Kean University is pleased to feature the work of six highly accomplished painters who work and live in New Jersey: Tom Birkner, Serena Bocchino, Paul Caranicas, Gary T. Erbe, Ben Georgia and Nancy Staub Laughlin. The exhibition is appropriately titled, *New Jersey Masters 2010* and has been curated by Professor Emeritus W. Carl Burger. It is on view from September 15 through October 22, 2010, at the Karl and Helen Burger Gallery in the Jack and Maxine Lane Center for Academic Success.

While this show is clearly a special opportunity to shine the spotlight on some of the most outstanding regional talent, the viewer should keep in mind that all of these artists are also very active nationally, some exhibit internationally, and all have received prestigious awards.

Because artists today have access to every style of art imaginable, from every culture throughout human history, in this day and age it is increasingly difficult to distinguish a regional movement or style. Nowadays such identifiable movements when they exist are generally transnational by nature. The six “New Jersey Masters” are all contemporary working artists with access to museums and galleries in New York City. They are all well traveled and are all very well informed. They have been chosen for this exhibition to represent a cross section. You will enjoy a broad spectrum of artistic interests, ranging from the super-surrealistic rendering of Gary T. Erbe to the energetic drip painting of Serena Bocchino.

On behalf of Kean University and the College of Visual and Performing Arts, I wish to thank each participating artist for the wonderful artworks they have created and shared for this show. Many thanks to W. Carl Burger for his generosity to Kean University and to Lisa Conrad for her consistent efforts to make this project a success. For the installation I want to thank our gallery assistants Kelly Murphy, Samantha Jackson and Kristen Oshust. I especially want to thank President Dawood Farahi, our acting Vice President Mark Lender, and Holly Logue, the acting Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts, all of whom together made this possible. We look forward to more exhibitions in the future that will continue to celebrate the rich and outstanding artists of New Jersey.

Neil Tetkowski
Director of University Galleries
Born in Rahway, New Jersey, Tom Birkner creates art reflective of the places, people, roads and oddities of the Garden State. He received his formal artistic training from Rutgers University and Pennsylvania State University, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Master of Fine Arts degree. He is a recipient of numerous honors and awards, including a Graham Fellowship, a Dodge Foundation Fellowship and a New Jersey State Council of the Arts Fellowship. Birkner’s work emerges from the landscape of the state that he knows best, and he creates work that is both personal to New Jersey and universal to our world at large. Birkner feels the landscape of New Jersey is the perfect metaphorical backdrop for contemporary America — its deep-rooted suburban expanses being the primary mode of today’s way of life. Birkner paints Jersey’s overlooked places and countless roads, and in doing so he creates a new representation of what both our state and our country are today. As Birkner himself explains, “Painting is a long journey. And thankfully, New Jersey has plenty of roads to take that journey on. One never knows what’s around the corner.”

“In a globalized, centralized and standardized world, a little provincialism can go a long way. The proverbial small pond, the local nabe – this is where the action is. This is where the wheel hits the road, where meaning unfolds daily, where life is lived.”

**The Swan, 2009**
Oil on canvas, 38 x 34 in.
Serena Bocchino is a painter whose themes include visual interpretations of American jazz and the energies of the urban landscape. Bocchino earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Fairleigh Dickinson University and her Master of Arts degree from New York University. Bocchino has received recognition from many institutions, including New York City’s Artists Space, P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center and the Museum of Modern Art. Her work is influenced by the inherent nature of music and the power that it has to change a mood or evoke emotion. For her, the notion that music may fill a space, and allow us to visualize something, is extremely profound. With her work, Bocchino challenges herself to deconstruct this idea through painting by physically filling a space with paint, hoping that actual sounds and music will be evoked through the painting. The romantic aspect of attempting to push the boundaries of abstract painting to communicate a personal poem or song in each of her paintings is the critical element that continually impels her to paint. Bocchino’s paintings and drawings are abstract entities translating the spontaneous and rhythmic qualities of music into a two-dimensional form. Jill Conner, an art critic and writer, explains, “Bocchino’s process, moreover, is completely unbound from academic restraints. By taking on subject matter that is both ahistoric and thematically abstract, Bocchino leans toward the decorative, but each piece succeeds in its hypnotic effect.”

“Abstract painting has a unique ability to communicate... because it touches both the intellect and the human spirit.”

