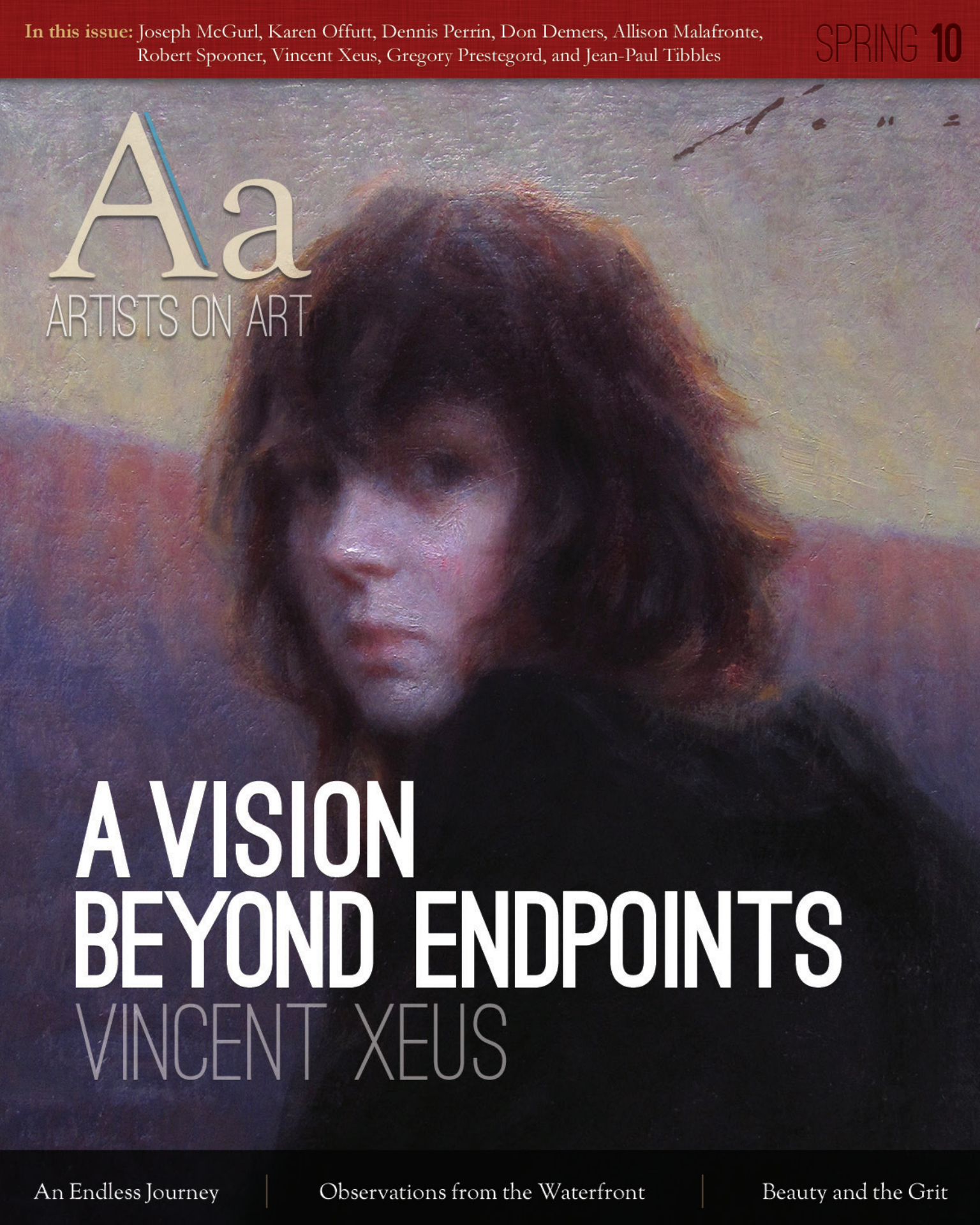


In this issue: Joseph McGurl, Karen Offutt, Dennis Perrin, Don Demers, Allison Malafronte,  
Robert Spooner, Vincent Xeus, Gregory Prestegord, and Jean-Paul Tibbles

SPRING 10

# Aa

ARTISTS ON ART



## A VISION BEYOND ENDPOINTS

VINCENT XEUS

An Endless Journey

Observations from the Waterfront

Beauty and the Grit



GREGORY PRESTEGORD

## BEAUTY AND THE GRIT

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Many artists try to capture the energy of the time in which they live. Look at the work of great masters—they tend to paint the times. I remember as a child my dad would always say, “Don’t paint pretty things.” When I would ask him why, he would reply, “Look around you. Look at all the industrial buildings that are falling apart. Look at all the poverty around us. Paint these things; they are the sign of our times.”

