

NEW JERSEY MASTERS

KEAN UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Kean University is pleased to feature the work of six highly accomplished painters who work and live in New Jersey; Thomas Birkner, Serena Bocchino, Paul Caranicas, Gary T. Erbe, Ben Georgio, 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 15th through October 22nd 2010 in 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 as well, 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 of interests. You will enjoy a broad spectrum of artistic viewpoints, 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 my assistant, Lisa Conrad for her consistent efforts to make this project a success. I especially want to thank Kean University 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



TOM BIRKNER



“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.

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 received a Bachelor of Arts and an Master of Fine Arts. He is a recipient of numerous honors and reward, including a Graham Fellowship, a Dodge Foundation Fellowship and a New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship. Birkner’s work emerges from the landscape of the state that he knows best, and 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. New Jersey is the province and reality that Tom Birkner both understands, and so eloquently portrays. He paints the roads and places of New Jersey because this is what he knows and in doing so he creates an accurate 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 a lot of roads. One never knows what’s around the corner.”

SERENA BOCCHINO



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

Love Blue, 42x52 in., 2007,
enamel paint on canvas, courtesy
Tria Gallery, New York, New York

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 Masters of Arts degree from New York University. She 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 provoked 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 captivates her to paint. Bocchino's paintings and drawings are abstract entities translating the spontaneous and rhythmic qualities of music into a two-dimensional form. "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"

(Jill Conner, curator, writer, and art critic).

PAUL CARANICAS



“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), 16x20 in., 2009, oil on wood

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 either be 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.

This background, along with his interest in landscape painting, has led him to his latest works creating rearrangements of the New Jersey Industrial landscape, exploring the use of the sky as the central image in his landscapes. The land and the cityscapes have been pushed to the edges of the canvas.

GARY T. ERBE



“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, 60x70 in., 2007, oil on canvas

New Jersey born artist Gary T. Erbe is a self-taught painter with remarkable technique and powerful creative vision. Erbe’s artist 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.

BEN GEORGIA

“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, 42x54 in., 2007, oil
on canvas

Ben Georgia was born in Jersey City, New Jersey,. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Rutgers University and a Masters of Art from Kean University. He also studied art history at New York University, and painting with Theodore Stamos at Columbia University. Georgia’s art has evolved from his studies of Abstract Expressionism with Stamos in the sixties to a more idiosyncratic use of abstract form, color and light. He is a colorist who paints directly from his emotions as he reacts with his experiences, his memories, and a great feeling for life. Georgia paints because he loves the way color forms on the canvas in the act of painting. His palette is very diverse, as he finds it stimulating to create varied colored patterns with an understanding of color interaction. Through the use of geometric forms, he is able to create different moods and feelings. Having grown up in the dense, urban environment of Jersey City, with its bricks, windows, doorways, alleyways, rooftops, and industrial buildings reflecting a geometric world, he paints to combine the essence of this dense 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 and the commitment to the moment and life.

NANCY STAUB LAUGHLIN



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

Fountain of Pearls, 35x26
in., 2007, pastel on paper

Nancy Staub Laughlin works exclusively in hand-milled pastel chalks, rendering uniquely composed simulated still lifes, creating drawings rich in texture and color. Laughlin has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Moore College of Art, in Philadelphia, PA. 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 drawings emerge from her assemblages, which are often placed underwater, and which she feels are as important as the works themselves. For Laughlin, the artistic journey offers an almost limitless exploration of the possibilities of artistic creation, allowing her to enter the unreal world in 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. "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"

(Sam Hunter, Art Critic and Historian of Modern and Contemporary Art).

NEW JERSEY MASTERS 2010

TOM BIRKNER

Title, 2000

Oil on canvas, ?x? in.

Title, 2000

Oil on canvas, 45x60 in.

Title, 2000

Oil on canvas, 45x60 in.

Title, 2000

Oil on canvas, 45x60 in.

PAUL CARANICAS

Ozone 16 (Route 1 & 9), 2009

Oil on wood, 16x20 in.

Title, 2000

Oil on canvas, 45x60 in.

Title, 2000

Oil on canvas, 45x60 in.

Title, 2000

Oil on canvas, 45x60 in.

BEN GEORGIA

City Lights Red Three, 2008-2009,

Oil on canvas, 60x48 in.

Green, Metamorphosis, 2008

Oil on canvas, 48x48 in.

Greens Metamorphosis Reds, 2005-2007

Oil on canvas, 48x48 in.

Return, 2007

Oil on canvas, 42x54 in.

SERENA BOCCHINO

Blessings, 2002

Enamel and oil paint on canvas, 72x86 in.

Blue Fountains and Mountains, 2007

Enamel paint on canvas, 52x65 in.

Catch Wave, 2007

Enamel paint on canvas, 42x52 in.

Love Blue, 2007

Enamel paint on canvas, 42x52 in.

*All works courtesy Tria Gallery, New York, NY

GARY T. ERBE

Double Jeopardy, 2000

Oil on canvas, 45x60 in.

Frenzy, 2007

Oil on canvas, 60x70 in.

Subway Series, 2008

Oil on canvas, 55x45 in.

Those Amazin' Mets, 2005-2006

Oil on canvas, 64x45 in.

NANCY STAUB LAUGHLIN

Aiming for Sparkling Perfection, 2009

Pastel on paper, 41x22 in.

Effervescence of the Spring Snow, 2009

Pastel on paper, 38x50 in.

Fountain of Pearls, 2007

Pastel on paper, 35x26 in.

Perfection of Precipitation, 2009

Pastel on paper, 35x26 in.

