed media on panel, 72 x 60", by Erin Currier. 16. Loretta McNair, *Tamika*, oil, 24 x 30"
17. Mary Whyte, *Sabbath*, watercolor, 18½ x 29" 18. Mary Whyte, *One's Own*, watercolor, 17¼ x 17¼"



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it looks most engaging,” says Dudley, who often paints archetypal figures. “Most of the time, I like the protagonist making direct eye contact. There is something provocative and unsettling about direct eye contact and I love it. Once the viewer is engaged, and their eyes start to wander, history slowly emerges and the mystery is solved. Which brings that delightful ‘aha!’ moment.”

Nothing inspires **Loretta McNair** more than people—their facial expressions, the personalities concealed in their features and gestures, and the challenge of capturing exactly who they are on canvas. “The technical matching of skin colors and

shadows, light composition and enhancement, and ambience that results from color mixing is also a constant intrigue, calling me to each piece time after time,” she says. “I never tire of the process. I love being able to include an object or background scene that portrays my subject’s life purpose, if possible, and making every aspect of a portrait meaningful. It’s incredibly rewarding to be able to meet different people in life, hear their stories, and paint them—and to know that what I leave behind will be the cause to tell many others that story.”

Suzanne Vigil is both a storyteller and an artist. “The human form has always

intrigued me and putting it into a narrative I’ve created is exciting every time I start a new piece,” she says. Like an author, she develops the character as she conjures up scenarios. “Recently I’ve become fascinated by fabric and use it as a background watching it ebb and flow. The reality is I never quite know where I’ll end up.” She usually has a general idea of where she’s headed, but leaves plenty of room for change as the picture emerges. “The final story can be different as night and day,” Vigil adds. When she discovered drafting film decades ago, a drawing slid to the floor face down and she realized she had overlooked a great opportunity to use the

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19. Blue Rain Gallery, *Vanessa Turnbull (after Titian)*, acrylic and mixed media on panel, 48 x 36", by Erin Currier. **20.** Sivananda Nyayapathi, *Mattie Ree*, oil on linen, 16 x 12"
21. Sivananda Nyayapathi, *Michael Shane Neal*, oil on linen, 20 x 16" **22.** African American Artists Collective, *Ruminate*, graphite, 24 x 18", by Anita Easterwood.
23. African American Artists Collective, *Carolyn*, watercolor, 15 x 10", by Dean Mitchell.

backside too. "Now I combine colors on the front and on the back which give rich colors like you'd find in an oil painting. The series I'm working on this year involves a black and white figure with blasts of color in the background for contrast."

Erin Currier, represented by **Blue Rain Gallery**, is a humanist artist, passionately devoted to furthering social transformation through the creation of her mixed media portrait art. Currier eloquently states "that our commonalities as human beings far outweigh our differences. Divisions are often either superficial or artificially

created based on racial, economic and national ideologies." The artist weaves her message between layers of paint and collage created from bits of trash collected from her travels. "The use of trash allows her to use materials close at hand while also implying an interconnectedness through our globalized world," says gallery representative, Denise Phetteplace. "Travel is an important part of Currier's art-making practice; she has visited every continent in her more than 20-year career seeking experiences that will guide her in her work."

"Whether we are artists or not, we all

seek a life that is filled with 'more'—more creative pauses, more colorful relationships, more meaning," says artist **Mary Whyte**. "Everyone wants the secret to success and happiness." In the classes she teaches, Whyte aims to show students that they have to identify what they are feeling in order to paint, and that the quality of their production is not primarily about technique. "As artists, we paint from our hearts as well as our heads," she continues. "Truly learning to paint becomes a matter of learning how to see. This means we must become masters at observing and feeling

the world around us before we can begin to express it on an easel. It also becomes a matter of knowing ourselves." Whyte suggests that collectors select art that resonates with their life. "The work should be relatable and captivating, and ultimately give you more than you had ever asked for or expected," she adds. "It should be as if you invited a friend to your house for dinner, then asked them to stay forever."

During a visit to the studio of the late artist Everett Raymond Kinstler in Easton, Connecticut, Michael Shane Neal was giving a tour of his mentor's studio, when **Sivananda Nyayapathi** found himself so captivated by "the wonderful dappled lighting on him in the outdoor setting," it inspired him to paint the portrait pictured here. *Mattie Ree*, is done in a more traditional studio portrait style. "It is set in studio with north light," says Nyayapathi. "The beautiful north light hitting her delicate features inspired me to do this portrait." He incorporated a subdued but textured background to highlight the delicate nature of his subject. "I have tried to capture the personality and impression of the subjects while also creating a mood," shares the artist. "This is what collectors should be looking for when commissioning a portrait."

The **African American Artists Collective** is a Kansas City, Missouri-based nonprofit



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created to support and advance the African American and Black arts movement locally, regionally and beyond. One of the many artists the organization helps promote is Dean Mitchell, an award-winning American figurative artist who works primarily in watercolor and oil paint. His subjects, derived largely from African American culture, have been cited for their emotional depth, avoidance of facile sentimentality and accomplished sense of formal design.

Another African American Collective artist, Anita Easterwood, also highlights

Black culture and community in her artwork that are facets of her life. "It has molded me into the person I am, which inherently shapes my lens as an artist," says Easterwood. "The beauty of the 'everyday person' is that we are never just one or two things. We are multidimensional. So, although my art is influenced by my blackness, it does not define it. It is just one of the many lenses I explore when creating." ●

FEATURED Artists & Galleries

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MO 64108, www.aaackc.org

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421 W. Broadway, New York,
NY 10012, (646) 861-3941
www.arcadiacontemporary.com

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www.blueraingallery.com

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IL 60654, (312) 722-6447
www.galleryvictor.com

LORETTA MCNAIR

www.lorettamcnair.com

MARY WHYTE

(843) 870-0430, marywhyte.com,
sharon@marywhyte.com

POETSARTISTS

www.poetsandartists.com

ROOPA DUDLEY

318 Wild Willow Way, Severn, MD 21144
(443) 695-8494, www.roopadudley.com

SIVANANDA NYAYAPATHI

305 Lahontan Pass, Suwanee,
GA 30024, (770) 495-9069
siva@sivanandafineart.com

SUZANNE VIGIL

13419 Pino Canyon Place, NE
Albuquerque, NM 87111, (703) 867-8959
www.suzannevigil.smugmug.com

THE MET

1000 First Avenue, New York, NY 10028
(212) 535-7710, www.metmuseum.org