

Art & ANTIQUES

FOR COLLECTORS OF THE FINE AND DECORATIVE ARTS



VENETIAN PAINTING | SAM GILLIAM | GIORGIO DE CHIRICO | MARVIN LIPOFSKY

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EDGAR DEGAS



From top: Alan Magee, *Aphorism*, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 46 x 69 inches; Steven Assael, *Henry*, 2013, graphite and crayon on paper, 11 x 10 3/4 inches.



completely flat rendering thereof. In *Aphorism*, an acrylic on canvas from 2010, Magee gives us only the stones, arranged in a pattern that could be random. In *Treasury* (2009), stones have been artfully combined with other objects to make a humanoid creature that lies on top of a handwritten letter and a manila envelope that appears taped to the background, with trinkets scattered across the whole thing. Winslow considers Magee to occupy “an interesting place between trompe and still life.”

Jackson has contributed some classically trompe paintings to the show, and like *Enough With the Bubbles*, they use humor as a major ingredient. *Looking at Art* (2014) plays the old trompe trick of tacking pieces of paper to a vertical board, as in the “letter rack” paintings of John F. Peto. But instead of letters we get those postcards of artworks

that museum shops sell by the thousands—Chuck Close, Richard Diebenkorn, Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon, Wayne Thiebaud, Giorgio Morandi, they’re all there, inviting the viewer to “name that painting.” Hanging over one of the postcards is a pair of 3-D glasses, in winking acknowledgment of the illusionistic game being played. And in *Mr. Rothko, Mr. Johns, Meet Mr. Jackson* (2013), Jackson ingeniously creates art-historical references out of trompe l’oeil elements. Other artists in the show who use trompe l’oeil techniques are Will Wilson, whose *Infrastructure* (2012) is an updated version of the classic back-of-the-framed-canvas view, and Scott Fraser, whose *Lemon Fall* (2015) does the peeled citrus thing—a staple of European still life from the 17th century on—but with a twist.

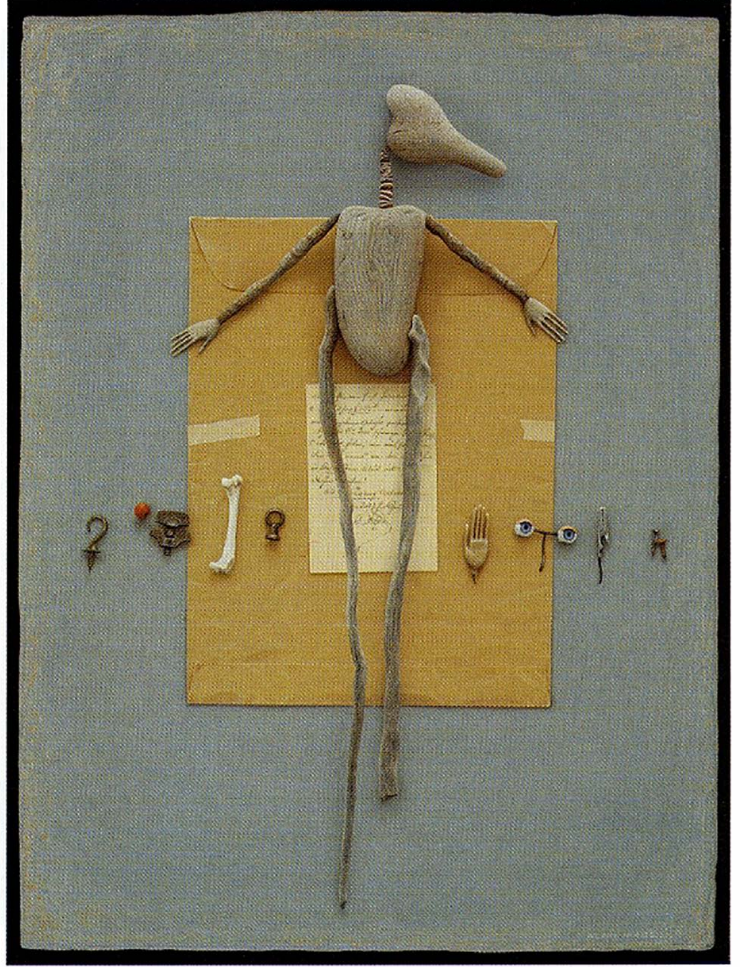
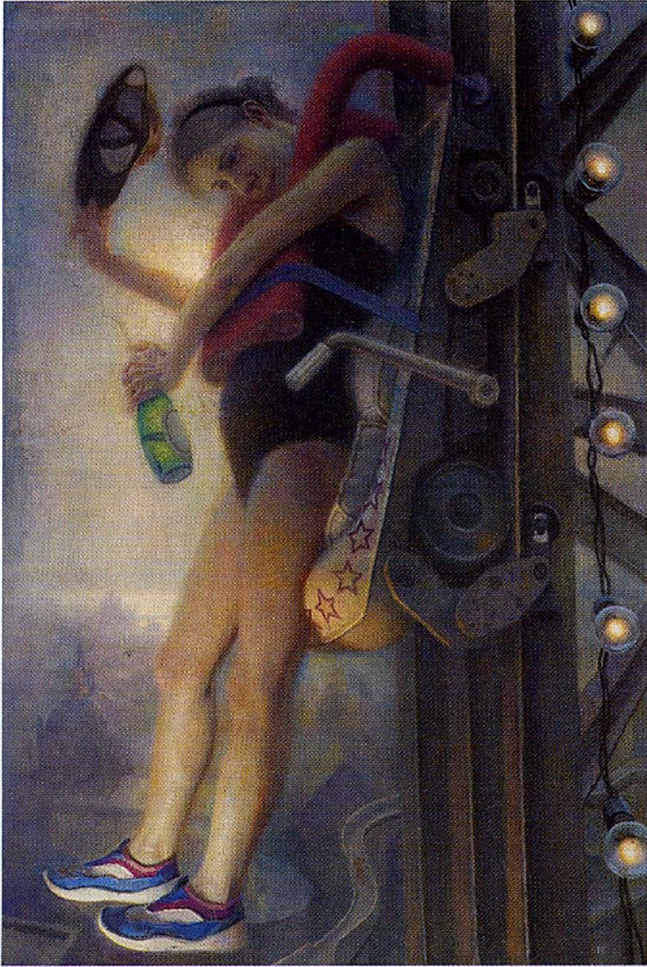
Figure painting—one of the classic trio of representational art, along with still life and landscape—also figures prominently in “Truth and Vision.” Steven Assael’s *Passengers* (2009) actually combines two of these



