

CURATOR'S COMMENTS ON THE ARTISTS IN PURE PAINTING 2

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Detailed information on these artists is available on request.

“Pure Painting 2” is a group exhibition featuring a diverse selection of works by eleven of San Diego’s most accomplished painters. An effort was made to include a broad range of techniques, styles, and creative approaches, ranging from the meticulously finished realism and surrealism of artists like Mark Adams Bryce, Marianela de la Hoz, Cliff McReynolds, and Vicki Walsh, to the painterly abstractions of Richard Baker and Robert Treat. Veterans of the city’s art scene include John Abel, Stuart Burton, Michael Wheelden, and W. Haase Wojtyla. Jackie Lo, the youngest artist of the group, demonstrates an unusually mature vision, a quirky sense of humor, and a unique technique. “Pure Painting 2” celebrates the inherent beauty, versatility, and expressiveness of the medium of paint and offers compelling evidence that one of the most gratifying and memorable experiences possible can be provided by a well-executed painting.

John Abel: Equally comfortable painting a wide variety of subjects ranging from the human figure to landscapes and vintage automobiles, John Abel succeeds in creating art that is accessible enough to reach the man on the street, yet complex enough to engage seasoned art world veterans. Abel’s primary interest is the human figure, especially as embodied in images of the impoverished, the physically and mentally ill, and the criminals and misfits who make up the least fortunate in our society. That darkness extends to his landscapes as well, in content and in the palette he uses. *Morning Star*, the unusual nocturnal landscape on display in this exhibition, transcends the boundary between abstraction and representation, and is an exceptional example of Abel’s painting ability and vision. Major influences on the artist range from Old Masters such as Rembrandt, Titian, and Caravaggio, to American realist painter Edward Hopper (1882-1967), Britain’s greatest living painter, Lucian Freud, and legendary *Mad* magazine cartoonist Mort Drucker. Abel teaches art-related subjects at two community colleges. Note: A signed, full-color catalogue for Abel’s recent Visual Arts Program exhibition (December 9, 2007 through February 3, 2008) is available from this library.

Richard Baker: A respected professor in the Department of Art at San Diego State University for decades, Richard Baker’s large, unusual paintings are in a class by themselves. Baker is represented in “Pure Painting 2” by several recent works from his Symmetrical paintings series. The most distinctive characteristic of these works is the symmetric configurations of their images. In general, these are hard-edge, geometric forms superimposed on backgrounds of loosely painted organic shapes. Viewers may notice that Baker’s images, which at first glance appear to be absolutely symmetric, are not. Baker’s imagery is derived from a wide variety of sources, including the human figure and the internal systems of the human body, Buddhism, meditation, and lately – in a carryover from Baker’s previous artistic interest in machines, tools, and implements in common use – custom motorcycles known as “choppers.”

Mark Adams Bryce: Due to its beauty, technical mastery and visual elegance, *Lilies*, Mark Bryce’s most recent painting, aptly deserves the honor of being reproduced on the postcard for this exhibition. As the rest of Bryce’s paintings on display in “Pure Painting 2” demonstrate, the artist’s interests are wide ranging and profound. *Eigentor (Doorway to Self)* and *Wedding Portrait*, Bryce’s most personal and complex works in the exhibition, deal with the artmaking

process and the troublesome issues that have faced all serious artists throughout history, including Bryce himself. That being said, Bryce prefers not to offer an interpretation of his art, instead leaving it up to the viewer. This artist's craftsmanship and command of the *tromp l'oeil* style are first-rate.

Stuart Burton: "Making marks is what painting is all about," says long-time San Diego-area artist Stuart Burton. Best known for his stylized, painterly landscapes (a genre into which he claims he was "sidetracked" for much of his career), Burton has always considered himself to be a figurative painter at heart. In 2007, to the surprise of those familiar with the evolution of his art, Burton returned to portraiture and the figure, and also began what promises to be a lively and successful series of paintings of dogs interacting. Although Burton painted for many years with acrylics, he permanently switched to oils in 1993. Among the characteristics of oils he admires are the consistency of the paint, the richness of the colors, the way they hold textures, and "the subtle things that happen within each mark." In "Pure Painting 2" Burton is represented by *Fire Light*, a large, dramatic portrait of his wife, Kathy, shown seated in a chair and illuminated by the light of a fireplace. This work is remarkable for its intense color scheme of oranges and blacks, and the vigorous brushwork found in the figure and background. These attributes make *Fire Light* one of the most memorable paintings in the exhibition. Burton is one of the founders of Arts College International.