Indeed, he was right. Many years later as a young man walking the streets of Philadelphia, I found myself working hard, low-paying labor jobs, building scaffolding for murals in rough areas while looking at all the amazing graffiti, and teaching art to inmates in prison. I thought to myself, “What a harsh world we live in. There are lots of poor, broken-down buildings, and people surviving on crack. Wow, it looks like a bomb went off in this city.” My response was to paint and portray this Rust Belt city whose factories and jobs have been lost in the meltdown of American manufacturing.

Above: *Abstract jazz man*, 48 x 48 inches, Oil on panel

Painting was the only thing I ever really loved to do. I have been drawing and painting since I was three years old. My parents discovered that if I had a crayon or marker in my hand, I could settle down and focus. We lived in the Fairmount section of Philadelphia, so the Philadelphia Museum of Art a few blocks away was my playground. I learned to rollerblade backwards down the museum's steps, took weekend art classes, and loved just hanging around the place and paintings.

I was never a great student, but was accepted into Creative and Performing Arts High School on the strength of my art. I had a fascination with graffiti, and after a brush with the police, I found myself doing community service at Philadelphia Mural

Arts, the most impressive mural program in the country, founded by Jane Golden. From the age of 16, I worked for PMA erecting scaffolding and learning from other muralists about the art of mural making and painting big.

At 18, I was enrolled at PAFA—Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, where I received a rigorous classical art education. We studied everything from still life to figure painting, printmaking, and sculpture. I had amazing teachers who were also working artists. Sydney Goodman taught me not to be afraid of the paint and showed me how an ordinary scene could be packed with meaning and metaphor. Murray Dessner taught us to paint light like the Impressionists and to create a

*NYC light*, 35 x 48 inches, Oil on panel



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“ *GRITTY IS A TERM FOR REAL THINGS AND REAL PLACES AND REAL EVENTS, NOT A HOLLYWOOD FLICK. IT’S LIKE HAVING A CHOICE BETWEEN AN OLD GUITAR AND A NEW ONE.* ”

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world that the viewer could step into. Al Gury taught me about color, color planes, and the techniques of Alla Prima—also known as direct painting or wet-on-wet painting, which gives a fresh, spontaneous look to a piece. The sculptor Alex Hromych sent us out into the street and beyond to salvage old materials to remake into tools (chisels made from rebar, for example), canvases, and sculpture. Finally, Scott Noelle taught me about structure and shape, and he encouraged and inspired me to start painting cityscapes—to go out and paint what I saw on the streets.

It was then that I noticed all the beauty in the grittiness. Gritty is a term for real things and real places and real events, not a Hollywood flick. It’s like having a choice between an old guitar and a new one, which one would you choose? The new one looks pretty, but the old one carries amazing sound from years of having been played. The painter makes multiple mistakes, trying to make things right in his or her work, just as people make multiple mistakes while trying to fix the world. Then the muse comes in and you’re completely at peace.

How does one see beauty in the grit amongst all the chaos of the world? I think painters have been at this task for thousands of years. My work is evolving, although it is still informed and inspired by my surroundings in an aging Northeast city. A few blocks from my studio stands “the Beast”—an electrical power plant with three smokeless stacks, another relic of the industrial revolution. It captivated my imagination—and was a subject of my painting for many years. I still explore the poorest sections of the city to seek out abandoned people and landscapes, but my subject matter has broadened.



*Broken down brewery, 24 x 48 inches, Oil on panel*

Whatever the subject, I strive to reveal the energy, mood, and beauty of a person, space, or place. My own evolution as an artist seems like the natural progression of so many artists I admire. My work is hard to define, but has leaned toward expressionism.

Recently, I have been adding more elements of abstraction for emotional depth and heft. A painting of street musicians veers off into an abstraction of the music they are creating and playing. I paint with a palette knife and other miscellaneous objects almost like a sculptor. I start out building up the two-dimensional surface with layers of paint as in a relief, and then remove layers as necessary to create feeling and a sense of space and time. I don't want to be perfect. I enjoy the final effect of mistakes in my subject matter and work.

The process is my meditation, my way of finding and conveying truth.



*Gray scale, 48 x 24 inches, Oil on panel*



*Gray scale, 48 x 24 inches, Oil on panel*

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*Learn more about Gregory and his work at:  
[www.gregoryprestegord.com](http://www.gregoryprestegord.com)*