Love Blue, 2007
Enamel paint on canvas, 42 x 52 in.
Paul Caranicas was born in Athens, Greece, and now works in Jersey City, New Jersey. He received his formal art training at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C. Caranicas has been influenced by historical and allegorical subjects and techniques, ranging from Renaissance masters to the Hudson River school, as well as the architecture of ancient Greek and Roman temples. He is interested in industrial and architectural images and in using these images to frame and define the heavens, thus allowing the sky to become the heart of the image. By eliminating part of the “land” from the “landscape,” Caranicas is able to radically change the prevailing emotional tone of the landscape, creating what he describes as “a contrasting atmosphere of machine-made mystery.” In his most recent works, the “edge” has come to include sculptural elements as well as architectural and natural objects. The sculpture used to define the frame of the piece can be either anonymous, like a railroad trestle, or specific, from work by an artist he feels relates. In both cases, the cityscapes created from these elements remain relegated to the far edges of the canvas, as the sky remains the central image.

“In today’s art world the mystery of a good piece lies not so much in its conception nor in its execution, but rather in its existence.”

Ozone 16 (Route 1 & 9), 2009
Oil on wood, 16 x 20 in.
Gary T. Erbe

New Jersey-born artist Gary T. Erbe is a self-taught painter with remarkable technique and powerful creative vision. Erbe’s artistic style can be described as “Levitational Realism,” a term he coined himself to attribute his contemporary approach to traditional trompe l’oeil painting. Trompe l’oeil is a technique involving extremely realistic imagery in order to create an optical illusion. The depicted objects rendered are perceived as three-dimensional, rather than the reality of the two-dimensional painting. Erbe’s interest in trompe l’oeil painting goes back to the late 1960’s when he discovered the artists Harnett, Peto and Haberle, whom all work in this style. Although greatly inspired by the technique, he conceived a new way of working by freeing objects from their familiar surroundings through the illusion of levitation and juxtaposing objects that in reality had no relationship to one another. At the forefront of Erbe’s vision is the desire to bridge the gap between modern art and traditional realism. While there will always be elements of trompe l’oeil technique in his work, he is more interested in creating work with diverse subject matter, focusing on stimulating the mind, rather than merely fooling the eye. For Erbe, subject matter has no boundaries and can be universal and timeless. His work is a harmony of contradictions, expressing a unique view of the American experience.

“For me, subject matter has no boundaries and can be universal and timeless. I ask viewers to ponder the elements of life’s journey through an aesthetic experience.”

Frenzy, 2007
Oil on canvas, 60 x 70 in.
Ben Georgia was born in Jersey City, New Jersey. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Rutgers University and a Master of Arts degree from Kean University. He also studied art history at New York University and painting with Theodoros Stamos at Columbia University. Georgia has been a professional full-time artist since 1983. His art has evolved from his studies of Abstract Expressionism with Stamos in the seventies to a more idiosyncratic use of abstract form. Using the grid, his painting explores the primacy of color in compositions based on the idea of the square. Complimentary colors act as pulsations. Through the use of geometric forms, he is able to create different moods and feelings. Having grown up in the urban environment of Jersey City, with its bricks, windows, doorways, alleyways, rooftops and industrial buildings, he paints the essence of this dense geometric space. He is interested in creating form, which moves between the picture plane and the vast expanse of deep space. For Georgia, painting is a sensual act, which combines memory, art awareness and emotional response with the commitment to the moment and life.

“Painting is for me the capturing of the experience of being alive. In terms of the art itself, I believe that it should reflect a personal emotion as well as a formal approach to the medium. By that I mean a technical awareness grounded in an aesthetic point of view.”

Return, 2007
Oil on canvas, 42 x 54 in.
Nancy Staub Laughlin works exclusively in hand-milled pastel chalks, rendering uniquely composed simulated still lifes, rich in texture and color. Laughlin has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Moore College of Art, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She also attended Johnson Atelier Institute of Technical Sculpture in Princeton, New Jersey, and the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, California. Her pastel drawings emerge from her self-photographed assemblages. These photographs are an important part of the process and are a separate recognized body of work. For Laughlin, the artistic journey offers an almost limitless exploration of the possibilities of artistic creation, allowing her to enter the unreal world which she has created. For nearly thirty years, this New Jersey-based artist has pursued this course, incorporating water, light and color, making the inanimate come alive and bringing the elements together as one. Sam Hunter, art critic and historian, writes, “She thus creates for us a fresh and enchanting world of form and chroma that seem to lurk just beyond the normal eyes’s ability to grasp the actual scene and its implications fully. Her magical, fragmented still life and landscape reward us richly with the briefly perceived objects of a demanding vision, gloriously, dynamically reflected through the finely distorting fluidities of a fantastic water world.”

