

In this issue: Gregory Mortenson, Nick Alm, Stephanie Deshpande, Emil Robinson,
William Kocher, Ali Ringenburg, Darryle Steele, and Joseph Lorruso

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ZOEY FRANK

Empathy & Emphasis

Nature's Slave . . . or Master?

A Shared Pursuit



ALI RINGENBURG

THREE LIVES

The great collector, J. Paul Getty, wrote, “In my opinion, an individual without any love of the arts cannot be considered completely civilized. At the same time, it is extremely difficult, and sometimes impossible, to interest people in works of art unless they can see them and know something about them.” Education and experience are the ultimate quest of any true art dealer.

I am not a painter, nor do I profess to understand the personal struggle that goes into a work of art by the creator. So in the context of this publication, I feel like a fraud! I do, however, love paintings; oil is a medium that I have always found approachable and friendly as a viewer. The relationship evolves both through the technical—smell, application, texture; and the visual—color, composition, value, and narrative. Inevitably my mind always goes to the artist. I’m a lover of people, and someone who wants to understand the context of the piece within the artist’s own world.

The painter gives life to a painting through a hopeful combination of concept, technical skill, and visual inspiration. Each artist I work with has a menagerie of practices and routines. Most are diligent studio-goers, where they have a level of peace and comfort surrounded by objects waiting to

be painted (some patiently for years), primed surfaces, and all sorts of brushes, mediums, and tubes. A painting’s first life is spent in this sanctuary, where it is scrutinized and belabored, shielded from outside eyes except those most trustworthy. One of my most thrilling experiences as a dealer is to visit an artist’s studio. I’m filled with a sense of possibility as I take in the paintings in progress, the light, and the unique materials. As a person who loves to talk, I often find myself very quiet, wanting sight to be the dominant sense, rather than sound. Once the paintings are in the gallery, they’ll hear enough of my voice anyway.

To me, Leo Mancini-Hresko’s *Studio Hallway* captures the peace, tranquility, and possibility that embody a painter’s studio. I first saw the piece on a visit to his studio; it was unfinished and the draftsmanship was incredibly intriguing.



Leo began the piece soon after he moved into his live-work studio outside Boston, having spent the previous eleven years in Florence. The painting was an exercise in practicality and simple, pure beauty. The hallway was there (a free model) and Leo wanted to paint the place that he now called home.

Several weeks after my visit to his studio, Leo dropped the painting off at the gallery and it began its second life. Its sense of space and calm welcomed many eyes and started reflective



conversations. Gallery visitors related to the mill building's old floors, Leo's use of color, and to visual textures, as well as the texture of his looser brushstrokes. *Studio Hallway* sold to a woman who related to Leo's sense of finding place—a beautiful hallway full of new light, old materials, and an opportunity to feel at peace and settled. The piece hangs at the crux of her stairwell, where it can be seen both upstairs and down, and where it forces a busy mind to take a momentary break and a deep breath.



Leo Mancini-Hresko, *Studio Hallway*, 24 x 30 inches, Oil on linen, 2013, Private collection

The third life of a painting is the most intriguing and mysterious. I relish the times that I deliver a painting and get to see where it will hang and how the collector will interact with it. I'm a greedy dealer—wanting to glean as much information as I can about the collector's pull to the painting, as well as where it will live.

I doubt I will ever have the opportunity to see Mary Sauer's *Erin* in person again, as it now hangs in a farm in Germany. Mary painted the piece while in New York studying at the Art Student's League and Erin was a friend she made during her time there. The beautiful profile and cool tones of the piece

resonated with me immediately, and I spent quite a bit of time thinking about who would end up purchasing the piece and why. *Erin* hung in the window for some time, beckoning passersby. A German couple visited the piece multiple times and one afternoon the husband snuck into the gallery on a secret quest. His wife could not stop thinking about *Erin*, and Mary's talent and maturity at such a young age. He had insincerely discouraged the purchase and now had returned to the gallery again to have the piece secretly shipped to their farm outside of Munich. He too felt the pull of the painting, and had begun to see an undeniable resemblance both in looks and presence between *Erin* and his wife.



Mary Sauer, *Erin*, 40 x 30 inches, Oil on canvas, 2012, Private collection

Personal connections between a painting and a viewer in the gallery never cease to amaze and excite me. The artist paints a piece of their own accord, choosing subject matter, composition, and color, as reflections of their own technique, place in life, or mood. A person browses the gallery and connects with these personal choices and often relates the piece to their own life and experiences. I no longer believe in pure coincidence. Carlo Russo's *White Parakeet* was my first memory at the gallery of a sincere and powerful connection between a viewer and a painting. The gallery's doors had been open for less than two days when a woman came in and was floored by the little parakeet Carlo had so delicately rendered. Her husband came in first thing the next morning and explained that his wife had dreamt about the parakeet all night, and had awakened resolved that the painting was to be hers. He further divulged that they had once had this little bird and when his wife returned home after giving birth to their son, the parakeet kissed her cheeks uncontrollably. For them, Carlo had found their parakeet.