Marianela de la Hoz: Born and educated in Mexico City, Marianela de la Hoz has emerged as one of the region's most gifted painters. Her painstakingly executed egg tempera paintings, many of which border on the grotesque, address the darker side of human nature and often touch on themes in Mexican culture. These range from the subjugation of women, to religion and death. As a testament to her rigorous studio training, dedication and craftsmanship, de la Hoz also makes her own paints. De la Hoz's works in "Pure Painting 2," taken from her personal collection and never formally exhibited, are from an earlier period when she created much larger paintings than her current ones. In recent years, due to the exorbitant amount of time and labor needed to create paintings this size, she has scaled down the size of her art to miniatures.

Jackie Lo: A gifted young artist who recently joined the art faculty of San Diego State University after receiving her MFA in painting there, Jackie Lo is an astute observer of the inconsistencies and ironies that arise when disparate cultures intermingle in the United States. Raised in a suburban Chinese enclave of Los Angeles by Chinese immigrant parents, Lo's depictions of ethnic foods juxtaposed with traditional American ones, and oddly worded package labels and signs, for example, illustrate the strange hybridization that can occur in these situations as well as embodying her own struggles with cultural identity. The artist's technique, which involves pooling paint in tiny islands of color that combine to form an image, is particularly unique.

Cliff McReynolds: Like many of the artists whose works are included in "Pure Painting 2," Cliff McReynolds has been an influential and inspiring art teacher in the San Diego area. Best known for meticulously rendered surreal landscapes and celestial views in which the microcosm and the macrocosm are ingeniously melded, McReynolds' recent works include politically oriented mixed-media works with a strong anti-war message. In *Spacescape #18*, clusters of cells (including a fetus encased in an amniotic sac) drift among galaxies in a stunningly painted, improbable universe. *Triumph of Pride* is more down-to-earth, depicting an ocean under a sky heavy with clouds. Dotting the water are the heads of hapless souls bobbing aimlessly. The

wave-like patterns of the clouds and the ocean, combined with the painting's monochromatic blue-purple color scheme is especially effective. McReynolds is also an accomplished poet.

Robert Treat: Executed in the medium of encaustic (beeswax mixed with pigments) on canvas, Robert Treat's paintings reflect years of experimentation with materials and a variety of influences including prehistoric cave paintings and petroglyphs, folk art, children's art, nature, and the work of contemporary masters like Willem deKooning, Robert Motherwell, Richard Diebenkorn, and Caio Fonseca. His early training as a printmaker and subsequent careers as an animator and award-winning animation director have also shaped his aesthetic. Treat's paintings are noteworthy for their innate elegance and sensitivity to line and materials. Like many artists, Treat's talents extend beyond the discipline of painting, and include architectural design, model railroad design, black and white photography, and teaching art.

Vicki Walsh: To say that Vicki Walsh's intimidating and unflattering portraits are "in your face" is an understatement. Building on the momentum generated by her critically acclaimed Visual Arts Program exhibition in 2007, Walsh continues pushing the boundaries of contemporary portraiture and critiquing our culture's infatuation with youth and beauty. *Role Playing #4*, on display in "Pure Painting 2," offers a preview of a new series of portraits currently in production in her studio. Overlaying Walsh's grotesquely grimacing self-portrait are translucent geometric shapes or symbols that make her already nightmarish images even more menacing and mysterious. Walsh's classic glazing technique using oil paints on birch panels achieves remarkable subtlety and delicacy. Walsh recently began teaching in the San Diego Community College system.

Michael Wheelden: From their elaborately engineered stretcher bars to their pristine surfaces, Michael Wheelden's impeccably engineered and flawlessly designed and painted canvases are in a class by themselves. In many ways, the attention Wheelden lavishes on his works is strangely at odds with the subjects he prefers to portray: the architecturally nondescript, banal buildings known as "vernacular architecture" comprising most of the structures in our cities and neighborhoods. Whether depicting an individual dwelling, or an entire street lined with them, Wheelden sees art where there is none. A lover of all things architectonic, Wheelden's paintings and drawings of chairs are also noteworthy, as are his renderings of the human figure. He is also a highly respected and influential art teacher.

W. Haase Wojtyla: Noted for his eccentric imagery and macabre sense of humor, W. Haase Wojtyla is one of San Diego's most enduring and best loved painters. Although his subjects can vary greatly, over the years he has become best known for colorful and deceptively whimsical paintings focusing on true crime (the more demented, gruesome, and sensational, the better), and nudes frenetically deconstructing as they bathe or shower. Not surprisingly, the artist's heart transplant years ago provided additional fodder for his fertile imagination. Always experimenting, many of Wojtyla's paintings incorporate objects affixed to, or dangling from, their surfaces. Incidentally, the cryptic text ("howdoyoulikeyourblueeyedboy") the artist uses in his disturbing painting *Mr. D. Two* is taken from E. E. Cummings' poem "Buffalo Bill's [defunct]." Despite their often dark sources of inspiration, Wojtyla's paintings are witty, creative, and a joy to view.