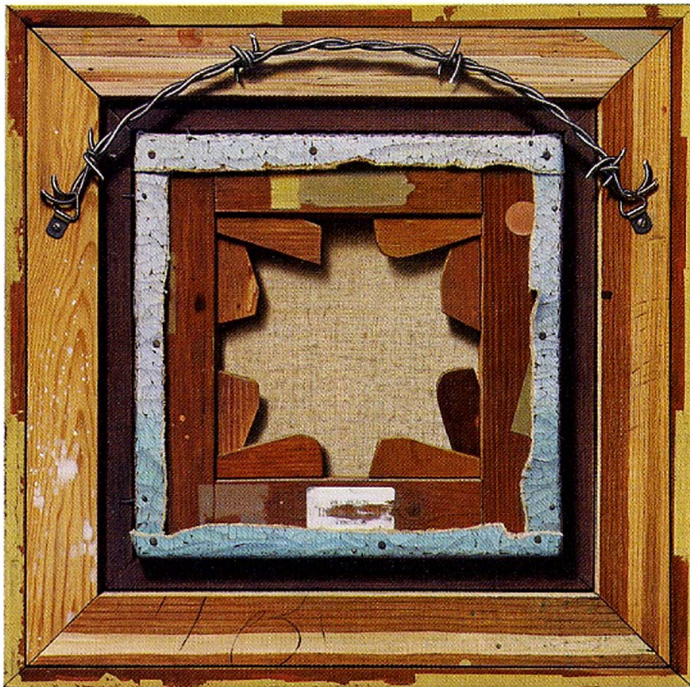
Clockwise from top left: Paul Fenniak, *Departure*, 2012, oil on canvas, 52 x 42 inches; Scott Fraser, *Spider Lullaby*, 2012, oil on canvas, 24 x 18 inches; Steven Assael, *Passengers*, 2009, oil on canvas, 72 x 90 inches.

genres. It shows three young people asleep in what appears to be a train car; through the window glows a sublime Hudson River School-like landscape. But is it really a window? It might be a painting hanging on a wall, and the three figures may be snoozing in a room at home instead of being bound on a journey. As with so many of the pictures in this exhibition, *Passengers* is enigmatic, realist but not quite realistic. Paul Fenniak paints moments that could be snapshots of real life but that nonetheless have an unsettling, ambiguous quality. In *Departure* (2012), a woman pauses on a wooden stair by a picket fence. It's either dusk or night, and a pale light catches her in a beam that sets her off from the surrounding gloom. Is she about to leave that house forever, and if so, why? Is one of the RVs in the background about to carry her away to a nomadic existence? Impossible to say. *Theme Park Patron* (2014), is a bit weirder but still plausible; the woman strapped to






Clockwise from top left: Paul Fennlak, *Theme Park Patron*, 2014, oil on canvas, 54 x 36 inches; Alan Magee, *Treasury*, 2009, acrylic on panel, 23 3/4 x 17 3/4 inches; Will Wilson, *Infrastructure*, 2012, oil on canvas, 15 3/4 x 15 3/4 inches.



a ride may just be enjoying being high up over the amusement park, or she may be stuck up there, unable to resist. There is an awkwardness about her posture that suggests something is not quite right.

The Delaware Art Museum's broad survey shows that representational painting is alive and well. The resurgence of this approach to art has been going on in the U.S. since the 1960s, when a reaction against the austerity of abstraction set in, and artists found that viewers, in some very deep way, crave images of people, objects, and scenes that they can recognize from their own visual experiences. Whether the paintings are true to everyday life or visionary and fantastical (what Winslow calls "imaginative realism"), they gratify this need while affording the artists a chance to make full use of their technical skills.

"There's been so much conversation and scholarship about the trajectory of representational painting," says Winslow, "which of course has been with us since the Paleolithic period, re-examining the impact of Abex, Minimalism, and conceptual art. I think that there has been a shift back to representation. In this portrait-heavy environment that we're in, in regard to social media, it's an interesting time to embrace representation." 

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