Carlo Russo, *White Parakeet*, 2012, Private collection
12 x 12 inches, Oil on linen



Jeremy Durling, *Caitlin*, 2013
20 x 16 inches, Oil on paper on panel, Private collection

Just as subject matter has the power to pull a viewer to a painting, pure execution can compel powerfully as well. Jeremy Durling paints from observation, although it was his well-executed palette knife marks and unique abstraction that drew me to his work. I loved the angularity of *Caitlin* and how he used an incredible array of colors to depict skin. It was exciting to have a painting that was flirting so heavily with abstraction in the gallery. One cool, early summer evening I had lost track of time and a gentleman wandered into the gallery around nine o'clock. He interacted with the pieces thoughtfully and decisively, offering no mistake that he was a collector and was after something specific. He came upon Jeremy's *Caitlin* and asked me to move it so that it could hang alone on a brick wall for him to view. He too loved the abstract quality of the work and the hard-edged marks of the palette knife. He felt as though *Caitlin* was a breakaway piece for Jeremy—that Jeremy had really found his stride in celebrating color and composition. He felt as though Jeremy wasn't playing by the rules of tradition or answering to someone else. *Caitlin* followed him to Texas, where it hangs in a highly modern house celebrating industrial design and sharp edges.

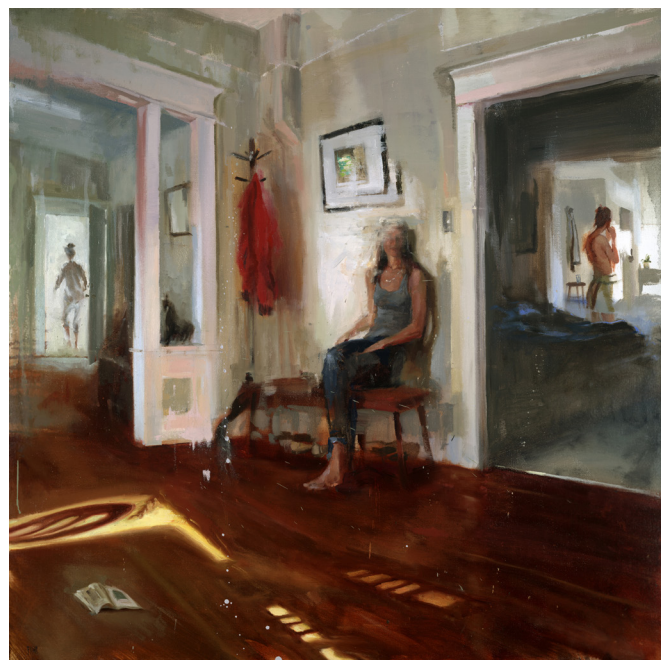
On occasion the third life of a painting comes about through courtship, a combination of spontaneity and calculation. Joshua Flint is a storyteller and a painter who has always made me think and heavily process his paintings. He presents the viewer with a beautiful vision and in a split second your mind begins delving into the narrative of his often-ethereal and haunting oils. I've found that most collectors who are caught by Josh come back time and time again to view all of his pieces in the gallery—not just the one they are particularly interested in. It's as if spending more time with his work gets them closer to him and his story. This was the case with Josh's *Planetary System*, a multiple-figure piece with a spinning narrative. A gentleman spent weeks jogging by the gallery, often going out of his way to come by to see what he considered "his painting," but reluctant to come in. He didn't like the expectation of galleries and maintained a solitary relationship with *Planetary System* until it was moved out of view from the street. At this point in the courtship, he had to take action. He had spent weeks studying the imagery of the piece and thinking about the relationship of the three figures, a dialogue he wanted to continue, contemplate, and enjoy in his own home.

From inception in the hands of the artist, to admiration and analysis in the gallery, to enjoyment and pleasure in the collector's home, each of these lives has purpose and value. The three stages are unique and fascinating to me and I'm well aware that there is no limit to just these three lives for a painting. Time marches on and sometimes paintings move about.

Matthew Saba's paintings will be the next to enter into their second life in the gallery, coming from their first life in his studio.



Learn more about Ali and Sloane Merrill Gallery at:
www.sloanemerrillgallery.com



Joshua Flint, *Planetary System*, 2013
36 x 36 inches, Oil on canvas, Private collection



Matthew Saba's studio