“My simulated still lifes allow me to enter an unreal world of my own creation.”

_Fountain of Pearls_, 2007
Pastel on paper, 35 x 26 in.
**NEW JERSEY MASTERS 2010**

**TOM BIRKNER**

*Crime Scene Port Newark*, 2008  
Oil on canvas, 32 x 64 in.

*The Swan*, 2009  
Oil on canvas, 38 x 59 in.

*Passaic River Lift Bridge*, 2010  
Oil on canvas, 32 x 48 in.

*Passaic River Lift Bridge II*, 2010  
Oil on canvas, 14 x 48 in.

**SERENA BOCCHINO**

*Blessings*, 2002  
Enamel and oil paint on canvas, 72 x 86 in.

*Blue Fountains and Mountains*, 2007  
Enamel paint on canvas, 52 x 65 in.

*Catch Wave*, 2007  
Enamel paint on canvas, 42 x 52 in.

*Love Blue*, 2007  
Enamel paint on canvas, 42 x 52 in.

All works courtesy Tria Gallery, New York

**PAUL CARANICAS**

*Today*, 2006  
Oil on wood, 78 x 105 in.

*Ozone 13 (Xanadu)*, 2009  
Oil on linen, 50 x 54 in.

*Ozone 14 (Exit 15E)*, 2009  
Oil on linen, 50 x 54 in.

*Ozone 16 (Route 1 & 9)*, 2009  
Oil on wood, 16 x 20 in.

**GARY T. ERBE**

*Double Jeopardy*, 2000  
Oil on canvas, 45 x 60 in.

*Frenzy*, 2007  
Oil on canvas, 60 x 70 in.

*Subway Series*, 2008  
Oil on canvas, 55 x 45 in.

*Those Amazin’ Mets*, 2005-2006  
Oil on canvas, 64 x 45 in.

**BEN GEORGIA**

*City Lights Red Three*, 2008-2009  
Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in.

*Green, Metamorphosis*, 2008  
Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 in.

Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 in.

*Return*, 2007  
Oil on canvas, 42 x 54 in.

**NANCY STAUB LAUGHLIN**

*Aiming for Sparkling Perfection*, 2009  
Pastel on paper, 41 x 22 in.

*Effervescence of the Spring Snow*, 2009  
Pastel on paper, 38 x 50 in.

*Fountain of Pearls*, 2007  
Pastel on paper, 35 x 26 in.

*Perfection of Precipitation*, 2009  
Pastel on paper, 35 x 26 in.
ToM BirKNer SereNA BocchiNo

Crime Scene Port Newark, 2008
Oil on canvas, 32 x 64 in. Enamel and oil paint on canvas, 72 x 86 in.

Blessings, 2002

The Swan, 2009

Blue Fountains and Mountains, 2007
Oil on canvas, 38 x 59 in. Enamel paint on canvas, 52 x 65 in.

Passaic River Lift Bridge, 2010
Catch Wave, 2007
Oil on canvas, 32 x 48 in. Enamel paint on canvas, 42 x 52 in.

Passaic River Lift Bridge II, 2010
Love Blue, 2007
Oil on canvas, 14 x 48 in. Enamel paint on canvas, 42 x 52 in.

All works courtesy Tria Gallery, New York

PAUl cArANicAS GAry T. erBe

Today, 2006
Double Jeopardy, 2000
Oil on wood, 78 x 105 in. Oil on canvas, 45 x 60 in.

Ozone 13 (Xanadu), 2009
Frenzy, 2007
Oil on linen, 50 x 54 in. Oil on canvas, 60 x 70 in.

Ozone 14 (Exit 15E), 2009
Subway Series, 2008
Oil on linen, 50 x 54 in. Oil on canvas, 55 x 45 in.

Ozone 16 (Route 1 & 9), 2009
Those Amazin' Mets, 2005-2006
Oil on wood, 16 x 20 in. Oil on canvas, 64 x 45 in.

BeN GeorGiA NANcy STAUB lAUGliN

City Lights Red Three, 2008-2009
Aiming for Sparkling Perfection, 2009
Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in. Pastel on paper, 41 x 22 in.

Green, Metamorphosis, 2008
Effervescence of the Spring Snow, 2009
Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 in. Pastel on paper, 38 x 50 in.

Greens Metamorphosis Reds, 2005-2007
Fountain of Pearls, 2007
Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 in. Pastel on paper, 35 x 26 in.

Return, 2007
Perfection of Precipitation, 2009
Oil on canvas, 42 x 54 in. Pastel on paper, 35 x 26 in.