



TODAY'S  
MASTERS

BY KELLY COMPTON

# A TRULY GLOBAL SALON



**F**ounded in 1999 by the New Jersey collectors Fred, Sherry, and Kara Lysandra Ross with several of their fellow scholars, the Art Renewal Center (ARC) is a nonprofit educational foundation that encourages the re-emergence of traditional art and training techniques. The fruits of its labors are becoming ever more apparent as time goes by.

ARC is probably best known to readers of *Fine Art Connoisseur* for its impressive website ([artrenewal.org](http://artrenewal.org)), which contains more than 80,000 images by Old Master, 19th-century, and early-20th-century artists, along with artist biographies and related articles. The site has evolved into an invaluable reference for anyone interested in historical realism.

ARC is equally committed to bringing this rich heritage up to date by highlighting the booming field of contemporary realism. In addition to its ever-growing roster of recommended ateliers, its registry and 5,000-image gallery of “Living Master” artists, and its generous scholarship program for atelier students, ARC organizes the ever more popular International ARC Salon Competition online. Launched in 2004, the Salon concluded its 16th edition recently when ARC announced the latest award winners, honorable mentions, and finalists.

Co-chair and chief operating officer Kara Lysandra Ross reports that the Salon jurors found it difficult to winnow down to the approximately 1,273 finalist works — roughly 24 percent of the 5,400 originally submitted from 75 countries. Nearly 50 jurors participated and 221 awards and honorable mentions have been bestowed, including ARC purchase awards for 11 works worth more than \$80,000.

The Salon’s Best in Show award, worth \$25,000, went to *An Unsatisfying Ending*, a painting submitted in both the figurative and portraiture categories by the Utah artist Mark Pugh. The artist explains, “With most of my paintings, I try to tell a story. Here a young girl has torn up the pages of a book she was not happy with, while hiding it behind her back. I wanted to make sure the look on her face matched the story being told. The

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**MARK PUGH** (b. 1979), *An Unsatisfying Ending*, 2021, oil and ink on linen mounted panel, 36 x 24 in.

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SARA GALLAGHER (b. 1990), *High Bar*, 2022,  
graphite and PanPastel on paper, 21 x 21 in.

sunflowers behind her reflect her mood and mirror her stance.” Pugh also won third place in the portraiture and imaginative realism categories with his work *Autumn Roses by the Sea*.

As implied above, the jury awarded first, second, and third place prizes in each of 11 categories: figurative, imaginative realism, still life, portraiture, landscape, sculpture, drawing, plein air, animals, “fully from life,” and work made by teens. These categories encompassed numerous honorable mentions and finalists. A host of special awards were also given, including People’s Choice, Most Ambitious Work, Best Nude, Best Social Commentary, Best Trompe l’Oeil, Best Pastel, and Best Watercolor. (We will also be illustrating all 11 category first-place winners in our May-June 2023 issue.)

The *Fine Art Connoisseur* Award went to *High Bar* by Sara Gallagher, who will be highlighted in a future issue of this magazine.

Of this work’s title, the artist writes, “Holding a high bar for oneself can create an illusion that anything below that bar is inadequate, or not fully formed. If the bar is constantly rising, when do we get to celebrate our accomplishments and relax into who we are today? This tension is carried around quietly by many.”

The People’s Choice Award, which entails \$1,000 cash and a full-page illustration in the catalogue that accompanies the Salon, went to Sihua Liu for *Sister in the Maze of Flowers*.

More applause greeted a new entrant, Chung-Wei Chien, for winning eight awards or honorable mentions. This is only the second time in the ARC Salon’s history that one artist has won so many awards in a single competition. His most awarded work, *Venice Symphony 2021*, is illustrated here, and he received additional honors for *Outside the Louvre* and *Just Light Your Own Light* (a still life). All three were painted in watercolors.



CHUNG-WEI CHIEN (b. 1968), *Venice Symphony*  
2021, 2021, watercolor on paper, 29 1/2 x 21 1/2 in.



(LEFT) SIHUA LIU (b. 1988), *Sister in the Maze of Flowers*, 2021, graphite on paper, 27 x 20 in. ■ (BELOW LEFT) BRYAN MARK TAYLOR (b. 1977), *First Evening Lights of the Loire Valley*, 2022, oil on panel, 36 x 48 in.

#### OUT IN THE WORLD, AND OUT OF IT

To make the Salon more visible to the public, ARC has coordinated multiple exhibition opportunities highlighting winning artworks. This summer (July 14–24), nearly 100 works will be on view with many available for sale at Sotheby's in New York City; the public celebration will be on July 15 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. ARC has extended its partnership with Fashion Week San Diego (FWSD) for a fourth time, through which FWSD designers will create original couture outfits and “looks” inspired by 10 winning artworks. (These will also be exhibited at Sotheby's on July 22 from 6 to 8 p.m.)

The Salon's impact is being felt in still other ways. Utah's Springville Museum of Art has presented an award to Bryan Mark Taylor's painting *First Evening Lights of the Loire Valley*, and will devote an entire gallery wall to Taylor's recent works for an extended period. This painting also won the new Best Marine Themed Work (\$3,000) awarded by the American Society of Marine Artists. Later this year, Rehs Contemporary (New York City) will mount a selling exhibition of works by the Salon finalists Dan Chudzinski, Allen Douglas, Greg Hildebrandt, Shana Levenson, Christine Porter Lofaro, Roland Mikhail, Mark Pugh, Margo Selski, Tina Spratt, and Mike Wimmer.

Finally, all winners and honorable mentions will also be making an impact beyond Earth through their inclusion in the Lunar Codex's Polaris Collection. Their images will be laser-etched onto nickel microfiche and/or digitized on terabyte memory cards and enclosed in a time capsule on the Griffin lunar lander, launched by SpaceX, and placed on the Moon in perpetuity. The Polaris Collection is the project's third and final time capsule and will be launched late in 2024.

Entries for the next edition of the ARC Salon are being accepted from March 1 through June 13, 2024. Thanks to the Internet's flexibility, anyone can submit an entry at any hour, day or night. This is a truly global enterprise, one made possible by the Internet, but made real by the dedication of the ARC team. Everyone at *Fine Art Connoisseur* congratulates them, and indeed all of the participating artists. ●

**Information:** [artrenewal.org](http://artrenewal.org); the Salon publication can be ordered at [arc-store.com](http://arc-store.com).

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